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From language of enemy to language of opportunity: Understanding teacher resistance to curriculum change in English language teaching and learning in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract
This qualitative research study sought to understand teachers' resistance to English language educational change in Kyrgyzstan. The participants were six English teachers working in both rural and urban public schools in Kyrgyzstan. Analysis of non-participant observation and post-observation interviews revealed that, despite changes in English objectives following changes in socio-economic and political context after the demise of the Soviet Union, the lock-in practices in English language teaching still persist in Kyrgyzstan. This is because educational reforms have occurred only at a structural level [e.g. the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), State Standards and publishing new textbooks] and have lacked planned capacity building—through targeted professional support and adequate teaching and learning resources—to bring the envisioned curriculum change to the classrooms. The findings indicate that the intended change has not yielded the much-desired outcomes because each element at every educational level is linked ceremonially and loosely, and is decoupled, which provides insights about teachers' resistance to curriculum change.

Keywords English language teaching · Curriculum change · Kyrgyzstan · Teacher resistance

Introduction

Socio-economic and political changes in Kyrgyzstan caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, coupled with the unprecedented spread of English in expanding circle[1] countries triggered by globalisation, have had a profound impact on English language teaching and learning in Kyrgyzstan. English language proficiency

[1] The Three Circle Model of World Englishes, developed by Kachru in 1985, describes the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle. These cir-

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became a "near-universal basic skill" (Graddol, 2006, p. 72) for socio-economic mobility in this market-driven context. As such, Kyrgyzstanis started learning other foreign languages (FL)[2] to enhance their employment and international educational scholarship opportunities, both of which are determined by English language proficiency. Thus, since the 1990s, English teaching in Kyrgyzstan has undergone reforms in terms of objectives, content, and approaches so as to reset the default English language teaching (ELT) practices to be congruent with current ELT goals. To achieve this, from 2009 to 2012, Kyrgyzstan—with assistance from international donors—developed the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for secondary school subjects, including English, oriented toward a competency-based approach.[3] The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was used as a benchmark for English language proficiency for each grade as follows: (i) A1 level in Grades 3–4; (ii) A1+ in Grades 5–6; (iii) A2 in Grade 6; (iv) A2+ in Grades 7–8; (v) B1 in Grade 9; and (vi) B1+ in Grades 10–11. The rationale for benchmarking CERF for learning a foreign language is "In the context of globalisation, Kyrgyzstan is striving to become part of the international educational process. The use of European competence in a foreign language will allow Kyrgyzstan to be considered a full member of the international educational space"[4] (Standards for Foreign Language Learning (SFLL), 2014, p. 9).

Within the new framework, the learning outcomes for English are developing students' communicative and pragmatic competencies, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving skills. Even though Kyrgyzstan is in the category of the Expanding Circle countries, where English does not have official status as an FL, according to the SFLL the objectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Kyrgyzstan extend beyond learning an FL to communicate with Inner and Outer Circle members, i.e. students need to develop communicative competence in its truest sense. However, against the backdrop of curriculum change, traditional ELT approaches, such as the Grammar–Translation Method (GTM) and Audiolingual Method (ALM), are still at the core of ELT in Kyrgyzstan.

The purpose of the study is to explore the underlying reasons for teacher resistance to aligning their teaching practices with the learning outcomes specified in the SFLL.

Footnote 1 (continued)
cles represent the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages. In Inner Circle countries, English is used as a native language; Outer Circle countries are former colonies of the UK or the USA; and in the Expanding Circle, English is taught as a foreign language.

[2] During the Soviet period, proficiency in Russian was prerequisite for socio-economic mobility.

[3] Competency based approach (curriculum) emphasises that learners acquire a set of clearly specified learning outcomes and demonstrate the mastery of the acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes through application in everyday life situations (UNESCO, 2003).

[4] Translated by the researcher.

Research question

The study will investigate one central question: What are the underlining reasons for English language teacher resistance to bringing the intended curriculum change to the classroom?

Resistance to educational change

In educational change scholarship, teachers have been recognised as critical agents to bring educational change to the classroom. As such, teacher agency is often construed as "a positive capacity" (Priestly et al., 2012, p. 192) assuming teachers as a passive recipient of educational change who are expected to exercise their agentic capacity by mobilising their knowledge and skills to bring the envisioned reform to the classroom. However, teachers also might exercise their agency to resist to educational change when their beliefs do not align with "the outsider's [policymakers and administrators] view of what results should look like" (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014, p. 101). Teachers' resistance refers to a cognitive or behavioural response when intended reform conflicts with their long-standing institutionalised beliefs and practices (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Bridwell-Mitchell & Sherer, 2017; Fullan, 2007). Teachers' resistance can take many forms such as overt resistance (openly criticising curriculum change), covert resistance (teachers may appear to support curriculum change, but no actions (Iwasiw & Goldenberg, 2014) and principled resistance (when teachers' professional principles contradict with the mandated educational policies, teachers, behind closed door, subvert the system by preserving their previous instruction practices or adapting the curriculum according to their understanding of students' needs and what is best for their students) (Bauml, 2015; Friedman et al., 2009). Thus, in educational change literature, teacher resistance has attracted the attention of many scholars to explore underlying reasons for this inertia (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Goodson et al., 2006; Richards, 2002; Terhart, 2013; Thornbur & Mungai, 2011; Zimmerman, 2006). Research has found that teacher resistance can stem from a wide range of factors including teachers' inferior position in educational change policy (Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Richards, 2002), threats to their proven expertise (Zimmerman, 2006), lack of agentic capacity and contextual constraints (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Priestly et al., 2012), ideological disagreements regarding change (Burch, 2007), fear and suspicion of the unknown (Fullan, 2007), social and political nostalgia and lost mission (Goodson et al., 2006), challenging deeply rooted beliefs about teaching and learning (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Calabrese, 2002; Kumaradeveleu, 2003; Priestly et al., 2012; Spillane et al., 2002). Though these factors are also significant in general education, their impact is of particular importance in EFL teaching because of context-specific constraints, including EFL teachers' limited language proficiency, limited authentic input, native versus non-native English-speaking teachers (NNSET), and so on. These factors have contributed to EFL teachers' resistance in the wake

of reforms requiring a shift from linguistic to communicative competence.[5] An important part of the reform involved replacing the existing Grammar–Translation Method (GMT) and Audiolingual Method (ALM) approaches with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to facilitate students' ability to use a foreign language for authentic communication (Brown, 2007; Hu, 2002; Richards, 2006; Richard & Rodgers, 2001; Savignon, 2002). Thus, many studies have examined EFL teachers' experiences in implementing CLT. Even though some reported that teachers had positive attitudes toward CLT, most indicated that CLT was not fully adopted because of cultural and contextual constraints. These constraints include NNSET low language proficiency, large classrooms, the incompatibility of CLT in a test-driven context, non-compatibility with traditional EFL contexts, teacher–student power relations, pressures in preparing students for grammar-based national college entrance exams, poor facilities and limited resources, students' limited language proficiency, and discrepancies between local values and imported curriculum change (Bax, 2003; Chang, 2011; Farooq et al., 2015; Hu, 2002; Lee, 2014; Littlewood, 2007; Humphries & Burns, 2015; Schweisfurth, 2011).

The literature reviewed indicates that teacher resistance is affected by various factors in a range of personal, institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, institutional theory (IT) was used as a framework to examine how each of these factors contributes to teacher resistance.

Framing the study

IT has been widely used in sociology to examine how organisational structures, including norms, rules and routines, become entrenched and are used as guidelines for organisational behaviour and how their remnants shape the course of subsequent structures. Over the years, IT has evolved beyond its sociological roots and has been used as a framework in education to examine interactions between educational policies and classroom practices, including the environmental constraints regarding educational change (Burch, 2007; Hanson, 2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Spillane et al., 2011; Zimmerman, 2006).

Institutional theorists suggest that organisations tend to adopt similar practices and behaviours to enhance their stability, legitimacy and survival prospects, leading to homogenisation (Burch, 2007; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hanson, 2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organisations maintain their legitimacy through coercive-regulative, normative, mimic and cultural-cognitive mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scot, 2013), which may influence individual and institutional behaviours. Coercive-regulative mechanisms influence social actors' decisions through formal and informal regulation to establish, control and sanction non-compliance (e.g. educational standards, school rule, curriculum, language

[5] Linguistic competence is knowledge about the language (e.g. grammar, syntax and vocabulary) communicative competence involves not only knowledge of language, but also knowing "what to say to whom," and "how to say it appropriately" (pragmatics) in various social cultural contexts (Saville-Troike, 2003, p.19).

policies). Normative mechanisms come from professionalisation in which the values, knowledge and normative expectations about appropriate behaviour are imposed through professional socialisation (e.g. teacher education programmes, in-service teacher training profession certification and accreditation agencies). Established values, norms and expectations guide organisations to behave in alignment with the organisational norms to establish their legitimacy, i.e. how things should be done (e.g. how to teach reading, how to assess students). Mimetic mechanisms occur when organisations mimic other organisations that they consider to be more successful—not necessarily to improve the quality or efficacy of their activity, but to gain legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders (e.g. joining Bologna system, curriculum aligned with CEFR, English-only teaching) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scot, 2013). Cultural-cognitive mechanisms shape shared frameworks that guide social actors' understanding and interpretations of their surroundings, which creates meaning to action (Scott, 2013).These mechanisms, once established and reinforced and authorised by power throughout organisational structures over the years, may limit their capacity to change and their ability to implement new organisational structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott et al., 2004; Zajac et al., 1993). Subsequently, reinforcement of these mechanisms will "lead to the persistence of these practices and structure (inertia), independent of rational efficiency or effectiveness concerns in implementing organisational change" (Zajac et al., 1993, pp. 85–86). Thus, organisational behaviour and policies are taken for granted and adopted ceremonially, which eventually creates "gaps between their formal structures and actual activities" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). That said, it is not necessarily true that all elements of an organisation are aligned or that they are dependent on one another. Institutional theorists use various metaphors to describe the relation, dependence and frequency of interactions among the elements of the organisation. *Coupling* occurs when organisations maintain close alignments between structures and activities through inspection, when quality is continually monitored and the efficiency of various units is evaluated, and when the various goals are unified and coordinated. *Loose coupling* is used to describe how various structural elements of an organisation are less related to each other and to activities, when they have little influence over one another, rules are not followed, decisions are not implemented, and when the elements are independent of one another, yet are still responsive to each other in certain ways, and assessment of each element is poorly coordinated. *Decoupling* occurs when organisations adopt regulations or policies to maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of public but fail to implement some or all of the practices described in the policies because the structures and practices often conflict with their beliefs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976).

IT is relevant to this study because actions do not happen in a vacuum, but "broader cultural scripts guide much of organisational behaviour to behave and act in a certain way" (Burch, 2007, p. 84). Thus, IT provides a holistic framework to understand teacher resistance, not as an isolated behaviour but in a broader socio-cultural context.

Context of the study

This section provides an overview of the objectives and practices of ELT under the Soviets and their ramifications in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.[6]

Despite the Soviets' isolation from the rest of the world for many years, foreign language teaching (FLT), including English, has always been a focus of their educational system.

Its objectives were directly linked to the Soviets' political agenda and to creating "a Soviet man" through pedagogy (Ter-Minasova, 2005). Current ELT in Kyrgyzstan mirrors how prior socio-cultural, economic and political factors impacted ELT practices at various critical junctures in the history of the country.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, from 1917 to 1927, the government did not consider FLT a priority and FL learning was optional for the following reasons: (i) the Soviets did not have time for such "frills" and focused on other priorities, e.g. nation-building, the eradication of literacy, and the Russian language education of the non-Russian population of newly annexed countries (Garrard, 1962, p. 71); (ii) there was a negative association between FL learning and the Russian aristocracy—the "people's enemy"—who learned/spoke FLs to mark their nobility; (iii) citizens were protected from "infection" by foreign elements spread through language; and (iv) there was a shortage of FL teachers (Olstein, 1958; Weinrich, 1993). In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the period of industrialisation in the USSR, the prominent Soviet-Russian linguist, Sherba,[7] advocated including FLs as general education subjects in secondary schools. He argued that ignorance of FLs limited Soviet citizens' access to technological advancements, which could become a threat in nation-building (Campbell-Thomson, 2016). On 25 August 1932, a government decree instructed that every secondary school graduate should be able to access FL publications about technological advancements (Campbell-Thomson, 2016; Pavlenko, 2006; Razumovskaya, 2015). Thus, from 1932 onwards, FLT became compulsory in secondary schools from Grade 5 to Grade 10 (a total of 490–660 h). Non-Russian schools generally had one-third less of FL instruction because they had to learn Russian, "a language of state consolidation" (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 82), as an FL. The main approach in FLT was a cognitive-comparative method emphasising the conscious understanding of rules and features of an FL by juxtaposing it with one's mother tongue (Sherba, 1932). However, textbook writers and teachers interpreted this as translation activities, which led to an overwhelming amount of reading and translation (Kamyanova, 2017; Campbell-Thompson, 2016). Thus, the main focus of

[6] This section includes scholarly works of a handful Western scholars who had the opportunity to visit the Soviet Union and observe EFL teaching in the former Soviet Union as well as post-independence scholarly works to shed light on how social, political and historical events impacted EFL in former Soviet Union republics, including Kyrgyzstan.

[7] Sherba, a prominent Soviet theoretical linguist, viewed FL teaching as an applied branch of general linguistics; therefore, he posited that, through conscious investigation of the linguistic aspects of an FL through the systematic comparison of native and foreign language systems, a learner could achieve the desired outcomes.

FL learning was limited to reading, translation and rote memorisation of grammar rules aimed at "… the production of qualified translators (of technical and scientific materials, chiefly for the Soviet Union's heavy industrial projects) and a fuller understanding of the Russian language through the study of comparative philology" (Garrard, 1962, p. 71). The Ministry of Education approved the objectives, content, approaches and textbooks to ensure uniformity. The objectives of language teaching were the ability to read, translate, speak and write. However, speaking was limited to prepared dialogues and reading comprehension answers. Writing was not given much emphasis and was limited to filling in blanks, copying exercises and translating the presented material.

German, English and French were the main FLs taught in Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet period. The socio-political climate in the country determined which FL would lead. For example, German was the most taught language between 1941 and 1961 (Kheimets & Epstein, 2001; Ter-Minasova, 2005) because, during WWII, the Soviets experienced a shortage of German translators (Kheimets & Epstein, 2011; Razumovskaya, 2015). This approach was the opposite of the US approach to learning German from 1917 to 1922 when the language of a nation that had "lost all moral sense" was almost eliminated from the school curriculum (Barnes, 1918; Luebke, 1980; Wiley, 1998). In contrast, the Soviets thought that learning "a language of the enemy" helped to know them better, thus making it easier to defeat them, as well as promoting the ideologies of socialism and communism (Pavlenko, 2003; Ter-Minasova, 2005).

The beginning of the Cold War had a significant impact on FL teaching and learning in Soviet Kyrgyzstan in positive and negative ways. In terms of the negative impact, the ideological struggle between the two countries led to the rise of the Iron Curtain, which isolated Soviet citizens from the rest of the world. This limited Soviet citizens' exposure and access to "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1982) in the form of physical contact (travelling to English-speaking countries or foreigners visiting the USSR) and access to authentic materials (movies, newspapers, radio broadcasting, etc.). Thus, FLT in Kyrgyzstan, and in the former Soviet Union in general, was "entirely a homegrown affair: made in the USSR" (McCaughey, 2005, p. 456). In terms of the positive impact, under the slogan to "learn the language of the enemy", the Soviets paid more attention than ever to FLT. For example, from 1948, the Soviets launched so-called specialised schools (*spetzscshkoly*) that specialised in one foreign language from Grade 2 to Grade 10. Initially, these schools opened in Moscow and Leningrad with the intention to spread this school model to other areas. The salient difference between specialised and regular schools was the number of hours allocated to teaching, which was 1610 and 480–660, respectively.

The Khrushev's Thaw era, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s when the Soviet–USA tension during the Cold War eased, promoted opportunities for international contact in trade, culture and academia. This was the most favourable period for FLT, particularly for English as a language of intercultural communication. However, these exchanges revealed that Soviet citizens lacked the oral skills to take advantage of these interactions owing to the existing grammar–translation approaches of ELT (DLI, 1991). The government was concerned with the quality of FLT at all educational levels, as well as the serious problems with teacher education.

Thus, on 27 May 1961, the USSR Council of Ministers issued a decree entitled "On the improvement of the study of FL". The decree of 1961 was one of the critical junctures in reforming FLT in all former Soviet republics. The decree mandated the following: (i) the publication of textbooks emphasising oral skills; (ii) the development of speaking and listening skills; (iii) the reduction of class sizes by dividing groups of more than 25 students; (iv) the production of audio–visual instructional aides to support FL teaching and learning; (v) the reform of FL teacher education; (vi) the establishment of 2 years of advanced training for university-level FL teachers; and (vii) additional specialised FL schools throughout the country.

Another significant change was the replacement of German with English. Replacing German with English was a result of the escalating relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union; therefore, learning "the language of the enemy" became imperative at this critical juncture. Hence, during the Soviet period, learning a foreign language had both instrumental and strategic considerations. However, despite governmental intentions to promote FL learning to know the "enemy" better, FL instruction in the former Soviet Union was limited to reading and translating classical texts (Ter-Minasova, 2005; Kheimets & Epstein, 2001).

The era of stagnation from 1964 to 1984, as coined by Michael Gorbachev, describes the economic inactivity during Brezhnev's period in power, marked by a renewed tension between the Soviet Union and the USA due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. These factors resulted in teachers continuing to practice the old "drill and kill" method in ELT.

The period of 1984–1991 was a pivotal point in FL teaching and learning. The advent of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) opened the Soviet political and economic system to the rest of the world. There was an exchange of ideas between the Soviets and the West in academic, personal, national and international areas, which shifted the objective of FLT to the development of communicative competence. Even though the reform of 1984 did not directly address FLT, some tasks set by the decree, such as "… develop skills and abilities, put them into practice" (Decree, 12 April 1984), created opportunities for the functional use of an FL. Thus, CLT as a teaching approach was adopted to promote "solid mastery by them [learners/students] of the fundamentals of a foreign language and the ability to use it in practice" (Garza, 1987, p. 105).

Implementation was planned for 1990, just a year before the fall of the Soviet Union. However, the educational reforms of 1984 had little impact because the timeframe for implementation was too ambitious, and the changing political climate in the country left blueprints for change on paper (DeYoung, 2006; DLI, 1991). Thus, Kyrgyzstan embarked on its journey to independence with inherited FLT methodologies such as GTM and ALM.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union dealt a heavy blow to FL teaching and learning in Kyrgyzstan, particularly to English as the lingua franca of global business and communication. Kyrgyzstan, as an independent state, was involved in various socio-cultural and economic relationships with the rest of the world that led to an "English boom" in the country. Knowledge of English became a vital tool for socio-economic mobility as it was tied to opportunities to study abroad and to obtain a better job in a new context. Thus, in the period after independence,

English became an important tool to boost one's human capital to compete for scarce job opportunities rather than "a language of enemy" to survive and thrive in a competitive job market. However, the ELT legacy inherited from the Soviets resulted in much damage to teachers' ability to adjust their teaching practices to respond to the needs of English language learners.

In the post-independence years in Kyrgyzstan, teaching as a profession reached its lowest level, as manifested by older teaching staff, low enrolment in teacher training programmes, and a low transition rate from initial teacher training to professional service, and the declining social status of teachers (Silova, 2009).

Methodology and methods

The study used a phenomenological study research design. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design approach that seeks to explore and understand phenomena through the lived experiences of groups of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013; Vagle, 2014). There are two major approaches of phenomenology: hermeneutic and transcendental. Although these both focus on uncovering human experience as it is lived, they differ in the distinct methods or procedures they employ (researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, issues of rigor, etc.) to generate findings about the phenomenon. The hermeneutic (interpretivist) approach emphasises the researcher's expert knowledge in interpreting what the perceived world means, rather than a mere description of the real perceived world of the participants. This is because hermeneutic phenomenologists believe the "researcher and phenomenon are inextricably linked, and that this relationship is invaluable for understanding the phenomenon itself" (Valentine et al., 2018, p. 462). Transcendental phenomenology, also known as descriptive phenomenology, focuses on describing the phenomenon the way it appears, without any presuppositions (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). In other words, transcendental phenomenology allows researchers to explore phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to emerge naturally (Moustakas, 1994 cited in Sheehan 2014, p. 10). Thus, transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside all her/his prior knowledge and bias to grasp the lived experience of the participants in relation to the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014; Moustakas, 1997). For this study, I used a transcendental phenomenology approach as it is relevant for gaining a deeper understanding of the study participants' resistance to curriculum change in such a way that "they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized, or sentimentalized" (Benner, 1985, p. 6).

Table 1 Participants' profile

Participants	Career stage	Length of teaching	Grade taught	School location
Participant 1	Early career	1 year	7th Grade	Rural
Participant 2	Early career	2 years	9th Grade	Urban
Participant 3	Mid-career	14 years	10th Grade	Urban
Participant 4	Mid-career	10 years	7th Grade	Urban
Participant 5	Late career	32 years	10th Grade	Rural
Participant 6	Late career	38 years	11th Grade	Rural

Study participants

The study used a criterion sampling that involves "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2001, p. 238). In phenomenological research, the main criterion is that the researcher should carefully choose participants who have all experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2014). In this study, participants were selected on the basis that they had knowledge and experience in implementing a new curriculum; therefore, they could provide accurate information about the phenomenon under study. The study sample comprised teachers working in rural and urban schools and teachers at various stages of their careers. Table 1 presents the participants' profiles.

Data collection

In phenomenological research, the typical source of data is interviews; however, other data collection procedures, such as observations, journal, poetry and so forth, can be used to collect data (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the data collection tools included unstructured non-participant observation and post-observation semi-structured interviews.

Non-participant observation

Non-participant observation allows researchers to capture objectively what is happening in detail to ensure comprehensive understanding "in the act of participating and observing" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 14). Phenomenologists suggest that researchers need to set aside their preconceived knowledge and perceptions about a phenomenon to minimise their influence on the data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Teaching observations were conducted to observe teachers' classroom activities and strategies to gather objective data to understand teachers' experience with the curriculum as well as to observe the overall teaching and learning process. During the interview,

following Mack et al.'s (2005) field note-taking strategy, I wrote down keywords and phrases that were used to ask follow-up questions during the post-observation interviews.

Although classroom observation is a common practice in the educational system of Kyrgyzstan, it is often used by school principals and head teachers to evaluate teachers' performance for the purposes of promotion, award nominations (e.g. the Best Teacher of the Year) and salary incentives. As such, classroom observation is usually stressful for teachers because of its socio-economic implications. Thus, to alleviate the anxiety and stress associated with such observations, pre-observation conferences were held with each participant. During the pre-observation conferences, the researcher explained the purpose of the observation, and that it was not intended to be evaluative and would be used only for research purposes.

Post-observation interviews

Interviews provide "unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions" (Kvale, 2008, p. 9). The semi-structured interviews were conducted after each classroom observation. Semi-structured interviews provide "a reassuring structure, and at the same time there is no pressure to stick to a predetermined script … In addition, the semi-structured format provides room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses" (Mann, 2016, p. 91). Thus, the post-observation, semi-structured interviews allowed me to understand the rationale for the lesson design and the selection of teaching activities and materials as well as constraints (if any) that influenced the achievement of the intended goals. Participants were asked one general question, "What do you think of the way the lesson went?" or "How do you think the lesson went?", which encouraged them to reflect on their lessons. Also, the keywords and phrases from the observation were used to further prompt participants to elaborate on sections in the lesson to gain insight into what factors facilitated or hindered aligning their instructional approaches to facilitate competencies specified by the NFC. The follow-up questions varied from interviewee to interviewee because they emanated from each classroom observation, and thus depended on the particular activities of the participant. All interviews were recoded for accuracy and transcribed verbatim.

Mindful of research ethics, formal permission was obtained from school principals to conduct classroom observations and interviews. Then, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the data collection procedure and the confidentiality of their identity and information. All participants signed a consent form to participate in the research.

Data analysis

Consistent with phenomenological data analysis, I started the analysis by bracketing; that is, setting aside all my preconceived knowledge, feelings and thoughts about the phenomenon to achieve judgement-free analysis of the data. This allowed me to analyse the data based solely on the participants' experience as well as to minimise the researcher's influence on the data analysis and findings.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process[8] for data analysis which guided in-depth engagement with, and analysis of, data. The data analysis process began by reading and rereading the interview transcripts and observation notes to become familiar with the data. The next phase involved generating initial codes in which a list of initial codes was identified based on interesting points, recurring patterns and commonalities across the data. While sifting through the data to list key statements, each statement was given an equal value. In vivo coding was utilised to identify the initial codes using participants own words and phrases to summarise and label the section of the data. Once the data have been coded, the initial long list of codes was sorted by clustering related codes together to identify potential themes. In the next phase, all potential themes were reviewed and refined by examining the relationship among the themes to form a coherent pattern as well as discarding redundant and irrelevant themes. The next phase involved further reviewing and refining themes, which led to the emergence of five distinct themes: (1) the mismatch between environmental conditions and new curriculum goals, (2) a lack of agentic capacity and lack of support, (3) workload, (4) teachers' inferior position regarding curriculum changes, and (5) curriculum goals conflicting with teachers' beliefs and practices. In the final phase, in the result section, each of the five themes was discussed, and quotes were referred to for the purpose of explaining participants' lived experiences in implementing a new curriculum.

Results

The new educational objectives of ELT—communicative and pragmatic competences, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving skills—called for a radical change from teacher-centred to student-centred approaches, e.g. from teaching grammar rules to developing students' communicative competence. However, the results of the non-participant observation revealed that, instead of developing new skills and strategies, teachers continued with tested instructional practices because of various external and internal factors. The following section provides insights about why, after more than 10 years (the SFLL was developed between 2009 and 2014), teachers still stick to drilling grammar rules, reading and translation.

[8] Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase data analysis involves (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing a report.

The mismatch between environmental conditions and new curriculum goals

Observations revealed that classroom conditions and teaching resources were not conducive for developing competencies specified in the SFLL. Most classrooms were poorly equipped in terms of technology to promote the kind of teaching that would facilitate learning outcomes defined by the new curriculum. In only two out of six observed classrooms did teachers have a computer and projector. These were mostly used to present grammar rules on the screen because schools did not have access to the internet because of the high cost. The other four teachers used traditional chalkboard methods to explain grammar rules and textbooks for reading. Moreover, the teaching resources and textbooks do not seem to promote the competences stipulated by the SFLL. As mentioned earlier, after the independence years, many textbooks were available, including commercial ones such as *Solution*, *English Files*, *Headway* and others published locally. Those used in the classroom varied from school to school depending on budget and location.[9] The textbooks used in the classroom were as follows: four teachers used locally designed and published books that were part of the educational reforms, one teacher used a commercial textbook (*Solution*) and one teacher used a textbook published in 1987 during the Soviet era. This teacher explained that they did not have enough new textbooks in their school, so she had to use the old ones. It is important to highlight that, in looking through the new and old textbooks used in the lessons, there were no major differences between them in terms of the activities. The new textbooks were designed using the Soviet template that mainly focused on reading, translating and answering comprehension questions. The design did not aim to promote acquisition of communicative competence per se. For example, in the lesson observed in Grade 11, the teacher used a textbook published in 2012. The activities in the textbook were:

1. Read the text and answer the question.
2. Read the sentences, find out the meaning of the underlined words and translate the sentences.
3. Complete the sentences using suitable words.
4. Read the text and say what you have learned from it.
5. Read the dialogue and act it out.

The SFLL states that the syllabus design in Grades 3–11 be based on the gradual development of the complexity of teaching content and competences. B1 was identified as the threshold in all language skills, but the observed classroom activities involved reading and answering questions. Speaking was limited to retelling as activities such as "read the text and say what you have learned from the text", which was used instead of inviting students to engage in activities geared toward developing their communicative competence. A striking activity in another class

[9] In Kyrgyzstan, public schools are funded by the state; however, this is not enough to equip schools with the necessary resources. Therefore, most schools survive on informal parental contributions.

observed was writing in Grade 10. The topic of the lesson was *Letter Writing*, and students read the text below:

Excerpt from the English textbook for Grades 10–11. pp. 17–18

Task. Read the text and answer the following questions:

a. What does the address on the envelope begin with?

b. In what order do we write the address on the envelope?

c. What parts does a letter consist of?

d. What are the beginnings and the ends of letters?

Text: Letter Writing

You know that there is the International Friendship Club in our school. The pupils have many penfriends in different republics of our country. But many of us want to have penfriends in other countries. One afternoon, we invited our English teacher to our meeting and asked her to give us advice in English letter writing. She said, 'If you want to send a letter, you have to write the address on the envelope. There is a special way of writing a letter and the address on the envelope in other countries. For example, the English do not put the name of the country and city at the beginning of the address. They begin the address on the envelope with the name of the addressee, then the number of the flat or house and the name of the street, and only then the name of the country'

Students spent time reading the text and answered questions on how to organise the information: name of the addressee and on what part of the envelope to write the address. Regardless of the content and skill (writing), the lesson activity seemed to be irrelevant considering the availability of global communication applications such as Skype, WhatsApp and others. During the post-interview reflection, the teacher explained that she also found it irrelevant, but she had to cover this activity because it was in the textbook. Textbooks are used as the syllabus, and teachers believe that they have to cover the textbook content without assessing it for relevance. For example, I observed ELT in Grade 7 in one of the secondary schools in which Oxford Press Solutions (pre-intermediate) was used as a teaching resource. This lesson shed light on how teachers are trapped in traditional practices (grammar, reading and answering questions), even though the lesson objective was to develop speaking skills and the topic of the lesson (superstition) was quite interesting. The lesson had at least three aspects that hindered students' learning: (a) students' English language level did not match the ascribed level of the textbook, as they could not understand simple sentences or construct sentences; (b) the exercises were culturally biased, and some of the superstitions did not seem to make sense to students (e.g. standing under a ladder, opening an umbrella in the house, etc.); and (c) the teacher lacked the skill to adapt lessons to make them relevant to the student context (e.g. replacing British superstitions with Kyrgyz superstitions). During the post-observation interview, I asked the teacher questions about these aspects. She responded:

> We have all levels of Solution, and the Pre-intermediate level was assigned for Grade 7. It is a good book because it is published by Oxford University. I have a teacher's book in which I can look up the right answers if I don't know.

This response indicated two things: (a) anything that is from the West is good, in particular if the book is published in Oxford, which is why it cannot be adapted; (b)

textbooks were assigned randomly without testing students' language proficiency, which hindered learning as well as participation.

Other classroom observations followed the same "paved path", i.e. the explanation of grammatical material followed by performing various exercises based on the rules (e.g. fill-in-the-blanks, translation exercises from English or vice versa, reading texts followed by comprehension questions). However, it is important to highlight that teachers' adherence to traditional approaches is not intentional resistance; rather, it is a consequence of textbook design and their previous teaching practices and beliefs based on their professional socialisation through English Language Teacher Education programmes and their schooling experience.

Lack of agentic capacity and lack of support

Post-observation interviews revealed that one of the main reasons for teachers' reproduction of activities and routines is the lack of support in developing the skills and knowledge needed for the new curriculum. As participant 3—a Grade 10 English teacher with 14 years of experience—commented:

> I know that what I teach is not good because students should learn how to use English, but I don't know where to start. They [trainers] say do not teach grammar, but if I do not, it is impossible for the students to speak. I have students in Grade 9 who do not even know how to read. So, what must I do?

This feeling was corroborated by another participant:

> I have been working only two years at this school. I expected that they [experienced teachers and administrators] would help me, but nobody helped me. I started teaching without knowing what to do. I used some activities my schoolteacher used but they were two or three activities that I liked. I think, if they did not teach me, then they don't have the right to ask me to teach students according to the new curriculum.

A participant with 38 years of experience commented:

> Of course, times have changed, and we have to teach differently. Before [during the Soviet era] we were trained properly for each change. Not like today.

These and other comments indicate that teachers were frustrated by the lack of or fragmented support in implementing the new curriculum. For example, a participant with 32 years of teaching experience said:

> I have attended several workshops organised by the international organisation, and I learned some activities. But they are not enough. I can use them for 4–5 classes but then I do not know what to teach. I wish they had more workshops so that we can teach our students communication skills.

Another participant, also reflecting others' views, said:

> In my university [teacher education program], we read, translated, retold texts and learned grammar. Here at school, they want me to teach communicative skills, writing skills and other skills like critical thinking skills. Is it fair? I teach what I know!

Participant 5, a mid-career teacher, told of her experience of in-service training:

> Whenever I participate in the training, I expect them to train or show us how to teach listening, reading, speaking, and writing but they show us some games in communicative teaching. I can't play games all the time in my class.

Also, participants expressed their opinions regarding the teacher training and support from school administration: *Trainings are so intense over one or two weeks. By the time it is over, I forgot what they have taught; "the training is good, but they are general. They [trainers] tell us to do this and that but they do not know our students"; "Only when the district educational department people come to inspect, we prepare a lesson to show our best"; "my language proficiency is not enough to teach communicative skills. I do not know how to do it"; "some trainers do not know our situation. They teach us some activities, but you can't use them in your classrooms."*

The above comments indicate that teachers are aware of their limitations, which they attributed to the inefficiency and irrelevance of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and in-service teacher education and fragmented in-service education and training (INSET) programmes in supporting the competence-based curriculum.

Workload

All participants talked of their frustration with the increased workload and school administration expectations due to the NCF. Participants reflected on the workload and pressure from the administration: *Besides my teaching, as a homeroom teacher, I have to deal with other issues such as writing a report on student academic progression or contacting parents if a student has academic and behavioural issues"; "the classes are large. In each class, we have 25–28 students, during the Soviet era, one foreign language class was divided into two with 8–10 students so that the teacher could monitor student engagement"; "the school principal gives us extra work, then when do I have time to prepare my lesson"; "I must also prepare students for Olympiad and other academic competitions or festivals."*

Participants' interviews revealed that they did not see benefits to developing new skills and changing their practices. Not seeing any payback resonated with all participants, irrespective of their career stage, as one participant noted:

> You work hard and what you get at the end is nothing. No appreciation from the school administration. Most teachers work the way they can. In our school, most of the teachers are retired or will retire in 5–7 years. We have a few young teachers. Who will come to work as a teacher for the salary teachers get? We, those who are still working as teachers, stay because it is too late for us to change professions. But some of the young teachers are waiting for a better opportunity, and as soon as they get the opportunity, they will leave.

> I do not blame them because to motivate people to stay in the profession and improve their teaching, they should be paid a good salary. They [government and schools principals] ask a lot for what they pay us.

These post-observation reflections demonstrate frustration with increasing extra-curricular activities that leave less time for preparation or improving instructional practices yet increasing teacher accountability. Teachers expressed concerns about the time they spend on administrative work, which leaves little time for preparing classes and reflecting on their teaching. Also, teachers identified a lack of sufficient recognition and pay that is not commensurate with the work they do. Thus, teachers' resistance could be attributed to the lack of personal benefits for investing their time and effort to learn new things and do things differently, that is, simply asking "What is in it for me?" (Terhart, 2013, p. 489).

Teachers' inferior position regarding curriculum change

One of the reasons for teachers' resistance to educational change is their subordinate position as they are instructed to implement change without a clear vision of what is expected. Participants' post-observation interviews revealed their dissatisfaction with implementing the new approach. Participant 5 stated:

> In the last 20 years, I have seen several changes. What is the result? They do not think about the working conditions we have in schools. The ministry gives directives to the educational department who tells the school director to give orders to us. No practical support to help us. I just do what I do as long as my students are not failing.

Another participant commented:

> Of course, the change is necessary but they [government] should not do things the way they do. People who are sitting in the ministry make decisions about how to teach. It is always easy to give orders.

One of the early career teachers said:

> I do not understand what to change and why? The whole system should be changed for change to happen. They should start change in universities [teacher training] and then in schools.

Participant 3 expressed somewhat mixed feelings, saying:

> The new curriculum does not seem to take into consideration our students and the school. I agree that we need change but how? We do not have appropriate teaching resources, but the government wants us to teach new skills. I am trying my best. What can I do?

From the above comments it is evident that teachers were frustrated with the authoritative nature of the curriculum in conjunction with a lack of sufficient

support and information about the rationale behind the curriculum and guidelines about how to implement the curriculum (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2004).

Curriculum goals conflicting with teachers' beliefs and practices

The literature on teacher resistance to educational/curriculum change consistently identifies teacher beliefs as the most influential factor when there is a discord between teachers' beliefs and curriculum goals (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestly et al., 2015; Spillane et al., 2002). Participants' opinions regarding the new curriculum revealed that they were sceptical about curriculum goals. The excerpts from post-observation interviews indicate that teachers' beliefs in what, whom, when and why English should be taught in Kyrgyzstan differ from the government's goals.

Participant 4 expressed her concern, stating:

> According to the new curriculum, all students should speak and write in English, but I think not all students need to speak English. The new curriculum should be taught only to those students who have some plans to use English. For example, if she or he wants to apply to university or wants to study abroad.

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

> In my class, I have students who cannot properly write in their own [native] language, and we want them to write in English … some students want to go to vocational schools, and they do not need English to become a driver or seamstress. Why do they need English?

Participant 3 had similar views:

> English is not included in the university admission test. Only those who want to apply to certain professions are required to take English as an additional test. So, I think, students should have more options in choosing the subject they need to achieve their goals, I mean, in their high schools.

Participant 2, an early career teacher, commented:

> I think English should be taught only to those who are motivated. For example, in my class, seven or eight students want to learn English. The rest do not want to learn English, but they distract me from teaching. If I start some activity to involve them in conversations, they keep silent or start laughing. Therefore, I think we should teach English only to those who want to learn it.

Participant 5, a late career teacher, spoke about curriculum goals:

> Requiring English to start from elementary school is unrealistic. Children do not know the grammar of their first language. When explaining grammar rules, they struggle. I think foreign languages should be taught from Grade 5.

From the above excerpts, teachers disagree with the imposed curriculum that instructs all high school graduates to have both verbal and written communicative skills as the end goal of their English language learning.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand why English teachers resist changing their instructional practices to make them consistent with the SFLL-specified learning outcomes. Data analysis reveals that this stems from intricate interactions of various factors that result in differences between what the government envisioned for curriculum change and how it has been implemented in the classroom. Teachers tended to consciously or unconsciously chose covert and principled resistance in response to the curriculum change.

The classroom observations, combined with post-observation interviews, revealed a mismatch between curriculum goals and English language teachers' classroom activities. First, there is a mismatch stemming from the teachers' capacity to bring the curriculum goals to the classroom. Participants' comments revealed that the teachers themselves lack the required competencies to implement the new curriculum. Consequently, instead of becoming agents of change, teachers became barriers to curriculum change. That said, teachers' resistance was not always deliberate or conscious, but rather an unintentional resistance stemming from a lack of adequate support and the competencies needed to teach the new curriculum. As post-observation interviews indicate, teachers were aware of their inadequacies but did not know how to facilitate students' communicative competence, which led to teachers' unintentional resistance. Comments such as, "*I don't know what to do", "my language proficiency is not enough to teach communicative skills"* and *"I don't know where to start"* indicate that they wanted to make their teaching practices align with the current needs for learning English, but their inability to adjust became the main hurdle in the new implementation process. It is clear from the participants' comments and classroom observations that curriculum change has been implemented without changing the main agents of change: the teachers. Post-observation interview analyses also revealed that government and school administration have provided little to no support for teachers in the form of initial teacher education, continuous targeted in-service teacher training, and systematic monitoring and coordination at each level so that teachers can change their instructional practices to achieve the intended goals of the SFLL. Thus, not having adequate, formal initial and continuous training to teach the new curriculum, teachers have continued to cling to tested teaching practices. From this, it seems as if the government has approached curriculum change as "we have done our job and now you do your job". Hence, this led to what Weick (1976, p. 3) referred to as *loose coupling* to describe how—as various structural elements of an organisation are less related to each other—rules are not followed, decisions are not implemented, and the assessment of each element is poorly coordinated. Also, teachers' adherence to old teaching practices could be attributed to the values and norms of their previous teaching experience (e.g. normative expectations about appropriate teaching practices, teacher education programmes and in-service

teacher training) that guided their behaviour, i.e. how things should be done (e.g. how to teach reading, how to teach grammar or how to teach FL in general) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2013). In the previous context, teachers had sufficient knowledge to respond to students' needs regarding reading, translating and retelling, i.e. what they were trained in. In the new context, students' needs go beyond reading and retelling to, instead, using English in functional situations. However, teachers' knowledge and skills formed during their previous initial teacher education are not enough to accomplish the mission they are now assigned. Thus, the intended changes may not happen unless "… teachers ending their habitual use of long-held institutional practices, teachers questioning the meaning and value of existing practices, and teachers using new practices rather than shielding existing practices from external intervention" (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015, p. 141).

Another factor in teachers' resistance is a top-down coercive-regulative approach mandating curriculum change as well as controlling its implementation and sanctioning non-compliance (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2013) mostly driven by international donors' logic (DeYoundg, 2011; Silova, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2008). Thus, teachers' inferior position results in their ceremonial acceptance of curriculum change creating the gap between what they should teach and what they do in the classrooms. This has led to *decoupling*, which occurs when organisations adopt regulations or policies but fail to implement some or all of the practices described in the policies, thus maintaining their legitimacy in the eyes of public by adopting structures and practices, which conflict with their beliefs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). Moreover, in-service teacher professional development programmes were mostly conducted by outside experts who had little knowledge of school realities (classroom size, outdated textbooks, lack of technology, etc.) and in a one-shot workshop approach. Thus, participants' instructional practices are decoupled from what has been specified in the SFLL, which has led to outdated practices remaining intact. At best, there was a superficial coupling "inserting" some practices learned from in-service teacher training or those practices that were feasible.

Decoupling also occurred between teachers' beliefs about *what*, *how* and *to whom* English should be taught and the government's aspirations. The NCF stipulates that the main goal of teaching FL is to develop students' communicative, cognitive and socio-cultural competencies that will enable them to effectively communicate in various contexts (SFLL, 2014). However, teachers were sceptical about the feasibility and practicality of developing the specified goals as they believe that not all students need to these communicative skills. Teachers' scepticism was based on their beliefs that some students lacked motivation to learn English because of the impracticality of learning English. However, student motivation can stem from other factors such as teachers use of engaging learning materials, and diverse and meaningful activities to facilitate students' engagement in the classroom. That said, there is a grain of truth in teachers' beliefs about the impracticality and irrationality of requiring all students to learn English. Motivation to learn English, and learning in general, hinges on the value attached to learning a particular subject. Students' motivations or goals for learning emanate from their personal and academic goals and aspirations. For example, in most rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, students have little opportunity to use English for real communicative purposes. The government's aspiration to

teach English (and FL in general) to develop communicative, linguistic and sociocultural competencies so as to be successful and competitive in today's world does not seem compelling enough for most high school students. This could be due to the irrelevance of investing in learning a foreign language when they do not see the practical benefits, as well as the irrelevance of the foreign language to their prospective job opportunities. Jonasson (2016) stated, "People often ask if there is a need to learn mathematics, languages, science or whatever subject that comes to mind, when they are in fact asking if it would be useful, or helpful to have some mastery of them" (pp. 6–7). This implies that educational reform has not considered local needs or offered options for students who want to pursue vocational careers that are relevant to their context.

Another case of decoupling was the obvious environmental and technical constraints in new curriculum implementation. Curriculum change was planned and implemented without considering the availability of the teaching resources and without creating a learning environment conducive to implementation. For example, teachers' ceremonial acceptance was observed in their use of new textbooks, published both locally and internationally, but they continued teaching in old ways, i.e. grammar–translation and rote memorisation. Priestley et al. (2012) emphasised the importance of the environment in teachers' agentic capacity, stating, "Agency can be understood in an ecological way, that is, strongly connected to the contextual conditions within which it is achieved and not as merely a capacity or possession of the individual. Agency is achieved in particular (transactional) situations" (p. 197). Thus, in the case of this study, teachers' classroom activities were constrained by their teaching resources and the school environment. One interesting finding was that career stage, i.e. early career or late career, did not affect teachers' responses to curriculum change, but rather resistance depended on the above environmental conditions.

The above analysis reveals that teachers' resistance to curriculum change stems from various interwoven and interdependent factors that affect the efficacy and viability of the curriculum change goals. This is due to a lack of communication, coordination and implementation planning among all stakeholders for achieving curriculum goals. It seems that curriculum change was mostly accepted ceremonially, loosely, and it was decoupled in its alignment with important structures and activities (e.g. curriculum change goal, teachers' practices and beliefs, environmental and resource constraints, etc.).

Conclusion

Curriculum change is a complex process that requires alignment, communication and coordination at each level of the system to ensure the success of the intended goals. The findings of this study revealed that curriculum change has not yielded the much-desired outcomes because each element at every educational level is linked ceremonially and loosely, and is decoupled, providing insights about teachers' resistance to curriculum change. As such, ELT teaching approaches, practices and beliefs

remain unchanged; more than two decades after independence, teachers' classroom practices remain "truer to [their] Soviet roots" (DeYoung, 2006, p. 511).

Curriculum change has stalled because reforms have occurred only at a structural level (e.g. the National Curriculum Framework, Standards for Foreign Language Learning, and publishing new textbooks) and have lacked planned capacity building through targeted professional support and adequate teaching and learning resources. Also, they have not touched on the deeper level of teaching practices and beliefs. In other words, structural changes did not have much impact on ELT practices because of the misalignments between what teachers can do, environmental conditions and resources, and intended curriculum change. For example, Biesta and Tedder (2007), in moving away from the view that teachers' capacity is a context-free individual ability, stated:

> This concept of agency highlights that actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment…the achievement of agency depends on the availability of economic, cultural and social resources within a particular ecology…the achievement of the agency will always result in the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations. (p. 137)

This suggests that success or failure of the intended curriculum goals does not only hinge on teachers' individual ability to act in response to curriculum change but that teachers' agency is situated and constructed within the socio-cultural contexts in which they act.

One of the main constraints was that the reforms overlooked teachers' agentic capacity in fostering curriculum change. This is because curriculum change has been primarily top-down, superficial structural changes that fail to provide teachers with the targeted support to acquire and develop the necessary skills to bring change to the classroom. In other words, structural change does not automatically result in the intended change unless it involves the realignment of teachers' deeply rooted teaching practices and beliefs, which were established and reinforced through normative and regulative mechanisms imposed through initial teacher education, textbooks and school teaching practices. Studies report that the rule of the game as a constituent part of institutions constrains self-enforcing behaviour relevant in the particular historical period that persists even after external forces (e.g. reforms) are directed to alter them. Those studies argue that reforms will not have an enduring impact if there are only superficial structural changes that do not alter socio-cultural constraints (e.g. teaching practices and beliefs) reinforced by previous educational practices and beliefs (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Yamasaki & Kuno, 2017).

The findings of this study indicate that curriculum changes are part of the complex and dynamic relationships between various institutional elements. They have reciprocal effects on each other that affect the success and effectiveness of the intended curriculum goals. Thus, each element should be aligned and tightly coupled by providing a conducive classroom environment, targeted support to enhance teachers' agentic and participatory capacity, and a shared vision among educational stakeholders to achieve the intended curriculum goals.

Study limitations and future research implications

One of the main limitations of the study is that the findings were based only on the teachers' perspectives; however, including other stakeholders could yield more comprehensive data. For example, one of the findings of this research was teachers' beliefs regarding the value of mandated learning English for all students. Although the findings present only the teachers' perspectives on "who," "what" and "how much" students should learn, it would be important to hear students' perspectives on the value of learning English because, after all, they are the final recipients of the educational change. In regard to the generalisability of the current findings to other geographical areas, in qualitative research, the aim is not to generalise findings to other individuals and contexts but "particularity is the hallmark of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2009, p. 193). That said, providing rich, thick descriptions of the context of the study may determine whether the findings can be transferred "because of shared characteristics" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32, cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Thus, the finding of the study can be generalised to similar contexts.

The findings of this study may have implications for educational policymakers, school administration and other stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan in reviewing existing educational policies, to make them effective in achieving the intended learning outcomes and feasible within the available resources.

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