Social Constructions of Early Childhood Care and Education in the Kyrgyz Republic before and after Independence

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Dedicated to my late husband Ulan Nogoibaev.

Thank you for everything!

Without you this endevour

would not be possible at all…

Abstract

As the awareness is rising in the global community about the fact that inequalities are to a large extent established long before a child enters a primary school, arguments have been put forward to examine more closely what happens to a child in his or her early years (Waller, 2009).

This study explores early childhood education and care in the Kyrgyz Republic in a historical comparative perspective using a theoretical framework underpinned by social construction theories. The primary concern of the research is to study dominant social constructions of childhood and the child as reflected in policy documents and how these may change over time. This will be done through an historical analysis of Kyrgyzstan during two periods: the Soviet period (1980-1990); and the time after Independence (1991-2011). In order to understand the rationale behind promoting certain constructions over others, the analysis is situated in the wider social and economic context of the country during the two time periods.

The study concludes that although there are differences and variance in the social constructions of childhood and the child represented in policy rhetoric in the two periods, the model of ECCE institutions has undergone little change. Policy makers and practitioners revealed constructions that were not dominant in policy documents, but which had played a key role in shaping the ECCE institutions both in the Soviet time and after Independence in Kyrgyzstan.

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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	Education for All
FSU	Former Soviet Union
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
KAE	Kyrgyz Academy of Education
NSC	National Statistics Committee
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of High Commissioner on Human Rights
PEI	Preschool Education Institutions
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
SCS	State Committee on Statistics
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
WB	World Bank

1 Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) has been termed the bedrock of Education for All (UNESCO, 2010). The very first of six Education for All (EFA) goals specified in the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action is aimed at expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO, 2006). The goal is well supported by scientific evidence that good nutrition, effective health care and access to good pre-school facilities can mitigate social disadvantage and lead to improved learning achievement (ibid.).

Although the general acknowledgement that early cognitive and social emotional development are strong determinants of school progress has been prevailing for a long time, new linkages have recently been made between early childhood experience and well-being in adulthood. The notion of the *development potential loss* (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007) has been discussed not only in scholarly circles, but has raised a heated global debate whether early childhood care and education is a private or a public good (OECD, 2006).

As the awareness is rising in the global community about the fact that inequalities are to a large extent established long before a child enters a primary school, arguments have been put forward to examine more closely what happens to a child in his or her early years (Waller, 2009). Studying ECCE is, therefore, important for those who care about the present and the future of young children around the globe. ECCE is a broad concept which, according to UNESCO (2006), encompasses efforts aimed at supporting health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

A vast array of recent literature in the field of early childhood calls for taking into account the wider political, social and cultural context of childhood (Waller, 2009). ECCE is, as childhood itself, a cultural, political and ideological construction which changes over time and place (James and Prout, 1990). Studying these constructions is an important task. Too often people take for granted the existing patterns in early childhood without questioning constructions that directly influence the institutional arrangement, order and design of ECCE and childhood in time and space (Moss et al.,

1999). Research, therefore, needs to examine more critically issues in ECCE because the way that children and childhood are perceived in society shapes children's everyday life. This includes examining policies and institutions set up for them.

In this study, I examine constructions of children and childhood as depicted in policy documents during two different periods of Kyrgyzstan history: before and after Independence in 1991. I also study the way these construction are interpreted by different stakeholders in the field to see if they are understood by them as to having changed over time.

1.1 Brief Background on the Kyrgyz Republic

The Kyrgyz Republic is a small landlocked country in Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Map 1). The mountainous region of Tien Shan covers over 80 per cent of the country. The Kyrgyz Republic is primarily mountainous with dry fertile valleys and deep gorges (NSC, 2012).

The Kyrgyz are believed to have emerged from various groups that settled in Central Asia over 2,000 years ago. In the 9th and 12th centuries, some of these groups moved to the central and western Tien Shan and Pamir regions and eventually formed what is today the Kyrgyz ethnic community. The area that Kyrgyzstan now occupies has been a crossroads for centuries. Located on one branch of the Silk Road, armies and traders have left their marks on the land and history of Kyrgyzstan. Many kingdoms have ruled the area in different centuries. In the middle of the 19th century, Central Asia and its people became a part of the Russian Empire. In 1924, seven years after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet Union established the Kara-Kyrgyz autonomous region, later renamed the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic. In 1936, its status was elevated to the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic of the USSR. On 31 August 1991, after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz Republic officially declared itself an independent state (NSC, 2013, p. 2).

The population of the Kyrgyz Republic is approximately 5.6 million people. Around 66 per cent of the population resides in rural areas. The country is characterized by a high rate of population growth, mainly due to the high birth rate (27.1 per 1,000 people in 2011) and relatively low death rate (6.5 per 1,000 people in 2011). Over the past two

decades, the size of the population has increased 1.2-fold, by 1 million people. Because of high fertility and population growth rates, Kyrgyzstan has a young population: 32 per cent of the county's residents are under the age of 15, while the population over the age of 65 is relatively small, about 4 per cent (NSC, 2012).
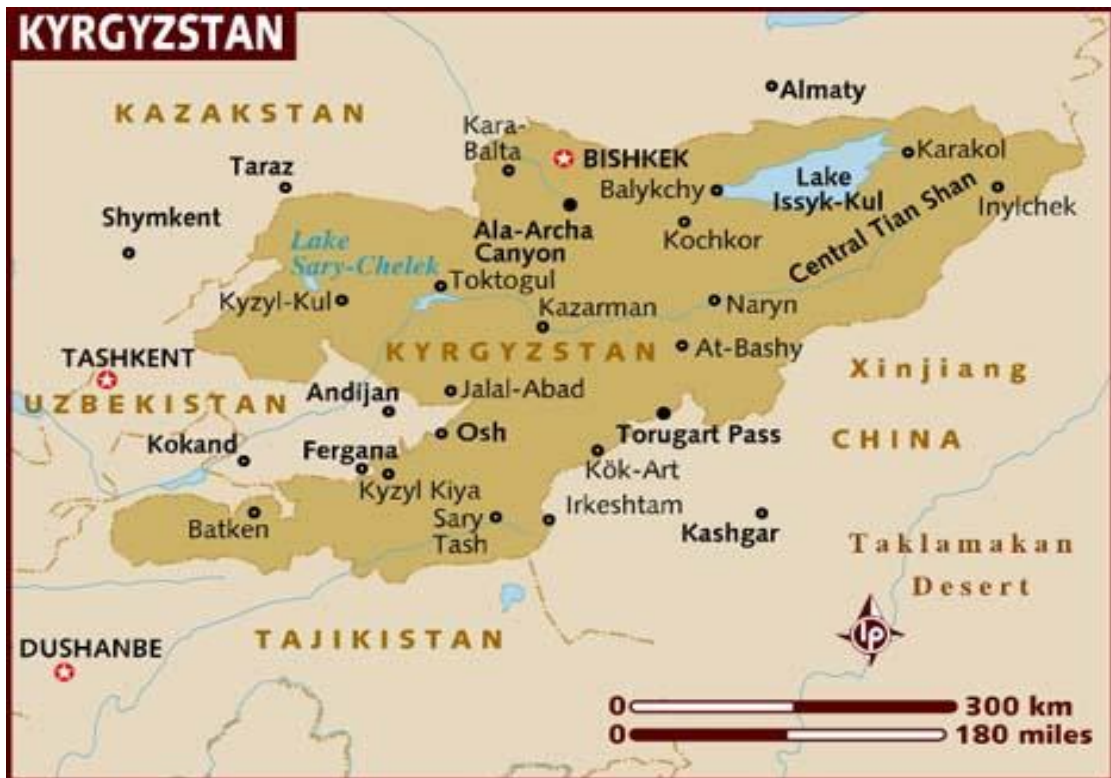
Map 1. Map of the Kyrgyz Republic and its borders

In terms of its international ties, the Kyrgyz Republic is a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community. Kyrgyzstan joined the World Trade Organization in 1998 (ibid.).

1.2 Purposes of the Study

The study explores ECCE in the Kyrgyz Republic. The primary concern and research focus relate to constructions of ECCE as reflected in policy documents and their change over time. This is done through an historical analysis of Kyrgyzstan during two periods: the Soviet period (1980-1990); and the time after Independence (1991-2011). The definition of ECCE is narrowed in the study to the formal state or publicly funded early

learning services for children under the age of seven which is the official primary school enrolment age in Kyrgyzstan.

The overall objective of the study is to examine and compare the social constructions of childhood and the child in policy documents in the two historical periods in Kyrgyzstan.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the social constructions of childhood and the child in policy documents in the Soviet and after Independence period in Kyrgyzstan?

- How are these constructions of childhood and the child reflected in institutional ECCE arrangements during the two periods?

- Have these constructions and institutional arrangements changed over time?

1.3 Rationale and Significance of the Study

Over 200 million children worldwide do not reach their full human potential (McGregor et. al, 2007). The most dramatic loss of developmental potential occurs prenatally and in the first few years after birth when children are most vulnerable to external threats and require the most nurturing (Engle, 2009). Poverty, stunting and lack of early opportunities are important predictors of the human development potential loss. According to estimates, the Kyrgyz Republic is losing one per cent of its annual gross domestic product due to the prevalence of stunting, poverty and the high number of children not attending preschool (ibid.).

There is a growing body of evidence about the importance of the early years for a child's immediate well-being and long-term outcomes, along with a critique of the dominant paradigms of economically rich, Western societies influencing the field which, it is argued, needs to search for more innovative theoretical studies (Woodhead, 2006). There is also a critique of the field in terms of research and theories about childhood undertaken until now that, according to James and James (2004, p. 48), have failed to specify processes and mechanisms through which diverse childhoods have emerged historically.

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The rationale for this study is grounded in the fact that no study has so far been undertaken on ECCE taking into consideration the historical dimension in the Kyrgyz Republic. The conceptual framework developed for this research permits a historical comparison of policy and practice based on an analysis of the social constructions of childhood and the child.

Recently, the idea that our image or understanding of the child is socially constructed in particular contexts and that, in turn, they influence policies, institutions and practices gained increased attention (Moss, 2010). Much of the recent literature in the field also calls for the need to consider the wider political, cultural and social context of childhood (Waller, 2009).

Therefore, social constructionist, post-modernist and post-structural perspectives have been employed for the study. According to Qvortrup et al. (1994) and James and Prout (1990 in Woodhead, 2006) these perspectives represent a much more radical critique of conventional theory and research on children. The approach is also giving way for a more historical and political perspective on institutions, policies and practices, and is shedding light on the ways theories, knowledge and beliefs about young children regulate their lives.

The notion of childhood varies depending on how the concepts of child-specific "needs" and "competencies" are articulated and made evident in laws and social policy, as well as in the everyday social interactions that take place between adults and children. Social constructions of childhood depict the complex interweaving of social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws, policies, and everyday actions of both adults and children (James and James, 2004, p. 13 in Wells, 2009).

The findings of this study are unique to the context of Kyrgyzstan. They are unique in the sense that the Kyrgyz Republic has a long history of a nomadic way of life with a literacy rate of its population of only 0.7 per cent in early 1900 (Izmailov, 1973). After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and after joining the Soviet Union, the population of Kyrgyzstan settled in less than a decade. According to UNESCO, the literacy rate was universal at the time of Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991 (as cited in Anderson and Heyneman, 2005). No other country in the world, except for a few Central Asian

neighbours, has passed this road. Although the findings of the study may not necessarily be replicated to other contexts, there are similarities to some of the countries of the CIS due to their shared history.

1.4 Structure of the Study

The study has six chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 provides the context and background about the Kyrgyz Republic with particular emphasis on education and ECCE. Chapter 3 presents the framework that guided the research design, methods and interpretations of the findings. The research design and methods are discussed in Chapter 4, including the process of data collection, the research sites, the data quality insurance mechanisms, and the limitations and challenges of the study. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the analysis of dominant social constructions of childhood and the child in policy documents in the two time periods and the way those constructions are privileged or promoted by practitioners. Key issues in ECCE are also outlined. Chapter 6 discusses the dominant social constructions of childhood and the child in the Soviet Kyrgyz Republic and the Independent Kyrgyz Republic, assessing the way they are reflected in ECCE institutions. The chapter concludes by answering the question whether social constructions of childhood and the child changed over time.

2 Children and Education in Kyrgyzstan during the pre-Soviet, Soviet and Independence Periods

Although this study focuses specifically on the decade before and after the Kyrgyz Republic became independent in 1991, the following historical overview also includes the period before what is now known as Kyrgyzstan became a part of the Soviet Union. This is done to show the huge transformation that the Kyrgyz people and society underwent in a relatively short period of time. The focus is specifically on the education system in the two periods.

2.1 Children and Education in the Pre-Soviet Period

In the 19th and early 20th centuries the Kyrgyz population had predominantly nomadic and semi-nomadic ways of life with patriarchal and communal relations which influenced the way family relations were organized, including children's upbringing. According to historians, extended families of the Kyrgyz people, usually consisting of three and sometimes four generations, lived together in one household moving from one place to another (Rahimova, 2004). Taking into account the high birth rate, one household would have a small nursery consisting of many young children (ibid.) and usually the grandmother or an older wife would be responsible for the upbringing of the children.

According to Geier (1901 in Voropaeva and Ploskih, 2004) in Turkestan[1] education was initially undertaken in religious schools – maktabs and madrasahs set up under the mosques with the help of donations (Djunushalieva, 2005). Turgunbaeva (2008) states that access to these schools was very restricted – only boys from families which could afford fees were admitted. These religious schools were widespread in the south of Kyrgyzstan among the settled population where Islam had a strong influence, but were

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[1] Kyrgyzstan was a part of Turkestan at the time.

rare in the north of the country with populations that predominantly had nomadic ways of life (ibid.).

In the late 19th century, the Russian Empire set up the first Russian-indigenous schools in Turkestan, including Kyrgyzstan (Arzygulova, 2007; Marchenko, 2007 in Orusbaev, Mustajoki and Protassova, 2008). According to Arzygulova and others (ibid.), the schools aimed at educating local people as interpreters, translators, and administrators. According to Tolstoy, the Tsarist Russian Minister of Public Education in the late 19th century:

> The ultimate goal of educating all national minorities in our land should obviously be russification and integration with Russian people (Daniyarov, 1983, p.33).

A small (most probably the first formal) private kindergarten was set up in 1910 or 1911 in Pishpek[2] to serve primarily children of local officials (Rahimova, 2004).

2.2 Children and Education in the Soviet Union Period

Immediately after the October Revolution in 1917, one of the biggest missions of the Bolsheviks was to build up a new generation of Soviet people based on the communist ideology. Thus, the upbringing and education of children was given high priority in the policy agenda.

A number of decrees on measures to protect children and women were issued immediately after the Revolution. The Soviet Union welfare system offered comprehensive services for women and children, including job protected maternity leave with benefits replacing 80-100 per cent of the wages, and extended parental or child rearing leave with lower benefits. Leave was granted to care for a sick child and has been offered since that time (Kamerman, 2006).

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[2] What is now known as Bishkek – the capital of Kyrgyzstan.
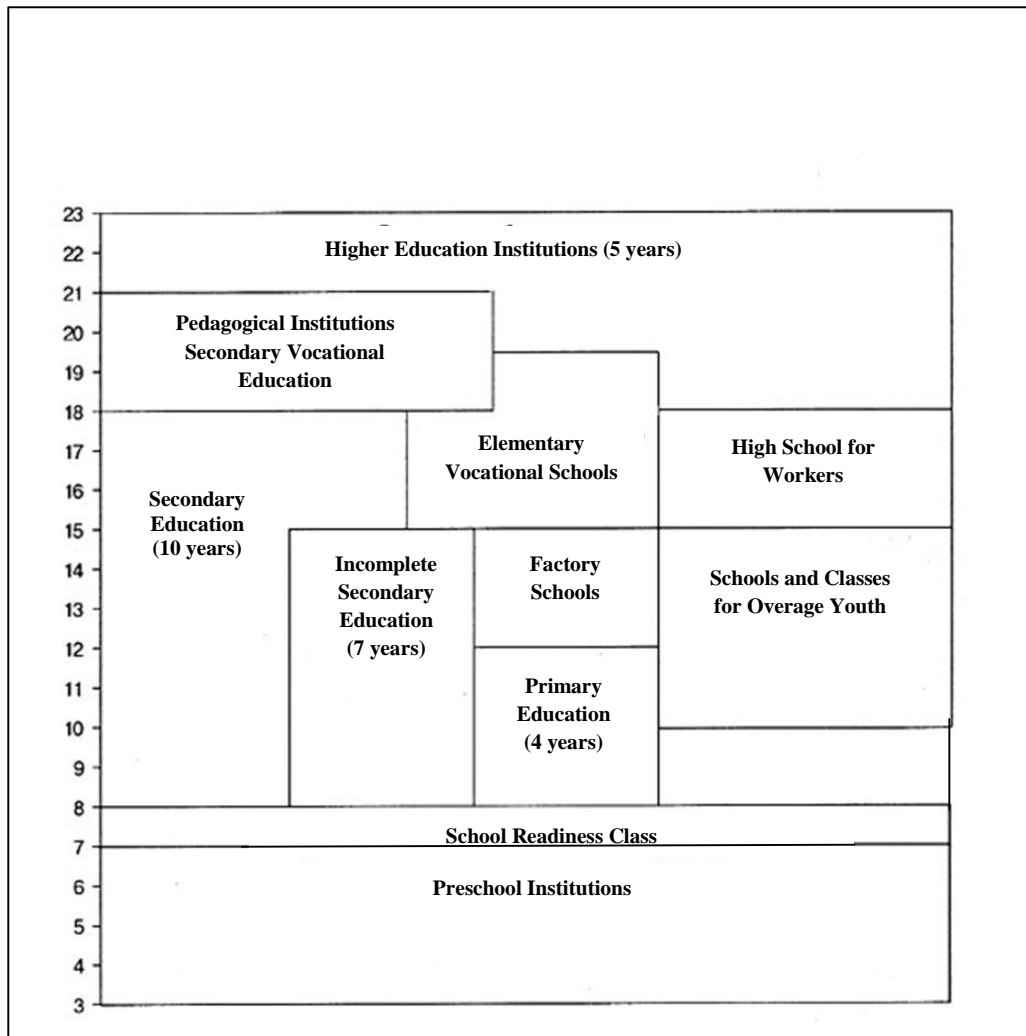
Figure 2.1 Public education system in the USSR, 1934

Source: Kodzhaspirova, 2003

Building the public education system was given priority in the Soviet policy agenda (Turgunbaeva, 2008). Figure 2.1 shows the general structure of public education in the USSR that the Communist Party approved on May 16, 1934 (Kodzhaspirova, 2003).

During the Soviet time formal institutions of early childhood education and care were under the auspices of the health sector as regards children aged 0-3 years and of the education sector as regards children aged 3-7 or 8 years depending on the start of compulsory schooling. Initially, primary school started at the age of eight years following a yearlong school readiness class. Later on, the beginning of primary schooling was lowered to seven years. At the age of 14-15 years, students with primary education could enter factory schools (lowest level of vocational education) which

usually took place in the big factories and plants. After incomplete[3] secondary education of seven years, students had a choice to either continue education in high school in the full cycle of secondary education consisting of ten years, or enter vocational institutions (four years), or combine work with evening classes in high schools for workers.

Students who wanted admission to a higher education institution had to have graduated from either a general secondary school or a secondary vocational school. Those who completed only elementary vocational school or incomplete secondary school were not certified as having completed secondary education since they lacked an *attestat zrelosti* − maturity certificate − or equivalent diploma from a specialized secondary school. They were thus not eligible to attend a higher education institution.

Tertiary education normally lasted four or five years in higher education institutions. Studying in teacher colleges for three years after finishing secondary education would result in what was termed an incomplete higher education degree (*nezakonchennoe vysshee obrazovanie*) since the full cycle of higher education of four or five years was not completed.

The establishment of preschool institutions was specified in the policy agenda of the Soviet state right after the October Revolution and given full and immediate attention. During the industrialization period of the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, preschool upbringing (*doshkolnoe vospitanie*) was considered as one of the most important social and political tasks (Mchelidze et al., 1988). There were two major reasons for this growing attention. First of all, preschool institutions were to ... free women to participate in the public, economic and cultural life of the country and help women to become literate (ibid., p. 35). According to Kreusler (1970), women were an indispensable source of labour for the Soviet industry and agriculture, and many collective farms and industrial plants were forced to open nurseries and day care centers for children of employed mothers.

Furthermore, the Soviet state put a high stake on the youngest generation in its aspiration to create a population distinguished amongst others by their adherence to

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[3] The full cycle of secondary education was ten years. Students who finished after seven years did not complete the full cycle and upon graduation could only enter elementary vocational education.

communist morality (Livschiz, 2007). This was formalized by the Communist Party in 1961 as the Moral Code for the Builder of Communism (Field, 2007). The Moral Code included principles, such as devotion to the cause of Communism, love of the socialist Motherland, intolerance of enemies of communism, peace, freedom of nations, mutual respect in the family, concern for the upbringing of children and collectivism.

In order to achieve the goal of creating a new generation of communist people, children were to be educated in state supervised institutions from their day of birth and until their university studies (Kreusler, 1970). The expansion in services for young children was a remarkable achievement at a time when primary schooling did not begin until the age of eight. The New York Times reported in 1931 that, "there are more day nurseries in Soviet Russia than in the rest of the world together" (New York Times, 27 December 1931 as cited in Valkanova, 2009, p. 211).

Table 2.1 Number of institutions and attending children in rural and urban areas in the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic, 1940-1988

Year	Number of Institutions			Number of Children		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
1940	197	103	94	7,000	5,000	2,000
1950	297	155	142	10,000	7,000	3,000
1960	533	306	227	36,000	27,000	9,000
1970	845	488	357	90,000	63,000	27,000
1980	1249	536	713	151,000	92,000	59,000
1988	1582	602	980	206,000	115,000	91,000

Source: SCS, 1989

Table 2.1 shows that in the period 1940-1988, the number of children enrolled in preschool institutions increased thirty times and the number of institutions expanded progressively. Interestingly, while the larger proportion of children were enrolled in the urban areas, the number of institutions expanded far more in rural areas with

progressive increase in the school population as well. This may be explained by the special attention given to preschool education in the rural area during the 1960s-1980s as a way to relieve female labour for further advancement of the agricultural industry (Mchelidze et al., 1988, p. 286).

2.3 Children and Education after Independence in 1991

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition to a market economy after independence in 1991 was a very painful experience for many families and their children in Kyrgyzstan. Being a small agrarian country that was heavily dependent on subsidies from the central government (UNDP, 2002), it now instead had to accept conditionality packages from the International Financial Institutions upon loss of its many economic ties with the Soviet Republics. The package of so-called "shock-therapy" led to relatively rapid implementation of economic and institutional reforms (Yarkova et al., 2004; Abazov, 1999). This resulted in a dramatic increase of the poverty rate which, according to Yarkova et al. (2004 citing Kararro and Ibragimova, 2000), reached 63 per cent in 1998.

The social sector suffered the most from these economic and political measures as the overall decline in GDP meant vastly reduced resources for key social services. In 1993, government spending on education constituted only 4.2 per cent of GDP compared to 7.6 per cent in 1990 (UNDP, 2002; Tiuliendieva, 2006).

Overall, the education system in independent Kyrgyzstan has kept the structure inherited from the Soviet Union (Figure 2.2). Pre-school education covers children aged zero to six years. Primary and lower secondary education, both of which are compulsory and free, cover grades 1 to 4 (usually ages 7-10 years) and 5 to 9 (11-15 years), respectively. Upper secondary school is not compulsory and can be completed in general education schools, vocational schools, or specialized technical schools. Post-secondary education can take place either in vocational schools and specialized technical schools, or in higher education institutions (OECD, 2010).

In 2010, there were more than 1.1 million students in the system, of whom more than 396,000 were enrolled in the primary grades. Almost all (98 per cent) students attended

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public schools, and over two-thirds of these students were located in the rural areas (NSC, 2014).

The number of preschool institutions fell dramatically immediately after Independence. Of the 1,696 kindergartens operating in Kyrgyzstan before independence in 1990, only 465 were functioning in 2006. In 2010, kindergartens served only 13 per cent of the children aged 0-6 years (NSC, 2011).
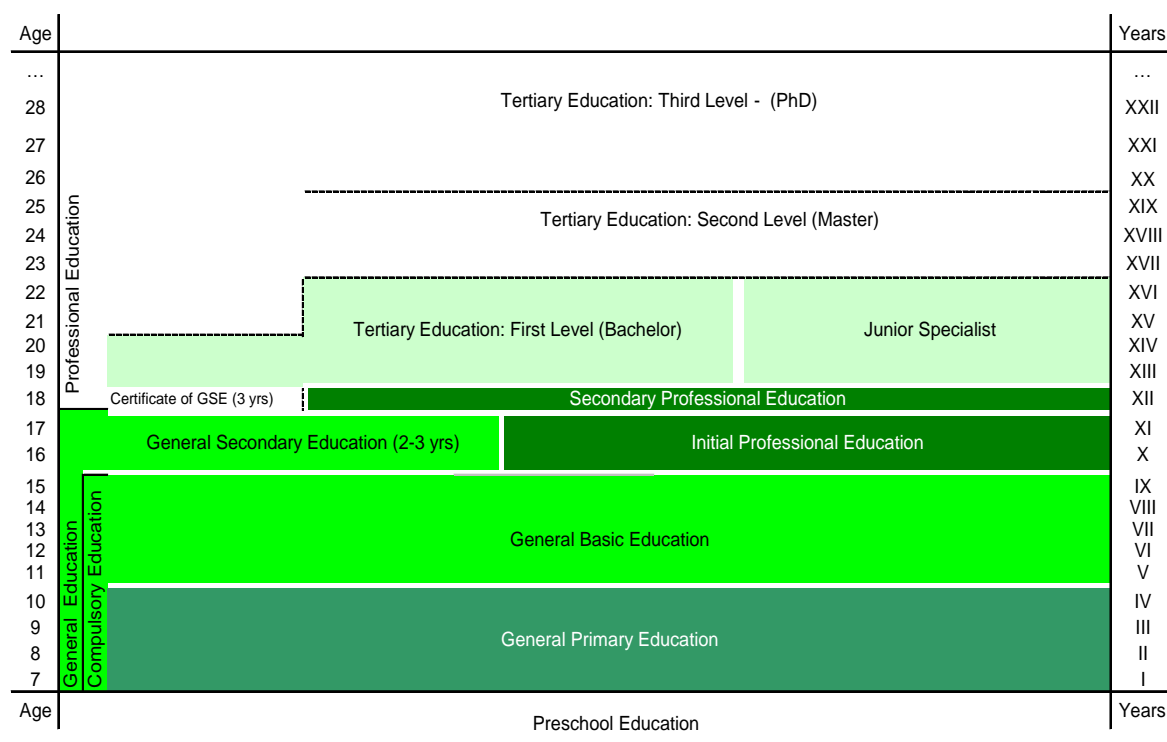
Figure 2.2 Formal education system in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2010

Source: OECD, 2010, p.74

In fact, Kyrgyzstan experienced the sharpest decline in enrolment in pre-primary education of all former USSR republics (Figure 2.3). The reasons for this decline were two-fold. First, privatization of state owned enterprises resulted in the closing down of many kindergartens which belonged to the enterprises during the Soviet time. Second, the preschool institutions that continued to exist started to charge fees in order to compensate for reduced state funding. This meant that many children, especially from rural and poor families, could not afford the services (ADB, 2003).
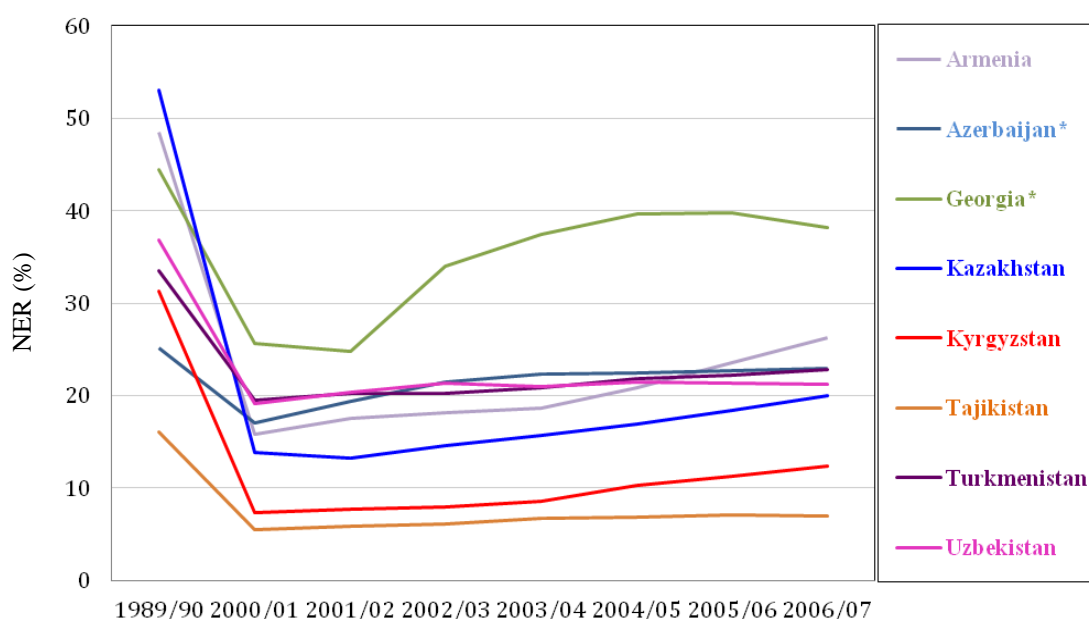
Figure 2.3 Net enrolment in pre-primary education, CIS, 1989/90-2006/07

Source: UNICEF, 2008

2.4 Summary

Although 70 years of Soviet rule constitute a small part of the long history of the Kyrgyz people, it had a dramatic influence since it resulted in the settlement of people who had been largely nomadic for more than 2,500 years. The introduction of mass literacy and the establishment of a formal education system from kindergarten to higher education is one of the great achievements of the Soviet state. The Soviet government acknowledged the importance of creating a welfare system for young children and their families and took formal responsibility for young children as future communist citizens.

The collapse of the USSR brought independence to the Kyrgyz Republic but the transition to a market economy was a painful experience for its population. Social sector deterioration and the rise of the poverty level following the "shock-therapy" measures taken by the Government of the new country seriously impacted children and their families across the country.

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In order to explore this in more detail, a framework for understanding social constructions of childhood and the child in Kyrgyzstan at the different times is presented in the next chapter.

3 Understanding Social Constructions of Childhood and the Child

The theoretical framework presented in the following has been developed based on an analysis of the general literature on social constructions of childhood and the child. It will be used to guide the analysis of social constructions of childhood and the child in Kyrgyzstan using two lenses. One is the social constructions of childhood and the child as reflected and promoted through policy documents. The other is whether social constructions, as reflected in policy documents and in ECCE institutions and their practices, have different, similar or hybrid forms in the two historical periods.

3.1 Social Constructions of Childhood and the Child

Since the 1960s, there has been increased attention to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives on childhood. Aries (1962) and de Mause (1976) (in Goelman et al., 2004) started the discussion of the history of childhood and have influenced the use of a wider disciplinary perspective in childhood research. Aries (1962) first highlighted the socially constructed character of childhood and proposed to consider childhood as more than an unproblematic descriptor of a natural biological phase. Our way of regarding and behaving towards children shape the children's own experiences and responses to and engagement with the adult world (James and James, 2004).

The idea that our image or understanding of the child is socially constructed (Cleverley and Philips, 1986; James and Prout, 1990; Moss et al., 1999) in a particular context and that these constructions are, in turn, reflected in policies, institutions and practices has recently gained increased attention (Moss, 2010). The social construction perspective emphasizes that the phenomenon does not exist independently of people's actions, beliefs and desires (Rosenberg, 2008). Hence, the image and understanding of childhood and the child may vary from one culture to another as well as undergo transformations within the same culture during different historical periods.

The concept of childhood as a distinct stage of life from, for example, adulthood is a modern one. Hanson (1963) noted that traditional societies see life in terms of the cycle of youth, maturity, and old age, where youth extends from infancy to young adulthood. Philippe Aries in his seminal *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) found through examination of historical artefacts that, in the Middle Ages, childhood in France was not seen as a distinct stage from adulthood – children were simply small adults (Cleverley and Philips, 1986). From the 15th century onwards, children began to appear as children (Waller, 2009). After the introduction of compulsory schooling in the late 19th century in Europe, the specific category of childhood was produced and constructed (ibid.).

Moss et al. (1999) distinguish among five dominant constructions of the child, as summarized in Table 3.1. These constructions or images and the thinking behind them are promoted, reinforced and replicated in policy rhetoric, in the public discourse, among professionals, such as teachers and caregivers, and among parents. Moss and Petrie (2005) suggest that dominant constructions are not the result of a special design, rather something that emerge from "contingent lash-ups of thoughts and actions" (citing Rose, 1999, p. 27). The constructions do not appear instantaneously, but evolve over many years under the influence of and with inputs from many different powers, architects and structures (ibid., p. 86).

The construction of the Child as a Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer depicts the child as an empty vessel; the life of a child progresses from incompleteness to maturity. The main goal of early childhood is to provide appropriate skills and reproduce dominant cultural values. The construction of the Child as Innocent and in the Golden Age of Life reinforces the inborn "goodness" of a child and his or her needs in a protective environment. This idealized image is heavily exploited and promoted in commercials of a wide range of products for children. The Child as Nature or a Scientific Child stems from medicine and/or developmental psychology. Biological, pre-determined stages of a child's development are prioritized and the everyday context and cultural aspects are underplayed. This construction promotes a possible universal image of the child which can be measured and studied using different categories and indicators. The Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor emphasizes the child as naturally bonded and attached to his/her mother. This construction supports childcare services when mothers are needed to expand the workforce and join the labour market.

Table 3.1 Constructions of childhood and the child

Social Construction	Meanings	Implications for Education
The Child as Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer	A young child is understood as an empty vessel that needs to be filled with proper knowledge. Childhood is the preparatory stage or beginning of a journey with progressively growing importance.	The child needs to receive pre-determined "appropriate" knowledge, skills and dominant cultural values.
The Child as Innocent, in the Golden Age of Life	A young child is seen as innocent and naive with innate goodness. Childhood represents an idealized period during which children need constant protection from the reality and the external world.	The child's expression in free play is prioritized; play is used as the main methodological tool for learning.
The Child as Nature or Scientific Child	A child is seen as a natural and abstracted rather than a social being. Childhood is a natural, biologically determined stage with certain development milestones.	The child's everyday context is ignored because of a genuine belief that each child follows a pre-determined sequence of biological stages. Child development is divided into measurable categories and domains.
The Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor	A child is seen as naturally and biologically bonded and attached to his or her mother. If the labour market needs to be expanded with a female workforce, alternative care must be arranged.	The child and childcare issues are considered from the point of parents as labour force. Day-care services are prioritized in order *"to keep a child safe while mom is working"*.
The Child as a Co-constructor of Knowledge, Identity and Culture	A child is seen as a separate individual who has his or her own stance which might be distinct from that of the parents or caregivers or other adults. Childhood is considered as one of the components of the societal structure having the same value as others, e.g. adulthood.	The child is a social actor participating in and determining his/her own life as well as the life of the family. Childhood is socially constructed and varies across time, space, and culture. There is no universal child or childhoods, but many children and childhoods.

Source: Developed by the author based on Moss et al., 1999

The Child as a Co-constructor of Knowledge, Identity and Culture has emerged recently as a result of a "new paradigm of the sociology of childhood" (Prout and James, 1990 in Moss et al., 1999). Children are considered and studied in their own right, and not as an auxiliary subject in the family or broader societal context. This construction or

perspective rejects the possibility of a universal childhood, and call for recognition of diversity and multiple perspectives on childhoods and the child.

The dominant constructions are often so deeply embedded in the thinking and action of, for example, parents, practitioners, and policy makers, that we do not recognize what it means for a child's everyday life. According to James and James (2004) traditional socialization theory stemming from developmental psychological understanding of the child leads to universal ideas of child development and represents children as passive and progressing in development. In this very influential discourse, children are framed as pre-determined and linked to age developmental stages that leave little room for individuality. Thus, according to Lee (2001 in James and James, 2004, p. 27) the dominant discourse or "regime of truth" about childhood from the lenses of developmental psychology and socialization theory placed attention to the "changing" (i.e. unstable) state of the child on the way to the stable status of adult. The child was regarded as "becoming" rather than "being".

This is why it is imperative to understand linkages between dominant discourses and the everyday practice of young children and to examine the social constructions predominant in society. Dahlberg (1997 in Moss et al., 1999) argues that:

> ... From a social constructionist perspective [early childhood institutions], as well as our images of what a child is, can be and should be, must be seen as the social construction of a community of human agents, originating through our active interaction with other people and with society... [Early childhood] institutions and pedagogical practices for children are constituted by dominant discourses in our society and embody thoughts, conceptions and ethics which prevail at a given moment in a given society (ibid., p. 62).

According to Dahlberg (ibid.), early childhood institutions are also socially constructed. Their role, purpose and modality are not pre-determined but rather influenced by constructions of childhood in the particular society and its wider socio-political context.

The notion of childhood varies with regard to the ways in which concepts of child-specific "needs" and "competencies" are articulated and made evident in laws and social policy, as well as in the everyday social interactions that take place between

adults and children. Social constructions of childhood represent the complex interweaving of social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws, policies and everyday actions of both adults and children. Therefore, much of the recent literature in the field also calls for the need to consider the wider political, cultural and social context of childhood (Waller, 2009) in order to get a broader and complete picture.

If we take the position that our images of the child and childhood are socially constructed, the question is how to capture dominant discourses prevailing in a particular historical time period. One of the ways to do so is to examine policy documents.

3.2 The Role of Policy and Law in Constructing Childhoods

Wright and Shore (1997 in James and James, 2004) call for the need of anthropologists or other social scientists to study policy issues. The argument is that:

> through policy, the individual is categorized and given such statuses and roles as "subject", "citizen", "professional", "national", "criminal", and "deviant". From the cradle to the grave, people are classified, shaped and ordered according to policies, but they may have little consciousness of or control over the processes at work (p. 4).

In order to understand how childhood is constituted and regulated, we need to explore policies and laws.

There is no single and agreed definition of policy (Ozga, 2000; Ball, 2006; Bray et al., 2007). Many scholars, such as Yeatmen (1998) and Stone (2002 in Bown et al., 2009), agree that a policy process is complex and influenced or premised on different actors' beliefs and values and on multiple agendas and interests. Although policy means a series of processes, negotiations and transformations (Taylor et al., 1997 in Bown et al., 2009), the focus in this study is written policy documents (laws, regulations, etc.) in order to capture the discourses about the social constructions that they promote and privilege. These subsequently determine the ECCE institutions' forms and means of

operation (Rigby et al., 2007). According to James and James (2004), it is important to explore the consequences social policy have for children, both as individuals and as members of a social category (children). Policies should be regarded as processes, rather than documents (ibid.), and as both texts and discourses (Ball, 2006) open to different interpretations, mediations and implementation.

Policy analysis can either critically examine existing policies or shed light on the policy construction process (Olssen et al., 2004). Gordon et al. (1977) differentiate between analysis <u>for</u> policy and analysis <u>of</u> policy (ibid.). Whatever approach is taken, Olssen et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of the context of policy documents.

Rigby et al. (2007) distinguish five policy tools commonly used by governments in ECCE:

- Direct government provision;

- Grants-in-aid to lower levels of government;

- Vouchers that assist parents in purchasing childcare services in the private market;

- Tax expenditures that refund a portion of family childcare costs; and

- Government insurance to fund childcare by parents or other caregivers.

The law is both a key element in the process of social change and therefore in production, regulation and reproduction of childhood over time (James and James, 2004, p. 64). Freeman refers to legislation as a "potent symbol of legitimacy" that sets standards for what is wrong or right (ibid.). Laws and regulatory frameworks are central to constructing children and childhood. At the same time, Laws serve as a social mirror reflecting adult perspectives on childhood that underpin the law (James and James, 2004, p. 75).

3.3 The Value of Historical Analysis

Historical research can, according to Gall (2007) and others, be defined as a process of systematically searching for data to answer questions about a phenomenon from the past to gain a better understanding of the foundation of present institutions, practices,

trends, beliefs and issues in education. Lagemann (2005) adds that history connects enduring dilemmas or current puzzles and, in doing so, helps in understanding the present in more depth (p. 17).

Bray et al. (2007) distinguish (adapted from Kazamias, 2001) the following theoretical positions used in comparative education research with historical perspectives:

- *Marxism/Critical Theory* that emphasize the role of economic factors and the influence of social class on policy and practice;

- *Dependency Theory/World Systems Analysis* that criticize hegemony of the developed "West" or "North" over the "developing world" or "South";

- *Poststructuralism* that recently gained popularity in academic circles which allows for "deconstruction" of policy and/or practice that are in conflict with historical statements of intention;

- *Postmodernism* which rejects linear and reason-based views of education offering opportunities for a multi-dimensional, impressionistic appreciation of realities;

- *Postcolonialism* that views education related issues through the prism of colonialism;

- *Feminism* which challenges and reveals prejudice;

- *Neoliberalism/New Managerialism* which seek historical evidence to justify the minimal involvement of government in education and offer market concepts to govern education.

For this particular research, I have adopted the poststructural and postmodernist perspectives that, according to Ballantine (2001), are sceptical towards an "all-encompassing explanation of the world" (in Kubow and Fossum, 2007, p. 63). Bray et al. (2007) indicate that poststructuralism has gained increased importance in the academic community during the last decades. It considers language as the principal determinant of human perception (Kubow and Fossum, 2007) and encourages "deconstructions" of policy and/or practice that are at odds with historical statements

of intention (Bray et al., 2007). The term deconstruction is used to dismantle and question claims and their underlying purposes and prepositions (Kubow and Fossum, 2007, p. 63). When analysing policy texts the focus is on its meaning and the way written language is used to promote and privilege certain discourses and thereby silence others.

Postmodernism recognizes uncertainty, complexity, diversity and multiple perspectives of the social world (Moss et al., 1999) instead of linear and exclusively reason-based views of modernity (Bray et al., 2007). According to the postmodern perspective, there is no absolute reality waiting to be discovered (Moss et al., 1999). Rather, the social world and our knowledge about it are seen as socially constructed in everyday interaction and practice of all human beings (ibid.). Therefore, according to this perspective, knowledge and its construction should always be considered as context specific, value laden and closely linked to power struggles. Postmodern researchers therefore, put emphasis on contextualization, recognition of multiple perspectives of the reality, and subjective understanding of the social world as their frame of analysis.

3.4 Framework of Analysis for the Study

Figure 3.1 represents the framework for the analysis of social constructions of childhood and the child in the Kyrgyz Republic. It is built on the three elements outlined above: social construction theory; policy and laws; and historical comparison. Images of childhood and the child that are dominant in a society at a particular time influence how laws and policies are developed, and privilege and promote particular social constructions of childhood and the child. The policies and laws underpin the dominant social constructions which is reflected in how ECCE institutions function, their arrangements, their goals, and their operation modalities. The rationale behind the particular constructions relate to the wider social and economic context at the particular time.
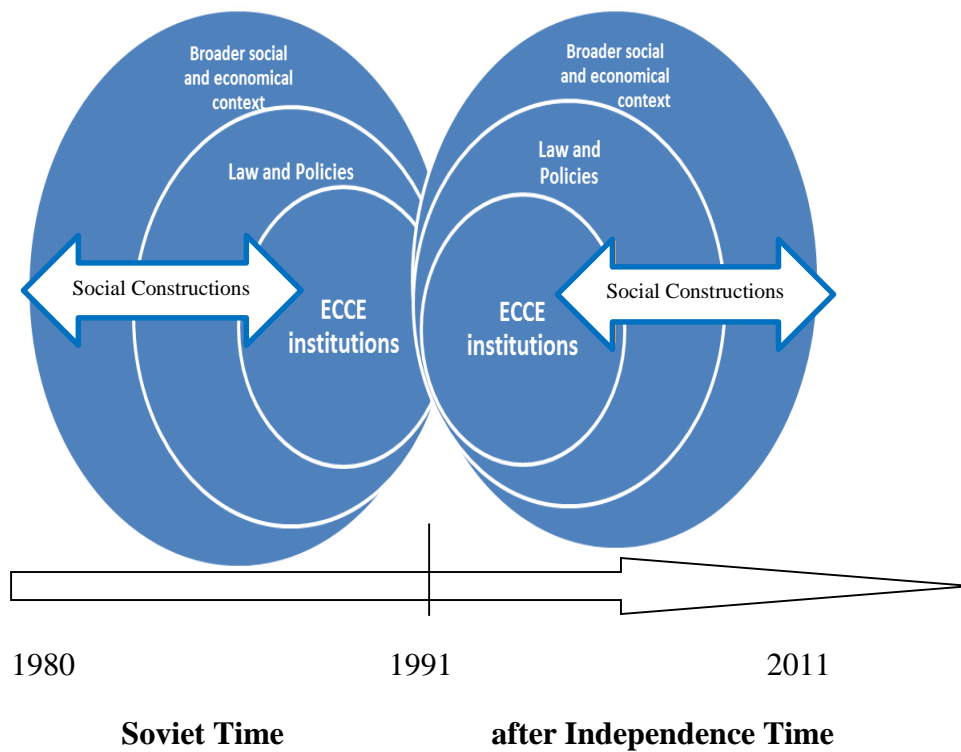
Figure 3.1 Framework for the study of social constructions of childhood and the child in the Kyrgyz Republic

The framework is applied during the two periods: 1980-1991 and 1991-2011 which is represented by the division of the linear time line in the independence year 1991. While social construction should be understood as a dynamic interaction with the three environments depicted in Figure 3.1, the analysis here is unidirectional and time bound within the two periods. The following chapter specifies how the research was designed and methods selected in order to gather the primary data for the study.

4   Research Design and Methods

Qualitative researchers always think reflectively and historically, as well as biographically

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 375).

This chapter presents the research strategy design in view of my stance as a social scientist. The applied research methods are discussed in some detail as regards data collection, selected research sites, data sources, and measures to ensure data quality.

4.1 Research Strategy

Bryman (2008) describes a research strategy as a general guiding orientation to the conduct of social research. There are two major research strategies available to researchers − the qualitative and the quantitative ones. Being different, they are often combined. The choice of the strategy is determined by the research purpose, the nature of the phenomena under investigation as well as the researcher's own standpoint and assumptions. Burrel and Morgan (1992) distinguish between four sets of assumptions about the nature of social science: *ontological; epistemological; human nature; and methodological ones*.

Ontological issues concern questions about the nature of the phenomena being studied, for example whether the social world is external to social actors or something that people invent in the process of interaction with each other. *Epistemological* assumptions address the question of what should be regarded as acceptable (Bryman, 2008) or appropriate knowledge. There are basically two different positions: one is that knowledge is considered as being hard, real and transferable in tangible forms (Burrel and Morgan, 1992); the other is that knowledge is considered as something of a softer and subjective nature which has to be personally experienced (ibid.). *Human nature* assumptions consider what social scientists prescribe to a human being about his or her environment. Determinists describe human beings as products of the external environment whose actions are conditioned by external circumstances (Burrel and Morgan, 1992). Voluntarism (ibid.) considers human beings as having a "free will" and as the creator of his or her own environment and life. All these assumptions influence the *methodologies* a researcher uses.

Following these general principles, guiding questions were developed to facilitate the research strategy and design choice (Figure 4.1). The first question, i.e. whether the social world is created in constant interaction and does not exist independently, or whether it is external to individual cognition (ibid., p. 5) and real is placed within the ontological discussion. Nominalism implies that the researcher adopts a subjectivist approach to studying a social phenomenon, whereas realism implies adopting an objectivist approach.
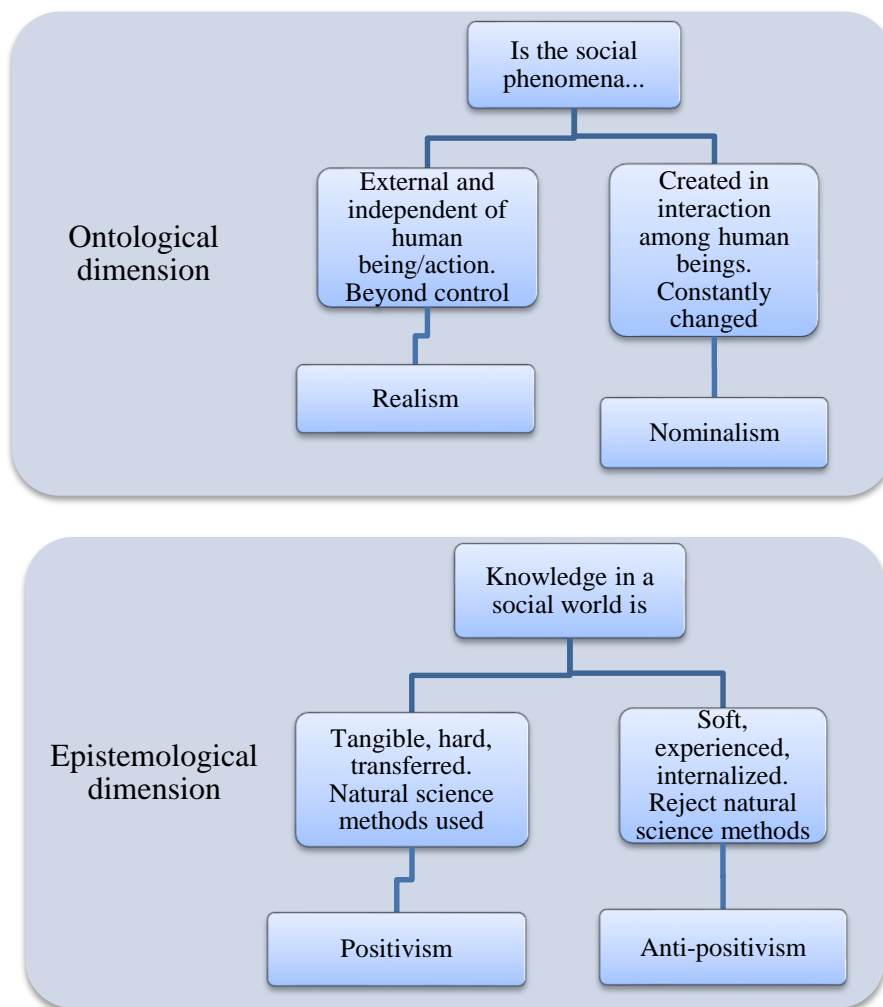
Figure 4.1 Guiding questions for the research strategy design

Source: Adapted from Burrel and Morgan, 1992 and Bryman, 2008

If knowledge can be described as something tangible which can be transferred easily and with the same meaning from one source to another, then the researcher would adopt a positivistic approach. According to Burrel and Morgan (1992), this means an "observer" position which, by searching for regularities and causal relationships, can

explain and predict the social world (p. 5). Anti-positivists reject that knowledge is of an objective nature. One has to experience and internalize knowledge in order to understand the social world. Anti-positivism leads to taking the subjectivist approach to social science.

I have chosen the qualitative research strategy due to my own stance as a subjectivist. I agree with Rosenberg (2008) that one of the goals of social science is to probe the inevitability or determinism of social arrangements. I believe that there is no objective reality in social science and one needs to take a subjective approach in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation. In that sense, my position corresponds to the way Rust et al. (1999, p.106 cited in Bray et al., 2007) describe scholars in the field of comparative education:

> Concerning the nature of reality, comparative educators would tend to see reality as somewhat subjective and multiple, rather than objective and singular. Epistemologically, comparative educators would tend to interact with that being researched rather than acting independently and in a detached manner from the content.

Qualitative research allowed me to have a more holistic view and provided me with a deeper and multi-dimensional perspective (Bray et al., 2007).

4.2 Data Collection and Research Sites

The primary data for the study were collected in the Kyrgyz Republic. In June-July 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) of the Kyrgyz Republic focal point on preschool education permitted me to conduct interviews with ECCE policy-makers and practitioners at selected institutions. These took place in autumn 2011. Meanwhile, I identified historical documents in the National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Of the four types of primary sources which, according to Gall et al. (2007), are used for historical research, I used only three: (1) *documents*, in particular on policy and legislation; (2) *oral data* from semi-structured interviews with policy makers, representatives of academia and practitioners; and (3) *quantitative data*, in particular

statistics to analyse key issues on ECCE that helped to clarify the reality of the dominant constructions of childhood and the child.

4.2.1   Identifying Relevant Policy Documents

The documents used for the research are official government documents such as policies and laws. As Gall et al. (2007) note, the selection of sources for historical data cannot be determined entirely in advance. I therefore started with a search of *provisional sources* which then became an index for primary and secondary sources. For this purpose, bibliographies related to preschool education were accessed in the National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic. Key policy documents were examined to capture how the social constructions of childhood and the child were promoted and privileged.

As the study involves a historical dimension, I searched for comparative policy documents for the two time periods. The parts related to ECCE (preschool education) were the particular focus. The parts of the documents describing general values, goals and objectives of the education system also formed part of the analysis.

The policy documents include three Constitutions and three Laws on Education. The Preschool Education Law (2009) in the after Independence period was also included despite the lack of a comparable Law in Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Legislations governing ECCE institutions were included for both periods. All policy documents for the independence period were accessed in the official online database called Toktom (http://toktom.kg/), which contains the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic and makes references to laws which are no longer in force. Legislation for the pre-independence Soviet period were accessed either in the same database or retrieved from the archives of the National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic.

For the purpose of analysis, I first identified key words to be searched, such as child, children, childhood, and derivative words such as childcare and education. I translated all text from the documents from Russian into English. I also investigated which policy documents and legislation my interviewees considered as regulating preschool education.

4.2.2 Accessing Oral Data

In order to assess the kinds of constructions promoted and privileged in the policy documents and legislation, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six interviewees representing policy makers, academicians, and practitioners, most of whom had knowledge of ECCE from both the Soviet and the current period (Table 4.1). I used snowball sampling to identify the respondents who worked in the area of preschool education during the pre-independent Soviet period.

I first contacted the MOES which has the responsibility for formulating the national education policy and for its implementation, and for setting standards for each level of the education system. It also has the responsibility for the national-level educational institutions. Although the MOES is responsible for education policy and its implementation, it does not have budgetary allocation functions which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance (OECD, 2010, p. 33).

The Ministry representative recommended contacting two representatives of the Kyrgyz Academy of Education (KAE) who had been working in preschool education during both the Soviet time and after Independence. KAE is a subsidiary institution of the MOES. The Academy mainly deals with the curriculum and textbook development, in-service teacher training and research in education (http://www.kao.kg/). The Ministry representative also recommended for interview a representative from the preschool department of the only university offering a preschool education qualification.

At the institutional level, two kindergartens were included in the study. One is located in a rural area, and was selected from a list provided by the MOES focal point. It was selected because its Head worked in the MoE during the Soviet period. It was initially established in 1983 during the Soviet period as a boarding type of kindergarten for children with severe speech delays. In 1993, shortly after independence, it was closed because of economic difficulties which meant that the local authorities were unable to sustain the services. It reopened in 1996 and still mainly has children with severe speech delay.

Table 4.1 Selected interviewees and their organizational functions

Interviewee	Functions
Representative of MOES	Policy development, normative regulations, control over implementation. Has been working in the system both in the Soviet period and after Independence
Representative of KAE	Curriculum development, in-service teacher training. Has been working in the system both in the Soviet period and after Independence
Principal of a kindergarten in a rural area	Overall management of the kindergarten. Has been working in the system since 1997
Representative of KAE	Curriculum development, research, in-service teacher training. Has been working in the system both in the Soviet period and after Independence
Representative of a pedagogical university	Pre-service teacher training, overseeing of the curriculum and research areas. Has been working in the system both in the Soviet period and after Independence.
Principal of a kindergarten in an urban area	Overall management of the kindergarten. Has been working in the system both in the Soviet period and after Independence.

The other kindergarten is located in an urban area and was chosen upon recommendation of the respondents of the first interviews. This kindergarten was initially set up in the Soviet period but was closed shortly after independence. The kindergarten reopened its doors in 1997 because the current principal fundraised and donated her own funds to restore the building.

All interviews were conducted in person, recorded and transcribed. I asked for permission to use a digital recorder and briefed about the purpose of the interview. I took hand written notes to supplement the digital recordings. I hired a graduate from the journalist department with proven experience in transcribing to transcribe the interviews. I verified myself all the recordings and transcriptions.

I conducted all interviews in Russian and translated some parts of them into English for purposes of quotation. Three interview guides were developed to cover the specific questions for the target interviewees (see Annex I, II and III). As my research was of a qualitative nature, the interview guides and questions were considered as guiding.

Although I tried to cover all questions listed in the interview guides, I did not insist on getting answers to all of them. Some of the initial questions turned out to be of little relevance (for example, questions related to number of children residing in the catchment area of the kindergarten or the budgets) since there are no comparable data from the Soviet time. The responses to the issues of in-service and pre-service teacher training as well as kindergarten practice were also not included in the study, partly for the same reason.

Five interviews took place in the capital, Bishkek city, and one in the rural area in the Chui province. The first semi-structured interview was with the MOES representative. All subsequent interviews were done as a matter of convenience and availability of interviewees and were not purposeful. They were done on the job site of the interviewees. Each interview normally lasted between one and one-and-a-half hour. There were no disturbances, except for a few interruptions during the interviews with the kindergarten principals. All interviewees were cooperative and the interviews were informative and relevant.

4.2.3   Using Supporting Quantitative Data

In addition to the oral data, quantitative data were used as a complementary source of information. According to Bryman (2008), official statistics allow researchers to undertake cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, and is an "objective" source for triangulation of data. Comparable statistics were included in the analysis for the two periods to support some of the findings from the document analysis and interviews, and to complement the provisional historical analysis in Chapter 2.

Statistics related to the independence period were easily accessible in contrast to the time of the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic. For example, data on enrolment of children in preschool education based on the socio-economic background of the family is available for public use in independent Kyrgyzstan, but not for the period of the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the data permitted more in-depth analysis of who was privileged by the particular ECCE arrangements in the two time periods. While the policy documents were useful because of their universal rhetoric, the quantitative data were used to

examine some trends over time as regards beneficiaries of the planned policies seen in relation to wider issues of workforce participation and poverty.

4.3 Data Quality: Validity and Reliability

Bryman (2008) specifies the three most prominent criteria for evaluation of social research: reliability; replication; and validity. Reliability concerns whether the results of a study can be repeated (Vulliamy et al., 1990). Replication addresses whether a study can be undertaken by another researcher in the same way which requires that researchers specify the procedures of a study (Bryman, 2008). Validity is defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure (Ary et al., 2010). Reliability, replication, and validity are strongly emphasized in quantitative research (Bryman, 2008) and their relevance and appropriateness for qualitative research are still being debated (Kleven, 2008). Authors, such as Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman, 2008) suggest using trustworthiness and authenticity criteria to evaluate qualitative research.

Table 4.2 summarizes standards of rigour for research and the issue addressed for each of them. Since I have chosen the qualitative research strategy, the standards of *credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability* are particularly valid.

Table 4.2 Standards of rigour and issues addressed in quantitative and qualitative research

Quantitative	Qualitative	Issue
Internal validity	Credibility	Truth value
External validity	Transferability	Generalizability
Reliability	Dependability	Consistency
Objectivity	Confirmability	Neutrality

Source: Ary et al., 2010

Credibility refers to accuracy or truthfulness of the findings. In order to meet credibility criteria, a number of methods or techniques can be used, such as control of bias, respondent validation, and triangulation. In order to adhere to this, I combined several data sources (documents, oral data, and quantitative data). After the fieldwork, I asked the graduate from the journalist department to transcribe the data from the interviews in order to control potential bias and have on paper "what the respondent actually said"

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rather than "what I wanted to hear from the respondent". I also crosschecked with interviewees part of the transcribed texts which were unclear to me either when reading the transcriptions or during the data analysis stage.

Transferability refers to the possibility of generalizing findings to other contexts or groups. Generalization of findings is the primary concern for quantitative research studies. Qualitative researchers should use what Geertz (1973 in Bryman, 2008) calls thick description. In my research, I give detailed descriptions of the context and background information. Generalization to a population is not likely since my sample of six respondents is very small and because of the use of purposive and snowball sampling.

Dependability is an alternative to reliability as understood in quantitative research. In order to meet the dependability criteria, researchers are advised to keep their research data base and records well-organized. For this study, I saved all original interviews and their transcription in a digital format. All laws and policies retrieved from the online database were saved on my computer while the documents of the Soviet period were photocopied and stored together with other research related documents in a separate folder. Transcribed interviews do not contain names of the interviewees so that anonymity is not jeopardized.

Ideally, other researchers should be able to repeat a study step-by-step and arrive at almost the same findings in a different location or in the same one at a different time. This cannot necessarily be done for this research for several reasons. First of all, I used snowball sampling and repetition of the exact same sample is unlikely to happen although the general categories of the sample could be used. Secondly, each country has a unique history and experience. Arriving at the same conclusions in different countries or locations is hardly possible unless the countries have a shared history and similar socio-economic backgrounds. Finally, the underlying poststructural and postmodern views reject that there is an objective reality. Therefore, another researcher may interact differently with the issue and context under analysis.

Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the research undertaken. While not accepting this criterion due to my standpoint as a social scientist, I have instead indicated my personal stance since, as suggested by Gall et al. (2007), a researcher has to clarify

his/her values and beliefs concerning the topic under investigation which ultimately define our way of "seeing" certain aspects and not others. I have also observed research ethical rules, critically considered the collected data, and approached the study without preconceived value judgments in order to not affect the data by personal bias.

According to Gall et al. (2007) the ultimate value of an historical study is determined by the researcher's ability to judge the authenticity and validity of the historical sources using historical criticism, as related to both external and internal validity. *External validity* is the process of determining whether the apparent or claimed origin of a historical document (author, place, and circumstances of publication) corresponds to its actual origin (Gall et al., 2007, p. 541). In this case, I used only published sources retrieved from the archives of the National Library as regards the historical part of the research. Internet or unpublished sources were avoided.

Internal validity relates to the accuracy and worth of the statements contained in a historical document (ibid., p. 542). The issue of internal validity also relates to the worth of statements in oral data. During the interviews and throughout the data processing and analysis, I realized that many of the interviewees had "nostalgic" memories of Soviet preschool education and little critical reflection on the system. This may be related to the psychological and human nature of memory that tends to idealize events in the past, and to the high emphasis on fostering particular values in the Soviet system that the interviewees themselves experienced in their professional life. Preschool education professionals genuinely believed that the Soviet model was the best one and hardly questioned the status quo in education or examined potential deficiencies. In order to overcome this potential bias, I used different primary sources and held their views against one another and against views expressed by secondary authors (both Western and Soviet ones) to analyse the situation in the Soviet Union.

4.4 Research Ethics

According to Ary et al. (2010) compliance with ethical standards and principles is the most important at each stage of quantitative and qualitative research. In this study, all respondents had a full briefing on the purposes of the research at the beginning of the data collection. Respondents were also notified that they could request any additional

information associated with the study in terms of its dissemination, intended audience and the way respondents would be cited. I informed participants that the final report would be produced in English but that a summary would be provided in Russian for those interested in the research results. The policy makers and the pre-service teacher training representative expressed their strong interest in receiving a copy of the summary.

All data obtained during the research have been used confidentially for the purpose of the study only and all measures have been taken to protect the data from possible misuse. I have purposefully not mentioned the names of the respondents, the location of the kindergartens or the specific interview sites in order to adhere to the "no harm" principle.

4.5 Research Limitations

The main challenge for the research related to accessing rich data from both historical documents and from respondents who could compare the Soviet and independent periods. Access to historical policy documents was particularly difficult and in order to ensure consistency between the two periods, I decided to analyse only those documents that could be directly compared. Another limitation related to obtaining data on the political and socio-economic context, particularly for the pre-independence period.

Although, my sample of six respondents is very small, I was particularly interested in generating an in-depth understanding of each respondent's unique experience and interpretation. I consider the sample of six interviewees as being sufficient to reach data saturation (Bryman, 2008) and to answer the research questions that guided the study.

5 Childhood and the Child in Policy and Practice

This chapter presents the findings from the policy analysis, interviews with policy makers, academicians and practitioners and the analysis of the statistical data in the two time periods. As previously mentioned, the quantitative analysis is complementary to the historical analysis in Chapter Two.

The first part of the chapter contains the analysis of the dominant social constructions of childhood and the child as they appear in policy documents. This is followed by an analysis of the way in which those constructions are reflected in the institutional arrangement of ECCE as understood from the interviewees' perspectives on the goals of preschool education.

The chapter finally examines selected issues in light of the universal image of childhood and the child represented in the policy rhetoric and by the practitioners.

5.1 Childhood and the Child in the Kyrgyz Policy Rhetoric

The following presentation discusses images of childhood and the child as they appear in three kinds of policy documents: constitutions; laws; and those governing ECCE institutions.

5.1.1 Images in the Constitutions

A Constitution defines the principles upon which the state is based. This study includes three Constitutions that were in force during 1980-2010: the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialistic Republic (KSSR) dated 1978; the 1993 Constitution; and the 2010 one.

The *Constitution of 1978* (KSSR, 1978) mentions the key words children or childhood 8 times, and education 4 times. The words are mentioned in five of the articles. Article 33 and 51 articulate the equal rights of women and men, and mention children and childhood in relation to social benefits of families, such as paid maternity leave, reduced

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working hours for mothers with young children, and availability of childcare institutions. Article 40 prohibits child labour except for work done by children for educational purposes. Article 43 specifies the right of the citizens to free education at different levels. No specific reference is made to preschool education, unlike other levels (compulsory secondary, vocational and higher). Article 64 of the Constitution states that:

> Citizens of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic are obliged to concern themselves with the upbringing of children, to train them for socially useful work, and to raise them as worthy members of a socialist society. Children are obliged to care for their parents and help them.

The images presented are both the Child as Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer and the Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor. Reference is made to childcare institutions, which are mentioned in the context of social support for families (particularly working mothers).

The *Constitution of 1993* (Kyrgyz Republic, 1993) mentions the key words children 6 times and education 5 times. Children are mentioned in a protective manner in the context of the family in three articles. Article 16 refers to childhood along with motherhood, fatherhood and the family as objects of special societal care. The Government obligations with regard to provision of care and education to children-orphans and those without parental care are specified. Article 28 prohibits child labour and Article 32 stipulates the right of each citizen to education. Preschool education is mentioned in the following words:

> The Government creates conditions for education of each citizen, starting from preschool education to basic education.

The *Constitution of 2010* (Kyrgyz Republic, 2010) mentions the key words children, child and childhood 8 times and education 6 times. Article 15 of the Constitution of 2010 mentions for the first time the principle of *the best interest of the child*, which the Kyrgyz Republic follows. Article 36 also considers childhood within the context of the family, but the second part of the article stipulates that:

Each child has a right to a living standard that is required for its physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral and social development.

The two constitutions after Independence promote the image of the Child as Innocent in the Golden Age of Life and in need of protection. This appears in the reference to childhood as an area of concern for the whole society and the need for primary protection by the Law (Article 16). The State's provision of care, upbringing and education for orphans and children left without parental care are highlighted in the same article of the Law.

The appearance of the singular form of the child as well as the wording of the best interest of the child may be the influence of the CRC (1989) which the Kyrgyz Republic signed soon after Independence (see further below).

5.1.2 Images in the Laws on Education

There were three Laws in force during the researched time period: the Law on Education dated 1974; the Law on Education dated 1992; and the Law on Education dated 2003.

The Preamble to the *Law on Education dated 1974* (Shustova et al., 1980) refers to socialism which was to ensure the steady rise of the material well-being, and the cultural and educational levels of the Soviet people. It made it possible to create favourable conditions for preschool upbringing of children and other levels of education. According to the Law, the goal of public education in the USSR was:

Preparation of highly educated, holistically developed active builders of the communist society, cultivated in Marxist-Leninist ideas, with respect for the Soviet laws and the socialist order, communist attitudes to labour, physically healthy, able to successfully work in different economic and social-cultural areas, actively participate in public and state affairs, ready to devotedly protect the socialist Homeland, guard and enhance its material and spiritual wealth, and protect its nature.

The Law also refers in the Preamble to education in the USSR as being a public concern and that State, family and public organizations are jointly responsible for children's upbringing and education.

Section II of the Law is devoted to preschool upbringing/"*vospitanie*". The section has six articles that define the overall objectives of preschool upbringing, establishment of preschool institutions, enrolment of children, pedagogical guidance of preschool institutions as well as medical services in those institutions. Article 17 of the Law presents the objective of preschool upbringing:

> Preschool institutions in close cooperation with the family aim at holistic development and upbringing of children, protection and strengthening of their health, imparting basic and practical skills and affection for labour, development of their aesthetic education, preparation of children for learning in school, and upbringing of children in a spirit of respect for elders and love for the socialist Motherland.

Unlike the previous Law, the *Law on Education of independent Kyrgyzstan* (Kyrgyz Republic, 1992) does not specify the goal of education but states in its Preamble:

> Education is a continuous, systematic process of upbringing and education, conducted in the interests of the individual, the society and the state and ensuring the moral, intellectual and physical health of the nation. Priority of education is the precondition to sustainable development of the Kyrgyz Republic aimed at equal dialogue with the global community.

The law refers to education as a process and, unlike the previous Law, puts the individual's interest first. For the first time, the word nation is mentioned which might be an indication of the new state's aspiration to find its place in the global community. Article 15 of the Law is devoted to preschool education and consists of only two paragraphs. According to the article, preschool education should be carried out in the family and preschool education institutions. It aims at laying the foundation for physical, intellectual and moral development of the individual. The law further declares that:

The state guarantees financial and material support for the upbringing of early childhood age children, and guarantees the affordability of education services in preschool education institutions for all strata of the population.

The Law on Education (Kyrgyz Republic, 2003) describes in the glossary preschool education as a system of upbringing and education, with the main goal of preparing the child for life and school, and developing its abilities. Article 15 of the Law is devoted to preschool education. It has expanded compared to the previous Law and has nine paragraphs.

The Law identifies the preschool age as the basis for the physical, moral and intellectual development of the child's personality. It also mentions the need for a modality to regulate relations between preschool education institutions and parents. Preschool education institutions are intended for children from six months to seven years old. Preschool education teachers are equal to primary school teachers when it comes to their status and salary.

Article 15.1 of the Law refers to the importance of school readiness programmes to ensure an equal start for children who have no preschool background. Those programmes are supposed to be financed from the national budget.

In 2009, the Kyrgyz Republic approved a separate *Law on Preschool Education* (Kyrgyz Republic, 2009). Although there is no comparable Law for the Soviet period, an examination of the Law helps to understand the issues and trends of preschool education in the after Independence period.

The Law reflects the values and commitments of the CRC. Article 18 states that a child has a state guaranteed right to preschool education, protection of their health and well-being, free medical care, protection from any form of exploitation and action that are harmful to children's health; and protection from physical and psychological abuse. In addition, Article 19 requires the State to provide social protection and support for children of pre-school age, orphans, and children deprived of parental care, children with special needs, and children from poor families.

The word child is used for the first time separate from the family context. The Law recognizes the following principles for the state policy on preschool education in Article 3: diversity in provision; affordability; quality; the holistic nature of child development; secularism and universal school readiness programme.

The adoption of the Law is an important step in reinforcing preschool education in the policy rhetoric of independent Kyrgyzstan by sending a signal to stakeholders about the renewed commitment of the Government for the area. The Law also institutionalizes alternative provision, e.g. via community based kindergartens, and stipulates an obligatory (universal) school readiness programme.

The image of the *Child as Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer* is dominant in the education laws of both the Soviet and after independence periods. The child is considered as being at the beginning of the journey. The goal of preschool education in that context is to prepare the child for school and adulthood, and to lay down a proper foundation for the future. The after Independence Education Laws also promote the image of the *Child as Innocent, in the Golden Age of Life*. This is reflected in the special attention given in the laws to social protection measures.

5.1.3   Images in Legislation Governing ECCE Institutions

Several documents were selected to analysis images in legislation governing ECCE institutions, in particular *Decree #327 on Preschool Children's Institution (1960)* and the *State Standard on Preschool Education and Care (2007)*. The legal framework that directly governed the ECCE institutions in the Soviet period was well developed. State control over ECCE institution was heavy, starting with building construction and safety issues, specifications for recommended nutritional value of the daily meals, regimented daily routines in the kindergarten, and highly prescriptive recommendations for use of teaching and learning materials.

The handbook for preschool upbringing: main legal and instructional documents [*Spravochnik po doshkolnomu vospitaniu: Osnovnie zakonodatetnie i instruktivnie document*] issued in 1980 has 543 pages listing main decrees, regulations and orders that governed every aspect of ECCE institutions. A separate chapter is devoted to organizational aspects of specialized kindergartens. In the Soviet Union, along with

mainstream kindergartens, separate kindergartens were set up for children with different kinds of disabilities and deficiencies as a result of the influence of the "defectology" approach in Soviet pedagogy (OECD, 2009).[4] ECCE institutions could be set up by education departments, enterprises, cooperatives and collective farms. According to the Soviet legislation, private ECCE institutions were not allowed (Charter of the Kindergarten, approved in 1944 in Shustova et al., 1980, p. 58).

According to Kreusler (1970), in 1959 important changes were made in the organization of preschool education. Up to that time, the nursery and kindergarten were two separate institutions under the jurisdiction of two separate Ministries: Health and Education. A resolution by the Communist Party of 1959 called for merging nurseries and kindergartens into one preschool institution (ibid.).

Decree #327 on Preschool Children's Institution: Nursery-Kindergarten, approved by the Soviet Council of Ministers on 8 March 1960 mentions that these institutions are set up in the interest of implementing a unified system of communist upbringing of preschool age children and corresponding to the goals of further education in school. Children from two months to seven years old were accepted in the institution. Nursery-kindergartens should ensure holistic development of preschool age children, their proper physical and moral upbringing, and cognitive development (Shustova et al., 1980).

According to the Decree, the Head of the preschool education institution had to have higher pedagogical (preschool) education, and caregivers [*vospitateli*] should have pedagogical vocational education [*uchilishe*]. The document also discusses financing and governance structures, reporting mechanisms, and defines the capacity (number of children) of a group according to the age range. The working hours of the nursery-kindergarten depended on the working hours of parents and could be 9, 12 or 24 hours. Enrolment of children of working mothers, mothers with many children, and mothers studying in regular, distant and on-the-job education institutions were prioritized. It is hard to interpret from the document whether <u>single</u> mothers were given enrolment

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[4] Defectology, or corrective education, is a pedagogical framework which establishes a classification system for children with disabilities. Some are declared as un-educable and referred to care in social and medical institutions (Vogt, 2008).

priority or whether <u>all</u> mothers who corresponded to the criteria were given priority when enrolling their children in the ECCE institution. Interestingly, there is no reference to fathers, and mothers or parents are used in the plural form (ibid.).

The State Standard on Preschool Education and Care approved by Decree #17 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (GoK) on 16 January 2007, does not specifically mention mothers or fathers, but rather use parents and the family. The family is the first and main teacher of the child. Principles of inclusive education are mentioned (GoK, 2007) with special reference to the Salamanca Declaration of 1994 which offers a framework for action on special needs education and reinforces inclusive education as essential to achieving the EFA goals (UNESCO and MOES Spain, 1994).

The development of inclusive education takes into account the needs of all children, including children with special needs and from poor families, gender, and ethnic minorities (ibid., p. 10). The goal of the preschool education institutions is not specified as in the case of the Soviet legislation. The glossary section, however, defines a preschool educational institution as one that is established with the purpose of meeting the needs and demands of families as regards childcare, holistic development of children and their preparation for school. It can be both Governmental and non-governmental, i.e. private, or any other form of ownership. The document also refers to alternative (to state kindergartens of the Soviet model) provision of ECCE, such as community based kindergartens, mothers' schools, and mobile services for children.

Although the State Standard is a comprehensive 45 pages document, it does not make specific recommendations for enrolment procedures and priority (if any) on the enrolment list. It specifies qualification requirements for ECCE institutions' workforce and stipulates systematic (at least once in five years) in-service teacher training for pedagogical staff.

5.1.4   The Child and its Rights from a Global Perspective

Unlike Soviet legislation, the one formulated after independence clearly reflects the child rights discourse. Particular reference is made to *the best interest of the child* but also to the issue of children being rights holders on their own within and beyond the

family context. The appearance of the singular form of child may also be an influence of the global discourse.

The foundation for the legal justification of children's rights was laid down in 1924 with the promulgation of the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child, followed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1959 (James and James, 2004). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 stated that motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and protection (Vargas-Baron, 2005). Children's rights were reaffirmed as basic human and educational rights in a number of Declarations and Conventions and in 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the CRC.

Article number six of the CRC, signed by 191 states including the Kyrgyz Republic, refers to every child's inherent right to life and state parties' obligation to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child (UN General Assembly, 1989).

General Comment No. 7 to CRC specifies that development is used in the broad sense and goes beyond mere physical well-being (OHCHR, 2005). The General Comment was issued six years after the CRC and aimed at encouraging recognition that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights (ibid.).

The document calls for the State parties to construct a positive agenda for rights in early childhood recognizing that young children are "…active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view…" (General Comment No. 7, Para 14 in Woodhead 2006, p. 29).

Despite the apparent, direct influence on legislation after independence, the child rights discourse was not echoed in the same way in the practitioners' perspectives as will appear in the following.

5.2 The Kindergarten as a Cloakroom: ECCE Institutions through the Perspectives of Practitioners

Ewick and Silbey (1998 in James and James, 2004) argue that laws are interpreted and legality is constructed through and comprises everyday actions and practices (p. 53). The constructions in the policy documents and legislation were therefore compared with those identified by people working in the preschool education sub-sector.

5.2.1 Goals and Values of Preschool Education

When asked about the goals guiding preschool education, respondents did not radically differ in their general statements, although they varied in terms of the order and priorities of individual goals. The goals were understood either at the system or the institutional level depending on the respondent's function. One respondent stipulated the goals for the system in the following way:

1. Expand access and ensure affordability [of preschool education];

2. Ensure the quality of preschool education;

3. Strengthen pre-service teacher training in state and alternative preschool education institutions;

4. Enrich preschool education institutions with international experience and practice;

5. Provide the same school readiness programme for all children and in all four dimensions of the programme including: socialization; motivation; intellectual readiness to study in school; and aesthetic perspectives.

As can be noted, children are specified in the last instance and in the plural form, and issues related to the system are generally predominant. In contrast, another respondent, a practitioner, mentioned specifically the goal of preschool education institutions:

> The main goal of the preschool education institution is a child's
> personality formation, its holistic development, socialization, motivation
> for a positive education of good quality at school, and later participation
> in labour activities, etc. Because everything is formed in the preschool

period. It is a long-term programme which ensures development of a healthy society.

5.2.2   Adult Responsibility and the Child as being or becoming

All respondents pointed out that preschool education aims at preparing competent children, socially adapted, communicable and ready for learning in school. The construction of the child as *becoming* as opposed to *being* was dominant in all the discussions. More specifically, the construction of *the Child as a Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer* was widely represented in all responses of the interviewees. The child is considered as an empty vessel that needs to be filled with pre-determined knowledge and skills and be prepared for progressively more important stages: the school-university period; and adulthood. In this regard, school readiness was mentioned several times in the conversations at different instances. For example, one respondent mentioned school readiness as being among the key expectations of parents from the kindergarten:

> Parents expect their children to be A-students and come ready to school. They [the children] should come to school from kindergarten being ready for school. So, they put the responsibility on us. When we ask the question: "why do you need a kindergarten?", they answer, "you should prepare them for school and that is why we give them to you". However, the kindergarten alone cannot prepare a child for school. We can give knowledge, but the moral part should be strengthened by the family.

Responsibility was also one of the frequently mentioned sub-themes. The respondents were concerned about the lack of clear roles and responsibilities with respect to the provision of preschool education, funding and quality assurance, but also about the responsibility of parents for the child's upbringing and their expectations. This is apparent from the following statement:

> Parents are mainly concerned with the nutrition part. They want their child to have four meals per day, so that the child sleeps and has a rest

on time… I do not agree that it is a very strict schedule. We have very flexible schedules… But of course we do have certain activities [meals] that are always at the same time to ensure reflectory functioning of the stomach and bowels so that it [the food] is absorbed better and is more beneficial.

In this case, the child is considered as a biological species whose stomach and bowels start functioning "properly" when having meals at regular times. There is probably medical evidence to back the statement and approach which represent the construction of *the Child as Nature or a Scientific Child.* In this construction, a child is seen as a natural and abstract being rather than a social one. Childhood is regarded as a natural, biologically determined stage with certain development milestones. The child's opinion and perspective are ignored and adults decide when and for what reason it is to have food.

5.2.3 Perceptions of Practitioners on ECCE during the two Time Periods

The aim was also to examine the goals in the Soviet period and whether they changed over time. According to one respondent, preschool education in the Soviet Union aimed at holistic development of children and their school readiness. The respondents indicated that the current preschool education goals were the same as for the Soviet time. Although different countries of the post-Soviet Union adapted the programme to their national context, they claimed that it has not changed dramatically. According to a respondent:

…We cannot change the programme because it was developed by Ushinsky, Montessori and Pestalozzi[5]. This [programme] is based on the ancient science of teaching children. Even when there is something new, it is based on it…

This statement represents one of the key challenges when making reforms in education. Even if the most advanced programmes are developed and teachers trained, it is very hard to actually change the way teachers operate. When mindsets, paradigms and social

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[5] These are prominent authors on education that influenced Soviet pedagogy.

constructions of the child, childhood and the role of preschool education institutions are fixed, it is challenging to change everyday practice.

When asked why a particular form was chosen for preschool education institutions, all respondents underlined that this is closely related to the broader socio-economic context, with particular reference to the expansion of the workforce:

> All factories and enterprises were working 24 hours per day… And almost all citizens of the Soviet Union had to work. Almost everybody left their children with kindergartens. Therefore, many enterprises had their own kindergartens.

In this statement, preschool education institutions are closely linked with the labour market. The construction of *the Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor* represents the child as naturally and biologically bonded and attached to his or her mother. If the labour market needs to be expanded using the female workforce, alternative care must be arranged.

When examining whether the image of the kindergarten as serving mainly working parents and their children changed over time, one respondent explained:

> Preschools are also dealing with social issues and family support. If mothers and fathers work, their income will be increased and if they are not worried about their child, they are happy. And this emotional happiness in the family translates into the social one.

In this statement, the interviewee links the kindergarten with wider social and economic issues. The child is not referred to as an individual, but rather as being a natural part of the family. The construction of the *Child as Innocent, in the Golden Age of Life* was, however, also mentioned in the interviews:

> A child should always be in the happiness and calm of the family. If she [the mother] is upset, for example, if she has been offended in the shop, she will pull the child down the staircase, rushing home. She comes home and throws the bag and, of course, she does not care about the

child anymore... What can this child get from home? We have to teach parents how to control their emotions and love their children.

In this statement, the child is seen as needing protection from its own family while parents are in need of learning how to love and care for their children.

5.2.4   Educating Parents

The emphasis on the need to educate parents came across in other ways in the interviews. Parents are seen as incapable of child rearing and being needed in the labour market:

We have to teach parents nowadays. We, the teachers, know that it is easier to work with children than their parents. We can teach children and see results of our work in them more quickly than we can train their parents.

This assessment of parents as not being much concerned about the upbringing of their children and relying on the state to do so can be related to the Soviet time. In the Soviet Union the widespread paternalistic approach of the state gave birth to a strong sense of passivity and dependence of the population which contributed to the weakening of the traditional family role in child upbringing (Cornia, 1995).

As indicated by a respondent:

I call kindergartens a "cloak room". They [the parents] bring the luggage in the morning and we need to give it back in the evening "safe and sound". Moreover, we need to put a label on it that it has been fed, is not sick and slept well. That is it. Kindergartens are cloakrooms for parents… and certainly they pay for the cloakroom. I always tell parents: Here is your luggage, safe and sound. Tomorrow the cloakroom opens at 7am.

The perspectives of the interviewees working in preschool education revealed another construction of childhood and the child that was not reflected in the policy and legal documents, namely- the *Child as Nature or a Scientific Child.* Other images were also

represented, such as the *Child as a Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer,* the *Child as Innocent, in the Golden Age of Life,* and the *Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor*.

How these perceptions may relate to the actual development of ECCE during the two periods is examined in the following.

5.3 Development of ECCE before and after Independence

In order to further understand the importance of ECCE in light of the underlying perceptions on childhood and the child, an analysis is undertaken on ECCE coverage in view of the needs of the labour market and the commitments of the respective Governments in the two periods. The analysis complements the historical background in Chapter 2.

5.3.1 Access and Equity: a Legacy of the Soviet Union?

Table 5.1 shows the development in the number of institutions and children attending kindergartens in pre-independent (green) and independent (pink) Kyrgyzstan. As appears, access expanded in the pre-independence period, whereas coverage fell dramatically after the Kyrgyz Republic became independent. In 2001, the number of children attending preschool education was the lowest in the history of the Republic, i.e. 32,536 children, which is more than 6.5 times lower than the figure of 211,571 in 1990. Calculated as a percentage of the population of preschool age children, coverage fell from approximately 30 per cent to almost 8 per cent (SCS, 1989; NSC, 2011). In spite of the growth of both the number of children enrolled and of preschool education institutions during the Soviet period, there was always a huge difference between the provision in urban and rural areas.

Table 5.1 contradicts the perception that coverage of preschool education was universal in the Soviet time (Gowani et al., 2013). There were huge disparities not only in a particular country, but among different countries of the Soviet Union. For instance in 1988, enrolment rates among preschool-aged children were around 70 per cent in Belorussia and Moldova (Cornia, 1995, p. 69).

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Preschool enrolments in Central Asia lagged significantly behind those in other Soviet Republics. Notable progress was made in many areas in the decades between 1970 and 1990, with enrolments in Kazakhstan rising from 30 per cent in each age group in 1970 to 53 per cent in 1988. In Kyrgyzstan, enrolments rose from 18 per cent to 30 per cent in this period (Riazantsev et al., 1992, p. 27). In 1990, more than 30 per cent of preschool-aged children attended preschool in Kyrgyzstan (NSC, 2011).

Table 5.1 Number of institutions and children in preschool education in the Kyrgyz Soviet and the Kyrgyz Republics, 1980-2010

Year	Number of Institutions			Number of Children			Coverage (as % of preschool age children)		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
1980	1,249	536	713	151,000	92,000	59,000	28	55	16
1990	1,696	624	1,072	211,571	112,900	98,700	30.2	52.2	20.4
1993	998	432	566	92,245	50,872	41,373	13.4	24.0	8.6
2001	407	233	174	45,052	31,404	13,648	9.0	23.0	3.7
2010	691	301	390	85,236	56,505	28,731	13	28.0	6.3

Source: SCS, 1989; NSC, 2011

In terms of disparities in enrolment rates after Independence in the Kyrgyz Republic, Figure 5.1 shows that in 2006, seven per cent of children from the poorest quintile attended preschool education compared to almost 47 per cent of children from the richest quintile.

As van Ravens (2010) notes the most remarkable characteristics of the Kyrgyz Republic is not the low level of enrolment per se, but rather the absence of a build-up effect (Figure 5.2). In the majority of the countries represented in Figure 5.7 enrolment "builds up with age", i.e. small numbers of children enroll at the age of three, but enrolment at the pre-primary (the year preceding their enrolment into primary education) level is universal. Finland best illustrates this trend.
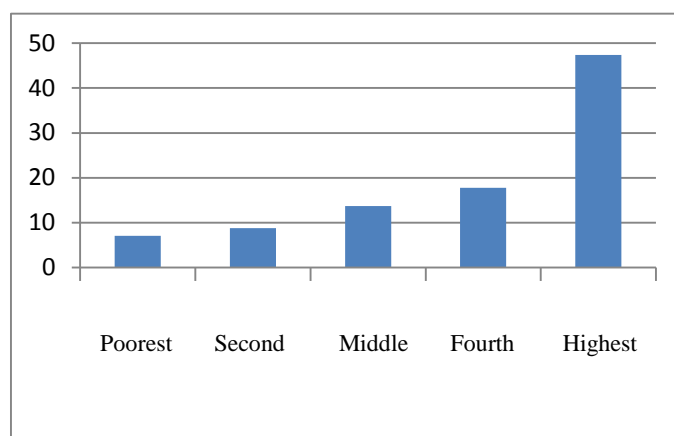
Figure 5.1 Enrolment in kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan among 3-5 years old in 2006, by wealth quintile

Source: NSC and UNICEF, 2007

However, in Kyrgyzstan the relatively small number of children that join state kindergartens as early as the age of three never increased with time passing. This small group is not joined by other children, i.e. there is no build up effect. This indicates that it is one and the same social group – predominantly urban and better-off – that benefits from government expenditures on state kindergartens (van Ravens, 2010).

Figure 5.2 Age specific enrolment patterns in selected countries, 2004

Source: UNESCO, 2006 in van Ravens, 2010

Unfortunately, there are no data on enrolment in preschool education in the Soviet period related to family income. Dobson (in Karabel and Halsey, 1977) states that

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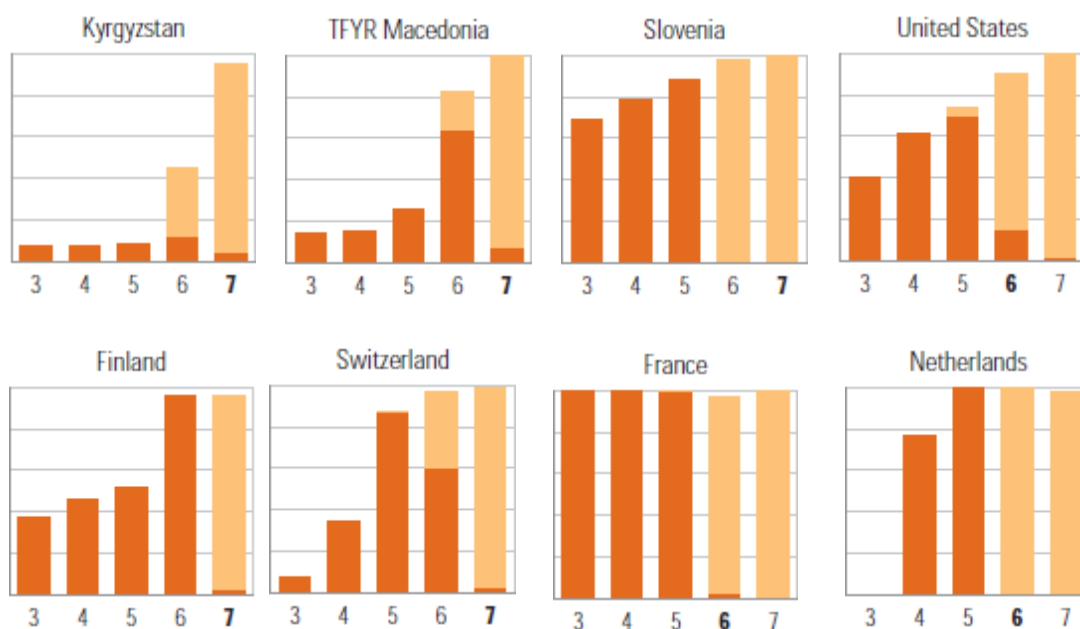although the Soviet government aimed at obliterating the distinction between social groups and classes, access to higher education in the USSR was unequal and related to the social status of families. The process of social selection by the educational system in the USSR was in many ways similar to that in other industrial countries and a child's social status determined, to a considerable extent, his/her chances of attending higher education (ibid, p. 269). Therefore, it is likely that pre-school education also favoured children of well-off families.

5.3.2   Poverty and Labour Force Participation

Several sources, including official documents and interviews, indicated the linkage of preschool education with the expansion of the (particularly female) workforce. In the Soviet period, there were high rates of labour force participation for both men and women. In the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, about 85 per cent of working age men and 75 per cent of working age women were employed in 1989 (UNICEF, 1999). In 1991 when Kyrgyzstan became independent, the total percentage of the employed population was almost 76 per cent, decreasing to almost 64 per cent in 2003 and to around 58 per cent in 2010 (NSC, 2011).

Given the very high rates of employment in the Soviet Union, one can assume that low enrolment rates, especially in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan, related to supply factors. When considering the wealth distribution in different countries of the Soviet Union, it is evident that the poorest countries were getting less. While poverty was considered a non-existent phenomenon in a country of general equality, many Western researchers reported varying degrees of poverty both among different republics of the USSR and among different population groups (Yarkova et al., 2005).

Falkingham (2000, citing Atkinson and Micklewright, 1992) reports that in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the poorest republic after Tajikistan and strongly dependent on subsidies from Moscow, roughly 30 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line (ibid.). However, child poverty which has been monitored as a separate area after Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, declined from 65 per cent in 2002 to 43 per cent in 2007 (Institute of Strategic Analysis and Evaluation under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF, 2009). This may be a result of increased government attention to the social sectors.

5.3.3 Education Financing: Commitment of the Government Reaffirmed

Table 5.2 presents the state expenditures on education in the two time periods: 1980 and 1990 cover the Soviet time, while 2001 and 2010 represent the after Independence period. The Soviet Union allocated a large share of resources for education. In spite of the difficult economic situation after Independence, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic also allocated a considerable share of its resources for education. Almost one fourth of the national budget was spent on education in 1980, with a small decrease in 1990. In 2001, the state budget for education reached the level of the Soviet time again.

Table 5.2 Public expenditures on education in Kyrgyzstan, 1980-2010, %

	1980	1990	2001	2010
Expenditure on education as % of GDP	7.6[6]	7.5	3.9	5.4
Expenditure on education as % of state budget	23.4	20.1	23.2	17.4
Expenditure on preschool education as percentage of education budget	7.8	6.4	6.7	8.4

Source: SCS, 1989; NSC, 2014; WB, 2004

Importantly, education expenditures also increased recently as a proportion of GDP. According to NSC data, the GDP proportion of education expenditures accounted for almost four per cent in 2001, but for 5.4 per cent in 2010. As a proportion of the state budget, education expenditures dropped between 2001 and 2010 and rests at a lower level than during the Soviet period. The major proportion of education expenditures is allocated for primary and secondary education, averaging 60 per cent of the total (OECD, 2010). However, in 2010, the proportion of the education budget allocated for preschool education increased to 8.4 per cent against 6.7 per cent in 2001 which is higher than during the pre-independence years and despite the falling proportion for education from the state budget.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has shown that in the legislation during the Soviet period, two dominant images of the child were promoted: the Child as a Knowledge, Identity and Cultural

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[6] Here as a percentage of GNI, as in the USSR GDP was not calculated until 1990.

Reproducer and the Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor. The modality for ECCE institutions was shaped by the needs of working parents and there were highly prescribed recommendations for use of teaching and learning materials in the institutions.

Legislation of Independent Kyrgyzstan continues to promote the image of the Child as a Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer but not in as highly an ideological manner as in the Soviet period. The other dominant image of the Child as Innocent in the Golden Age of Life also appears in the policy rhetoric.

In spite of the common belief about the egalitarian nature of the Soviet system, including in education, disparity issues appear in the access to preschool education in Kyrgyzstan, and also among other countries of the previous Soviet Union. Compared to other parts of the world (Europe and the richer parts of the USSR), in Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, coverage was comparatively low even in the better off Soviet period and pre-school education seemed to favour the well-off as did education at other levels. A more detailed discussion of this appears in the final Chapter Six.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

The overall objective of the study was to examine and compare the social constructions of ECCE as they appear in policy documents in two historical periods in Kyrgyzstan: the Soviet period (1980-1990); and the time after Independence (1991-2011). The reflections of the constructions in the institutional arrangement of ECCE and their change over time were also examined. Five dominant constructions of the child were considered and guided the interpretation of the data. The findings of the study are discussed in the following in the context of existing literature on the topic.

6.1 Dominant Social Constructions of Childhood and the Child

6.1.1 The Soviet Period

The study found that during the Soviet period the constructions of the *Child as Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer,* and the *Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor* were dominant.

Although the Soviet Government used the preschools to instil the characteristics of obedience and adherence to the Communist ideology, they were also used to ensure early childhood education and school preparation (Henscher and Passingham, 1996 in Giddings et al., 2007) as well as public health. Ipsa (1994) mentions the provision of a safe, stable, and loving environment in the Soviet kindergartens, in which teachers actively promoted the development of gross and fine motor skills, cooperative behaviours, ecological awareness, and basic math and reading skills. In addition, all students attending the preschools were regularly examined by a nurse and received regular vaccinations. The relatively strong health and education indicators seen today in former socialist countries can be attributed, in part, to the preschool policies of that era (UNICEF, 1999).

The study shows that in the Soviet period social constructions of childhood and the child were highly ideological. The biological understanding of human nature was a foundation for this construction. Childhood was considered as the most favourable

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period for the formation of the Soviet identity and state institutions for children were considered as a perfect arena for development of a new Socialist generation. The discourse was ambiguous. On one hand, the positive side included development of an enabling policy environment aimed at special measures and social protection of children and mothers, i.e. an organized health system and expansion of ECCE institutions. But on the other hand, the paternalistic approach of the Soviet state, according to Cornia (1995), contributed to the erosion of the traditional family role in child upbringing and resulted in a strong sense of passivity and dependence in the population.

From the policy text analysis, the child as the *Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer* was the dominant construction in the Soviet period. Children are identified in the laws simply as part of the "family" policy and not in their own right. In the policy documents explored in this study, the singular form of the "child" was never mentioned. Children are seen as a natural part of the family discourse, but also as a part of the bigger society. According to Kreusler (1970), the Communist Party leaders were certain that in order to build communism, particular qualities of character had to be instilled in citizens from a young age. These qualities included: altruism, commitment to productive labour and devotion to collective living and communal affairs, as opposed to selfishness, indifference, and lack of social responsibility (p. 429). The child is no longer the private concern of the family. Communal upbringing is the foundation for education and other early childhood institutions with family members, teachers, and the wider society participating in the important process of raising a new generation – the builders of Communism.

At the same time the main demand in the Soviet Union for preschool education was associated with the economic and political structures of the country. With the expansion of industry and agriculture, women's participation in economic activities was highly desirable in order to maintain economic growth. Industrial organizations and collective farms were forced to open nurseries and day-care centres in order to offer working mothers alternative care (ibid.). In this context the construction of *the Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor* became dominant. This construction laid the foundation for the model of the kindergarten which is currently functioning in the Kyrgyz Republic. The working hours of the kindergarten were fixed in a way to adhere to the standard working

hours of the parents and boarding type of kindergartens were set up to address the needs of parents working in the night shift.

Farquhar (2012) points out that rapid expansion and privileging of institutional childcare can also be a sign of a deficit discourse which represents an image of young children seen as not yet fully human, and in need of strategies to ensure their health, well-being and education. The deficit discourse extends to parents that are seen as incapable of child rearing or are needed in the labour market (ibid., p. 295).

The reason and logic for "the silencing" of fathers in the Soviet legislation require additional research. However, it might be a measure to reinforce the image of the *Child as a Labour Market Supply Factor* where the child is seen as naturally and biologically bonded and attached to his or her mother.

6.1.2 The after Independence Period

The communist ideology changed to a liberal one as soon as the Kyrgyz Republic became independent in 1991. The new nation state had to address many challenging tasks starting with governance and economic downturn. The aspirations of the Government of the new state was to find its niche in the global community. It also defined new goals for education instead of the highly ideological Soviet ones.

Therefore, the laws and policies lost the ideological underpinning of the Soviet period. The singular form of the child is mentioned in the laws, underlining individualism as opposed to collectivism as promulgated in the Soviet legislation. *The best interest of the child* and a child's rights perspective appear in the after Independence period legislation as a likely influence of the CRC. Nevertheless, ECCE is not undertaken from a rights perspective. It is still about charity towards the young, needy and dependent ones (Woodhead, 2006). Children are seen as recipients of services, beneficiaries or in need of protective measures to salvage them from deprivation. *The Child as Innocent in the Golden Age of Life* and in need of protection represent the key constructions in the policy discourse. Childhood is represented as an idealized period during which the state or parents create special protective measures to guard children from the harsh realities of the external world.

The social construction of the child as *Knowledge, Identity and Cultural Reproducer* is still dominant in the policy framework, though not in as highly an ideological form as

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in the Soviet time. Children are represented as being at the beginning of a journey towards mature, rational, responsible, autonomous adults. They are seen as "not yet being" (Verhellen, 1997). They are human becomings rather than human beings (Qvortrup, 1994), noble causes rather than worthy citizens (Knuttson, 1997). ECCE institutions in this context are called upon to lay the foundation for physical and moral development of a person and preparing the child for life and school. The instrumentality (Moss and Petrie, 2005) of the institutions are prioritized, i.e. provision is made for a specified purpose, be it "freeing" a mother to join the labour workforce or to raise the new generation of builders of Communism.

Constructions that were dominant in the policy documents in both periods were validated in interviews with practitioners and policy makers. Unlike the clear distinction of the dominant constructions in the written policy documents in the two time periods, the study could not clearly differentiate between constructions that were dominant before and after Independence in the discussions with practitioners and policy makers. However, the study argues that practitioners and policy makers have been reproducing the same dominant constructions since the Soviet period. New constructions were laid over the old ones, but never actually replaced them. Interestingly, unlike for example the policy rhetoric of the after Independence period which made reference to child rights and the CRC, this was not specifically mentioned in the rhetoric of practitioners. According to Gowani et al. (2013), the education system, including preschool education, in the after Independence period is slow to change. In the absence of a robust system of teacher education for early childhood professionals, teachers have continued to have an outlook on and run the preschools as was done prior to independence (p. 12).

The study concludes that both in the Soviet time and after Independence, the first policy tool – direct provision by the government - was the priority. Although the rationale behind the choice in the Soviet time is quite logical – a planned economy and state monopoly over social sectors - the situation in the independence period is puzzling. One could argue that in the context of the market economy, the state might want to restrict the social sector, i.e. preschool education, and transfer a bigger part of the service provision to the private sector. Or that the state would at least try to reduce the cost of the public services to a minimum by finding alternatives to the previous, expensive model.

But this has so far not happened in Kyrgyzstan preschool education. Instead of cutting the expenses, the government closed down a number of kindergartens, but kept a tiny network of kindergartens which represent the typical Soviet type of a well-funded public institution. This may be explained by the nature of any institution or organization that has an institutional memory and is shaped by the previous arrangement or order (Ball, 2006). Another possible explanation and theory is that the measure was purposeful and for the benefit of the political and economic elite of the country, using publicly subsidized kindergartens to privileging their own offspring and reinforcing their social capital. Data on equity and access of the after Independence period partially support this hypothesis although more in-depth analysis has to be undertaken to verify this.

6.2 Conclusion

The study examined and compared dominant social constructions of children and childhood in two historical periods in Kyrgyzstan. Constructions of childhood and images of the child represent ethical and political choices made within larger frameworks of ideas, values and rationalities (Moss and Petrie, p. 85) and are highly influenced by power struggles (Saavedra and Camicia in Cannela and Diaz Soto, 2010). Views of childhood, therefore, have changed and are changing under the impact of changes in the laws, policies, discourses, and social practices through which childhood is defined (James and James, 2004, p. 20).

At the same time, as Heywood (2001) argues, childhood is a variable of social analysis just like class, gender and ethnicity. There is no unified childhood experience and a child of the *intelegentsia*[7] would have a different experience than a child of a farmer in Central Asia in the Soviet time.

Rejection of the universal image of childhood and recognition that childhood is socially constructed and varies across time, space and culture lay at the heart of the Child as a Co-constructor of Knowledge, Identity and Culture. Of the five constructions used to

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[7] A group comprising all "specialists", i.e. skilled white-collar workers possessing either a higher or a specialized secondary education.

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form the theoretical framework this one was never mentioned or observed neither in the written policy rhetoric nor in the discussions with practitioners and policy makers.

In this construction, the child is a separate individual which can be considered in its own right and not only as a continuation of his/her family, or biologically attached to his/her mother or the future of the country. The child is a social actor with his/her own stance which might be distinct from those of the teachers or parents. The child has a previous experience which influences the way he/she learns - not a blank paper to write his/her story or the future of the country. The child is *being* rather than *becoming*. Accepting this construction and promoting that discourse in education and beyond could help in changing the current thinking, beliefs and values of parents, teachers, policy makers and the global ECCE community at large.

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Annexes

Annex I

Interview guide for the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Kyrgyz Academy of Education

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

Introduction

My name is Saltanat Builasheva, I am a Master Degree Student at the University of Oslo. As a part of my master thesis, I am conducting research in educational field of Kyrgyzstan. I would like to ask you some questions regarding preschool education. The interview will last approximately one hour. I will be using digital tape recorder in the course of the interview (asking permission to do so). As a part of UiO requirements I need to have a signed consent form. I assure that the data will be used for academic analysis only and will exclusively been used in this connection (hand in the consent form).

1. What are the goals of the preschool education in Kyrgyzstan?

2. What are the policy documents that shape preschool education? What kind of strategic documents mention or guide the field?

3. What is the share of funding that preschool education receives (detailed in case available)?

4. What kinds of institutions/organizations are set up to serve the goal? What are the rules/official regulations that govern them (get list of documents if possible)?

5. Do you have typical requirements for the infrastructure of the kindergartens (the way they are organized in space and time)?

6. Why this kind of institutions/organizations are chosen, what are the alternatives?

7. Who is the target population for these institutions?

8. What is the coverage by preschool education nationwide?

9. Who would be prioritized in getting a place in preschool education institution?

10. What are the legal documents that govern enrolment patterns?

11. What do you expect from kindergartens? What kind of outcomes, outputs? What are the indicators of successful kindergarten?

12. Where these expectations are written? Which channel does the state use to reach the kindergarten personnel?

13. How do the state/local authorities measure achievement of these goals?

14. Pre-service and in-service teacher training

15. What are the other trends and issues in the preschool education?

Conclusion

Thank you for the time devoted for the interview. Do you have questions related to the given interview or general research I am currently undertaking? The results and findings of the research will be available as a part of my master thesis in English in late 2012 (ask if they are interested in getting a copy and if translation into Kyrgyz or Russian is desirable).

Annex II

Interview guide for kindergarten principals

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

Introduction

My name is Saltanat Builasheva, I am a Master Degree Student at the University of Oslo. As a part of my master thesis, I am conducting research in educational field of Kyrgyzstan. I would like to ask you some questions regarding preschool education. The interview will last approximately for one and a half hour. I will be using digital tape recorder in the course of the interview (asking permission to do so). As a part of UiO requirements I need to have a signed consent form. I assure that the data will be used for academic analysis only and will exclusively been used in this connection (hand in the consent form).

1. Background information about kindergarten

Name of kindergarten	
Date of opening	
Name of the community (village, city)	
Name of aiyl okmotu	
Name of Rayon	
Name of Oblast	
Distance from rayon center	(0 km means it is in the rayon center)
Distance from municipality center	(0 km means it is in the municipality center)
Distance from oblast center	(0 km means it is in the oblast center)
Location	Urban ☐ Rural ☐
Medium of instruction	Kyrgyz ☐ Russian ☐ Uzbek ☐ Other ☐

Type of preschool	State ☐ Municipal ☐
Intended capacity of preschool	Number of places
Actual capacity of preschool	Actual number of children enrolled and attending kindergarten
Number of teachers and their posts	
Teacher/child ratio	
Other important information	

2. What are the goals of preschool education?

3. Can you rank these goals according to the importance?

4. In your opinion what are the expected outcomes of the kindergarten? How can we measure them?

5. What are the indicators of successful kindergarten? What are the documents that specify that?

6. Do you think parents share the same opinion/ have aspirations with regard to the preschool education? How do you know that?

7. How many children of preschool age live in the given area?

8. Do you have other kindergartens in the given area?

9. What are the enrolment procedures? What kind of regulations re enrolment exist?

10. Who gets priority while enrolment?

11. How is your kindergarten organized (in time and space)?

12. Are you happy with the way the kindergarten functions? If you were given a chance to make amendments, what would you change (both in time and space)?

13. What kind of policy documents do you use in everyday practice?

14. What is the annual budget KG gets from the state/local authorities?

15. Does KG have others financial sources? (additional parental fees, charity, income generating activities, etc.)

16. What is the monthly fee for attending kindergarten? Is it high or acceptable? Are parents happy with the fee?

17. What is the programme you use in the kindergarten?

18. Other important information you want to share.

Conclusion

Thank you for the time devoted for the interview. Do you have questions related to the given interview or general research I am currently undertaking? The results and findings of the research will be available as a part of my master thesis in English in late 2012 (ask if they are interested in getting a copy and if translation into Kyrgyz or Russian is desirable).

Annex III

Interview guide for pre-service and in-service teacher training institutions

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

Introduction

My name is Saltanat Builasheva, I am a Master Degree Student at the University of Oslo. As a part of my master thesis, I am conducting research in educational field of Kyrgyzstan. I would like to ask you some questions regarding preschool education. The interview will last approximately for one hour. I will be using digital tape recorder in the course of the interview (asking permission to do so). As a part of UiO requirements I need to have a signed consent form. I assure that the data will be used for academic analysis only and will exclusively been used in this connection (hand in the consent form).

1. How many students are admitted on an annual basis? What is the survival rate? How many teachers actually work in kindergartens (in case statistics available)

2. What are the goals of the preschool education in Kyrgyzstan?

3. What are the policy documents that shape preschool education? What kind of strategic documents mention or guide the field?

4. What kinds of institutions/organizations are set up to serve the goal?

5. Why this kind of institutions/organizations are chosen, what are the alternatives?

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6. Who is the target population for these institutions?

7. What are the outcomes of the kindergarten? How do we measure them?

8. What are the indicators of successful kindergarten teacher? How do we measure them?

9. What kind of educational programmes are used at the pre-service and in-service level? When it became effective? What kind of programmes had been used before that time? (get a copy of programmes if available)

10. What kind of programme does kindergarten teacher use? Is it universal or teachers have alternatives? When that programme was developed and what kind of programme existed before? (get a copy of the programmes is available)

11. What are the other major issues in the pre-service and in-service teacher training?

Conclusion

Thank you for the time devoted for the interview. Do you have questions related to the given interview or general research I am currently undertaking? The results and findings of the research will be available as a part of my master thesis in English in late 2012 (ask if they are interested in getting a copy and if translation into Kyrgyz or Russian is desirable).