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A struggle for hearts and minds; What evidence is there of a dominant (neoliberalist) discourse amongst senior students at an international school in Malaysia

Spence, Trevor

## Abstract

This study investigates the discourses at work in international schools and their role in Identity formation of international students. In particular, it evaluates whether a neoliberal discourse plays a dominant role in such identity formation resulting in a commonly shared set of values that form the basis for a TNC. Previous research has demonstrated the important role of the school in developing student identities and the development of identities amongst students attending international schools, though such research has tended to focus on traditional international schools serving a globally mobile elite and the development of an international or cosmopolitan or third identity. This research looks at identity formation within non-traditional international schools serving local elites and middle classes and compares such with identity formation within a national school serving a similar demographic. Data provided from surveying students' self-reported attitudes provides a perspective into the discourses at work and values held. Contrary to claims regarding the dominance of a neoliberal discourse in international schools the findings, at least of this international school, suggest a complex picture of competing discourses where a mosaic of contradictory identities emerges rather than a composite whole. It suggests that international schools are failing in their traditional role of identity formation. In comparison to the national school the international school is seen to be weakening localised cultural identity without replacing it with a commitment to cosmopolitanism, leaving its students prone to the neoliberalist discourse. This has significant implications both for the place of international schools within nation states and for the challenge facing International School Principals in facilitating student identity formation.

A struggle for hearts and minds; What evidence is there of a dominant (neoliberalist) discourse amongst senior students at an international school in Malaysia?

by  
Trevor Spence

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Education

School of Education Durham University 2024

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>List of tables and figures</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Declaration Statement</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Statement of Copyright</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Acknowledgment</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction to the research</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>1.2 The origin and rationale of the research focus</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>1.3 Context of the study</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>1.4 Research Questions</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>1.5 Unique contribution of the study</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>1.6 Structure of the research</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>1.7 Development of a theoretical position</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>1.8 Positionality statement</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>1.9 Structure of the Thesis</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.1 Structure of the chapter</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.2 Neoliberalism</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.3 What is an international school?</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>2.4 The significance of the existence of a dominant discourse</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>2.5 The international school as an agent of socialisation</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>2.6 Theories of Class formation</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>2.7 Evidence for the emergence of a TNC</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>2.8 The notion of Discourse</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>2.9 Competing discourses within international schools</b> .....	<b>71</b>
2.9.1 Neoliberal discourse .....	75
2.9.2 Cosmopolitan discourse .....	78
2.9.3 National/Local cultural discourse .....	81
2.9.4 Post-colonial discourse .....	83
2.9.5 Individual/egoistic discourse .....	84
<b>2.10 Student Agency in discursive practices</b> .....	<b>85</b>
<b>2.11 Concluding statements</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>90</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>90</b>

<b>3.2</b>	<b>The shift in ontological perspective.....</b>	<b>92</b>
3.2.1	The original study and its limitations/reasons for change.....	93
3.2.2	Taking a Pragmatic Approach .....	97
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Research Design.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>107</b>
3.4.1.	International School Students.....	107
<b>3.5.</b>	<b>Data Collection Method.....</b>	<b>120</b>
3.5.1	The use of school documents to inform the design of the survey.....	132
3.5.2	Pilot Study .....	135
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Data Analysis .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>3.7.</b>	<b>Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>143</b>
3.7.1	Positionality and researcher .....	144
<b>3.8</b>	<b>Limitations .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>3.9</b>	<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>148</b>
	<b><i>Research Findings .....</i></b>	<b><i>151</i></b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Research Findings: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics .....</b>	<b>151</b>
4.2.1	International Students Values and Attitudes .....	152
4.2.2	The Schooling Experience .....	153
4.2.3	Student Motivation .....	156
4.2.4.	Cultural Awareness.....	159
4.2.5	Teacher Characteristics .....	165
4.2.6	Learning Goals.....	168
4.2.7	Student Perceptions of Self .....	176
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Interim Insights .....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Research Findings: Statistical Analysis .....</b>	<b>183</b>
4.4.1	Results of the Mann-Whitney test.....	186
4.4.2	Results of the ANOVA tests.....	189
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Concluding comments about the findings. ....</b>	<b>200</b>
	<b><i>Discussion.....</i></b>	<b><i>203</i></b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Summary of the research.....</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Discussion of the findings.....</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Reflections on existing research .....</b>	<b>226</b>
	<b><i>Conclusion .....</i></b>	<b><i>234</i></b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Is there evidence of a neoliberal discourse in a Type C international school and, if so, is it dominant? .....</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Is there evidence of the formation of a TNC in a Type C international school? .....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Is a neoliberal discourse or evidence of TNC formation particular to an international school? .....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Significance of the research.....</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Reflections on the research. ....</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>Proposals for Future research .....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>6.7</b>	<b>Implications for Practice .....</b>	<b>241</b>
	<b><i>Appendix A Questionnaire .....</i></b>	<b><i>245</i></b>

<b><i>Appendix B: Grouping of Question Responses by Mindset</i></b> .....	<b>269</b>
<b>B.1 Neoliberal mindset</b> .....	<b>269</b>
<b>B2. Cosmopolitan mindset</b> .....	<b>269</b>
<b>B3. Local Cultural mindset</b> .....	<b>269</b>
<b>B4 Egoistic mindset</b> .....	<b>270</b>
<b>B5. Post-Colonial mindset</b> .....	<b>270</b>
<b><i>Appendix C.1 Consent Form</i></b> .....	<b>270</b>
<b><i>Appendix C.2 Privacy Notice</i></b> .....	<b>272</b>
<b><i>Appendix C.3 Information Sheet</i></b> .....	<b>276</b>
<b><i>References</i></b> .....	<b>278</b>

## ***List of tables and figures***

### Tables

Table 2.1: International Association of School Librarianship Criteria for International Schools .....	39
Table 2.2: National International school continuum .....	44
Table 3.1: Key Concepts operationalized.....	136
Table 3.2: Content Analysis of Key School Documents.....	142
Table 4.1. Average and Median across 0-10 Ratings style questions.....	161
Table 4.2. T-Test of Normality.....	195
Table 4.3: A Comparison of International and National students by mindset.....	196
Table 4.4: Results of the Mann-Whitney U test comparing International and National students by mindset.....	197
Table 4.5: Significance of differences in Mean Rank between international and national students.....	199
Table 4.6: Relationship between time spent in school and mindset amongst international students.....	202
Table 4.7: Relationship between time spent in school and mindset amongst national students.....	203
Table 4.8: Relationship between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset amongst international students.....	204
Table 4.9: Relationship between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset amongst national students.....	205
Table 4.10: Relationship between Gender and mindset amongst international students.....	207
Table 4.11: Relationship between Gender and mindset amongst national students.....	208
Table 4.12: Relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset amongst international students.....	209
Table 4.13: Relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset amongst national students.....	210

### Figures

Figure 3.1: Example of Ranking Type Question.....	131
Figure 3.2: Example of Likert Scale Type Question.....	131
Figure 3.3: Example of Choice Question.....	133
Figure 3.4: Example of Ranking Question.....	150

## Charts

Chart 3.9.1a. Year group of Participants (Int).....	115
Chart 3.9.1b. Gender of Participants (Int).....	115
Chart 3.9.1c. Years at International School.....	116
Chart 3.9.1d. Previous School (Int).....	116
Chart 3.9.1e. Ethnic Background of Participants (Int).....	117
Chart 3.9.1f. Dominant Home Language of Participants (Int).....	118
Chart 3.9.1g. Academic Ability of Participants (Int).....	120
Chart 3.9.1h. IGCSE FL English Results (Int).....	120
Chart 3.9.1i. Socio-Economic Status (Int).....	121
Chart 3.9.2a. Gender (Nat).....	122
Chart 3.9.2b. Years at National School.....	123
Chart 3.9.2c. Ethnic Background (Nat).....	124
Chart 3.9.2d. Dominant Home Language (Nat).....	125
Chart 3.9.2e. Academic Ability (Nat).....	125
Chart 3.9.2f Socio-Economic Status (Nat).....	126
Chart 3.9.3. Demographic Similarities and Differences Between the Two Schools.....	126
Chart 4.1. Relative Importance (International).....	164
Chart 4.2 Relative Importance (National).....	165
Chart 4.3 Motivation for Learning (International).....	166
Chart 4.4 Motivation for Learning (National).....	168
Chart 4.5 Cultural Awareness (International) .....	170
Chart 4.6 Cultural Awareness (National) .....	171
Chart 4.7 Importance of Festivals (International).....	172
Chart 4.8 Importance of Festivals (National).....	173
Chart 4.9 Relative Importance of selected teacher characteristics (International).....	175
Chart 4.10 Relative Importance of selected teacher characteristics (National).....	177

Chart 4.11 Learning Goals (International).....	179
Chart 4.12 Learning Goals (National).....	181
Chart 4.13 Learning Goals through a different lens (International).....	183
Chart 4.14 Learning Goals through a different lens (National).....	185
Chart 4.15. Work Location Aspirations (International).....	187
Chart 4.16 Career Aspirations (International).....	188
Chart 4.17 University Aspirations (International).....	189
Chart 4.18 Work Location Aspirations (National).....	190
Chart 4.19 Career Aspirations (National).....	191
Chart 4.20 University Aspirations (National).....	192

## ***Abbreviations***

AIMS	Association of International Schools in Malaysia
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIS	Chinese Internationalised Schools
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECIS	Educational Collaborative for International Schools
EMIS	English Medium Instruction Schools
FOBISIA	Federation of British International Schools in Asia
GCE	Glocal Citizenship Education.
GMC	Global Middle Class
IB	International Baccalaureate (curriculum)
IBDP	International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organisation.
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education.
IP	Internet Protocol address
IPC	International Primary Curriculum
ISC	International Schools Research
ISKL	The International School of Kuala Lumpur
MS	Microsoft
RM	Malaysian Ringgit
SDB	Social Desirability Bias
SES	Socioeconomic status
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (national examination of Malaysia)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics,
TNC	Transnational Capitalist Class.
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

## ***Glossary***

A note on some terminology used:

### **Capitalist/Capitalism**

Refers to neoliberal capitalism, a system characterized by deregulation, privatization, free markets, competition, and individualism. The thesis focuses on how this form of capitalism informs a dominant discourse in education Kotz (2009); Apple (2001)

### **Cosmopolitanism**

A worldview that embraces cultural diversity, international mindedness, and global citizenship. It is seen as one of the competing discourses in international schools Weenink (2008); Hill (2015).

### **Discourse**

As defined by Foucault, discourse is a system of knowledge, language, and practices that shapes how individuals perceive and construct social reality. Schools are sites of competing discourses that influence student identity Foucault (1991); Popkewitz & Brennan (1997); Collins (2009)

### **Egoistic Discourse**

Refers to a self-centred perspective where students prioritize individual goals and ambitions over collective or cultural values Darvin & Norton (2019).

### **EMIS (English Medium Instruction Schools)**

Schools that use English as the language of instruction, often associated with international schools, especially in non-English speaking countries Brummitt and Keeling (2013); Joseph (2017); ISC (2025).

### **Figured Worlds**

A concept from Holland et al. referring to socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which identities are formed and enacted. Holland et al. (1998)

### **Habitus**

A concept from Bourdieu, referring to the deeply ingrained habits, dispositions, and ways of thinking shaped by life experiences, especially education. Bourdieu (1986)

## **IB / IBO (International Baccalaureate / International Baccalaureate Organisation)**

A globally recognized educational framework that promotes inquiry-based learning and international mindedness. Hill (2015); Hayden & Thompson (2008)

## **International School (Type A, B, C)**

- **Type A:** Traditional schools for expatriate families.
- **Type B:** Ideologically driven schools promoting internationalism.
- **Type C:** Market-driven schools catering to local elites and middle classes.

Typology by Hayden & Thompson (2013)

## **Internationalised Schools**

This term refers to schools that follow a national curriculum that have adopted international curriculum elements using an English or bi-lingual medium of instruction. (Poole and Qin). While it has been mainly used to refer to public and private national curriculum schools in India and China it has also been used to refer to international schools follows a national curriculum, for example British schools, which have adopted a more internationalised curriculum (Pearce, 2023)

## **Internationally-National School**

A school that offers an alternative to national education within a local context, typically by delivering an international curriculum or pedagogy Pearce (2023).

## **Marketisation**

The process of introducing market forces (competition, consumer choice, etc.) into public services such as education. Chubb & Moe (2011); Ball (2012)

## **Neoliberalism**

An economic and political ideology promoting privatization, free markets, individualism, and limited government intervention, often associated with performance-based reforms in education. Steger & Roy (2010); Kotz (2009); Apple (2001)

**Neoliberal Discourse**

Emphasizes market-oriented values in education, such as competition, individual achievement, performativity, and accountability. Seen as potentially dominant in international schools. Apple (2001); Ball (2012)

**Post-Colonial Discourse**

The legacy of colonial power structures and ideologies that continue to influence educational systems and identities, particularly in former colonies. Wylie (2008); Gibson & Bailey (2022)

**Privatization**

The transfer of public services (e.g., education) into private hands, usually aligned with neoliberal reforms. Hill (2009); Gordon & Whitty (1997)

**Social Capital**

The networks, norms, and shared values that enable collective action and mutual benefit. Bourdieu emphasizes its role in class formation Bourdieu (1986); Young (2016)

**Stakeholder**

Any individual or group directly affected by the operations and outcomes of a school—e.g. parents, students, teachers, board members, school leaders etc. *Apple (2001)*

**Third Culture Kid (TCK)**

Children raised in a culture different from their parents' or passport culture, often associated with expatriate families and international schooling. Pollock & Van Reken (2009); Pearce (2011)

**Transnational Capitalist Class (TNC)**

A globally connected elite with shared economic and ideological interests, possibly emerging from international schooling. Brown & Lauder (2011); Bunnell et al. (2020)



## *Declaration Statement*

No material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution.

## *Statement of Copyright*

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## *Acknowledgment*

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## ***Introduction***

### ***1.1 Introduction to the research***

In the context of international schools and international education this study sets out to explore identity formation amongst students at an international school and how such compares to identity formation in a private national school. It does so through surveying the students' perceptions and analysing their responses to build up an understanding of the discourses at work within the schools and the identity formation of the students involved in the study. The aim is to contribute to the rich and detailed research on identity formation within schools and add to the growing body of research on identity formation within international schools. It also adds to the limited research on identity formation within international schools (Hayden and Thompson, 1995), that is, a non-traditional international school that caters to local host country elites. Such schools are representative of the largest sector of the international school market as it is these types of schools that have largely driven the phenomenon that is the rapid growth of the international school market (ISC, 2025) Hayden and Thompson's typification of international schools will be explored in Chapter 2.2 in more detail. This chapter starts by exploring the origin and rationale behind the research, sets the research topic in its wider context and clarifies what the research questions that the study sets out to explore are before outlining its contribution to the academic literature on identify formation in the field of international schools. I will also explain the context in which the research was carried out, including my own positionality and how that impacted upon the research. Finally, I will provide an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

## **1.2 *The origin and rationale of the research focus.***

Neoliberal reforms in education, globalization and the rapid growth of international schools have led to a number of authors investigating the potential emergence of a Transnational Capitalist Class (TNC) in international education (Brown and Lauder, 2009; Tarc and Tarc, 2015; Bunnell et al., 2020; Lillie, 2020), conceptualizing international schools, usually elite international schools, as transnational spaces for class formation. Numerous studies have claimed that education is dominated by a neoliberal discourse (Apple, 2001, 2004; Ball, 2012; Bittencourt and Willetts, 2018; Wu, 2020) which raises the possibility that any emerging transnational class would be capitalist in nature. However, neoliberalism is not the only discourse at work and other studies question such dominance (Weenink, 2008; Sobré-Denton, 2011; Hill, 2014; Caffyn, 2011; Wylie, 2008; Gibson and Bailey, 2022; Wright and Huang, 2024). This research sets out to explore the claim that there is a dominant neoliberal discourse in international schools and that such dominance is leading to the formation of a TNC. It sees what is happening within international schools as a struggle for hearts and minds and seeks to ask the questions; What evidence is there of a dominant (neoliberalist) discourse amongst senior students of an international school in Malaysia?

## **1.3 *Context of the study***

In the context of international education, the last 20 years has seen its dramatic growth, increasing social impact through increasing number of students experiencing such and, therefore, its increasing importance as a social phenomenon in shaping

the society in which we live. That society is also undergoing rapid transformation through globalisation and economic capitalisation. Both trends converge, through the rising number of affluent middle classes, particularly in post-colonial societies, in the market demand for international education and in the 'global trend' (Apple, 2006) of neoliberal education reforms, leading to claims of an emerging TNC (Brown and Lauder, 1996) which, if it is the case, could lead to significant changes in nation-states as a polity, furthering class divisions and inequality (Ball, 2010). Due to the rapid growth of international schools an increasing number of young people are experiencing an international education and/or attending an international school. They are doing so in a world of increasing globalisation (Hayden and Thompson, 2008; Bunnell, 2022) in which, by their very nature as private, capitalist enterprises, Type-C international schools are potentially impacting on the identity formation of the upper and middle classes and the emerging global society they will lead. A lot is at stake here (Bates, 2011).

Therefore, it is necessary to not only understand this social phenomenon but, through that understanding, consider its implications for future society and, as one of the key purposes of education is, as per the Nuffield review, to prepare children for that society (Pring et al., 2012), better understand the challenges facing international educators.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

In essence the research sets out to answer three key research questions:

1. Is there evidence of a neoliberal discourse in a Type-C international school and, if so, whether such a discourse is dominant?
2. Is there evidence of the formation of a TNC in a Type-C international school?

3. If there is evidence of a neoliberal discourse, its relative dominance to other discourses or evidence of TNC formation, is it particular to the international school in comparison to a national school?

It does so by considering the perceptions of international students and to what extent they reflect different discourses and whether there is a dominant mind-set amongst international students which could indicate a dominant discourse. It also considers to what degree such perceptions are shared and whether they could thus form the basis of class formation within the international school. Finally, it will also use a comparative study of a national school to see whether such perceptions are unique to an international school.

This study does not aim to prove that what may be found in one international school necessarily holds true for all. Not only is it clear from the work on defining international schools that there are many different types of international schools but also because they are “intrinsically exceptional” (Pearce, 2013, xii). This could only be achieved by further research into other Type-C international schools.

### ***1.5 Unique contribution of the study***

In trying to provide a unique contribution to the existing research the study sets out to do so in the context of Type-C international schools. In doing so it applies theorisation of class formation in both a national and international school context, looking at such through both a national and a transnational lens. Much of the research has focused on elite international schools as transnational spaces, Lillie’s (2020) research is of an elite boarding school in Switzerland, Tarc and Tarc (2015) interviewed teachers who had worked in elite private international schools in the ‘Global South, Bunnell and Hatch (2021) studied an elite traditional international school in Japan, Tanu (2014) studied an elite international school in Indonesia. Thus,

the research tends to focus on Type- A traditional international schools designed to cater to globally mobile expatriate children, although a common feature of such schools is that numbers of expatriate children are dwindling and being replaced by local elites or more regional expatriate children, as is the experience of the international school in Tanu's study. The number of studies looking at identity formation in Type-C international schools seems more limited. An investigation carried out on Elicit.com (29/9/24) using the search phrase "Studies of identity formation in Type-C international schools" returned 64 results of which only a few seemed to focus on identity formation of local host country elites (Emenike and Plowright, 2017; Poole, 2018; Fitzsimons, 2019; Wu, 2020; Cruz et al., 2023) as opposed to studies of globally mobile children adapting to the host country.

This study also sets out to question whether this is a feature of international schooling in particular through carrying out the same research in a private school in Malaysia delivering a national curriculum to a local host country elite. A similar Elicit.com investigation (29/9/24 (2)) using the search phrase "Studies of identity formation amongst national schools in Malaysia" found only 2 studies that looked at neo liberal and/or transnational identity formation in schools in Malaysia or the Southeast Asia region (Kinnvall and Jönsson, 2002, Sua and Santhiram, 2017).

## **1.6 Structure of the research.**

The research was initially targeted at graduates of international schools but when this proved too difficult and too costly in terms of time, it became focused on the attitudes of existing students at international schools and the use of an attitudinal survey. A pilot study was carried out in an international school in Qatar and an attempt was made to start the research amongst international students in China, but a combination of Covid restrictions and the political context which created a

hesitancy for participants to engage with such research and a change of job led to the research being completed in an international school in Malaysia. All of the schools above could be characterised as Type-C international schools. Completing the research in Malaysia created a unique opportunity to carry out a parallel study in a private national curriculum school, particular as both schools shared many of the same characteristics, common ownership, Mission and Vision, very similar ethnic and socio-economic demographics, shared cultural events, a largely non-transient student population and a shared perceived importance of English Language Learning acquisition. While key differences, such as the existence of international teachers and an international curriculum in the international school and differing aspirations regarding university and career destinations suggested potentially different outcomes.

Starting from a theoretical understanding of the different discourses of neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, localised cultural identity, post-colonialism and the importance of student agency, these key concepts were operationalised into questions, for which see Chapter 3.6, and the actual research was carried out anonymously through the medium of an online questionnaire to students in their last two years of secondary schooling, Year 10 and 11 in the international school, S4 and S5 in the national school, though it is worth noting the different ages due to the different education systems, 14-16 in the international school, 15-17 in the national school, although the actual years of education, 10 to 11, were the same.

### ***1.7 Development of a theoretical position.***

The actual findings, detailed in Chapter 4, not only seemed to demonstrate the existence of competing discourses but also questioned the dominance of any one discourse in this case study of an international school. The possibility became clear

that a neoliberal discourse may certainly not be the preserve of international schools nor, perhaps surprisingly, the cosmopolitanism discourse either. The influence of the localised cultural identity remained strong in both schools, as to be expected considering the influence of parents, the numbers of local teachers in both schools and the shared cultural events, but more so in the national school which seemed to contribute to a more complete identity formation, a “composite identity” (Pearce, 2011) while in the international school students’ identity seemed more confused, more incomplete, as a result of the many competing discourses and the weakening of the localised cultural identity without the replacing of a strong alternative identity. What became clear is the complex nature of adolescent identity formation, but that such was particularly so in international schools where greater contradictions existed which resulted in the amplification of the role of student agency. The school came to be seen in my mind as less of a Foucauldian institution and more just the site in which differencing discourses competed for the hearts and souls of students. The unfinished nature of the identity formation leads me to agree with DesRoches (2011) that while neoliberalism is at work the identity of international schools was “not final or fixed” (DesRoches, 2011, p83). Which in turn seriously questions the view that a shared set of values is leading to the emergence of a TNC, at least in that the international school’s role in that class formation is debatable, although the possibility remained that in weakening the localised cultural identity the groundwork was being done for such international students to find themselves distanced from a local/national identity and thus seeking the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006) of a TNC.

## **1.8 Positionality statement**

As Urrieta and Hatt correctly points out, “people generally conduct research because it matters to them and to the world in which they live” (Urrieta and Hatt, 2019, p.3). What follows is my positionality statement in which I seek to provide transparency as to why I chose to study identity formation in international students and why it matters to me. I have consciously chosen to provide a positionality statement, acutely aware of the debate in the literature about the value of such reflexive statements (Savolainen et al., 2023) as I am in no doubt about the central importance of my positionality to the research.

The underlying reason why I am doing this research is a heuristic one and, in many ways, an attempt at validating my life work as an international educator. I did not enter the career of international educator over 20 years ago knowing what it entails, though I did start with a preconception of knowing what it should not be; I was convinced that international education should not be post-colonial in its advocacy of all things British/Western, though I discovered that this remains a view amongst many in the career. I also started with a view of what it has the potential to be, about developing global citizens or future economic entrepreneurs and felt I knew what the purpose of education was as later defined by the Nuffield review as contributing to “a more just and cohesive society”, (Pring et al., 2012). But here I met my first challenge as an international educator, as this only works when you know what the more just and cohesive society you are preparing the children for is. What is the society international education is preparing its students for? There are multiple answers, their home society? the host culture? a global society or an imagined community (a future cosmopolitan society)? International schools are full of lofty visions and missions, creating future leaders, global citizens, life-long learners, internationally minded compassionate young people, but does it prepare students for a more just and cohesive society? That it is certainly achieving something, such as a

Third Culture (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009) has been frequently claimed.

Therefore, one key reason to carry out this research is to help me understand what I am doing and have been doing as an international educator and to contribute to the sense of purpose, my own Mission, that I have created. One thing was also clear from the outset. The claim that schools were generating neoliberal students seemed to me to undermine the very purpose of international education as I then understood it and had experienced it. It became a challenge to the very purpose I was seeking to identify with and thus the research proposal can be seen as an attempt to validate that self-Mission.

Aside from the above selfish purpose for the research my positionality is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, professional, and cultural factors. My mother and father were both immigrants, her Catholic Spanish and him Protestant Irish, living in the United Kingdom. I grew up, therefore, with a conflicted identity - that of my home identity, itself conflicted between my Irish and Spanish background and that of my context, growing up in England and developing an English identity largely through my schooling and exposure to literature, particularly historical. With the result that I ended up doing an MA on the historical origins of the English. I became more English than either of my parents and still to this day, sound very English (middle Oxford). Having experienced my own complex identity formation it was no surprise that I would be later inclined to research identity formation in others. Also, unsurprisingly, as a father I became very focused on the importance of my children's identity formation and with my wife, notably Polish who considered herself Spanish, having grown up in Spain, adding further to the mix of identities, decided that we wanted our children to grow up 'international' rather than English. With that came the decision to seek a career in international education, to provide my children that which my parents had not provided me, a sense of belonging to a complex and

international community. This experience of navigating and reconciling multiple identities has profoundly influenced my academic and professional pursuits, leading me to study and work in international education and my decision to become an international educator was driven by my own sense of internationalism and seeking an identity for my international children.

My professional journey spans over several continents. When I started this research, I had recently returned from a 9-year stint as an international educator working in independent schools in South America, Europe and Southeast Asia. Since beginning the research my international career has continued, after a one-year sabbatical, taking me to the Middle East, Far East and back to Southeast Asia. My tenure in international schools has exposed me to diverse educational philosophies from traditional elite institutions focused on elite-self recruitment, through ideological institutions focused on developing an idealized global society to institutions primarily driven by neoliberalist principles, in effect all three types of international schools identified by Hayden and Thompson (2013). My first experiences of international education were of Type A international schools, serving an elite, whether expat or local, where the goal was, for most, to access Higher Education in the UK as a steppingstone to entry into a global and/or local elite. I also encountered and was attracted to working in schools with the philosophy of the IB programme, typical of Type B schools. These were the types of schools I had sought for my own children and in line with my own internationalism. However, it also became clear that each type of school was also becoming increasingly influenced by the local context and the tension between the motive of the school and the increasing number of local elite involvement and the importance of localized cultural identity at play. During the latter half of my professional journey my understanding of the role of international education has changed somewhat as my experience changed and I found myself

working for Type C international schools, ones focused on market forces serving a predominately local and rapidly developing market of consumers (students) and customers (parents). My professional journey has, therefore, been shaped by the very rise of neoliberal forces that the thesis sets out to question.

Therefore, a cosmopolitan outlook and commitment to internationalism are central to my professional and personal identity. As described above, my experiences and personal choices have fostered a belief in the value of cosmopolitanism and the development of an international mindset. However, those same experiences have made me aware of the challenges and tensions that exist in international schools and thus created a critical awareness of the role of the school in identity formation, which in turn has led me to critically evaluate the impact of neoliberal forces in international schools as well as question whether this impact is different in national schools as opposed to international schools.

My positionality has also been affected by my own children's experience when transitioning from an international student to a UK university. This anecdote may serve to illustrate that experience. In order to fit in with her new house mates my daughter tried to find links between their working/lower middle-class origins and hers, "my dad's just a teacher" was one such claim. But this all came horribly unstuck when they found her stood by a pile of dirty clothes in the kitchen looking at a washing machine of which she had no idea how to work. When asked whether she had never used a washing machine before she replied "no, the maid did the washing", whereupon the social glue dissolved. Not only did her housemates question her class origin but she also realised that her assumption that everyone had a maid was actually a false social reality created by an international schooling experience, where everyone of her friends did have a maid. Her social identity was clearly in a dilemma and her reaction was to seek out others like her, either

international students or students who had grown up with maids, the socioeconomic elites, forming a bond through their shared cultural experience and understanding, finding those whose experience, however 'confusing' had left them bi or multilingual, with a three-dimensional world view and cross-cultural awareness and the skills to survive in such a complex world (Brown and Lauder, 2011). In other words, creating an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). Seeing this happen to my children made the process of identity formation in international schools and the possibility of an underlying set of values as the basis of a TNC being formed all the more intriguing to study.

The choice, therefore, of the research topic was based upon my own personal values, a need to provide validity to my life's work as an international educator and school leader and the unique opportunity resulting from my career journey which embroiled me in the issues of local student identity formation in the context of an international school and has led to my current position as Executive Principal of a campus of three schools, both local National private schools and an international school, providing me with a unique (though increasingly less so) opportunity to compare identify formation in both contexts.

## **1.9 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is organised into six chapters, each exploring a stage in the research. This chapter, the introduction, has attempted to set the context, both theoretical, academic and situational, that the research is situated in and provide the reader with an overview of the whole. In Chapter 2 I will review the existing literature to both set the scene in regards the importance of studying identity formation within international schools and provide a more complete picture of the theoretical and academic context of the research, in particular to illustrate the nature of identity formation within

international schools and the role competing discourses are playing in such. In Chapter 3 I will detail the methodological journey undertaken that resulted in the shift to the use of attitudinal surveys of existing international students and demonstrate how discourses were operationalised to enable quantitative research to be carried out. The findings are presented visually and statistically in Chapter 4 and analysed both through descriptive and inferential analysis, with comparisons being made between the international and private national school. This analysis is then discussed in relation to the existing literature in Chapter 5 both to consider to what extent the findings support and are informed by previous research and how the findings contribute further to such as well as help answer the original research questions, leading to a conclusion in Chapter 6 which addresses both the question of dominance of any one discourse and the formation of a TNC as well as addressing the study's contribution to the complex picture of adolescent identity formation in international schools before considering the significance of such conclusions, both in the field of academia and that of international school leadership, making recommendations for further research as well as implications for practice to be considered by international school Principals and national education authorities. One hopes the read will be, if not an enlightening one, a though provoking one that will contribute to better educational practice through a stronger understanding of the challenges facing young people forming their identity in an international school setting.

## ***Literature Review***

### ***2.1 Structure of the chapter***

In order to examine the research question that there is a dominant neoliberal discourse in international schools I will start by providing a background to the rise of the neoliberal discourse in international education before considering the literature that there is such a distinct entity that can be defined as an international school and to what extent the school that is the focus of this study can be defined as such. The growth of international schools as a well recorded social phenomenon has been accompanied by numerous studies trying to define what is an international school. Due to this growth, I will use the literature to suggest that what is happening in international schools is significant and worthy of study.

There is a wealth of research and theory that posits schools as a key agent of socialisation (Apple, 2001, 2004; Resnik, 2012; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Hameed et al., 2023). I will refer to this literature to advance the view that international schools not only play a key role in identity formation for their students but also through students identifying with a particular group and the sharing of common values that such is the prerequisite for the formation of class and, therefore, that the emergence of a TNC amongst graduates of international schools is theoretically possible. I will review the literature to see to what extent a network of communication exists on a transnational scale amongst international students that enable its members to act together to advance their class interests.

Finally, I will consider the literature that there are competing discourses within international schools, whether one discourse is dominant and how these are linked to the formation of identity.

## **2.2 Neoliberalism**

The research question that is being considered herein is that there is a dominant neoliberal discourse in international schools and that such dominance is leading to the formation of a TNC with a significant global influence. Neoliberalism in education has been defined in a variety of ways but can be broadly understood as a discourse that extends the mechanism of the market to spheres of social action, in this case education (Schmeichel et al., 2017; Bernstein et al., 2015) with a resulting focus on individualism, accountability, marketization and competition (Balan 2023; Lerch et al., 2022) which has been criticised for creating increased pressure on teachers through a focus on performativity and a narrowing of curriculum (Connell, 2013)

The influence of neoliberalism in schools has been a topic of substantial research and debate, with scholars examining its implications on educational policy, pedagogy, curriculum, and equity. Neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasises market-based principles and advocates for limited government intervention in the economy. It has gained significant popularity since the 1980s, shaping economic policies worldwide. Margaret Thatcher in the UK (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the US (1981) introduced policies focused on privatization and deregulation, (Hall, 2011). Key institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank effectively spread neoliberal ideas to developing countries through development policies (Peet, 2009). Globalization in the 1990s spread neoliberalism further through the rise of multinational companies and global financial markets (Steger and Roy,

2010). While the hegemony of neoliberal economic policies is now being criticised for exacerbating inequalities (Martin, 2017) and a global financial crisis in 2008 has resulted in calls for a re-evaluation of neoliberal policies (Kotz, 2009) nevertheless neoliberalism remains influential, particularly as a dominant discourse or “thought collective” (Gray et al., 2015, p.386).

As discussed above, in the context of education, neoliberalism promotes competition, marketisation, and accountability, often leading to the introduction of efficiency-driven reforms in schools (Ball 2012; Apple, 2001, 2004; Chubb and Moe 2011; Lubienski and Lubienski, 2013). One significant impact of neoliberalism in schools that has been debated is the promotion of marketisation and school choice policies (Gordon and Whitney, 1997; Chubb and Moe, 2011, Rizvi, 2009). Various studies have examined the consequences of introducing market forces into education systems. For instance, Chubb and Moe (2011) argue that market-based competition improves educational outcomes by providing parents with a wider range of school options. However, others argue that marketisation exacerbates educational inequities, favouring privileged families who can navigate the complexities of school choice (Lubienski and Lubienski, 2013). Additionally, the emphasis on competition can lead to increased stratification among schools, creating winners and losers in the education system (Lubienski and Lubienski, 2013; Apple, 2001; Savage, 2017). Neoliberalism in schools is often associated with increased accountability measures, such as standardised testing (Ball, 2012; Apple 2001). Proponents argue that accountability ensures quality education and helps identify areas needing improvement (Chubb and Moe, 2011; Wilkins et al., 2020). However, critics contend that an overemphasis on standardised testing leads to a narrowing of curriculum, teaching to the test and a reduction in actual classroom teaching (Au, 2007; Riddle et al., 2021)). One such narrowing of curriculum, that of a focus on developing skills

for the labour market is criticised as meeting the needs of the market not those of the students (Flores-Rodríguez and Martín-Sánchez, 2023). This can have negative consequences, as it limits teachers' autonomy, stifles creativity, and diminishes the overall educational experience. Another impact of neoliberalism in schools is the rise of privatisation and market-oriented reforms. Public-private partnerships, charter schools, and voucher programs are some examples of neoliberal policies aimed at injecting market principles into education. Increased market orientated approaches and reduced government involvement are apparent in countries like the UK and New Zealand (Gordon and Whitty, 1997). There have been similar reforms in Latin America (Bartlett, 2005) although the foreword in *Contesting Neoliberal Education* (Hill, 2009) makes it clear that such neoliberal forms are being resisted by teacher trade unions and intellectuals in places like Chile, Brazil and Venezuela. In Southeast Asia, in particular Malaysia, the focus of this study, neoliberalism has had a significant impact on educational policies (Joseph, 2017; Steger and Roy, 2010; Bunnell and Hatch, 2021), such as the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, and has been criticised for exacerbating inequalities, such as discriminatory educational policies in Malaysia described as “ethnicized neoliberalism” (Joseph, 2017).

Researchers have examined the effects of these reforms on educational outcomes, equity, and stakeholders' interests. While proponents argue that privatisation enhances efficiency and innovation, research suggests mixed outcomes. Some studies reveal improved performance in select charter schools, while others find no significant difference or even negative effects on student achievement (Abdulkadiroğlu et al., 2011; Crehan, 2018). The focus on individualism, a key characteristic of neoliberalism has been criticised for increasing

inequity and also undermining community values through a focus on values such as competitiveness and commerce over community (Sellars and Imig, 2020).

The neoliberal agenda has also influenced the professionalism and accountability of teachers. The introduction of performance-based pay, teacher evaluations based on student test scores, and the measuring of teacher effectiveness have been controversial aspects of neoliberal education policies (Wilkins et al., 2021; Ball, 2012; Apple, 2004; Riddle et al., 2021). While some argue that these measures hold teachers accountable and improve teaching quality (Chubb and Moe, 2011; Crehan, 2018), critics contend that they devalue the holistic nature of teaching and fail to capture the complex role teachers play in students' lives (Ball, 2012; Apple, 2004; Wilkins et al., 2021; Riddle et al., 2021; Au, 2007). Wilkins et al describe the rise of “the neo-performative teacher” (2021) free to “act as social change agents through improving educational outcomes” yet also “held accountable” and subject to “multi-layered surveillance” (ibid, p28). Such policies can also contribute to high stakes testing cultures, where teachers focus more on test preparation at the expense of well-rounded education (Au, 2007, Riddle et al.,2021). In a paper synthesizing large scale surveys of Australian state schools, although as not all states were surveyed the findings national representativeness is limited, intensification of teachers' workloads linked to test preparation, reporting and producing data was blamed for reducing classroom teaching time (Riddle et al, 2021)

Moreover, privatisation and market-oriented reforms can exacerbate inequalities and undermine public education as a common good (Savage, 2010, Savage 2017). Critics argue that neoliberal policies in schools contribute to widening educational inequalities and exacerbate social injustices (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2012; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2013; Rizvi, 2009; Joseph, 2017). The market-driven approach favours those with resources, creating a two-tiered education system

increasing segregation and inequality (Lubienski and Lubienski, 2013) and favouring ethnic and socioeconomic hierarchies (Jospheh, 2017). Research has shown that market-based reforms tend to benefit already advantaged students and perpetuate educational disparities for marginalised groups (Gillborn, 2015) reinforcing class and racial inequalities (Apple 2001, 2004). High stakes testing and narrow curricula can further disadvantage students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, minority communities, and even students with special educational needs by limited differentiated instruction (Apple 2001, 2004; Riddle et al., 2017).

The significant impact of neoliberalism on education, in particular on international schools, has been widely accepted with the increased commercialization of international education (Jin, 2022; Hameed and Lingard, 2023) and the adoption of market driven approaches (Wilkins et al., 2020). While proponents would argue that neoliberal policies have enhanced efficiency, competition, and choice there is significant evidence that international schools and international curricula like the IB have become tools for privileged families to reinforce their social status and existing socioeconomic inequalities (Hameed and Lingard 2023,; Bunnell, 2021; Maire and Windle, 2022) . The existence of a neoliberal discourse within international schools and the possibility of its dominance means it is important for policymakers and educators in international education, Boards, Parent Governors, associations of international schools, and School Principals, to critically examine the implications of neoliberal policies, consider alternative approaches, and strive for educational systems that prioritise equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

### **2.3 *What is an international school?***

First there is a need to define the social phenomenon that I am studying, the international school. Thirty years ago Hayden and Thompson pointed out that while the concept of international education was a “well-used one” it was not, however, “well-defined” (Hayden and Thompson, 1995). Much of the discussion was then focused around whether the purpose of such a school to deliver an international education, such as the IB diploma, should be used as the basis of definition over whether the character of the school such as delivering a non-local, often Western curriculum through Western trained teachers to a diverse population of students should be the basis on which international was defined. (Hayden & Thompson, 1995; Sylvester, 1998; Cambridge & Thompson, 2004) Just over ten years later the academic discussions had moved to talking about two types of international schools, the traditional international school serving expatriates and diplomats and providing such children with an education system similar to their home countries and the rise of English-medium and/or international Baccalaureate schools accessed by local elites (Hayden and Thompson, 2013; Bunnell, 2010, 2016; Tarc 2009; Xu, 2001, Walden 2018). Xu (2001) and Walden’s (2018) definitions of international schools as those that prioritise a global perspective and serve a mainly globally mobile population matches Hayden and Thompson’s first type of school. It does not, however, match the second type of school, or the school that is the core of this study and so further exploration of the definition is needed.

Sylvester (1998) distinguished between the ‘inclusive’ and ‘encapsulated’ international school. The former is a school whose international mission is embedded in the diversity of the student body, the international character of its teaching body, exposure to different cultures, a balanced and formal curriculum and a management regime whose values are consistent with the international mission (Sylvester 1998, p. 186). At the core of that international mission is the ideological

position of internationalism, where no one culture is dominant, instead diversity is the goal. While encapsulated schools have limited diversity/cultures and a dominant imported school culture reflected through a narrow curriculum. This is more helpful as the school that is the focus of this study has many, but not all, of the characteristics of an 'encapsulated' school, diversity of its student body outside of the multiethnicity of Malaysian society, is limited, exposure to different cultures is limited to an 'international week', its curriculum is international and balanced, but not entirely and its teaching population is mixed between international and local and the management regime values are more strongly linked to neoliberal values such as success and preparation for a future global competition.

Differences in definition can often be traced to personal experience; Walden, for example, refers to her time in Taipei American School "a large international school for expatriates" (p.190) and the International School of Kuala Lumpur whose mandate is "to serve primarily the children of expatriate families living in Malaysia." (ISKL 2024), while Xu was writing in the context of China where most Chinese nationals were prohibited from attending international schools unless they held a non-Chinese passport. Hayden and Thompson (1996) later refined their definition in their keynote address to the European Council of International Schools, whose bylaws define an international school as one offering any of the following; either offering curriculum of two or more countries, typically an international alongside a local curriculum, or offering a curriculum of one country but located in another or having a diverse student body and curricular that aligned with that of the purpose of ECIS (ibid. p48). In the keynote Hayden and Thompson distinguished between international education and international schools and that the former can be delivered by national schools (ibid. pp50-51). By removing the defining characteristic as "an education for international mindedness" (Hill, 2015) the definition of an

international school becomes significantly broader, and more in alignment with the audience at the ECIS conference and with the school that is the focus of this study.

Nagrath (2011). in an article in *The International Educator*, provided the following all-encompassing criteria:

**Table 2.1: International Association of School Librarianship Criteria for International Schools**

1. Transferability of students' education across international schools
  2. A moving population (higher than in national public schools)
  3. Multinational and multilingual student body
  4. An international curriculum
  5. International accreditation
  6. A transient and multinational teacher population
  7. Non-selective student enrolment.
  8. Usually English or bi-lingual as the language of instruction
- (quoted from Nagrath 2011)

Hayden and Thompson (2013) later refined their definition further into a three-part typology of international schools.

1. Type A or *traditional international schools* designed to cater to globally mobile expatriate children.
2. Type B '*ideological*' *international schools* that promote international mindedness and world peace through an international education.
3. Type C *non-traditional international schools* designed to cater to local host country elites

And then went further distinguishing between “groups of commercially operated schools” and “satellites of ‘well-established’ and prestigious schools.” (Hayden and Thompson 2016) but still recognising the need for an update in the rapidly evolving market of international schools (Hayden and Thompson, 2018).

This typification has come under criticism as the traditional cohorts of students such schools serve has changed (Bunnell, 2016; Poole, 2019; Pearce, 2023). As recently as 2023 Pearce has questioned the above typification by introducing the concept of “internationally-national” schools, defined as “a school that falls within the

definition of an international school ..... but aligns itself to one or more nationalities” (Pearce, 2023). In recognising the more nuanced and complex nature of ‘transplanted national schools’ that have become more internationalised, an example is given of Tanglin Trust, a British international school offering the IBDP pathway to students, Pearce has added greater depth and complexity to the emerging definition of what is an international school. Whether such schools differ sufficiently from the typology to be considered as a different type of school or whether the above typology still applies would require further research, for example, while the ‘expatriate’ children Type A schools is changing, the degree to which they remain a ‘globally mobile elite’ needs to be considered before differentiating between one Type A school and another. Pearce recognises that such internationally-national schools could exist as Type-C or Type-A schools (Pearce, 2023) but that a typology which “encourages fluidity and/or overlap” would be more helpful (ibid.)

Poole (2019) has further questioned Hayden and Thompson’s typology through the study of Chinese Internationalised Schools (CIS). Such schools are differentiated from traditional international schools, such as they incorporate international elements alongside the National Curriculum, are bi-lingual in instruction, have a wider demographic of teachers drawn from expatriate and local markets. While this is a nuanced differentiation of a Type-C school, nevertheless the categorisation of international schools serving a local population remains valid. What both Poole’s and Pearce’s nuances reflect is that the Type-C category of schools, while still a valid umbrella under which to group non-traditional international schools, is increasingly covering a very diverse and growing body of schools whose differences need to be further studied in order to develop a more precise categorisation of international schools. Perhaps a Type-D school, the internationalised school, a public or private school following a national curriculum that has adopted international curriculum

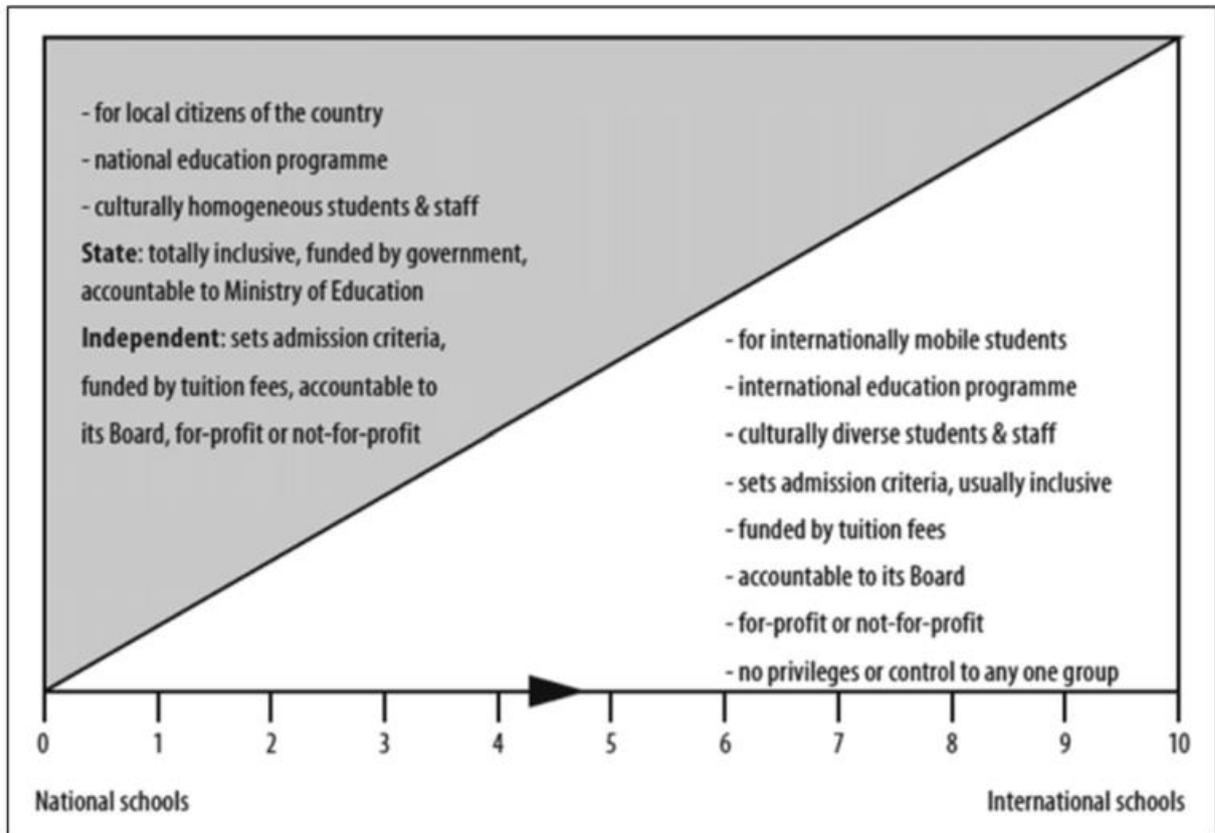
elements and EMIS needs to be adopted, although there is the added complication that this term has also been applied to traditional international schools which follow a national curriculum that is different to the host culture, for example, British curriculum schools, who have adopted international elements. For this study the former type of 'internationalised school' will be considered as a different 'type' of school, with further discussion needed to see if it qualifies as an 'international school'. As no such distinction has yet been drawn and as studies of such 'internationalised schools' remain useful when considering the discourses at work within schools in the international environment, such studies will be used herein,

Hayden and Thompson's typification remains useful for distinguishing between the traditional elite schools originally set up for expatriate mobile children, schools with a strongly cosmopolitan ideological position and what is now the great majority of international schools, those serving local upper and middle classes, whether as international schools following an international curriculum (IB) or a national curriculum from another country (predominately British, US and Australian). For now, local national curriculum schools that have been internationalised remain outside this typification of what is an international school. Based on the above the focus school is defined as a Type C international school sharing the criteria of international schools but with less of a focus on an international mission and more of a local context in terms of both students, teachers and to some extent, curriculum. While the school has the nuances of an internationally-national school, for example, a core British curriculum within which elements of Singaporean curriculum, IPC and other international curriculum influences drawn from individual teacher's experiences, it remains a Type-C school, providing an internationalised curriculum serving predominately the local context. Thus, in this research, I will frequently refer to this typification to refer to the school that is the focus of the research as a Type-C

international school. The national curriculum school used as a comparison is a private school following the national curriculum of Malaysia but can be considered to be an “internationalised school” having adopted elements of international education, including a GCSE dual-accreditation path and progressive teaching methods and predominately English medium instruction.

Interestingly the debate has also had the effect of differentiating between international schools and the provision of an international education (Cambridge and Thompson, 2005; Tarc, 2009; Hill, 2015). Hill (2015) agreed with removing the assumption that an international school provides an international education, providing the label ‘internationally minded’ institution for any school offering an international education, whilst reserving the label international school for schools whose purpose was “to welcome, first and foremost, the children of those culturally diverse families living abroad because of their work”, in other words defining an international school as one that serves an expatriate population, seemingly bringing the debate full circle. In 2016 Hill proposed a National-International school continuum defining schools by the nature of the school rather than its students, staff or mission/purpose. This provides the fluidity/overlapping approach espoused by Pearce when discussing internationally-national schools (Pearce, 2023). The focus school would be well within the international school continuum, probably an 8 due to catering to local elites and having a balance of local and international teachers.

**Table 2.2: National International school continuum (Hill, 2016; 13) taken from Pearce, 2023; 365)**



Pearce (2023) identifies the “emerging concept” of “internationally-national schools” (p.351) identifying international schools as those which offer “something different to the local, national system in the country in which it is located” (p.355), in essence placing the international school in juxtaposition to the national school.

Which is clearly where the focus school sits, as an alternative to National education.

Recent research has continued recognising the complex nature of international schools (Khalil, 2019; Pearce, 2023; Poole and Ying, 2024; Bunnell et al., 2020).

Khalil (2019) looked at the proliferation of ‘British-style’ for profit international schools

providing a “British education” where the key characteristic was the English medium British curriculum. What is a “British education” is itself an area of debate as international schools with national affiliations are becoming more internationalised, the internationally-national school (Pearce, 2023) or becoming more national, the “internationally facing” school (Poole and Ying, 2024) and as schools shift how they present themselves in a rapidly expanding and diversifying market (Bunnell et al., 2020). Though Wynne-Hughes and Pswaravi (2020) continued to follow the separation between student body and educational purpose developed by Hayden and Hill above, defining international schools as composed of international students and/or with a philosophy of internationalism. Poole and Ying (2024) have proposed the concept “internationally-facing school” to describe schools “rooted in the nation” (ibid., p7) but also international, arguing that to describe a school as international is anachronistic. In essence, what is an international school remains, academically, a subject for continued debate, “a permanent identity crisis” characterised by their complex nature whereby international schools are “intrinsically exceptional” (Pearce, 2013, xii). This has become increasingly so as the international school landscape has dramatically changed with the rapid growth of Type C non -traditional international schools with the result that “the number of schools being classified or claiming to be ‘International Schools’ has grown enormously” (Bunnell and Fertig, 2016).

The result is that there remains no clearly accepted definition of an international school and we now live in a context where bodies like the Association of International Schools in Malaysia (AIMS) and the Federation of British International Schools in Asia (FOBISIA) are engaged in the debate at an operational level regarding what defines an international school for the purpose of membership.

Pearce (2023, p. 362) critiques Hayden and Thompson’s typology on the fact that it

has been outdated by the rapidly changing nature of international schools, giving the example of schools within Malaysia that were originally Type A international school founded to serve expatriate families whose demographics have changed to include increasing numbers of local students, partly due to changes in Government policy and to economic development. Similarly, Pearce (2023, p.362-363) critiqued Sylvester's division as too static and too diametric to account for the again rapidly changing and complex scene. Pearce (2023, p.367) did accept that Hill's National International school continuum allowed for the greater flexibility that the complex reality seems to demand. However, it does suffer from an assumption that diversity is the preclude of international schools, one that makes sense in, for example, a Chinese context, but no sense in a multicultural/multiethnic society like Malaysia.

In summary, the international school chosen as the core school for this study will be considered a Type C international school according to Hayden and Thompson's typology. It is a for-profit school, designed to cater to the local elite, with an ethnically, culturally and nationality diverse student population, which delivers a British style curriculum in an English medium, has a multinational population of teachers and is accredited by an international education accreditor plus a member school of both international and British organisations. As an encapsulated international school (Sylvester, 1998) it meets most if not all of the criteria on the right of Hill's continuum and thus it can be considered a valid case study for the global social phenomena that is the "substantial and unprecedented growth" (Bunnell, 2019) of EMIS. This makes it ideally suited to explore the issue of dominant discourses both as an example of the type of international school that is reflected in the rapid growth of international schooling but also because of the counter-play between the for-profit neoliberal discourse of the owning body, the international

character of its school leadership and 50% of its teachers and the local/National character of its students and the other 50% of its teachers.

#### **2.4 The significance of the existence of a dominant discourse.**

Having established that the focus of the study is an international school, I will now consider why a study of the dominant discourse within such a school is significant in light of the rapid growth of international schools, in particular Type C international schools. Due to the rapid growth of international schools an increasing number of young people are experiencing an international education. The growth of international schools, defined as EMIS, has been well documented. In 2009 Brummitt and Keeling estimated that there were 5374 such schools serving 2.3 million students and estimated by 2020 there would be 11,000 international schools with 4.9 million students (Hayden and Thompson, 2011 p86). Brummitt and Keeling later raised this estimate to 11,331 schools catering to 6.2 million students and employing 529,000 teachers by 2022 (Brummitt and Keeling, 2013, p34). By 2019 there were over 10, 000 schools, employing 506, 900 teachers teaching 5.4 million children (Speck 2019) and as of January 2025 the total had, in many ways, exceeded Brummitt and Keeling's estimation with 14, 883 international schools, catering to 7.4 million students and employing 713, 539 teaching staff (ISC 2025). International schools are, therefore, a form of schooling experience for an increasing number of young people, and, therefore, the importance of researching the potential impact of such has increased.

They are doing so in a world of increasing globalisation, "as the forces of globalisation gather strength and speed, the international schools' sector is likely to become more significant", predicted Hayden and Thompson, (2008, p10) and yet as

recent as 2021 Bunnell and Hatch (2021) reported that the “diverse areas of ‘International Schooling’ is continuously growing yet still under-reported” (p.1). The rise of international schools must be treated as a social phenomenon of the past 40 years that is shaping the world today.

One would be right to expect that such a development on a global scale would have a significant impact on global society. Perhaps even that the roots of an emerging global society, ‘patterns of global consciousness’ (Hayden and Thompson, 2013) could be identified by studying the values adopted by young people who experience international schooling (Cambridge and Thompson, 2004; Tarc, 2009; Bunnell, 2022, 2016)). “The success of the IB Diploma and other “international” schooling options can also be explained as the emergent process of global and upper-class formation” (Maire and Windle 2022). Researchers have recognised the impact of globalisation on the state’s capacity to direct educational policy (Ozga and Lingard 2007) and the increasing homogeneity of educational politics (Henry et al 2013) with the potential for “detachment of education from its local and national roots and the transformation of its historical purpose in consolidating national identity and citizenship.” (Bates 2011, p13). Bunnell and Hatch (2021) discusses how reactionary policies in Asia and the Middle East to international schooling as “providing a convenient and proven model for potentially fast economic growth and educational development” (p.53) has resulted in a “crypt-growth” of EMIS, which could be seen as a “form of educational neo-colonisation” (p.53). One that is potentially reinforcing existing social inequalities rather than promoting global citizenship. Maire and Windle (2022) argued that in the Australian context, parents were choosing the IB Diploma route not for its internationalising curriculum but “as part of domestic class reproduction strategies, through investment of economic and cultural capital” (p. 87).

Globalisation, the accompanying growth in international schools and the potential significant global influence it has provides further justification for a study of dominant discourses. As private, capitalist enterprises, Type-C international schools are potentially impacting on the identity formation of the upper and middle classes and the emerging global society they will lead. A lot is at stake here, “what is at stake here are the very definitions and organisations of knowledge that are to prevail in a globalised world.” (Bates, 2011, p8). Therefore, the existence of dominant discourse within international schools, whether neoliberal or otherwise, is highly significant as such would provide potential insights into this emerging global society.

## ***2.5 The international school as an agent of socialisation.***

Having established that international schools are a distinct entity and that the rapid growth of such means they have a far greater potential influence on global society, the potential for schools to impact upon their students’ identity now needs to be considered. It has been long established that schooling is an “agency of socialisation” (Parsons and Halsey, 1959 p35). As such it is an agent in the process of identity formation amongst students. There are, however, different paradigms about identity construction. “Most academic discourses on identities tend to assume only two alternatives. Either identities are predetermined and fixed, or identities are completely constructed and fluid.” (Strauss and Quinn 1997 p8). Recent research, however, suggests a social constructionist paradigm is more valid, with identities being “socioculturally constructed” through interaction and interpretation (Darvin and Norton, 2019, Darvin and Zhang 2025, Cruz et al., 2023) in which globalisation is shaping “identities, allegiances and notions of citizenship in new ways.” (Darvin and Norton, 2019, p.456). There is a continuing shift away from positivistic to critical and

decolonizing paradigms (Urrietta and Hatt, 2019) with increasing focus on student agency and how identities are constructed within schools. Students “figure” (Holland et al., 1998) out their identity interacting with a number of figured worlds leading to the development of a composite identity (Pearce 2011).

The first paradigm is of little use to our study as it would mean that a child’s identity is fixed prior to schooling and thus the dominant discourse in school particularly a secondary school would have little relevance in identity formation. The second paradigm, let’s call it the traditional model, sees the construction of identity as part of an ongoing process, identity is first constructed as part of primary socialisation and then reshaped and modified through secondary socialisation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The student may have formed a self-identity through primary socialisation, but this identity is then potentially modified or even reshaped through a process of secondary socialisation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The potential for international schools to be instrumental in forming identities in this way has long been recognised (Sylvester, 2002; Haywood, 2007; Poole and Van Reken, 2009, Resnik, 2012; Hayden and Thompson, 2013; Bunnell, 2016). One popular theory is that of the Third Culture Kid whose home or national culture is modified and reshaped by the experience of international schooling which adds “some interesting twists to the child’s cultural development”. (Pollock and Van Reken 2009). The transient nature of the typical international student whose “life trajectories (may) take them through a sequence of locations and cultural situations” (Pearce, 2011, p160) suggest that their self-identity may be more open to modification as it is less well embedded and reinforced, they are, in other words “rootless” (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Brevetti and Ford’s shared experience of international students is that “Schools are a morally formative culture for all students, but international students especially.” (Brevetti and Ford 2017, p189).

As Foucault makes clear, schools use their disciplinary power to set out what is normal and thus, by definition, what is not, the “binary division” (Foucault 1977, p199) and thus, through these “mechanisms of normalization” (Foucault 1977, p306) reinforce a dominant discourse. In essence, through privileging a particular discourse, schools both construct and limit what a student can be. The international school, therefore, can be seen as institutions within which students are spoken into existence and the experience of international schooling has ‘shaped’ the self (Flynn and Petersen, 2007). However, it is also worth being aware that the student can experience ‘burnout’ of the dominant discourse. Erentaitė et al.’s (2018) study illustrates how student engagement with the school resulted in a positive relationship between the school and the student which in turn facilitated identity formation amongst students. Erentaitė et al. referred to such students using ‘information-orientated identity processing style’ through which they engaged with the school, we can assume discourse, and thus were open to such and “willing to revise aspects of their identity.” (p762), However, the study also suggests that while 2 years was sufficient to positively affect adolescent identity formation, the experience of “school burnout can hinder the development of adolescent identity “(p771). School burnout was described as “experiences of exhaustion, disengagement from studies and a sense of incompetence in school” (p764) and resulted in students adopting ‘normative’ processing style in which students maintained their existing identity and resisted an alternative discourse or adopted “diffuse-avoidant’ processing style through which students “avoid and procrastinate when dealing with identity issues.” (p762), both of which could result in the student resisting or avoiding being shaped by the dominant school discourse. Other studies also demonstrate the negative impact on identity formation school burnout, defined as exhaustion, cynicism and

feeling inadequacy as a student, can have, resulting in lower school engagement and impaired identity development (Vansoeterstede et al., 2022; Salmela-Aro, 2017)

The international schools potential as a primary form of political socialisation is demonstrated in a study of the relationship between politics and schooling in Hong Kong which showed school as a “primary tool for maintaining and legitimating political power and the ideology of those in power” (Morris and Sweeting 1991, p249) or an alternative to national community socialisation whereby students who “forgo the national system in favour of international schools evade a major means of socialisation.” (Kim and Mobernd, 2019, p2). A recent study of an IB school in Poland demonstrates how it acts as an “island of educational resistance” to national political trends (Leek, 2024). What if the roots of this emerging global society were found to be neoliberalist ones (Ball, 1993; Brown and Lauder, 2011) rather than the international vision often expressed by international schools and international educational organisations such as the IBO themselves?

Thus, the need to study discourses within international schools becomes even more significant as a challenge to the nation-state. However recent studies of international schools in China show how such schools are being ‘reigned’ in by the State (Wu and Koh, 2023) or used as a ‘commodity’ by Chinese middle-class families (Cao, 2022) for their utilitarian purpose of achieving university entry and to maintain social status, detracting from any role of political socialization.

The alternative third paradigm is to see the distinction between primary and secondary socialisation as unnecessary and instead to see identity construction as an ongoing process with new identities being formed and added to a student’s home identity, with students building up a “mosaic of identities” (Pearce, 2011 p154). Pearce describes students as acquiring new values and norms from their international schooling experience depending on the degree to which these are

“consonant” or “dissonant” with their existing values, picking out national identity as of particular importance in this process. Only if there is a dominant transnational discourse in the school will a student’s identity be shaped as ‘international’ as “unless there is a clearly dominant institutional model it is more likely that the values accrued will be the national model, supported from home, plus single or locally situated values that are widely displayed in the institution.” (Pearce, 2011 p169). Nevertheless, this leaves open the possibility that with a dominant discourse students national or local/home identity could be reshaped . Pearce goes further therefore, to show that the combination of adjusting to the way of being and the nature of being an international student with strongly held national and personal value-sets, the latter possibly having their origin in local events, results in a “composite nature of personal value-systems” (Pearce 2011, p170.), similar to the “hybrid identities” Cruz et al. found in schools in China, India and the UAE (Cruz et al., 2023) and “cosmopolitan nationalism” Wright et al. found in schools in China (Wright et al, 2021).

There seems no doubt that international schools play a significant role in shaping student identities (Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Tarc, 2009; Cruz et al., 2023; Hou et al., 2024; Joseph, 2017; Walker, 2005), though much research focuses on the development of identities which are a composite of international and national, variously referred to as ‘hybrid identities’ (Cruz et al., 2023) layered or dual identities (Tarc, 2009). Marginson (2014) and others (Fitzsimons, 2019; Hou et al.; 2024; Vinokur, 2024, Cruz et al., 2023) discuss how students navigated their identities between home and host country. While Marginson’s work (2014) looks at how higher education students navigated their identities between home and host country, her study remains useful for demonstrating the role of the student as an agent in the self-formation of their identities. Tanu’s study of identity formation in an international

school in Indonesia demonstrated how local students “constructed themselves “ a complex identity within “a site of intense cultural mixing” (Tanu, 214, p595) like their higher education counterparts “compared with local students, most international students face wider and more varied possibilities.” (Marginson, 2014, p. 13). The concept of ‘Hybridity’ Marginson uses to describe how the student “synthesises different cultural and relations elements into a newly formed self” (Marginson, 2014, p. 15) is also applicable to the international school. Fitzsimons (2019) study on international and national identities discovered a ‘hierarchy of identities’ and competing discourses, illustrated through a documentary study of language and humanities curriculums in particular, as well as through the pedagogical practice of Enquiry Based Learning through which “young people are given space to question, construct and re-construct their sense of national and international identities.” (p.285) The research describes students as either strengthening their international or national identity, with the result that they move along a continuum ‘The Spectrum of National Identification’ (p.286-7). This provides a different sort of complexity, where the students identify may shift along the spectrum although the research found that “participants felt the greatest change to their sense of identity happened within the first three years at the school” (p.288). The result was a “complex construction of their national identity” (p. 289) a view reinforced in Wright et al.’s study of the development of a “cosmopolitan nationalism” amongst Chinese students in an international school in China (Wright et al. 2022) Although there was some recognition of other identities these studies largely presented a ‘hybrid’ identity formation within international schools as a matter of competing international and national discourses. Cruz et al. (2023) describes the international school as a ‘transnational space’ envisioning students as transnational students travelling across national, cultural and social borders and engaged in negotiating varying situations in

order to achieve 'ways of being' and 'ways of belonging' (Levitt and Schiller, 2004), with students either able to negotiate a 'way of being' within their existing identity or adapting a 'way of belonging' through identity formation. The focus of such studies is on the interplay between the international discourse of the school and the national discourse of home and host country, though these may be themselves competing national discourses where the child's home culture is different to the host country culture. In doing so are they presuming that international schools are Type A traditional or Type B ideological (Hayden and Thompson, 2013), where students are globally mobile and/or attending a school with a clear international discourse, rather than Type-C the more rapidly growing type of international schools in which students tend not to be globally mobile and where the international ideological approach may be significantly diluted? As the focus school is a Type C international school, as identified above, the study can, perhaps, be seen as more significant in exploring this area.

Sears (2011) and Fitzsimons (2019), took a somewhat different approach, seeing international schools as a setting within which existing composite identities could be sustained. The study described globally mobile students whose composite identity had been formed as a result of their globally mobile lives, stressing the student's agency in utilising a "narrative mechanism as the means whereby they maintain a unified sense of self amidst their shifting social experiences" (p. 83). The international school is relegated to the 'milieu' within which this composite identity was sustained in an artificial environment designed for such purpose. While again these studies may prove more relevant to Type A and Type B international schools with a globally mobile student population rather than Type C international schools this study is focused on.

While Type C international schools continue to be under-researched (Bunnell, 2016) or not well understood (Cruz et al., 2023), there are some studies that have emerged (Poole, 2018; Li and Hall, 2023). Poole's study was of a Type C non-traditional international school in Shanghai, specifically a CIS, that is a school aimed at Chinese students, set within a Chinese culture, providing an international curriculum and elements of an international school experiences, such as access to expatriate staff. Poole also used the concept of 'hybridity', though talked about "potential spaces for hybridity" (p.117) which is indicative of a key difference in the lived experience of teachers, his main focus of study, and by inference students, at this sort of international school. Through the expatriate teachers 'cultural script' and the international curriculum students are exposed to an international discourse, although the findings of the study, especially in relation to how Chinese and Expatriate teachers responded differently to the flag-raising ceremony, demonstrated that the dominant discourse was Chinese national identity. Interestingly, in showing how expatriate teachers retained their identity through resistance to the flag-raising ceremony it also reinforces the difference between 'ways of being' and 'ways of belonging' mentioned above. The expatriate teachers "response to the ceremony....are examples of what could be called international institutional logics....deployed as a way to reaffirm an international identity" (p. 116). Li and Hall's (2023) study of international schools in Hong Kong as "an attractive destination of choice for local middle-to-upper class Chinese as well as expatriate families" focuses on how 'local students' negotiated their identity within an international school. Such students were local in the sense that they had lived in Hong Kong for at least 5 years (p.3). The findings of the study mention the "conflicts in identity" (p.7) such students faced, such as multiple home cultures versus the sense of belonging to the local Hong Kong culture, or the conflict between identifying as a local Chinese but

attending an international school. The result was that students “conceptualise their identities beyond the parameters of geography or race-ethnicity and to that of belief and ideals.” (p. 10). This has direct relevance for the school in question, where students bring their race-ethnic identities to school and are then challenged to go beyond such parameters.

While it must, therefore, be recognised that the student is an actor in this process of identity formation and creates their own narrative choosing actions that are significant within the student’s self-identity (Giddens, 1991), nevertheless the studies above illustrate that the situation of an international school does play a significant role in the identity formation of its students. It also seems clear that such significance may vary depending on the ‘type’ of international school it is, the strength of its ideological internationalism and the degree to which its students are globally mobile (Hayden and Thompson, 2013, Cruz et al., 2023). While Bunnell (2016) may be critical of the typology he agrees that different school types affect student in different ways. Rey and Bolay’s study (2020) show that commercially driven international schools may not internalise internationalist values in the same way. It would seem that in Type A and Type B international schools there is a competitive discourse between international and national identities with students’ identities ending up along a continuum between the two. Where the ‘international identity’ of the students is stronger, perhaps as a result of global mobility then the school’s main function may be not to form identity but sustain the existing identity through providing a ‘milieu’ within which such an identity makes sense even within a local cultural context, a ‘bubble’ if you will. The situation in Type C international schools and, possibly, for local students in Type A and B international schools, seems far more complex, where students respond to multiple discourses to either find ‘ways of being’ that allow them to preserve their existing identity or where they

developing composite identities through 'ways of belonging', which, in itself, may be connected to the degree to which any one of the competing discourses can be seen as dominant. What does seem to be emerging is that the lived experience of an international school is different depending on the school and that lived experience is more complex in Type C international schools which are, after all, the most prevalent and rapidly growing type of international school, with the result that students in such schools may develop a more complex, or more confusing, 'mosaic of identities'. This has key implications for the study. Even if the institution of the school had a dominant discourse it is clear that such a discourse may not be dominant in student identity formation due to both student agency and other competing discourses.

## **2.6 Theories of Class formation.**

Having established that international schools are potentially significant actors in the process of identity formation and the culture and values that underpin such, consideration must now be given to how that process of socialisation can provide the foundation of class formation as the basis for the emergence of a TNC. Bernstein's claim that "educational transmissions embody class ideologies which are crucial to the cultural reproduction of class relations" (Bernstein, 2003, p 15), emphasises the role educational institutions play in cultural reproduction. Through the three principles of 'distribution', 'recontextualization' and 'evaluation' (Bernstein, 1990) what is knowledge is relocated and refocused from the universities to the school "defined by what those who regulate and control society believe to be the most useful and desirable to benefit society" (Clark, 2005), with the result that schools are not an agent of change but an agent of cultural reproduction. This is carried out through the rituals, both 'consensual' and 'differentiating' that "function to maintain continuity, order, boundary and the control of dual loyalties and ambivalence "(Bernstein, 1990).

This cycle of a produced or dominant culture that is internally socialised through educational transmission through rituals leading to the reproduction of that culture underpins the concept of Cultural Capital, institutionalised through the medium of educational qualifications, which forms the basis both of a shared set of values and connections made through this shared set of values which Bourdieu defines as Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and it is these coactions that could form a TNC. Young (2016) makes the connection between school as “the sensitive period for interpersonal relationships” and social capital, as it is the forming of these close relationships as an international school student that provides the “bonding social capital” (Young, 2016, p128). As the sharing of common values is the prerequisite for the formation of class, the formation of a TNC in disparate international schools is thus theoretically possible. However, such theorisation of the formation of class in schools is located in national school systems within the boundaries of a nation-state. In this study the focus is on TNC formation happening within international schools and explores whether there is a dominant culture (a neoliberal culture) in international schools into whose values students are socialised into, so that such values become a shared set of values,

This has been framed in an operational sense in terms of ‘character education’ or global citizenship education (GCE) in international schools (Goh, 2020; Bunnell et al., 2020, 2022; Hameed et al., 2023) and set in the context of cosmopolitanism as a form of cultural capital (Weenink, 2008, Vinokur, 2024), an international mindedness (Hill, 2015; Bunnell et al., 2022, Palmer, 2022), or “patterns of global consciousness” (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Educational transmissions are one of the “earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave” (Bourdieu, 1986, p 244) enable us to seek to identify this process by investigating the marks of cultural acquisition.

Brown and Lauder (2011) define these common characteristics or marks as:

1. Bi or multilingualism,
2. Cross cultural awareness,
3. Three-dimensional world view,
4. Skills and aptitudes enabling them to cooperate with others from a different culture – namely diplomacy, flexibility, patience and tolerance,
5. Self-sufficiency.

The sharing of these common characteristics provides the building blocks of a shared culture amongst such students that, through its network of connections and connected interests forms a TNC. This can perhaps be best envisaged through the concept 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1986) in that these skills and dispositions lead, through the logic of association (Bourdieu, 1986, p34) to particular behaviours or actions towards the social world and the sharing of these actions is a social bond for class formation.

Weenink sees cosmopolitanism as an example of this cultural capital acquired by international students (Weenink, 2008), which he describes as “a consciously constructed, normative, moral and political ideal of world citizenship” (Weenink, 2008 p 1091). He describes parents as actively pursuing cosmopolitanism as a form of cultural and social capital, either through holding themselves such a cosmopolitan view or, more pragmatically, though seeing the economic advantages of such, a view that fits closely with Ball’s view of parents acting as ‘choosers’ and ‘consumers’ in the education market (Ball, 2003). In his analysis the “bodily and mental predispositions and competencies” (Weenink, 2008, p1092) emerge:

1. Openness to the Other,
2. Preference for diversity,
3. International network of friends,
4. Awareness of global events through news etc.,
5. Access to a global audience,
6. Near mastery of English plus 1 other language.

We see the marks of cultural acquisition mentioned above reappear in a similar guise. In linking these acquired values to two types of parents; dedicated

cosmopolitans and pragmatic cosmopolitans (Weenink, 2008, p1093) with a shared view of cosmopolitanism as providing a means that enabled cultural and social capital to be turned into economic advantage and recognising the habitus of dedicated cosmopolitan parents as an embodied form of cosmopolitanism, we can also see the intergenerational transmission of class.

Hsieh (2018) illustrated such in his self-analysis of his class positionality in which he traces the link between his parents' economic capital, his acquisition of cultural capital through the gaining of academic qualifications to his position within a habitus where "I unconsciously chose to live the same lifestyle as my academic friends" (Hsieh, 2018, p660). Hsieh then goes on to detail how his habitus developed from an academic to an economic and political one, "It turned from a tool enabling me to know more about the world into a tool for profit-making and survival in Taiwan's academia." (Hsieh, 2018, p 667) At this point we can see the actualisation of class through the development of values and a way of being that results in behaviour that can be seen as a mark of an economic or TNC. What is of particular interest in this self- analysis though is how Hsieh goes on to reject the habitus of a TNC and instead see education as a way to "free the mind" (Hsieh 2018, p668) something he seems more able to do due to the differences that remain between himself and other members of this transnational economic class, namely his lower economic background, which reminds us that the identity formed through schooling is but one identity, part of a composite identity (Pearce, 2011) and may not become the dominant one.

Researchers (Goh (2020), Bunnell, 2020, Bunnell and Hatch (2021), Bunnell and Poole, 2024) have applied Bernstein's theory about pedagogic discourse to class formation in international schools. Goh's study of four elite schools in Singapore explored the development of an approach to character building, which

became “the initial pedagogical device for reproducing the elites” (Goh, p. 215) and when it was later copied to the compulsory secondary school system as that expanded, “a central pedagogical device of the mass making of citizen subjects.” (Ibid., p 215) The desirable character, that of leadership, that was defined as the result of the interplay between colonialism, capitalism and Christianity in post-independence Singapore was that of “humility, character and service (ibid., 214), the ideal citizen subject. Interestingly, with the opening of international schools to the rising middle class, the character building has been recontextualised to reflect a globalised 21st century Singapore “so that the new elites could reproduce themselves daily, monthly, yearly to maintain their hold on power” (ibid., p2.18), classic elite self-reproduction, continuing to distinguish the elite as a class from the rising middle classes.

Bunnell et al. (2022) explored how the IB’s promotion of “international mindedness” served as a “platform for class solidarity” within international schools, the international mindedness achieved providing a platform for a global class solidarity which he further developed through his study of Chinese branches of Dulwich College (Bunnell and Poole, 2024), schools that deliver the IB programme, though interestingly findings show how GMC parents in China are constructing “their own pathways” (ibid. p17) demonstrating the social constructionist view of stakeholder agency as part of the identity formation process.

Bunnell and Hatch (2021) linked Bernstein’s theory to Interaction Ritual Chain Theory (Collins, 2014) and the concept of ‘Collective Memory’ (Halbwachs, 2020) to illustrate how rituals within elite traditional international school transmitted the Cultural Capital of the elite, the basis of class formation and thus again elite self-reproduction. The “habitus of ‘international mindedness’ characterised by mutual respect, intercultural understanding, and global responsibility” (Bunnell and Fertig,

2016, p. 264) is much the same as the character building identified in Goh's paper above. This work illustrated how rituals within my school, annual such as International Day and Hair Raya assembly, monthly like Awards and Recognition assemblies and the weekly assembly, potentially formed a "collective memory" which could be "a strong platform for creating a long-term class cohesion and solidarity" (ibid., p264).

Sancho's study (2016) of the emergence of internationalised schools in India, their rebranding and the resulting class formation of both 'designer migrants' (Qureshi and Osella, 2013) in the elite international schools and "internationalised schooling as a middle-class aspiration and a marker of class status" (Sancho, 2016, p488), is an indication of how the reproduction of social elites discussed by Bunnell and Goh above, was different in the Type C international schools. Like Goh, Sancho's study of how one international school in India has recontextualised itself to providing an international education within the local Hindu culture as part of the "continuous renegotiation of middle-class culture" (ibid, p. 488). Bailey (2015) further illustrated the process of this negotiation through a case study on host country nationals in an international school by illustrating the difference between the international teachers and Malaysian students. International teachers transmitted a discourse which saw Western, British and international values as desirable, an approach that would seem to support Gibson and Bailey's (2022) description of international schools in Malaysia as operating as "post-colonial sites" (ibid., p.414). While Malaysian students had a more instrumental view of the school as both a route to overseas higher education and a way to gain some of the cultural capital, such as the English language, needed to both access and succeed overseas. This again hints, temptingly, at the development of a localised middle-class identity within an

international framework that also helps differentiate its participants from local middle class.

What has emerged here is a picture of international schools not only as agents of socialisation of cultural capital that is the basis of class formation, but also of elite international schools needing to recontextualise themselves due to the rapid growth of international schools for the rising middle class, in order to continue to defend and reproduce the elite social class. They have done so through shifting character education towards global identity and thus emerges the claim of a TNC formation, which I will explore further below. Meanwhile the new type of international schools are contextualising themselves within both an international and local context to defend and reproduce the upper middle class. International schools are actively maintaining class boundaries and thus social inequalities. Of course, this also raises the issue whether the school is the 'agent of socialisation' responsible for the transmission of a dominant class ideology or whether it is moulded by the class ideology of its parents to reflect its customer's class ideology, returning us to Foucault's view of schools as prisons reinforcing norms but we can see that that the above provides a theory of class formation within international school.

## **2.7 Evidence for the emergence of a TNC.**

However, there is a big step from international schools developing a 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1986) for a TNC to evidence of a TNC emerging and thus a debate as to the how far international schools play a role in developing a TNC (Brown and Lauder, 2009) but the potential for such has attracted numerous studies, (Bates 2012; Kenway and Langmead, 2017; Young, 2016; Tarc et al., 2019; Bunnell et al., 2020; Lillie, 2020). There is a significant body of research that highlights that a new international social class has emerged: the 'international business elite'; a 'World

Class' with a 'global management culture'; ' nouvelles élites de la mondialisation '; 'new global elites' or a 'TNC' (Weenink 2008, p1092) The paradigm of a Third culture referred to above can also be seen as an alternative to national identity and thus a potential transnational identity. Such a transnational identity is based on the concept of transnationalism within international education, both in terms of the global mobility of educational programmes, teachers and students across national borders (Knight, 2016; Warriner, 2017) and it has been seen both as a force for cosmopolitanism (Wu and Tao, 2022) and , paradoxically, nationalism in expat enclaves (Jiang, 2021) fostering a sense of shared belonging that facilitates students transition to international higher education (Hou et al., 2024). International schools are seen as 'transnational social spaces' (Kennedy, 2004; Cruz et al., 2023) which encourage the development of internationalism, often framed in terms of the IB 'international mindedness' (Hill, 2014) and intersects interchangeably with transcultural approaches (Wang and Zhang, 2024) with students seen as developing intercultural understanding (Cruz et al., 2023).

Tying together the rapid growth of the international school system and the consequent growth in the number of students accessing such an elite education alongside the links between such schools and elite universities, Brown and Lauder raise the potential for a TNC to emerge. While Brown and Lauder (2011) debate the role of international schools in developing a TNC, the link between international schools and universities and how far international schools provide a fast track for the local socio-economic elite to top universities and in effect help to create a transnational ruling class is an area of research they see as worth pursuing (Lauder 2015).

Young describes international schools dealing with 2 groups of students, local students and the global nomad, (Young 2016 p 25) which the author identifies as a

transnational elite and whom Bates (2012, p265) agrees with Brown and Lauder (2011) as holding “a particularly abstract notion of citizenship and imagine themselves as close to a cosmopolitan ideal.” Such identity formation amongst local students can also be seen in Kenway and Koh’s study of a school in Singapore for gifted students, Clarence, which describes how the school produces a “consecrated elite” from amongst local elite students (Kenway and Koh, 2013, p. 282) through providing many opportunities to be involved in education programs abroad. “These study trips provide extended opportunities to learn, and also to develop transnational social and cultural capital.” Although the research was of a national independent school it remains useful for demonstrating the development of cosmopolitan cultural capital through an international context. That capital is “shared solidarities and hostilities” (Kenway and Langmead, 2017, p.5) around mobility, the global economy and capitalism. Tarc et al, (2019) and Bunnell et al. (2020, 2021) also discuss how international schools are developing a ‘global middle class’ (GMC) or ‘TNC’ (TNC). Tarc et al. discuss how “tens of thousands of Anglo-Western international schoolteachers .... are part of the GMC” (Tarc et al. p667) with the obvious extrapolation being that such teachers provide a GMC discourse for students within the international school environment. While Bunnell et al. focus on the role of ‘international mindedness’ in schools offering “a class constructed platform in providing an element of global social solidarity.” (Bunnell et al., 2020, p.1). Here Bunnell et al. has drawn upon Bernstein’s work (1977) on school cultures, referring to the aim to produce a ‘global citizen’ as “expressive, open and differentiated, giving the student access and advantage to global career pathways....We might expect this educational pathway to be attractive both to the TNC and the GMC.” (Bunnell et al., 2020, p. 6) a claim Bunnell and Poole later back up with their study of GMC parents of Dulwich Colleges in China (Bunnell and Poole, 2024). Wei (2020) also describes

capital “as accelerating the formation of a TNC.” (Wei, 2020, p. 251) which Wei describes in a Marxist perspective as exacerbating the conflict between labour and capital and thus not a good thing. Interestingly though Wei sees the rise of economic globalisation as creating a competing discourse, that of anti-globalisation, “anti-globalisation is a result of the emergence of this transnational class” (Wei, 2020, p258). The view that elite international schooling is creating a ‘globally connected elite’ (Bunnell et al., 2020) with elements of class solidarity is widespread (Brown and Lauder, 2011; Bunnell et al., 2022; Howard and Maxwell, 2020; Maire and Windle, 2022; Ray and Bolay, 2020; Poole and Qin, 2024; Cheung Judge, 2024) , although the research seems mostly focused on ‘elite’ international schools (Type A) and ideologically minded international schools (Type B) rather than the Type C international schools which is the focus of this study. Resistance to such a culture referred to by Wei (2020) will be picked up and developed further later in this literature review.

Lillie’s (2020) study of a boarding school in Switzerland for the economically elite adds a nuance to the above by describing a negotiated space between the cultivation of cosmopolitanism through a shared investment in the global economy and the reinforcing of and attempts to assert dominance of national identities, “American students, for example, networked with their classmates to cultivate future material gains whilst asserting their language (native English) and culture as more globally-relevant and therefore significant than others.” (Lillie, 2020, p. 93) Lillie has, therefore, raised the issue of competing discourses again, within such international school environments and that “elite schools engage with transnational class formation processes in some ways and moments but not in others.” (Lillie, 2020, p. 94). Ray and Bolay’s study, also of an elite Swiss international school, demonstrated how the diversity and mobility of the international students was transformed into

capital, “assets” (2020) . I will return to the evidence of international schools as sites of competing discourses in the next section.

Cambridge and Thompson go further and see the children of local elites also as members of a TNC, seeing their decision to attend international schools as a move away from their own educational system and, by implication culture and towards the “values of the economically developed world” (Cambridge and Thompson 2004, p 170) a view supported by studies of international schools in China (Wu and Koh, 2021; Poole and Qin, 2024) and Nigeria (Cheung Judge, 2024) show how international schools are being used by elites to secure status and transnational mobility. Increasing commodification of international schools has enabled the economically privileged in China to access elite international education for the “positional advantage” (Wu and Koh, 2021) such schools provide, preparing students to join global social and economic elites (Poole and Qin, 2024). Beck agrees with this idea of a conscious choice being made seeing that cosmopolitanism as a conscious or voluntary or elitist choice, a “cosmopolitanization of reality” (Beck, 2004, p134), although he sees this more as a forced consequence of globalisation. Weenink agrees, seeing cosmopolitanism “as an expression of agency, which is acted out when people are forced to cope with the cosmopolitan condition when it enters their personal lives.” (Weenink, 2008, p 1103) Such cosmopolitanism is, in turn, seen as “a model for such transnationalism and trans culturalism” (Gunesch, 2004 p255). In fact, transnationalism becomes a precondition of cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2018). Cruz et al. (2023) also describes local students as moving towards international values while remaining limited in mobility as a result of the environment of an international school, “students with limited mobility experiences are also likely to demonstrate similar thought process and open-mindedness simply from engaging in their unique educational environment.” (Cruz et al., 2023, p. 115)

Underpinning this view of the development of a TNC is work showing the important role of English language in forming a transnational culture (Starkey, 2007; Brummitt and Keeling, 2013; Jospeh, 2017; Darvin and Zhang, 2025; Lie and Apple, 2023). Starkey demonstrates the tensions that exist between language learning policies that promote intercultural communication and persistent traditions of language teaching that identify languages as national cultures. (Starkey 2007). English is the “language of hegemonic globalisation” (Guilherme 2007, p74). The theory here being that through language acquisition one also acquires the culture, but rather than a post-colonial Western culture the culture being acquired is that of a TNC for whom English is a shared language. English is the key link in global networks (Darvin and Zhang, 2025), underpinning global mobility (Brummitt and Keeling, 2013) and parents consciously choose EMIS as a strategic tool to access such global elites (Liu and Apple, 2023). Jabal sees the habitus of English language as “one way of understanding the enhanced role and status of international schools in Hong Kong” (Jabal, 2011, p2)

Also underpinning this view is work on transnational mobility (Hannerz, 1996; McKillop-Ostrom, 2000; Kennedy, 2004; Castells, 2011; Bunnell et al., 2022; Brown and Lauder, 2011; Howard and Maxwell, 2020; Maire and Windle, 2022) which sets out not only the frequent mobility of international children or global nomads as they have been referred to elsewhere, but also the frequency of contact they have through international schools with other children and teachers who are also globally mobile, thus creating fertile ground for the development of transnational networks through a willingness to engage with other cultures and openness towards different cultural experiences (Hannerz, 1996), through shared experiences of mobility (Bunnell et al., 2022, Brown and Lauder, 2011; Maire and Windle, 2022). Analysis of friendship patterns also shows transnationals developing new forms of friendship

networks as a result of inhabiting transnational spaces, 'transnational social spaces may encompass and generate more social units of analysis than are presently available in the sociological repertoire' (Kennedy, 2004, p161). These networks are seen as the key to structuring of elites through the process of globalisation (Castells, 2011), providing pathways to access global elites (Howard and Maxwell, 2020).

Finally, there is research into the growth of international schools becoming themselves part of transnational companies leading to the potential spread of neoliberal ideology through international schools in which students are embedded into neoliberal and market-driven frameworks (Bates 2011; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell, 2022). International schools provide alternatives to national education systems potentially undermine national educational policy and allow the introduction of markets into such, in effect stealth marketisation (Kim and Mobernd 2019, p2) or "crypto-growth" (Bunnell, 2022). This also affects teacher education leading to ideological narrowing (Baltodana, 2012) and 'neo-performative' teacher identities (Wilkins et al., 2020; Winchip, 2022)

In summary the potential for international schools to be spaces or social fields within which a transnational culture can develop and form the basis of a TNC, is clear. A TNC is theoretically possible as networks, social spaces, social fields exist that enable a shared culture to develop. Through exploring the values held by students the study will consider the possibility of such.

## **2.8 *The notion of Discourse.***

Foucault's notion of discourse (Foucault, 1991) looks at the way knowledge, power and language interrelate to shape a "regime of truth" which becomes the social reality held by the target audience, in this case students at an international school. The statements made by the school, or more particularly its leadership, the

Vision and Mission for example, construct meaning, the social reality of the school. Furthermore, the practices implemented by the school, its policies and procedures, are the embodiment of that discourse. These policies and procedures provide the “surveillance”, “normalization” and “examination” (Foucault, 1991), the instruments of discipline, that ensure conformity to what is then regarded as the norm. In analysing the relationship between power and knowledge Foucault demonstrated how power was the producer of knowledge and hence of the social reality. “In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.” (Foucault, 1991, p.194) The institution exercises power through the discourse, which in turn, legitimates that power. In this case the international school legitimates its existence and purpose through promoting its role in developing ‘international mindedness’, ‘future proof’ skills etc. as underpinning future success in a global market. One such example would be through defining English language as critical for future success not only does the role of the English Medium International School become legitimised, but a social reality of English-speaking global elites is created.

Numerous studies have looked at how the school constructs a social reality through the exercising of its power (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1997; Pitsoe and Letseka, 2013; McDonald, 2014), emphasising the close relationship between discourse, power and knowledge production within schools. Popkewitz and Brennan (1997) discuss how the school as an institution uses disciplinary techniques, surveillance mechanisms and institutional practices to exercise its power and how the discourse around such effectively construct both student and teachers’ social reality. They show how classroom management techniques and assessment practice act as instruments of ‘discipline’ to reinforce the discourse. Although their study is more of a historical analysis of how such techniques have developed over time

rather than an analysis of contemporary educational practices. Graham (2005) applied Foucault's theoretical framework to an analysis of how the school creates a discourse around "disorderly objects" that challenge or disrupt the established norms, using the example of the discourse surrounding the referral of a primary school student for violent behaviour to the school's behaviour management program to illustrate how psychological discourse "prevail over medical conceptualisations of behaviour disorderedness." (p.12). This provides both an archaeological explanation of how such a discourse came to dominate and also the role of power dynamics in the categorisation of 'disorderly' students. Similarly, McDonald's (2014) study showed how "disciplinary powers" that exist within the school "constrain possibilities for teachers to explore alternative pedagogies." (P.96) This exclusion of alternative discourses by the bi-lingual teachers involved in the study, constrained by "disciplinary powers' such as a prescriptive curriculum, lead to a dominant discourse around the importance of English Language acquisition over other language curriculum models. It is clearly evident how the discourse has produced a social reality here as the relationship between power/knowledge embodied by the power, held by teachers, to define the curriculum. Pitsoe and Letseka's (2013) study of instructionist classroom management links Foucault's notion of discourse with Bourdieu's "habitus "and concept of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991) by discussing how the setting of the classroom enables the teacher to utilise the power of their role and discourse to perpetuate a "bureaucratic hegemony" (p. 28). The emphasis on production, productivity and outputs of Taylorism and Fordism become the socialised norms of the classroom, the "habitus", accepted by the students. Pitsoe and Letseka also makes the link between Bourdieu's argument that children of the socio-economic elite benefit from a cultural capital received at home that aligns with that of Fordham and Taylorism with the result that they are at advantage to succeed within

the habitus of the instructions classroom and as a result “their habitus becomes their cultural capital” (p.27).

In essence the institution exercises its power through its language and social practices and the students’ discursive interactions with such plays a crucial role in their identity construction (Vågan, 2011). Thus, Foucault’s notion of discourse contributes to understanding the process of social reproduction while also challenging social reproduction theory by seeing it as not purely structural but the result of the complex interplay between the institution and the students whose own voice and agency contribute to the formation of identity (Collins, 2009).

The above works demonstrate how Foucault’s work on discourses, the relationship between power and knowledge and the framing of social realities through discourses can underpin a study of relationships within schools, though such studies tend to provide an archaeological and genealogical analysis from the point of view of the institution or faculty rather than look at the lived experience of the student. While such work is clearly important in framing the focus of this study on the impact of such discourses on students identity, this study is not an attempt to understand the deeper structures of discourses that exist within international schools but it does lean heavily on Foucault’s work, particular that of the relationship between power and knowledge in the institution that is a school and how the exercise of that power to define what is knowledge creates ‘regimes of truth’ and thus shapes a social reality. The question being considered here is whether that social reality, within the historical context of international schools today, is a neoliberal one as the neoliberal discourse has become dominant and other discourses have become marginalised?

## **2.9 *Competing discourses within international schools***

As has emerged from the literature review on the school as an agent of socialisation, it seems clear that international schools are sites of competing discourses, of which the institutional discourse is but one (Hayden and Thompson, 2013; Bunnell, 2016, 2020; Lillie, 2020; Chatelier, 2022; Palmer, 2022; Wei, 2022; Cruz et al., 2023; Hameed et al., 2023; Poole and Ying, 2024) and that even the institution is the site of competing discourses between owners, leaders and teachers, leading Tamatea et al. to refer to “contradictory discourses” (2008) and Chatelier to refer to the complexities and contradictions international school leaders need to navigate (Chatelier, 2022).

There is significant research that shows that international schools are the site of competing discourse and in so doing add a complexity to the story of international schools being the site of the emergence of a transitional class. I have already referred to Lillie’s (2020), Wei’s (2020) and Poole and Ying’s (2024) research above which showed that international schools are the site of competing discourse between transnational views, whether cosmopolitanism or economic globalisation and ‘anti-globalisation’ or ‘de-globalisation’ and national views. This competition is highly significant in questioning both the formation of a single set of shared values and thus the likelihood of a TNC developing. The dominance of any one discourse has been hotly debated with some (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Apple, 2011; Ball, 2012; Winchip, 2022; Hameed et al., 2023) claiming a neoliberal discourse is dominant while others (Weenink, 2008; Sobré-Denton, 2011; Hill, 2014) draw attention to the rise of cosmopolitanism alongside globalization or even as a response to globalization (Vinokur, 2024). Other studies have continued to stress the influence of post-colonialism (Palmer and Chandir, 2023; Gibson and Bailey, 2022) while recent changes in the relationship between nation-states and international education have seen competition between national and international discourses within international

schools in China (Wright et al., 2022; Wu and Koh, 2023; Poole and Bunnell, 2023) and Malaysia (Bailey and Gibson, 2021).

Studies of international schools (Caffyn, 2011; Wright and Huang, 2024) have shown how difficult it is for any one discourse to gain dominance due to the juxtaposition between neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, localised and national cultural identities and even the continuing legacy of post-colonial discourse (Wylie, 2008; Gibson and Bailey, 2022; Wu and Koh, 2023). Then, of course, it is also important to factor in student agency into this competition and an increasing number of studies are demonstrating how students are taking an active part in their identity formation (Sears, 2011; Maxwell et al., 2020; Li and Hall, 2023; Cruz et al., 2023).

While recognising that international schools were “transnational spaces” (Cruz et al., 2023, p. 115) Cruz et al. saw local students engaging in the traditional spaces as developing a ‘hybrid identity’ (ibid., p.215), a mix of their national identity and an internationalism as a result of attending an international school, which Cruz et al. linked to Fitzsimons study (Fitzsimons, 2019) “which found that students often had what they termed an ‘(inter) national identity’” (Cruz et al., 20203, p. 112). Fitzsimons described such an identity as reflecting “national, transnational or international affiliations” (Fitzsimons, 2019, p.276) and the conclusion of Fitzsimons research was that students in an international school “displayed a complex construction of their national identity, with each taking individual paths in their development” and “it was not always an international identity these students developed” (ibid., p289). Therefore, such works do explore how specific discourses are shaping the identities of students, in effect constructing social reality.

Similarly, research has shown tension between the ideology of internationalism and the forces of neoliberalism within international schools (Bittencourt and Willetts, 2018; Tamatea et al., 2018; Hameed et al., 2023; Palmer, 2022; Hameed and

Lingard, 2025). Bittencourt and Willetts (2018) critical discourse analysis of the mission statements of American international schools found that international schools tended to see “preparing students for global citizenship” and preparing them to compete in a global market economy as “compatible”, something that the study questioned (ibid., p.524). Other studies, such as Tamatea et al. (2018) look at the tension created in international schools around the individual, the local community and the global community and found “contradictory discourses” (Ibid., p. 168) while implying the dominance of neoliberalism over the ideology of internationalism, “the celebrated notion of cosmopolitanism may often be vacuous.” (Ibid., p. 166).

Hameed et al.’s study (2023) and Hameed and Lingard’s study of an international school in Singapore (2025) and an independent school in Australia illustrate the tension between neoliberalism, demonstrated through the marketization of schools and internationalism as an educational practice, within schools, with the tension within the international schools being of particular relevance for this study. Their findings being that neoliberal market forces are changing educational programmes but not without competition creating tension with internationally minded curricula and Principals. While Palmer’s study of the implementation of the IB programme in an international school (2022) demonstrated how the international mindedness at the core of such a programme was challenged by “IB corporatism” particularly in regard the focus on the individual or learning to “sing by yourself” as one of the parents interviewed put it. In essence comparing the collaborative ideal of international mindedness with the neoliberal ideal of the “enterprising individual” (Apple, 2001).

Therefore, the study sets out to try and identify the existence of these discourses within the international school and measure the degree to which anyone could be said to be dominant. The method for doing this is explored in more detail in Chapter 3 but essentially through using students’ responses to an attitudinal questionnaire to

find evidence for competing discourses and to use statistical measurements to consider whether any one is dominant.

### **2.9.1 Neoliberal discourse**

The role of neoliberalism as a competing and possibly dominant discourse in schools has been well explored (Doherty, 2009; Resnick, 2012; Bunnell, 2016, 2022; Palmer, 2022; Wilkins et al., 2020; Bunnell et al., 2022; Hameed et al., 2023). Apple defines neoliberalism in action as “privatisation, marketisation, performativity and the ‘enterprising individual’” (Apple, 2001, p409) and makes four key claims:

- 1 That neoliberalism is a ‘global tendency’ for educational change
- 2 That neoliberals believe that “only by turning our schools, our teachers, and children over to the competitive market will we find a solution.” (Apple, 2001, p409)
- 3 That neoliberalism, neo- conservatism and the ‘new managerialism’ are in league – a “new alliance, a new power-bloc.” (Apple, 2011, p410) with the aim of achieving global economic competitiveness, profit and greater social cohesion through free market, reduction of welfare state and a social Darwinism
- 4 That it results in reinforcing the advantages of the privileged in regards class, race and gender

Ball (2012) provides evidence of a global convergence, a hegemony, a new paradigm central to which is governance through the forces of market competition, performance management and accountability resulting in a meritocracy, a key pillar of neoliberalism. Davies and Bansel see international schools as being reconfigured to produce economic entrepreneurs in order to meet economic needs of government and big business, part of the focus on the importance of social capital driven by the need to be competitive in a globalised world market (Davies and Bansel, 2007). This

hegemony can be seen in the way international schools act, we have already referred to “stealth marketization” (Kim and Mobrand, 2019) and Jabal’s study of two Hong Kong schools identified how one such school sought to position itself in what is saw as a “highly competitive market for educational services.” (Jabal, 2011, p115). Winchip’s study of teachers working in international schools (2022) also showed how such “Business Influences” affected teacher’s work and how this led to teacher’s demonstrating increased competition and performativity. That some students interviewed by Young saw their international schooling experience as a way to augment their social, academic and human capital; seeing the International Baccalaureate and being exposed to different cultures as good investments in their futures, as giving them a competitive edge (Young, 2016), provides an example of how such a discourse may manifest itself in international schools. Hameed et al. (2023) and Hameed and Lingard (2025) demonstrated how market forces impacted on the curricula of the schools studied, one of which was an international school in Singapore, seen especially in the tensions within global citizenship education (GCE) between promoting the individual and competition and promoting globalism and community with market ideology having played a “key role in influencing and shifting contemporary global educational policies and practices.” (Hameed and Lingard, 2025, p774).

However, Hameed et al.’s work demonstrated not that neo-liberalism had achieved dominance but that schools and particularly School Principals sought to ‘find a balance’ (Hameed et al., 2023) and curricula were ‘hybridized’ (Hameed and Lingard, 2025) just as DesRoches (2011) recognised that while the “current dominant Discourse” neoliberalism was at work, not just in international but post-secondary education, it was “not final or fixed.” (Ibid., p. 83).

There is also a strong correlation between the high socio-economic status of the typical parent of an international school student and neoliberalism. Bettache et al. (2020) linked subscription to neoliberalism to the presence of economic freedoms, meritocracy, marketplace success etc. All characteristics of a society in which higher socio-economic status groups flourish. Other research also suggests a strong correlation between high socio-economic status and neoliberal educational choices, particularly international schools. Liu and Apple's study (2023) demonstrates the trend for high-SES Chinese parents to choose international schooling. International education and international curricula are increasingly seen as a means for upper-middle-class families to secure social status and reproduce advantage (Waters, 2006; Doherty et al. 2012; Hagage Baikovich and Yemini, 2022, Cheung Judge, 2024). International curricula like the IB are popular with high socio-economic families as they provide "the international cultural capital of international managers." (Resnik, 2009, p. 238) and the "multiple promised capitals of international schooling" (Wright and Mulvey, 2022, p93).

The link between high socio-economic status and neoliberalism is worth exploring a bit further as this proved to be an important link in the study. Bettache et al., (2020) study demonstrated through both a societal-level analysis and an individual-level analysis the correlation between neoliberal values either held individually or as a society and an indifference to social inequality, acceptance of meritocracy as a justification for economic inequalities and a belief in competition as a means to success and progress. A similar conclusion was drawn by Azevedo et al. (2019) looking at national surveys of attitudes in the US and UK. Their study demonstrated the strong correlation between social and economic attitudes, that economic conservatism, protecting and justifying the existing social order and neoliberal policies went hand in hand. Piff et al.'s 2012 study showed that upper-class

individuals had more favourable attitudes towards greed and exhibited more unethical behaviour, thus protective of socioeconomic status (Thornton, 2018)

The link between neoliberalism and individualism is also well attested (Doherty, 2009; Palmer, 2022; Hameed et al., 2023). I have already mentioned the 'enterprising individual' seen as characteristic of neo liberalism (Apple, 2001), neoliberalism has been described as a "cluster of personal beliefs" such as a belief in meritocracy and competition (Bettache et al., 2020). Neoliberalism is seen as an environment which facilitates individualism (Doherty, 2009), promoting individualism through its focus on personal responsibility and self-advancement (Cheshire and Lawrence, 2005) or a reduced focus on social responsibility (Hameed et al., 2023) resulting in an "enterprise society" in which the individual is privileged over the community (Lazzarato, 2009) resulting in "narcissistic identities "focused on self-interest (McDonald, 2007) in which individuals prioritise their own interest (Leme, 2023).

### **2.9.2 *Cosmopolitan discourse***

The alternative view is that international schools can and do generate a "cosmopolitan sensibility", "an educational orientation" wherein the student is not merely open to other cultures but actively seeks to learn from other cultures (Hansen, 2008, p289). In some cases international schools create a 'bubble' environment within which such cosmopolitanism is developed while students are isolated from the local environment (Rey and Bolay, 2020), as "offshore-like" enclavements (Bolay and Rey, 2021) and as 'islands of educational resistance' to national influences (Leek, 2024). I have already discussed above Weenink's view that cosmopolitanism is a form of capital and thus a basis for class (2008). Sobré-Denton study of international students at Arizona State found that developing a

cosmopolitanism was a stepping stone for adaptation into the host culture. This case study demonstrated how cosmopolitanism was socially constructed through interaction both with the host culture but also through engagement with other international students who provided support. International students developed an “attitude of heightened tolerance, openness, and acceptance for other cultures.” (Sobré-Denton, 2011, p87). While the study was specifically focused on Higher Education students the finding that cosmopolitanism was an adaptation technique used as part of the acculturation to the host culture has clear applicability to international school students. Returning to Young’s study, which does consider the international schooling experience, the extensive travel and interaction with different cultures, the typical global nomad lifestyle, was shown to result in many of the students interviewed developing a cosmopolitan capital, or, as Young defined it “having extensive and extended connections and possessing mastery of at least one other language.” (Young, 2016, p 130). Although global mobility is not a necessary prerequisite of a cosmopolitan identity as demonstrated by Howard and Maxwell’s study (2021) of class-making strategies in elite international schools which actively cultivated “cosmopolitan subjects” (ibid, p165) through GCE. The international mindedness at the heart of the IBO programme can be seen as another cosmopolitan discourse within international schools. Three out of the six elite schools in which Howard and Maxwell (2021) identified cosmopolitan orientations were IB schools. Hill’s discussion of leadership of an internationally minded school, particularly an IB world school, saw the role as requiring a careful blending of the host culture, home cultures of the diverse student population and the institutional culture of the school in order to achieve the international mindedness enshrined in the IB Learner Profile (Hill 2014, p179). Leek (2024) refers to the “progressive approach” (ibid, p635) to IB as underpinning resistance to national influence and

promotion of internationalism and Palmer (2022) to the development of international mindedness within an IB school. Finally, though, researchers warn us that cosmopolitanism is neither a one-way process nor necessarily a positive one. Beck regards cosmopolitanism as a realist reaction to the forces of 'cosmopoliticalization' that accompany globalisations (Beck, 2004), Ward and Kennedy remind us that the stronger the identification with the home culture the less successful the acculturation process into a new host culture will be (Ward and Kennedy, 1994) and Caffyn warns us about the imbalance of power between teacher/educators and parents, particularly due to the market forces within international education, which makes it extremely difficult to maintain such an internationally minded culture (Caffyn, 2011). Post the Covid crisis Bailey and Gibson have argued for a de-globalisation within international education as the discourse of internationalism and thus cosmopolitanism was "fractured" (Bailey and Gibson, 2024) while Vinokur (2024) regards cosmopolitanism as a "viable educational response to the challenge of globalisation" (ibid, p1).

Wright and Huang's (2024) study of international schools in China also shows how state controls and regulations over aspects of international education creates a "juxtaposition of cosmopolitanism and nationalism" (ibid., p. 247) creating a hybrid identity, a 'cosmopolitan nationalism' (Maxwell et al., 2020). In effect the Chinese students in this study developed an understanding of the world but within the framework of Chinese national and Chinese Communist party identity, their own brand of cosmopolitanism. Such could be seen as providing students with a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Vinokur, 2024). Additionally, whether the cosmopolitan discourse that exists in international schools is just a "convenient shield" (Prosser 2020, Pearce 2021), for "stealth marketization" (Kim and Mobernd 2019) has been raised,

questioning the dominance of such a discourse in international schools, while reaffirming its existence as a competing discourse..

### **2.9.3 National/Local cultural discourse**

Such research is a timely reminder of the importance of the ‘host discourse’ especially with the changes happening within the international school market, which Bates refers to as the rise of local middle-class involvement and with this the increasing pressure from parents for “localised cultural identities” (Bates, 2011, p7). McIntosh and Hayden (2022) research into parental engagement in international schools has demonstrated how a shift in the balance of power resulting from a heavily marketized international education sector empowers parents to “shape schools’ agenda” . Researchers looking at international schools in the Asian market have also emphasised the shift from teaching expatriate to local children in the Asian market resulting tensions within international schools and a need to reframe the curriculum to reflect Asian students (McIntosh and Hayden, 2022; Probert, 2023; Bailey, 2018). But such a discourse is also coming from without, Wright and Huang refer to an era of rising nationalism leading to a “tug of war between cosmopolitan and national forces” (Wright and Huang, p88, 2025), Such a national/local discourse is seen as creating a hybrid identity of “cosmopolitan nationalism’ (Maxwell et al., 2020) which Poole and Qin also discovered in their study of Chinese teachers working in ‘internationalised’ schools in China (2024). The need for schools to both engage with the diverse cultures of their student body but also increasingly engage with the host culture to develop, rather than an international mindedness or cosmopolitanism but an interculturalism has been raised before (Heyward, 2002) to attempt to avoid or lesson the ‘cultural dissonance’ (Hayden, 2006) between the

institutional culture of the school and the host culture. While work done on the challenges facing international students' adaptation to new host cultures in Higher Education (Simonovich, 2008; Kashima and Pillai, 2011; Vasilopoulos, 2016) still has relevance for understanding the challenges facing globally mobile international school students in new host cultures the work done more recently on the tensions created by the shift to predominately serving local students, particularly in Type C schools has proved more relevant for this study (Maxwell et al., 2024; Bright and Poole, 2025). In Bright and Poole's examination of tensions within international schools in Vietnam, they found tensions exist between the perceptions that expatriate teachers, both in international and internationalised schools, had of their role to influence local students' cultural perspectives with international perspectives.

The resulting competing discourses of cosmopolitanism and local/national culture results in "sites of cosmopolitan nationalism" (Bright and Poole, p1188, 2025). It is worth noting, however, that such sites were internationalised schools, where the national/local influence would be stronger while international schools were seen as 'expatriate enclaves' in which there was a danger that international schooling would become "a homogenising induction into Western culture." (ibid, p1188.). The importance of the host culture discourse leads us to return to Pearce's mosaic of identities (Pearce, 2011) and the concept of a composite identity, something also reflected in Young's study where "students spoke of themselves on a 'supranational' level; identities which transcend boundaries on a global level, not in the homeland but also not in the host country" (Young 2016, p 123). Both Li and Hall (2023) and Fitzsimons (2019) found that the impact of international education on student's identity was, for some students, to reinforce their national identity.

#### **2.9.4 Post-colonial discourse**

It is also important to remember the continuing post-colonial discourse that exists within international schools (Wylie, 2008; Bunnell, 2016, 2020; Joseph, 2017; Chatelier, 2022; Gibson and Bailey, 2022; Wright et al., 2022; Probert, 2023; Leek, 2024). As Wylie has argued, the Western perspective curriculum using Western evaluation methods based on a hegemony of pedagogy and an English network of learning, reinforced through the mostly expat and privileged teaching body, continues to provide a post-colonial discourse (Wylie, 2008). By replicating Western models, international schools are reinforcing cultural and educational hierarchies, echoing colonial power structures (Bunnell, 2016, 2020). Probert's (2023) critique of British-style international education in Asia identified 'colonial narratives' and drew the conclusion that there was a need to decolonise the curriculum, which potentially marginalises non-Western cultures (Resnik, 2012). Studies of international school leadership (Thearle, 1999; Benson, 2011; Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart, 2024) have emphasised how such continues to echo colonial power structures through the predominance of men, particularly White (Western) men (Bunnell and Gardner-McTaggart, 2024; Gibson and Bailey, 2022). Gibson and Bailey (2022) postulated that international schools in Malaysia operate as postcolonial sites through the way they construct school identity, educational expertise, leadership and Malaysia, although it must be noted this study was based only on a small sample of parents, disproportionately Malaysian-Chinese, who the authors recognised as potentially "embracing postcolonial education as a means to resist/reject Malay-dominated government schooling" (ibid, p414). It is, however, a finding supported by the post-colonial inequalities mentioned in Joseph's study of EMIS in Malaysia (2017).

Marshall also stresses the need for "a post-colonial critique of the European ideal of cosmopolitanism" (Marshall, 2009, p257) itself part of this hegemony of

knowledge and Guilherme reminds us that English language, the dominant medium in international schools, can also be part of a postcolonial framework that frames English as “the language of Intercultural Communication, Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Citizenship” and subjugates the local speaker to an inferior role (Guilherme, 2007, p80). Probert (2023) refers to English as the ‘language of power’ (ibid, p 192).

Such research serves to remind us of Anderson’s concept of Imagined Communities whereby a “coherent universe of experience” and a ‘pilgrimage’ of graduation from local schools to secondary schools (Anderson, 2006, p121), allowed for the consequent development of nationalism from a colonial era. In a post-colonial discourse could we interject transnational cultural capital as that shared experience and see the graduation into international schools as helping to create an imagined community that is supranational, potentially undermining the national identity?

### **2.9.5 Individual/egoistic discourse**

There is also plenty of research that focuses on the role of the student as an agent in their own identity transformation developing complex, multiple, composite identities which reflect both their own experiences but also their own individual paths to a sense of belonging and identity (Sears, 2011; Pearce, 2011; Maxwell et al., 2020; Li and Hall, 2023; Cruz et al., 2023; Poole and Ying, 2024; Leek, 2024) . Sears (2011) stresses the awareness of the participants of her study in the “need to take on and to embrace new personas that enable them to ‘fit in; with the new social contexts” (ibid., p. 79) but do so while retaining their individual identity “that reflect all facets of their life inside and outside school” (p.79). Poole and Yiing (2024) and Leek (2024) demonstrate how students in two very different locations, China and Poland respectively, navigate and resist competing discourses to develop their identity.

Pearce (2011) refers to 'emotional attachments', both in and out of school, that affected children's identity formation, further indication of children taking individual pathways to form a mosaic of identities. Li and Hall's (2023) study describe how international students in Hong Kong negotiated their identity to create a sort of 'cosmopolitan nationalism' (Maxwell et al., 2020) both belonging to Hong Kong but also belonging to an international culture, though this is not clearly defined other than through students positioning themselves as different to locals whilst still being local. Similarly, Cruz et al. (2023) identifies international schools as 'transnational spaces' in which students "play a role in fuelling and sustaining the culture" (ibid, p 115.).

Such research highlights the transactional nature of social construction of identity within international schools and the need for further consideration regarding the role of student agency.

### ***2.10 Student Agency in discursive practices.***

Moving even further away from the deterministic view of international schools as institutions within which students are socialised into a dominant, neoliberal, discourse, let us consider not just the view that competing discourses are at work but also that the student is an agent in the process, and the degree to which they exercise their power to develop their own social reality, their own complex identity and thus their own 'student discourse'. Just as one could apply Foucault's concept of discourse to studying the school as an institution to identify the institutional discourse so one could study the students to identify what discourse they held and in doing so see the degree to which the discourse of the school was dominant.

To be clear, I am introducing here the concept of a 'student discourse' by which I mean the 'regimes of truth' that students hold themselves as opposed to the 'regime of truth' that is created by the institution. This assumes a different power

relationship between the school and student, that while the school, teachers and even parents exercise power over the students, the students exercise agency to create their own 'regime of truth', their own student discourse.

Previous research, admittedly into Higher Education, has challenged the deficit discourse surrounding international students and highlighted their agency in navigating academic environments. A systematic review of student agency that reviewed 51 studies carried out between 2002-2022 found that a quarter of those studies empirical findings resulted in an 'inductive realisation' of the role of student agency (Inouye et al., 2022). Tran and Vu's (2018) research into international student mobility demonstrated how international students were "envisaging and proactively cultivating both their personal development and transformation of the context in which they engage" (ibid., p. 175) a process they termed as 'agency for becoming'. Such work draws upon both Agency theory and Positioning Theory. Tran and Vu (2018) define agency as "an individual or collective capacity to act with "intentionality" in line with "rational" choices and in response to a given circumstance" (p.170). Van Langenhoven and Harré (1999), refer to positioning as "the discursive construction of personal stories." (p.17). Both Poole and Ying (2024) and Leek (2024) demonstrated that students had been successful in constructing their own identity, although interestingly in the first case by adapting the cosmopolitan discourse to their local/national discourse to develop a "cosmopolitan nationalism" (Poole and Ying, 2024) while in the second case resisting and pushing back against local/national discourses to retain a cosmopolitan identity (Leek, 2024). Thus, students can be seen as interacting with the competing discourses mentioned above and exercising student agency to construct their own personal story or student discourse.

Some recent research into international schools has further highlighted such student agency. Ferguson and Brett's study of three international schools in Netherlands, Finland and Australia (2025) highlighted tensions between 'student activism' and institutional 'mechanisms of normalization' such as the school director's view that student activism over the environment needed to be redirected to a 'sustainability committee'. Wright et al. (2021) highlighted the students' ability to project national identity into global contexts as part of developing a "cosmopolitan nationalism" identity. For the most part, however, this continues to be an under researched field of enquiry in regards examples of student agency at work in international schools.

Student perceptions, how the student interprets the discourses and view themselves in relationship to such, plays a critical role in shaping their identity and, thus, another way in which student agency is a key part of the process. There are several theoretical frameworks that help contextualise the way in which perceptions can shape identity formation. Students possess a self-concept or self-perception (Rosenberg, 1979; Urrietta and Noblit, 2018)) and their schooling experience, particularly during adolescence, significantly influences their sense of self and thereby their future adult identity (Erikson, 1968, 1994). Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes how self-concept and thereby identity is formed through social interaction with peers and teachers (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986) and Social Identity Theory posits that students develop a sense of identity through the groups they perceive themselves to belong to (Tajfel et al., 1979). This has been reinforced by more recent empirical research, such as Eccles (2009) who showed, through a study of gender identity, how identity developed over time through student's perceptions of themselves, their competencies and skills, alongside personally held values and goals. Marginson's (2014) work demonstrates how higher education students fashion

their changing identities through a process of 'cultural negotiation', again highlighting student agency, as part of self-formation and Kudaibergenov's (2023) narrative inquiry of a single international student illustrated identity negotiation in action through a conscious process of self-formation. Again the evidence specific to international schools remains limited and in need of further research.

In conclusion both students' perceptions, their self, as the basis for identity formation and student agency have been well documented outside of international schooling and is being increasingly evidenced within international schools. The 'student discourse' is, therefore, that held by the student, their self-perception and the influence this has upon their actions and their future identity formation as a possible other dominant discourse.

## **2.11 Concluding statements**

In short, the reading suggests at least five competing discourses:

1. Neoliberal
2. Cosmopolitan
3. National/Local cultural
4. Post-colonial
5. Individual/egoistic

The paradigm that identities are fixed has clearly been challenged by the research that describes how international students' identities are shaped, reshaped and modified in international schools. The research also challenges the view that a new, alternative identity, a third culture, is constructed and instead again raises the possibility that multiple identities, a mosaic of identities or a composite identity is constructed. This in turn challenges the view of a dominant neoliberal discourse. All the above discourses could exist without any being necessarily dominant, all contributing to a mosaic of identities.

Globalisation has, without doubt, created change which has impacted both upon the nature of international schools as well as the values contained therein. Traditional international schools are reconceptualising themselves within a transactional framework to retain an elite identity, while the new type of international schools, of which there are numerous types, are conceptualising themselves within a local, national, market-orientated context. The ideology of internationalism remains relevant as a thread throughout, though whether it is used for its ideological roots of cosmopolitanism, as a driver for a national agenda, or as part of a marketing plan, or as a “convenient shield” (Pearce, 2021) varies in degrees from school to school.

In summary, international schools, or at least English-medium international schools, can be seen to be an environment of competing discourses rather than a dominant discourse, where student engagement with the competing discourses cannot be guaranteed due to school burnout and because of student agency, though the degree to which students in an international school exercise such agency in creating their own discourse is largely unexplored. This is a competition which has increasing significance due to the rise in the international school sector with the resulting potential this has for the development of a TNC as well as the impact it may have on national identity. However, whether such a TNC is being created and whether it is driven by neoliberalism remains open to debate. Hopefully, this research will add a little more light on the question of identity formation in international schools. It will probably add additional complexity to the mosaic of identities being formed.

## ***Methodology***

### **3.1 Introduction**

In attempting to address the three research questions:

1. Is there evidence of a neoliberal discourse in a Type-C international school and, if so, is it dominant?
2. Is there evidence of the formation of a TNC in a Type-C international school?
3. If there is evidence of a neoliberal discourse, its relative dominance to other discourses or evidence of TNC formation, is it particular to the international school in comparison to a national school?

This study set out to explore the values held by students in an international school. In doing so it attempts to explore:

1. What students' values are in regards their international school.
2. What their future aspirations are.
3. Whether there is a link between the amount of time/exposure to international schooling and values/aspirations held.
4. Whether there is a dominant set of values in any one school
5. Whether there is any evidence of a form of cultural capital being accumulated
6. Whether there is a link between students' aspirations and their values.
7. Whether there is a link between students' cultural background and their values.
8. Whether there is a link between the values held by educators and the values held by students.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of the research process. I will first discuss the ontology of the study in order to outline the philosophical stance underpinning the study, including explaining the shift in methodology from a purely interpretivist approach of asynchronous (email) semi-structured interviews of graduates of international schools to a critical realist and pragmatic approach, using online anonymous questionnaires of current students.

I will then outline the research design. In order to explain the overall research design, I will rationalise the accompanying shift from a qualitative to a quantitative Survey Research Design by exploring the research design journey, through which online questionnaires as a methodology emerged in order to fully justify the research design chosen.

While the rationale behind the choice of studying senior students from international and national schools has already been explained in Chapter 1, the impact of that choice on the research will be considered here through considering key characteristics of the respective populations of the study in each school and the potential impact such had on the study.

I will then both justify the use of and describe how the online questionnaire was constructed and conducted, including the use of documentary analysis of key school documents and how the Pilot study and the lessons learnt from the pilot study were applied to the main study.

I will also consider ethical considerations of the research method and how these were addressed, including considerations arising from working with students and parents for whom English was an additional language, the cross-cultural context, ethical considerations that arose as a result of Covid-19, lockdown and distance learning and my own positionality from my role as an educator and school leader within the study.

I finish this chapter by evaluating the reliability and validity of the research data and reflecting on the limitations of the results, especially in regards transferability and representativeness, before reflecting on the value of the research data both in terms of addressing the research questions and in informing further research into the social construction of student identity in international schools.

### **3.2 *The shift in ontological perspective.***

The need for researchers of education to adopt a clear ontological perspective, and thereby epistemological approach, is clearly set out in the literature claiming that such deeply influences the nature of the research, even what you choose to research. The view is that through aligning the ontological and epistemological positions research design becomes more credible (Morrison, 2002; Mack, 2010; Keser and Köksal, 2017; Grix, 2018; Chowdhury, 2019). This is reflected in the historical dominance of positivist research and the emergence of the social constructionist approach as a criticism of positivism (Creswell and Creswell, 2017), However, the dominance of either a constructionist or positivist approach to understanding education has been questioned, for example Brown (2015) in his study of the learning environment concluded that the reality was more complex and “a critically realist alternative to dominant concepts of education” (ibid p31) was needed. Similarly other education researchers have called for a more critical realist approach (Clegg, 2005; Mack 2010), as the purpose of education research is “in order to improve educational action” (Bassegy, 1999, p.39). The idea that educational research, in order to be relevant, must develop “ontological synchronization” (Akkerman et al., 2021), in other words a continuous adjustment to “what matters” (ibid, p. 421) before and during research, also reflects a critical realist approach.

For the purpose of this study ontology will be defined as the “nature of reality” and epistemology as “nature of knowledge” (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000). Initially the research set out to take an interpretivist ontological approach that a study of attitudes/mindsets that seeks to understand the lived experiences of students attending an international school in order to draw conclusions about the relative influence of competing discourses requires a subjective approach but for both pragmatic reasons and through an “ontological synchronization” (Akkerman et al., 2021) shifts to a view point that there is an objective reality that can be empirically measured, that student mindsets are observable through their responses towards questions which reveal attitudes whose patterns can be analysed to measure the relative dominance of one discourse over another. In doing so the approach taken in the research is more in line with that of Slade-Caffarel (2024) and Hall (2003) who describe ontology as a means to uncover social phenomena, in this case the relative dominance of competing discourses, that exist independently of human construction while recognising that the student self-reported attitudes are themselves a social construction as a result of human interaction (Vygotsky, 1987; Mack, 2010; Al-Ababneh, 2020.)

Therefore, epistemologically, the initial research design set out to use interviews as a method to gain qualitative data in order to understand both what identity and how international students had constructed such as a result of their experience of international schooling but shifted to a more pragmatic and realist methodology designed to gather data in a cost-effective and accessible way that could be analysed, the online questionnaire. The advantages of such a method are further discussed below.

### ***3.2.1 The original study and its limitations/reasons for change.***

The original method involved attempting asynchronous (email) interviews of graduates of international schools, gained through snowball sampling with the possibility of face-to-face interviews and textual/visual analysis of school documentation and websites at a later stage, to cross validate findings. A pilot study was carried out with two participants which was reasonably successful, demonstrating the capacity for the asynchronous email interview technique to produce qualitative responses that become more detailed as the process continued, and the participant warmed up to the subject matter. There was a 'democratization of exchange' (Boshier, 1990), and it did seem that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) was encouraging "hyper personal communication" (Walther, 1996).

It was also clear that as the researcher I was able to move quite quickly away from the pre-set questions to explore issues raised by the participant and thus for the dialogue to become hermetic (Moustakas, 1990). for both participants who were able to explore their feelings about international schooling. The narrative being produced were able to be subjected to a discourse analysis to see what evidence there was for the emergence of a shared (at least amongst the participants) culture of neoliberalist values or a habitus.

As an interpretive approach it provided the necessary insights in the nature of a social phenomenon, in this case international schooling, enabling it to be understood through understanding individuals shared experience of that phenomena which, in turn, would, in a more complete study, enable a deeper understanding of other social phenomena, in this case the emergence of a TNC. For example, through interviewing one of the initial participants regarding their experiences at university post international schooling they revealed how they had struggled to make friends with other university students without an international background and ultimately gravitated to make friends from similar international school backgrounds.

The pilot study showed the asynchronous email interviews met the need for a qualitative methodology that could access the language of international education, and the self-identity of the students involved, creating a narrative for discourse analysis enabling the students' self-identity to be investigated.

The problems began when trying to expand from the initial pilot study to a wider group of international students. While it had been initially reasoned that the population to be studied were, by default, globally dispersed and thus email to be a pragmatic way to access this population it proved not to be the case. Social media was used to invite participation, with a reasonable response rate but this declined sharply in regards those who responded to the initial email. In some cases, reminders on social media worked but then once email conversation began responses quickly declined. Despite the belief that CMC was a particularly relevant means of communication as a possible defining characteristic of this group it proved not to be the case, with very few of the initial participants responding to the email communication.

A second issue was the intent to use emails as a way to interview based on the view that interviewing was an institutionalized behaviour, "part of the mass culture, so that it has actually become the most feasible mechanism for obtaining information about individuals..." (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p695). Attempts to get an exchange of emails and thus an interview going faced significant challenge as a result of which the CMC approach had very limited success. The initial email, when picked up, would be responded to, often with some additional details about schooling background but response to follow up emails, which began to ask more pointed questions, fell away dramatically. It proved, in other words, very difficult to warm the subjects up into the interview and very easy for the subjects not to respond. I had discovered the limitations of using email interviews (Hunt and McHale, 2007) and

that email was a much inferior form of communication for interviewing (Hershkowitz-Coore, 2005). My experience adds to the research that shows that nonresponse to emails is becoming institutionalised behaviour, partly due to 'email overload' (Sapleton and Lourenço, 2016) but also as a trend in both academic and work settings (Rust and Schwitzgebel, 2013; Skovholt and Svennevig, 2006).

The snowball sampling also did not work, despite studies like that of Hodkinson's study of the transnational subculture of goths (2000 referenced in Mann and Stewart 2000) which do show the value of CMC as a framework for snowball sampling. The problem was twofold, on the one hand invites to interview via email as a result of connections made via the pilot participants met with a very limited response and secondly, attempts to use Social Media, such as Facebook, while initially more effective in gaining participants, presumably as the Facebook notification was much more likely to be seen and much easier to respond to interest through a click, but had the issue of attracting participants who, perhaps due to the ease of 'signing up' for further details were also not attracted to the intended length of the study.

The other problem that emerged was one of timing of the research. The initial aim was to build upon the rapport gained with my past students. Such students had recently graduated or were graduating and thus had recent experience of international schooling. However, there was a need to explore the relevant literature in order to properly formulate questions, which delayed the start of research by which time the distance between participants experiences of schooling had grown and I began to doubt the validity of responses that were increasingly reliant on memories of schooling rather than lived experiences. In fact, the participants current lived experiences became a more powerful effect of self-identity, and the danger arose that the study would become self-fulfilling as the majority of those responding had gone on to be successful and there was the clear danger that the capitalist

values that they were portraying reflected their success in the capitalist world of work rather than values derived from their international schooling.

The decision was made, therefore, to abandon this approach as though it was capable of producing qualitative data both the sample size and the validity of such data had become seriously in doubt.

### **3.2.2 *Taking a Pragmatic Approach***

The move away from the original epistemological stance that in seeking to research what was envisioned as a social phenomenon, that of the social construction of identity in international schools, required an interpretive approach and thus the use of qualitative methods to a view that a social phenomenon could be explored through quantitative data, to a more positivist approach (Bryman, 2016) was a significant change of direction for the study. As the focus of the study was on the practical outcomes and real-world applications of the findings rather than the scientific testing of a hypothesis the study became more pragmatic in its approach (Morgan, 2007). It was decided that the empirical method of an online questionnaire would be used to provide quantitative data that would provide an insight into the reality of the interplay between discourses and identity formation in international schools while also recognising that such a reality was socially constructed, not least by the students as social actors and whose perceptions were to be self-reported through the questionnaire. Such an approach aligns with Bryman's description of critical realism as an approach that combines a belief in an objective reality with a recognition that such a reality is socially constructed (Bryman, 2016). In essence the perceptions self-reported by the students would simply become my way of knowing about the social reality of identity formation in international schools. The unobservable "generative mechanisms" (Bryman, 2016, p29) of discourses at work

cause observable phenomena, in this case students' perceptions, and the critical realist position is taken that through measuring such an understanding of the discourses at work would be generated. The student perceptions are themselves self-reported, in other words, how the students have chosen to interpret the question in relation to themselves, the 'empirical' findings of the study. Such provide a way to measure the 'actual', the unobservable, students' attitudes or mindsets which in turn allows for the consideration of root causes of such mindsets, the impact of the 'real', discourses at work (Bhaskar, 2013).

Note therefore, that the study does not attempt to take either a purely inductive or deductive approach, instead it takes an abductive approach that through evaluating results, or lack of, identifies what is workable and thus creates new "lines of action" (Morgan, 2007). Morgan introduced three key concepts of the pragmatic approach; "lines of action", "warranted assertions" and "workability". What follows is an attempt to define the methodology of this study in relation to this epistemology and in light of the practical choices I made, "a pragmatic approach reminds us that our values and our politics are always a part of who we are and how we act." (Morgan, 2007, p70).

Through the challenges faced with the asynchronous email interviews the use of relatively straightforward questionnaires with second language learners proved far more workable and thus the chosen research method arose out of the 'practical considerations' (Morgan, 2007). This was the first 'line of action' taken. Through witnessing at first hand as a participant the interplay between the school's mission and vision statements and its dominant discourse and the values of the parent, student and staff body the contradictions at play became clear and thus informed new lines of action to investigate the values held by the students. Finally, due to the constraints of time, while critical realism advocates for the use of mixed methods

(quantitative and qualitative) for a deeper understanding (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Bryman, 2017), this study only employed a quantitative method.

Secondly the study can neither be completely objective or subjective, partly as neither is possible (Morgan, 2007, p71) and partly as the study required the research to work both objectively as a researcher and subjectively as a School Principal while trying to understand the interaction between the different subjective positions of the school and stakeholders in order to comprehend the social phenomena, thus requiring intersubjectivity. Finally, the study also rejected the dichotomy between those results specific to a context and those that could be generalized as it sought to use specific data in particular contexts to develop an understanding of a universal social phenomena, that of international schooling and to generalize in order to answer the research questions set. Therefore, as Morgan (2007), I advocate for the “transferability” of the research because, as a School Principal, what is important to me is what can I do with this knowledge, or more particularly, due to my own values and political stance, how can such knowledge help me and my colleagues better achieve the mission and vision of the international school, that is, achieve its discourse as dominant. While I will continually remind the reader that the findings apply to this specific case study of an international school I will, nevertheless, seek to raise broader questions that other School Principals may find relevant in the context of their school. Having positioned myself as a researcher undertaking the pragmatic approach of “abductive-intersubjective-transferable” (Morgan, 2007, p73) following “lines of action” along areas of “workability” the question becomes how to carry out such research, how to develop a properly integrated methodology.

As the purpose of the research had now become linked to the transformative agenda in the schools I worked, in other words “social betterment” (Henry et al., 1998), there was a need to address the criticism of Biddle and Schafft that this

transformative pragmatism was merely a convenient fix for sidestepping philosophical issues in the research design (Biddle and Schafft, 2015). In settling for the pragmatic approach of questionnaires was I sacrificing a method more likely to provide a more valid understanding of reality, i.e., the true values underpinning international education for a method that was more likely to work and provide results? After all, one of the questionnaire respondents on the initial questionnaire had said

*“I find guided “pattern seekers” like these radio button questionnaires misleading. One can create similar questionnaire which will yield to diametrically opposite conclusions. I think open-ended approaches would be more beneficial and closer to reality.”*

Certainly, the limitations of the initial methodological approach meant that the change of method had been driven by pragmatism or “methodological eclecticism” as Yanchar and Williams (2006) described it. The preference for seeking correlations and making comparative analysis can certainly be seen as “positivism in drag” (Giddings, 2006). In the end the justification for the approach is in the idiom that the end justifies the means, in this case the end being to contribute to the ongoing discussions about the true moral purpose of international education and the high moral goal of a more cosmopolitan future. Quite simply put if such research as this made any contribution towards the high moral goal of international education providing a ‘glue’ for a more communal global society through developing internationally mindedness amongst its students, perhaps even if by only highlighting the danger of international education serving solely to perpetuate existing elites through ensuring the dominance of neoliberalist discourses and through creating a transnational capitalist elite based on competition rather than collaboration, a dog eat dog society, then it had justified itself. Through repositioning the transformative paradigm in this way, as an operationalisation of the “social good” (Biddle and Schafft, 2015, p 330) the axiology of the research can be located. However, in trying

to do some social good through informing educational practice my own positionality and the biases that come from such needs to be considered (see below).

### **3.3 Research Design**

Ultimately, as a result of the ontological and thus epistemological shift, this study followed a Survey Research Design approach in order to achieve the three key research questions by:

1. Identifying the values held by all key stakeholders in international schooling.
2. Understanding the dominant discourse of the schools involved in the study.
3. Being able to draw comparisons and see patterns between target groups across the schools studied.

The rationale behind identifying a Survey Research Design approach as the correct approach for this study emerged out of the limitation of the initial study. The need to try and understand the values at play within the real-life context of international schooling and to employ both a pragmatic approach to data collection, while utilising more statistical methods to see trends and patterns and yet frame the study within the interpretivist perspective of social constructivism led to a realisation that a Survey Research Design approach would work best. While there was a realisation that the micro picture of the participants values needs to be set within the macro context of the school's values as an institution and a discourse analysis of the school documents was considered, ultimately this was set aside for future research due to time constraints. Key to this decision was the research that online surveys have been shown to be an effective method for data collection in education that

would enable me to “gain insight into the thoughts, ideas, opinions, and attitudes of a population” (Brewer, 2009, p.520). The use of surveys to gain data about student attitudes is also prevalent in schools (Stapleton et al., 2010) further facilitating the use of such for this study.

Online surveys offer several advantages and disadvantages, the key to which, for this study, was that it facilitates the collection of quantitative data that can be statistically analysed to identify patterns (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2017), in this case the mindset of senior school students. Such data would in turn enable inductive and abductive reasoning to identify possible relationships between students’ mindsets and competing discourses. The data is stored in an Excel format which made cleaning of the data and analysis of trends simpler. Missing data could be filtered easily and also the use of an online survey with questions that required responses would significantly reduce the frequency of missing data and allow for easier data management (Carbonaro et al., 2002; Bryman, 2016)

Online surveys are also time-efficient, a key consideration as this allowed for the collection of data while I worked on my other job, running schools, meaning that data could be gathered efficiently (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Web based survey tools, like Microsoft Forms, have made survey research even more efficient, less time-consuming and less costly (Bakla et al., 2012; Wright, 2006). They also allow for standardization of questions which increases the reliability of the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2017), particularly when comparing across the different schools. This reliability is built into the repeatability of the questionnaire across different contexts (Bryman, 2016). Following the pilot study, it also proved useful that the online survey platform used, Microsoft Forms, was easily customisable with questions being adjusted to fit the context of the school and even providing translated questions where needed.

Participants were also afforded anonymity which is essential considering the power relationships at work between myself as the Executive Principal and students. Such anonymity helps reduce Social Desirability Bias (SDB) (Miller 2011, Fowler 2013). As Miller's study demonstrates there is contrasting research about the significance of SDB in student self-report studies. While some studies showed that there was a significant relationship between social desirability and institutional values, for example, others did not. It is also interesting to note that Miller's research identified a pattern of stronger SDB amongst senior students who may feel more of a "social obligation" towards that institution or more "cognizant" of the institution's values (Miller, 2011, p. 12)

There are of course, also disadvantages to using online questionnaires. Numerous authors have reported sampling problems, lack of knowledge about the demographics of participants other than that which is self-reported (Wright, 2006), self-selection bias (Wilson and Dewaele, 2010; Wright, 2006), different attitudes towards using technology (Bryman, 2016) and poor response rates (Bryman, 2016; Wright, 2006). Although, in this case, that latter two problems could be mostly avoided through the design of the research and the context in which it took place.

Potential problems regarding hardware platforms and web browsers and their compatibility with the survey software being used that may create a sample bias through different levels of access (Carbonaro et al., 2002; Bryman 2016) again are largely avoided by using the online questionnaire within the school network and during the school day, when all participants have access to the required technology. Another potential technological problem, that of multiple responses from one individual (Carbonaro et al., 2002) is largely resolved through using the school-issued student email as the necessary log-in to complete a questionnaire.

Probably the biggest challenge is that of ensuring validity. In trying to study the concept of students' mindsets and then infer from such the relationship with competing discourses there will be a need to construct questions which accurately measure such (Bryman, 2016). The design of the questionnaire will be critical if valid and generalizable data is to be produced (McColl et al., 2001). A key challenge in doing so is that of the cross-cultural context of the research, as a Western white middle-aged male, designing a questionnaire to be answered by predominantly Asian, upper/middle class, male and female students from a variety of ethnic/cultural and religious backgrounds with the resulting danger of ethnocentrism affecting the construction of the research (Thomas, 2007). One such area is the equivalency of the ordinal/Likert scales used in the study and the relative meaning of a scaled response in different cultures that results in cultural response bias (Thomas, 2007). The concern is that participants from different cultural backgrounds or subcultural backgrounds may respond differently to the use of Likert scales (Lee et al., 2002; Research shows that there are significant cultural differences in how people from different cultures respond to ordinal scales. Research suggests that while Americans may view the mid-point of the ordinal scale as neutral or no-opinion and they are more likely to use the extremes of scale, Asians tend to prefer mid-point responses (Chen et al., 1995; Lee et al., 2002), a response bias that is associated with the collectivist mentality of Asian culture and also uncertainty avoidance resulting in acquiescent response bias (House et al., 2004; Smith, 2004). Fortunately, while this would probably invalidate cross-cultural comparisons between schools from different contexts the core study compares two schools located in the same cultural context. Awareness of acquiescent response bias amongst the predominately Asian respondents remains important however when analysing the results and Lee et al.'s

point about the possibility of different response patterns amongst subcultural groups may prove relevant.

Several theoretical positions provide a basis for the use of surveys as a form of research.

Positivism asserts that social phenomena can be studied through the collection of quantifiable data that can be analysed statistically to identify correlations and, therefore, the use of questionnaires “aimed at measuring and analysing relationships between identified variables supposedly existing in social reality” (Romm, 2013, p.653) is underpinned by positivist and post-positivist theory. Findings from such an analysis could be generalized from a sample to a larger population (Bryman, 2016). This aligns with the pragmatic approach described above. Realism accepts that there is an objective reality that can be studied and measured (Bhaskar, 2013; Bryman, 2016) although, due to the limitations of the methodological tools the understanding of such a reality will always be fallible and partial (Sayer, 1999).

The biggest theoretical challenge to using surveys/online questionnaires is that posed by constructivism, which would argue that the framing of the questionnaire itself is a social interaction, in which meaning is being created within the cultural context of the school and the researcher (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2022). Such an approach would question the value of the quantitative data gained, “raw data, especially social science data, cannot be interpreted in the absence of values. Human beings cannot fully reason on or about ‘facts’ without concurrently reasoning and relying on values” (Johnson, 2009, p. 452). Additionally, the questions themselves must be interpreted by the participant and “this interaction between the participant and the questionnaire is seen as the key to the results that become generated “(Galasiński and Kozłowska, 2010, pp. 271–272 quoted from Romm, 2013). As Romm goes on to suggest though, through accepting that the

questionnaire is not a neutral instrument of data collection, recognising that the data is socially constructed and engaging in a reflexive approach in how the researcher's positionality matters, the researcher can position the use of the questionnaire in a way that address the constructivist position. In this case, as with Taylor and Hoehsmann's national survey on multicultural education in Canada (2011) the questionnaire would be designed to enable students to explore and reflect on their own identity, goals and values. In essence it would become both an exercise in data gathering and an educational purpose, which aligns somewhat with Romm's idea of designing questionnaires "with the intention that they initiate learning opportunities for participants" (Romm, 2013, p. 659) although the balance would remain firmly with the collection and analysing of quantifiable data.

In addition, collecting the quantitative data would be relatively quick and its analysis relatively less time consuming which was an important consideration considering the demands of my full-time job. The use of surveys and questionnaires within schools is also an institutionalized behaviour and allowed the evidence to be collected in a way that did not disrupt the natural day to day rhythm of participants. The decision to use quantitative data also fitted with the possibility of extending the study over two schools for comparison as the quantitative method could be far more easily repeated and used with different populations.

In summary, the shift to a survey research design and the use of an online questionnaire can be seen not only as a pragmatic one, a time-efficient method to collect quantitative data in a reliable way that could be analysed to address the research questions, but also based on a theoretical foundation that the social phenomena in question, that of students mindsets and its relationship to discourses, could be observed and measured, while recognising that the data gained would be a social construction as a result of the interaction between my design of the

questionnaire and the interpretations of the participants. The questionnaire would serve both a practical purpose, the 'workability' of enabling me to better understand identity formation within the schools while providing a reflective learning opportunity for students.

### **3.4 Participants**

The two schools from which the student sample was taken both belong to the same family of schools and share the same campus facilities, though they have different teaching bodies and curriculum. They also share the same policies, which are then adapted to the context of the individual schools and the same Mission and Vision statements, including the same promises to focus on safety, health, happiness, academic outcomes, character development, developing growth mindset and preparing students for the future. While not part of its core Mission and Vision statements the oft quoted catchphrase "Malaysian hearts, Global minds" indicates that both schools also seek to ground their students in the local context while also developing an outward looking, international mindset.

This chapter presents the findings from 2 groups who were surveyed through the use of questionnaires. The 2 groups are:

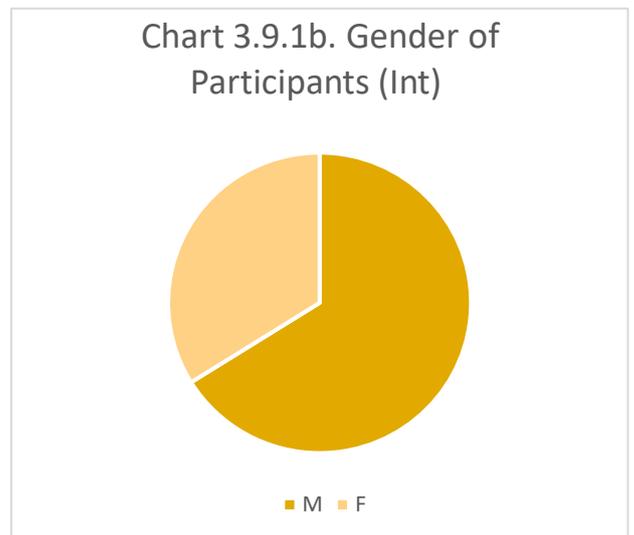
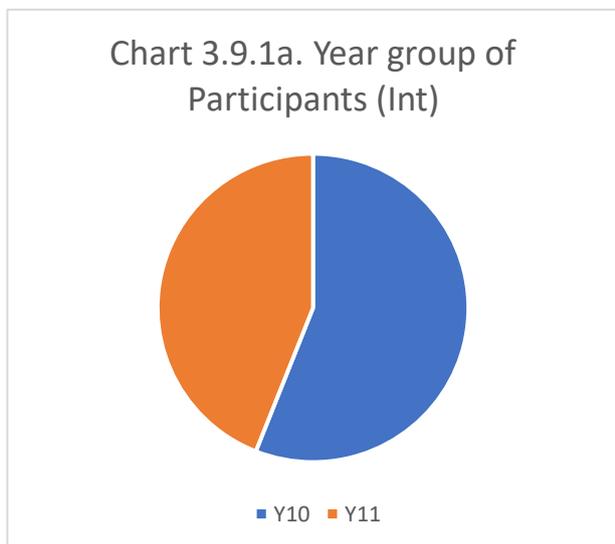
#### **3.4.1. International School Students.**

These were students attending an international school in Malaysia. These were the main focus of the study. Senior students were defined as those in Year 10 through to Year 11 (14-16 years old). Y12 to Y13 were not sampled as the nature and the context of the school meant that only a handful (8) students graduated from Y11 into Y12 and no Y13 existed. International school students followed an international curriculum (Cambridge IGCSE and A levels) in an English medium delivered by a mix of expat and local teachers. The ratio of expat to local teachers at

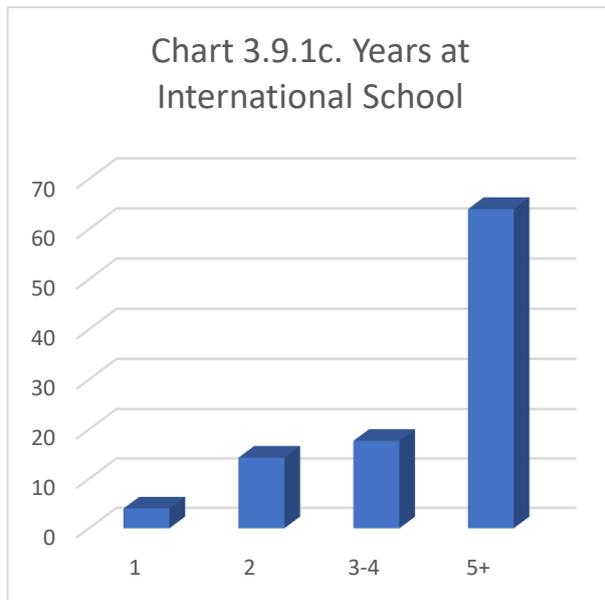
the time of the study was 49% expat to 41% local. Expat teachers were defined as non-Malaysian teachers with experience and training in a British-style curriculum and predominately, but not exclusively, came from the UK.

### 3.4.1.1 *Population of International School sample*

The population of international students was 282 students. A cleaned sample of 219 students was collected, providing a Confidence level of 99% with a 5% margin of error. 56% of the students surveyed were in Year 10 and the remaining 44% in Year 11 with 98 female (44.7%) and 121 male participants (55.3%).

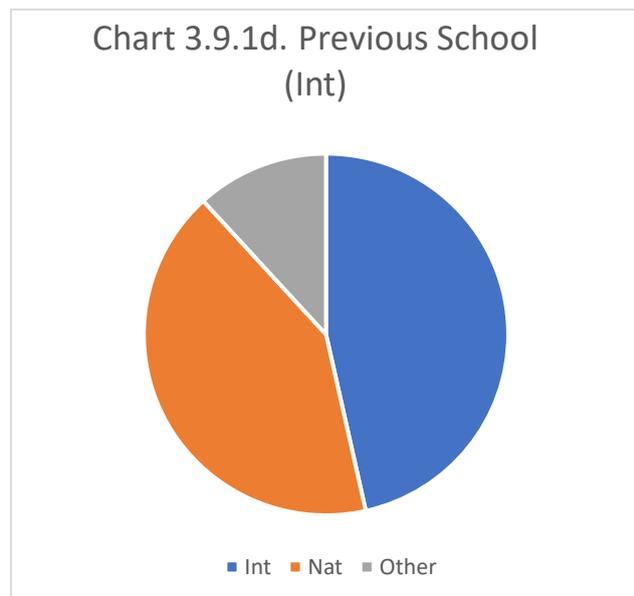


### 3.4.1.2 Length of time within the international school



79% of students reported that they had spent 3 or more years in the school, reflecting those who had joined the secondary section. Close to half the students (46.5%) reported having been at the school 5 years or more, reflecting those students who had come through from the primary section in a 3-18 school. While only a small minority (6%)

said they had joined the school within the last year, effectively to undertake the IGCSE. Therefore, the sample was predominately students whose discourse could be said to have been impacted over a significant period of time as students at the school for 3+ years. While it is important to note that, according to the student reported data, just over half (53.5%) had spent the previous years of their school life in another school, with most (78% based on the school enrolment figures) having transferred from the national school, the decision was made that this prior experience could be set to one side as the focus was on student's lived experiences as part of

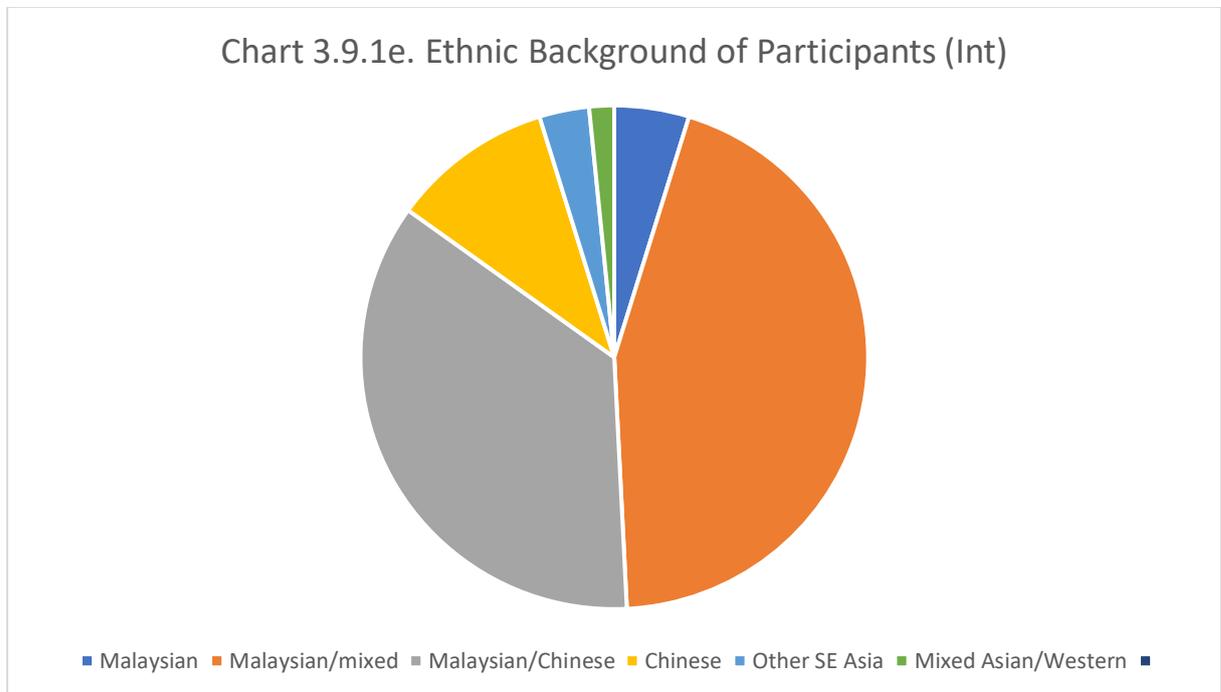


their formative adolescent years while in the international school. Both Erikson (1994) and Marcia (1966) identified the importance of identity formation during

adolescence. Therefore, the assumption was made that the findings would reflect the impact of spending these formative adolescent years in the international school in question, whatever the prior experiences.

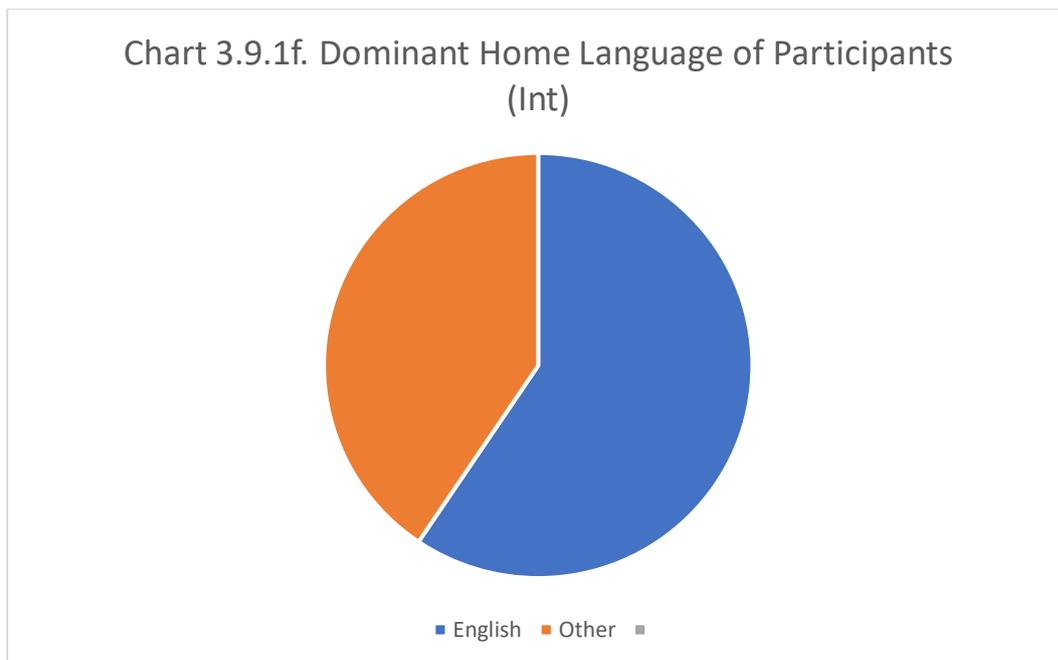
**3.4.1.3 Ethnic/cultural/linguistic background of International School sample**

158 (72%) of the students sampled identified as Malaysian with 85 (53.8%) of these identifying as Malaysian plus one other cultural background. 17 students (7.7%) identified as Malaysian/Chinese, 29 (13.2%) identified as Other Asian (Korea/Japan) and 12 (5.4%%) identified as Chinese with 6 (2.7%) from other Southeast Asian countries and 9 students (4%) identified as mixed Asian/European/Western or Western background. The remaining 5 students indicated “none of the above.” These figures are indicative of the multicultural community that is served by the school.



138 students (63%) of those sampled stated English as a mother tongue/home language, 37 (16.8%) stated Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), only 32 (14.6%) had

Bahasa Malaysia as a mother/home tongue while 84 students (38%) identified themselves as having 2 or more mother tongues/home languages. This data reflects the importance given to English as a language not only in the school community but within Malaysia and is often a key reason for a child to transfer from a national school to an international school due to a limited or lack of Bahasa Malaysia or Chinese. 196 (89%) of the students felt that they spoke their mother tongue(s)/home languages(s) fluently, although 58 (29%) of these indicated a lack fluency in regards reading and writing, probably a reference to their second home language with only limited time given to the study of Bahasa Malaysia or Chinese (Mandarin) in the school timetable (just 7% of curriculum time).

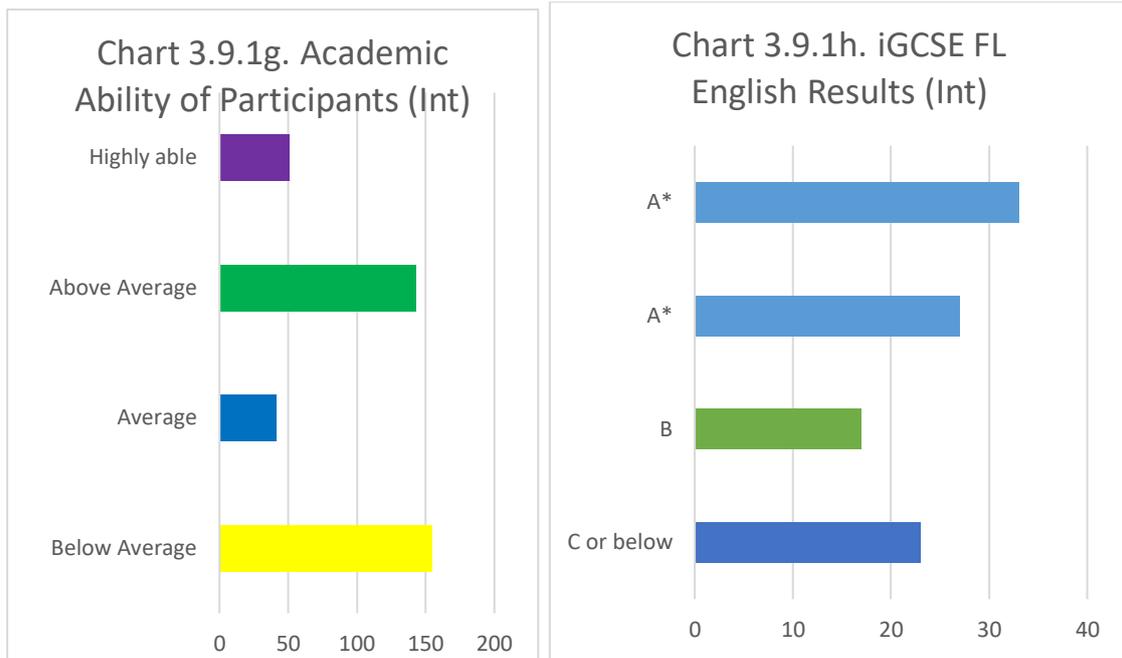


The strength of English amongst the student body is also reflected in the academic results with 85%+ students taking English as a First Language at IGCSE and over half achieving A/A\*. English was also observed to be the language of the playground, the medium of communication between teacher and student, between students and between school and home. Indeed, proficiency in English was a requirement for admission to the school, although, at the time of writing, the school

has since introduced an EAL programme predominantly aimed at international students from China and Korea to enable those with a low level of `English language proficiency to transition to core curriculum classes taught in English. Therefore, for most students who were participants of the study, level of English would not be a factor in the degree to which the school impacted upon their discourse. In other words, school documents, teachers and school leadership shared a common language with students facilitating the development of a discourse amongst students without language as a barrier. Language plays a key role in transmitting cultural values (Rabiah, 2018). Furthermore, Sawir et al. (2012) demonstrated that language proficiency plays a crucial role in students' capacity for active agency. Therefore, not only would the high level of English Language capacity not only facilitate the transfer of the institutional discourse, but it would also empower students to negotiate with that and other discourses to create their own student discourse.

#### **3.4.1.4      *Academic background of International School sample.***

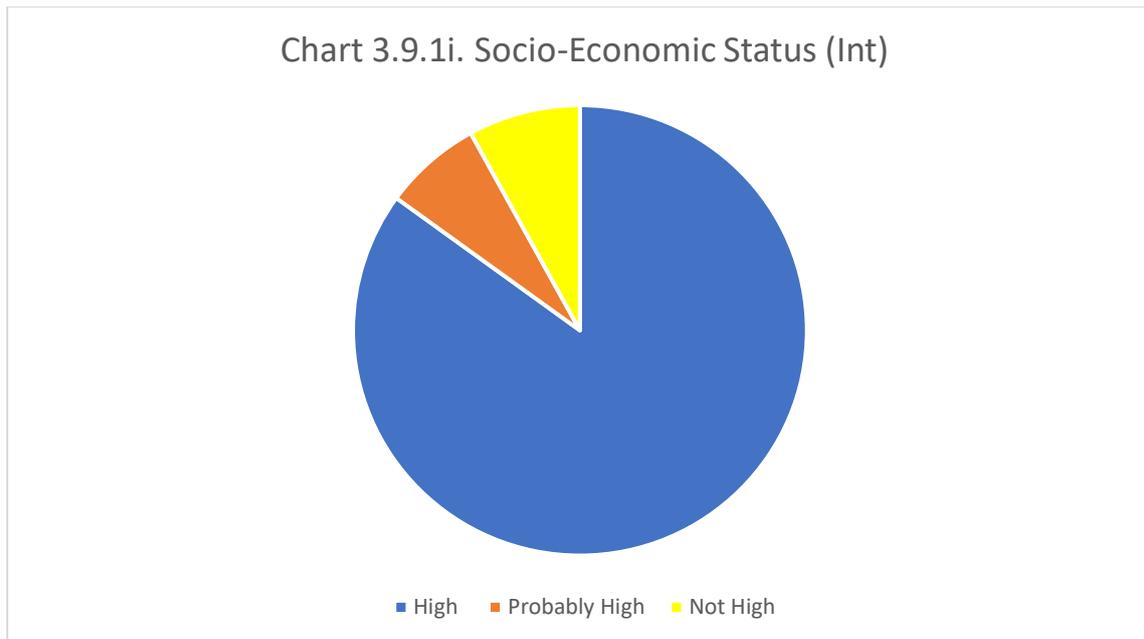
As a cohort the sample appears to be academically able with 143 students (65%) identifying as above average and 51 (23%) as highly able. When one considers the school's IGCSE results (2023 33% A\*, 60% A\*/A, 77% A\*-B) we can see that the average in relation to their peers was probably a B grade and above Average an A grade or above. The sample is, therefore, an academically able sample which reflects the academic results of the school and thus any differences in the student discourse amongst students of similar academic ability would suggest that academic ability itself is not a key factor in determining student discourse.



### **3.4.1.5 Socio-Economic background of International School sample.**

Most of the sample (74%) identified themselves as coming from high socio-economic status and another 20%, who put “don’t know” or “retired” can be also so considered based on student’s responses regarding educational background and perception of level of wealth. When one considers that the cost of tuition is RM65, 500 to RM70, 000 in Year 10 and Year 11 respectively and the average annual salary in Malaysia is around RM80, 000 it is not difficult to conclude that socio-economic status has already been predetermined by the decision to sample international school students. If one assumes a link between socio-economic status and neoliberalism, as indicated by Bettache et al.’s 2020 study which showed a strong connection between socio-economic status and the neoliberal mind set (see Chapter 2), this will skew the likely results in favour of a neoliberal discourse.

Chart 3.9.1i. Socio-Economic Status (Int)



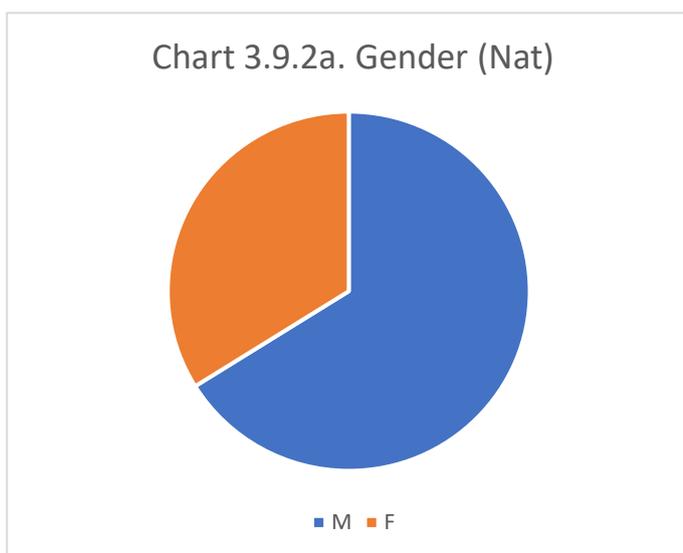
### **3.4.2 National School Students.**

These were students attending a private school in Malaysia. Senior students in this school were defined as S4 (14-15 years old). S4 can be considered the equivalent of Y10 in the UK system in regards years of education and both cohorts of students were undertaking their IGCSEs or equivalent (SPMs). The original intention had been to also survey S5 (15-16 years old, the equivalent of Y11) but as they were preparing for their SPMs at the time of the survey this was considered unethical by the researcher and the survey limited to S4 students. National private school students followed an adapted national curriculum that was delivered partly in English and partly in Bahasa Malaysia, so they can be considered to be following a bi-lingual curriculum. It was delivered by a body of local Malaysian teachers with experience and training in the Malaysian National Curriculum. This group was surveyed as a useful comparison and as a way to identify differences between international and non-international school students. This would allow for cross-tabulation to consider the significance of the impact of a different schooling experience on student responses and thus whether any dominant discourse discovered was particular to international schools.

### 3.4.2.1 *Population of National School Sample*

The population of national students was 186. A cleaned sample of 126 students was collected, exactly what was needed for a Confidence level of 95% with a 5% margin of error. 42 female (33%) and 82 male (65%) and 2 students identifying as

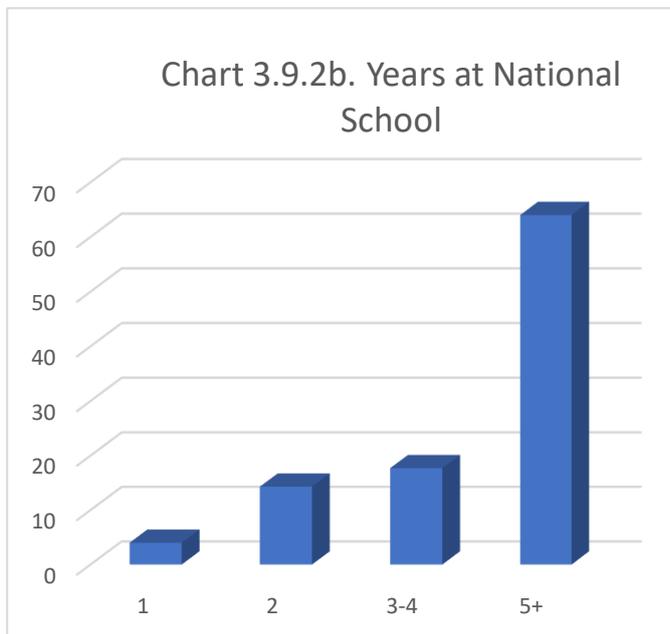
non-binary. This reflects a different gender distribution than that of the international school, which was more balanced between genders (45% female, 55% male). However, it is representative of the gender distribution in the National Secondary school which is skewed towards male.



### 3.4.2.2 *Length of time within the national school.*

103 (81.7%) of students said that they had spent 3 or more years in the school, with 81 students (64%) claiming to have spent 5 or more years at the school, a figure explained by students who had transferred from the Primary National school to the Secondary national school. Only a very small number of students (4%) said they had only joined the school within the last year, effectively to undertake the SPM. Therefore, both schools were similar in terms of the number of students who had spent a significant amount of time in the school (81.7% compared to 79%), but a higher percentage (64% compared to 46.5%) has spent 5 or more years within the national school system. This could suggest that the national school would have a

greater impact on the national student sample in regards identity formation, although Erentaitė et al. (2018) study suggests that while 2 years could positively affect identity formation, over a longer period of time “school burnout can hinder the development of adolescent identity “(p771). The national school sample will provide a clear picture of students who, for the most part, will have been at their school long enough to have their discourse significantly impacted which will provide a useful comparison with the international school where students have had a more transient experience. It will be interesting to see if length of time at the school results in a more uniform and dominant discourse or reflects evidence of “school burnout” (see



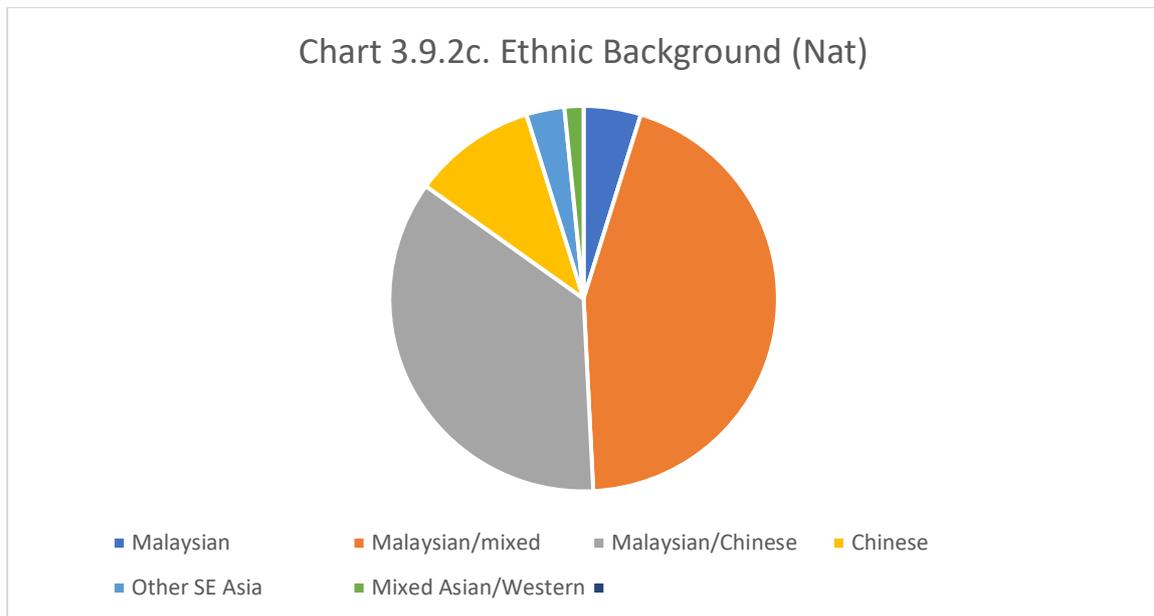
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### **3.4.2.3 Ethnic/cultural/linguistic background**

107 (85%) of the students sampled identified as Malaysian with 56 (52.3%) of these identifying as Malaysian plus one other cultural

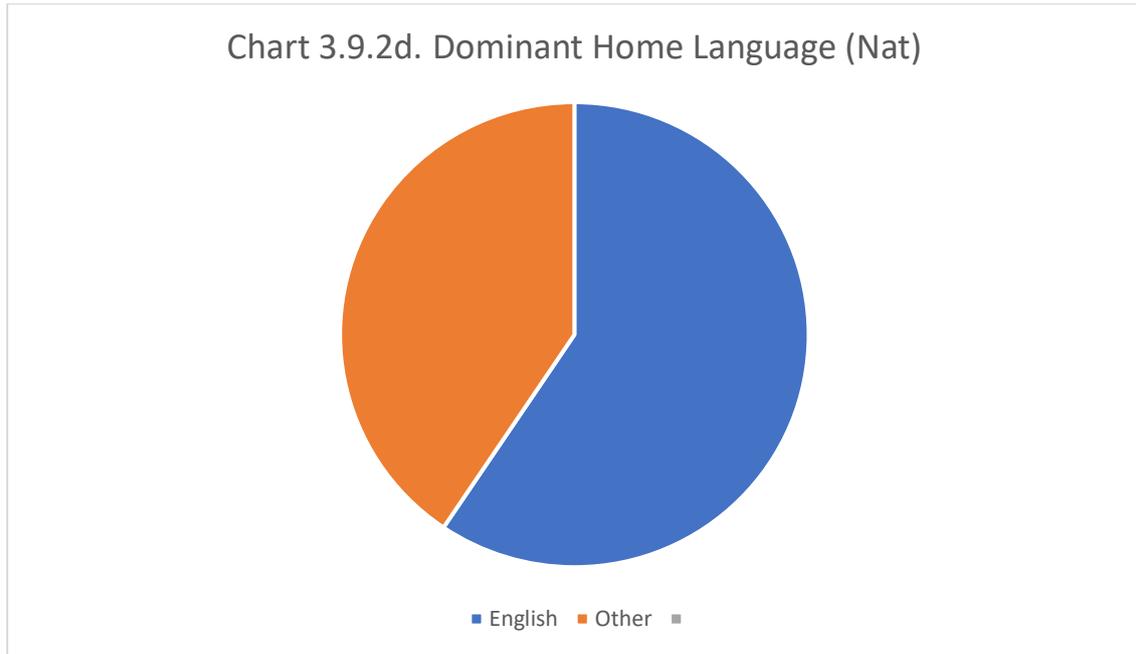
background. 45 students (35.7%) identified as Malaysian/Chinese and 13 (10.3%) identified as Chinese with 4 (3%) from other Southeast Asian countries and only 2 students (1.5%) from a mixed Asian/European background. As a cohort there is significantly less ‘international influence’ (15% non-Malaysian as compared to nearly 28%) as would be expected, with this international influence largely limited to Korean/Japanese students. For the most part I would be comparing like for like, Malaysian students or Malay/mixed Asian students who have gone through a national curriculum school compared to similar students in an international school, with Malaysian/Chinese as a significant minority in both schools. This would allow for

the nature of the school rather than cultural background to be considered a potential reason for any difference.



63 (50%) of those sampled stated English as a mother tongue/home language and 43 (34%) identified themselves as having 2 or more mother tongues/home languages. 48 students (38%) the students expressed a lack of fluency in their mother tongue/home languages. While the overall level of English is lower (50% compared to 63%) than the international school, as perhaps, to be expected, with a similar bi or multilingualism (34%/38%). There was an even stronger concern about lack of fluency (38% as opposed to 29%) which could both reflect weaker English or, Mandarin/Cantonese, as the curriculum is predominately in Bahasa Malaysia. As stated above the discourse of the school and the school leadership was in the medium of English, while the students would have also experienced a discourse from teachers and from the textbooks in Bahasa Malaysian. Considering the role of language in transmitting culture mentioned above, one could expect a more mixed discourse.

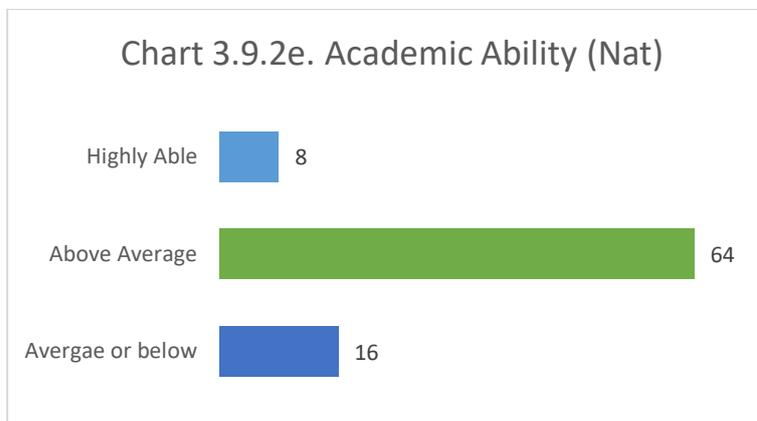
Chart 3.9.2d. Dominant Home Language (Nat)



#### 3.4.2.4 *Academic background*

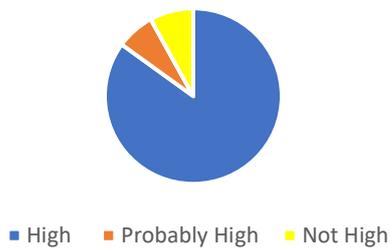
As a cohort the sample seems academically more diverse with 64% identifying as above average and only 8% as highly able. It will be interesting to see if this difference in terms of academic ability effects a difference in discourse.

Chart 3.9.2e. Academic Ability (Nat)



#### 3.4.2.5 *Socio-Economic background*

Chart 3.9.2f Socio-Economic Status (Nat)

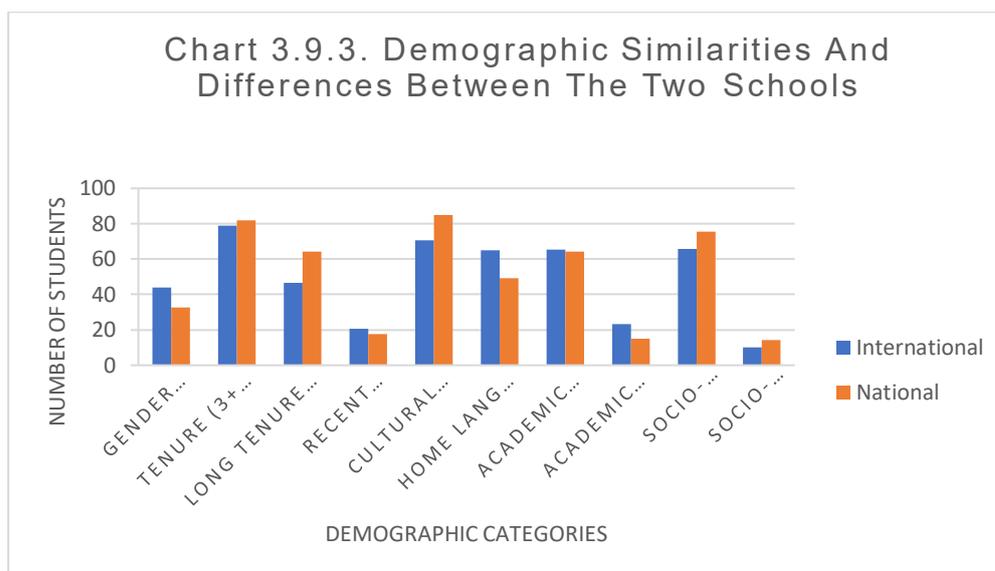


Again, a high percentage of the sample (85%) identified themselves as coming from high socio-economic status with an additional 7% (don't know/retired answers) to be added to this figure when considering student responses regarding education level, profession and perceived

wealth. The two schools are thus very similar in socio-economic status and so unlikely to be a factor in any difference in discourse

### 3.4.3 Demographic Trends

Chart 3.9.3. Demographic Similarities And Differences Between The Two Schools



The chart above shows the demographic trends of the two schools in comparison. From the above the considerations when making comparisons, are.

1. International and National students were similar in terms of tenure, cultural background, academic ability, and socio-economic background. This can be considered the basis of a valid comparison of the two cohorts for a number of reasons:
  - a. Homogeneity. As the students perceive themselves as coming from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, similar cultural contexts and are

comparable in terms of their self-perceived academic ability then such homogeneity makes it more likely that findings from one school are applicable to the other (Creswell, 2014).

- b. Less extraneous variables. As the two schools share similar extraneous characteristics, so any differences are more likely to be due to the variable of differences in school experience.
- c. Validity: Validity is enhanced by the shared characteristics making it more likely that differences in outcomes are due to the variable being studied, i.e. dominant discourse (Cook and Campbell, 2007).

2. International and National students were dissimilar in terms of gender (the national school had more male respondents), with a long tenure (again national students tended have a longer tenure), home language English (perhaps not surprisingly the international students tended to be more likely to have English as a home language) and highly able students (again the international school had a higher percentage of students who considered themselves to be highly able).

These factors will then need to be considered to see if they account for any difference in student discourse. Bearing in mind that these are self-reported and thus differences, such as highly able, may reflect the student's perceptions of themselves rather than actual differences, in this case ability. However, it is such self-perception that does affect identity. Research suggest that self-perception and identity formation are closely intertwined particularly during adolescence (Bukowski and Newcomb, 1983; Moran, 2005; Eccles, 2009)

### **3.5. *Data Collection Method***

Once the decision to move to a questionnaire had been made it was a relatively straightforward decision to use Microsoft Forms as the medium for collection of the data, largely because the school had recently introduced this technology, and all students and teachers had become familiar with it. All stakeholders at the school were also used to the collection of data through such methods and thus there was an alignment of method of data collection and the lived experiences of participants. This familiarity with MS Forms and completing surveys, the type of questions used such as Likert scales and Ratings scales and even the practice of expressing an opinion or attitude towards an aspect of the school and self-reflection are all a common part of the collection of feedback that marks the modern, data driven school. Students would be used to such data collection and approaches through termly student surveys, post event surveys, self and peer assessment practices and even through the importance given to 'taking risks' in class through expressing opinions.

Therefore, the questionnaire had to be adapted to this new form of technology. While the nature of the students as second language learners required careful editing and testing of the language used in the pilot study, with feedback from teachers from a range of cultural backgrounds, prior to and post the study, adding a further level of revision, to this end care was taken to ensure the language was age appropriate. Due to the fact the questionnaire was designed for senior students (14-17 years old) in an English Medium International School where there was a level of English language competency amongst students in both the pilot and core schools to facilitate an English language-based questionnaire. Questions would also be kept as short as possible, preferably within the 20-word limit per sentence recommended (Oppenheim, 2000.)

An option to translate the text into Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin was made available, however, as an additional aide to understanding questions. For Mandarin

the questionnaire had been translated for an additional trial in a school in China, the data from which was not used in the final study due to low response rate. It was translated using MS online translation checked and revised by a native speaker language expert. The same process of MS online translator, checked by a native speaker language expert was used for the Bahasa Malaysia translation.

Cognitive and communication theoretical foundations helped inform the design of the questionnaire. Lietz (2010) helpfully summarises the cognitive process as four steps; comprehension of the question, retrieval of stored memory, judgement or decision-making and then matching the answer in the participant's mind to the categories provided. Therefore, there is a need to keep the questionnaire as simple as possible, simplifying response options and ensuring questions could be easily responded to in order to avoid cognitive overload (Kahneman, 2011; Eysenck and Keane, 2015). To this end the questionnaire was divided into four sections; social/cultural/economic background, personal characteristics, values and attitudes, future aspirations, each clearly introduced to help participants 'cognitive transitions' (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000) and closed choice questions were used to simplify and speed up responses, the aim was for the questionnaire to take a maximum of fifteen minutes which would also help with the logistical practicalities with students completing the questionnaire within a twenty minute Form time. Four types of questions were used, multiple choice options, ordinal scale 0-10, a Likert Chart and text responses. The latter were limited to providing the opportunity to add any further responses the participant wished to and kept optional to answer. The key data would come from the closed questions which were kept compulsory to answer. Research shows that memory recall can result in cognitive overload, (Schaeffer and Presser, 2003), the questionnaire focused on the students' current attitude only and provided helpful prompts to make needing to make qualified judgements, also a

problem identified by research (Holbrook et al., 2003) easier, for example “what cultural background do you feel best describes you?”

Lietz also helpfully summarised communication perspective about questionnaires as “a complex communication process whereby the product of the interaction between researchers and respondents lead to the sharing and creating of meaning.” (Lietz, 2010, p.249). Having decided what to ask the researcher then encoded that into a question which must then be decoded by the reader before being encoded into an answer via the categories/options provided by the researcher, which must then be decoded by the researcher in order to analyse the response (Lietz, 2010, p250). The use of closed order questions would simplify the encoding of the answer as well as decoding the response to enable an identification of any consistently shared set of values amongst target groups and to measure the strength of the correlation between any pattern of values held by any two groups and to a number of external factors, such as cultural background and socio-economic status.

In particular, two types of questions were used on the questionnaire to measure students' self-perceptions, Likert Scale and a 11-point (0-10) rating scale. For example:

*Figure 3.1: Example of Ranking Type Question*

10. Please rank the following in terms of their importance to you.  
\*  
 Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
That you achieve the best academic results you can	<input type="radio"/>				
That you are happy at school	<input type="radio"/>				
That you learn how to live a healthy lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>				
That you develop a mindset that enables you to be a global citizen	<input type="radio"/>				
That you learn the English language	<input type="radio"/>				

*Figure 3.2: Example of Likert Scale Type Question*

13. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I have a test or exam to pass?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all Very strongly

The Likert scale is commonly used to measure attitudes and opinions (Watson Todd, 2018), which allows for more variance than a simple yes/no. However, its use does bring with it certain limitations when considering how to analyse the data produced. The first step would be to use bar charts to simply show frequency of responses, which could be used for some comparative analysis between the international and national school students. As the different responses on a Likert scale are not actual measures care would need to be taken when analysing the Mean, hence the use of the Mann-Whitney U test to test for significant differences rather than directly interpreting Means as indicative of differences

The 11-point Ratings scale provides a true out of 10 rating and allowed for a broader spectrum of opinions and attitudes. The research seemed very divided on the optimal point scale to be used with 5-, 7- and 10-point scales all being lauded (Lietz, 2010) but Lietz did report that there was significant research that would indicate the 11-point scale used provides consistently higher reliability and validity (Lietz, 2010, p261). A search on Elicit also found several studies which reported the 11-point scale as more reliable and valid (Kroh, 2007; Leung, 2011; Friedman and Friedman, 1986), although there is also research that shows the validity of other scales. Ultimately the decision was made to provide a broad spectrum (11 point) as it was measuring attitudes, it fitted the context in that students were used to scale judgements between 1 to 10 in student surveys and in class exercises. Both types of question provide a simple way for participants to encode their answer, and both allow for quantifiable responses facilitating decoding by the researcher, easier quantitative analysis and allowing for statistical tests of significance to be carried out.

Another issue in regards the language of questions to be addressed was the use of frequency measures. Words like 'usually' have different meanings for different people (Bradburn and Miles, 1979). This is particularly a challenge with the use of Likert Chart type questions where students are categorising a choice as 'lowest, average, highest', although as the question structure requires participants to order one highest, one high etc. it could be considered to be asking participants to identify which is most important to them, next most important etc. rather than make a value judgement. This also helped avoid any issue regarding participants tending to choose a 'middle option' (Schuman and Presser, 1996). One question that was removed from the final questionnaire due to this problem was the question "where do you usually go on holiday?".

As the nature of the questionnaires was effectively a self-report study, students would also be asked to reflect on their identity through choice questions about themselves, such as:

*Figure 3.3: Example of Choice Question*

8. Which of the following best describes you?  
\*

Choose one.

- I have a good knowledge and understanding of my host country, its traditions and customs
- I have a deep understanding of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I have some knowledge of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I have little or no knowledge of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I am not interested in learning about the culture of my home country.

As a self-report study there is significant potential for respondents to give socially desirable responses, which Holtgraves describes as "a tendency to respond in self-report items in a manner that makes the respondent look good rather than to respond in an accurate and truthful manner" (Holtgraves, 2004, p. 161), and questions to ask the participants to express their opinions, for example, "how

important do you think it is to celebrate Malaysia Day?”. In addition, some questions, like the above which could reflect an individual’s sense of patriotism, and questions of relative importance of local versus other cultures, for example, the question asking students to rank in order of importance learning about home, host and other cultures, could be considered as sensitive in nature. In order to address the issue of socially desirable responses the questionnaires would be anonymous, participants would be able to use a range of possible responses, including ‘don’t know’ and there was a focus in using language in questions that enabled the participant to self-report how they felt about something rather than what they considered to be true or not, for example “ What cultural background do you feel best describes you” allows participants to pick from a range of 13 cultural backgrounds as to which they most identified with and the insertion of “do you think” in the above question about Malaysia Day and others like it, meant that the response was not about how important Malaysia Day was, but rather their own perception of its importance. This focus on ‘current attitudes’ has been recommended by researchers into questionnaire design (Bradburn et al., 2004). Nevertheless, as the questions were aimed at getting at the self-perceptions, attitudes and values students had the danger of socially desirable responses remains.

Research about question order and its effects seems inconclusive (Lietz, 2010) other than to be aware of possible question combinations, where one question leads to another, for example a general then specific question about the same issue. This was largely avoided by having each question stand alone and at the same level of specificity, the personal perception. One aspect that should have been noted was the advice to put the demographic questions at the end (Oppenheim, 2000). One of the advantages of using MS Forms was the option to allow choices to be randomised in terms of the order they appeared, providing some protection from any potential

'primacy' effect whereby earlier options would tend to be chosen more often (Foddy and Foddy, 1993) although Lietz's review of the research concludes that such is 'negligible' (Lietz, 2010, p.265).

Research about the provision of a 'don't know' option shows that its presence increases the likelihood of participants selecting don't know (Schuman and Presser, 1996) and, therefore, a conscious decision was made to both exclude this option (or the similar none of the above) from the core sections on values and attitudes and future aspirations and also to require responses to questions. 'Don't know/none of the above' was however, retained for the demographic questions where questions were either about the participant's parents and not themselves or where the range of options, for example, cultural background, could not be comprehensive.

In summary, the questionnaire was designed to be as simple and easy to respond to as possible, to use language carefully in a way that reflected the English language level of the respondents, to use Likert type response scales and use an 11 point scale as providing more validity and reliability and also Likert chart questions where a middle option was provided as again increasing reliability slightly, and to focus on current attitudes to be self-reported anonymously as a key measure against social desirability.

The next step was to operationalise the key concepts in order to frame questions that would provide data about participants attitudes and values and thus enable an analysis of the degree to which different discourses were held. In order to measure the existence of commonly held discourses, identified through the Literature Review as neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, national/local cultural, post-colonial and individual/egoistic, questions needed to be created. The process was first to define what these discourses stood for, which was done in Chapter 2. Secondly, indicators of each discourse, core concepts and manifestations were identified. This was then

checked by asking Elicit (Elicit 27/07/2024) “what are the core concepts and manifestations of...”. Next it required translating these often-abstract concepts into measurable items that were understandable to the target population, senior school students and made sense within the context of a school. This I was able to do drawing on my existing knowledge of the school literature, discussed above, and understanding of the target population. Finally, the questions were reviewed by teachers and pre-tested and revised, a process described in the Pilot Study section below. This is summarised in the table below.

**Table 3.1: Key Concepts operationalized.**

Discourse	Key Concepts/ manifestations	Question themes	Possible questions
Neo liberalism	Global market economy <sup>1</sup> , privatisation <sup>2</sup> , performativity <sup>3</sup> , competitive market/edge/advantage <sup>4</sup> , enterprising individual <sup>5</sup> , meritocracy <sup>6</sup> augment social/economic/human/cultural capital <sup>7</sup> , high socio-economic status <sup>8</sup> , choice <sup>9</sup>	Questions around future marketability, performance, career focused, wealth focused. Also, socio-economic status of parents.	Socio-economic status of parents, competency in English language, importance of academic achievement, importance of extrinsic motivation, importance given to passing tests, importance given to teacher’s qualifications, importance given to STEM subjects and career related subjects, importance of the school preparing them for the world of work, getting good grades, desire for high paying jobs, university as means to better paid/more important job
Cosmopolitanism	Global citizenship <sup>10</sup> , openness/heighten	Questions around globalism and the skills	Preferred holiday destinations, competency in and importance given to

<sup>1</sup> Bittencourt and Willetts, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Apple, 2001

<sup>3</sup> Apple, 2001

<sup>4</sup> Apple, 2001; Young, 2016; Waters, 2006

<sup>5</sup> Apple, 2001

<sup>6</sup> Ball, 1993

<sup>7</sup> Young, 2016; Resnik, 2009

<sup>8</sup> Bettache et al., 2020

<sup>9</sup> Eagleton-Pierce, 2016

<sup>10</sup> Bittencourt and Willetts, 2018

	<p>ed tolerance/acceptance of other cultures<sup>11</sup>, transnationalism<sup>12</sup>, trips abroad<sup>13</sup>, mastery of other languages<sup>14</sup>, international mindedness<sup>15</sup>, expat teachers<sup>16</sup>, diversity valued<sup>17</sup>,</p>	<p>needed to be a member of a global community, such as language, cultural openness, soft skills. International focused, citizenship, global nomadic future.</p>	<p>learning multiple/foreign language, importance of developing a global mindset, importance given to learning about other cultures, importance given to being part of a global community, importance given to celebrations of internationalism and international days, importance given to teacher's international resume, importance given to cultural and language subjects, moral education, learning to cooperate/collaborate, influence of expat teachers, future aspirations to work/study abroad, wants to get a job that involves travelling/seeing the world/helping others, university as a way to get a more important job/meet people</p>
<p>National/local cultural</p>	<p>Local community<sup>18</sup>, national identity<sup>19</sup>, strong identification with home culture<sup>20</sup>, local teachers<sup>21</sup> glocalization<sup>22</sup></p>	<p>Questions around home language and culture and influence of local teachers and local parents</p>	<p>Competency in and importance given to learning mother tongue/home language, knowledge and understanding of home/host country and importance given to learning about home/host country, preferred holiday destinations, importance given to National/local cultural events, importance given to teacher's national</p>

<sup>11</sup> Hansen, 2008, Sobré-Denton, 2011

<sup>12</sup> Weenink, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Kenway and Koh, 2013

<sup>14</sup> Young, 2016

<sup>15</sup> Hill, 2014

<sup>16</sup> Caffyn, 2011

<sup>17</sup> Bates, 2011; Hill, 2014

<sup>18</sup> Tamatea et al., 2018

<sup>19</sup> Lillie, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2020

<sup>20</sup> Ward and Kennedy, 1996; Bates, 2011

<sup>21</sup> Caffyn, 2011

<sup>22</sup> Roudometof, 2005; Tartaglia and Rossi 2015

			resume, influence of local teachers, future aspiration to work/study in home country, parents' importance in choice of university,
Post-Colonial	Preference for values of economically developed world <sup>23</sup> , Western perspective <sup>24</sup> , preference for expat teachers <sup>25</sup> , predominance of English language <sup>26</sup> , Eurocentric orientation <sup>27</sup>	Questions about English language, Western approaches and influence of Western teachers	Preferred holiday destinations, competency in and importance given to English language, importance given to learning about Western culture, importance given to teachers being trained in Western pedagogy, importance given to native speakers of English, influence of Western teachers, future aspirations to work/study in the Western world
Individual/egoistic	Student agency <sup>28</sup> , composite identities, <sup>29</sup> negotiated identity <sup>30</sup> , personal development <sup>31</sup> , influence of family/peers/emotional attachments outside school <sup>32</sup> , awareness of self <sup>33</sup> , short-termism <sup>34</sup>	Questions about a focus on short-term and personal goals. Personal satisfaction and needs.	Friendship groups, different persona at school/home, importance of own happiness and welfare, importance attached to teacher supervision, importance attached to finding study interesting or fun, importance given to celebrating individual identity days e.g. international women's day, importance given to self-development/personal skills, preparation for university/next step, influence of others, wants to get a job they like/enjoy/gives lots of free

<sup>23</sup> Cambridge and Thompson, 2004

<sup>24</sup> Wylie, 2008

<sup>25</sup> Wylie, 2008

<sup>26</sup> Guilherme, 2007

<sup>27</sup> Visser, 2011

<sup>28</sup> Sears, 2011; Inouye et al., 2022

<sup>29</sup> Pearce, 2011

<sup>30</sup> Li and Hall, 2023

<sup>31</sup> Tran and Vu, 2018

<sup>32</sup> Pearce 2011, Blumer, 1966

<sup>33</sup> Eccles 2009, Marginson, 2014

<sup>34</sup> Elliot and McGregor, 2001

			time, university as means to further study of subject
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From the above set of questions, the questionnaire was devised (see Appendix A) and tested through the Pilot Study, see below.

In order to ensure validity and reliability a process similar to the model (Artino et al., 2014) was followed. The first step was to carry out the Literature Review detailed in Chapter 2. The next step was the experience of the initial research, the asynchronous email exchanges through which I was able to move quite quickly away from the pre-set questions to explore issues raised by the participant and thus identify valid questions for further research. To this was added a Content Analysis of key documents/texts in the international school and the sum of my own experiences as a school leader to create a list of themes or categories of questions. Following this I then set out to write the actual questions, highly conscious of the language level of the target audience and the fact that for most English was a second language, although, as I will show later in the findings, the proficiency of such was high. However, in the initial design the language was carefully constructed for a low reading level (see below). While a career in education working with the target audience and in particular over twenty years working with EAL students has enabled me to develop the skills necessary to write accessible text for such students I still followed the advice given to avoid using negatively worded or leading questions and matching response anchor to the question stem, for example, “how strongly do you agree.... Not at all/very strongly”, in other words ‘avoiding the 5 common pitfalls of questionnaire design’ (Artino et al., 2011). I then, as part of the piloting of the questionnaire, asked a panel of experienced teachers, to review the questionnaire and provide feedback to provide face validity or ‘expert validation’ (Artino et al., 2014, p467). I was also able to test out the questionnaire on a small group of

international students, my A level Sociology class, who were set a task to evaluate the questionnaire and in the follow up discussion enabled me to ask questions probing for any misunderstandings or difficulty in interpreting questions. While not exactly the 'cognitive interviews' referred to by Artino et al. (2014, p471) it nevertheless served as a similar level of checking for how easy questions were to respond to and how much interpretation was needed. Finally, a pilot study was carried out, see below.

### ***3.5.1 The use of school documents to inform the design of the survey.***

As part of the process in designing the questionnaire various key school documents were analysed to identify possible categories for questions. Any such categories for questions to study student perceptions were considered provisional.

Considering my position within those schools and capacity to influence the production of such documents, I have purposefully striven to focus on documents that a). prelisted my intervention/arrival and b). were produced at the highest executive levels, but also, fully realising that there exists at least one level of meaning between the school philosophy as realised at the executive level of an organisation and the lived experience of students and that is the interpretation of such documents at the school leadership level where philosophical statements are often translated into meaningful actions that direct peoples lived experiences. I also set out to analyse documents produced at school leadership level, such as newsletters, while trying to avoid those documents I was directly involved in, though this was fraught with difficulty as the longer I remained within a school the more my ideas, my discourse would influence other leaders. For the collection of documents for analysis it was decided therefore to study three key sources of the dominant discourse within the institutions, based on the fact that such documents would be

common to both schools. These were, the Mission and Vision statements, the accompanying key principles and philosophies of each school which could typically be found on the school website and in the Parent Handbook and the website itself, or at least the public dimension of the website meant for prospective parents (and teachers), and which provided an insight into the marketing of the school, and the newsletters. The latter two mediums, as noted above, are a step away from the vision of the school as imagined in the Mission and Vision literature as they involve the interpretation of those responsible for marketing, a combination of administration, senior leadership and teachers and those responsible for compiling the newsletters, predominately teachers with oversight from senior leaders. While, in theory, the website and newsletters should be an embodiment of the Mission and Vision it seemed inevitable that there could be some divergence.

The analysis undertaken was a simple content analysis of the written communication of these three key documents by breaking down these texts into key phrases and grouping according to common meaning around key values to provide inspiration for formulating questions.

This analysis of the documents produced the following:

**Table 3.2: Content Analysis of Key School Documents**

Document	What it said?	What values it implied?	Possible questions
Mission and Vision	Safe, happy successful Diverse and inclusive Aspire to positively impact others	Importance of the individual's well-being Goal orientated Multiculturalism Compassion/citizenship	Sense of well-being Attitude towards academic results/ambitions in life Attitude towards cultural events in school

			Attitudes towards moral education
5 Promises	<p>World class academic qualifications Clear sense of purpose</p> <p>Nurturing culture Clear sense of self</p> <p>Resilient students equipped with the skills to be successful in life</p> <p>Future leaders</p> <p>Provide immersive experiences to enable students to achieve Full potential</p> <p>Relentlessly pursue continuous improvement</p>	<p>Goal orientated</p> <p>Importance of the individual</p> <p>Competitiveness/ ability to succeed</p> <p>Elitism/power</p> <p>Competitiveness/success</p> <p>Competitiveness/success</p>	<p>Attitude towards academic results/ambitions in life</p> <p>What the students wanted out of education/their ambitions</p> <p>How well prepared they felt about future roles</p> <p>How well prepared they felt about future roles/careers</p> <p>Qualities wanted in teachers</p> <p>Attitudes to learning</p>
Newsletters/social media	<p>Celebration of exam results Celebration of individual achievements</p> <p>Kindling kindness/cranes of hope</p> <p>Arts and Sports – value of</p> <p>Student leadership/involvement in school governance</p>	<p>Importance of such achievements</p> <p>Importance of the individual</p> <p>Compassion/citizenship</p> <p>Holistic education</p>	<p>Relative importance to students compared to other aspects</p> <p>Individual ambitions/goals</p> <p>Involvement in such</p> <p>Importance of non-academic/non career aspects of life</p>

		Citizenship/elitism	Student attitudes towards social responsibility
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Due to my extensive familiarity with such documents over 14 years of educational leadership it was also felt possible to generate categories of themes that I had become familiar with through working in international schools. These were:

1. Global mindedness
2. Cultural competency
3. Bi or multilingualism
4. Compassion for others
5. A belief in taking action to improve the lives of others
6. Communal responsibility
7. Ambition
8. Elitism
9. Future success framed in terms of career or university goals
10. Competitiveness
11. An awareness of global economic interdependence
12. Immediate and deferred gratification

The above categorisation contributed to the questionnaire design.

### **3.5.2 Pilot Study**

The Pilot Study took place in School A, where I was working as the Headteacher at the time. Permission was sought from and granted by the then School Principal and the Director of Education. Ethical approval had previously been granted by the University of Durham following resubmission of the Ethical Approval Request due to the change of format of the methodology and due to requirements resulting from the Covid-19 epidemic. By the time the questionnaire was ready to be sent the school had gone into lockdown and, due to the difficulty of sending home a Consent Form for signature, it was agreed with the School Principal and Director that the mail made it clear enough that in choosing to click on the link and complete the survey participants had indicated their consent and that they did not need to return a Consent Form. This followed the standard practice of the school in regards gaining parent consent. A debriefing sheet was then sent out to all in the original email following the submission deadline.

A panel of Senior Teachers volunteered to review the questionnaire both to ensure language levels were appropriate, the meanings of questions were clear to English as a Second Language speakers, to ensure sensitivity to the cultural context, the pilot study took place in Qatar, a Muslim country under Sharia law, and sensitivity to the different cultural groups within School A. After review and some discussion, it was agreed to keep the West/South/east African cultural group as it was and add Caribbean to the African American group. There were some minor language changes to improve ease of understanding and with a Flesch-Kincaid Reading level of 5.1 it was felt to be easily accessible to both students and parents. The Flesch-Kincaid Reading level is widely used in education as a reading index that uses a mathematical formula to convert count of word and sentence length into a level of reading complexity which is then given a reading score equivalent to US school grades (Brewer et al., 2018). It is also one of the default measures of reading difficulty used in MS Word.

The questionnaires were created on Microsoft Forms, largely as the school used Office 365 and all students and teachers had a linked email. They were anonymous, the relevant settings being selected on Forms to ensure emails and IP addresses were not collected and the responses automatically stored via Office 365 and then backed up. Accompanying documents went out in two waves, first a standard school letter explaining the survey, its purpose and the format it would take, largely summarising the Participant Information Sheet, then a follow up email that included the Privacy Notice and Participation Information Sheet in full. In addition, for students, an assembly had been held by the Head of Upper School to further explain the study and the Consent. While the email communication explained that those invited to participate were under no obligation to participate and that they could choose to opt out of completing the questionnaire, or have the completed

questionnaire removed from the study, at any time if they so wished, it was also felt worth explaining this to students further.

The student questionnaire was sent to all Year 11, 12 and 13 students. The parent questionnaire was sent to all parents of the above students and the Teacher questionnaire to all teachers across the Foundation, Primary and Secondary campus. There were 44 student replies, 22% of the student population in Y11-13, 29 parental replies which represented 20% of the families and 30 teacher replies, 57% of the teacher population.

The average time to complete the questionnaire was:

Students 12 minutes

Parents 13 minutes

Techers 10 minutes

Which would indicate that the questionnaire had proven accessible (Brewer et al., 2018).

The gender split in terms of completing the questionnaire was:

Students 28/16 in favour of females

Parents 24/5 in favour of males

Teachers 16/14 in favour of males.

The disproportionate number of female students answering the questionnaire and the very disproportionate number of male parents answering the questionnaire was noted for the main research, where the questionnaire would be completed by the whole class rather than by choice as in the pilot study, which had resulted in this gender response bias. While this may be explained by the cultural context in which the questionnaire took place and it was noted with interest the number of female students who seem to have taken this opportunity to have their voice heard,

nevertheless the gender imbalance in response was not a desirable outcome if the study was to attempt to be representable.

The participants according to cultural background were distributed as follows:

Students: 18% Filipino 34% Indian/Pakistani/Bangladesh/Sri Lankan, 23%

West/South/East African and the remainder Other.

Parents: 21% Filipino, 34% Indian etc. And 17% West African etc.

Teachers: 17% African American or Caribbean, 40% European, 20% Indian etc. 20%

Middle Eastern/North African and 3% West African etc.

The distribution of respondents by cultural background in all three groups was considered a fair reflection of the school and teacher population, though the lower percentage of West/South/East African parents may be linked to a lower language proficiency. The cultural background differences between the student population and teacher population were very marked and while there were some shared cultural backgrounds between teachers and students/parents the significant factor was first that 67% of respondents were from a Western background, which accurately reflected the teacher population distribution as a whole, and secondly that there was a significant, 20%, local cultural influence.

It was also noted in the pilot that, perhaps because of the very nature of a 3-18 school or because the participants invested interest, 86% of the student respondent and 73% of the parent respondents had been at the school for the longest period of time offered in the questionnaire, 5 years or more. Such a bias in the respondents would make it difficult to see any correlation between length of time and values held.

Analysis of the response to the questions showed clear trends emerging, suggesting most questions served their purpose well. The only exception to this was the question "If you had to pick one thing that you friends and you had in common what would it be?". As the results from this were so varied and would require further

exploration in order to be meaningful, which was not planned as part of the study, it was decided to omit this question from the main research.

Comments made about the research and questionnaire helped me to identify the following issues:

1. The labelling of the Likert Scale in question 20 on the student questionnaire had not been done correctly and so was corrected for the main research
2. The labelling of the Likert scale on Q14 of the parent questionnaire needed correcting.

Finally comments like the following.

*“It helped me understand myself better and make my aims more clear to me.”*

*“this questionnaire actually helped me find out more about what my importance and preferences are!”*

*“It was very interesting and helped me know what I wanted as a student, during and after my education, then into my adult years. It made me acknowledge what exactly I wanted to do with my future.”*

made me realise the educational potential of the questionnaire and its value as a self-reflection, which made me revisit the hermetic approach proposed by Moustakas (1990) which I had encountered early in the formative period of my thesis proposal.

### **3.5.2.1 Issues from the Pilot Study**

Below I detail issues that arose from the pilot study and outline how they would be addressed in subsequent studies:

1. The gender imbalance. The initial study had taken a ‘convenience sampling’ approach and had not attempted to select the sample. In order to avoid any such bias, it was decided to have a more focused population (senior students in Years 10 and 11) that would allow for purposive sampling.

2. The difference between the cultural background of teachers and their students and parents is an interesting variable. It would be interesting to see if there were any changes in theme if the balance between Western and local influence changed, as it would in the final school studied. Therefore, a decision was made to collect comparable data from two comparable schools where one of the differing variables was degree of Western/local influence.
3. The bias towards those invested in the school. Again, convenience sampling meant that the initial pilot had not struck a balance between long time students/parents of the school and others. This would make it difficult to measure the impact of length of time spent at the school. Again, by focusing the population of the main study as senior students and including length of time spent at school this variable could be more accurately measured.
4. Response rate of parents and representative nature of parent sample. Due to the voluntary sampling approach taken the response rate of parents had been low and probably, therefore, unrepresentative. A decision was made not to include parents in the main study, but to leave such for further research.
5. The types of questions used. A decision was made to focus on using a limited range of closed response questions and also to use questions in a consistent manner. In effect 3 types of questions were used; choice responses, Likert scales and Rating scales and the question stems were consistent; “best describes you” for choice responses, “rank the following in order of importance” for Likert scales and “how strongly/how important” for Ratings scales.

### **3.6 *Data Analysis***

By grouping the questions as mentioned above under Data Collection Methods above a method for measuring the attitude or mindset of the students was hit upon. The first 6 categories would be taken as evidence of a cosmopolitan discourse and the latter 6 as evidence of the neoliberal discourse being investigated. Students' responses for each grouping of questions would be given a score between 2 and -2, 2 for a response that was the strongest possible linked to that discourse and -2 for the response most removed from that discourse. For example, for the question below

*Figure 3.4: Example of Ranking Question*

10. Please rank the following in terms of their importance to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
That you achieve the best academic results you can	<input type="radio"/>				
That you are happy at school	<input type="radio"/>				
That you learn how to live a healthy lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>				
That you develop a mindset that enables you to be a global citizen	<input type="radio"/>				
That you learn the English language	<input type="radio"/>				

responding to the first option “that you achieve the best academic results you can” as “Highest” was rated a as a 2 for neoliberal mindset, “High” as a 1, “Average” as 0, “Low” as -1 and “Lowest” as -2. By calculating the students score across a grouping of questions a score for each discourse could be produced.

The score for each student for each mindset was then calculated by adding up their scores for each response that was considered a key indicator for that mindset. These could be considered response groups, for example.

Neoliberal mindset =

SUM (Q2, U2, V2, X2, AA2, AH2, AO2, AP2, AQ2, AR2, AS2 ,AW2 ,AX2, AY2), which indicates that the students response to the following was used to create a neoliberal mindset score:

1. That you achieve the best academic results you can
2. That you learn the English language
3. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when there is something to gain, like a prize or house points or my parents have promised me a reward?
4. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I have a test or exam to pass?
5. Learning about Western Culture
6. Teachers have higher degrees (Master's and above) in their subject
7. Learning Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths related (STEM) subjects
8. Learning personal skills, like collaboration, leadership and time management
9. Learning about career related subjects like business and economics
10. That school prepares you for the world of work
11. That school helps you get good grades
12. In the future I want to live and work in the West
13. I want to get a high paying job
14. I want to go to university in order to get a better paying job.

Please see Appendix B for the groupings of questions and responses for each mindset.

The mindset score was thus calculated for every student for each of the five mindsets for each student, creating data that could then be used in statistical tests to

look for significance between responses by students from different schools and between the degree to which students held different mindsets in the same school.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations.**

Ethical approval for the research was sought at three levels, the Ethics Committee of the University of Durham, the CEO and Board of the schools being studied and finally the two Heads of School. One of the ethical considerations that was problematic was the need to enable each participant to choose whether to complete the questionnaire juxtaposed against the need to ensure a representative sample of the population. For the online questionnaires sent to parents and teachers the choice to opt out of the research was significant in the resulting low response rate and why they were not considered for the findings. With students however it was possible to seek consent from the School Board and Head of School for the research to be carried out as part of an educational objective. The Heads of School completed the Consent Form (see Appendix C.1) on behalf of the students who would complete the questionnaire. Once granted it was then possible to follow well-set lines of communication to parents offering them the opportunity to withdraw students from any such research. Parents were fully informed of the research and its purpose through the provision of a Privacy Notice (Appendix C.2) and Information Sheet (see Appendix C.3). It was my experience at the school in question that parents rarely do withdraw their children from school activities, including student surveys, except for sensitive issues around religious or sex education. The final adjustment that ensured a high response rate was asking for the research to be carried out as part of a regular survey of student attitudes. The results meant that almost all the target population of students were able to complete the questionnaire. Central to the ethical justifications was that the questionnaire would be anonymous, that the research was

not sensitive in nature, that the data from the research would be stored safely on an encrypted server and setting out how the data would be used. Finally, the questionnaire included a debriefing section, including contact details to get in touch with me as the author of the research. In this way the research met the basic requirements of an ethical study which Bryman set out as informed consent, confidentiality and transparency (Bryman, 2016).

A major ethical consideration, however, is the epistemological relativist view that the researcher should be reflexive about their own positionality (Sayer, 1999) which I have addressed below and in Chapter 1.

### ***3.7.1 Positionality and researcher***

How my positionality, my background, my experiences, my beliefs, have affected my research and how I have attempted to address the biases that come out of my positionality is addressed below.

In Chapter 1, I set out my positionality, my personal need to validate my life's work as an international educator and my professional need to challenge the claim that international schools were not contributing to the cosmopolitan vision of a global community as much as there were reinforcing existing inequalities in society through a dominant neoliberal discourse. Here I consider how such a position could affect the carrying out of the research and how I sought to mitigate for such,

I would need to guard against any temptation to seek to find results that would validate my own biases identified in the Introduction. As outlined above I tried to do this in three ways, first, through the Pilot Study, to engage a diverse group of international teachers in reviewing the research questionnaire and making suggestions to change it, secondly through carrying out statistical analysis to identify

the significance of my findings and thirdly, through retaining an open and curious mind that could be and was open to being surprised by the findings.

Of course, my position as the Executive Principal not only brings opportunity of access but also meant that the research would have been affected by power dynamics and the power relationships between the students completing the research and my role. The latter was one of the reasons I ultimately chose to move away from interviewing to using online questionnaires, in order to mitigate the power dynamics, as the latter provided much greater anonymity for the students and hence reduced the potential impact of my role as the Executive Principal on students' responses.

The power dynamics at work can particularly be seen in my direct involvement in shaping the Vision and Mission statements of the schools I lead. The role of Executive Principal gives me significant potential influence over the educational narrative and the identity formation processes at work within the schools, an 'autobiographical rooted management' (Ina ter Avest et al., 2008, p. 319). Although the schools in which this research was carried out did not have a curriculum driven international mindedness as there would be in the IB schools I previously worked in, nevertheless part of the goals of the schools are to develop young people with "global minds". Thus, the opportunity exists for me, as the Executive Principal, to develop a narrative around internationalism and shape identity formation accordingly. Helpfully, for the purpose of this research, the research was carried out in the first months of my joining the organisation, when my influence and impact on the educational narrative was at its weakest. The research was more immediately useful to me as a fact finding of where identity formation in the two schools was at, rather than an evaluation of the impact of my Principalship on developing such identity formation. So, I would argue that the power dynamic of my role as Executive Principal in affecting the institutional discourse had not yet had an impact due to the

timing of the research. It has been used since, including with Principals of other international and local schools, to form a narrative around identity formation and the role of schools in shaping such.

My position as a white expat studying identity formation in schools in Malaysia amongst ethnically diverse but predominately Malaysian and South-east Asian students means that as a researcher, I have had to be highly aware of cultural bias. One of the ways I have sought to address this was through involving teachers from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds to review the research questions and methodologies, especially during the pilot study. The second was to distance myself from the participants through an anonymous questionnaire and the third was to extend the study to a national school to provide comparative results for the analysis. In conclusion, my research, alongside my professional practice, has been guided by reflexive practice, cultural sensitivity and ethical research practice in order to address potential researcher biases in the design and the interpretation of the research. Through a deep awareness of cultural bias, an understanding of the power dynamics at play and through balancing my own personal cosmopolitan outlook with the local context and the market-driven dynamics at work I have set out to approach the question of identity formation in schools with an open mind and a sensitivity to many competing discourses. Failing all else the positionality statement provided here can help the reader make their own evaluations about the validity of my findings.

### **3.8 *Limitations***

An underlying assumption throughout is that there is a relationship or a lack of relationship between the school's discourse and the values of students. This assumption of a cause-and-effect relationship, even if that relationship proved to be null, would need to be further tested through research that looked at other variables

that affected student values. Through comparing the values of the students with the dominant discourse of the schools the existence or not of a correlation could be found but this does not either demonstrate the strength of that correlation or whether it is a causal correlation, as further study would be needed, especially for the latter. There will be, of course other influences upon the formation of values amongst students and further qualitative data, probably gained through interviews, would be needed to explore the validity of the assumption that if there is a correlation between the dominant discourse in the school literature and the student values then this is due to the school literature and not a dominant discourse elsewhere, such as media, society, family etc.

The validity of the data in regards whether it truly reflects participants values also would need further consideration, hence the consideration that the author kept returning to, of the possibility of follow up interviews, an option that was only given up due to the factor of time and the ongoing context of Covid-19.

One of the realisations of undertaking this research was the complexity of the question and the need for greater depth of research. Greene et al. refer to a “balance of certainty and complexity” (2001) as the results may offer a more complex picture of the social phenomenon which would require greater “follow-through” (ibid, 2001, p40). Exploring the true meanings behind the values expressed by participants would take further interpretative research for which the author did not have the time. In addition, any correlations found are clearly only drawn between target groups in two schools, though that each school represented a different type of school is helpful. Probably the greatest value of this research is in “generating important research questions” (Johnson et al., 2004, p129) for future research.

While pragmatism as a philosophical approach underpins this study, it does bring with it some weaknesses, not least that I could be said to have ‘discovered’ this

approach as a pragmatic solution to practical difficulties rather than as a philosophical approach around which the research was designed.

The use of Likert scales brought with it certain limitations when it came to measuring attitudes as a basis for considering mindsets or dominant discourses held. While the Likert Scale is commonly used as a measure of attitudes it can face semantic issues in the use of terms like strongly agree as opposed to agree etc. (Taherdoost, 2019), which is why I chose to use a Ratings Scale as well to provide a different measure of strength of attitudes. Also, by sticking consistently to the Lowest/Low/Average/High/Highest ranking choices and ensuring the question design fit with these terms the semantic issues could, I hope, be largely avoided.

At the end of the day the Likert scale is a format by which to capture data in response to the question set and allow for data analysis to be carried out. In addition, statistical tests, such as those used in the next chapter, can be used to test the validity of data collected from the Likert scale type questions. As. “its alleged defects and problems are vastly over-stated” (Carifio and Perla, 2007, p.114)

### **3.9 Summary**

The main research topic for this study was: **A struggle for hearts and minds: What evidence is there of a dominant (neoliberalist) discourse amongst senior students at an international school in Malaysia?**

The study sought to explore three research questions:

1. Is there evidence of a neoliberal discourse in a Type-C international school and, if so, whether such a discourse is dominant?
2. Is there evidence of the formation of a TNC in a Type-C international school?

3. If there is evidence of a neoliberal discourse, its relative dominance to other discourses or evidence of TNC formation, is it particular to the international school in comparison to a national school?

The first two were measured through an empirical measure of students' perceptions through an online questionnaire. This provided data that was used to measure the actual, the students' mindsets by categorising responses according to discourse. This categorisation is my interpretation, as the researcher, of the possible responses and is thus highly provisional. The categorisation of responses into mindsets would then allow for interpretation to provide an analysis of the apparent impact of the varying discourses. Finding a correlation between student mindsets and discourses would provide the evidence requested in the question but, as made clear in the limitations above, would not prove or disprove the claim.

The third research question would be explored through carrying out the same study in a national private school in order to see whether the neoliberal discourse was particular to international schools.

In this chapter, I explained how the study evolved to take on a critical realist approach. This was an evolution partially driven by the pragmatic reality of trying to manage a study alongside the challenging role of school leadership, made more so by the need for transformative leadership and exacerbated by the challenges of Covid-19. Therefore, the discovery of the pragmatic approach was both a timely and convenient one.

The challenges faced in the initial study led to a more pragmatic approach designing an accessible questionnaire through a documentary analysis of readily available educational documents. In the next chapter I will discuss the findings of the questionnaire.



## ***Research Findings***

### ***4.1 Introduction***

As a reminder, the original purpose of the research was to explore the view, set out in the Introduction and Literature review, that there was a dominant discourse within the international school that was the focus of the study. As explained in the Research and Methodology chapter the research became focused on senior students in an international school in Malaysia and, as a comparison, senior students in a private national school in Malaysia.

This chapter will first present a demographic overview of the 2 groups surveyed, in particular with the purpose of demonstrating the comparability of the international school student's data and the national school student's data. It will then attempt to investigate whether a dominant discourse of neoliberalism does exist within the international school, first through a descriptive analysis of the findings of the research and then through a statistical analysis of the significance of the research findings, bearing in mind that the significance is specific to the international school in question though it may bear relevance to other international school contexts. The opportunity was taken to compare the data collected from the international school to data collected from a non-international school, allowing for consideration of whether the findings are specific to this international school and by implication international schools in general or not.

### ***4.2 Research Findings: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics***

### **4.2.1 International Students Values and Attitudes**

Two types of questions were used on the questionnaire to measure students' perceptions, Likert Scale and a 11-point (0-10) rating scale. The Likert scale is commonly used to measure attitudes and opinions, which allows for more variance than a simple yes/no. The 11-point Ratings scale provides a true out of 10 rating and allowed for a broader spectrum of opinions and attitudes.

In order to provide a comparative measure to data derived from a Likert scale a Ratings score of 9-10 was considered to be the equivalent of a high/highest result on the Likert scale questions and the term strongly was used to describe how participants felt, while 6-8 was considered the equivalent of average, described as such and below 6 as the equivalent of low/lowest and described as ambivalent. The rationale for this can be seen in Table 4.1 below, a comparison of average and median scores for the Ratings style questions, where, with the exception of Q12 a score of 6-8 can be considered average or within the mean for the two sample groups.

**Table 4.1. Average and Median across 0-10 Ratings style questions**

Question number	Average rating (Int)	Median rating (Int)	Average rating (Nat)	Median rating (Nat)
Q11	6.07	6	6.8	7
Q12	8.37	9	8.81	9
Q13	5.99	6	6.26	6
Q15	6.64	7	7.9	8
Q16	5.77	6	6.75	7
Q17	6.95	7	8.24	8

Q18	5.95	6	6.57	7
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Both allow for quantifiable responses facilitating easier quantitative analysis and allow for statistical tests of significance to be carried out. Further discussion of the Likert and Ratings scale as methods for data collection can be found in the Methodology chapter.

During this description and analysis of the findings I will refer to the five mindsets or identities: Neoliberal, Cosmopolitan, National/localised cultural, Egoistic and Post-Colonial. These competing discourses were introduced in Chapter 2 but in brief they are:

1. Neoliberal mindset: a focus on the importance of competition, the individual and preparation for the competitive nature of a global economic market.
2. Cosmopolitanism: a focus on the ideological value of diversity, cooperation and acceptance of others alongside preparation as a global citizen.
3. National/localised cultural: a focus on National and/or local values and culture and preparation for national citizenship.
4. Post-Colonial: a focus on the value and predominance of Western education and preparation for a Western-orientated future. As neoliberalism reflects a Western market orientated approach and as cosmopolitanism can be seen as a Western hegemonic concept (Marshall, 2009), it may prove difficult to separate out a post-colonial mindset.
5. Egoistic/Individual: a focus on the student as having agency and an existing self-identity, negotiating a composite identity (Pearce 2011).

#### **4.2.2 The Schooling Experience**

Chart 4.1 and Chart 4.2 look at what students considered to be important to them in the context of their schooling, using a Likert scale. Students were asked to rank the relative importance to them, from highest to lowest, of what were considered 5 key aspects of their schooling experience, academic results, happiness, healthy lifestyle, global mindset and English language. They could only select one highest and so on. The bar chart is measured in number of students selecting each option, providing a visual indication of strength of response to each option. The relative importance of academic results could be considered as an indicator of neoliberal mindset while that of global citizen would point to a more cosmopolitan mindset. English language could be considered as relevant to a neoliberal, cosmopolitan and post-colonial mindset, while a concern with health and happiness would reflect more of a 'egoistic' mindset.

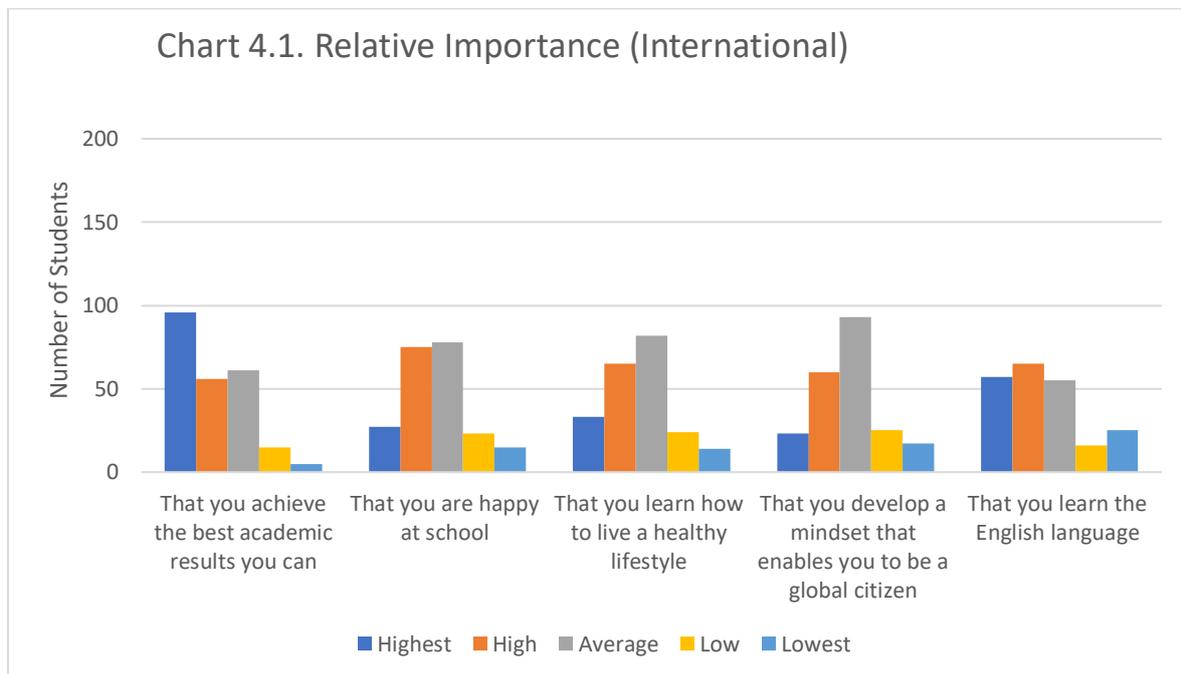


Chart 4.1 shows the relative importance placed on these 5 aspects of school life by international students. The above results show that, perhaps not surprisingly for an international school, achieving the best academic results was easily the highest in terms of relative importance to the students, no student saw it as of the lowest importance and only a very few (15) students saw it as of low importance. The

importance of English language in an international school setting is also clearly demonstrated, however it was notable that of all the categories learning English language was ranked of the lowest importance by the most students (25), though this may reflect that they already had high levels of English Language as Chart 3.9.1f would suggest. Students' health and happiness are recognised as important though the majority did not see this as of the highest or high importance. Developing a global mindset was seen as the least important, making this clear that this was not a priority for most students, perhaps surprising for an international school which talks about developing a “global mindset” that nearly 20% of the students surveyed felt this was of the lowest or low importance.

These findings could be used to argue for the dominance of a neoliberal mindset amongst students who rated results and the acquisition of marketable skills as the key priority.

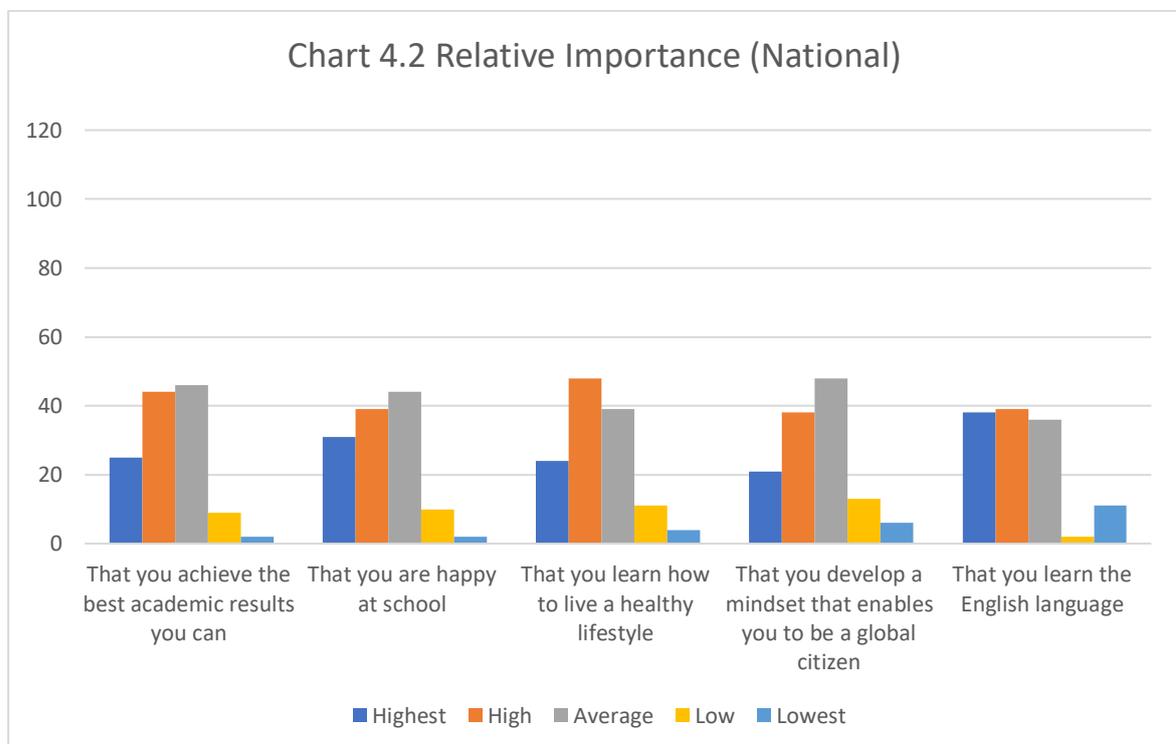


Chart 4.2 shows the relative importance placed on these five aspects of school life for national students. It allows us to compare students' values and attitudes in the national school in regards relative importance. There are some really interesting

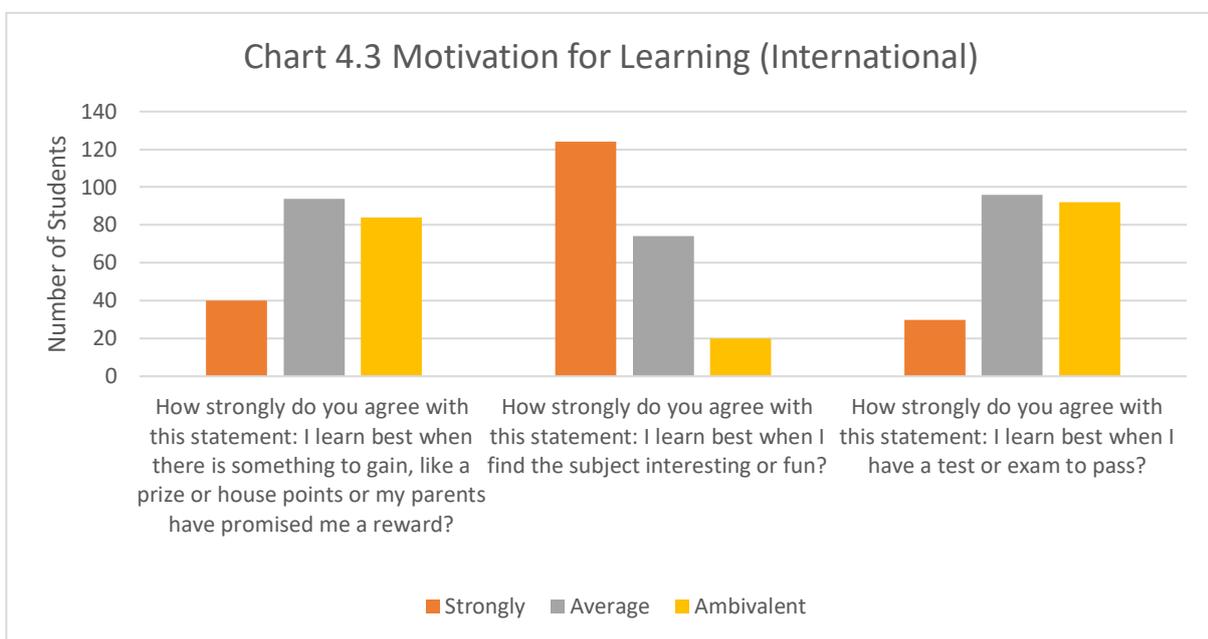
differences, bearing in mind the similarities between the two schools. For a start learning English Language takes precedence over academic outcomes, with over 61% of students rating this as high or highest importance, although again it was the category with the highest number of students who ranked it as of lowest importance (11 students). Nor is the importance of academic outcomes relegated to second place but in fact it is pushed further down the scale by the relative importance students put on health and happiness. Does this reflect the differences in academic ability between the two schools, with the international school sample having more highly able and thus you would assume highly academic students? Again, we see that the relative importance of developing a global mindset is the least important, although 47% of national students rated this as high or highest importance compared to only 38% in the international school!

Such differences could indicate that the dominance of a neoliberal mindset is particular to the international school while attitudes amongst national school students suggested a more diverse competition for hearts and minds.

### **4.2.3 Student Motivation**

Students were asked “how strongly they agree’ with the three statements below on a scale of 1 to 10. A score of 9 or 10 was taken as ‘strongly’, 6-8 as Average and 1-5 as Ambivalent. The bar chart is measured in number of students providing a visual indication of strength of response. By motivation I refer to the psychological construct that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors drive goal-orientated behaviours (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

In Chart 4.3 and Chart 4.4, I have used a Rating scale to explore what motivates



students. Motivation through extrinsic factors could be seen as linked to a neoliberal mindset while intrinsic motivation would reflect a more egoistic mindset.

Chart 4.3 shows the degree to which international students say they are motivated by extrinsic factors or by intrinsic factors (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Learning best when there is an immediate reward like a prize or house points or when the learning is fun is considered an intrinsic motivator while learning for a future exam is considered an extrinsic motivator. In Chart 4.3 we can see, quite clearly, while many international students report that they are motivated by extrinsic factors such as the promise of a House point or an upcoming test, mostly students report that they learn best when they find the subject interesting or fun, that is, they are intrinsically motivated. This is

in line with Albrecht et al. (2009) who showed how increasing students' intrinsic motivation did lead to improved attainment. Referring to Chart 4.1 for Q. 11, 12 and 13 the difference between the average and median of Q12, interesting or fun, and the other question responses, would seem to indicate a significant attitude amongst international students.

The significance of these findings is that intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors are more motivational but that intrinsic factors that could be seen as indicative of a neoliberal mindset, that is a focus on immediate rewards is less strong than personal intrinsic motivators, is it fun? This serves to emphasise the importance of student agency (DesRoches, 2011).

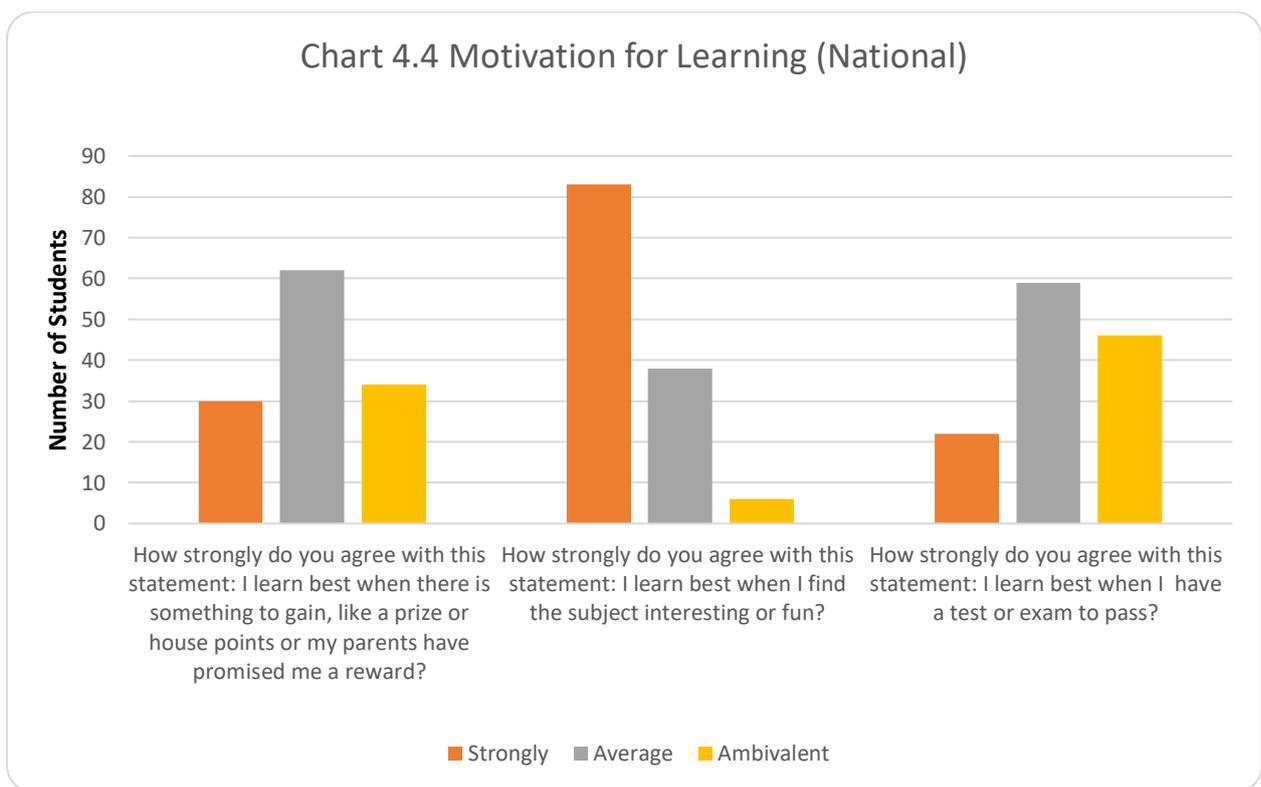


Chart 4.4 shows the degree to which national students say they are motivated by extrinsic factors (rewards and pending exams) or by intrinsic factors (fun and interesting). Results from the national school were very similar with Chart 4.3 showing students from the national school again demonstrating that students report

that they learn best when intrinsically motivated and the difference in average and mean with the other responses shown on Table 4.1 also indicating that this is a significant attitude amongst national students as well.

The significance of these findings is that they appear to show greater strength of student agency in national schools. This could indicate that the greater neoliberal discourse in the international school weakens student agency.

#### **4.2.4. Cultural Awareness**

With Chart 4.5 and 4.6 I have used a Likert scale to explore students' perceptions about the relative importance of learning about different cultures, for which I have used the term 'cultural awareness', with the basis that the more importance students attached to learning about other cultures the more culturally aware they could be said to be (Deardorff, 2009). Students were asked to rank the relative importance to them, from highest to lowest. They could only select one highest and so on. The bar chart is measured in number of students selecting each option, providing a visual indication of strength of response to each option. While in Chart 4.7 and 4.8, I have used a Ratings Scale to continue to explore students' perceptions of the relative importance of education about cultures. Students were asked "how strongly they agree" with the three statements below on a scale of 1 to 10. A score of 9 or 10 was taken as 'strongly', 6-8 as Average and 1-5 as Ambivalent. The bar chart is measured in number of students providing a visual indication of strength of response. The relative importance attached to learning about home and host culture would be indicative of a 'localised cultural identity' while that attached to being part of a global community or learning about other cultures could

be used to consider a 'cosmopolitan identity'. The relative importance attached to learning about Western cultures could be considered indicative of a post-colonial or also a neoliberal mindset, the West being the 'land of opportunity' and Western universities the goal. While learning about different cultures is its own goal in regards developing cultural awareness (Banks and Banks, 2019), doing so in order to be able to adapt and succeed in such a different culture (Deardorff, 2009) is also a motivation for such learning. Again, like Chart 4.5 and 4.6 the relative importance of Malaysia Day and Deepavali day shown in Chart 4.7 and 4.8 can be seen as evidence of a 'localised cultural identity' while the relative importance of international days and international week as evidence of a more cosmopolitan mindset.

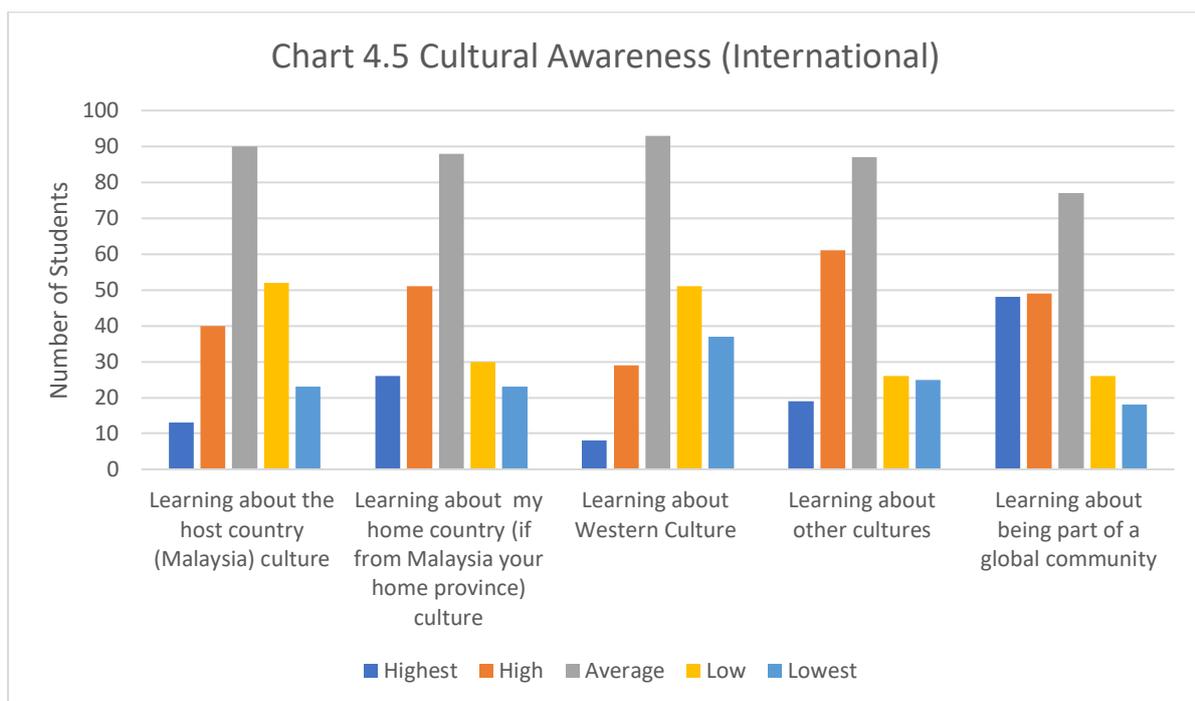


Chart 4.5 shows international students' perception about the relative importance of learning about home and host cultures as opposed to other cultures. In Chart 4.5 what is striking about international students' perceived importance is that most students thought that learning about culture, whether home or other, was only of average importance, something that could be considered to also reflect the student perception in Chart 4.1 and 4.2 that developing a global mindset as opposed

to academic success, health and happiness was less important. However, in the above Chart it is interesting to note that where students did identify that learning about culture was important then it was learning about being part of a global community or about other cultures, though not specifically Western culture. 44% of students felt learning about being part of a global community was high or the highest importance and 37% felt learning about other cultures was high or of highest importance. While the number of students (97) that thought that learning about a global community was of high or the highest importance it is still less than half. A significant minority of students (35%) reported feeling that learning about their home country was of high or the highest importance. Students may not have found it easy to distinguish between learning about host and learning about home country when the majority of students (70%) were Malaysian and for whom the host and home country were the same, so this percentage that feel learning about their home country is probably higher.

The significance of this finding is that it would indicate that a cosmopolitan discourse is at work alongside that of a localised cultural identity. As the latter is the home or host culture then the strong presence of a cosmopolitan discourse could be seen as something distinct to the international schooling experience.

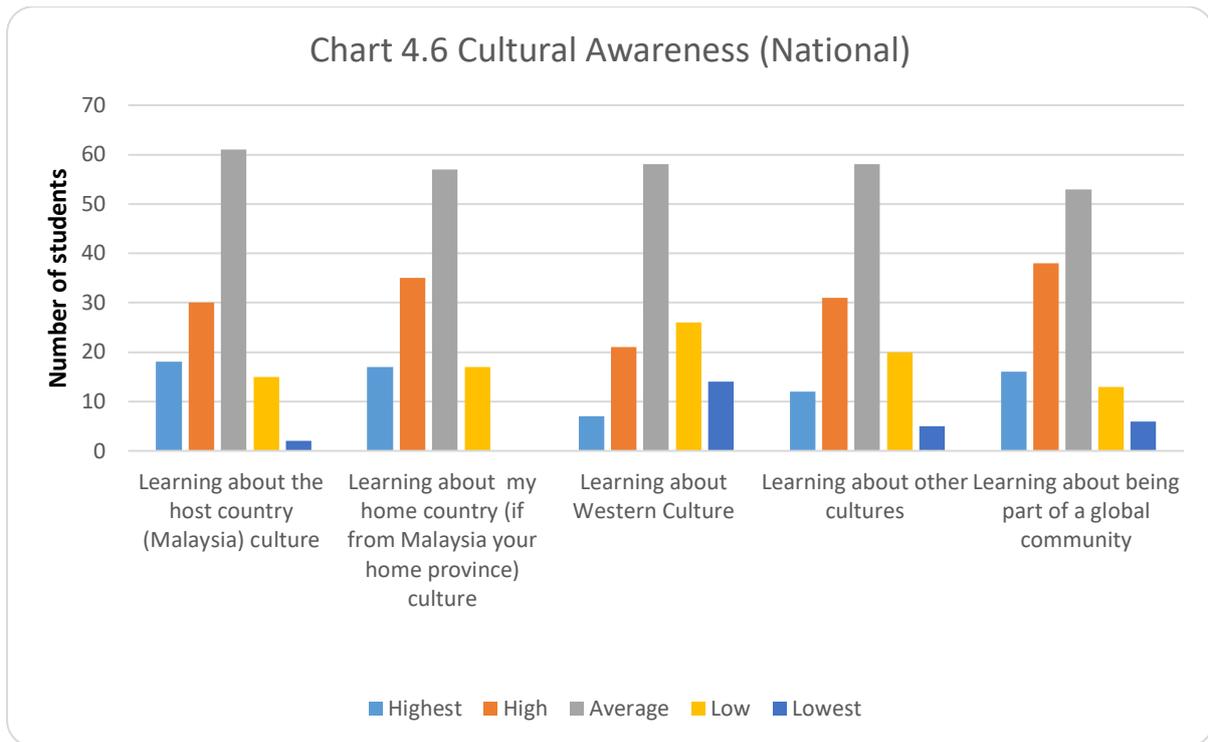


Chart 4.6 shows that national students seem to share a similar perception that learning about cultures is not a priority in school, again reflecting Chart 4.2. Similar to the international students, a significant minority of national students reported seeing learning about being part of a global community/other cultures as important (43% and 35% respectively) again though less than half. A larger minority reported that they thought that learning about their home (41%)/host country (38%) culture was of high/highest importance, probably reflecting the higher percentage of students from a Malaysian background (85% as opposed to 71%). Not surprisingly perhaps the less ‘international’ nature of the national school experience is reflected in the stronger showing of localised cultural identity and while the findings show that cosmopolitan discourse is not unique to the international school it would indicate that the cosmopolitan discourse is stronger in the international school setting.

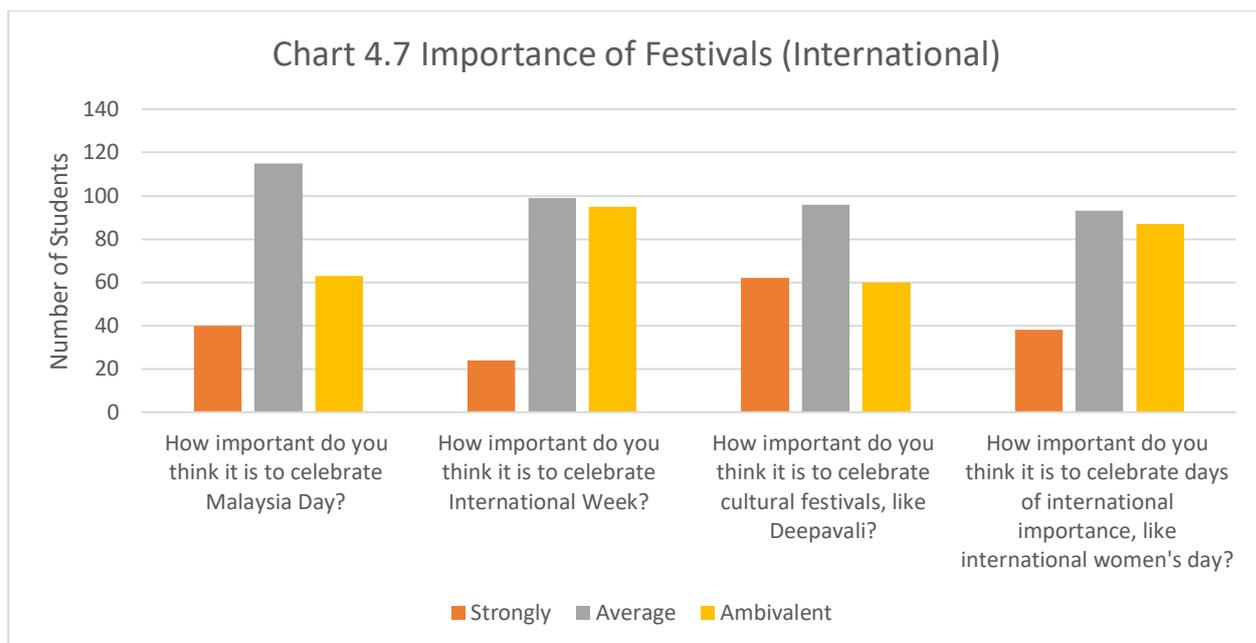


Chart 4.7 shows international students' reported perception about the relative importance of different festivals that are celebrated in the school. The question asked students to compare the relative importance of local cultural festivals, namely Malaysia Day and Deepavali, to international festivals, that is International Day and international days like International Woman's Day. Similarly to Chart 4.5 the celebration of festivals is seen as only of average importance by most international students, reflected by a consistent median of 6 –7 on these 4 questions for which see Table 1, although cultural festivals like Deepavali are seen as more important than both national and international festivals. Noticeably the celebration of both International Week and international days is seen as the least important aspect of the festivals programme, which is in contrast to Chart 4.5 where learning about being part of a global community was seen by a significant minority as important, perhaps reflecting the subtle difference between learning about and celebrating.

The significance of these findings is that it again indicates the competition between local cultural discourse and the cosmopolitan discourse, indicating here that the local cultural discourse seems to be more influential.

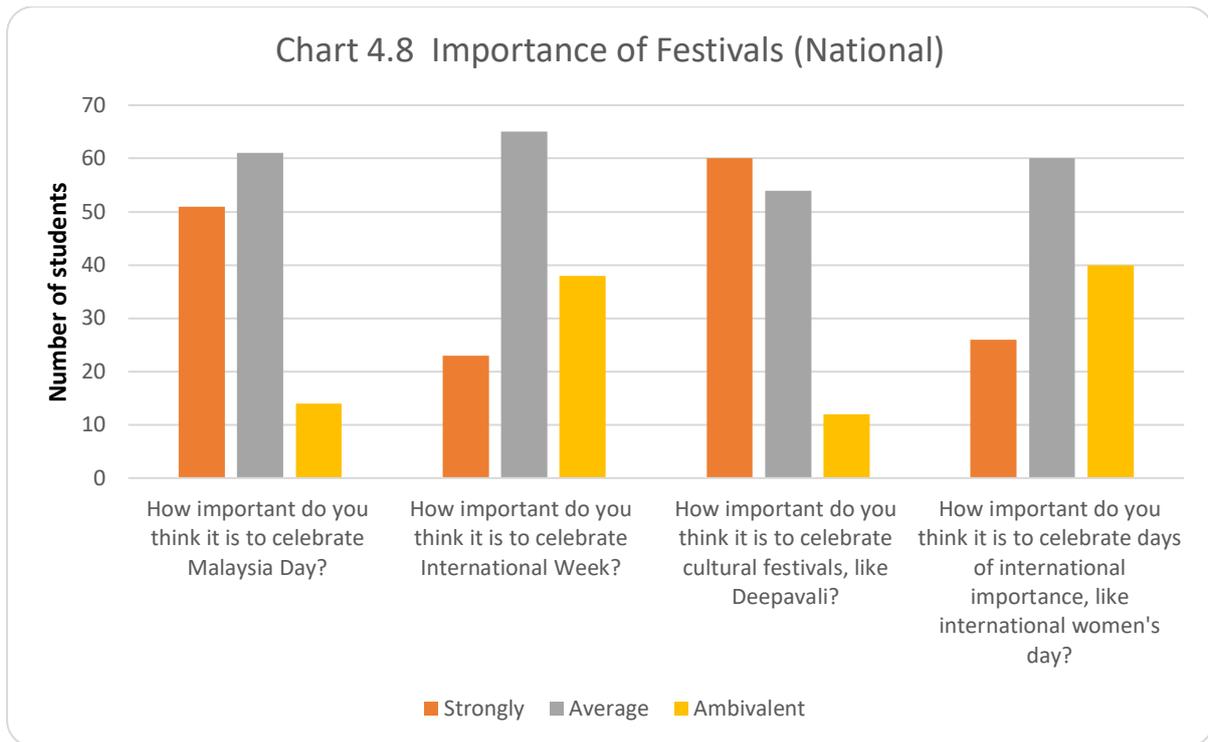


Chart 4.8 shows national students' reported perception about the relative importance of different cultural events that are celebrated in the school. Again, like in the international school, the festivals are, for the most part, considered of average importance, 6-8 on the median scale in Table 1. However, it is noticeable that, while the trend in terms of those festivals which students feel strongly about their importance is the same, Deepavali, followed by Malaysia Day, followed by international days, followed by International Week, the relative importance given to Deepavali and Malaysia Day is far higher in the national school, also seen in a higher median of 8, see Table 1. again, probably reflecting the difference noted in Table 1 in terms of percentage of Malaysia students in the two schools. While still less than half, 48% of national students reported that they regard the Deepavali festival celebrating as very important, even more so than Malaysia day, even though only 6% of the students in the national school are of a cultural background for whom Deepavali could be considered of special significance, compared to 3% in the international schools. This does raise the interesting possibility that this attitude may

reflect the teacher demographics in the national school and thus indicative of identity formation by teachers, though this would need to be explored further.

The significance for the study of these findings is that, like Chart 4.6 above, both the fact that competing discourses of local cultural and cosmopolitan are at work in the national school just as in the international school but also that the cosmopolitan discourse is weaker, again indicating that the cosmopolitan discourse may be more dominant in the international school setting.

#### **4.2.5 *Teacher Characteristics***

Charts 4.9 and 4.10 show the relative importance the students reported attaching to selected teacher characteristics. Again, students are asked to rank according to a Likert scale. A concern about teachers' qualifications could be linked to concern about academic results and thus more indicative of a neoliberal mindset, while preference for Western trained or internationally experienced teachers would be more indicative of a cosmopolitan and/or post-colonial mindset and previous experience in national schools more indicative of a localised cultural Identity. Speaking English as a native would be important in a range of mind-sets, neoliberal, cosmopolitan and post-colonial.

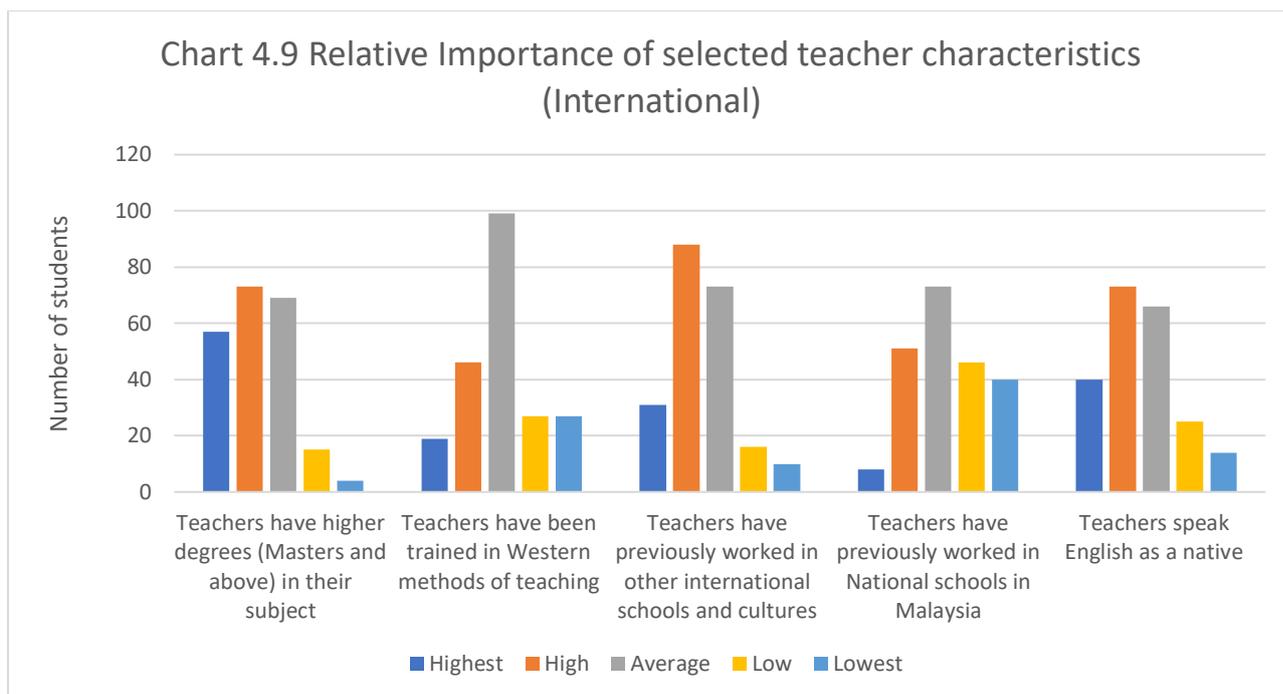


Chart 4.9 shows the relative importance the students reported they attached to the selected teacher characteristics by international students. The strongest importance is attached to qualifications, 59% of international students rated this as of the highest or high importance, probably linked to the focus on achieving the best academic results in Chart 4.1. Again, as seen previously in Chart 4.1, the perceived importance of the English language, in this case shown through the relative importance attached to teachers speaking English as a native, can be seen. 52% of international students ranked this as highest or high. Previous experience in an international school is also perceived as relatively important to 54% of international students. Interestingly though only 30% felt that being trained in Western teaching methods was important. Could this be because of the local acceptance of traditional teaching methods as effective? This would seem to contrast with the findings in Chart 4.4 that students learnt better when they found the learning fun and interesting though it would require an assumption that Western teaching methods were more engaging due to their interaction and student-centred approaches, a case made by Dineen and Niu (2008) study of the effectiveness of Western teaching methods in China, which showed high

levels of engagement, enjoyment and motivation amongst Chinese students exposed to Western teaching methods. Only a small minority (17%) of the student's surveyed felt previous national school experience was important.

The significance of such results for the study was that it again, as Chart 4.1, indicated the importance of higher qualifications and marketable skills, both indicative of a neoliberal mindset, over cosmopolitan, local cultural and post-colonial influences. While the relative importance given to learning English language could also be seen as indicative of an egoistic mindset as well as the neoliberal value of individual choice, the value placed on higher qualifications is reflective of neoliberal values if we consider such as evidence of individual competition.

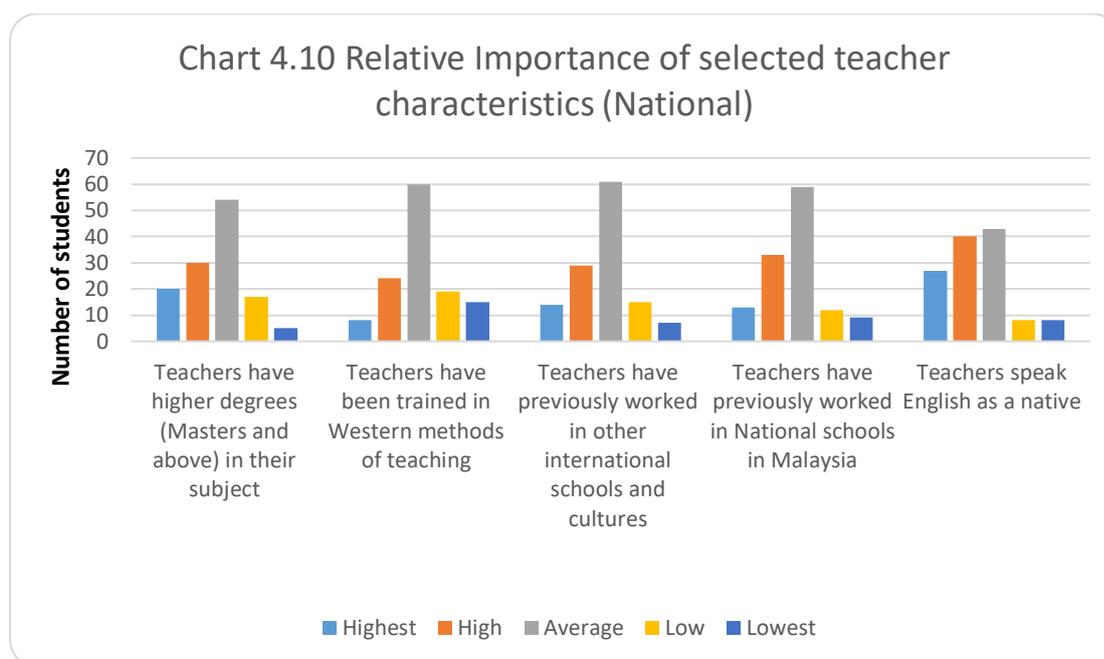


Chart 4.10 shows the relative importance students reported attaching to the selected teacher characteristics by national students. Immediately one is struck by the view that national students seem less concerned about specific teacher characteristics with all categories being seen as of average importance by most students. Only English language is perceived as high or of highest importance by more than half the students (54%), reflecting the importance attached to learning the

English language in Chart 4.2. An interesting statistic considering that national teachers are not from what would normally be considered native English-speaking backgrounds though this may reflect more what national students consider a high level of English amongst national teachers and, as well, the demographic data which shows most students consider English as their home language/mother tongue. Perhaps not surprisingly previous experience in a national school is perceived as more important than previous international experience. Training in Western methods of teaching is seen as the least relevant. The juxtaposition of teaching methods between those typically demonstrated by local teachers which could be described as predominately 'chalk and talk' and that typically demonstrated by Western or Western trained teachers with more of a focus on student-centred learning experienced by international students each school day puts them in a better position to make a comparable judgement while national school students' awareness of this distinction would be more questionable.

Again, both the similarities and differences with the international school findings are of significance. The relative importance of both qualifications and English language indicate that a neoliberal discourse is at work in the national school and thus neoliberalism is not particular to the international school. However, the difference, once again, is how no one discourse seems to be dominant in the national school compared to the international school, indicating while both international and national students experience competing discourses, certain discourses are stronger in the international school. So far we have suggested that both the neoliberal and the cosmopolitan discourse is stronger in the international school.

#### **4.2.6 Learning Goals**

Charts 4.11, 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14 show the relative importance students reported attaching to various selected Learning Goals. Again, a Likert scale has been used with students asked to rank the relative importance of each statement. A focus on career related goals can be seen as indicative of a neoliberal mindset, perhaps alongside a focus on STEM subjects which are seen as closely linked to modern careers, although the perspective of what a modern career is, is changing. A focus more on developing personal skills or learning languages can be seen both as indicative of a cosmopolitan mindset but also an egoistic focus while learning about culture may be more linked to a localised cultural identity. Charts 4.11 and 4.12 help to differentiate this further by comparing the relative importance to students as reported of developing personal skills specifically to help with cooperating with people from other countries as compared to preparing you for university. While a student's subject preferences will clearly affect what they consider important, nevertheless, if a school bias in regards what is considered important can be seen this can be considered evidence of a potential dominant discourse. The second set of charts moves away from subject choices to provide another way of testing the same preferences.

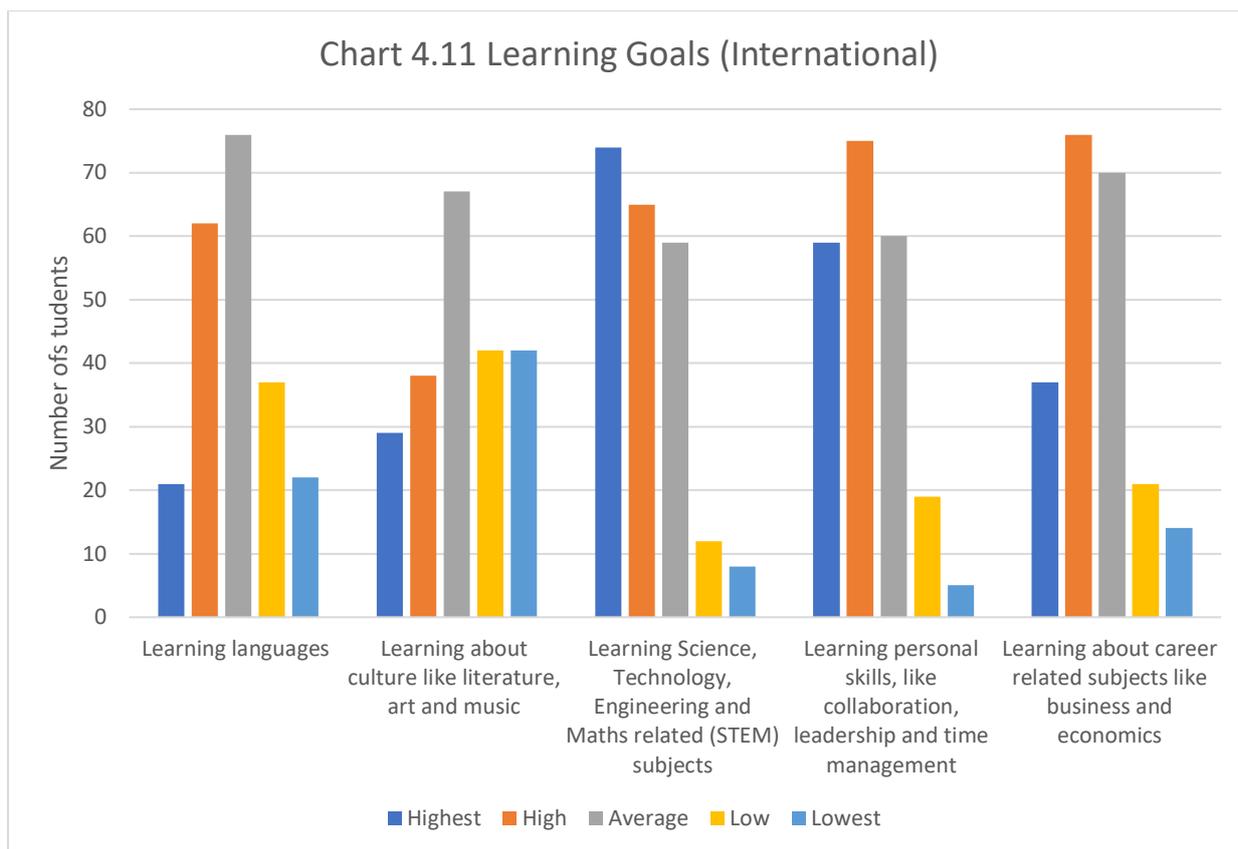


Chart 4.11 shows the perceived importance of the selected different learning goals amongst international students as reported by students. There is clearly an emphasis on the importance of STEM subjects with 34% of students identifying this as of the highest importance and a clear majority (63.5 %) of international students seeing this as either the highest or of high importance. This probably reflects a cultural bias towards these subjects and related careers, the school itself does not particularly promote itself as a STEM school. Business and Economics also score highly with a similar clear majority (64%) of students reporting seeing such learning goals as the high or the highest priority – though proportionately less see it as the highest priority, probably reflecting that careers are still some years off or that it reflects the higher ratio of senior students who follow STEM rather than Commerce based courses. The importance of developing personal skills is not far behind with again a clear majority (61%) of international students reporting regarding this of high or the highest importance and it is the second most identified as of the highest

importance after STEM. The shift away from just a focus on career related subjects to the need for a range of soft skills may be indicative of a more cosmopolitan identity or an understanding of the need for future-proof skills in a constantly changing job market. While learning languages remains important to many students it is only to a minority (38%), and it has the second highest number of lowest importance results reported by students. Learning about culture is clearly seen, according to the students' reported data, as the least important of the Learning Goals, although it remains important to a significant minority of international students (30.5%). Overall, this chart would seem to indicate a dominant focus on industry and career related learning over cultural education, along with a healthy dose of personal development, in the international school, and therefore significant as thus the strongest indication yet of a neoliberal mindset. The international school as a gateway to future success in the world of work can be seen as central to the neoliberal philosophy of the purpose of education as "schools focus on teaching technical skills and knowledge necessary for the achievement of the economic purpose of education" (Edeji, 2024).

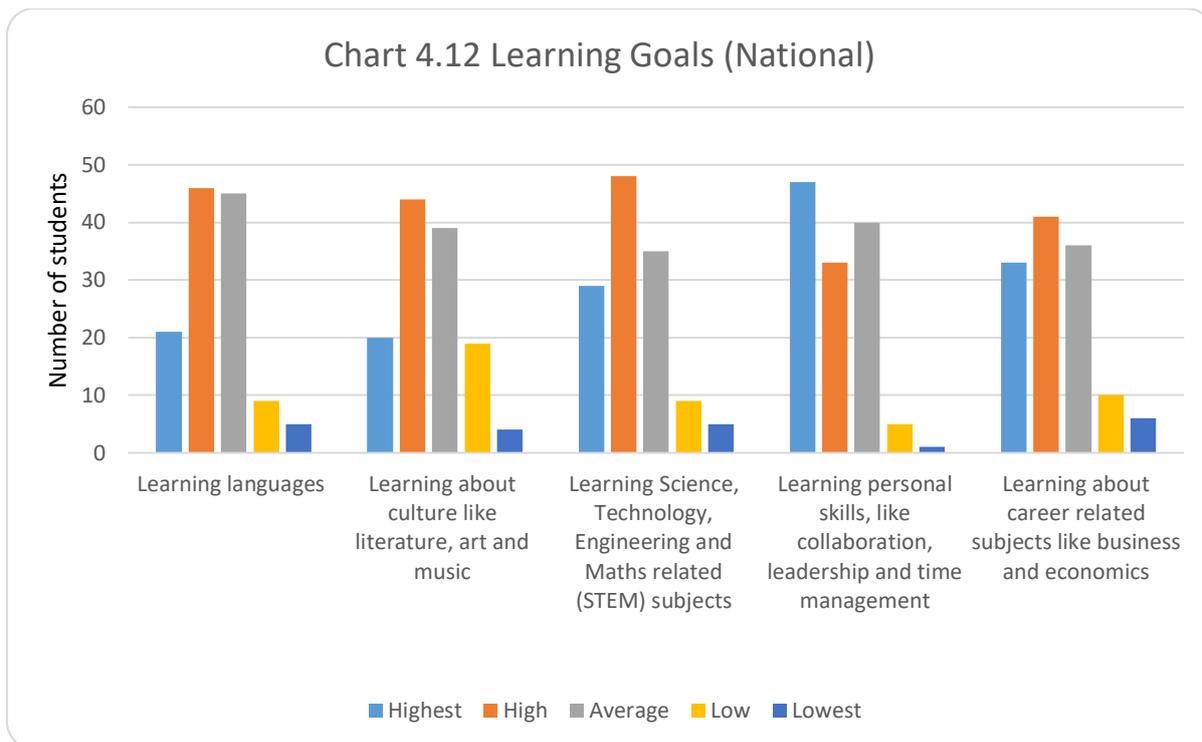


Chart 4.12 shows the perceived importance of the selected different learning goals amongst national students as reported by the students. Interestingly, while learning STEM subjects remains important it is now only third in terms of number of students who saw it as of the highest importance, although, like the international school, it is important to a clear majority (61 %) according to the reported data. Notably the national school does more to promote STEM education through the existence of STEM specific facilities (Makerspace) STEM programmes and an emphasis on the Science Stream in Secondary school as the more prestigious, through requiring higher entry requirements. Business and Economics also score highly with a similar clear majority (59%) of national students reported seeing such learning goals as the high or the highest priority – though more see it as the highest priority, second overall. A key difference to the international school data is that developing personal skills is reported as being of the highest importance to 37% of the students and has the highest majority (63.5%) of students who report regarding this of high or the highest importance. Another key difference is that learning about

culture and learning about languages do not have the same high levels of low importance attached to them as in the international school. Overall, this chart would seem to indicate a lack of a dominant focus in the national school, other than on personal development, but in doing so can be seen to support the view from Chart 4.11 that the international school may developing more of a neoliberal mindset amongst its students than the national school.

Again, significantly, the national school student responses show less of a dominant student attitude, implying a lack of a dominant discourse, and while importance is still given to economic purposes that these do not dominate would again suggest a significant difference between national and international school, that is the strength of the neoliberal discourse in the latter.

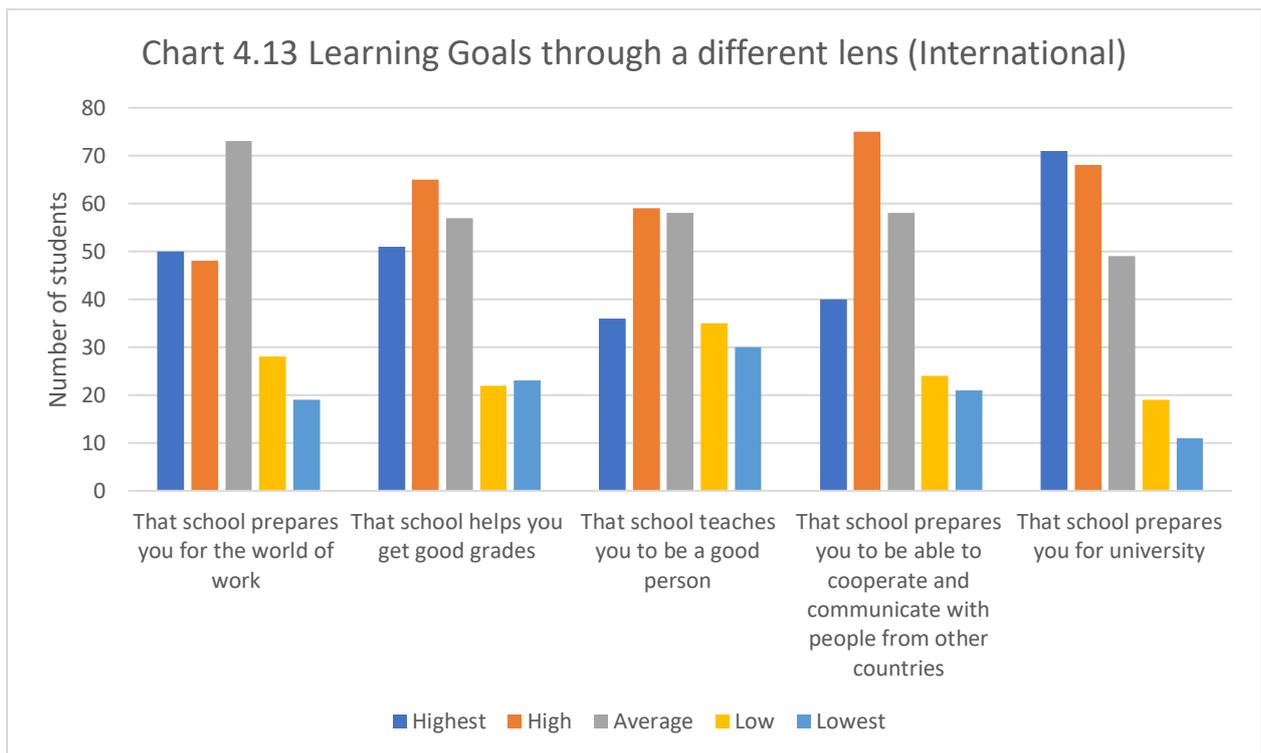


Chart 4.13 shows the relative importance to learning goals as reported by international students, using a different lens to Chart 4.11. When the questions are asked this way the importance of the school preparing students for university becomes dominant, with 32.4 % of students reporting seeing this as of the highest

importance, which is also the highest number by some distance amongst all the categories with the highest clear majority (63.5%) of international students identifying this learning goal as of the highest or high importance. This probably reflects the students focus on preferred subjects in Chart 4.11 but is also indicative of a shorter term/immediate focus with the longer-term goal of preparing for the world of work slipping to 45%. in terms of importance compared to 64% in Chart 4.11 where the question was framed in terms of Commerce courses. When considering the relative importance of short-term goals, to try and differentiate further, a lower figure of 53% of international students report seeing the short-term goal of exam grades as more important, so there is more of a focus in students minds on preparation for university and thus what they want to do on the next stage of their educational journey than just getting the best exam grades. This could be indicative of a more egoistic rather than neoliberal mindset. Just as in Chart 4.11. The development of personal skills is reported as important as more academic goals (52.5% of international students see it as important). It is also interesting to note that personal values, while apparently important to a healthy minority (43.4%) of students also has the highest levels of unimportance attached to it with 30% of international students seeing such as of low or the lowest importance. Chart 4.13 would appear to qualify the findings from Chart 4.11, emphasising more students' personal choices, subject preferences and focus on their short-term future rather than a career/world of work focus or solely concerned about exam results. This again would suggest an egoistic rather than a neoliberal mindset.

This is a significant finding as it raises again the overlap between neoliberal philosophy and student agency, with both drawing upon the importance of individual choice. The key difference is that the former seeks to prepare students to “enter a neoliberal world of hyper-functionality that ultimately privileges work and economy”

(Baltodana, 2012, p4) while the latter emphasises student choices for the betterment and enjoyment off their own life. What we can thus choose to interpret here is that student agency temporises the influence of a neoliberal discourse to put their own interests first.

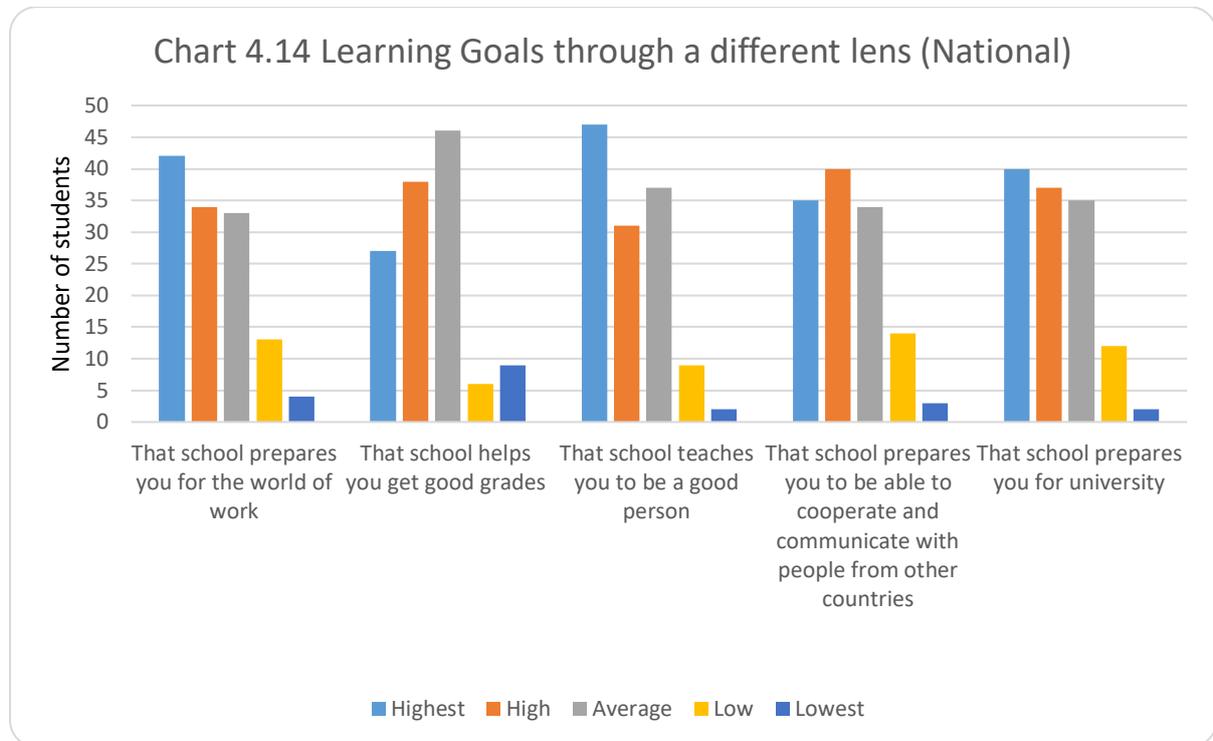


Chart 4.14 shows the relative importance attached to learning goals by national students, using a different lens to Chart 4.12. Chart 4.12 suggested a lack of a dominant focus in the national school, and this is reinforced by these results which see roughly equal importance give to both personal development and career preparation, compare the 61% who reported feeling preparation for university was important to 59.5% who reported feeling developing cosmopolitan skills (was and 60% who reported feeling preparation for the future world of work was. While still important to most national students with 51.5% reporting that the immediate goal orientated focus of getting good grades has the lowest number of students who see it as important and lowest number of students who see it as of highest importance.

The difference between the national and international school is perhaps most sharply seen in the contrast between the 62% of national students who reported seeing learning to be a good person as important compared to the 43.4% in the international school. This only adds to the perception of the national school's focus on the student's individual identity rather than any one dominant discourse. Again, even though Chart 4.11. qualifies the perspective of the international school as having a dominant neoliberal discourse, these results seem to show a significant difference between the national and international school that could be due to a dominant discourse within the international school. It could indicate that student agency is less strong in the international school than the national school which would provide a causal factor for the more dominant neoliberalism. It could also indicate that the neoliberal discourse was weaker in the national school resulting in a focus on learning to be a good person amongst students rather than the "cluster of beliefs" (Bettache et al., 2020) that focused on self-advancement, the privilege of the individual and "narcissistic identities" (McDonald, 2007).

#### **4.2.7 Student Perceptions of Self**

The following data comes from the second main section of the questionnaire which shifted to a focus on students' future aspirations and, in doing so, gives an insight into the sense of Self the students have developed and how they use that to frame their future aspirations. Note this could be quite different to their identity at school as it is about them framing a future identity.

The questions gave students a range of options from which they could only select one that 'best described them'. The number of students selecting each option was then represented on the graph providing a visual indication of what students chose to indicate as their self-identity.

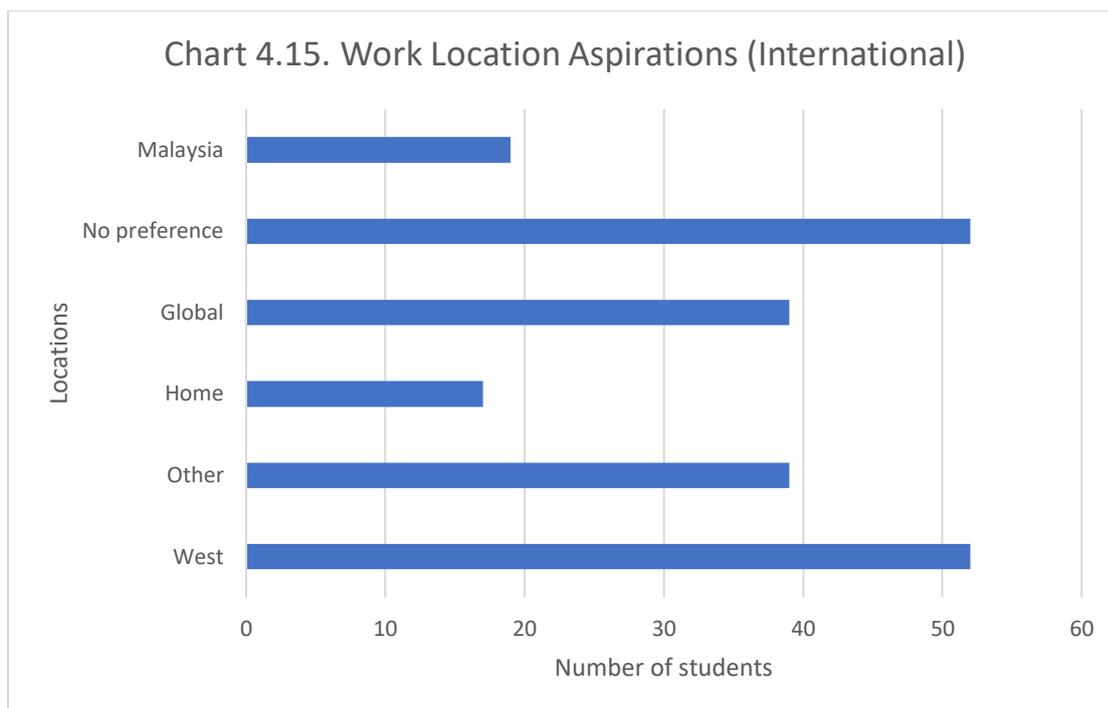


Chart 4.15 shows the preference reported by international students in regards where they want to work in the future. There is clearly a very strong preference to work elsewhere other than Malaysia or their Home country, noting again that for the majority of students this is the same. The majority of students (59%) expressed a preference to work elsewhere or go international, this may be the outcome of an international education and global aspirations, or it may reflect the socioeconomic status of the international school parents and their capacity to invest in a more expensive international education and thus more expensive international university destination, or a combination of both.

While 52 students expressed a preference for working in the West just as many said they didn't mind where they worked in the future and when the 'no preferences' are added to the 'go international' then 83% of students reported seeing themselves as working or possibly working elsewhere, the strongest indicator yet of a cosmopolitan mindset and more so than that of a neoliberal as most students did not mind where they worked as long as it was elsewhere. This would also be strong evidence against a localised cultural identity in the international school. In essence

while the international school is serving the function of preparing students for the world of work where that world of work will be, or at least aspire to be, is affected by other factors, particularly student agency, judging by the range of responses. The alternative interpretation is that international students seek to join a global workforce indicative of the dominance of the neoliberal mindset.

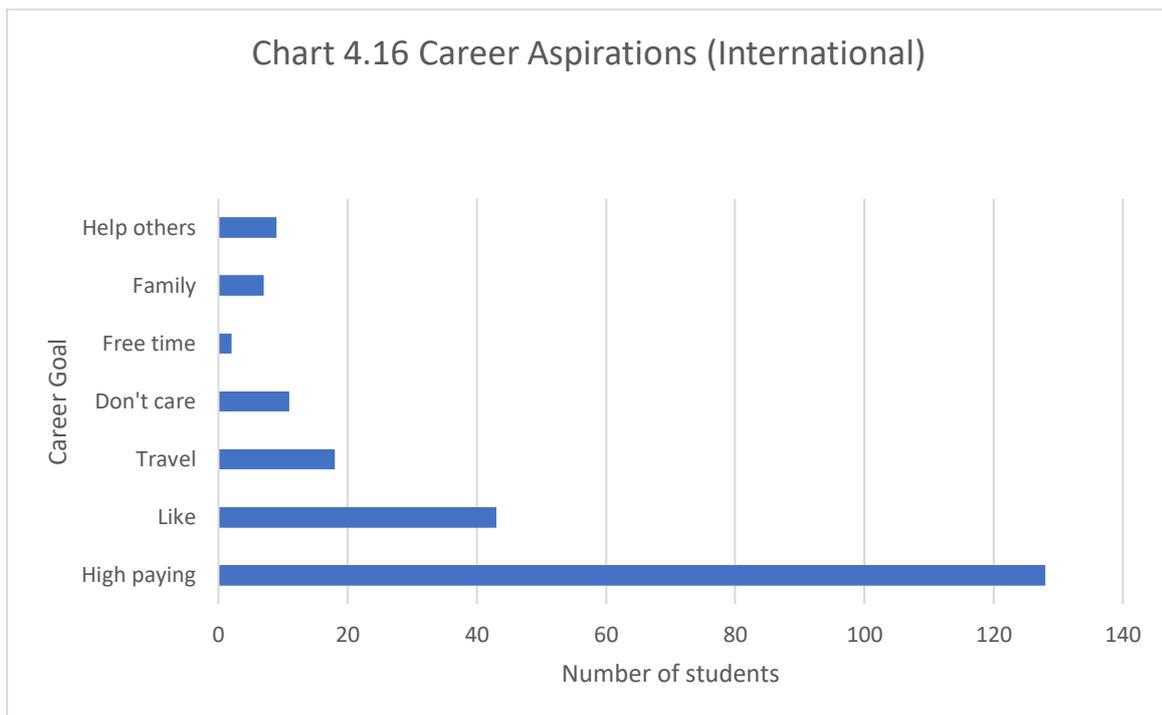


Chart 4.16 shows the reported preferences of international students in regards their career aspirations. The standout statistic is that 58% focused on a high paying career over other possible preferences. When this data is put alongside Chart 4.15, we can, perhaps, see the emergence of a trend of wanting to work elsewhere and wanting a high paying job, in which case the reason for wanting to work elsewhere could possibly be less to do with a cosmopolitan mindset and more a neoliberal mindset. However, this would assume that the two were related in international students' perceptions and further research would be needed to identify a link between high paying salaries and working elsewhere. The second preference was for a job they liked even though the pay was average, though at less than 20%

this is significantly lower. The significance of these findings is that it provides evidence of the existence of a very strong neoliberal discourse with its pursuit of economic success, “what students should learn, and the value of education is relative to their individual prospects for future earnings” (Hastings, 2019).

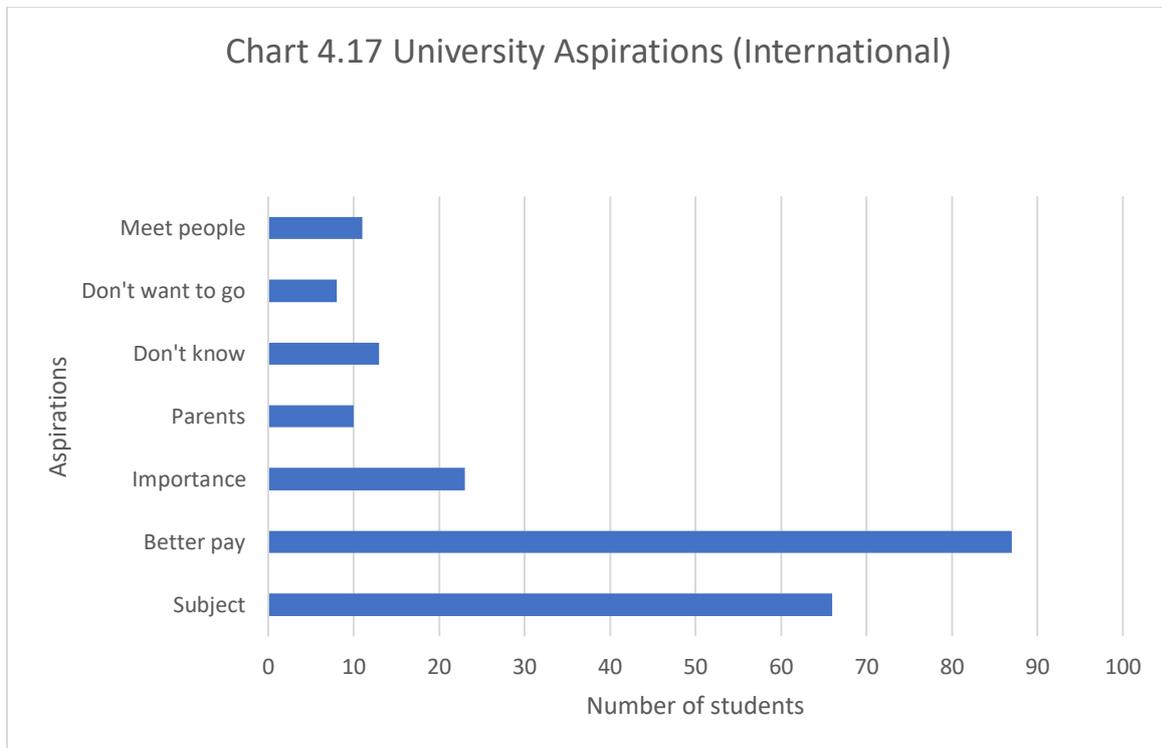


Chart 4.17 shows the preference reported by international students in regards their university aspirations. Again, the importance of a better paying job stands out, although this has dropped to 40% of students with the personal interest in a subject (30%) taking a reasonably close second place. Is this difference with Chart 4.16 further indication that the student's perception of their self-identity in their own minds will shift from the current identity they hold in school to a future identity? Research indicates that university is a key part of the transition from adolescence to adult identity for international students (Waterman, 1982; Pollock, 1997; Benson and Furstenberg 2006). This is significant as once again it shows that the scene is one of competing discourses, with individual choice and the egoistic mindset counterbalancing neoliberal aspirations and further it serves as a reminder that the

social construction of the student's identity is not yet complete or predetermined by their schooling experience.

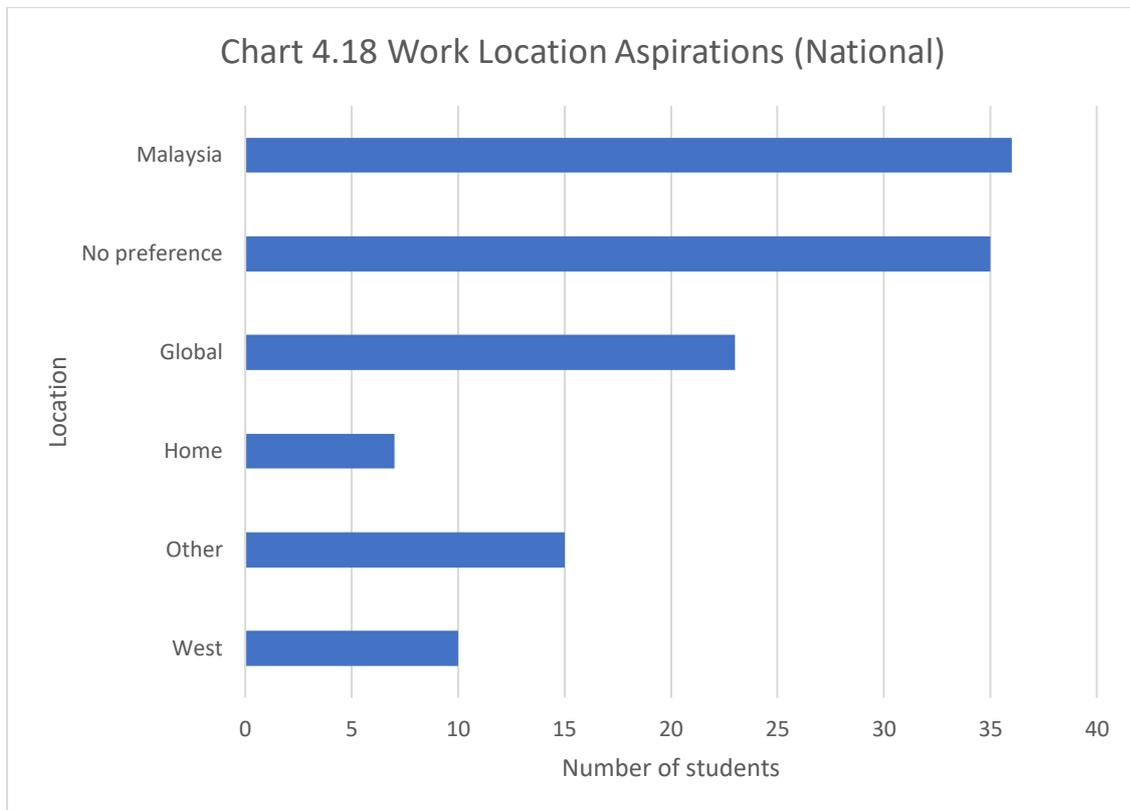


Chart 4.18 shows the preference reported by national students in regards where they want to work in the future. The difference to the preferences of international students in Chart 4.15 is marked. Here there is a much stronger aspiration to remain in Malaysia, although this is only held by 28.5% of the students and almost the same number of students (28%) have reported no preference with 18% having a preference for working globally. The data reinforces the 'localised cultural identity' in the national school that has been seen in the data earlier in Chart 4.6 and 4.8 while also supporting the trend in the data that there is no one dominant discourse in the national school. The significance of such findings is in the difference it indicates between national and international schooling experiences, that the latter does create a different mindset that is further from the local cultural identity of the students' home experience.

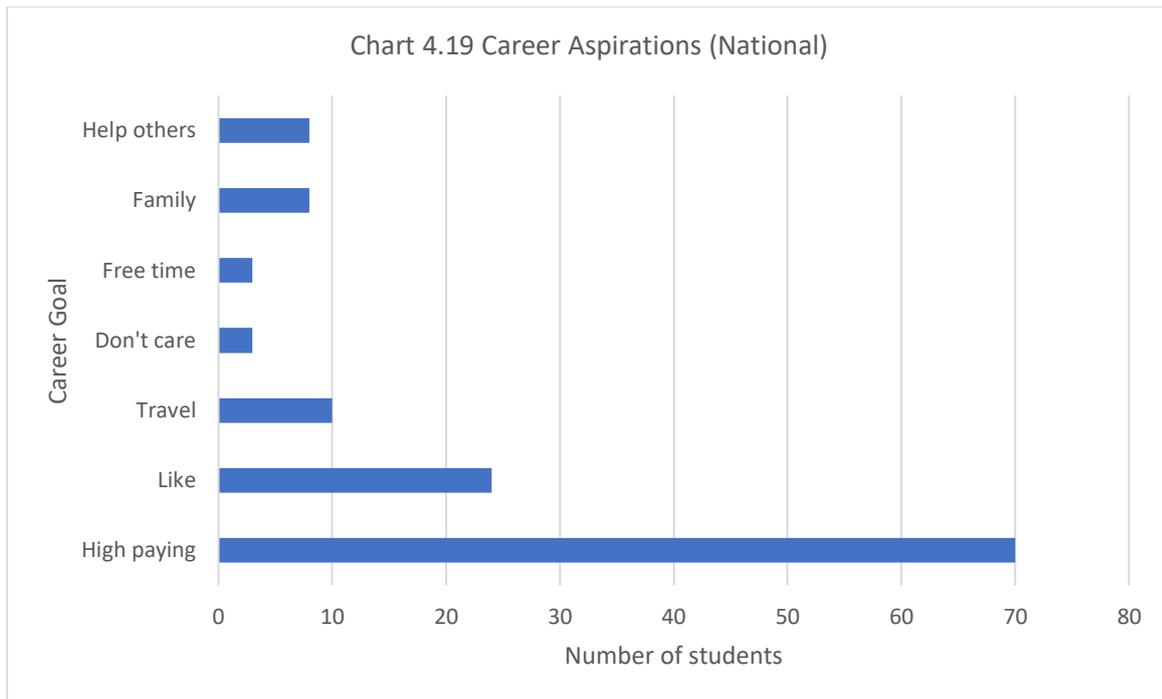


Chart 4.19 shows the reported preferences of national students in regards their career aspirations. Again, the standout statistic is that they report sharing the same preference for a high-paying job as did the international students, with 55.5% expressing this preference, very similar to the 58% in the international school. Again, a preference for a job they liked even though the pay was average was the second most reported preference though at 19% is significantly lower. How does this align with Chart 4.18? This could show that in the students' perception there is no clash between staying in Malaysia to work and being able to get a high paying job. Is this indicative of elements of a localised cultural identity and a neoliberal identity coming together in a composite identity (Pearce, 2011; Sears, 2011) or different students developing different identities (Fitzsimons, 2019)? Again, significantly, these findings remind us that neoliberalism is not unique to international schooling.

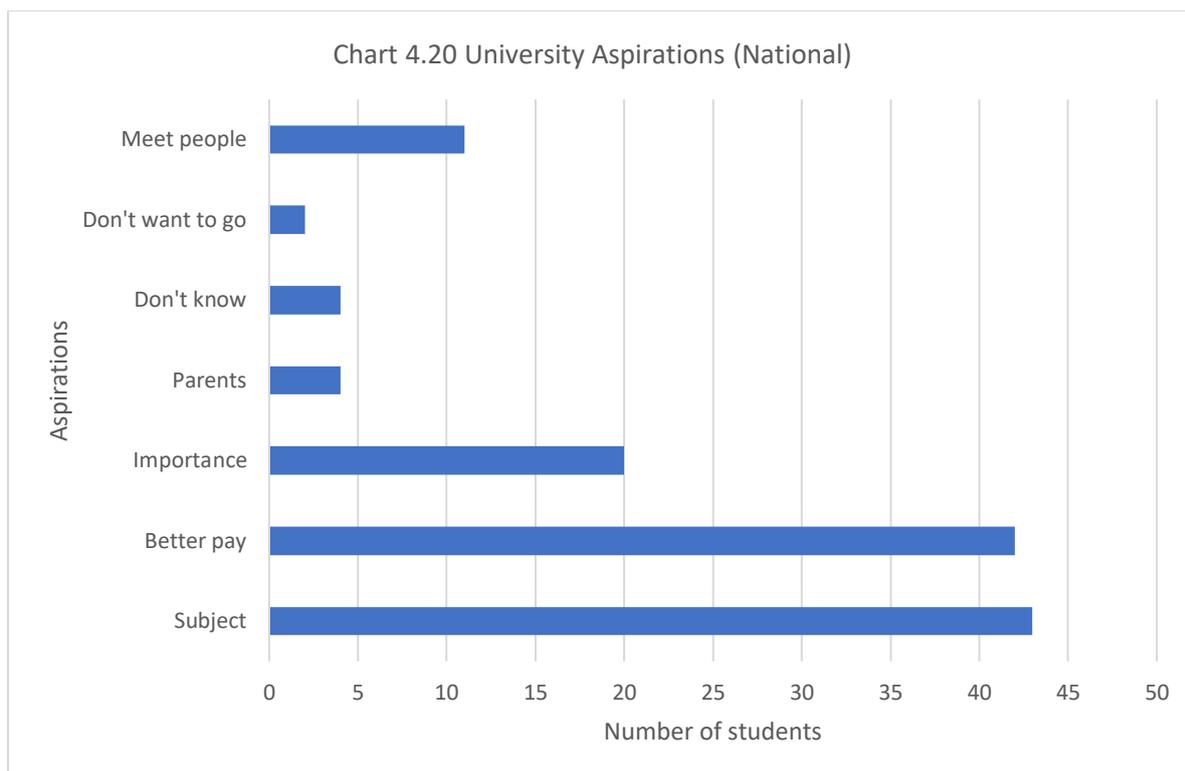


Chart 4.20 shows the reported preference for national students in regards their university aspirations. The similarity with the international school shown in Chart 4.17 is clear with the top three being again Better pay, Subject and importance of the job. However, in the national school the preference to focus on their subject is slightly stronger than that of better pay. The suggestion made above was that such could indicate the transition from adolescence to adulthood and, if so, could suggest that this transition may be slower amongst national students or, to put it another way, is accelerated in the international school due to a neoliberal discourse around the world of work. Again, we see the relative strength of student agency in the national school in counter-balancing other discourses, perhaps indicating a more unequal competition of discourses in the international school.

### 4.3 *Interim Insights*

Before proceeding on to the statistical analysis to see what, if any, is the statistical significance of any evidence of a dominant discourse in the international

school and the differences in the data between the international and national school, it is worth considering the data above as a whole. There are a number of interim conclusions that emerge:

1. There is no one dominant discourse but rather a picture of competing discourses. While a neoliberal mindset seems stronger in the international school it has to compete with students' egoistic focus on fun and interesting and short-term goals. The influence of a cosmopolitan discourse can still be seen, as well as localised cultural identity, though the latter is weaker in the international school. The emerging picture is one of competing rather than a dominant discourse.
2. Identity seems a more complex less consolidated mix in the international school than the national school. Students of the latter put more stock on learning about cultures, cultural celebrations and moral education with a localized cultural identity emerging. International students put less value on cultural education and more on what could be seen as neoliberal goals, such as a high paying job.
3. Student agency seems to be an important factor with students in both schools demonstrating they have their own priorities.

#### **4.4 Research Findings: Statistical Analysis**

A prerequisite to carrying out a statistical analysis using SPSS was that the categorical data first had to be converted into an Ordinal Scale, which would allow for the ranking of categories. The questions were grouped into 5 categories or mindsets, neoliberalism, cosmopolitan, local culturalized identity, post-colonial and Independent or, as it became defined, egoistic. The rationale behind the grouping of the questions was discussed in Chapter 3 but in short, questions regarding

performativity, and a focus on economic rewards were seen as indicative of neoliberalism while a global awareness and respect for diversity, as well as a sense of responsibility towards the world was seen as characteristic of a cosmopolitan mindset, while questions about the host country influence were seen as evidence of a localised cultural identity and, for the sake of completeness, questions that indicated a Western hegemony were used to measure post-colonial identity. In the course of the study responses that were seen as individualistic or egoistic were identified and this fifth mindset created, although, in the discussions, it will be considered how far that this is another form of neoliberalism and indicative of “individual responsabilisation” (Keddie 2016). In this way each student could be given a score for each mindset and that data was then used for additional statistical tests (see below)

In order to carry out a statistical analysis comparing the international and national an independent t-test was carried out as this allows for a comparison of independent samples, international and national. However, as Table 4.2 shows, the Test of Normality for a number of the data sets were not normally distributed and therefore the t-test was abandoned as a statistical test for this study.

**Table 4.2. T-Test of Normality.**

### Tests of Normality

	StudentType	Shapiro-Wilk	
		df	Sig.
Neoliberalmindset	International Students	217	.129
	National Students	126	.011
Cosmopolitan	International Students	217	<.001
	National Students	126	.074
Local	International Students	217	<.001
	National Students	126	.003
Egoistic	International Students	217	<.001
	National Students	126	.118
Postcolonial	International Students	217	<.001
	National Students	126	.002

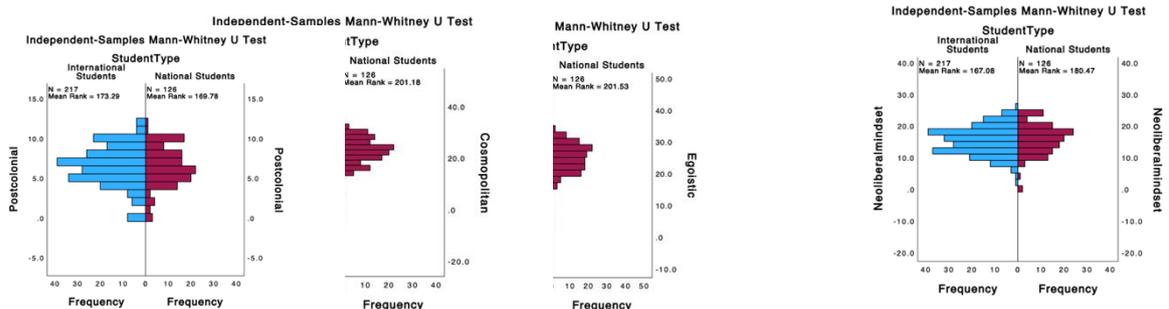
\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

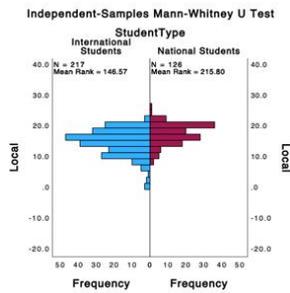
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

### T-Test

Therefore, a non-parametric test was required, as such a test does not require normality of distribution. The Mann-Whitney U Test was selected, as it doesn't require normal distribution and still allows a comparison of the two independent data sets to see whether there is a difference in the impact of the dependent variables on the two groups. The data met the four assumptions of the Mann-Whitney U test, the dependent variable (the mindsets) were continuous data (each student had received a score measured by converting the categorical data into an Ordinal Scale), the independent variable is two categorical independent groups, international and national, there was independence of observations as no participants were in both groups as per the design of the study and, as Table 4.3 shows there was a normality of distribution across the samples. Therefore, an analysis of the data could be carried out using the Mann-Whitney U test.

**Table 4.3: A Comparison of International and National students by mindset.**





#### 4.4.1 Results of the Mann-Whitney test

In interpreting the data from the Mann-Whitney U test the Mean Rank of each data set was compared for each group for each mindset. Where the Mean Rank was notably different, as determined by a test of significance, see below, then it could be taken to indicate a significant difference in the mindset. As we were looking for evidence of a dominant neoliberal mindset amongst students at an international school, by comparing data from both international and national schools we could statistically test if being an international student was significant in developing a different mindset.

**Table 4.4: Results of the Mann-Whitney U test comparing International and National students by mindset.**

## Mann-Whitney Test

		Ranks		
	StudentType	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Neoliberalmindset	International Students	217	167.08	36257.00
	National Students	126	180.47	22739.00
	Total	343		
Cosmopolitan	International Students	217	155.06	33647.50
	National Students	126	201.18	25348.50
	Total	343		
Local	International Students	217	146.57	31805.00
	National Students	126	215.80	27191.00
	Total	343		
Egoistic	International Students	217	154.85	33603.50
	National Students	126	201.53	25392.50
	Total	343		
Postcolonial	International Students	217	173.29	37603.50
	National Students	126	169.78	21392.50
	Total	343		

The significant result above is the column showing the Mean Rank as this allowed a direct comparison between the international and national student responses to the questionnaire. The results were somewhat surprising. First the national student had a higher Mean Rank in all mindsets except post-colonial, the latter perhaps not surprising as there was more Western influence in the international school both in terms of its curriculum and its faculty. Equally surprising was that national students had a notably higher Mean Rank in regards cosmopolitan mindset than international students, even though the latter followed an international curriculum much of which was delivered by expat teachers. The notably higher Mean Rank of national students in regards local cultural identity was expected considering that they followed a national curriculum delivered exclusively by local teachers and considering their demographics showed a stronger Malay influence. Finally, the national students had a notably higher Mean Rank in egoistic mindset but only a small difference between the two groups in regards neoliberal mindset. The significance of such results is that it both reinforces but also questions the interim

conclusions drawn from the descriptive data above. It reinforces the view that there is a competition between discourses for hearts and minds with no one mindset dominating. It also reinforces the view that the identities being formed are complex and more of a mosaic of identities (Pearce, 2011) although this would appear to be more of a completed mosaic and thus a composite identity (Pearce, 2011) in the national school where a combination of the influence of local cultural and cosmopolitan discourse is counterbalanced by student agency through the egoistic mindset as compared to the international school where the competition between discourses appears to be more evenly spread. It does, however, question the interim conclusion that the neoliberal and cosmopolitan discourse are stronger in the international school. Instead, the data suggest that the international student is subject to more competing discourses. As the egoistic mindset will be argued to indicate an individualism that is also characteristic of neoliberal then it would also seem that the reverse claim to the hypothesis is true, that is, that international students are not more likely to have a neoliberal mindset, while retaining the possibility that the neoliberal mindset may be a dominant discourse within schools.

A test of the significance, see Table 4.5 below, shows that the differences in regards cosmopolitan, local and egoistic mindsets between international and national students is significant, as the Asymp Sig is below 0.005, taken as the measure of significance. This would allow for the conclusion that while a localized cultural discourse is stronger in the national than international school, as would be expected, both cosmopolitan and egoistic discourses were also stronger in the national school. In itself indicating that

- a). multiple discourses existed within the schools,
- b). a neoliberal mindset, as defined, was not a dominant discourse in either school but that

c). a neoliberal discourse may be demonstrating itself through the egoistic mindset, although it would still only remain one of and not a dominant discourse and finally

d). that international students did not have a more neoliberal mindset, whichever way you look at it and, therefore, developing a neoliberal mindset is neither a particular feature of nor more dominant in international schools.

However, we must bear in mind that these are self-reported findings. In other words, the difference may also indicate differences in international and national students' perceptions of what was meant by the questions. Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, the responses used to indicate a particular mindset are open to question.

**Table 4.5: Significance of differences in Mean Rank between international and national students.**

<b>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>					
	<b>Neoliberalmind set</b>	<b>Cosmopolitan</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Egoistic</b>	<b>Postcolonial</b>
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	<b>12604.000</b>	<b>9994.500</b>	<b>8152.000</b>	<b>9950.500</b>	<b>13391.500</b>
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	<b>36257.000</b>	<b>33647.500</b>	<b>31805.000</b>	<b>33603.500</b>	<b>21392.500</b>
<b>Z</b>	<b>-1.208</b>	<b>-4.160</b>	<b>-6.261</b>	<b>-4.213</b>	<b>-.318</b>
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>.227</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.750</b>

**a. Grouping Variable: StudentType**

Following the Mann Whitney U test the next step was to analyse the two sets of school data separately to see what was causing the significant differences noted above in Table 4.5, or lack of. The significant differences were those below 0.001, that is, in regards the degree to which students held a cosmopolitan, local or egoistic mindset in the two schools. A series of ANOVA tests to check for the significance of any statistical difference between the two groups was carried out.

#### **4.4.2 Results of the ANOVA tests**

Having identified some significant differences between mindsets of international and national students and thus evidence regarding discourses in the two schools the next step was to see which variables might be causing these results. A series of one-way ANOVA tests were carried out to analyse the significance of different variables.

An ANOVA test was chosen as the data met the criteria for such a test, namely, the dependent variable, the mindset is continuous integral data, it is categorical, there was no relationship between subjects in each sample, it was a random sample, there was a normal distribution, and a homogeneity of variance

The different variables chosen were:

1. Time spent as a student at that school. Research by Erentaité et al., (2018) and Luyckx et al. (2010) both found that student's identity formation was impacted by time spent in a school or college. Luyckx et al.'s research demonstrating how "being in a future-orientated context, ..... could lead normative individuals to adopt a future orientated time perspective." (p245) although Erentaité et al. cautioned that such was dependent on the degree of engagement with the school culture by the student.
2. Cultural background and ethnicity. Research consistently shows that cultural background and ethnicity significantly influences adolescent identity formation. Zhang and Qin (2023) showed that "cultural and ethnic identity plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescent self-identity" (p25).
3. Gender. Sandhu and Tung (2006) study of gender differences in adolescent identity formation showed that "girls are somewhat further along than boys in identity formation", suggesting that significance in regards mindset held might be more easily seen amongst girls as they develop their identity earlier.
4. Socio-Economic background: while it might be assumed that a high socio-economic background would be directly linked to a neoliberal mindset, a study by

Destin et al. (2019) of ninth-grade students in the US showed that “students from higher-SES backgrounds were likely to express less of a fixed mindset than students from lower-SES backgrounds”. In a study where students were predominately from high SES backgrounds this could help explain a lack of a dominant mindset.

#### **4.4.2.1      *Time in the school***

The null hypothesis being tested here was that students who have spent a longer period of time in school are no more likely to demonstrate a particular mindset. If there was a significant correlation ( $<0.05$ ) then this could be considered evidence of dominant discourses within the school affecting student identity formation over time. If there was not a significant correlation then, while it would not disprove the existence of a dominant discourse, it would suggest that discourses held were due to extraneous factors more so than schooling. If a correlation existed between the mindset neoliberalism and time, then this would indicate that a dominant discourse in the school was that of neoliberalism. Students were grouped into 4 groups for this test, those who had joined the school this year, 1-2 years, 3-4 years and 5 years or more and this data was then compared to the Mean of the different mindsets.

#### **Table 4.6: Relationship between time spent in school and mindset amongst international students**

### ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Neoliberal</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>28.311</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9.437</b>	<b>.468</b>	<b>.705</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>4290.749</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>20.144</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4319.060</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Cosmopolitan</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>47.104</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15.701</b>	<b>.359</b>	<b>.783</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>9312.149</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>43.719</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9359.253</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Local</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>124.776</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>41.592</b>	<b>2.385</b>	<b>.070</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>3715.059</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>17.442</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3839.834</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Egoistic</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>142.285</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>47.428</b>	<b>2.312</b>	<b>.077</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>4369.245</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>20.513</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4511.530</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Postcolonial</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>7.707</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.569</b>	<b>.386</b>	<b>.763</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>1416.542</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>6.650</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1424.249</b>	<b>216</b>			

The data in Table 4.6 shows that there was no statistical significance of time spent in school and any mindset, remembering that a Sig. score of <0.05 was needed to indicate significance, thus indicating that there was no significant impact on the mindset of students related to their time spent in school and thus implying that the school was not changing the mindset held over time. It does not support the claim of a dominant discourse amongst students in an international school as time spent in such a school does not appear to have significantly impacted on the students' mindset. We might be tempted to consider that the Sig of 0.07 and 0.077 for local and egoistic mindsets could indicate a possible relationship and that students who had spent longer in the international school developed a local and egoistic mindset, but the data used is not sufficient to prove that is the case. Evidence from the national school, see Table 4.7 below, further demonstrates that there is no significant relationship between time spent in school and any specific mindset.

**Table 4.7: Relationship between time spent in school and mindset amongst national students**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Neoliberal	Between Groups	30.277	3	10.092	.441	.724
	Within Groups	2791.024	122	22.877		
	Total	2821.302	125			
Cosmopolitan	Between Groups	13.473	3	4.491	.176	.912
	Within Groups	3107.385	122	25.470		
	Total	3120.857	125			
Local	Between Groups	9.838	3	3.279	.278	.841
	Within Groups	1437.821	122	11.785		
	Total	1447.659	125			
Egoistic	Between Groups	46.942	3	15.647	.888	.450
	Within Groups	2149.916	122	17.622		
	Total	2196.857	125			
PostColonial	Between Groups	17.246	3	5.749	.921	.433
	Within Groups	761.460	122	6.241		
	Total	778.706	125			

This may indicate that mindsets are determined by factors external to the school or that the dominant discourse in the school, if it does exist, it not effective or that the school's impact is away from any dominant discourse.

The significance of such findings in regards the study is that it reinforces the view that schools are sites of competing discourses but that no one discourse has come to dominate. Instead of a correlation between the time spent in school and any one mindset the reverse appears to be true, a correlation between time spent in school and a mosaic of identities suggesting the competing influence of numerous discourses.

#### **4.4.2.2 Cultural Background**

The null hypothesis being tested here was that there was no correlation between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset. If there was then this would indicate

that it was not the school but factors outside of the school that most affected identity formation. Students were grouped into 7 cultural/ethnic groups for this test, Malaysian, Chinese Malaysian, Indian (or the sub-continent), Other Asian, Mixed Asian (as in with parents from two different Asian countries) Mixed European (one Asia and one European parent) and European/South African for the test.

**Table 4.8: Relationship between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset amongst international students**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Neoliberal	Between Groups	142.095	9	15.788	.780	.635
	Within Groups	4171.863	206	20.252		
	Total	4313.958	215			
Cosmopolitan	Between Groups	589.578	9	65.509	1.554	.131
	Within Groups	8681.236	206	42.142		
	Total	9270.815	215			
Local	Between Groups	433.539	9	48.171	2.927	.003
	Within Groups	3390.442	206	16.458		
	Total	3823.981	215			
Egoistic	Between Groups	207.331	9	23.037	1.103	.362
	Within Groups	4304.003	206	20.893		
	Total	4511.333	215			
Postcolonial	Between Groups	55.044	9	6.116	.922	.507
	Within Groups	1366.951	206	6.636		
	Total	1421.995	215			

The data in Table 4.8 demonstrates that there was no significant relationship between cultural/ethnic background and mindset with one exception, localised cultural Identity, where the Sig. score was .003. This relationship could be expected and provides further evidence that cultural and ethnic background “plays a pivotal role” in shaping adolescent identify formation (Zhang and Qin 2023). It does not, however, support the claim of a dominant neoliberal discourse amongst international students, in fact it suggests the opposite, that a localised cultural identity deriving from a cultural and ethnic background, is dominant and the significance of 0.70 in Table 4.6 above hints at the possibility that such a local culturalized identity may be

reinforced through time spent in school. To test this an ANOVA test was run using the national student data.

**Table 4.9: Relationship between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset amongst national students**

		<b>ANOVA</b>				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Neoliberal</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>216.993</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>36.165</b>	<b>1.653</b>	<b>.139</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>2604.309</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>21.885</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2821.302</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Cosmopolitan</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>127.237</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21.206</b>	<b>.843</b>	<b>.539</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>2993.620</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>25.156</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3120.857</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Local</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>55.184</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9.197</b>	<b>.786</b>	<b>.583</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>1392.474</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>11.701</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1447.659</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Egoistic</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>72.983</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12.164</b>	<b>.682</b>	<b>.665</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>2123.874</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>17.848</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2196.857</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>PostColonial</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>47.698</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.950</b>	<b>1.294</b>	<b>.265</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>731.008</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>6.143</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>778.706</b>	<b>125</b>			

The data in Table 4.9 shows no significant relationship between cultural background, ethnicity and mindset as all Sig. scores are well above 0.05. Bearing in mind the significant difference between the national and international students in regards localised cultural mindset, with national students having a significantly stronger localised cultural identity, see Table 4.4 above, this would seem to indicate that the national school rather than home background did play an important role in shaping such an identity. This is a significant finding as it would seem to indicate a clear difference in purpose and thus discourse between national and international schools. International students who retain a strong local cultural identity do so because of their own ethnic and cultural background. Competing discourses in the

international school could be said to weaken such an identity so that it becomes the weakest element of international students' composite identity (the lowest Mean Rank see table 4.4) while the national school reinforces this identity so that it becomes the strongest element of the composite identity of national students (highest Mean Rank see Table 4.4).

#### 4.4.2.3 Gender

The null hypothesis being tested here was that there was no correlation between gender and mindset held. If this was proven, then it would contradict Sandhu and Tung's 2006 study as it would indicate the impact of schooling on identity formation as being no more significant amongst girls rather than boys. Note no students identified as non-binary.

**Table 4.10: Relationship between Gender and mindset amongst international students**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Neoliberal	Between Groups	34.148	1	34.148	1.713	.192
	Within Groups	4284.912	215	19.930		
	Total	4319.060	216			
Cosmopolitan	Between Groups	.115	1	.115	.003	.959
	Within Groups	9359.139	215	43.531		
	Total	9359.253	216			
Local	Between Groups	1.106	1	1.106	.062	.804
	Within Groups	3838.728	215	17.855		
	Total	3839.834	216			
Egoistic	Between Groups	2.109	1	2.109	.101	.751
	Within Groups	4509.421	215	20.974		
	Total	4511.530	216			
Postcolonial	Between Groups	.620	1	.620	.094	.760
	Within Groups	1423.628	215	6.622		
	Total	1424.249	216			

The data in Table 4.10 above shows there was no significant relationship between Gender and mindset as all Sig. scores are well above 0.05. These results, therefore, contradict the findings in Sandhu and Tung's 2006 study as it does not appear to

show any earlier development of identity amongst girls over boys. The results from the national school, see Table 4.11 below, show the same lack of significant relationship and the difference in Gender distribution (international. 45% Female, 55% Male, national 33% Female 66% Male 1% Non-binary) seems to have had no significant effect on the results. The only significance of these results is that we can discount an external variable, that of Gender, in our consideration of the impact of competing discourses on student identify formation.

**Table 4.11: Relationship between Gender and mindset amongst national students**

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Neoliberal	Between Groups	4.348	2	2.174	.095	.910
	Within Groups	2816.954	123	22.902		
	Total	2821.302	125			
Cosmopolitan	Between Groups	10.719	2	5.359	.212	.809
	Within Groups	3110.138	123	25.286		
	Total	3120.857	125			
Local	Between Groups	9.442	2	4.721	.404	.669
	Within Groups	1438.217	123	11.693		
	Total	1447.659	125			
Egoistic	Between Groups	6.360	2	3.180	.179	.837
	Within Groups	2190.497	123	17.809		
	Total	2196.857	125			
PostColonial	Between Groups	.426	2	.213	.034	.967
	Within Groups	778.280	123	6.327		
	Total	778.706	125			

#### **4.2.2.4 Socioeconomic background**

The null hypothesis being tested here was that students from a particular socioeconomic background are no more likely to demonstrate a particular mindset. If this was disproven it would further support the view that factors external to the school were key in affecting the mindset held by students. Students were grouped into high. middle and low socio-economic status based on parent profession, parent

educational level and students' perception of their status in comparison to their peers.

**Table 4.12: Relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset amongst international students**

		<b>ANOVA</b>				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Neoliberal</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>507.223</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>56.358</b>	<b>3.061</b>	<b>.002</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>3811.837</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>18.415</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4319.060</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Cosmopolitan</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>221.827</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>24.647</b>	<b>.558</b>	<b>.830</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>9137.426</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>44.142</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9359.253</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Local</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>77.118</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8.569</b>	<b>.471</b>	<b>.893</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>3762.716</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>18.177</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3839.834</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Egoistic</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>405.047</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>45.005</b>	<b>2.269</b>	<b>.019</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>4106.483</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>19.838</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4511.530</b>	<b>216</b>			
<b>Postcolonial</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>109.768</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12.196</b>	<b>1.921</b>	<b>.051</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>1314.480</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>6.350</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1424.249</b>	<b>216</b>			

The data in Table 4.12 demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and the mindset of students in regards holding a neoliberal (.002), egoistic mindset (.019) and also, possibly, post-colonial mindset (.051). This would strongly indicate that it is not the school but rather the parents and their socioeconomic background that creates a neoliberal mindset amongst students at the international school and, if anything, as indicated in Table 4.4 international students become less so through their schooling years. This is a significant finding

for the study as adds to the emerging view that the impact of international school experience is to help create multiple identities rather than any one dominant identity, reflecting the many competing discourses at work in creating a mosaic of identities (Pearce 2011).

It is interesting to compare these results to the same variable in the national school, see Table 4.13 below.

**Table 4.13: Relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset amongst national students**

		<b>ANOVA</b>				
		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Neoliberal</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>184.399</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>20.489</b>	<b>.901</b>	<b>.527</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>2636.902</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>22.732</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2821.302</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Cosmopolitan</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>169.852</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18.872</b>	<b>.742</b>	<b>.670</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>2951.005</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>25.440</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3120.857</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Local</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>68.388</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7.599</b>	<b>.639</b>	<b>.762</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>1379.270</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>11.890</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1447.659</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>Egoistic</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>249.845</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>27.761</b>	<b>1.654</b>	<b>.108</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>1947.012</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>16.785</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2196.857</b>	<b>125</b>			
<b>PostColonial</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	<b>40.057</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.451</b>	<b>.699</b>	<b>.709</b>
	<b>Within Groups</b>	<b>738.649</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>6.368</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>778.706</b>	<b>125</b>			

The data in Table 4.13 shows no significant relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset. Could this indicate that the national school experience has been even more successful, whether by design or not, in eradicating a dominant discourse, even that which one would expect from a high socioeconomic background, or could it reflect the different values of parents who opt for national education, less neoliberal and more local cultural? Either way it is significant for the study of the international school as it indicates that the experience of national schooling is more successful at eroding any bias due to socio-economic status,

perhaps because of its more composite identity formation while the experience of competing discourses in international schools is less successful. Could this be seen as evidence of increased inequality (Ball, 2010; Lubienski and Lubienski, 2013; Apple, 2001, 2004)

#### **4.5 Concluding comments about the findings.**

To summarize the findings regarding the international school students who participated in the study, these international students placed more importance on a goal-orientated approach with academic results and university entry featuring highly. In terms of longer-term goals, more importance was put on a high paying career and working globally. In this way results reflected a neoliberal mindset but also the student's self-centred focus. The latter came through in other ways such as what motivated them, intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors and putting more importance on fun and interesting learning. A focus on the importance of English language learning also seemed to be linked to its market value rather than part of a post-colonial Western bias. International students put less emphasis on cultural and moral education, perhaps reflecting the propensity of a neoliberal discourse to exacerbate inequalities (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2012; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2013; Rizvi, 2009; Joseph, 2017). While there was some importance given to belonging to a global community this was slightly weaker. Statistically speaking no one discourse seems to be dominant in the international school with international school students holding a complex mix of mindsets.

National students put both more importance on cultural and moral education and perceived their future as local, while also demonstrating a similar focus on career and industry learning and the future of a high paying job. Like their

international counterparts there was a strong focus on the importance of personal development and meeting their own personal needs. National students also saw English language learning as important and did attach some importance to the idea of belonging to a global community. Statistically speaking the localized cultural identity, the egoistic identity and, surprisingly cosmopolitan identity were perceived of as more important in the national students' perception.

The key comparisons between the two sets of data were the relative importance given to localized cultural identity, low in the international school, higher in the national school, the shared importance of personal goals and needs and apart from a shared value in terms of the importance of English learning, the variation in what was important to one student as compared to another, greater in the international school. These differences were shown to be statistically significant, with national school's students responses showing a stronger correlation with localized cultural, egoistic and cosmopolitan identities.

In explaining these findings, a number of factors were considered and a statistical measure given of their significance. Time spent in school did not seem statistically significant in regards the students' mindsets suggesting that factors external to the school were relatively more important. Gender was not seen to be significant. Cultural/ethnic background was seen to be significant in explaining a localized cultural mindset amongst students in the international school while not significant in the national school. National school students were more likely to hold a localized cultural identity whatever their cultural/ethnic background suggesting the school played a stronger role in forming such. There was a significant correlation between socio/economic background and neoliberal identity in the international school though not in the national school.

The data presented does not, therefore, present a simple relationship between the school and students' perceptions of themselves and identity formation. Despite the many similarities between the international and national schools the impact of the two schools on students' identity formation is different in some ways, but often in surprising ways. The data presents a complex picture of adolescent identity formation which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Discussion

### **5.1 Summary of the research**

The research aimed to test the claim of a dominant neoliberal discourse amongst senior students at international schools, whether such could be considered as evidence of the formation of a TNC with significant global influence and if such was particular to an international school. The study aimed to compare the data from an international and non-international, national school to determine if the findings are specific to the international school in question. The research also sought to address the reliability, validity, and limitations of the data and whether the findings can be generalizable to other international schools.

The study focuses on students attending an international school and private national school in Malaysia, focusing on 14–16-year-old students. The two schools surveyed share the same campus facilities, policies, and Mission and Vision statements. The international students follow an international curriculum, Cambridge IGCSE and A levels, taught in English by a mix of expat and local teachers while national private school students followed an adapted national curriculum that was delivered partly in English and partly in Bahasa Malaysia by a body of local Malaysian teachers. The majority of students in both schools identified as Malaysian. The international school sample was more academically able while the national school more academically diverse. Most students identified themselves as coming from high SES. The national school sample was biased towards male respondents (65%) while gender distribution was more balanced in the international school;

(55%). Both schools were similar in terms of the number of students who had spent a significant amount of time in the school (81.7% cf. 79%), but a higher percentage (64% cf. 46.5%) had spent five or more years within the national school system. The majority of students in both schools reported considered English a home language. The two schools are thus very similar in many respects including sharing the same school values, age of cohort samples, SES of parents, level of English language and thus capacity to interpret and answer the questionnaire and time spent as a student of the respective school, remembering that 2+ years has been considered sufficient to positively affect adolescent identity formation (Erentaitė et al., 2018), while there were some differences, gender balance, longevity of national students.

Data analysis used the Likert Scale and an 11-point rating scale to measure students' attitudes towards certain questions. These attitudinal responses were then categorized as a mindset. The five mindsets or identities (neoliberal, cosmopolitan, localized cultural, egoistic, and post-colonial) and the significance of any differences between the two schools was then analysed.

## **5.2 Discussion of the findings**

Students were first asked to rate the relative importance of achieving academic results, being happy, learning to live a healthy lifestyle, becoming a global citizen and learning English. Chart 4.1 and Chart 4.2 showed the relative importance placed on such for international and national students. The results showed significant differences. For an international school student, achieving the best academic results was the highest in terms of relative importance while national students were more focused on being happy at school, while both international and national students considered learning English as very important. The more results orientated focus of international school students could be seen as evidence of a

neoliberal mindset as evidence of performativity and that there was a significance difference in this regard between the two schools an indication that the international school had a stronger neoliberal discourse. However, students in both schools shared a sense of the importance of English language which could be seen as a reflection of the students, and probably parents, awareness of the market-importance of this global language and thus part of the marketization of themselves for a future global economy as well a post-colonial legacy of a country, Malaysia, where English remains a dominant language as well as a global language of trade. The market importance of English is referred to by a number of researchers (Guilherme, 2007; Rizvi, 2008; Bunnell, 2021; Darvin and Zhang, 2025). This would indicate again a strong neoliberal discourse but not exclusive to international schools and a possible alliance between neoliberalism and post-colonialism. The alliance is based on the continuing market-value of English as a global language. The focus on the importance of English language seen in the institutional discourse, the characteristics of teachers and the student's own perception of its importance reinforces the neoliberal goals of market-readiness with students putting more relative importance on English than their localised cultural/national identity. By helping students break free of a localised identity English language learning weakens the competing discourses to neoliberalism.

It is also possibly significant that both sets of students rated developing a global mindset as least important overall. Not only would this suggest the weakness of the cosmopolitan discourse in both schools, but it would also indicate that in comparison to the relative importance of performance and marketability that the neoliberal discourse was dominant over the cosmopolitan discourse. Rather surprisingly though the importance of developing a global mindset was rated as high or highest importance by 47% of national students compared to only 38% in the

international school. This would seem contrary to expectations of a stronger cosmopolitan discourse in the international school, not only because of the international nature of the curriculum but also because of the exposure to expat teachers with international mindsets, although both schools had the development of a global mindset stated as part of their Mission. This is even more striking when compared with Chart 4.15 and 4.18 about preferred work destinations with international students showing a very strong preference to work in the West, again an indication of a post-colonial influence, or Global while national students were, not surprisingly, focused, where they had a preference, on working in Malaysia. Such a result could suggest a stronger cosmopolitan discourse in the international school or the strength of the post-colonial discourse. This is also reflected in Chart 4.1 and 4.2 where students were asked about the relative importance of learning about local and global cultures. International students were more likely to consider learning about being a part of a global community as of highest importance, yet both international and national students were very similar (44%/43% respectively) in seeking it as highest or high importance. Such an 'openness' towards other cultures is characteristic of a cosmopolitan outlook (Sobré-Denton, 2011). Again, this would demonstrate that there is perhaps not a relative lack of a cosmopolitan discourse in the international school which makes the result above that national students rated gaining a global mindset as more important more surprising still. Perhaps we are seeing a reflection of the dominance of another discourse, possibly the neoliberal discourse in the international school as compared to the national school where the cosmopolitan discourse seemed more competitive.

Next students were asked about motivational factors. Chart 4.3 and Chart 4.4 showed that neither international or national students were motivated by extrinsic factors like rewards and exams but were far more motivated by intrinsic factors, like

fun and finding it interesting. As factors like performance, competitiveness and market principles, arguably reflected by the motivational factors of rewards and impending exams or tests, neoliberalism is often associated with standardised testing (Ball, 2012; Apple 2001, 2004; Au, 2007; Riddle et al., 2021), would be indicative of a neoliberal mindset, such a result would suggest that the neoliberal mindset is not as dominant as was initially suggested, at least when it is in competition with a fourth mindset, that which I termed egoistic, that is, a mindset where the student is focused on their own needs and wants. This mindset reflects the research that demonstrates that individuals have agency in construction of their identity (Marginson, 2014; Tran and Vu, 2018,; Inouye et al., 2022,; Kudaibergenov, 2023). It could also suggest a negative reaction to over testing (Au, 2007).

Interestingly a similar relationship can be seen in Chart 4.13 and 4.14, here students were asked to compare the relative importance of the school preparing them for the world of work or to operate in a global community as opposed to getting grades and preparing them for university. International students rated the latter, university, as more important, again possibly reflecting the dominance of an egoistic mindset over neoliberalism. Though the data would suggest that while egoistic mindset may trump neoliberalism at times, in the long run, the data would also suggest, the neoliberal mindset wins out. When asked about aspirations in regards university, that is what they hoped to get out of going to university, reflected in chart 4.17, international students emphasised better pay over interest in the subject and well over any other factor, potentially showing the shift back in favour of a neoliberal preoccupation with capitalist drivers over personal interests. Interestingly perhaps, the data in Chart 4.20 showed national students rating interest in subjects as slightly more important than better pay, so while it also possibly suggests a shift towards a neoliberal mindset in the long term the difference in comparison with the international

school where better pay was a clear winner, could be taken as evidence again of a stronger neoliberal discourse in the international school. The data in chart 4.16 and 4.19 showed that both international and national students were very clear about their eventual goal, a high paying career, which far out ranked in importance any other factor. Taken together such data could suggest a competition between a neoliberal discourse and an egoistic mindset amongst students, with students more focused on the latter than the former in the short term while developing a neoliberal mindset for the long term. It is possible that the neoliberal discourse results in neoliberal goals, such as a high paying career, replacing student egoistic desire to have fun and find things interesting with the result that the egoistic and the neoliberal goal become one and the same. Do students retain their egoistic desire to have fun but come to the realisation that this can only be achieved through adopting neoliberal goals? In other words, do they develop into the “enterprising individual” (Apple, 2001) characteristic of neoliberal mindsets? After all neoliberalism has been described as a “cluster of individual beliefs” that are capitalist in origin (Bettache et al., 2020) and such individualism, as mentioned before, could be seen as indicative of “individual responsabilisation” (Keddie, 2016) another characteristic of neoliberalism. Or does it just reflect the difference in priorities when someone else is footing the bill, that is tuition paying parents and when you have to pay the bills yourself? Is this partly why the neoliberal discourse is dominant, because students are preparing for what they see as a neoliberal world where only the rich survive?

Students were also asked to compare the relative importance of learning about local or home cultures against learning about Western/other/global cultures. Chart 4.5 and 4.6 shows international and national students' perception of the relative importance of learning about home and host cultures. Perhaps the most striking finding is that both international and national students believe that learning

about culture is only of average importance, at least in school. As mentioned above international students were more likely to see learning about a global community as of highest importance than national students, but both were very similar in rating the importance of such as high or highest, which suggested the presence of a cosmopolitan discourse in both schools that was stronger in the international school. Also, not surprisingly in the national school more students (41%) rated learning about home country as important than in the international school (35%) which probably reflects that more students that were surveyed in the national school were of Malaysian background (81%) than in the international school (70%), while also reflecting that learning about the home country remained important to both. We can see here a competition between the cosmopolitan discourse and a localized cultural mindset following on from Bates (2011) who noted that the rise of local middle-class involvement with international schools had resulted in increasing pressure for “localised cultural identities” (ibid. p7), a competing discourse therefore in international schools. While this doesn’t help answer the question regarding the dominance of a neoliberal discourse it does introduce another discourse into the competition, adding to the view that both schools are the site of competing discourses on young people’s minds. The data can also be interpreted to see neoliberalism, and its ally post-colonialism, losing out to both cosmopolitan and localized cultural discourses as finding out about Western cultures, arguably the most neoliberal and certainly post-colonial response was seen as least important by both international and national students. The question about the relative importance of cultural festivals held in school shown in chart 4.7 produced very similar results in the international school, with of average importance being the most frequent response. While Chart 4.8 shows that national students felt that cultural festivals like Deepavali are seen as more important with International Week and international

days being seen as the least important aspects of the festival program. This difference would suggest a weaker localized cultural discourse in the international school perhaps weakened through its competition with neoliberal and cosmopolitan discourses.

What was particularly surprising perhaps was how ambivalent international students were to the 'international' cultural celebrations of International Day and international days like International Women's Day. While localized cultural discourse doesn't come out as dominant in any way the relative weakness of the cosmopolitan discourse is again evident as it was in Chart 4.1. Yet the analysis above of chart 4.15 work location aspirations and also the data from chart 4.13, which shows the relative importance international students put on school preparing them to fit into a global community, both seem to show that there is a cosmopolitan discourse which results in international students having global aspirations. Are we seeing a similar trend as with neoliberalism and egoistic mindsets, that is, are students more focused in the short term on their localized culture identity but, when considering the longer term are more cosmopolitan in their outlook? How does this help address the question of the dominance of neoliberalism? First. By again reminding us of the competing discourses but also by highlighting how cosmopolitanism may become a stronger competitor for the neoliberal discourse over time. Just as international students' egoistic desires may be replaced or superseded by neoliberal goals over time so may their localized cultural identity be watered down and if not replaced developed to include an additional level of complexity, a cosmopolitan identity.

Charts 4.9 and 4.10 reveal the importance students attach to teacher characteristics. The expectation here is that a focus on qualifications and academic results would be indicative of a neoliberal mindset, while a focus on internationally experienced teachers would be more indicative of a cosmopolitan mindset, a focus

on Western trained teachers possibly a reflection of a post-colonial mindset as opposed to a focus on locally trained teachers as reflecting a localized cultural mindset. International students value qualifications, native level English language, and previous experience in an international school. These results can be interpreted in a number of ways. The value placed on qualifications could be said to match international students concern with achieving the best academic results found in Chart 4.1 and focus on university destinations in Chart 4.13. It could also reflect one of the consequences of neoliberal reform of education that market forces enable parents with high SES to choose schools (Chubb and Moe, 2011), in the case of the Malaysian local context, international schools, that will give the best chance of achieving top academic results and university destinations of choice. Thus, such a result could be seen as evidence of a focus on performativity and thus reflecting neoliberal discourse. It could also be interpreted as egoist with students focused on what they need to do to achieve their personal desires to reach university, although if that was the case then one could expect a similar value placed on Western trained teachers as such teachers' pedagogical style is more student centred and thus more focused on making lessons interesting and fun, which was international students' highest motivator for learning (Chart 4.3). Combined with the other results, valuing native level English and previous international experience, one could argue that international students are focused on teacher qualities that will provide them with the competitive edge that they need to do well on their main objective, getting good grades (Chart 4.1), in order to achieve their personal goal of getting to university (Chart 4.13) in order to achieve their long-term goal of getting a high paying job (Chart 4.16). An argument for a dominant neoliberal discourse within the international school.

The alternative view, that students are affected by a cosmopolitan discourse, does not seem as strong. First, previous international experience which could be associated with the development of an international mindset or at least a global outlook on life for someone whose career is an international one, ranks as less important than teacher qualifications and level of English. Secondly, Western trained pedagogy whose preference can be seen to be part of the value of international education, is significantly less important than qualifications suggesting the latter may be associated in student's minds, remember predominately Asian students' minds, with success rather than the pedagogical approach. It is interesting to note that a clear majority (63.5%) of international students see STEM subjects as of the highest or high importance with the additional knowledge that most STEM subject teachers in the international school studied were locally trained and/or Asian teachers. Linking this together could suggest that Asian students regard highly qualified Asian STEM teachers, with high levels of English, as the best combination for performance outcomes. Compare this to the national students results (Chart 4.10) which are, for the most part, very similar in regards qualifications and English language, the latter being relatively more important but with prior experience in national schools replacing prior experience in international schools as valued. This would suggest a similar preoccupation with getting good results as in the international school, reflecting most probably their shared ethnic/cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

For the study its significance is that it does not suggest any particular difference between the international and national students and that both are driven by performativity thus both are affected by a neoliberal discourse, with the addition of cosmopolitan influence in international and localized cultural influence in national.

Perhaps the most significant response is that for both sets of students speaking English as a native is of high importance, second for international students and first for national students. Interestingly enough this was also reflected in Chart 4.1 and 2.2 with both sets of students perceiving learning the English language as very important with again international students placing it second and national students of first importance. First this requires some explanation as to why this might be more highly rated by national students. Looking back at Chart 3.9.1f and Chart 3.9.2d we can see that most international and national students identified English as the Home Language even though in both schools only a tiny percentage (4% in international, 1.5% in national) identified their ethnic background as non-Asian/Western so the explanation is not due to differences at home. Secondly, over 50% of both sets of students regarded developing the ability to communicate in a global community as of highest or high importance, with again national students rating it as more important than international students (Chart 4.13 and 4.14) and yet international students were more likely to aspire to work in the West or globally than national students who were more likely to aspire to work in Malaysia (Chart 4.15 and 4.18).

One thing is clear, speaking English is perceived of as important by the students whether international or national. From a neoliberal perspective this could be viewed as market-forces at work, for students to compete in either a global or, in the sake of Malaysia where English is widely spoken particularly at the higher socio-economic levels, local market, speaking English provides a market advantage. Joseph's study of educational policies in Malaysia (2017) describes an "ethnicized neoliberalism" one of whose impacts may be to drive certain groups, such as Malay Chinese, to see the gaining of English through private and international schools as an alternative route to maintaining high socioeconomic status outside of the national education system. Being able to speak English at a high level may also reflect a

certain socio-economic status providing some argument for the development of a capitalist class that is both local and transnational. English, particularly native level English, is effectively a class language, effectively marketization (Lubienski and Lubienski 2013) with privileged families able to use their economic capital to create cultural capital. From a cosmopolitan viewpoint it could be seen as reflecting the importance placed on fitting into a global society and having a global mindset, except that the relative importance of this to students has already been questioned in Chart 4.1/4.2, 4.3/4.4, 4.9/4.10 and that learning English is viewed as even higher importance by the group of students, national students, whose aspirations were more local than global. Still the national students had placed more importance on developing a global mindset than the international students (Chart 4.2/4.1). This suggests that learning English could be so important because it fits both the needs of students with a neoliberal mindset and a cosmopolitan mindset and creates the cultural capital that ensures confirmation of elite class status (Maire and Windle, 2022). How far are post-colonial attitudes towards English as the language of preference and the language of leadership/power in society still at play? Certainly Wylie (2008), Joseph (2017) and Gibson and Bailey (2022) see post-colonial discourse as strong within international schools with a Western perspective curriculum, Western teachers etc.

Charts 4.11 and 4.12 reveal the importance students attach to various learning goals. There is a clear focus on career-related goals and STEM subjects in both the international and national results. In both schools STEM subjects are highly valued, with a majority of international (63.5%) and national students (61%) identifying them as of high or highest importance. Business and Economics also score highly, with a similar majority (64% in international, 69% in national) identifying them as high or highest priority. This focus could be argued to reflect a neoliberal

discourse with students focusing on market orientated or traditional high paying professions. If so, then the neoliberal discourse is just as strong in the national as the international school. Again, this matches students' aspirations for high paying careers (9.1b and 9.2b) What is interesting however, is that developing personal skills are also highly valued, with a similar majority (61%) identifying them as high or highest importance in the international school and national students' responses placing such as of the highest relative importance (63.5%). Perhaps if the question had been focused on skills like collaboration and communication it might have been possible that such a response could indicate the strength of the cosmopolitan discourse, however they were combined with skills for leadership and management and so can equally be seen as further evidence of a neoliberal mindset. What tips the scales of analysis in favour of a dominant neoliberal discourse being reflected in these charts is the relatively low importance given to learning languages and learning culture, indicative of a cosmopolitan mindset, seen as least important by both international and national students. The conclusion appears to be that a dominant focus on industry and career-related learning over cultural education indicates a dominant neoliberal discourse but one that is not particular to international schools.

I have already discussed how the data in Chart 4.13 can be used to support the view of competing discourses of neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism and egoism and that these exist pretty equally in both national and international schools, but there is one additional finding that is also worth discussing, and that is the value placed on a moral education in the national school where 62% of students reported this as important compared to 43.4% in the international school. I have already advanced an argument that egoism as a mindset is at work in both schools and this focus on the self in the national school could be taken as further evidence of that. But what is

interesting is how relatively low importance this is in the international school, which also has the highest percentage (30%) of students rating it as of low or lowest importance compared to just 11% in the national school. This seems to be evidence to support critics of neoliberal reforms in education as creating a “cluster of personal beliefs” (Bettache et al., 2020) that promote a narcissistic self-advancement and individual privilege over common good and social responsibility (Doherty, 2009; Cheshire and Lawrence, 2005; Hammed et al., 2023; Lazzarato, 2009; McDonald, 2007; Leme, 2023). The focus on outcomes that seem particularly strong in the international school, an increased sense of market-forces driving students developing neoliberal mindsets seems to come at the cost of morality. In essence the dominance of a neoliberal discourse in international education results in students focused on achieving academic results that enable them to access elite universities in order to get high paying jobs to meet egoistic desires rather than students looking to contribute to the betterment of either a global or local society. If so, then international schools could be criticized for helping to create a ‘dog eat dog society’ (Bettache et al., 2020) or “narcissistic identities” focused on self-interest (McDonald, 2007, Leme, 2023). Such findings could be illustrating the “greater indifference to social inequality” that is seen as characteristic of neoliberalism (Bettache, et al, 2002, p. 221). Other findings can be used to support this conclusion. International students gave, surprisingly it seemed initially, less relative importance to becoming a global citizen than national students (Chart 4.1 and 4.2), and being able to cooperate and communicate with others (Chart 4.13 and Chart 4.14) but other data questions such an analysis, national students are just as unlikely to aspire to a career that is focusing on helping others and just as likely to aim for a high paying job, (Chart 4.19 and Chart 4.16 ).

To add a further depth of analysis the categorical data was converted into an Ordinal Scale, and question responses were grouped into five categories: neoliberalism, cosmopolitan, local culturalized Identity, post-colonial, and egoistic and a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the mean rank of each data set to test for significance of the differences discussed above. The results (Table 4.4) showed that national students had a higher Mean Rank in all mindsets except post-colonial. The latter was not surprising as there was more Western influence in the international school. Nor was it surprising that national students had a higher Mean Rank in regard to local cultural identity, as they followed a national curriculum delivered exclusively by local teachers and thus had a stronger Malay influence. The particularly interesting results were that national students had a notably higher Mean Rank in regard to cosmopolitan mindset than international students. This therefore supports the analysis above that the cosmopolitan discourse seemed stronger in terms of level of dominance in the national school, which the Mann-Whitney test also seems to show, ranking cosmopolitan mindset as equal to egoistic mindset and second only to localized cultural mindset. In comparison the cosmopolitan mindset trailed behind the Postcolonial and neoliberal mindset in the international school, though admittedly not by much and the Mean Rank scores in the international school would, if anything, seem to support the view of competing discourses and certainly not the view that the neoliberal discourse was dominant. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that the differences in cosmopolitan, local, and egoistic mindsets between international and national students were significant, with the Asymp Sig being below 0.005. This indicates that while a local cultural discourse is stronger in the national than international school, both cosmopolitan and egoistic discourses were also stronger in the national school. The national school identity seems quite clear, it is a national school with a localized cultural identity attended by

students who share the same cultural identity from their ethnic/home background, where students individualism competes with this institutional identity but where the focus on the Mission and perhaps also the sharing of a campus with an international school and international leadership in the person of the Executive Principal (the author) has resulted in a strong cosmopolitan discourse as well. In short, the school motto; “Malaysian hearts, Global minds” seems to fit like a glove. On the other hand, the international school identity is far from clear with the various discourses clearly competing and none clearly emerging as dominant.

Obviously, there are questions to answer here. Why has a clear identity emerged in the national school in line with its Mission and why is the international school identity seemingly more complex and less defined. To analyse the two sets of school data ANOVA tests were carried out to check for the significance of any statistical difference between the two groups. The variables chosen were time spent as a student at that school, cultural background and ethnicity, and the influence of the school culture on the students' mindsets.

The study examined the relationship between time spent in school and mindset among international students. The null hypothesis was that there would be no relationship between time spent as a student in the school and a particular mindset, which would indicate that the school lacked a dominant discourse. The data (Table 4.6) showed no significant impact in terms of difference on the mindset of students related to time spent in school. This result does not support the claim that there is a dominant mindset let alone that the neoliberal mindset is dominant. It does support the emerging view that the international school is a smorgasbord of competing discourses from which students pick or are affected by probably due to external factors to the school. Lillie's (2020) study of a boarding school in Switzerland raises the interesting possibility of students influencing other student's

choices through asserting their own cultures. It could be argued that a dominant school or institutional discourse may exist as we have seen above how international students longer term aspirations are neoliberal in character, but that it does not dominant only contributes to students' identity formation and that to remains only a contributing factor even when students have spent a significant amount of time in the school, suggest there are external factors influencing students' identity formation. A similar relationship of no significance is seen in the national school, again suggesting that school has a limited, at most a contributing influence on student identity formation. This would seem to be in direct contrast to the traditional view which has been that the school is a major agency of socialisation" (Parsons and Halsey, 1959, p35).

However, it does seem to support more recent research which sees identities as being "socioculturally constructed" (Darvin and Norton, 2019, Darvin and Zhang 2025) and with the view that student's "figure" (Holland et al., 1998) out their identity through interacting with several discourses resulting in composite identities (Pearce, 2011). Perhaps what is new here is that we can see the composite identity clearly defined in the national school as localized cultural, egoistic and cosmopolitan (Malaysian hearts, Global minds) but we seem to be seeing a 'confused identity' or a 'mosaic of identities' (Pearce, 2011) in the international school setting, though one that is fertile to neoliberalism as the student moves from school to the world of work and the reality of a global market economy. The confusion of identity cannot be happening just because there is a number of competing discourses as we can see those discourses at work in the national school as well and yet a clear composite identity emerges. Is the confusion of identity happening because of the contradictions within the international school, what Sears (2011) referred to as an 'artificial environment', as opposed to the synergisms within the national school. The

latter has a national curriculum, taught by local teachers, attended by predominately local students, whose aspirations are predominately local and whose aberrations, a focus on the importance of English language and a cosmopolitanism can be explained away due to the importance of English in Malaysian society, especially in higher socioeconomic groups and thus as a potential marker of socio-economic status. Or, as Gibson and Bailey (2022) described, the instrumental view of Malaysian students towards international schools as a route to university overseas and acquisition of the English language needed to succeed. The former has an international curriculum, with elements of national curriculum artificially inserted by Ministry of Education mandate, taught by an eclectic mix of international and national teachers, the former, through transmitting a pro-Western discourse instrumental in such international schools being seen as “post-colonial sites” (Gibson and Bailey 2022), whose students are predominately local but with over a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> and an increasing number from other Asian countries, bringing another different ‘international’ element, whose aspirations, both local and Asian international, are predominately global and, in particular Western.

It may not be surprising, therefore, that such an international school lacks a clear identity or a dominant discourse and, as Pearce goes on to develop, students will acquire new values and norms from their international schooling experience depending on the degree to which these experiences are “consonant” or “dissonant” with existing values, in particular their personally held values or their self-concept/self-perception (Rosenberg 1979, Urrietta and Noblit, 2018). In the national school experiences are “consonant”, in the international school “dissonant.”

It is interesting to compare this to Poole’s (2018) study of a CIS where Chinese students and culture clashed with international curriculum and teaching body resulting in an identity Poole described as ‘hybrid’. The study was focused on

teachers but showed how they teachers retained a personal identity – a ‘way of being’ while developing an institutional identity – a ‘way of belonging’ (Levitt and Schiller 2004). I would suggest that in the national school we share seeing the way of being and the way of belonging as synergised while in the international school the way of being and the way of belonging are in competition. Looking back there a some results which could potentially support this idea, the international students focus on academic outcomes and their comparative rejection of global citizenship in Chart 4.1, their preference to learning about local culture over Western culture (Chart 4.1), the apparent contradiction of rating important learning about global community (Chart 4.1) while rejecting international cultural festivals over local festivals (Chart 4.7), their strong preference for highly qualified teachers rather than Western trained or internationally experienced teachers (chart 4.9) and perhaps most of all their focus on good grades, university and the world of work rather than a moral education (Chart 4.13). Above we interpreted this as possibly evidence of the neoliberal selfishness and lack of concern about inequality and social justice, but it could just as easily be seen as a rejection of the international schools moral/ cosmopolitan/ Western values as ‘thank you very much but we get our moral upbringing at home and through the local culture’.

Another interesting comparison is with Li and Hall’s (2023) study of an international school in Hong Kong. This study showed how local students ‘negotiated’ their identity in the international school with resulting “conflicts in identity” (Li and Hall, 2023, p 7). The international school was the one challenging and creating the conflict through its attempts to promote an international identity. The results seem at best to be that students developed a way of belonging while retaining a way of belonging. This really does bring into stark view the question what the role of an international schools is in identity formation. It is notable that both

these studies were of Type C international schools as is the current study and all three studies illustrate a conflict created by the contradictions that exist by the very nature of Type C international schools. Are Type C international schools dysfunctional one wonders?

The study also examined the relationship between cultural background and ethnicity and mindset among international students. The data showed no significant relationship between cultural background and mindset, except for localized cultural identity. This relationship could be expected and provides evidence that cultural and ethnic background plays a pivotal role in shaping adolescent identity formation. It further supports the argument emerging above that the localized cultural identity, dominant in the national school where it synergises with the curriculum and the teachers, is a potential source of conflict in the international school where it contradicts with the curriculum and the teachers. While it does not support the claim of a dominant neoliberal discourse among international students it does suggest that competing discourses, including that of neoliberal, are successful in wearing down the localized cultural identity, it had the lowest Mean Rank in the international school compared to highest in the national school. We can also see evidence of the localized cultural identity being eroded in other findings, such as the relative importance of learning about being part of a global community rather than the local community (Chart 4.1), the preference for Western trained, internationally experienced and native English speaking teachers over local teachers (Chart 4.9) and perhaps even the focus on outcomes and careers rather than values (Chart 4.13), culminating in the aspiration to leave Malaysia for the West (Chart 4.15). here we can perhaps see a dominance of sort, dominance of the 'alien; discourses that exist within the international school over the localized cultural discourse. The international school is weakening the Malaysian Heart while not fully establishing the

Global Mind with the result that international students do not emerge with a composite identity but a confused identity. Could we describe such an identity as 'vulnerable' and thus open to the next socialising agent. If, as national students aspiring to a future in Malaysia, that will be the localized cultural identity then their national identity would be reinforced along the Spectrum of National identification (Fitzsimons 2019 ) but for international students, aspiring to a Western or global future, their national identity has already fallen to the bottom of the 'hierarchy of identities' (Fitzsimons 2019) before they have left the school and so a significant the shift on the spectrum in the other direction is to be expected. It would be an interesting development of this research to see where these international students' identities were in 5 years' time after they have left their international school, with the prophecy that a neoliberal or cosmopolitan or composition of both would be dominant. Hsieh's (2018) self-study in which he traces the development of a habitus post international schooling which he describes as turning from "a tool enabling me to know more about the world into a tool for profit-making and survival" (Hsieh, 2018 p660) is an illustration of this prophecy in action. International schools may not be achieving this mission in the short term, a neoliberal discourse may be not be achieving dominance, but, through weakening competing discourses they may be preparing the groundwork for the ultimate dominance of a neoliberal discourse amongst graduates of international schools.

The study examined the relationship between gender and mindset among international and national students. The null hypothesis was that there was no correlation between gender and mindset, contradicting Sandhu and Tung's 2006 study. The results from the national school showed no significant relationship, and the difference in gender distribution did not affect the results.

Socioeconomic background was also tested, with students grouped into high, middle, and low socio-economic status based on parent profession, educational level, and students' perception of their status. The data showed a significant relationship in regards neoliberal and egoistic mindsets amongst international students. The relationship between economic privilege and a neoliberal mindset is well established (Piff et al., 2012, Thornton, 2018, Azevedo et al. 2019, Bettache et al. 2020) as is the relationship between neoliberalism and an egoistic mindset (Apple, 2001; Cheshire and Lawrence, 2005; McDonald, 2007; Lazzarato, 2009; Bettache et al., 2020; Leme, 2023). This neoliberal and egoistic mindset of international students is seen in their focus on academic results (Chart 4.1), self-interest (Chart 4.3), concern about teacher's qualifications (Chart 4.9), their focus on good grades, university and the world of work over morality, collaboration and communication (Chart 4.13) and their career aspirations for high-paying jobs and university degrees that lead to such (Chart 4.16, 4.17). The link between privileged families and the choice of a privileged education as a means of securing social status and class/cultural reproduction is also well established (Bourdieu, 1986, Bernstein, 1990, Clark, 2005, Waters, 2006, Resnik, 2009 Doherty et al., 2012). This is clearly illustrated in Hsieh's self-study (2018) where he traces the link between his parents' economic capital, his acquisition of cultural capital through his international schooling and his adoption of neoliberal values. So, the significant relationship between neoliberal and egoistic mindsets and high socioeconomic status should not come as a surprise. However, where the surprise comes is in comparing the results to the national school. Here the data showed no significant relationship between socioeconomic background and mindset. Bearing in mind that 74% of the international school sample identified themselves as coming from high socioeconomic status as did 85% of the national school sample this begs the

question why the difference in results? We have already established that the national school seems more successful in developing a clearly defined composite identity based on localized cultural values, egoism and cosmopolitanism so this may account for the lack of significant correlation between socioeconomic status and neoliberal mindset in the national school, but this only poses the question in the international school, is the correlation between neoliberal mindset and socioeconomic status affected by the school? We have argued above that the international student faced competing discourses with the end result, at least by the high school years, 14-16, is a confused identity in which no one discourse is dominant. However, we can see a 'hierarchy of identities' of postcolonialism, neoliberalism and egoistic, all closely allied, in the Mean Rank and evidence of where neoliberal and egoistic discourse seems dominant reflected in the findings. Which does lead us to alter our argument somewhat. It would appear that students at international schools enter international schools predisposed towards neoliberalism and egoistic mindsets due to the socioeconomic backgrounds of their parents. In fact, it seems likely that this is why they are international students in the first place, because their parents used their economic privilege to position their children in order to ensure cultural reproduction (Waters, 2006; Doherty et al., 2012; Resnik, 2009). With such an initial advantage one would think the dominance of the neoliberal discourse to be assured and yet the findings have repeatedly shown that these international students hold a wide range of sometimes inconsistent attitudes reflecting that neoliberalism is far from dominant in the international school as it faces competing discourses and that the school hasn't so much prepared the student for the inevitable capitulation to neoliberalism but has managed to stem the inevitable for a while where the students identity formation is still a work in progress where post-schooling experiences will play a key role as they did with Hsieh (2018).

### **5.3 Reflections on existing research**

Earlier, I raised the issue of the differences in cosmopolitan identity in the national and international school as needing explanation and suggested this may be because of the competing discourses, possibly the strength of the neoliberal discourse, in the international school. It is worth considering the research into defining international schools here. Researchers have differentiated between ideologically driven international schools such as IB world schools and schools which are international in term of their mix of international curriculum, teachers and leadership rather than ideology (Hayden and Thompson 1995, Hu, 2001, Walden, 2018). In fact, Sylvester (1998) originally distinguished an 'inclusive' type of international school that was international because of its diversity where no one culture is dominant. This is a view that seems to be supported by this study, where no one discourse is dominant, where students' identity is a complex and confused mix of cultures. So, perhaps we should not be surprised that the cosmopolitan identity is weaker in 'inclusive' international schools of this type. Sylvester also defined such 'inclusive' schools as holding the ideological position of internationalism and thus more like the second type of schools identified by Hayden and Thompson and originally, I had interpreted the international school in the study as an 'encapsulated school' (Sylvester 1998) because of the lack of this ideological position. However, the findings have forced me to review that original identification and realise that the diversity which underpins the international mindedness of the IB, "understanding, respecting and valuing different cultures" can be gained not just through an ideological position but through the lived experience of this international schooling however where the ideological position, the cosmopolitan mindset as it has been defined herein, is not dominant the end result could well be a weaker international mindedness. The stronger the identification with the home/host culture

the less successful the acculturation process into the 'new' culture of cosmopolitanism or international mindedness (Ward and Kennedy, 1994). How has this contributed to the debate about what is an international school? It has, on the one hand, demonstrated that the 'diversity' that is the ideological goal of truly international schools as many would define them (Sylvester 1998, Hu 2001, Hill 2015, Walden 2018) can be achieved through the competing discourses, the contradictions that, by its very nature, a Type C international school, offers. Such creates a "preference for diversity" (Weenink 2008) identified as predisposing the students to be cosmopolitan. However, what the study also seems to demonstrate is that not only are Type C international schools in a "permanent identity crisis" (Pearce, 2013) but they recreate this identity crisis in their students! Perhaps Bates (2011) can rest easier knowing what 'social reality' is to "prevail in a globalised world" "is not going to be defined by international schools, particular when considering that the Type C international school studies here could be said to be representative of the impact of "the forces of globalisation" on international education (Bunnell and Hatch, 2021)

Another way that the study could be said to contribute to the discussion around the role of the school as an agent of socialisation is through the way it seems to have supported recent research which focus on identities being "socioculturally" constructed (Darvin and Norton, 2019) with students navigating their identity (Marginson 2014) in order to achieve "ways of being" or "ways of belonging" (Levitt and Schiller, 2004). The findings have shown competing cultural discourses, "wider and more varied possibilities" (Marginson 2014, p13) are experienced by students to varying degrees and, either negotiated with (Levitt and Schiller 2004, Lillie 2020, Li and Hall 2023) to achieve a 'way of belonging' or adapted to achieve a 'way of being'. While such research is often out of the specific field of international

education, Marginson is researching international student in higher education, Levitt and Schiller transnational mobility the findings remain very relevant to international schools as a transnational space (Weenink, 2008; Tanu, 2014; Cruz et al., 2023). It is possible therefore that the act of negotiating an indemnity means the students own egoistic objectives are a competing discourse. Thus, some students in this study can see learning about being part of a global community as important yet reject international cultural events over their preference for local cultural events yet position their home language as less important than that of English, as they position themselves to be part of a global market. The actual act of negotiating may also be developing in the international student the skills and aptitudes and self-sufficiency, the character-building Goh described in his study of elite Singapore schools, (Goh 2020), that are characteristic of the cultural capital of a TNC (Brown and Lauder 2011) and yet their rejection of 'rituals' such as International Day question whether a "strong platform" for class cohesion is being built (Bunnell et al., 2020)

Through comparing the international students' mindsets to those of the national students we can see how the international schooling experience is shaping their "identities, allegiances and notions of citizenship in new ways." (Darvin and Norton, 2019, p.456, Darvin and Zhang, 2025). The competing discourses that exist with the international schools and the lack of a dominant discourse also demonstrates that students are negotiating 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998) but the lack of clearly defined identity in comparison to national students as illustrated by the pretty evenly shared hierarchy of identities (Fitzsimons, 2019) amongst the participants, questions whether a composite identity (Pearce, 2011) is achieved. The international student's identity has not been reshaped (Berger and Luckmann 1966), not even into a Third Culture (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009), but their roots have been shaken, the localized cultural identity we can see has been weakened in the international school

in comparison the national school, but the roots haven't been transplanted to a new pot. It does seem that what Pollock and others have feared, of international school students being "rootless" is the case but not because they have accepted a new 'social reality' or entered a new transactional class but because they haven't. Perhaps the school is engaged in the "negotiation" with local culture that Sancho (2016) evidenced in Type C international schools in India. Brevetti and Ford (2017) claimed schools are "morally formative for all students". The findings regarding this international school bring that positive, constructivist view into doubt and raise the bigger question are Type C international schools deconstructive, at least in regard to identity.

The findings in this international school also bring into question the "mechanisms of normalization" (Foucault 1977) while the findings in the national school support such. Normal in the national school is defined as "Malaysian Hearts, Global Minds" and we can see this clearly reflected in the students' hierarchy of identities. But the international school seems not to have defined what is normal, except only that diversity is normal and this has therefore, not led to a dominant discourse emerging. In essence it doesn't disagree with Foucault at all, just demonstrates that if the "mechanisms of normalization" are not in place a dominant discourse will not emerge, and so the claim becomes that the "mechanisms of normalization" are not in place in Type C international schools so there is an "identity crisis" because international schools have complex characters which are "intrinsically exceptional." (Pearce, 2013). Compare the normalization of academic grades and teacher qualifications against the students' preference for learning that is fun and interesting and not being strongly motivated by tests. This is a lack of a norm. An alternative explanation would be that of "burnout" (Erentaité et al., 2018) in which students maintained their existing identities and resisted alternative discourses. But

why would this happen in the international and not the national school? One reason given is feelings of inadequacy or incompetence (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Vansoeterstede et al., 2022; Salmela-Aro, 2017) yet 65% of the international students rated themselves as academically above average with 23% rating themselves as highly able (Chart 3.9.1g.) as compared to the national school while a similar, 64% saw themselves as above average but only 8% as highly able (Chart 3.9.2e.). In addition, the national school students had been at the school for longer with 64% as compared to 46.5% having been at the school 5 years or more (Chart 3.9.1c and Chart 3.9.2b) and so both of these findings would suggest the national school students should have evidenced more burnout.

A third view is that expressed by Pearce (2011) which posits that only if there is a dominant transnational discourse in the school will a student's identity be shaped as international, otherwise the values accrued will be the national one. The national school study seems to illustrate this. There is a cosmopolitan discourse, but it is not dominant and as a result local/national identity prevails. However, in the international school no identity prevails. Instead, the students seem to have a confusion or mosaic of identities. The localized cultural identity is eroded, seemingly, by the competing discourses but the very fact that the discourses are competing, and no one is dominant also seems to be contributing to a lack of international identity. A possible reason for this difference is that much previous research on international students has been on transient international students (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009, Pearce 2011, Nagrath 2011, Sears 2011) and this transience has been argued to force an adjustment of the national and personal values (localized cultural and egoistic mindsets) that helps create the "composite identity." Another approach is that of Sears (2011), whose study illustrated how globally mobile students were able to maintain their composite identity in the 'milieu' of the international school. Again,

transience is put forward as a key factor in the creation of a composite identity. The point here is that the international students in this study and, probably the majority of the 7.4 million international students (ISC 2025) are not transient but local. Again, note that nearly half of the students (46.5%) had been at the international school for 5 years or more and most (78%) had transferred from the national school on the same campus. Is the lack of transience an explanatory factor? local/national and personal values remain strong and though we have argued they are eroded by the competition with neoliberal, cosmopolitan and post-colonial discourses they are not replaced as the Mean-Whitney Test of Mean Rank seems to indicate. (Table 4.4).

The success of the international school market has been explained as part of an emergent process of global and upper-class formation (Maire and Windle, 2022). But such theories of class formation rest upon an assumption that the school is a key agent of socialisation and thus plays a key role in the process of cultural reproduction (Bernstein, 2003, Clark, 2005) which would be the bond for class formation (Young 2016). The findings suggest that this international school may, because of the competing discourses, not play as strong a role in identity formation as the national school. Whether this could be applied to other international schools depends on the context of such schools but should, at least, be considered as a possibility. We have seen above that national students seem to emerge with a clearly defined composite identity that it is argued here does provide them with the Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that will enable cultural reproduction of socio-economic grouping in Malaysia, though potentially at odds with the “ethnicized neoliberalism” and its cultural reproduction of ethnically determined socioeconomic groups (Joseph, 2017). But the international student is exposed to the complex nature of an international school of a type of international schools who have a

“permanent identity crisis” and who transfer this identity crisis to the student (Pearce, 2013). The “bonding social capital” (Young, 2016) is, if not missing, weak.

Alternatively, the very complexity that creates this identity crisis also builds the skills and aptitudes, the flexibility and self-sufficient that Brown and Lauder (2011) see as a common characteristic of the cultural capital of a TNC. This does bring into question the view that a TNC is forming in international schools and instead points to the lived experiences of students after school as potentially being more important in terms of class formation, though that would need further research to prove or disprove such a claim. Two things remain clear though; First, the importance of English language acquisition for the students creates the prerequisite for a network of communication that exists on a transnational scale, Brown and Lauder (2011) identified bi or multilingualism as a key characteristic of the cultural capital of a TNC, Weenink (2008) saw near mastery of English as “predisposition” for cosmopolitanism and Guilherme (2007) described English as the “language of hegemonic globalisation”. So, the acquisition of English and the importance assigned to it isn’t in itself clear evidence for any one discourse’s dominance. Second, that the lack of dominance of any one discourse and the confusion or identity crisis in which international students are left in, is fertile ground for the completion of the process, the acquiring of skills and aptitudes. Perhaps this could be seen as the ‘three-dimensional world view’ or ‘cross-cultural awareness’ that Brown and Lauder (2011) see as a common characteristic of the cultural capital of a TNC. The students’ ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1991) may not have been shaped by the international schooling experience, but it has been well and truly shattered leaving the student exposed to institutions of power that will define students’ future social reality or, perhaps, required to create their own “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) by adding coherence to such experiences. When one considers how many of these

students aim is to study and work abroad in Western neoliberal democracies then perhaps the view that there is a dominant neoliberal mindset amongst graduates of international schools can be understood.

The argument being made here is that international schooling erodes localized social realities, replacing such with a confused or in crisis identity which leaves international school students open to, possibly even predisposed to, developing bonds through shared culture that is transnational in form. They leave with all the social capital necessary to become a member of a Class that will finally allow their 'way of belonging' to merge with their 'way of being'. Of course, this study has only raised the first part of that proposition, the rest is speculation for further research.

## Conclusion

### ***6.1 Is there evidence of a neoliberal discourse in a Type C international school and, if so, is it dominant?***

The study has provided a complex picture of adolescent identity formation in a Type C international school. First, it has illustrated that there are competing discourses, some of which may be institutional, such as cosmopolitanism and post-colonialism in particular, some of which come from outside the school due to its context, localized cultural discourse, some of which are both internal and external, such as neoliberalism and some of which reflect the very nature of identity formation as socially constructed with the student as an active agent, such as egoistic. It has also questioned whether any one of the discourses are dominant, showing that even though neoliberalism starts with a huge advantage due to the close relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and neoliberal values, international students' identity remains unclear or unfinished, even though they may have spent a significant number of years in the international school. It has raised the possibility that international schooling erodes the localized cultural identity without ever fully replacing it with a commitment to cosmopolitanism with the result that international student's identity is better described as confused rather than composite. This has been particularly clear when placed besides the results for the national school which seem to demonstrate a clearly defined composite identity. The not surprising conclusion is that national schooling moves the student along the Scale of National Identity to the right, that is, it strengthens a localised cultural identity, while international school moves the students to the left, that is it weakens it.

It has advanced reasons for the confused rather than composite identity conclusion. The contradictions that exist within an international school, particularly a Type C international school, means that the student enters a playing field of competing discourses, which only serves to amplify the student's agency in negotiating their identity. Unlike the national school where synergies exist to reinforce a composite identity that is encapsulated in the school Mission, the contradictions in the international school between student's cultural background, their personally held values, the localised context of the school, the influence of local teacher and local curriculum mixed with the international influences, the neoliberal values encased in the schools' 5 promises, international teachers and curriculum, literally create a competition amongst discourses for hearts and minds. In which neoliberalism is aided by its alliance with post-colonialism and, to some degree, with egoism, especially where, over time, the students personally held values become aligned with neoliberal values. Students must resort to negotiating between a way of being and a way of belonging in order to navigate the competing discourses. It is tempting to conclude that there is no clear winner but to do so would be to fail to recognise that international schooling is not the end of but just a step in the ongoing identity formation of the student and that while the neoliberal discourse may not have won the competition, the neoliberal realities of the societies students aspire to join in the West and the shift in their own personal values, means that it is likely to win the war.

Therefore, in this case of this study of international schooling, it has prepared for the eventual dominance of neoliberalism by eroding localized cultural identity and failing to replace it with a cosmopolitan identity. At best we could agree with Resnik (2009) that the dominance of neoliberalism in international schools is "not final or fixed." (ibid. p83) the competition for hearts and minds is not over. The study has not

fully rejected the claim of a dominant neoliberal discourse in international schools, but it has questioned its dominance, showing it not to be complete in the context of this international study at the time of study in the minds of these students, according to their self-report of their attitudes. It has left open the strong possibility of dominance through highlighting the erosion of locally culturalized identity, the transformation of egoistic values to those that align with neoliberal values, the relative weakness of cosmopolitanism as a 'new' culture and the continuing strength of the post-colonial discourse as an ally of neoliberalism with the result that international students enter adult life predisposed towards neoliberalism.

In conclusion, while a neoliberal discourse was found to exist within both the international and national school studied the evidence clearly indicates that it was not dominant but in competition with other discourses.

## ***6.2 Is there evidence of the formation of a TNC in a Type C international school?***

The study has also questioned the claim that there is evidence of the formation of a TNC in international schools. It has questioned the dominance of a neoliberal discourse in the school in question. It has strongly suggested a relatively weak cosmopolitan discourse as well. So, it has questioned capitalist and transnational elements of that statement, at least in relation to this school. The "bonding social capital" is, if not missing, weak and thus it would be premature to talk about the formation of a TNC. It has also questioned the creation of a clear 'composite identity' at all, instead suggesting that student identities remain confused, in something of a dilemma as they are unresolved, at best a 'mosaic of identities'. This has led to the suggestion that in doing so it has completed the groundwork for

the creation of an “imagined community’ as international students both develop the skills and aptitudes, including self-sufficiency, to negotiate their own identity and create the ‘rootlessness’ that leaves them needing to find others like them, and develop an “imagined community”. But such is just a suggestion for future research arising out of the study.

The conclusion to this research question must be that insufficient evidence has been found to support the claim of the formation of TNC within the international school studied..

### ***6.3 Is a neoliberal discourse or evidence of TNC formation particular to an international school?***

Through carrying out the same research in both an international and national school the study has shown that students in both schools are subject to competing discourses. It has shown that the international school in question does not have a monopoly in regards neoliberal or even cosmopolitan discourses and it also showed that the national school seemed more successful than the international school in making a cosmopolitan mindset part of the composite identity of its students. In fact, it has shown that the national school seems to have been more effective in carrying out the role of identity formation in achieving a composite identity of a strong local cultural identity with an element of cosmopolitan identity all temporized by the student’s own agency and thus achieving its Mission of developing students with “Malaysian Hearts, Global Minds.” It is this failure of the international school in question to develop a strong composite identity in its students that has come to be seen as the defining element of an international schooling, namely the erosion of local cultural identity and exposure to multiple competing discourses that has the

effect of leaving the international students in question still in a formative stage of their socialization.

The conclusion is that the influence of a neoliberal discourse can be seen in both the international and national school studies but that its influence is stronger in the international school where the local/cultural discourse has been weakened by the nature of an international school.

#### **6.4 *Significance of the research***

The significant global influence of the outcomes of this competition for hearts and minds remains clear and some of the ways that influence is being felt has been highlighted in this research. What is happening in such Type C international schools in regards students' identity formation is significant because of the growth of such schools, it is a social phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century affecting national, non-Western communities in particular. If this school is to be taken as representative of such Type C international schools, which I have argued it is, then we can see that one influence is that such schools can act as an alternative to localized cultural and national identity formation that occurs in national schools. We have seen a relationship between a national school, even a private national school, and strengthening of the national identity and the international school and the comparative weakening of the national identity. While such international schools may make up only a small percentage of the education system within a nation-state, their impact upon a rising middle-class, particularly one here in Malaysia which may see itself as marginalised by "ethnicized neoliberal" (Joseph, 2017) government policies, is significant. The erosion of localized cultural identity and weakening of national cultural identity is happening. It was only the other week I overheard a parent at the Merdeka Assembly, annual celebration of Malaysia's nationhood, comment on how

poorly the international students sang the Negaraku (the Malaysian national anthem) in comparison to the private national school students. We cannot conclude, based on this research, that this international school has a dominant neoliberal discourse and is forming a TNC, but we can conclude that what it is doing has local significance for the nation-state and thus, by extrapolation, global significance.

### **6.5 Reflections on the research.**

The limitations of the study must, of course, be borne in mind. The impact of discourses on identity formation in the international school, what is really going on, is seen only through the relative importance students place on different categories. Even if, and this is questionable as such categorisation is itself provisional, ones that I have constructed, the categorisation is accepted as providing empirical data about students' perceptions, and even if the potential researcher bias is not seen to have adversely affected the students self-reporting, the students' perceptions that are recorded are but shadows projected on the wall. I have used such shadows, naming them to create a social reality, a picture of what is hidden behind me. (see Plato's Allegory of the Cave, 2010).

While the original intended methodology underwent much revision as pragmatism and a healthy dose of critical realism took over, the study remained true to its intention of seeking the answer through the students lived experience of international schooling. The clear difference between what international schools say they do and what they actually do has been realised, again a reality I am conscious of having constructed from the data before me.

Through a deep consideration of my own positionality, I was able to mitigate somewhat against researcher bias through the method whilst remaining true to the

stated goal of social betterment and providing a research outcome that can inform educational practice in international schools.

While attempts have been made to provide statistical measures of the significance of the findings, I nevertheless remain very conscious of the statistical limitations of the research, as I am no statistician and did not set out but found myself drawn into a statistical analysis. So further work could have been done on statistically testing the validity of the categories, for example, but was not carried out due to my own limitations and that of time.

Various barriers to research, not least of which were Covid and the global nomadic aspects of my career, were overcome and fate provided the opportunity to expand the original research into a comparison between students at an international school and a national school, as well as research a Type-C international school, which, I believe have added a unique contribution to the study of identity formation in international schools.

## **6.6 *Proposals for Future research***

What is happening in these 'diverse areas' of international school is still underreported (Bunnell and Hatch, 2021), and though hopefully this study goes some way to addressing that our understanding of the impact that international schools are having can only benefit from further research into such international schools.

The opportunity to compare identity formation in a private national school and an international school who shared many of the same characteristics which made such comparisons statistically viable was a unique one and I have not come across any similar studies in my research. However, there should and there will be as the other way that neoliberalism has been felt in international education is through the

development of TNCs with controlling interests in both national private and international schools (Bates 2011; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell, 2022). I am personally aware of a number here in Malaysia, like the Tenby Schools and Asia-Pacific schools, and in China, like the Yew Wah Yew Chung schools. Such schools offer opportunities for comparative studies that can further illustrate the different experience of identity formation for international students as compared to students following a national system.

As the study has shown a picture of an incomplete process of identity formation in an international school it has opened the gate for further studies, along the lines of Hsieh's 2018 autobiographical study, of what happens to graduates of international schools in what, for the want of a better word, could be called their 'tertiary socialisation'. If the synergism between primary and secondary socialisation has broken down in such schools due to the contradictions and dissonance created by competing discourses then studies of the post-schooling experience become even more relevant. Perhaps this author will find time to return to the original intention to research graduates of international schools 5-10 years after they left to understand the story of their identify formation since.

Of course, this study is of one Type C international school, and one subset of students of such a school, in a particular context in time. Its applicability to all Type C international schools needs to be considered carefully, especially when one considers how "intrinsically exceptional" (Pearce, 2013) Type C international schools are.

## **6.7 Implications for Practice**

First, there is a clear challenge to School Principals of Type-C international schools, and that challenge is one of student identity formation. There are a number

of facets of this challenge we must, as School Principals, face. One is the continuing post-colonial discourse within international schools created out of the Western perspective curriculum, methods of evaluation, the teachers we hire and the Western-orientated aspirations we create amongst our students. The 'West is Best' mantra is one we must continually challenge as we seek to weaken this discourse within our schools. In challenging it we must also work with other key stakeholders, parents and their perception, students and their aspirations and owners and their financial goals. A second facet of this challenge and perhaps a more winnable one, is to recognise the problem of identity that may exist and the reasons for it. We are often not in the position, and I would argue do not want to be in the position, of enforcing cosmopolitanism as an alternative discourse to local/national identity and yet we need to clearly place 'international mindedness' somewhere. I would advocate that we do this through focusing on diversity as the underpinning message. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) provides a bonding value that has both local, national and international benefits. The third and perhaps most vital one as it affects the well-being of each of our students is recognising the confusing experience that international schooling is, the contradictions and dissonance that exist, the competing discourses students must navigate in order to find a 'way of belonging' and our role in this is first to make such challenges visible and do what we always do with challenges in education, turn them into opportunities for learning. If students develop the skills and aptitudes through negotiating their own way through the milieu of competing discourses and thus become future-ready, lets imagine how much more skilled they will be if the school has systematically helped them develop those skills and supported them in facing up to those challenges. Students are developing a mosaic of identities, lets understand the parts of the mosaic in our school and help students build out of that mosaic a composite identity. lets' aim to align their "way of

being” with the “way of belonging” and this means adapting our approach to be fully inclusive and one in which student agency is at the core as they self-construct their identity. With some fellow School Principals I used the analogy of the sandwich shop. Most of us were no longer offering just the one sandwich (coronation chicken if we wanted to stay true to post-colonial roots) but a smorgasbord of opportunities, in fact we were priding ourselves on how many differing options there were without worrying too much about how they combined (banana and salmon sandwich springs to mind). What is needed, I have suggested, is a slight change of approach – the Subway or buffet approach. Ensure that students are able to choose from quality ingredients but facilitate the students in exercising their agency in building their own sandwich. Let us move further away from the school as an agent of socialisation to a milieu of socialisation but one within which students are facilitated to make good choices.

A second implication and a challenging one for those whose livelihood depends on the explosion of international schooling, is the impact international schools are having on the local/national identity. The growth of international schools competing with national education systems has been referred to as a sort of back-door or “crypto-growth” which is, rightly starting to be questioned (Pearce, 2021). We have, I feel, a duty to our host nation to ensure that Malaysian children who attend an international school can sing the Negaraku (national anthem) as well as any Malaysian child. We must value and be seen to value the localised cultural identity and, as above, help our students align their way of being in a local/national sense with a way of belonging in an international/global sense, and this can’t just be to speak English. We must work with government to ensure that international education strengthens not weakens the local/national identity while also strengthening that nations place in a global community. “Malaysian hearts, Global minds” is a pretty

good position, though what it means for Chinese and Korean students needs considered. In effect international education and local/national cultural identity cannot be competing discourses here in Malaysia, because if they are then recent policy changes in China illustrate what the impact may be on international schools.

In these ways I believe as School Principals we can reassert our moral purpose while still achieving the necessary business targets set by the neoliberal framework of Type-C for profit international schools.

## Appendix A Questionnaire

(note the National questionnaire is an exact copy)

Values and Attitudes (Students) (International)

26/07/2024, 13:43

### Values and Attitudes (Students) (International))

Dear Sri KDU Student,

My name is Mr. Spence and I am the Executive Principal for Sri KDU Kota Damansara I am conducting research as part of my doctoral studies in international education at Durham University.

The school has given permission for me to undertake this research with you. The study has received ethical approval from the education ethical committee of Durham University.

You have been invited to take part in this research by your school as you are a student in S4-6/Year 10-13, the focus group for the study.

Please note the questionnaire responses are anonymous.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to explore your view of international education. The questionnaire should take you about 20-25 minutes to complete.

\* Required

**This section asks questions about your parents.**

1. What is the highest level of qualifications achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?

- At least one has a postgraduate degree level qualification.
- At least one has a degree level qualification.
- Qualifications below degree level.
- No formal qualifications.
- Don't know.

2. Which best describes the sort of work the main/ highest income earner in your household did in their main job?

- Traditional professional occupations such as: accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer.
- Modern professional occupations such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, artist, police officer, software designer.
- Business owner.
- Senior managers and administrators usually responsible for planning, organising and co-ordinating work and for finance such as: finance manager, chief executive.
- Middle or junior managers such as: office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager.
- Admin and Clerical such as: secretary, personal assistant, clerical worker, office clerk.
- Technical and craft occupations such as: motor mechanic, electrician, gardener, train driver.
- Semi-routine manual and service occupations such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker.
- farm worker, catering assistant, receptionist, sales assistant.
- Routine manual and service occupations such as: van driver, cleaner, packer, sewing machinist, messenger, labourer, waiter / waitress, bar staff. ☐
- Retired.
- Don't Know.

### 3. Compared to people in general, how would you describe yourself?

- Much wealthier than most others.
- Wealthier than most.
- A bit better off.
- About the same.
- Poorer.
- Much poorer.

4. How many children do your parents have?

- Just me.
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more.

5. What cultural background best describes your father?

\*

Note you may select more than one option.

- Malaysian
- Other Asian (Japan/Korea/South East Asia)
- Chinese
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladesh/Sri Lankan
- European
- Russian
- Filipino
- Australia/New Zealand or Pacific islands
- Middle Eastern/North African
- North American (US and Canada )
- South or Central American
- South African
- East or West African
- None of the above

6. What cultural background best describes your mother?

\*

Note you may select more than one option.

- Malaysian
- Other Asian (Japan/Korea/South East Asia)
- Chinese
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladesh/Sri Lankan
- European
- Russian
- Filipino
- Australia/New Zealand or Pacific islands
- Middle Eastern/North African
- North American (US and Canada )
- South or Central American
- South African
- East or West African
- None of the above

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## Values and Attitudes (Students) (International))

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Please note the questionnaire responses are anonymous.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to explore your view of international education. The questionnaire should take you about 20-25 minutes to complete.

\* Required

This section asks some questions about you.

7. What gender are you?

\*

Female

Male

Non-binary

8. Which school do you attend? \*

- Sri KDU International School
- Sri KDU Secondary School

9. What year group are you in? \*

- S4
- S5
- S6
- Y10
- Y11
- Y12/13

10. How long have you been in a Sri KDU Kota Damansara School?

\*

- 5 years or more.
- 3-4 years.
- 1-2 years.
- Joined this year.

11. How would you rate your academic level?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Lowest.

Highest.

12. Which of the following is your mother tongue (i.e. the language spoken at home)

\*

You can select more than one option.

- Bahasa Melayu
- Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)
- English.
- Other.

13. Which of the following best describes you?

\*

Choose one.

- I speak, read and write in my mother tongue (home language) fluently.
- I speak in my mother tongue (home language) fluently but I am not fluent when I read or write.
- I only speak a little or just the basics of my mother tongue (home language).
- I do not speak my mother tongue.

14. What cultural background do you feel best describes you?

\*

Note you may select more than one option.

- Malaysian
- Other Asian (Japan/Korea/South East Asia)
- Chinese
- Indian/Pakistani/Bangladesh/Sri Lankan
- European
- Russian
- Filipino
- Australia/New Zealand or Pacific islands
- Middle Eastern/North African
- North American (US and Canada)
- South or Central American
- South African
- East or West African

15. Which of the following best describes you?

\*

Choose one.

- I have a good knowledge and understanding of my host country, its traditions and customs
- I have a deep understanding of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I have some knowledge of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I have little or no knowledge of my home country, its culture and traditions.
- I am not interested in learning about the culture of my home country.

16. Which of the following statements best describes what you usually do during the long summer school holidays assuming there are no Covid travel restrictions?

\*

(You can choose as many as apply)

- Spend the holidays in Malaysia
- Spend the holidays in my home country/province.
- Spend the holidays somewhere else in Asia.
- Spend the holidays somewhere in the West (Europe/America)
- Go on holiday to different places

17. Which of the following best describes you?

\*

You can choose as many as apply

- My friends get the same sort of grades as I do. 我
- My friends like the same subjects as me.
- My friends enjoy the same weekend activities as me.
- My friends go the same CCA (after school clubs) as me.

18. If you had to pick one thing that you friends and you had most in common what would it be?

\*

Enter your answer

19. Which of the following best describes you?

\*

You can choose as many as apply.

- I love school, its the best time of my life.
- I like going to school as I enjoy being with my friends.
- I like going to school as I enjoy studying.
- I like going to school as I enjoys clubs and sports.
- I see school as something you have to do if you want to get anywhere in life.
- I go to school because I have to.

## Values and Attitudes (Students) (International))

Dear Sri KDU Student,

My name is Mr. Spence and I am the Executive Principal for Sri KDU Kota Damansara I am conducting research as part of my doctoral studies in international education at Durham University.

The school has given permission for me to undertake this research with you. The study has received ethical approval from the education ethical committee of Durham University.

You have been invited to take part in this research by your school as you are a student in S4-6/Year 10-13, the focus group for the study.

Please note the questionnaire responses are anonymous.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to explore your view of international education. The questionnaire should take you about 20-25 minutes to complete.

\* Required

This is the main part of the questionnaire and is about your values and attitudes.

21. Please rank the following in terms of their importance to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
That you achieve the best academic results you can	<input type="radio"/>				
That you are happy at school	<input type="radio"/>				
That you learn how to live a healthy lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>				
That you develop a mindset that enables you to be a global citizen	<input type="radio"/>				

That you learn the English language

22. Please rank the following in order of importance to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Average and one Highest.

	Lowest	Average	Highest
Learning the English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning Chinese	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning other languages (e.g. French)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning Bahasa Melayu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when there is something to gain, like a prize or house points or my parents have promised me a reward?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very strongly

24. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I am closely supervised by my teacher or parent?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very Strongly

25. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I find the subject interesting or fun?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very strongly

26. How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I have a test or exam to pass?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very strongly

27. Please rank the following in order of importance to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
Learning about the host country (Malaysia) culture	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about my home country (if from Malaysia your home province) culture	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about Western Culture	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about other cultures	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about being part of a global community	<input type="radio"/>				

28. How important do you think it is to celebrate Malaysia Day?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very important

29. How important do you think it is to celebrate International Week?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very important

30. How important do you think it is to celebrate cultural festivals, like Deepavali?

\*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very important

31. How important do you think it is to celebrate days of international importance, like international women's day? \*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all

Very Important

32. Please rank the following in order of importance to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
Teachers have higher degrees (Masters and above) in their subject	<input type="radio"/>				
Teachers have been trained in Western methods of teaching	<input type="radio"/>				
Teachers have previously worked in other international schools and cultures	<input type="radio"/>				

Teachers have previously worked in National schools in Malaysia

Teachers speak English as a native

33. If there is anything else that is important to you about your teachers then please add it below.

Enter your answer

34. Please rank the importance of the following to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
Learning languages	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about culture like literature, art and music	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths related (STEM) subjects	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning personal skills, like collaboration, leadership and time management.	<input type="radio"/>				
Learning about career related subjects like business and economics	<input type="radio"/>				

35. Please rank the importance of the following to you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, one Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	High	Highest
That school prepares you for the world of work	<input type="radio"/>				
That school helps you get good grades	<input type="radio"/>				
That school teaches you to be a good person	<input type="radio"/>				
That school prepares you to be able to cooperate and communicate with people from other countries	<input type="radio"/>				
That school prepares you for university	<input type="radio"/>				

36. Please rank the following in order of the influence you think they have on you.

\*

Please choose one Lowest, one Low, two Average, one High and one Highest.

	Lowest	Low	Average	Average	High	Highest
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>					
Friends	<input type="radio"/>					
Parents	<input type="radio"/>					
Peers (other people your age)	<input type="radio"/>					
	<input type="radio"/>					

Social media

Books I have read

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## Values and Attitudes (Students) (International))

Dear Sri KDU Student,

My name is Mr. Spence and I am the Executive Principal for Sri KDU Kota Damansara I am conducting research as part of my doctoral studies in international education at Durham University.

The school has given permission for me to undertake this research with you. The study has received ethical approval from the education ethical committee of Durham University.

You have been invited to take part in this research by your school as you are a student in S4-6/Year 10-13, the focus group for the study.

Please note the questionnaire responses are anonymous.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to explore your view of international education. The questionnaire should take you about 20-25 minutes to complete.

\* Required

This section is about your future aspirations

37. Which of the following best describes you?

\*

Choose one. 单选

- In the future I want to live and work in Malaysia
- In the future I want to live and work in my home country (if not Malaysia)
- In the future I want to live and work in the West (Europe/America)
- In the future I don't mind where I live and work. 将
- In the future I want to live and work in many different countries
- In the future I want to live and work somewhere other than mentioned above..

38. Which of these best describes your ambitions in regards your career?

\*

Choose one.

- I want to get a high paying job
- I would rather do a job I like even if the pay is only average
- I don't care what job I get
- I want to get a job that enables me to travel the world
- I want a job which gives me lots of free time even though it might be low paid.
- I want to get a job that helps other people and would consider doing charity work
- I want to focus on raising a family so either I don't want a job or I want a job that is flexible

**39. Which of these best describes your view of University?**

\*

Choose one.

- I want to go to University because I am really interested in studying my favourite subject in more depth.
- I want to go to University in order to get a better paying job
- I want to go to University in order to get a more important job
- I want to go to University in order to meet people from all over the world
- I want to go to University because my parents want me to go to University
- I don't want to go to University
- I don't know what else to do

**40. This questionnaire has been about exploring your values and attitudes towards your international schooling. If there is something important about what school means to you that has not been covered please feel free to comment below.**

Enter your answer

41. Please feel free to make a comment about the research or the questionnaire.

Enter your answer

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## *Appendix B: Grouping of Question Responses by Mindset*

### ***B.1 Neoliberal mindset***

That you achieve the best academic results you can  
That you learn the English language  
How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when there is something to gain, like a prize or house points or my parents have promised me a reward?  
How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I have a test or exam to pass?  
Learning about Western Culture  
Teachers have higher degrees (Masters and above) in their subject  
Learning Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths related (STEM) subjects  
Learning personal skills, like collaboration, leadership and time management  
Learning about career related subjects like business and economics  
That school prepares you for the world of work  
That school helps you get good grades  
In the future I want to live and work in the West  
I want to get a high paying job  
I want to go to university in order to get a better paying job.  
I want to go to University in order to get a better paying job

### ***B2. Cosmopolitan mindset***

That you develop a mindset that enables you to be a global citizen  
That you learn the English language  
Learning about other cultures  
Learning about being part of a global community  
Learning languages  
How important do you think it is to celebrate International Week?  
How important do you think it is to celebrate cultural festivals, like Deepavali?  
How important do you think it is to celebrate days of international importance, like international women's day?  
Teachers have previously worked in other international schools and cultures  
Learning languages  
That school teaches you to be a good person  
That school prepares you to be able to cooperate and communicate with people from other countries  
In the future I don't mind where I live and work.  
In the future I want to live and work in many different countries  
I want to get a job that helps other people and would consider doing charity work  
I want to get a job that enables me to travel the world  
I want to go to University in order to meet people from all over the world

### ***B3. Local Cultural mindset***

Learning about the host country (Malaysia) culture  
Learning about my home country (if from Malaysia your home province) culture  
How important do you think it is to celebrate Malaysia Day?  
How important do you think it is to celebrate cultural festivals, like Deepavali?  
Teachers have previously worked in National schools in Malaysia  
Learning about culture like literature, art and music  
That school teaches you to be a good person  
In the future I want to live and work in Malaysia

#### ***B4 Egoistic mindset***

That you are happy at school  
That you learn how to live a healthy lifestyle  
How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I find the subject interesting or fun?  
How strongly do you agree with this statement: I learn best when I have a test or exam to pass?  
Learning about the host country (Malaysia) culture  
Learning about my home country (if from Malaysia your home province) culture  
How important do you think it is to celebrate Malaysia Day?  
Learning personal skills, like collaboration, leadership and time management  
Learning about career related subjects like business and economics  
That school helps you get good grades  
That school prepares you for university  
I want to get a high paying job  
I would rather do a job I like even if the pay is only average  
I want to go to University because I am really interested in studying my favourite subject in more depth.  
I want to go to University in order to get a better paying job

#### ***B5. Post-Colonial mindset***

That you learn the English language  
Teachers speak English as a native  
Learning about Western Culture  
Teachers have been trained in Western methods of teaching  
Teachers speak English as a native  
In the future I want to live and work in the West (Europe/America)

### ***Appendix C.1 Consent Form***

**Consent Form**

**Project title:** A struggle for hearts and minds: What evidence is there of a dominant mindset amongst students of International Schools?

**Researcher(s):** Mr. Trevor Spence  
**Department:** Department of Education, University of Durham  
**Contact details:** t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa, frnp48@durham.ac.uk

**Supervisor name:** Dr, Oakleigh Welply  
**Supervisor contact details:** oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy for your school to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [07/03/2020] and the privacy notice for the above project.	/
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	/
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	/
I agree, on behalf of the school, for students to take part in the above project.	/
I understand that the participation is voluntary and students are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	/

Principal/Head of School



Signature. \_\_\_\_\_

Date. 23 Oct 2023

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)

LILI MARIAH ABDULLAH

## Appendix C.2 Privacy Notice

### Privacy Notice



#### PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE

Durham University has a responsibility under data protection legislation to provide individuals with information about how we process their personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. Organisations variously call them a privacy statement, a fair processing notice or a privacy policy.

To ensure that we process your personal data fairly and lawfully we are required to inform you:

- Why we collect your data
- How it will be used
- Who it will be shared with

We will also explain what rights you have to control how we use your information and how to inform us about your wishes. Durham University will make the Privacy Notice available via the website and at the point we request personal data.

Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part (i.e. common to all of our privacy notices) and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

#### Data Controller

The Data Controller is Durham University. If you would like more information about how the University uses your personal data, please see the University's [Information Governance webpages](#) or contact Information Governance Unit:

Telephone: (0191 33) 46246 or 46103

E-mail: [information.governance@durham.ac.uk](mailto:information.governance@durham.ac.uk)

Information Governance Unit also coordinate response to individuals asserting their rights under the legislation. Please contact the Unit in the first instance.

#### Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising the University on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the University is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer:

Jennifer Sewel  
University Secretary  
Telephone: (0191 33) 46144  
E-mail: [university.secretary@durham.ac.uk](mailto:university.secretary@durham.ac.uk)

#### Your rights in relation to your personal data

### **Privacy notices and/or consent**

You have the right to be provided with information about how and why we process your personal data. Where you have the choice to determine how your personal data will be used, we will ask you for consent. Where you do not have a choice (for example, where we have a legal obligation to process the personal data), we will provide you with a privacy notice. A privacy notice is a verbal or written statement that explains how we use personal data.

Whenever you give your consent for the processing of your personal data, you receive the right to withdraw that consent at any time. Where withdrawal of consent will have an impact on the services we are able to provide, this will be explained to you, so that you can determine whether it is the right decision for you.

### **Accessing your personal data**

You have the right to be told whether we are processing your personal data and, if so, to be given a copy of it. This is known as the right of subject access. You can find out more about this right on the University's [Subject Access Requests webpage](#).

### **Right to rectification**

If you believe that personal data we hold about you is inaccurate, please contact us and we will investigate. You can also request that we complete any incomplete data.

Once we have determined what we are going to do, we will contact you to let you know.

### **Right to erasure**

You can ask us to erase your personal data in any of the following circumstances:

- We no longer need the personal data for the purpose it was originally collected
- You withdraw your consent and there is no other legal basis for the processing
- You object to the processing and there are no overriding legitimate grounds for the processing
- The personal data have been unlawfully processed
- The personal data have to be erased for compliance with a legal obligation
- The personal data have been collected in relation to the offer of information society services (information society services are online services such as banking or social media sites).

Once we have determined whether we will erase the personal data, we will contact you to let you know.

### **Right to restriction of processing**

You can ask us to restrict the processing of your personal data in the following circumstances:

- You believe that the data is inaccurate and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether it is indeed inaccurate
- The processing is unlawful and you want us to restrict processing rather than erase it
- We no longer need the data for the purpose we originally collected it, but you need it in order to establish, exercise or defend a legal claim and
- You have objected to the processing and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether our legitimate interests in processing the data override your objection.

Once we have determined how we propose to restrict processing of the data, we will contact you to discuss and, where possible, agree this with you.

### **Retention**

The University keeps personal data for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was originally collected. Most of these time periods are set out in the [University Records Retention Schedule](#).

### **Making a complaint**

If you are unsatisfied with the way in which we process your personal data, we ask that you let us know so that we can try and put things right. If we are not able to resolve issues to your satisfaction, you can refer the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: [Information Commissioner's Office](#)

## **PART 2 – TAILORED PRIVACY NOTICE**

This section of the Privacy Notice provides you with the privacy information that you need to know before you provide personal data to the University for the particular purpose(s) stated below.

### **Project Title:**

A struggle for hearts and minds: What evidence is there of a dominant **mindset** amongst the students of International Schools?

### **Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:**

'Personal data will be collected through the questionnaire. This will include your gender, ethnicity, year group (if a student), your experience of international schooling and your views on international education.

The only personal data that will be collected that identifies you will your signed consent form. Note this will be collected separate to and kept separate from the research data.

Note that it is an online questionnaire, but IP addresses will not be collected.

### **Lawful Basis**

- *For the majority of projects, the legal basis will be the University's public task:* Under data protection legislation, we need to tell you the lawful basis we are relying on to process your data. The lawful basis we are relying on is public task: the processing is necessary for an activity being carried out as part of the University's public task, which is defined as teaching, learning and research.
- *For further information see* <https://durham.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/governance/dp/legalbasis/>

### **How personal data is stored:**

- All personal data will be held securely and strictly confidential to the research team.
- You will be allocated an anonymous number for data collection. Information that identifies you, such as your signed consent form, will be kept separate from the anonymised data.
- All personal data in electronic form will be stored on a password protected computer, and any hardcopies will be kept in locked storage. Data will not be available to anyone outside the research team.

### **How personal data is processed:**

- Data about gender, ethnicity and year group are being collected in order to compare responses by these categories and see if there are any significant differences about views on or experience of international education according to gender, ethnicity or year group.
- Information will be entered into a database for analysis. After six months the data will be completely anonymised and the original records, including any information which can identify you personally, will be destroyed.'

- 

### **Withdrawal of data**

You can request withdrawal of your data until it has been fully anonymised. Once this has happened it will not be possible to identify you from any of the data we hold.

### **Who the researcher shares personal data with:**

No personal data that could identify you will be shared.

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the research team may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering, or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behaviour (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

### **How long personal data is held by the researcher:**

'We will hold personal data, i.e. your signed consent form, for six months or until the completion of the dissertation, after which it will be destroyed.

### **How to object to the processing of your personal data for this project:**

If you have any concerns regarding the processing of your personal data, or you wish to withdraw your data from the project, contact Mr. Trevor Spence at [t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa](mailto:t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa) or [frnp48@durham.ac.uk](mailto:frnp48@durham.ac.uk)

### **Further information:**

*If you require any further information please contact Mr. Trevor Spence at [t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa](mailto:t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa) or [frnp48@durham.ac.uk](mailto:frnp48@durham.ac.uk)*

## Appendix C.3 Information Sheet

### Participant Information Sheet

**Project title:** A struggle for hearts and minds: What evidence is there of a dominant mindset amongst students of International Schools?

**Researcher(s):** Mr. Trevor Spence

**Department:** Department of Education, University of Durham

**Contact details:** t.spence@mis.qpschools.qa, frnp48@durham.ac.uk

**Supervisor name:** Dr, Oakleigh Welply

**Supervisor contact details:** oakleigh.welply@durham.ac.uk

Your school is invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my doctoral studies in international education at Durham University

This study has received ethical approval from the education ethical committee of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree for your school to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved for participants.

Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/>

#### What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to...

- Ask students, teachers and parents about what they think is important about attending an international school. For students and parents this will also look at what they hope to get out of attending an international school. This research will then be compared, possibly with similar research with students, teachers and parents of other international schools, to see if there is a dominant set of values that are shared.
- *The research will then be used to complete a doctoral dissertation by 2024.*

#### Why has my school been invited to take part?

Your school has been invited because ...

- *It has an international education element to its Mission, Principles and Practices*

#### Does the school have to take part?

Participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree for your school to take part. If you do agree for your school to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. In agreeing to take part you agree to the students taking part in the research and for the research to be distributed to parents and teachers at the school. Note all participants

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will...

- *Be sent an online questionnaire via Office 365 Forms. This questionnaire can be completed in about 15-20 minutes by clicking on the link provided either at home or at school, on a desktop pc, laptop or smart phone. As some of the questions ask for a short-written response you may find it easier to complete on a desktop PC or laptop.*

- *The questionnaire is anonymous and there will be no personal identification questions other than gender, ethnicity and, for a student and parent, year group/year group of your child. You may choose to not answer any questions that you wish.*

#### **Are there any potential risks involved?**

- You should find the questions easier to answer as they are about your opinions about international education. Completing the questionnaire may help you reflect on what you value in terms of international education. None of the questions will be of a sensitive nature.

#### **Will my data be kept confidential?**

The data you provide is fully anonymous and we will not collect or ask you to provide any personal data. Please note that the option to collect IP address on Forms will be turned off so I will have no way of linking responses back to an individual.

#### **What will happen to the results of the project?**

- *The research results will form part of a dissertation that I hope to publish by 2022*
- *Results may also be used in articles written for academic or educational publications or in educational conferences.*
- No personal data will be shared, however anonymised (i.e. not identifiable) data may be used in publications, reports, presentations, web pages and other research outputs. At the end of the project, anonymised data may be archived and shared with others for legitimate research purposes.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after publication of the dissertation.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

#### **Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?**

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's [Complaints Process](#).

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

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