Exploring Classism in International Student Exchange: Implications for Equity and Social Justice in Global Education

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Abstract

International student exchange programs at the secondary level offer significant cultural immersion and academic enrichment opportunities (Hansel & Grove, 1986; Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). However, classism significantly influences participating students' experiences and outcomes, particularly in the United States, and often excludes many who would benefit from such programs (Goldoni, 2017). Addressing these inequities requires inclusive, humble knowledge sharing that challenges unsustainable development in global education. This review examines the intersection of international exchange and classism among U.S. students, proposing a new framework to include diverse perspectives and highlighting the use of social reproduction theory to explain persistent inequities while suggesting alternative frameworks to understand systemic classism.

Keywords: Equity, classism, class status, study abroad.

Theoretical Framework

While social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1973) explains how education perpetuates class inequalities in exchange program access, this study integrates critical pedagogical frameworks - hidden curriculum theory (Apple, 1971), cultural wealth models (Yosso, 2005), and learning pathways (Nasir et al., 2020) - to demonstrate how institutional practices can either reinforce or disrupt these patterns. This framework examines how ideological influences and identity development processes impact poor and working-class students' engagement with the identity of the "global citizen."

Methodology

This systematic argumentative literature review analyzes peer-reviewed publications from 2003-2023 using thematic synthesis to challenge existing theoretical frameworks and propose an integrated critical perspective. The analysis examines literature from education, sociology, and international studies databases to address two key research questions:

1. How have institutional structures of class power and privilege impacted U.S. students' participation, experiences, and outcomes in international student exchange programs?
2. What theoretical frameworks have scholars employed to study classism in international education, and what alternative perspectives could enhance our understanding of these inequities?

Significance

The research uncovers societal implications of classism in international exchange, evaluating interventions for inclusivity and equity. By synthesizing scholarship, it highlights challenges for diverse

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U.S. students and offers recommendations for equitable opportunities, deepening the understanding of socioeconomic disparities in international education and contributing to the discourse on social inequality.

Introduction

In the global education landscape, international student exchange programs promise unique opportunities for cultural immersion and academic enrichment (Hansel & Grove, 1986; Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Amid these ideals, underlying issues of classism often shape the participation options, experiences, and outcomes of students in the United States (Goldoni, 2017; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stallman et al., 2010). Class status has continued to divide neighborhoods and cities, segregate schools, and reproduce significant discrepancies in families' access to resources in all parts of the country. International exchange (also known as study abroad) programs have consistently followed the same divides, privileging middle and upper-class students since it gained popularity in this country (Engel & Gibson, 2022).

International education has long been framed as an option for those with the social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1973) necessary to navigate global citizenship complexities. Existing research on participation barriers predominantly focuses on two areas: financial constraints facing students and families (Engel & Gibson, 2022; Salisbury et al., 2009; Whatley, 2017) and differential accumulation of social and cultural capital affecting study abroad intent (Goldoni, 2017, 2018; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). However, this research overlooks deeper systemic barriers, including ideological and institutional practices that systematically suppress information about program benefits and accessibility for marginalized students (Apple, 1976; Stuber, 2009). These ideological barriers have created hidden and thus under-researched areas of analysis that could uncover and address class inequality in participation.

The Problem and Promise of International Education

The Institute of International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919 and was the first private organization formed to facilitate international education and student exchanges in the United States. According to data collected annually for the Open Doors Report, the 2021/2022 academic year exposed continued disparity in who elects to study abroad. Women (68%) continue to participate at higher rates than men, and only a small percentage identify as non-binary (0.2%). 68% of participants are White, 12% are Hispanic, and 5% are Black or African American (Institute of International Education, 2023). These disparities have been a focus of researchers for the last two decades, primarily due to the consistent and seemingly irreparable inequity in participation despite what studies have shown to be relatively equal intent (Brux & Fry, 2010; Lei, 2022; Salisbury et al., 2011; Stroud, 2010).

A critical gap in the study abroad literature is the systemic analysis of the participation of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This gap is emphasized by the omission of statistics on the socioeconomic status of participating students in the data available from the Institute of International Education (IIE). However, the 2008 report "College-Bound Students' Interests in Study Abroad and Other International Learning Activities," produced in collaboration with the American Council on Education (ACE), the Art & Science Group, and The College Board, revealed that among 1509 surveyed high school seniors intending to study abroad, 28% reported a family income of less than $50,000 annually, and 9% reported an income of less than $20,000 (American Council on Education et al., 2008). Statistics related to socioeconomic status and international student exchange programs in high school were not available.

There is abundant research that supports the significant positive outcomes that are connected, both directly and indirectly, to participation in international education for students at the university level. From increased graduation rates (Sutton & Rubin, 2004) to improved cross-cultural awareness (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004), students who study abroad gain advantages personally, academically, and professionally. Few studies focus on adolescent students at the secondary level. Still, the findings in one qualitative case

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study on international students in the U.S. identify numerous benefits to the student and the host families (Sustarsic, 2020), including increased awareness of global issues and reduced prejudice.

Studies have also highlighted the historical inequity inherent in the U.S. education system. Students of all ages in the United States, from preschool through the post-secondary level, have been shown to experience significant disparities in access to financial, educational, social, and curricular resources (Carter & Welner, 2013; Oakes, 1985; Schmidt et al., 2015; Tyack & Cuban, 2000). Public school funding imbalances have created cavernous divides between communities with access to appropriate funding and those without what they need to provide safe buildings and basic supplies for students (Ewing, 2018; Kozol, 1991). This divide, among other things, has contributed to the need for more support for international education in under-resourced schools.

Without addressing these disparities, educational systems risk perpetuating inequitable stratification throughout students' academic trajectories while reinforcing institutional and societal classism. This perpetuation intensifies the divide between dominant conceptions of valued knowledge and marginalized perspectives in global educational spaces.

While existing literature demonstrates substantial positive impacts of international programs on academic outcomes, cross-cultural understanding, and intercultural learning, this research primarily reflects experiences of privileged participants. This literature review contributes to scholarly and practitioner efforts to create inclusive educational opportunities by examining the intersection of international student exchange and classism among U.S. students through both established and alternative theoretical lenses. Specifically, the review analyzes how dominant cultural norms maintain institutional classism and identifies theoretical frameworks that could disrupt these patterns.

Theoretical Framework

Existing literature on participation inequities in U.S. international education predominantly employs social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1973; Weininger, 2002) to explain how educational systems perpetuate social inequalities by replicating class structures through differential access to social and cultural capital (Engel & Gibson, 2022; Salisbury et al., 2009). While this framework effectively explains the persistence of class-based disparities, it offers limited insight into how these patterns might be disrupted or how marginalized students exercise agency within constrained systems.

This review therefore employs an integrated critical framework that builds upon social reproduction theory while incorporating three complementary perspectives: Apple's (1971) hidden curriculum theory to examine how institutional practices covertly maintain class boundaries, Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth model to recognize assets marginalized students bring to educational settings, and Nasir et al.'s (2020) learning pathways to understand how students navigate and potentially reshape educational opportunities. Together, these frameworks provide a more comprehensive analytical lens for understanding both the reproduction and potential disruption of class-based inequities in international education.

Many studies investigate how students' cultural capital and social networks affect their ability to navigate and benefit from international exchange programs (Engel & Gibson, 2022; Goldoni, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Whatley & Stich, 2021). Drawing on concepts of cultural capital, social capital, and habitus (Bourdieu, 1973; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Weininger, 2002), these studies elucidate how socioeconomic status and class position shape students' access to information about and participation in these programs. Social and cultural capital are often associated with environmental factors connected to immediate and extended familial relationships, such as parental income and education level, emphasizing how student experiences are replicated within family units across generations (Bourdieu, 1973).

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This integrated theoretical approach serves two analytical purposes: first, to systematically examine how existing research has employed social reproduction theory to understand class-based participation patterns, and second, to apply the combined critical framework to identify gaps in current understanding and potential intervention points within institutional practices. Utilizing the theory of the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1976; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux & Penna, 1979), the review will interrogate how culturally embedded institutional structures and educational policies perpetuate class-based inequities within exchange programs. It will explore how students experience advantages or disadvantages based on their socioeconomic backgrounds (Langhout et al., 2009; Lareau & Calarco, 2012; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012), impacting their likelihood of participating in global learning experiences. By applying Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth model and Nasir and colleagues' (2020) learning pathways, the review will examine opportunities for disrupting dominant narratives and fostering transformative practices that promote equity and inclusion.

Methodologically, this framework guides the literature analysis by directing attention to three interconnected levels: (1) how hidden curriculum practices within educational institutions shape student perceptions of international education accessibility (Apple, 1971), (2) how cultural wealth assets of marginalized students are recognized or dismissed in program recruitment and support (Yosso, 2005), and (3) how learning pathways reveal both constraints and opportunities for agency in educational decision-making (Nasir et al., 2020). This multi-level analysis enables identification of both reproductive mechanisms and potential disruption points that single-theory approaches might overlook.

This integrated critical framework reveals how structural inequities embedded in U.S. educational systems operate through hidden institutional practices that shape student identity development and international education participation patterns. Importantly, this theoretical approach also illuminates how educators and program administrators can identify and disrupt these practices by recognizing student cultural wealth and creating learning pathways that expand rather than constrain educational opportunities.

Methods

This argumentative literature review employed a comprehensive search strategy across three academic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR. The search encompassed peer-reviewed publications from 2003 to 2023 to capture two decades of scholarship while maintaining contemporary relevance. Search strategies combined terms related to international education, socioeconomic factors, and theoretical frameworks using Boolean operators (See Table 1 for detailed search criteria and results).

Table 1 Literature Search and Selection Criteria

Search Component	**Details**
Databases	Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR
Date Range	2003-2023 (20 years)
Search Terms	International education AND (classism OR socioeconomic OR "social class")
Initial Results	320 articles
After Screening	45 articles
Additional Sources	15 (citation tracking)
Final Corpus	60 sources

The initial search yielded 320 potential articles, which underwent systematic screening using predetermined criteria. Studies were included if they focused on U.S.-based students or programs, addressed socioeconomic dimensions of international education participation, and were published in peer-reviewed journals within the specified timeframe. Articles were excluded if they focused solely on

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language learning outcomes without socioeconomic analysis, examined non-U.S. participants without comparative analysis, or discussed racial factors without addressing class dynamics. This process resulted in 45 articles for detailed analysis, supplemented by 15 additional articles identified through citation tracking. There were also several foundational theoretical works cited to establish the conceptual framework.

Approaching this topic through an argumentative literature review allows for the challenge of previously utilized theories and the presentation of alternative theoretical perspectives. The research explores the historical evolution of international student exchange programs, tracing their roots from early initiatives focusing on diplomacy and forming the identity of the "global citizen" (Cheon et al., 2020; Zemach-Bersin, 2007) before examining the multifaceted dimensions of classism within U.S. education systems and how socioeconomic status influences access to these programs. Surface-level barriers such as financial constraints and differences in support networks are explored (Kubota, 2016; Kuzma et al., 2012; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015), followed by a deeper analysis of systemic and ideological factors. While secondary programs were the initial focus, the lack of research on classism in this age group required expanding the search to include post-secondary participants.

Analytical Framework

The literature analysis employed the integrated critical framework described previously, examining studies across three interconnected analytical dimensions. First, articles were analyzed for their use of social reproduction theory, particularly how they employed Bourdieu's concepts to explain participation patterns. Second, studies were examined for evidence of hidden curriculum practices that maintain class-based barriers. Third, the analysis identified how research recognized or overlooked cultural wealth assets and learning pathways of marginalized students. This multi-dimensional approach enabled the identification of both reproductive mechanisms and potential intervention points across the literature.

The research questions driving this inquiry are:

1. How have institutional structures of class power and privilege impacted U.S. students' participation, experiences, and outcomes in international student exchange programs?
2. What theoretical frameworks have scholars employed to study classism in international education, and what alternative perspectives could enhance our understanding of these inequities?

Researcher Positionality

In the words of Stuart Hall, "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context,' *positioned*" (Hall, 2015, emphasis in original). Considering international student exchanges and study abroad programs for students in the United States prompts my reflection on my position and on the formative influence such programs could have had on my identity as a cisgender, White woman. Raised in a predominantly White, middle-class community in rural New Hampshire, where discussions on race, class, and equity were absent, my upbringing shielded me from the realities beyond my immediate surroundings. It was not until adulthood, after continuing my education and navigating a career in finance, that I recognized my ignorance of and complicity in systemic racism.

This realization informs my perspective on international exchanges, recognizing both the historical inequities in participation and the privilege inherent in remaining unaware of these patterns. Those with class privilege are often shielded from seeing how institutional practices can exclude people. My background shapes both my theoretical approach and analytical priorities in this research. Rather than focusing on individual deficits or perceived family shortcomings, I am drawn to frameworks that examine how educational institutions themselves create and maintain barriers through mechanisms that operate below the surface. My experience in finance provides additional perspective on how economic structures intersect with educational access, while my eventual exposure to international experiences as an adult

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heightens my awareness of how transformative such opportunities can be – and thus how significant their unequal distribution becomes. This positionality leads me to prioritize literature that examines institutional practices and to seek theoretical frameworks like hidden curriculum theory and cultural wealth models that can expose how educational systems both perpetuate inequities and potentially overlook valuable assets that marginalized students bring to global learning experiences.

Literature Review

The literature review examines three interconnected dimensions of classism in international education. While this review necessarily draws primarily from post-secondary research due to limited scholarship on secondary programs, the institutional structures and theoretical frameworks examined operate across educational levels, making these insights relevant for understanding class barriers in both contexts. First, I trace the historical evolution of U.S. international education to demonstrate how class-based exclusions became embedded in program structures from their inception. Second, I analyze how contemporary research has documented economic barriers and their relationship to student intention and participation. Finally, I examine the theoretical frameworks scholars have employed, particularly Bourdieu's concepts of capital, while identifying gaps that necessitate the alternative approaches outlined previously. While existing research has documented financial barriers facing poor and working-class students (Engel & Gibson, 2022; Pope, 2023; Walpole, 2003), fewer studies examine how these students perceive themselves in relation to the constructed identity of the "global citizen." This gap reveals the need for theoretical frameworks that move beyond economic explanations to examine how ideological and hegemonic forces shape identity formation and educational aspirations. The following analysis demonstrates how hidden curriculum theory, cultural wealth models, and learning pathways can illuminate these overlooked dimensions.

International Education in the U.S. – A Brief History

Organized international student exchange programs in the United States date back to after the First World War. Although the Allies emerged victorious from that conflict, global foreign relations and perceptions were tarnished due to U.S. involvement (National Park Service, 2021). Peace negotiations took place in 1919, and the Institute of International Education (IIE) was established in the same year. The IIE was the first non-profit created to promote international educational opportunities in the United States and immediately set out to improve "global competency." The organization's establishment was believed to be "the key to a peaceful and prosperous future" (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, p. 19).

From its inception, U.S.-based international education served diplomatic goals by cultivating "global citizens" who would represent American values abroad (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, 2010). This foundational purpose inherently privileged students who already embodied elite cultural ideals - those who were well-educated, culturally literate, and capable of diplomatic representation. This early framing established international education as a domain for exemplary Americans rather than a transformative opportunity for diverse populations. Subsequent decades have seen periodic resurgences of this diplomatic framing, particularly following events threatening national security, which reinforced international education's role in projecting American cultural and political values globally (Hovey & Weinberg, 2010; King, 2021; Lincoln Commission, 2005; Loss, 2012). Each resurgence further entrenched the notion that participants should embody idealized American citizenship, further reinforcing class-based exclusions.

Economic Barriers and Intention

Educational inequities in the United States manifest across multiple dimensions, creating complex intersections of race, class, and access to opportunities (Carter & Welner, 2013; Kozel, 1991; Oakes, 1985). This complexity has led researchers to often conflate race and socioeconomic status in their analyses, obscuring the specific mechanisms through which class operates in international education access.

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International education research reflects this conflation, with scholars frequently examining race and socioeconomic status as interconnected rather than distinct analytical categories (Dessoff, 2006; Goldoni, 2017; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Stuber, 2009). However, studies that isolate financial barriers provide important insights into how economic constraints specifically operate in study abroad participation. A 2017 study by Melissa Whatley focused on students within the University System of Georgia, finding that grant recipients were more likely to participate in study abroad programs. In contrast, students with student loans or a high expected family contribution were less likely to engage in such activities. Stuber (2009) found that upper-middle-class students were more likely to engage in extracurricular activities, including internships and study abroad programs, than their working-class peers. These findings are consistent with the theoretical links to social reproduction theory and the accumulation of economic, social, and cultural capital.

The intention to study abroad has been examined thoroughly from several notable angles. A study by Kim and Lawrence (2021) indicated that fewer students from medium- and low-income families intended to study abroad. Further, Lei (2022) found that intention was a weak predictor of participation across race and gender groups. Socioeconomic status emerged as a stronger predictor for White students in their study, whereas college experiences were more predictive for students from underrepresented groups. Similar findings were noted by Salisbury and colleagues in 2011. Lei (2022) also found that Students of Color were not deterred from participation because of the potential for negative experiences related to their race and racism. In fact, they showed increased behavioral intention to engage in a study abroad experience. Furthermore, for various reasons, many students who intend to study abroad do not ultimately pursue international education (Heisel & Stableski, 2009). These findings reveal a critical gap: while economic barriers clearly constrain participation, intention studies suggest that financial constraints alone cannot fully explain class-based disparities. This points to the need for theoretical frameworks that examine how institutional practices and identity formation processes mediate the relationship between economic resources and educational aspirations.

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction

Research consistently demonstrates the transformative benefits of international education, including enhanced cross-cultural competence and academic outcomes (Boyd et al., 2001; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). However, access to these benefits follows predictable class patterns. Upper-class and elite students receive consistent messaging about international education opportunities through their social networks, family expectations, and institutional environments. (Nyaupane et al., 2011; Stuber, 2009; Zemach-Bersin, 2010). These students have been socialized to believe that international educational opportunities are normative and are entitled to pursue them, subsequently benefiting from improved social status and career prospects (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Whatley & Stich, 2021). While this message resonates with upper-class and elite students, it fails to reach many others (Bolen, 2001; Kommers & Bista, 2020; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Zemach-Bersin, 2010).

Understandably, the lack of participation in study abroad programs from working-class and low-income families has been connected to a deficiency in economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) cultivated within the families of upper-class and elite students (Lareau, 2011). Bourdieu's framework explains this pattern through three forms of capital that interact to maintain class advantages. Economic capital – direct financial resources – enables families to absorb study abroad costs without sacrificing other necessities. Cultural capital encompasses both explicit knowledge (language skills, global awareness) and implicit dispositions (comfort with international travel, cosmopolitan identity) that facilitate navigation of international educational spaces. Social capital – networks of relationships – provides access to information,

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recommendations, and support systems that make participation both possible and meaningful (Bourdieu, 1973; Weininger, 2002). International education research has demonstrated how these forms of capital operate synergistically. Students from privileged backgrounds often possess not only the economic resources to participate, but also the cultural knowledge to maximize benefits and the social networks to access opportunities (Goldoni, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). This capital combination creates what Bourdieu (1977) termed 'habitus' - internalized dispositions that make international education seem both accessible and valuable.

While social reproduction theory effectively explains the persistence of class-based disparities in international education, it offers limited insight into processes of resistance, agency, or institutional change. The theory's emphasis on reproduction can inadvertently reinforce deficit perspectives about working-class students while overlooking the cultural assets they bring to educational settings. This limitation necessitates complementary frameworks that recognize both constraint and agency in educational experiences.

Bourdieu (1973) also posited that intergenerational symbolic capital transfer reproduces class differences over time through cultural and social reproduction. Researchers have leaned on this idea when examining the disparity in study abroad participation, particularly when pulling apart student demographics (Stuber, 2009; Whatley, 2017). Scholars such as Annette Lareau (2011) and Jonathan Kozol (1991) have studied the impact of class divides on student experiences and outcomes, exposing both the point of view of the students and that of their families in how they understand their roles, as well as what they expect from their education.

Lareau (2011) found apparent differences in student and parent attitudes toward schools and education based on their socioeconomic class, and that these differences manifest in varying outcomes. Kozol's work reveals a stark inequity of resources among schools, which results in profound inequity in the student experience. The findings of both of these scholars provide support for Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social reproduction, delineating how students, families, and institutions understand their position in the educational system over time (Lareau, 2011; 2015; Lareau & Calarco, 2012). International education is considered a luxury, if considered at all, and many under-resourced families and communities cannot entertain participation due to a lack of economic capital (Stuber, 2009). The lack of economic capital then contributes to the underdevelopment of social and cultural capital.

Looking Beyond the Literature

The Hidden Curriculum

While Bourdieu's social reproduction framework effectively explains the persistence of class-based inequities in international education, its deterministic focus on reproduction offers limited guidance for institutional transformation. The framework's emphasis on how economic, social, and cultural capital perpetuate class advantages(Bourdieu, 1973; Weininger, 2002) provides essential insights into systemic barriers, but says little about how educational institutions might disrupt these patterns or how marginalized students exercise agency within constrained systems.

This limitation necessitates complementary theoretical frameworks that examine both reproductive mechanisms and possibilities for disruption. Three critical perspectives - hidden curriculum theory, cultural wealth models, and learning pathways - offer analytical tools for understanding how institutional practices can either reinforce or challenge class-based exclusions in international education. These frameworks shift analytical focus from what students lack to how institutional environments shape

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opportunities and constrain or enable student agency. While family and community contribute to student attitudes, identities, and experiences, the school as a site of socio-political struggle cannot be understated (Anyon, 2006). Scholars such as Michael Apple, using the concept of the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1971), provide a viewpoint that incorporates the educational environment as powerfully influential in student attitudes and behaviors.

Through his scholarship on the hidden curriculum, Michael Apple (1971) builds on the ideas put forth by Phillip Jackson in his work, "Life in Classrooms" (1968). Jackson details the intricate social dynamics within classrooms, highlighting how the physical environment, teacher-student interactions, and peer relationships contribute to the learning process. He delves into the many roles of the teacher, emphasizing the challenge students face in navigating and adapting to the classroom environment and the teacher as an authority figure. He argues that through this navigation and adaptation, students develop coping mechanisms, allowing them to conform to the demands placed on them as they progress throughout their educational experiences (Apple, 1971; 1976). This work contributes to our contemporary understanding of how students experience educational spaces and, further, whether or not they are exposed to the idea of international education during their formal schooling.

Apple (1971) builds on Jackson's scholarship to develop a critical analysis of how ideology shapes classroom experiences through hidden mechanisms. His work reveals how educational institutions tacitly discourage conflict and questioning, promoting acceptance of existing power structures as natural and inevitable. Drawing on Gramscian concepts of hegemony, Apple demonstrates how schools establish subtle yet discriminatory perceptions that normalize class-based hierarchies - what Bourdieu termed symbolic violence. (Weininger, 2002). These hidden processes operate below the level of explicit curriculum, shaping student expectations about their place in educational and social systems. While "The Hidden Curriculum and the Nature of Conflict" (1971) specifically addresses science and social studies domains, understanding the impact on student experiences is transferable to any discipline, including international education for students in the United States.

Two salient ideas in Apple's (1971, 1976) work help explain the continued class inequity in international education participation despite efforts to address it. First, he suggests two types of rules inherent in the social order: 1) constitutive or basic rules that provide the broad parameters within which society operates and are implicitly recognized by individuals and groups. These constitutive rules, or "common sense" guidelines, influence the decisions of stakeholders within an educational setting without being explicitly stated. The consequences of breaking these rules, such as rejection, are well understood, which helps to make it clear that they are associated with constitutive rules. Moreover, 2) preference rules, or the choices one has within the bounds of previously established constitutive rules (Apple, 1971). These rules allow individuals to exhibit agency in their choices within the larger established parameters.

Apple posits that these rules contribute to the continuation of the hidden curriculum that establishes order in educational spaces. He cogently suggests that these rules lead to political quiescence and students' acceptance of existing power structures, limiting their educational opportunities (Apple, 1971). Applied to international education, Apple's framework reveals how institutional practices maintain class-based exclusions through unexamined assumptions about who belongs in global educational spaces. When schools present study abroad as normative for college-bound students without addressing financial barriers, when guidance counselors unconsciously direct working-class students toward local opportunities, or when program marketing emphasizes cultural sophistication over transformative potential, they reinforce constitutive rules that preserve elite access. These hidden practices shape student identity development, influencing whether students can envision themselves as potential global citizens.

Secondly, Apple's (1971) discourse on the nature of conflict and the treatment of disagreement within educational institutions revolves around the ideological assumption that conflict and disagreement are

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inherently 'bad' and should be avoided at all costs. He critiques the scientific discipline for contradicting its values, positing that science exemplifies progress achieved through individuals challenging the normative assumptions held by preceding scholars and scientists. These dominant norms underpin the previously discussed constitutive and preference rules, maintaining them through overt and covert mechanisms to preserve the status quo. Legitimizing these rules confines any controversy within these parameters, where 'little attempt is made to focus on the parameters themselves' (Apple, 1971, p. 29). Apple contends that this lack of criticality is inherently problematic, urging educators to examine how they privilege the transmission of specific forms of knowledge and consequently perpetuate educational inequity. Classism remains uninterrupted in educational spaces partly because of the privileging of high-value academic knowledge and the silencing of voices that may challenge the traditional norms that benefit the elite class (Giroux, 2010). Critical thought and conscious awareness by educators can inspire the activism necessary to disrupt these patterns (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010; Giroux & McLaren, 1986).

Critically analyzing the hidden curriculum in schools illuminates the tacit teaching of norms, values, and ideologies that students absorb through their daily interactions within the educational institution (Anyon, 2006; Apple, 1976; Giroux & Penna, 1979). This analysis can explain how certain social groups' knowledge is privileged and how educators' perspectives influence the transmission of ideologies. By examining the hidden curriculum, researchers can uncover how social structures and power dynamics shape the educational experience, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of schools in perpetuating societal norms and values (Apple, 1971; Giroux & Penna, 1979). Classism, as it exists in international education, continues as a result of the way dominant ideology is preserved and disseminated, reinforcing oppressive systems within educational institutions that discriminate against poor and working-class individuals and groups. Preserving these systems vis-à-vis the hidden curriculum may significantly impact identity development.

Cultural Wealth

While hidden curriculum theory reveals how institutional practices maintain class-based exclusions, cultural wealth theory offers a complementary lens that recognizes the assets marginalized students bring to educational settings. Tara Yosso (2005) challenges deficit-based perspectives by demonstrating how students from non-dominant backgrounds possess valuable forms of capital that traditional frameworks overlook. This asset-based approach provides tools for understanding how students exercise agency within constrained educational environments. Yosso's framework identifies six forms of cultural wealth that can disrupt dominant educational narratives. Aspirational capital - the ability to maintain hope and dreams despite facing structural barriers - represents a form of resilience that enables students to envision possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances(Yosso, 2005). In international education contexts, this might manifest as working-class students who maintain global aspirations despite never having traveled abroad, or first-generation college students who seek international experiences to expand opportunities for their families.

Applied to international education, cultural wealth theory suggests that marginalized students possess assets that could enrich global learning experiences if recognized and valued by institutional practices. Rather than viewing working-class students as lacking preparation for international education, educators could recognize their navigational capital (skills for maneuvering through institutions not designed for them), resistant capital (knowledge gained from challenging inequality), and social capital (networks of community and family support). When international education programs actively value these assets, they create possibilities for transforming rather than merely reproducing existing hierarchies. Lei's (2022) study, though not directly connected by the author, illustrates this phenomenon through their findings on the behavioral intention to study abroad by Students of Color despite perceived barriers.

While previous studies have drawn on Yosso's (2005) notion of cultural wealth in the context of international education, they typically focus on students already engaged in cross-cultural experiences

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(Engel & Gibson, 2022; Grieb, 2023). Moreover, few studies have examined the educational environment and constitutive rules (Apple, 1971), perpetuating the silencing and exclusion of poor and working-class students from coveted extracurricular activities like studying abroad. This gap highlights the need for further research to address these systemic barriers.

Learning Pathways

Learning pathways theory (Nasir et al., 2020)extends both hidden curriculum and cultural wealth frameworks by examining how students navigate educational opportunities within specific institutional and cultural contexts. Building on situative learning theory, this framework recognizes that learning occurs through dynamic interactions between individual agency and structural constraints (Greeno et al., 2004). The concept of learning pathways uses the metaphor of a "trodden path" to suggest that while students inherit existing routes shaped by historical and institutional forces, they also possess agency to reshape these pathways through their choices and actions. Applied to historically marginalized students, learning pathways theory reveals how educational routes are simultaneously constrained by institutional structures and open to individual and collective transformation. This dual emphasis on constraint and agency bridges the deterministic tendencies of social reproduction theory with the asset-based perspective of cultural wealth theory.

Nasir's concept of "learning pathways" reinforces the view that belonging and social identity are dynamic and that students have agency in their choices, yet are constrained by limitations and lack of access due to historical, geographical, and political elements (Nasir et al., 2020). Moreover, it goes beyond traditional thinking to a more critical framework that contemplates how learning is "facilitated or constrained by social systems and institutions" (Nasir et al., 2020, p. 195) and examines "how institutions and systems structure access to and position various types of learning and learners" (Nasir et al., 2020, p. 195).

Nasir and colleagues identify three fundamental aspects of culturally organized learning pathways. First, these pathways are linked to identities and encompass relational, affective, and motivational elements. Second, they consist of cultural practices and routines, socially constructed and accumulated over time. Third, they involve experiences of privilege and marginalization influenced by structural constraints and supports, impacting learners within their families, peer relationships, and institutions (Nasir et al., 2020, p. 196). When applied to the previous discourse on discrimination in international education based on class, these learning pathways can inform how educators perceive the "global citizen" and begin to rethink where valuable knowledge and experience can be gained and by whom.

In international education, learning pathways illuminate how students from different backgrounds encounter and navigate opportunities for global learning. For privileged students, pathways to international education are well-established, clearly marked, and supported by institutional resources. These students inherit pathways that lead seamlessly from early travel experiences through high school study abroad information sessions to college-sponsored programs. In contrast, working-class students often must create new pathways, drawing on their cultural wealth to identify opportunities, navigate complex application processes, and secure funding without institutional guidance. However, learning pathways theory suggests that these alternative routes can become established pathways for future students when institutions recognize and support them.

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Learning pathways also incorporate the importance of identity development within the learning process. Learning pathways are deeply embedded in the specific cultural, social, and institutional contexts in which students operate (Nasir et al., 2020). These contexts influence what students learn, how they perceive themselves, and their roles within these environments. For example, students may adopt different identities depending on the expectations and norms of their educational settings, such as the contrast between home and school cultures or between local and international educational environments (Cheon et al., 2020; Tatum, 2017). Learning pathways theory also illuminates the dynamic nature of identity formation in international education contexts. Students actively negotiate multiple identities - as family members, community representatives, and emerging global citizens - while making educational choices (Cheon et al., 2020). These negotiations are informed by their cultural wealth assets, institutional messages about belonging, and their capacity to envision alternative futures. Understanding these pathways enables educators to identify intervention points where institutional practices can expand rather than constrain student possibilities

Students often navigate multiple identities simultaneously, such as being a student, a family member, a friend, and a member of various cultural or social groups (Cheon et al., 2020). Learning pathways acknowledge the fluidity with which students move between these intersectional identities, negotiating and reconciling any conflicts or synergies that arise. This process underscores the complexity and dynamism of identity formation as students balance and integrate different aspects of their lives (Nasir et al., 2020). A unique understanding of individual intersectional identities is developed throughout a lifetime, and this awareness contributes to improved cross-cultural understanding. While the opportunity for international education has been withheld via the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1971), students who have been historically oppressed can find the path forward through education that advocates for the inclusion of their knowledge and experience.

Identity development, particularly in adolescents, is inherently complex, yet examining class dynamics within the hidden curriculum of educational environments can provide a more nuanced understanding of classism and its impact on the identities of students marginalized by their socioeconomic status (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Crucially, such research can shed light on how identity development influences students' ability to connect with the notion of a global citizen.

Previously published literature on classism in international education has consistently highlighted the connection between students' economic, social, and cultural resources and their participation and interest in study abroad programs (Goldoni, 2017; Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Walpole, 2003). Some studies have demonstrated that economic disparities shape students' self-perceptions and views of others, subsequently affecting their ability to engage meaningfully with diverse cultures and educational environments (Goldoni, 2017, 2018). While these studies effectively link the identity development of marginalized students to their experiences in international education, they predominantly focus on those who participate and the impact of study abroad programs on aspects of their intersectional identities. There is a need for further research that investigates how class-related self-perceptions of identity may deter students from pursuing international educational opportunities. This research would benefit from a view through the lens of theoretical approaches outside of those posited by Bourdieu.

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Implications and Conclusions

This literature review demonstrates how an integrated critical framework - combining hidden curriculum theory, cultural wealth models, and learning pathways - provides a more comprehensive understanding of class-based inequities in international education than social reproduction theory alone. While Bourdieu's framework effectively explains how economic, social, and cultural capital perpetuate participation disparities, the integrated approach reveals both the institutional mechanisms that maintain these patterns and the possibilities for transformation through recognition of student assets and alternative pathways.

Each theoretical component contributes distinct analytical insights: hidden curriculum theory exposes how institutional practices covertly maintain class boundaries through unexamined assumptions and policies; cultural wealth theory identifies valuable assets that marginalized students bring to international education that deficit-based approaches overlook; and learning pathways theory reveals how students exercise agency within constrained systems while illuminating intervention points for institutional change. Together, these frameworks shift analysis from individual deficits to institutional practices, from reproduction to transformation possibilities, and from constraint to agency within structural limitations.

The proposed research contributes to the ongoing discourse on international education by highlighting the nuanced relationship between student exchange and classism. By synthesizing existing scholarship, this study illuminates the challenges U.S.-based students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds face in international exchange programs. While this analysis draws primarily from post-secondary research, the institutional mechanisms and theoretical frameworks identified are applicable to secondary international education contexts. The findings may inform recommendations for policymakers, educators, and program administrators to create more equitable and inclusive opportunities for all students to participate in transformative global learning experiences.

The integrated framework reveals how class-based exclusions in international education operate across multiple levels - from overt financial barriers to subtle institutional messaging that shapes student aspirations and identity formation. The historical construction of "global citizenship" as an elite identity reflects broader hegemonic processes that normalize privilege while marginalizing alternative forms of cultural knowledge and global engagement (Adams et al., 2018; Oakes, 1985). However, the combined theoretical approach also identifies specific intervention points where these patterns can be disrupted.

This argumentative literature review reveals the field's heavy reliance on social reproduction theory to explain class-based participation disparities while identifying significant gaps in theoretical approaches. The analysis demonstrates that while Bourdieu's framework effectively documents how economic, social, and cultural capital create barriers, it provides limited guidance for institutional transformation. The integrated critical framework proposed here addresses these limitations by offering analytical tools for understanding both reproductive mechanisms and possibilities for disruption.

This integrated theoretical approach provides practical tools for advancing equity in international education. Educators can use hidden curriculum analysis to examine how institutional practices inadvertently maintain class-based barriers, cultural wealth frameworks to recognize and build upon assets that marginalized students bring to global learning, and learning pathways theory to create alternative routes to international education that expand rather than constrain student possibilities. By applying these combined perspectives, scholars and practitioners can move beyond documenting inequities to actively disrupting the institutional practices that reserve international education for privileged students, ultimately fostering educational environments where diverse forms of global citizenship can flourish.

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