Cultural and Symbolic Capital in the Educational Aspirations of International School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how cultural and symbolic capital influence students' educational aspirations at international schools in Surabaya, Indonesia. The research investigates how family background, social networks, and the prestige associated with foreign degrees shape students' decisions, focusing on the increasing trend of students pursuing higher education abroad. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's cultural and symbolic capital theories, the study finds that students with access to these capitals, often from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to choose international universities. The study also highlights the symbolic value of international education, which enhances career opportunities and social status. Data was collected through qualitative methods, including interviews with students, parents, and teachers, revealing the significance of the school environment in fostering global perspectives. This qualitative research contributes to an in-depth understanding of how the interplay between local cultural contexts and global aspirations shapes educational choices. It also opens avenues for further research on the educational inequalities within globalized contexts.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, International Education, Symbolic Capital.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a striking trend regarding the increase in students from international private schools choosing to continue their education at universities abroad. Based on Unesco data (2024), Indonesia is ranked 2nd among ASEAN countries regarding the number of students studying abroad (Marietha, 2024). This phenomenon reflects a significant change in views towards global education (Tempo.co, 27 Juli 2020). These students often face complex and diverse choices when determining their next educational steps. Not only that, many parents support their children's decision to study abroad, hoping that a better and broader educational experience will be obtained. This shows the strong influence of parents' expectations on students' educational aspirations (Namraksa & Kraiwanit, 2022).

It is important to understand that a student's decision to continue their education abroad is not only based on personal desires but also influenced by broader social and cultural factors (Courtois, 2020). In this case, the cultural capital described by Bourdieu (1983), such as the educational values upheld in their social community, plays an important role in shaping students' aspirations. Students from family backgrounds with higher education tend to have greater access to the information and support needed to pursue education abroad. Additionally, symbolic capital related to the prestige and recognition of foreign educational institutions also influences their decisions. Therefore, an in-depth

analysis of these factors is necessary to understand the existing phenomenon (Bourdieu, 1983) comprehensively.

On the other hand, the international school environment often encourages students to think globally (Tanu, 2014). The curriculum implemented in these schools tends to emphasize the importance of international involvement and cross-cultural understanding (Bourdieu, 1983). This creates high awareness among students regarding the various opportunities available abroad. Thus, students studying at international schools are more likely to be open to continuing their education abroad than students from local schools. More frequent interactions with friends from different countries also enrich their perspectives on global education (Tanu, 2014).

Smith's (2021) research examines the relationship between higher education and student international mobility, highlighting how study-abroad experiences can enrich students' identities and aspirations. This research shows that international interactions positively enrich students' social and cultural capital, ultimately influencing their decision to continue their studies abroad. Johnson (2020) continues this discussion by highlighting cultural capital's influence, concluding that students with more substantial cultural capital are more likely to choose international education. These findings further emphasize the important role of cultural factors in shaping students' educational aspirations.

In addition, Lee's (2022) research focuses on the symbolic role in educational aspirations, especially related to the prestigious status of overseas educational institutions. This research reveals that the prestige symbol of the institution has a significant influence in shaping students' decisions to continue their studies. Martinez (2021) also examined the role of the social environment in shaping students' educational aspirations and found that social community support can increase students' self-confidence in making decisions regarding their education. This research emphasizes the importance of social networks in shaping students' educational aspirations to study abroad.

Meanwhile, research by Chen (2020) focused on students' perceptions of overseas education and identified that family and broader community experiences often influence positive perceptions of education abroad. On the other hand, Thompson (2021) analyzes the impact of international education on students' careers after they return to their home countries, highlighting that overseas education provides significant competitive advantages in the world of work. This research further strengthens the understanding that international experiences impact students' academic aspects and future career development.

Furthermore, research by Robinson (2022) highlights the important role of parents in shaping their children's educational aspirations to study abroad, showing that support from parents has an enormous influence on students' decision-making processes. Patel (2020) identified challenges international students face in continuing their education abroad, as well as various opportunities that can be exploited. This research emphasizes that many students can adapt to new environments and succeed in international education despite many obstacles. These findings provide valuable insight into the dynamics of overseas education and the factors that influence students' decisions.

However, deciding to continue education abroad does not always go smoothly. Various challenges must be faced, primarily related to high education costs and a complicated visa application process (Al Ghaniyy & Akmal, 2018). Students and parents need to consider these various aspects carefully before making a final decision. Therefore, it is important to explore the various supports that international schools and related communities can provide to help students overcome these obstacles. Understanding the existing context and challenges can provide more appropriate and helpful recommendations for students interested in continuing their education abroad.

Local community involvement is also equally important in influencing students' educational decisions. Communities that support higher education and provide accurate and relevant information can help students feel more confident in making decisions.

Support from alumni who have studied abroad is also very valuable because they can share their experiences and provide guidance on the steps that need to be taken (Gan & Kang, 2022). Thus, a strong social network can be important in shaping students' educational aspirations.

Considerations related to culture and language are also factors that influence students' decisions to continue their education abroad (Al Ghaniyy & Akmal, 2018). Many students feel more comfortable studying in an environment familiar to their language and culture. However, they must also overcome fear and anxiety regarding the cultural differences they will face in the destination country. This adaptation process can be a challenge in itself, but it is also an invaluable opportunity for personal growth. Therefore, international schools must prepare students well to deal with the cultural differences they will encounter.

In globalization, a deep understanding of overseas education is increasingly relevant. Students need adequate skills and knowledge to compete in the global market (Hendriani & Nadya, 2018). Education abroad often offers more innovative curricula and access to the latest technology. It provides significant competitive advantages for students, whether they return to their home country or continue their careers abroad (Courtois, 2020). Therefore, in-depth analysis of overseas education options is essential to understand how students prepare to face the challenges of an increasingly globally connected world.

This research focuses on exploring overseas education options from the cultural and symbolic capital perspective, which has not been widely discussed in previous literature. Cultural and symbolic capital is a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu to explain how cultural values and certain symbols can influence individual success in educational and social systems. Cultural capital includes knowledge, skills, education and expertise acquired through socialization in the family and social environment. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, refers to the recognition and legitimacy given by society to that cultural capital. While much previous research has highlighted the impact of education abroad in general, this study delves deeper into how cultural and symbolic capital shapes students' educational aspirations at international schools. In addition, this research will also consider the broader social and cultural context, as well as the interaction between these factors in student decision-making. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth insight into the dynamics of overseas education among international school students.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the subjective experiences of students from international private schools in choosing overseas universities. This approach focuses on the meaning individuals give to their experiences to reveal students' views and feelings in depth. The subjects in this research consisted of students enrolled in international private schools, most of whom chose to continue their education at foreign universities. The students were selected from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure a diversity of perspectives. Apart from students, their parents will also be involved as participants to gain a more holistic understanding of the factors that influence educational decisions.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with seven students, two teachers and seven parents to explore the motivations, hopes and considerations underlying their choice to study abroad. These interviews were designed to facilitate open discussion, allowing research subjects to share their in-depth experiences and views. Researchers observed social interactions in the school environment related to educational aspirations. This aims to understand the social dynamics within the school community, including how students influence each other in making educational decisions.

The data analysis technique used is a thematic analysis approach. The researcher will identify key themes from the interviews, observations, and documents analyzed through this analysis. This process includes coding data, looking for patterns, and developing themes relevant to the research focus. In addition, this research will use Bourdieu's theory, specifically the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital, to categorize and understand the factors that play a role in students' educational decisions. This theory will help explain how the social and cultural capital students possess and the symbols of prestige associated with overseas education can influence their aspirations and choices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural And Symbolic Capital On Overseas Educational Choices

This research focuses on how cultural and symbolic capital influences the educational aspirations of international school students in Surabaya, primarily related to their choice to continue their education at overseas universities. The findings of this research were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and data collection related to the experiences of students, parents, and international schools. One of the parents interviewed was the mother of a Grade 12 student at an international school in Surabaya. She emphasized the importance of cultural and symbolic capital in shaping her child's aspirations to study abroad. She stated, "We have always encouraged our son to aim for top universities overseas because we believe it is not just about academic excellence, but also the prestige and networks he can gain. Studying abroad reflects a higher status and opens global opportunities." She further explained that their family has invested in extracurricular activities, foreign language courses, and international experiences to build a well-rounded profile, aligning with what prestigious universities expect. This mindset was further reinforced by the school's culture, which frequently highlights alums who have successfully entered world-class institutions, creating a strong aspirational environment for students and their families. The research results show that social, cultural and symbolic factors significantly influence students' decisions to continue their education abroad.
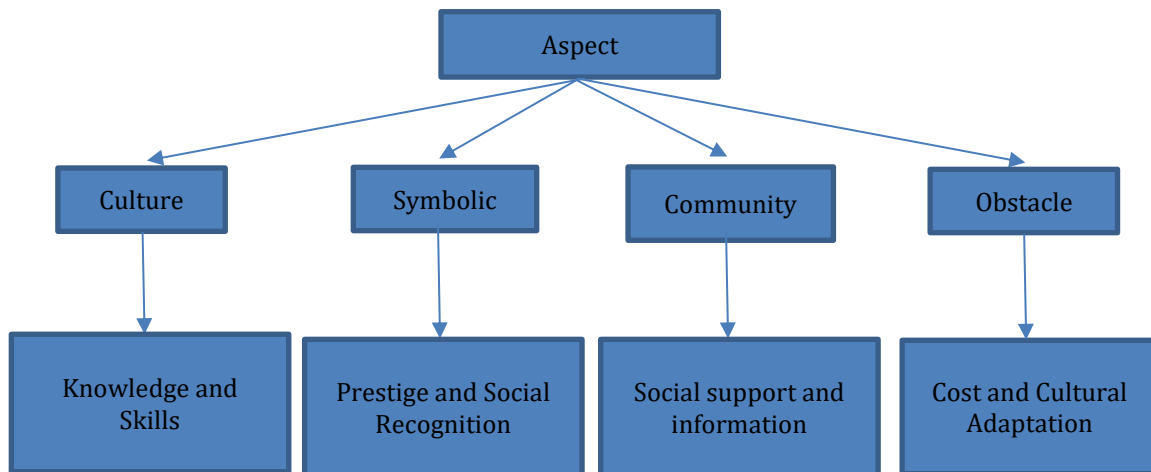
Chart 1. Capital of Educational Aspirations of International School Students

Cultural Capital in Educational Choices

Cultural capital refers to individuals' knowledge, skills and values that can open access to social, economic and educational opportunities. In the context of international school students in Surabaya, the cultural capital they possess considerably influences their educational aspirations. For example, students who have been provided with an international curriculum and English language lessons tend to have better knowledge of

foreign education systems. This cultural capital makes them feel better prepared to compete in an international academic environment that often uses English as the language of instruction. In addition, families with higher educational backgrounds play an important role in providing much educational support in terms of material, information and motivation. As stated by Bourdieu (1986), individuals with more substantial cultural capital tend to have more significant opportunities to achieve educational success.

Knowledge about various foreign universities, information about education systems, and insight into global opportunities are often gained from students' interactions with the international community at school. For example, students who often participate in seminars or international education exhibitions at school feel more confident about continuing their education abroad. The cultural capital of international school students in Surabaya leads to a higher awareness of the importance of global education and the competitive advantages that can be obtained abroad. This supports the research results by Smith (2021), which shows that cultural capital, such as a better understanding of international education, contributes to students' decision-making to continue studying abroad.

However, this cultural capital is not limited to higher education knowledge. International education also equips students with important skills needed in a global world, such as communicating in different languages and cultural adaptation. This cultural capital gives them greater confidence and readiness to pursue studies abroad, further strengthening their aspirations to pursue international education. One of the key findings from the interviews reveals how cultural capital extends beyond mere knowledge about higher education opportunities abroad. A student's father shared, "Through their school curriculum and activities, my daughter has become fluent in multiple languages, which makes her more adaptable and confident in global settings." These skills, including proficiency in foreign languages and cross-cultural adaptability, form a significant part of the cultural capital that international education fosters. Moreover, a Grade 12 student elaborated, "Our school does not just teach academics; it prepares us to navigate different cultural settings, which makes studying abroad seem less daunting and more exciting." Such preparation builds students' confidence and cultivates a readiness to engage in diverse international environments, further solidifying their aspirations to pursue higher education overseas. Symbolic capital also plays a critical role, as one parent highlighted, "Studying abroad has a certain prestige attached to it, and we believe it sets our children apart when it comes to career prospects and social standing." These insights underscore the interplay between cultural and symbolic capital in shaping students' and their families' educational aspirations and decisions.

Symbolic Capital and Prestige of Overseas Educational Institutions

Symbolic capital relates to social recognition and status held by individuals or groups. In this case, the symbol of prestige associated with education abroad greatly influences the aspirations of international school students in Surabaya. Students who continue their education at foreign universities associate this experience with higher social status at the national and international levels. This research identified that students prefer foreign universities with a global reputation, such as universities that are ranked high in world rankings, because they feel that education at these universities will increase their social recognition in society and the world of work.

This symbol of prestige is also associated with the hope that overseas education can open up better career opportunities. Most students assume that they will gain international experience that will not only enrich their academic knowledge but also expand social and professional networks that are very useful in the global world of work. These findings support the theory put forward by Lee (2022), which shows that the symbol of prestige from overseas educational institutions can strengthen students' decisions to continue their education abroad. For students, overseas education is not just about acquiring academic

skills but also about accessing symbols of prestige that bring greater social recognition in the future.

However, this symbolic factor does not only come from students' perceptions but also from the views of parents and the school community. Some parents see overseas education as an investment in their children's future, who will gain a more significant competitive advantage than if they chose to study at a domestic university. Overall, the symbolic capital associated with overseas education greatly influences students' aspirations to continue their studies abroad.

The Role of Family and Community in Supporting Educational Aspirations

The role of the family in shaping students' educational aspirations is crucial. This research shows that students from families with higher educational backgrounds tend to have more support for continuing their education abroad. This family support covers various aspects, such as providing information about college choices and the application process and the financial support needed to pay for higher education costs abroad. Parents act as agents who provide encouragement and motivation to pursue education abroad, especially in decision-making and long-term educational planning.

Additionally, the international school community plays an important role in influencing students' educational aspirations. The social networks built at international schools, both with peers and alumni, greatly influence students' decisions to continue their education abroad. Students feel more confident about choosing international education because they know they have support from the wider community, including alums who have experience studying abroad. This support also creates a sense of confidence among students, who feel that they have access to the information needed to succeed in education abroad.

On the other hand, this research also found that local community support, such as overseas alumni, provides opportunities for students to obtain further information about life and the challenges they face abroad. Several successful alums shared their experiences, provided helpful guidance, and demonstrated that overseas education can significantly change one's academic life and career. This robust social network creates a supportive climate for students to make more confident decisions regarding their educational choices.

Challenges and Obstacles in Continuing Education Abroad

Although many students aspire to continue their education abroad, this research identified several challenges and obstacles. One of the main obstacles is the high cost of education at foreign universities. Although some students have financial support from their families, the high cost of education remains a factor that limits their ability to continue their studies abroad. Many students feel hampered by the high cost of living abroad and other costs associated with the university application and visa process.

Apart from that, another challenge often faced is the cultural adaptation process in the destination country. Many students feel anxious about the cultural differences they will face, especially related to different languages and ways of life. They must overcome the fear of social isolation and the difficulty in adapting to an education system different from the one they are familiar with in Indonesia. While international schools often provide training and preparation to help students adjust, these challenges remain and must be carefully considered by students and families.

However, despite these obstacles, many students feel that the benefits they gain from studying abroad far outweigh the challenges they have to face. They believe that international experience will give them significant advantages in their academic lives and careers and provide opportunities to develop as more global individuals. This is in line with research conducted by Nerlich (2021), which found that studying abroad provides students

with language improvement experiences. Apart from that, they will also get a new view of the culture in other countries.

Discussion

This research explores the dynamics of overseas education choices among international school students in Surabaya, focusing on cultural and symbolic capital. The research results reveal that international school students tend to choose overseas education not only because of the higher quality of education but are also influenced by the cultural values firmly held by their families and school communities (Gan & Kang, 2022). Substantial cultural capital, acquired through a family background with a high level of education, broadens access to information and supports their aspirations to continue their studies abroad. Additionally, symbolic capital, in the form of prestige associated with foreign universities, influences students' perceptions of the success and social status they gain from this educational choice.

These results align with research findings conducted by Smith (2021)**,** which shows that students' international mobility can enrich their social and cultural capital. This research identifies that international interactions and study abroad experiences provide students with not only academic knowledge but also opportunities to expand social networks and strengthen their position in a global context. Johnson (2020) also confirmed that cultural capital, including international curricula comprehension, facilitates students' decisions to study abroad.

In addition, the findings regarding the importance of prestige symbols associated with overseas institutions also reflect research by Lee (2022), which states that symbolic influences in overseas education can influence students' educational aspirations, with prestige symbols attached to overseas universities providing an image of success. social and economic. On the other hand, Martinez (2021) highlights how social communities can strengthen or hinder students' educational aspirations, and this research indicates that support from families and international schools plays an important role in shaping students' decisions to continue their education abroad.

These findings imply the importance of community, family and school support in shaping students' educational aspirations. In globalization, where overseas education is considered an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage, social and cultural factors increasingly play a significant role in students' educational decisions. Bourdieu (1986) proposed that individuals' social and cultural capital contributes significantly to determining their educational choices, including continuing their education abroad. Therefore, international schools focusing on global education must better understand how this cultural and symbolic capital works to support students in achieving their aspirations.

However, although many students have aspirations to study abroad, challenges related to tuition fees, visa processing, and cultural differences need to be considered (Courtois, 2020). Therefore, international schools need to increase support in the form of information, career guidance, and preparation programs that help students overcome these obstacles.

This research opens up various possible future research directions. One is further exploration of the role of digital technology in expanding access to international education. With the development of online education platforms, students can access global education without having to leave their home country. Therefore, examining digital capital as an additional social and cultural capital could be an interesting direction for future research.

In addition, further research could focus on comparing students who continue their studies abroad with those who choose to remain studying at home to see how social and cultural capital play a role in both decisions. Such research can provide insight into unequal access to quality education and how educational policies can facilitate or hinder international mobility among students. Future research could also deepen understanding of the psychological and cultural challenges faced by international students, especially

regarding the feelings of anxiety and adjustment they experience when in a foreign country. Studying students' experiences in dealing with cultural differences and social adaptation can help develop more effective programs to support their transition to overseas education systems.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this research reveal that students from international schools in Surabaya decide to continue their studies abroad, influenced by a complex series of social and cultural factors, emphasizing the importance of cultural and symbolic capital. Cultural capital, reflected in students' broad academic knowledge and cross-cultural skills, is crucial in opening up more significant opportunities for them to pursue international education. In this context, students with substantial cultural capital are more likely to be able to navigate and adapt to a global educational environment.

On the other hand, symbolic capital related to the status and prestige of overseas educational institutions also strengthens students' encouragement and aspirations to continue their education abroad. The view that a degree from a foreign university provides added value in building a career and social status is a significant motivating factor. Additonally, the support provided by families and the school community is equally important in influencing students' decisions. These two elements often serve as sources of motivation and self-confidence, encouraging students to realize their educational aspirations abroad.

However, even though there are many supporting factors, there are several obstacles that students must face, especially those related to high educational costs and challenges in the cultural adaptation process. Significant costs are one of the main obstacles preventing students from realizing their plans to study abroad. In addition, adapting to a new culture and a different educational system is also a challenge that students must overcome on their journey to pursue international education.

This research provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of educational aspirations held by international school students and the factors that shape their decisions to continue their studies abroad. The results of this research can be a strong basis for developing educational policies that better support inclusive international mobility by paying attention to the challenges faced by students and providing relevant solutions to reduce existing barriers.

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