Power and Privilege: Mapping Imagined Communities in Japan's English Medium International Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the commodification of education and the reinforcement of hegemony through international English Medium schools in Japan, positioning them as gatekeepers to imagined communities of global elitism. Over the past decade, Japan has seen a surge in international schools, driven by the global dominance of the English language. The institutions, which were initially established for expatriate elites, now cater to affluent Japanese and Asian families. This paper examines the high costs, selective admissions, and marketing strategies of these schools to illustrate how they commercialize education, perpetuate class divisions, and uphold cultural dominance. The literature suggests that English Medium U.K. and US model international schools in Japan symbolize access to elite Western power structures, reinforcing social stratification and the marginalization of those within Japan unable to afford such education. This study employs theoretical frameworks of imagined communities, hegemony, and cultural capital to analyze the broader societal implications of these schools. A systematic review of relevant academic literature, complemented by a comparative analysis of tuition fees, was conducted to deepen the understanding of the relationship between education, power, and social identity in contemporary Japan. By doing so, it aims to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

1. Introduction

There has been a steady increase in the number of English Medium International Schools in Japan over the past decade, with a current total of 98 schools mostly located in the Tokyo area, up 30% as of 2019 (Watanabe, 2019, para.1). Originally, highly selective English Medium International Schools in Japan served the needs of expatriate elites newly residing in Japan due to the post World War II global economic boom (Silova, 2014). Ultimately, these exclusive US and U.K. model English Medium International Schools primarily catered to the children of American and British politicians, businessmen, and wealthy expatriates. Today, these schools have become mostly exported for-profit institutions that cater to wealthy Japanese, mixed nationality families, and expatriated Asian elites. The primary contributing factor to the recent boom in international schools according to Hobson and Silova (2014) is, "Because of the emergence of the English language as the world's lingua franca, this has led to the ascendancy

of the U.S and U.K school models on the international scene" (p.3). However, the literature suggests that there is more to the recent rise of these schools than sole access to a "global language".

From a financial standpoint, accessing a US/U.K. English Medium International School in Tokyo is a costly affair. On average, at the time of this writing, the fees per year for elementary, middle school and high school range from around 30,000 U.S. to $50,000 U.S. dollars per year. These newer English Medium international schools are less than five years old in Japan and cost 12-20k U.S. dollars more than the handful of long-established legacy American and British international schools that appeared post-World War II. According to The Yomiuri Shinbun, "International schools are a growing presence in Japan amid burgeoning demand from parents seeking a full-fledged English-language education for their children" (Matsumoto, 2023, para1). The literature will show that parents aim to enter an imagined global community through their children where their wealth and status buy their family entry to a global community of hegemonic influence and symbolic power.

The commodification of education allows these schools to operate and provide services to the wealthiest families. Furthermore, the literature suggests that access to education at an elite international school implies access to the circles of power that represent the hegemonic forces of an English elite aristocracy. According to Zhou (2014), "International schools' exclusivity manifests in mammoth costs and inaccessibility to "commoners"" (p.202) In other words, families that can provide an education at an international school envision themselves and their children entering a global community of status that comes with the power and ownership of the lingua franca. Those who cannot access this education are viewed as simple or deficient by the elite classes from the perspective of entering the global community.

In exploring the connections between the commodification of education, imagined communities, and hegemony within the context of Japan-based English Medium international schools, it became clear that these institutions not only serve as educational centers that claim access to global education but also as symbolic gatekeepers of Western societal power structures and influence. This literature review seeks to explore the many implications of the broader societal implications of class structure and "othering" within Japanese society based on the study of three theoretical frameworks. By examining imagined communities, this literature review aims to expose the factors shaping the landscape of international education in Japan and its implications on social stratification and cultural identity. Drawing from empirical research articles, this work endeavors to provide an analysis of the commodification of education, the construction of imagined communities, and the hegemonic ideologies within the realm of Japanese- based English Medium International Schools. Through this exploration, we seek to deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between education, power, and social identity in contemporary Japan.

2. Positionality Statement

This topic is of particular interest to me as my daughter attends an English Medium International School in Tokyo, Japan. I need to consider my positionality as my unique situation and family dynamics give me a particular insight into this topic. I acknowledge the privilege that I have as a White American male residing in Japan, particularly in terms of cultural capital. However, I must also acknowledge that my family's financial situation and status do not align with the exclusive membership requirements of the school. Due to our unique financial situation that provides the ability to pay the entry fees and my "race", we faced fewer barriers to the admission of my daughter.

The school, classmates, and parents do not question my financial status or social standing; instead, they perceive me as a native English speaker and a White American, which gives us access to the "imagined community". Although I have my unique point of view, this review is based solely on a systematic search of academic literature and avoids relying on personal anecdotes/observations.

3. Methods

This study employed a comprehensive and systematic approach to review and analyze relevant academic literature and empirical data. A systematic search was conducted using scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and the University of Kansas (KU) library databases. Keywords included "Japanese international schools," "imagined communities," "hegemony," "commodification of education," "cultural capital," and "social stratification." The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible reports published within the last 20 years, emphasizing studies addressing international education, hegemony, and related sociocultural dynamics specifically in the context of Japan. Seminal works older than 20 years were included if they provided foundational theoretical insights. Non-peer-reviewed sources and articles not specifically addressing international schools or the Japanese context were excluded to ensure relevance and academic rigor.

In addition to the initial search, a snowballing technique was used to enhance the comprehensiveness of the literature review. This involved tracing references cited in key articles to identify additional relevant studies. This iterative process helped in building a robust body of knowledge by uncovering studies that might have been missed in the initial search.

The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify key themes and patterns related to the positioning of English Medium International Schools in Japan as gatekeepers to imagined communities, the commodification of education, and the reinforcement of hegemony. This thematic analysis facilitated the categorization of findings into coherent themes, providing a structured understanding of the issues at hand.

Alongside the qualitative analysis, a quantitative assessment was conducted to compare tuition fees. Data on the cost of attending international schools versus traditional Japanese private schools were collected from official school websites, education reports, and financial statements. An Excel graph was created to visually represent the differences in tuition fees, highlighting the significant financial barrier to entry for most students in the general population and illustrating the economic barrier perpetuated by the English Medium international school system.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, rigorous peer debriefing and member-checking processes were implemented.

Peer Debriefing: This involved regular discussions with experts in international education and cultural studies at The University of Kansas. These experts critically reviewed the research methodology, thematic findings, and interpretations. Their feedback helped refine the analysis and provided external validation, ensuring that the interpretations were not solely influenced by the researcher's perspective.

Member-Checking: Member-checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings and interpretations with selected stakeholders, including educators and administrators from international schools, as well as academic peers familiar with the topic. Feedback from these stakeholders was incorporated to verify the accuracy of the findings and to ensure that the interpretations were reflective of their experiences and observations. This process also helped

identify any potential biases or misinterpretations, further strengthening the reliability of the study.

To ensure methodological rigor, established guidelines for systematic reviews were followed throughout the study. This included maintaining transparency in the search strategy, clearly defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, and thoroughly documenting the analysis process.

The combination of a systematic literature review, thematic and quantitative analyses, and validation through peer debriefing and member-checking ensured a comprehensive investigation into the commodification of education and the reinforcement of hegemony through Japanese international schools. This methodology provided valuable insights into their broader societal implications, contributing to the academic discourse on English Medium international education in Japan.
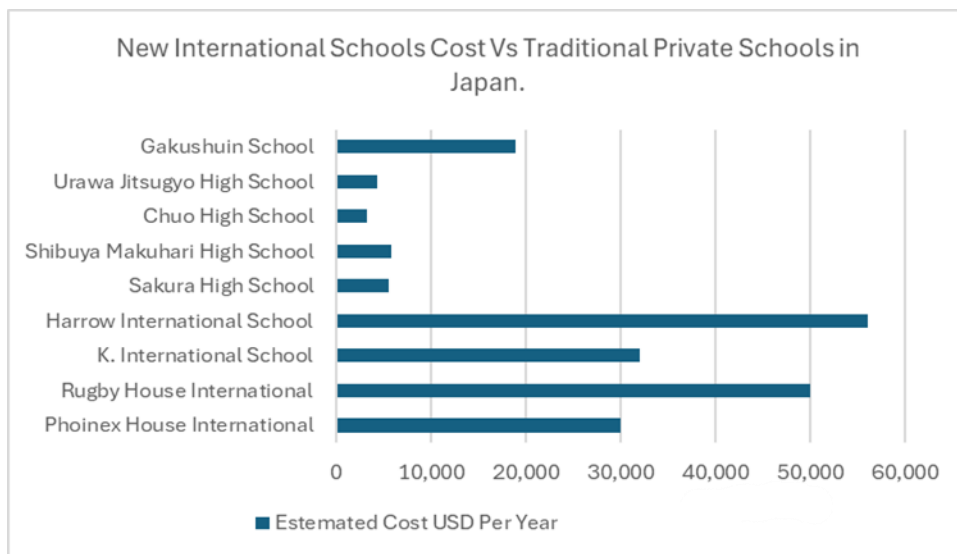
Figure 1. New International Schools Cost Vs Traditional Private Schools in Japan

4. Literature Review

4.1. Commodification of Education and Japanese International Schools

The commodification of education refers to the idea that education has become a product that can be bought and sold. This results in a situation where only those who have the financial resources can afford to access the best education, which in turn leads to knowledge being restricted to certain social classes. When we examined this issue in the context of Japanese International schools, it became clear that only those with the financial means can access certain types of knowledge, while those who are not as wealthy are excluded. This creates a situation where some people can access knowledge that others are unable to, based purely on financial status. Power structures cast those without access, again, into the perceived social category of "commoners" (Zhou, 2014, p. 202). Classism is maintained through the exclusion of a majority of social groups from exclusive international schools.

According to Apple (2012), "Here knowledge is power, but primarily in the hands of those who have it already, who already control cultural capital as well as economic capital" (p.161). Elites in Japan have access to knowledge and this knowledge is reproduced and guarded throughout their circles of power within the international school community. This guarantees that classes may maintain their dominance and control over the economic stratification in society.

Bunnell et. al. (2020) explored the British perspective, of the international school marketing model as seen to export power through exclusivity. Bunnell et. al. (2020) explained when British schools expand to international markets like Japan and East Asia, they sell, "symbolic power" which "arguably depends on their exclusivity" (p.3). However, they risk their reputation and exclusivity by expanding to overseas markets for profit. Bunnell et. al. (2020) explained this is purely a commodity-driven choice to "let others" in for financial reasons often at the expense of an inferior version of the original product. Bunnell et al. (2020) discuss marketing strategies in the global education industry (GEI), "GEI is largely driven by the spread of standardized, low-quality products distributed on a large scale (Hogan, 2018; Verger et al., 2016a; Pizzaro and Quirke, 2017), the literature on elite schooling points instead to the cultivation of rarity and distinction and to the dominant position of unique, long-established institutions historically associated with the production of elites (Courtois, 2018; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2016)"(p.5). In other words, English Medium international schools marketed as versions of their parent schools are sold for their elite status and perceived connections, this commodified association in theory offers access to institutions that reproduce and perpetuate elitism.

Bunnel and Hatch (2023) explored the gatekeeping strategies of an elite international school in Japan. They discovered that due to low enrollment from expatriated transnational capitalist class families, they opened the doors to wealthy Japanese and East Asian families. However, the decision was made to limit enrollment of the "new middle class" to those they felt "fit" the economic model of the school. This was accomplished through biased and intentionally exclusionary admissions processes (Bunnel and Hatch, 2023).

In the Japanese model of elite international schools Bunnel and Hatch (2023) further explained, "Social legitimacy is a fragile condition involving a complex balancing act between serving those you want and are expected to, and others that, over time, might seek entry" (p.1039). The practice of distinguishing students who can afford the school but are denied entry when compared to those who are "wanted" results in the further commodification of status through barriers of entry.

In considering barriers, Bunnel and Hatch (2023), investigated a Japanese international school with the pseudonym Utopia and looked at their barriers to entry being renegotiated to screen and admit families of the "Japanese new middle class" that could pay the high tuition to fit the new business model but didn't fit what they were looking for in terms of social/racial class. In this case, purchasing power is not enough, there are covert racial barriers at play. Bunnel and Hatch (2023) stated, "The increased wealth of the local population has meant that Utopia is now a school of choice for many local families. Hence, the school has had to invent new ways (or, logic) of dealing with the admissions process, in order to 'guard/protect the gate'" (p.1054). Families may be able to purchase access to the school but still need to possess the cultural capital to fit the criteria to maintain the image of exclusivity Utopia is selling.

In his 2023 study, Hollis (2023) explores the marketing strategies employed by elite British international schools that export and franchise their names in foreign markets. Harrow School is a prime example of this phenomenon, having recently established a branch in Japan where the annual tuition fee (at the time of writing) is a staggering 57,488 US dollars per year. Hollis (2023) explains that the high tuition is paid for the image and status that come with entry, available only to those who can afford it. Hollis (2023) explained, "In promotional materials, franchises place a strong emphasis on the history, status, academic reputation, and notable alumni of the founding school (such as former British Prime Ministers and members of the royal family). Images of traditional British architecture, British students in school uniforms, and even the Union Jack are common (Wu & Koh, 2022)" (p.55). In this case, image is also a

commodity, and this image grants access to wealthy families to the symbols of communities that hold power, status, and control. Entry to these schools is advertised as entry to an imagined community (Anderson, 1983).

4.2. Imagined Communities

When discussing imagined communities, we must first consider the origins of this theory in connection with the concepts of nationalism and national identity (Anderson, 1983). Nationalism, according to Smith (2010) cannot be divorced from an understanding of a community's collective identity. Smith (2010) defined a nation as "a named human commodity residing in a perceived homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members" (p.13). In simpler terms, a nation is a social construct based on an intersubjective collective agreement.

The collective agreement of a shared nationality is imprinted on the identities of the nation's citizens. The term national identity applies to the individual members of the nation and closely aligns with the maxims of the nation as a socially constructed phenomenon. Smith (2010) defined national identity as, "The continuous reproduction and reinterpretation by the members of a national community of the pattern of symbols, values, myths, memories, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations and the variable identification of individual members of that community" (p.20). A nation's citizens share a collective system of socially constructed truths that place their identity in line with that of the nation as a historic entity. An individual receives a sense of belonging and identity from their national communities.

The nation reproduces and distributes national ideology, which assumes that its members will uphold the symbols, values, myths, memories, and traditions that make up the distinct heritage of the nation; however, when considering national ideology and social reproduction, Smith (2010) explained that nationalism in and of itself is ideology or, "nationalism is an ideology" (p28). Therefore, nationalism does not exist independently of human ideas; rather, it is created through the indoctrination of specific beliefs, values, and symbols.

In becoming who we are and forming our identities as members of a community socialization is the responsibility of the nation's members to reproduce and maintain its ideology (Smith,2010). Apple, (2019) stated, "Becoming a person is a social act, a process of initiation in which the neophyte accepts a particular social reality as reality tout court, as the way life "really is." On a larger scale, the social meanings which sustain and organize a collectivity are created by the continuing patterns of commonsense interaction of people as they go about their lives" (p.27). The social reality in this context is that of reproduction among community members within an "imagined space" i.e. the socially constructed concept of a nation.

Benedict Anderson (1983) coined the term imagined communities based on the understanding that all members of a nation will never meet yet share a similar set of values and beliefs based on the sense of unity derived from membership in the nation (Anderson, 1983).

Kanno (2003) examines the influence of schools in Japan on the identities of bilingual students as gatekeepers to accessing imagined communities. Specifically, Kanno (2003) explores how schools affect the sense of belonging of bilingual students to particular social groups. Generally, the education system in Japan creates an environment where students can potentially enter either privileged or disadvantaged imagined communities based on the practice of sorting that Japanese schools use. Moreover, schools in Japan are perceived by society as centers of learning and are responsible for creating and maintaining the social stratifications that define class in Japan Kanno (2003). These practices are exacerbated by the policies of international

schools that may operate covertly within this model in a society that already condones classism and elitism through stratification.

Schools then are not only responsible for learning but are centers of social reproduction (Apple 2019) which positions learning as a social process. Kanno (2003) explained learning, "is situated in local community practices shaping and shaped by concrete relationships" (p.286). The shaping of learning communities in Japanese schools shapes access to communities. Ultimately, if students are sorted based on financial or language status, they are socialized to enter specific imagined communities, these communities can either grant or deny access to an identity as a member of an elite or minority social class.

Membership in an imagined community again, relies heavily on learning to imagine oneself as a member. In paraphrasing Anderson (1983), Kanno (2003) stated, "We humans are capable of relating to people beyond our immediate social networks through our imagination" (p.287). Our imagination allows us to connect with a community of people we may never see, but with whom we feel a sense of belonging through our thoughts (Anderson, 1983). Yet, schools as institutions can imagine our communities for us and this grants us a conceptualized membership of status or marginalization.

In Japan, elite US/U.K. English Medium International Schools promise that students who graduate will gain entrance into exclusive global communities. In other words, these schools sell the idea that "They are not yet members of such communities, but they hope to gain access to them one day" (Kanno,2003, p.287). Therefore, international schools in Japan offer English-only education, providing access to imagined communities of Anglo-Saxon elitism. Parents and students can see themselves as members through "future affiliations" (Kanno, 2003, p. 28).

Future affiliation is one major reason Japanese parents choose international schools. Mackenzie (2009) looked at why Japanese parents seek membership in international schools when they are already members of the nation and have access to a national identity that values their homogeneous membership as access to an already implied privilege afforded to ethnically Japanese in Japan. Mackenzie (2009) found that most parents wanted to find "international mindedness", Mackenzie (2009) stated most parents felt, "International mindedness' (IM) is often proposed as an integral part of an international education" (p. 344). However, Mackenzie (2009), never defines IM and only alludes to it by mentioning many parents want future freedom for their children. This implies that entering an imagined community of IM promises a future identity that has an affiliation with freedom. Conversely, this may point to the theme of wealth as freedom from the constraints of one society to access the "freedom" of another.

International Baccalaureate Schools (IB) offer an interesting case study. IB schools hold the IB certification and are one of the most common certifications for international schools in Japan. IB schools promote IM as a major sales point. Hacking et al. (2018), explained that a major component of IM is that, "Content remains fairly descriptive, with an emphasis on raising awareness to encourage learners to help others less fortunate than themselves, for example by donating time, money and resources" (p.4). Promoting a view of others, especially from impoverished communities as needing "help", reinforces a deficient view of those who are not members of the imagined community because they are less fortunate. Students are introduced to an imagined community of status, where they are taught to be benevolent towards those designated as "others". In other words, they are exposed to an ideology that positions the identity of underprivileged groups of people as less fortunate and in need of aid. Thus, repositioning students in these schools as members of a privileged class. This stratification promotes the separation of classes into hierarchies of power (Bourdieu, 1970).

4.3. Hegemony

In considering how English Medium international schools in Japan support the knowledge and culture of the dominant group while gatekeeping, excluding, and marginalizing people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Apple (2019) stated, "One can think about knowledge as being unevenly distributed among social and economic classes, occupational groups, different age groups, and groups of different power. Thus, some groups have access to knowledge distributed to them and not to others" (p.15). Hegemony is maintained because access to knowledge is limited to privileged groups, giving them an advantage in a stratified society thus sustaining existing power structures.

Ultimately, the motivations of wealthy parents who enroll their children in U.S. and U.K.-based international schools in Japan are deeply intertwined with the pursuit of status and positional advantage. Pennycook (2017), referencing Motha and Lin (2014), asserts that "at the center of every English language learning moment lies desire: desire for the language; for the identities represented by particular accents and varieties of English; for capital, power, and images that are associated with English; for what is believed to lie beyond the doors that English unlocks" (p. 553). This pursuit of accessing the imagined community of power and prestige associated with English further entrenches social stratification by reproducing existing hegemonic structures.

In Japan, when considering the hegemony of the English language, controversy surrounds the inception of the language over the past century, with privileged groups historically maintaining access to English. Therefore, many Japanese intellectuals have used the term "English imperialism" or "English domination" to describe the mandatory nature of the relationship in Japan with the English language for success (Kubota, 1998). The introduction of the English language in Japan has been viewed as a conditioned policy of whiteness forced on the nation in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Thus, the image of a White English speaker has been championed as the pure expression of the ideal English language speaker (Koshino, 2024). Symbolism is preserved and structures maintained by selling the image of the white teacher as a shepherd leading the child into the promised imagined community. Koshino (2024) explained that many schools in Japan already, "promote the idealized image of Whiteness" (p.57) through advertising.

In this case, hegemony is exacerbated when international schools select staff for the elite international community perpetuating the symbolic association of whiteness and the English language (Gardner, Mctaggart, 2020). In reproducing the ideology of power within the imagined community, the faculty of international schools are often White "native English speakers". According to Gardner and McTaggart's (2020), "This reproduces ideology implicitly based on hegemonic principles" (p.3). Hegemony in this case is the reproduction of whiteness or the values and culture of the Anglo-Saxon ethic. When considering the image of the international school staff, Gardner and McTaggart's (2020) continued, "Most successful members of the international schools' sector (a director of a significant Austrian, German or Swiss school) is a journey that starts in Anglo-English whiteness and wittingly or not, actively operationalizes it, overriding or reinterpreting the organizational values of the IB through leadership's own white, privileged lens" (p.8). International schools reproduce the values and stories of those in power by maintaining hegemony by hiring mostly White English-speaking staff.

The practice of separation based on teachers' race can be deconstructed according to Pennycook (2017), as the "native/nonnative divide" (p.627). This symbolic racism manifests itself through the neo-liberalization of English language Education in overseas markets. This again must be

viewed through the critical lens of reproducing power through racism. Pennycook (2017) stated, "The ways in which English language teaching (ELT) is tied up not only with neoliberal economic relations but also other forms of power and prejudice sheds light on the ways in which assumptions of native speaker authority privilege not only a particular version of language ideology but are also often tied to particular racial formations (white faces, white voices)" (p.627). English Medium international schools in Japan maintain the symbolic power of the white English speaker through hiring practices (Gardner, Mctaggart, 2020).

Through an ideology of whiteness, the English language has become a global lingua franca, tying access to its symbolic power to hegemony (Shin, Kubota, 2008). Shin and Kubota (2008) argue that colonialism perpetuated hegemony through the global spread of the English language, which was associated with the desired White phenotypical traits of the ruling class. To this day, in the post-colonial era, symbolic speakers of English are valued above others, Shin and Kubota (2008) explained, "Given the persisting colonial relations in language education, validating local varieties of English and identities of language teachers who speak local varieties of English in language classrooms poses complex questions. Similarly, the increased amount of economic and cultural capital attached to English as the global lingua franca under neocolonial conditions significantly undermines post-colonial efforts to adopt the local language as the medium of instruction" (p.213). With that said, the ideal language is English and the ideal teacher possesses the cultural capital in line with the colonial ideals and legacy as the "true speaker" of English. In other words, "Both race and nativeness are elements of "the idealized native speaker" (Romney, 2010, p.19).

These practices perceptually validate the perceived value of the ideal language teachers and devalue local language and tradition. The maintenance and reproduction of hegemony by English Medium international schools is evident in their hiring practices. This reinforces the ideology of the colonial power of the language and also maintains barriers to entry by only extending it to those with the financial means to afford it.

The amount of available research on international schools in Japan is limited and there is a lack of comprehensive studies. Many studies primarily do not focus on the financial barriers to accessing these schools, neglecting the nuanced sociocultural implications and the lived experiences of individuals both within and outside these institutions (Bunnell et al., 2020). Empirical research exploring social dynamics among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds is scarce, limiting our understanding of how these schools perpetuate or challenge social hierarchies (Kubota & Lin, 2019). Additionally, the predominant focus on U.S. and U.K. educational models often overlooks the unique challenges of integrating these models into the Japanese context (Kubota, 1998).

Furthermore, existing research frequently lacks an intersectional perspective, omitting crucial factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender, which results in an incomplete picture of the challenges faced by diverse groups within international schools. The broader effects of international schools on local educational institutions and Japanese society are underexplored, with few studies examining their influence on local educational practices, policies, and societal perceptions of education and social mobility.

To address these gaps, studies should explore the phenomenological lived experiences of students, parents, and educators, providing a post-structural comprehensive analysis of the sociocultural dynamics within English Medium International Schools in Japan and their societal implications. Research should also investigate how U.S. and U.K. educational models are adapted within the Japanese context and incorporate an intersectional analysis to understand how socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity affect access and experiences within these schools. Additionally, the research will evaluate the impact of international schools on local

educational practices and societal perceptions, offering insights into the broader implications for Japanese education and social stratification.

5. Conclusion

This literature review has examined the role of Japan's English Medium International Schools as gatekeepers to imagined communities, reinforcing hegemony by commodifying education and promoting elitist Anglo-Saxon ideologies through discriminatory hiring practices. These institutions, originally designed to serve expatriates, now have reimagined their business models to attract wealthy Japanese and Asian families by marketing access to a globalized community. This commodification not only benefits the privileged but also perpetuates social and educational inequalities, with the predominantly Japanese and East Asian student bodies taught under the implicit ideology of English as a "White language," again, often reflected in discriminatory hiring practices favoring native White English speakers (Kubota, 1998).

To understand the complexities within these institutions, it is crucial to explore deeper into the dynamics of the oppressor-oppressed relationship within the imagined community framework. Freire's (1970) perspective could shed light on the powerful oppressed minority (in Asian communities) seeking entry into the world of the powerful oppressor through the imagined community of the oppressor's schools offering a compelling lens to explore this phenomenon. Additionally, the phenomenon of Asian elites striving for inclusion into these Western-dominated educational systems warrants further exploration, particularly in how it influences their identity and socio-cultural positioning/intersectionality.

Additionally, future research should consider Pierre Bourdieu's theories on cultural capital to further unpack how these schools perpetuate symbolic violence by creating barriers based on socioeconomic and racial status within the Japanese new middle class(Bunnell et al., 2020; Kubota & Lin, 2019). These barriers reinforce unequal power dynamics, impacting the self-esteem and social positioning of those within the local Japanese and East Asian communities who cannot afford entry into English Medium International Schools.

Another aspect to explore is the incorporation of native language and culture into the school curriculum. Exploring translanguaging as defined by MacSwan (2022) and Garcia and Klien (2016) presents an alternative educational paradigm that promotes the natural use of a bilingual's entire linguistic repertoire as a single system. Translanguaging recognizes the holistic integration of a learner's linguistic knowledge, challenging traditional views of language separation. This approach could have significant implications for educational practices in English Medium international schools, emphasizing the need to validate and integrate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students' native language, particularly those from minoritized groups. Research is needed in how implementing translanguaging can mitigate educational inequalities by leveraging students' full linguistic repertoires, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment in Japan.

To promote inclusivity and equity in Japan's English Medium international schools, it is essential to address discriminatory hiring practices; educational institutions must diversify their faculty to better reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students, challenging the notion of English as a "White language" and fostering a more inclusive atmosphere. Curriculum development should also be inclusive, incorporating diverse perspectives and linguistic practices to validate and celebrate the cultural identities of all students, especially those from marginalized communities.

Conducting phenomenological research can provide valuable insights into the personal experiences of students, teachers, and parents within the school community. Qualitative

methods, such as phenomenological interviews, can uncover how individuals feel about their belonging in the school community and their alignment with its beliefs, values, and narratives. Such inquiries can help identify areas for improvement and foster a sense of belonging among all community members. This also may help in unpacking the how behind the use of symbols of power and prestige that accompany the images associated with these schools.

Finally, advocating for policy reforms is imperative. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in international education must become aware of the barriers to access and the perpetuation of social inequalities within English Medium International Schools. Raising awareness of these issues can promote inclusivity, diversity, and equity within educational settings, fostering a more equitable dynamic in classrooms and initiating essential conversations about the true nature of Japan's international school market.

In summary, this review highlights the critical need to address the social and educational inequalities inherent in the current structure of Japanese international schools. By adopting more inclusive practices and challenging traditional ideologies, the public can be made aware of and force these institutions towards creating a more equitable and diverse educational landscape, ultimately benefiting all members of the school community. The packaging and selling of status and prestige through exclusivity offer minoritized communities of wealth perceived access to a social class that fundamentally positions them as racialized outsiders.

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