A Global-Local Paradox: The Influence of International Schools on Egyptian Students

Ericka Galegher, Ph.D. | Lehigh University | egalegher@gmail.com

**Problem Statement**: This study examined the influence of global-local connections in the context of international schools in Egypt through a mixed methods, vertical case study (see Figure 1). The rising demand of private, international schools in Egypt, and worldwide, has created a phenomenon where the adaptation of educational policies and practices is largely undertaken by foreign educators in these institutions or through the use of foreign curricula and foreign language instruction. However, little is known about the socializing influence of these international schools on host country nationals. International schools are unique and exclusive sites where global inputs—teachers, curriculum, language—flow largely unfiltered into these local schools. Yet, little research exists that analyzes the influence of these global inputs in local school contexts, if any adaptation or inclusion of the local context transpires, or the subsequent long term influence this field has on students' re)positioning into society.

**Significance**: Despite the significant focus on transnational students (aka Third Culture Kids), there is almost no research on the experiences of host country nationals in international schools despite comprising nearly 80% of these schools’ population. These unique educational sites could have potentially far-reaching implications as they shift the narrative of shaping national citizens to shaping global citizens for a particularly powerful and privileged segment of society in many developing countries.

**Methodology**: Mixed methods, vertical case study framed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, focused on field & habits, through the perspectives of school alumni. **Quantitative methods**: 52-item self-developed survey (n=238); multiple linear regression (dependent variables: localization, internationalization, cosmopolitanism, differentiation). **Qualitative methods**: semi-structured interviews & FGDs (N=18).

**Research Questions**: How does the international and local orientation of elite, international schools in Egypt influence Egyptian students’ orientations towards the self, others, and the broader society? Subquestions: What is the orientation of elite, international schools in Egypt? What global and local inputs have the greatest significant influence on this process? What role do international schools play in legitimizing and cultivating cosmopolitanism in these privileged students? How do privileged students interpret and use the skills and dispositions acquired and refined in their international schools?

**Results**: First, results indicated the orientation of elite, international schools in Egypt prioritized internationalization and neglected localization, as hypothesized. The degree of prioritization largely followed the hierarchy of the field of international schools. Second, the inputs which had the greatest significance in this process were foreign teachers, foreign curricula, and foreign languages of instruction. The prioritization of internationalization over localization reinforced students’ predisposition to cosmopolitanism. The refinement of cosmopolitanism through linguistic and cultural capital often came at the expense of acquiring local capital which students needed to successfully interact in local fields. As a result, the internationalization process reinforced status indicators representative of cosmopolitanism, which reinforced differentiation within international school groups as well as within Egyptian society resulting in deepening social stratification. Cosmopolitanism was inculcated at home and reinforced/redefined in international schools. Schools legitimized cosmopolitanism through their prioritization of internationalization i.e. policies regarding foreign teachers, language, curricula, culture. Three main patterns associated with international schools and cosmopolitanism: family reproduction, affinity for foreign schools, access and opportunities for refinement. Regarding influence, results largely focused on the interpretation and use of acquired habits and capital. Examples from each category include: Individual differentiation—Alienation from Arab; Group exclusion—living in a “bubble” and social segregation; Differentiation within the field along the hierarchical structure, influence of schooling environment; Differentiation between public and international schools—language, cosmopolitanism, valuation & devaluation capital/habitus; Social stratification—Horizons for Action through access to private sector and global workforce

**Conclusion**: This study concluded that social class position and specifically within-group positionality is inextricably linked to cosmopolitanism from the home and internationalization in the field of international schools. The rules of the game require access to the opportunities provided in the field of international schools to refine cosmopolitanism. Increased focus on internationalization indicated greater levels of refinement through access to foreign teachers, foreign languages of instruction, and foreign credentials. As a result of the dominance and legitimacy of these global inputs, localization was largely foreign-led and neglected, devaluing Egyptian cultural heritage, history, language & ill-preparing students for participation in local fields. The social segregation of students in these schools, the valorization of transnational capital, and their predisposed cosmopolitan habits created individuals who often lacked the cultural competence and familiarity to seamlessly participate within the dominant culture of Egypt. This results in the simultaneous loss of local capital resulting in increased social differentiation and reinforcement of social class boundaries. The implications of this conclusion were that desire for distinction in the form of transnational capital and social class position trumps the desire for strong national ties and the disadvantages that follow. Thus, a paradox exists between the contrasting expectations and aims between the parallel systems of international schools and national schools.