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**Meritocracy and Marketization of Education: Taiwanese Middle-Class Strategies in a Private Secondary School**

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MERITOCRACY AND MARKETIZATION OF EDUCATION:
TAIWANESE MIDDLE-CLASS STRATEGIES
IN A PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

Amanda Shufang Yang
B.A., National Changhua University of Education, 2008
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2016
May 2021
To my husband, Frank Du

For his innovative creativity, culinary skills, and endless love.
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ABSTRACT

In the 20th century, economic growth in Taiwan has brought social prosperity and fundamentally altered Taiwanese social structure. While successive generations of young people have climbed the social ladder and experienced upward mobility, being successful is still narrowly defined through academic achievement. This study argues that, despite constant education reform, a solution to class inequality in education has yet to be found. The mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum in 2019 was an answer to local, global, and international transformations. While citizens celebrate the neoliberal concepts of autonomy and deregulation embedded in the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum, coercion is approaching. The deeply rooted belief of credentialism and the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum is an apparatus of class reassurance that continues to bring worries and stress to parents and students from different social classes. Utilizing Bourdieu’s concepts of social and cultural reproduction with neoliberalism as a theoretical framework, a case study was performed at a private secondary school in central Taiwan to gain insights into Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction along with the responses of teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization.

Data collection methods included interviews with 20 informants, observations, and school-generated as well as state-generated documentations. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA), the findings indicated that regardless of education reforms, these middle-class families appropriated their economic, cultural, and social capital to maintain their status through elite schooling. The middle-class parents adopted aggressive educational strategies and made clear blueprints for their offspring at a young age. From the school side, the neoliberal education reform allows this private secondary school to add more characteristics to acquire the title as a “good” school and distinguish itself in the fiercely
competitive education market. This study concluded by examining the impact of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum on meritocracy and marketization of education in Taiwan. It is a consideration of, as well as an addition to, scholarship on social and cultural reproduction through education, and a continuation of the conversation on inequality and social exclusion through neoliberal education reforms.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

As a Taiwanese saying goes, “Prosperity can never last for three generations.” The same sentiment is expressed in the U.S. as “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations.” Cross-culturally, the three-generation rule illustrates that the volume of capital holdings can be “increasing, decreasing or stationary” between generations (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p.118) and while the capital can be inherited, it does not guarantee eternal prosperity for the next generation. In Taiwan, as in many Asian countries, parents often tell their children that they must be the first generation to break this rule and obtain prosperity. In order to be the prosperous first generation and maintain a virtuous cycle, many Taiwanese parents believe in credentialism and live in a meritocracy, a system which rewards an individual’s aptitude and achievement rather than social standing and origin (Kennedy & Power, 2010; Liu, 2011; Young, 1994).

Standardized examinations are, thus, widely used in Taiwan to gauge one’s aptitude. This century-old practice has plagued the Taiwanese education system with rigidity and stagnation. To better prepare students for standardized examinations, the Taiwanese education system provides them with a standardized experience full of result-driven drills and test-oriented materials (Liu, 2011; Pan et al., 2017; Sung et al., 2016). It ignores individual aptitude, legitimates the dominant culture, and stifles creativity. Two main entrance examinations are held annually, assuring “the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification” (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 192). As a function of “classification” culture, these one-off examinations determine a student’s future. If one does not qualify, that student must wait another precious year to retake it and there is no alternative. This inflexible education system, together with a deeply rooted belief in credentialism, puts many families under tremendous stress (Cheng, 2011; Chou,
Only by reforming this system can Taiwan give pupils at all levels, in all sectors of society, a robust, organic curriculum and better way to assess their merits.

**Education in Taiwan**

Taiwanese culture blends the influences of Confucian Chinese, indigenous cultures, and the legacy of colonialism. This island lies in the western portion of the Pacific Ocean and is abundant in natural resources. Owing to its favorable geographic location, Taiwan lived under a constant cycle of colonial rule for centuries under such empires as the Dutch, the Qing Dynasty, and Japanese. During these periods of colonization, the “visitors” built infrastructure, mingled with locals, and adapted their approaches to Taiwanese characteristics (National Academy for Education Research [NAER], 2017). Their influences linger till these days and are reflected in Taiwanese education curriculum and culture.

In 1968, the Nine-Year Compulsory Education policy was implemented to increase the number of Taiwanese citizens obtaining a junior high school degree. From the 1970s through the Cold War and onwards through the end of official relationship between Taiwan, the Taiwanese economy and global status continues to grow and evolve. State-planning curriculum remained a privileged-based model which impudently naturalized and legitimated the culture and values of the dominant ideology. In theory it was tailored towards “those who were prepared for responsible citizenship” (Apple, 2014, p. 84). In practice, schools enacted “symbolic violence” through pedagogic actions that legitimatized dominant cultural and social reproduction while aggravating and manipulating the initial inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1991, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Lin, 2001).

Around the same time, neoliberalism became a full-blown global phenomenon. This new “ism,” was first coined by a small group of economists in post-World War I Germany and
became popular in the late 20th century (Pratt, 2016; Steger & Roy, 2010). Though the definition and usage of the term has changed over time and the impact varied from place to place, its main objective, such as deregulation, privatization, globalization, and encouraging unbridled competitions and personal autonomy, remained the same (Harvey, 2005). Originally intended to revive the global economy following the Great Depression, it gradually began to impact education.

Globalization blurred not only the borders between nation-states, but also the lines between international and domestic politics. As neoliberalism migrated from state to state, continent to continent, it was slowly infused into local contexts. By the turn of the 21st century, Taiwan had adopted its own form of neoliberalism with Taiwanese characteristics. One example of this is the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum, crafted by policymakers to confront recent social issues such as the aging population, low birth rate, growing ethnic diversity (NAER, 2014, p. 1), increasing numbers of stressing-out middle school students (the Ministry of Education R. O. C. (Taiwan) [MOE], 2020a), widening educational gap between urban and rural populations (Chou, 2019; NAER, 2017; MOE, 2020a) and the transformation brought on by globalization (MOE, 2020a). After several revisions, the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Implementation Plan was announced officially in November 2014.

The 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum (hereafter 12-Year BEC) was heavily influenced by the concept of education marketization. It aimed to ease academic stress for middle-school students with “exam-free admission” to high schools. Its advocates believed that with formative assessment, along with the usage of the “learning portfolio,” middle school students’ academic stress could be relieved and lead to more balanced lives. The 12-Year BEC reflected the neoliberal idea of “autonomy” (Mao, 2015), inviting students to utilize individual
autonomy by choosing schools according to their likes and needs. It includes both ministry-mandated curriculum and school-developed curriculum. It targeted the disparity of educational resources between urban and rural, along with the myth of credentialism. The proponents of the 12-Year BEC hoped that the school-developed curriculum would allow rural schools to develop curriculum infused with school characteristics for target students. By deregulating the implementation, they hoped that elite students would stay in their catchment areas and not have to travel afar for better educational resources. While students ostensibly enjoyed more freedom, in reality the advent of the 12-Year BEC complicated parents’ school choice.

The concept of both students and schools utilizing autonomy in choosing curriculum is relatively new to the Taiwanese education system. Now “school choice” is a perennial hot topic in daily Taiwanese conversation. In English-speaking countries, school choice has been widely discussed in education since it was introduced by the neoliberalist, Friedman, in the mid-1950s (Delale-O’Connor, 2018; Friedman, 1955; Groves & O’Connor, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Põder & Lauri, 2014). It served as a means of allowing families to choose the schools or services that best fit their preferences while lessening government interference in education decisions. Two major elements have shaped this trend. First, family choice decisions are highly determined by both “cultural practice” and capital resources. Family from different social strata tend to make different school choices (Ball, 2003; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Second, when free-market global competition is applied in the arena of education, it becomes a zero-sum game, when conflicting interests dictates that either “I win,” or “you lose.” Bourdieu might frown on seeing the marriage of his theory to neoliberalism. In this study I demonstrate that both theories go hand-in-hand to explain Taiwanese experience with school choice in the era of globalization.
Background of the Problem

In Taiwan, geography, culture, and education policies all play a role in explaining the concerns brought on by the 12-Year BEC. In the case of geography, the Central Mountain Range, as the name suggests, divides Taiwan in two. The terrain of the western portion is relatively flat, while mountains cover the eastern parts. Due to this geography, the western parts are much more developed with local transportation and state-of-the-art buildings compared to that of the eastern part. For example, the city of Taipei, the heart of Taiwan, has been greatly impacted by neoliberalism in recent years. In an attempt to market Taipei as the “face” of Taiwan, resources were concentrated on business infrastructure (i.e. Taipei 101) and connecting public transportation throughout the city (Chou, 2019; Harvey, 2005). This focusing of resources also extend to education.

Second, the unshakable belief of credentialism also shaped the impact of the 12-Year BEC. In a modern capitalist society, the advance of technology not only changed a people’s way of life (Rosling et al., 2018) but also transformed how they are educated (Ball, 2003; Bell, 1973; Brown, 1995). The post-war prosperity brought on global economic growth. On a small scale, local citizens were able to establish their own shops and become small shopkeepers. On a large scale, technical, scientific, and professional workers were now in high demand. The structural changes to the labor market inspired educational institutions to supply more qualified graduates (Brown, 1995; Lin, 2001; NAER, 2014). This global economic revival changed the dynamics of social class. Economic growth from 1950s to 2000 brought prosperity to all of Taiwan and increased the average annual income (MOE, 2020b) and fundamentally altered Taiwanese social structure. Successive generations of young people have climbed the social ladder to become middle class. While the middle-class population has expanded rapidly, moving up the economic
ladder does not guarantee the moving up of cultural ladder as well. Class discrepancy still exists regardless of middle-class expansion. The demarcation of social hierarchy has not blurred nor has the gap between the dominant and the dominated alleviate.

Many families look forward to the rewards of credentialism and hope academic success will lead their children to power and status. The truth, however, is that not every student can be a winner. The higher the value of education certificates, the more furious the competition for academic success becomes. Thus, the “old gang” middle-class parents face double worries. They not only worry about the widening education gap between urban and rural but also the emerging competitors from the “new wave” (i.e. the petit bourgeois) (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). How can the dominant “old gang” and “new wave” middle-class keep their cultural practices and lifestyle, and at the same time maintain, if not increase, their social advantage through education?

Still, the structure of government policies an apparatus of social order maintenance. While citizens triumphantly celebrate the value of individual freedom espoused by neoliberalists, coercion is lurking. For a modern society to perform in a harmonious way, individuals must be in their “proper place” (Bauman, 2000; Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Foucault, 1975/1977; Woodson, 2000). The new social order must be structured and “order” in Bauman’s (2000) definition is:

…monotony, regularity, repetitiveness and predictability; we call a setting ‘orderly’ if only if some event are considerably more likely to happen in it than their alternatives, while some other events are highly unlikely to occur or are altogether out of the question. This means by the same token that someone somewhere (a personal or impersonal Supreme Being) must interfere with the probabilities, manipulate them and load the dice, seeing to it that events do not occur at random. (p. 55)

In other words, someone must load the dice to prevent an incident from happening at random.

Hence, the government contemplates ways to intensify surveillance and normalization. Under the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, standardized examinations (Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students) though viewed as a source of academic stress, normalizes the
dominant culture, and ignores students’ multi-aptitudes, and continues to be a legitimate method of sorting students and exacerbating social inequality.

Taiwanese secondary school students face two main entrance examinations, the Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students (hereafter CAP) and the General Scholastic Ability Test (hereafter GSAT) or Advanced Subjects Test (AST) for high school graduates. While the 12-Year BEC sought to establish “exam-free admission” to high school, the deeply rooted belief of credentialism makes it difficult for most Taiwanese parents to ignore the appeal of elite schools (Liu, 2012; Pan et al., 2017; Sung et al., 2016). While the academic stress of middle-school students might be lightened after years of “exam-free admission,” as long as the examination system continues, the results will always reflect a bivalent solution: either you succeeded, or you failed. This solution also reflects upon an institution’s performance and thus, they are labelled as good or bad schools. While the good intentions of 12-Year BEC are acknowledged, the century-old belief is hard to challenge.

What’s more, the structure of school-developed curriculum is often neglected. Standardized examinations continue to be the main form of admission to high school. Therefore, the standardized ministry-mandated curriculum is still significantly valued because it represents the “right” knowledge that is worthy of investment. While the 12-Year BEC bestows schools more freedom and autonomy to structure curriculum with school characteristics, the fact that it officially reduces students’ regular school hours and access to the “right” knowledge have brought more worries to parents and students (Tan, 2019; Yan, 2019).

Although the 12-Year BEC stated that the new curriculum would bridge the gap between the north and other regions (Chou, 2019) and alleviate middle school students’ academic stress (NAER, 2017), educational inequality is still perceptible throughout its practice. Schools and
institutions in other parts of Taiwan were not allocated with the same amount of educational resources (Chou, 2019; MOE, 2019, 2020b). Still, the “autonomy” and “choice” embedded in the 12-Year BEC neglected the fact that choice-making is not a simple, isolated, and innocent action.

At the level of personal interest, choice is a manifestation of individualism. It is the objectification of one’s taste, and “[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. xxix). According to Bourdieu, there is no axis that indicates the level of taste, but a quadrant that situates one’s position in the social space. The mode of acquisition acquired through one’s domestic learning and scholastic learning is marked strongly in one’s ordinary choices and consumption. These can range from the legitimate areas such as music or painting, to personal preference of clothing or cooking (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Thus, the differences linked to social origin are obvious in one’s choices. When making school-choice decisions, factors such as one’s social origin, volume of capital, and parental educational qualification are put into consideration (Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1979/1984; DiMaggio, 1982). Cultural reproduction is never guaranteed and social mobility, either up or down, is always possible. Middle-class families are often said to make more prudent educational decisions (Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986; Põder & Lauri, 2014) and, to a certain degree feel more anxiety about finding an appropriate job for their offspring (Reay, 2000).

At the level of governmental policy, school choice is the manifestation of democratic citizenship (Apple, 2001, Dovemark et al., 2018; Lipman, 2011). To balance the supply and demand of the labor market, educational institutions produce certified “products” to meet job requirements (Ball, 2003; Brown, 1995). Since the elite credentials are highly valued, it is best to distribute them through “open competition” (Brown, 1995). Despite what neoliberal advocates have suggested, “redistributive effects” and “increasing social inequality” are insuperable
problems of neoliberalization (Harvey, 2005). As Ball et al. (1994) have indicated, under the influence of neoliberal education reform, “schools are increasingly keen to attract enrolments from ‘motivated’ parents and ‘able’ children who are likely to enhance their relative position in local systems of competition” (p. 17). Hence, parents’ and students’ roles have changed from passive to active consumers, while schools and institutions have become producers (Apple, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 1990b; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; English, 2009; Gewirtz, 2001; Lipman, 2011). Education, thus, has become “a private good, an investment one makes in one’s child’s or oneself to ‘add value’ to better compete in the labor market, not a social good for development of individuals and society as a whole” (Lipman, 2011, pp. 14-15) and ensured the reproduction of the structure of power and the symbolic relationship between different classes (Apple, 2001, 2006; Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1991; Cobb & Glass, 2009). Furthermore, the neoliberal characteristics of market failure (Harvey, 2005) and natural selection (Ball, 1993) indicated a changing teacher-pupil relationship in the classroom (Chubb & Moe, 1990b).

**Statement of the Problem**

The 12-Year BEC reflects the belief of neoliberalism. However, the concepts of competition, autonomy, and transparency do not eradicate education inequality in Taiwan but rather deepen it. Still, the incomplete measures of the 12-Year BEC created doubts among parents and children (Tan, 2019; Yan, 2019). What’s more, the commodification of education and teacher evaluation slowly changed the rapport between schools and renewed the rudimentary relations between teachers and pupils. Existing research within the past decades on neoliberalism and education has tended to focus on examining the Western contexts (i.e. Britain, the U.S., and Australia) (Ball, 2003; English, 2009; Lipman, 2011; Mao, 2015), and comparison between the middle- and working-classes (Ball, 1993; Ball et al., 1995; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Gewirtz,
Rare studies have mapped out the neoliberal education reform from non-Western perspectives. Most articles on the education market have focused on how it affected parental school choice (Ball et al., 1995; Lovenheim & Walsh, 2018; Pöder & Lauri, 2014), perpetuated systematic inequalities in society (Harvey, 2005; Holmes, 2002; Lauder & Hughes, 1999), changes the terrain of school recruitment strategies (Jabbar, 2016), and centered state governance (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). Less has been done to examine how the education market affects teacher-pupil relationships and teachers’ productivity and professional efficiency. Analysis of middle-class strategies and cultural practices towards school choice and how the producers (i.e. teachers and school administrators) handle this natural selection game have also been lacking. Still fewer studies have examined the discourses from the Taiwanese middle-class perspective.

Nader (1972) stated that most studies were “studying down” to understand inequalities and power relationships, and seldom were researchers “studying up” to give a fuller picture of society. Different classes have different class interests and their interests are often not “situated in the field of practices” (Poulantzas, 1973/1975, p. 109). Many studies investigated how school choice has targeted populations in the bottom strata of social hierarchy (Arreman, 2014; Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Delale-O’Connor, 2018; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008; Jabbar 2016; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017; Wilks & Wilson, 2012). Yet, few studies were done to gather perspectives to understand “redistributive effects” and “social inequalities” from the dominant sides.

In 2014, policymakers in Taiwan structured the 12-Year BEC to replace the obsolete and rigid standardized curriculum and to widen the opportunities for people from different social origins. The goals of the 12-Year BEC were to inspire students to “unleash their full potential, teach and develop students’ knowledge about life, promote students’ career development, and
inculcate students’ civic responsibility” (NAER, 2014, p. 4). In order to allow schools and
students to have more autonomy, the 12-Year BEC deregulated the construction of the school-
developed curriculum, which works in tandem with the ministry-mandated curriculum. The
school-developed curriculum is one fifth of the entire curriculum and is structured according to
students’ aptitude, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status etc., to enhance students’
interests. On August 1st, 2019, the curriculum was officially implemented in Taiwan.

Although the intention was to level the education fields and enhance individual
autonomy, in practices of 12-Year BEC remained a privileged model. As Woodson (2000) stated
“[w]hen you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions” (p. xvii). This
idea of control is encapsulated in Harvey’s (2005) term “a conceptual apparatus” (p. 5).
Neoliberalists often assert that “markets will solve all of ‘our’ social problems” (Apple, 2014, p. xli), and governance is the means to maintain the pre-structured social order (Foucault,
1975/1977; Harvey, 2005). This pre-structured harmony is established by the dominant class to
ensure the redistribution of resources and restoration of class power (Harvey, 2005). In Britain,
this privileged model was shown in Gewirtz’ (2001) analysis of the British government, arguing
that Blair administrators should not “universalize the values and modes of engagement of a
particular kind of middle-class parent” (p. 376) to improve the opportunities for the working-
class students. In Australia, English (2009) indicated that some Australian parents believe by
sending their children to a value-added school, they are “buying their children a better life” (p. 98). In Taiwan, the dominant agendas were embedded in the 12-Year BEC, thus perpetuating
educational inequalities in Taiwanese. My intention is to build on this work to examine the
intertwining of 12-Year BEC and middle-class cultural and social reproduction. The purpose of
this study is to understand Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction and the responses of
teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. How do middle-class families choose a middle school for their offspring? Also, in the wake of the newly implemented 12-Year BEC, how do school administrators and teachers operate in the education market?

**Research Questions**

To explore how resources were redistributed to the dominant class via the education market during neoliberal education reform in Taiwan, this dissertation, on the one hand, draws on the perspectives of middle-class families who chose a high-performing private secondary school in central Taiwan for their children. On the other hand, it examines the views of the school administrators and teachers in this private secondary school on the efficacy and responsibility delegated to school under the influence of neoliberal education reform. Utilizing qualitative methods, these two threads together help illustrate the middle-class families’ cultural reproduction and the contemporary trend of education marketisation. Because the 12-Year BEC remains a privileged-based model, this dissertation fills the gap in the literature of “studying up” to understand middle-class educational choice in the era of neoliberalism. My overarching research questions are as follows. Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

**Why Middle Class?**

This dissertation focuses on middle-class families’ cultural and social practices, particularly concerning middle school choice. For, in Taiwan, as in other nations, the baby-
boomer generation brought economic prosperity and changed the demography. While the middle-class population has expanded, the opportunities for valued educational credentials has not. The expanding middle-class population includes people from a variety of social groups. Broadly speaking, the middle class includes the old bourgeois, the petit bourgeois, and the parvenus (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Living in a dynamic society, everyone is assumed to have a chance for upward social mobility through hard work and effort. In Bourdieu’s words, petit bourgeois successfully escaped “from the proletariat, their past, and aspiring to enter the bourgeoisie, their future” (p. 332), and parvenus took time to learn what used to deem as” culpable prodigality, is in their new condition, expenditure of basic necessity” (p. 375). Indeed, capital and social origin are the two most essential indices of stratification in human societies. Everyone wants to be a winner, and everyone hopes to climb the economic ladder. Besides working hard or inheriting capital from family, obtaining valuable educational credentials is viewed as one of the “easiest” methods to upward social mobility in Taiwan. The definition of middle class varies from continent to continent. To put it into numerical description, Kharas’ (2017) definition of middle-class household as those with “an annual income for a four-person middle-class household of $14,600 to 146,000” (p. 3) is largely accepted.

As has been stated, in Taiwan, entrance examinations are deemed as legitimate forms of competition. While educators vociferously debate social inequalities, the practices of 12-Year BEC are opposite to its intent. Recently, Taiwan has entered the developed world with a large population holding higher education certificates and adequate income. Several factors are at work here, including:

- High school entrance examinations have profound ramifications upon one’s education trajectory;
• School-developed curriculum of the 12-Year BEC is structured according to students’ aptitude, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status;

• Medical school continues to be the first choice of college entrance examinations;

• According to the National Statistics R.O.C. (Taiwan) (2020), the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Taiwan amounted to $25,941; and

• The Ministry of the Interior R.O.C. (Taiwan) (2020) shows that 46.47% of Taiwanese finish higher education.

As more and more people fall into the category of the middle class, their daily practices, communication, and lifestyle continue to contribute to the prevalence of credentialism. Still, because of cultural reproduction, their actions might reinvent social inequality (Ball, 2003; Ball et al., 1994; Bell, 2009a; Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1991). What’s more, though the middle class is expanding rapidly, they are not, by and large, the dominant group. Class discrepancy still exists regardless of the expansion of the middle class. To maintain social harmony and manage the social contradictions produced by neoliberal education reform, new rules of exclusions, prudent educational strategies, and professional interests of the middle-class groups need to be forged.

**Mode of Inquiry**

Using a case study research with a single-case design (Yin, 2018), this study aims to provide explanations for cultural reproduction and an uneven education market from the perspectives of middle-class families, teachers, and school stakeholders at a private secondary school in Taiwan. With realist orientation, the purpose is to explore both the extrinsic factors (i.e., state policies) and intrinsic factors (i.e., cultural practices) of middle-school choice by middle-class families after the implementation of 12-Year BEC. This study also examines how the market mechanism of education influences the relationship between teachers and students.
Thus, a high performing private secondary school with a complete spectrum of secondary education in central Taiwan was chosen. To understand middle-class educational belief and cultural practices, seven families were recruited for interviews. To examine how middle-class strategies and state policies affect efficiency and equity, five teachers and one school administrator were interviewed. Utilizing Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory and neoliberalism, this study examines middle-class cultural reproduction and education marketization. Data collection methods include not only interviews, but also observations during regular school hours, after-school hours around convenience stores next the school, and school-generated documents (e.g., billboards, league tables, curriculum, enrollment information, school activities on school websites). The rendering of this research is visualized in Figure 1.1.

Data analysis consisted of two methods, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA). The purpose of this study is to understand Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction and teachers along with school stakeholders’ responses to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. Thus, power relationships and struggles for power through cultural reproduction are examined. Fairclough (1989) stated “assumptions are ideologies” (p. 2). Through the examination of school-generated documents, the embedded assumptions of the private secondary school will be demonstrated. As can be inferred from the burgeoning enrollment of this private secondary school, those who espouse this ideology will consider sending their offspring to this school. In the context of pre-conceived social belief, thematic analysis helped to map out the decision of middle-school choice behind closed door. This same ideology applied to those that work at this school as well. Thus, the interviews between teachers and school administrator are also examined through thematic analysis to understand the responsibility carried by school under the neoliberal education reform.
The findings indicate that, though the government tried to lessen the influence of credentialism in Taiwan, the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, from the middle-class families’ viewpoint, is a means of maintaining the mantle of meritocracy and marketization of education.

Figure 1.1. Structure, Class, and State: An Inquiry for Taiwanese Education Policy and Practices
Significance of the Study

This dissertation is not a representative statement for the middle class. Rather, this is part of the trends and trajectories that we can follow from the privileged side and to fight for social inequalities. It contributes to the fast-growing research on school-choice policies that seek to understand how middle-class families utilize their resources, identities, and opportunities to navigate and sustain their power and status in 21st century Taiwan. By examining middle-class strategies in central Taiwan, this dissertation examines the notion that education gentrification is not only a micro-level phenomenon in the English-speaking world (Harvey, 2005), but also happening at the macro-level around the globe. This dissertation starts with a thorough thematic literature review emphasizing on secondary school choice under the influence of neoliberalism from 2014 – 2018, tracing the spread of neoliberalism from the English-speaking world to other continents. Second, this dissertation covers both sides of the story from the knowledge suppliers and consumers in the era of education marketization. The perspectives from the middle-class families provide readers food of thought for on school choice and its correlations to cultural reproduction. The perspectives from teachers and school administrator in a private secondary school sheds light on the neoliberal education reform from the first-line practitioners.

To understand how middle-class ideology converged with neoliberal education reform, this study challenges the contemporary understanding of educational inequalities by studying the viewpoints from selected Taiwanese middle-class families. It contributes to the study of inequality and social exclusion, and invites parents, scholars, practitioners, teachers, policymakers, and school stakeholders to examine education inequality from the perspective of the middle class. As the mandate of the 12-Year BEC is on its initial phase, this dissertation
serves as a pioneering contribution to the study of the 12-Year BEC and its impact, and calls attention to the neoliberal approach to education reform.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

The first chapter discusses the background of the problem under examination and sets forth the research statement, research questions, and mode of inquiry and its significance. Under the umbrella of neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s seminal theory of cultural and social reproduction, the second chapter offers a brief historical background of the 12-Year BEC in Taiwan and the practices of school choice. A thematic literature review takes readers through the dissemination of neoliberalism around the globe and incorporates Bourdieu’s theory to explain the intrinsic factors of school choice. This narrative literature focuses on the past five years (2014 – 2018) to illustrate how different states emulated neoliberalism and incorporated local contexts to meet particular interests and needs. The third chapter demonstrates the methodology that is utilized to understand the educational equity, power relations, and cultural practices through the lens of the middle class and the role of teachers and school administrators in the era of neoliberalism. In this chapter, data collection, data analysis methods (i.e., critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis), validity, reliability, and ethnic consideration are explained in detail. The fourth chapter presents the findings of this research examining the middle-class strategies and education market trends. Lastly, the final chapter provides a discussion, relates findings to previous research, and provides final remarks for future studies.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The purpose of this study is to understand Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction and the responses of teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. The 12-Year BEC passed in 2014 and was enacted in the 2019 fall semester. It reflected the neoliberalism agendas with less government intervention and increased power vested in those who possess capital. The goals of the 12-Year BEC were to level the playing field for all families and bridge the educational gap between urban and rural populations (MOE, 2020a). In practice, however, the byproducts of the 12-Year BEC has included academic resources redistribution, social class reassurance, and meritocracy permeated by elitism.

Because neoliberal educational reform has its roots in the English-speaking world, it is necessary to recognize the relevance and international influence of Europeanism and capitalism (Harvey, 2005). In fact, neoliberal policies are not the sole factor regarding to school choice. This decision-making process is complex and involves numerous factors, such as household demographic information, school location, school performance, teacher and student ratio, and graduation rate, etc. (Eyer, 2018; Holme, 2002), as well as the most intrinsic overriding element, the volume of families’ cultural, social, and economic capital (Ball, 1993, 2003; Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1996; DiMaggio, 1982). Still, the decision is often made behind closed doors and is not easily detected. To understand this subtle process, I first reviewed literature addressing the school choice policies, then segmented into factors influenced by Bourdieu’s concepts.

At the level of political rhetoric, parental school choice is the manifestation of personal freedom and prevalent discourse. Embedded in this rhetoric are what factors influenced parents’ choice. They are often based on the resources at hand and the volume of capital they hold. Thus,
the idea of choice translates differently for people from different strata (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

Under the neoliberal regime, the definition of a good school has gradually changed due to education marketisation (Chubb & Moe, 1990a; Giroux, 2005). The process of ranking and competition within the education market unintentionally put “popular” and “unpopular” labels on schools and institutions (Lipman, 2011). This hierarchical phenomenon further reproduced social stratification and class reproduction and changed the essence of schooling.

Thus, to understand the effect of the 12-Year BEC in Taiwan, this chapter examines seminal pieces on school choice policies and different States’ neoliberalism-influenced educational reforms as well as the intrinsic factors (i.e. capital) influencing cultural and social production. Since school choice is not a new idea, I not only consider the old trend but also elucidate global waves within past five years (from 2014-2018). Specifically, during the nascent stage of the 12-Year BEC, it was under constant reforms and took insights from other States (Chou & Ching, 2012). Drawing from examples in other developed States, the educational system in Taiwan preserved the old credentialism and added some neoliberal ingredients from the English-speaking world (Mao, 2015). In the following section, I provide background knowledge about the 12-Year BEC, history of school choice, and clarify the convergence of neoliberalism and Bourdieusian theories in a thematic literature review style.

**What Is the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum?**

According to the Ministry of Education R.O.C. (Taiwan), the implementation of the 12-Year BEC was the end result of an inevitable historical trend. It provided four statements justifying the launch with evidence. First, it pointed to the establishment of compulsory education by France and Germany in the 18th century. Since then, many countries have adapted the same practice. A century later, a new social order was established amongst developed
With longer working hours, parents needed a safe place and practical means of childcare. Thus, many countries prolonged the length of compulsory education from primary to middle school. In these regions, education is no longer treated as a privilege enjoyed by certain group of people, but as a fundamental human right. This is evident in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and policies established by the International Convention of Rights of Children, UNESCO, and World Bank (NAER, 2017). Secondly, the economic growth and social changes in Taiwan have raised the average education level of its citizens. Thus, to go with the flow, policymakers and stakeholders argued vociferously for the expansion of compulsory schooling to secondary education. Third, in 2011, Taiwan spent just 5.5% of its GDP on total education expenditures compared to 7.6% in the Republic of Korea, 6.9% in the United States, and 6.1% of the average of the members countries of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (MOE, 2015, 2019). Expenditures on secondary school education in Taiwan were relatively low compared to other developed countries. The final justification for launching the 12-Year BEC was the modernization educational ideology and quality of life for Taiwanese citizens. Thus, the 12-Year BEC was structured under the belief that providing universal education, the duty of modern governance, recognizing the rights of Taiwanese citizens via compulsory education, quota subsidies for tuition, exam-free admission, and enrollment in catchment areas (MOE, 2020a; NAER, 2014, 2017). With several revisions, the 12-Year Basic Education Implementation Plan was drafted and effected after August 1, 2014. The goals were:

1. Enhance citizens’ basic knowledge, to inculcate students’ civic responsibility
2. Reinforce citizens’ basic skills, to implant Taiwanese economic competence
3. Enhance education equity, to fulfill social equity and justice
4. Solidify high school resources, to balance urban and rural development
5. Fulfill high school students’ aptitude exploration and career development, to promote personalized learning and employment

6. Ease the academic pressure, to guide a balanced learning-teaching with five ways of life (moral, intellectual, physical, group, and aesthetic education) in middle schools

7. Reinforce the assessment of middle school student achievement, to ensure the basic competencies. (NAER, 2014)

The implementation of the 12-Year Basic Education Implementation Plan would be incomplete without the practice of the accompanying curriculum. As noted in the goals mentioned above, the vision of the 12-Year BEC was to empower each child. The new curriculum was released with cross-field design, emphasizing the application of learned knowledge to real-life scenarios, encouraging schools to develop their own curricula, and advocating schools at all levels to promote and implement personalized learning (NAER, 2014). Thus, besides the ministry-mandated curriculum, schools and students had more autonomy and freedom to design and choose curriculum tailored for their interests. The school-developed curriculum comprised around one fifth of the whole curriculum and was structured according to students’ aptitude, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and community resources. On August 1st, 2019, the curriculum policy officially commenced in Taiwan.

The 12-Year BEC was divided into three educational stages, covering six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. In this dissertation, the discussion focuses on the middle school stage. Thus, among the three educational stages, only the middle-school curriculum is listed in Table 2.1. The 12-Year BEC can also be addressed as 108 Curriculum or 108. In Taiwan, the calendar year is marked in Minguo style. Minguo is the
first republic recognized in Chinese history and it is 1,911 years apart from the AD calendar. The official implementation of the 12-Year BEC was in 2019, therefore it was also the Minguo year of 108. Most Taiwanese use the Minguo calendar in everyday life. While the 12-Year BEC, 108 Curriculum, and 108 are used interchangeably in Taiwan, in this dissertation I use the term the 12-Year BEC consistently to avoid confusion.

Table 2.1. The 12-Year BEC for Middle School Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Middle school education</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry-mandated course</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain-specific curriculum</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Social Studies (History, Geography, Civics and Society)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>Natural Sciences (Physics/Chemistry, Biology, Earth Sciences)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Arts (Music, Visual arts, Performing arts)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Activities</td>
<td>Integrative Activities (Home Economics, Scouting, Guidance)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Technology (Information Technology, Living Technology)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education (Health Education, Physical Education)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of sessions of domain learning 29

School-developed curriculum | Alternative Curriculum | Integrative theme-, project-, and issue-based inquiry courses | 3-6 |
<table>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Club activities and professional courses</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special needs domain courses</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other types of courses</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of sessions 32-35

Adapted from MOE, 2020a

23
As shown in Table 2.1, the sessions for school-developed curriculum are flexible, allowing schools to integrate community resources with their own visions. Proponents hoped that with the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, local schools could develop their own curriculum in coordination with the characteristics and features of the 12-Year BEC. Furthermore, the promotion of “exam-free admission” to high schools was intended to lessen the academic pressure from the CAP on middle school students. Taiwan Ministry of Education (2020a) defined “exam-free admission” as free from the pressure of examinations, but as a reference to classify students, and no more than one third of high school placement determination. The proponents of the 12-Year BEC hoped to create a virtuous circle and further ameliorate the learning gap between urban and rural populations (MOE, 2020a; NAER, 2017). The goal was to eventually reach 85% exam-free high school admission, 96% local attendance within catchment-area schools, and 90% of high schools to be high quality (including vocational senior high school and the first three years of 5-year junior college programs) (NAER, 2017).

While proponents sought to promote the common good for future K-12 students through these statistical goals, the reality was that credentialism still existed. Though, under the educational reform, exam-free admission for K-12 education might ease the short-term academic burden, university admission standards remained stifled, rigid, and stratified. The protection of students’ basic learning rights did not erase the discrepancy between one child’s cultural, social, economic, and “habitual distance” (Bourdieu, 1990). I will further elucidate the use of capital later in the Bourdieusian section. After decades of education reform in Taiwan, the access to higher education after decades of educational reforms was increasingly stratified according to one’s social origin (Cheng & Jacob, 2012; Chou, 2019). Chou (2019) further indicated that,

Students with the best chance of gaining entry to a top/benchmark university are typically those whose: fathers have a graduate or college degree; mothers have a graduate, college
or junior college degree; gender is male; family incomes are above NT$1.15 million; descended from post-war immigrants from the Mainland; and residency is in the northern or middle regions of Taiwan. (p. 48)

Thus, the implementation of the 12-Year BEC might unconsciously produce meritocracy (Kennedy & Power, 2010; Kenway & Koh, 2013, 2015; Young, 1994) as a byproduct. Thought its original intentions were to narrow the learning gap between urban and rural students, distributing academic resources evenly, and lessening the academic anxiety, it might actually have the opposite effect. Also, it might not yield the desired effect of equality opportunity in education. Firmly believing in credentialism, most Taiwanese parents pay a lot of attention to “investing” in their offspring. However, in the education arena, the competition is not based on “where” to get the right knowledge, but “how” to secure and maintain their dominant stance. Privileged families are often more familiar with the “rules of the game” than those dominated groups (Lareau et al., 2016) and are more capable of deciphering the policies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990). For privileged families, choosing a “right” school for their offspring becomes a competition to protect their “infringed” rights and continue their privilege. The 12-Year BEC was constructed in market terms, and the Taiwanese educational system often synchronized with and emulated the experiences of English-speaking countries. In the following section, I will explain the factors underlying this process, beginning with neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism

The 12-Year BEC reflected key points of neoliberalism, such as lessening government intervention in education and treating school choice and a parent’s role in determining the educational trajectory of offspring as a civil right (Chou & Ching, 2012). In other words, through choice and competition, human dignity and individual freedom can be fulfilled. The term neoliberal can be traced back to the late 19th century, but the practices of neoliberalism did not
fully blossom until the end of the 20th century. The rise of neoliberal theory was formulated by a small and exclusive group of economic, philosophical, and historical elites (including Milton Friedman) who were gathered by the noted Austrian political philosopher Friedrich von Hayek in 1947 (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Steger & Roy, 2010). In their view, the working class were gaining power after the Second World War and the capitalists were losing ground in society. They proposed that the state decentralize power and give free, full rein to the market so that the hidden hands of market forces could naturally balance the supply and demand. The advent of neoliberalism led philosophical division between Hayek and John Maynard Keynes. Keynes believed that government should get involved in creating a good business climate and keep supply and demand under control, which was the opposite view of Hayek. However, Keynesian interventionism was long adhered to by many countries as a response to the Great Depression and the aftermath of the Second World War (Harvey, 2005; Ranney, 2003).

In the 1960s, as the contest between Hayek’s and Keynes’ positions continued, Communist political parties were gaining more ground, if not completely taking power, around the world. Global hegemonic states were contemplating political strategies to counteract the effects of Communism (Harvey, 2005). The expansion of Communism not only threatened the political power of the democratic states but also diminished people’s belief in private property and free-market competitions. At the same time, local and national protests sprang up around the world proclaiming the desire for greater personal freedom (e.g. free speech, personal choice). The freedom to choose is the primary belief held by neoliberalists. However, “values of individual freedom and social justice are not … necessarily compatible” (Harvey, 2005, p. 41). Everyone wants and craves different individual freedoms and, often, the pursuit of social justice inadvertently leads to more social inequality.
After taking root in the 1960s, neoliberalization became a full-blown trend in the 1970s. The neoliberalists believed “government intervention was the problem rather than the solution” (p. 54), thus, a new form of “common sense” (defined by Gramsci as “the sense held in common, as cited in Harvey, 2005, p. 39) needed to be structured to fundamentally change people’s mode of thinking. Based on the assumption that private sectors function better than public services, neoliberalists promoted competition, privation, and deregulation as means to increase productivity and efficiency in free markets (Apple, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Steger & Roy, 2010). In the U.S., where the value of individual freedom had long been praised, and across the Atlantic, in the U.K., where the class system was deeply entrenched, both Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher adopted neoliberal strategies to placate the chaotic situations. The result was the end to their economic crisis and a flattening of unemployment rate. Their successful experiences influenced the economies around the world. After decades of seesaw between the political and economic philosophers of Hayek and Keynes, neoliberalism finally took the upper hand in developed countries.

The aftermath of the Second World War not only change the power structure of nations around the globe, but also the terrain of international markets. The trade and exchange of capital, though it had its roots in the world hegemony of the 18th century, was rapidly shifted from local to national to global. The boundaries between nation-states blurred. To increase mutual benefit between nations, economic think tanks gathered to negotiate methods to reduce, if not remove, the barriers of capital exchanges. While the U.S. and the U.K. heartily adopted the neoliberal strategies, the primary value of “individual” freedom has been diluted. As Harvey (2005) noted, “once the state apparatus made the neoliberal turn it could use its powers of persuasion, co-optations, bribery, and threat to maintain the climate of consent necessary to perpetuate its
power” (p. 40). The construction of neoliberalism was in the hands of the a few think tanks to restore class power and redistribute resources back to capitalists (Apple, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). The freedoms of the masses are often constrained by lack of access to the same information as the power brokers.

**What Is School Choice?**

The intended purpose of lessening state intervention, within neoliberalism, is to prevent state power from being concentrated and evolving into oligarchy or outright nihilism. Sectors formerly ran or regulated by state would become more flexible, diversified, and competitive in free markets. In the mid-1950s, Milton Friedman, a neoliberal theorist, first introduced the concept of school choice to the world (Harvey, 2005). In the domain of the education market, Friedman suggested that free-market competitions would provide transparency and autonomy through citizens’ freedom of choice and would ultimately wind down the privilege enjoyed by the dominant groups while leveling the playing field for the dominated ones (Gobby, 2016; Holme, 2002; Lipman, 2011). Friedman stated that school choice policies allow public education funds to follow students to the schools or services that best fit their preferences – whether that’s a public school, private school, charter school, home school, or any other learning environment parents choose for their children (Forster, 2013).

Chubb and Moe (1990b) pointed to the dysfunctions of bureaucracy and noted that autonomy, as a social value, was at odds with American public-school systems. School choice policies could be viewed as a manifesto of the U.S. value of autonomy and the neoliberal trend of global markets. Based on the assumption that private sectors were more efficient and productive than the public sectors, neoliberal advocates further promoted education markets and privatization. They stated that a market system was not built on distributing order from a
centralized authority. Instead, in this neoliberal market-based scenario, “the authority to make educational choices is radically decentralized to those most immediately involved” (p. 6).

The neoliberal agenda of choice, competition, ranking, and natural selection has fundamentally transformed schools and institutions from knowledge providers to a system governed by the economic philosophy that “stores must provide good value or lose customers” (Forster, 2013, p. 4). By the same token, the emphasis on autonomy, transparency, fairness, efficiency, and efficiency of neoliberalism has discursively shifted parents and students from passive to active consumers and schools to producers in the education market (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Chubb & Moe, 1990a, 1990b; Steger & Roy, 2010). While the good intention of neoliberal education reform was heard, the meaning of choice translated differently to parents with different social status (Apple, 2001; Henig, 1995; Holme, 2002). “Choice is a self-contained reform with its own rationale and justification” (Chubb & Moe, 1990b, p. 8). People from different socioeconomic backgrounds and schools in different sectoral locations were imbued with resources and productive potential. Thus, instead of promoting the whimsical notion that schools could be effectively transformed via a uniform education reform policy, Chubb and Moe thought schools in different communities should be granted autonomy to “please their clients” (p. 6).

A market system granted parents and students greater autonomy to choose a school according to their preference and interests. The lessening of governance and decentralization allowed the market to organize to its full advantage. Thus, the environment of competition, would ultimately create a system based on valuing and ranking, and force schools and institutions to provide good services and produce good products. Schools and institutions were transformed from an arena of knowledge accumulation to product exportation. This natural
selection makes sure the balance of supply and demand of the effective schools and weed out the incompletable, undersubscribed, and obsoleted schools.

With the spread of neoliberalism, the idea of school choice has been universally espoused by numerous states and widely discussed in education fields (Ball, 1993; Delale-O’Connor, 2018; Groves & O'Connor, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011; Põder & Lauri, 2014). Governments’ attempt to reduce state intervention and provide parents greater autonomy in their children’s education signifies a new era of neoliberal education marketisation. When free-market competition is applied to the arena of education, education becomes a “positional good” (Hirsch, 1976), meaning it is now a function of a “competition that is fundamentally for a higher place within some explicit or implicit hierarchy and that thereby yields gains for some only by dint of losses for others” (p. 52). The assumption that parents (i.e., consumers) have equal access and know how and where to acquire and utilize updated information and policies provided by the government is tested by the fact that choice and competition are disguised terms. Studies show that from Oceania to Europe, school administrations set curriculum, admission examination, and other explicit and implicit recruitment standards for envisioned consumers. Demonstrating strategies overtly on school webpages or brochures, schools around the world set recruitment policies for target students, and “naturally” filter some low socio-economic families from the game (Ball, 1993). When privileged families gain more benefits from this game, the underprivileged are doomed to lose more chances and be left at the bottom of social reproduction. Thus, class polarization is deepened. In the following segment I demonstrate how neoliberal studies incorporate market competition, ranking, and natural selection into education reform.
Market Competition

Ball (1993) provided useful description of market-based public schooling from the perspectives on both sides of the Atlantic in the U.K. and the U.S. Ball stated that while parental choice and school competition enhanced performance and lessened state interference in education planning, this market reform of education was by no means a “class strategy which has as one of its major effects the reproduction of relative social class (and ethnic) advantages and disadvantages” (p. 4). Ball’s idea echoed Chubb and Moe’s (1990a) work on American public schools, which emphasized the downside of the Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Chubb and Moe believed that marketization of education would discursively go against the original intention of resource redistribution and lead to class reassurance.

By the same token, Ball et al. (1994) conducted a 39-month period qualitative study of 15 secondary schools in London. This study sought to understand the dynamics of the local education market, not simply parental choice and school responsiveness. They indicated that in a market system the “energetic and careful are rewarded and the slothful and ignorant are punished” (p. 13). In the U.K., education reform was implemented to increase diversity among schools. However, the National Curriculum was structured under centralized authority and paid little attention to consumer preferences. Furthermore, to meet the goal and purpose of self-interest, this market solution put certain groups of students at a systematic disadvantage. The authors suggested that the school market practiced in the U.K. had forced schools and institutions “to attract enrolments from ‘motivated’ parents and ‘able’ children who are likely to enhance their relative position in local systems of competition” (p. 17). The researchers concluded that the discrepancy between lifestyle and class identity might end up making the educational system in the U.K. “a more socially differentiated and divisive system of education” (p. 25).
Both studies demonstrated that the operation of the education market was in favor of certain classes and fractions and disadvantaged the education opportunities and equalities of others. The asymmetric power relations between individuals and government and the powerful and powerless tended to increase rather than decrease under neoliberal education reform. While the proponents were vociferously fighting for social inequality, they were consciously creating more educational inequity.

In discussing the neoliberal turn towards educational reform, Apple (2001) began with Kliebard’s (1986) debate on what counts as legitimate and official knowledge and stated it was a deep-rooted conflict within many states. In today’s neoliberal turn, the new markets help the restoration of the dominant authority through the guiding principles of the powerful groups. Apple’s idea echoed with Ball et al. (1994) when he indicated “in practice neo-liberal policies involving market ‘solutions’ may actually serve to reproduce – not subvert – traditional hierarchies of class and race” (p. 413). Hence, a market system benefited the middle class the most. For one thing, marketized systems of education attempted to filter them out. For another, they “often expressly have their conscious and unconscious raison d'etre in a fear of ‘the other’ and these often are hidden expressions of a racialization of educational policy, the differential results will ‘naturally’ be decidedly raced as well as classed” (p. 415, emphasis in original).

Apple concluded analysis of any discourse should pay close attention to the meanings behind “class and race and gender” (p. 421, emphasis in original) for they were often benefiting certain groups while sacrificing “the others.”

Connell (2013) illustrated the impact of this marketing trend in Australia beyond the K-12 educational stages in higher education. With more competition and less diversity, higher education was redefined as “a commodity not a citizen right” (p. 102). More and more
government subsidies were poured into private whose main clientele consisted of middle-class families. Because of their underprivileged socio-economic status, working-class children often chose public school. The market agenda more often excluded working class from the game. This resonated with Chou’s (2019) examination of higher education in Taiwan, where Chou noted that “massification” aroused mixed results towards education equity.

As can be inferred from the above studies, the application of marketing solutions towards education has created systemic barriers and made educational inequalities insuperable. The egalitarian reform of the 12-Year BEC, though constructed with the best intentions, neglected the idea of social scarcity. As Hirsch (1976) indicated, “[a]n expansion in the ‘output’ of educational credentials will, by itself, reduce the information conveyed by the particular credentials involved” (p. 48). Thus, egalitarian educational reform might cause the devaluation of education certificates, for they can no longer deliver what has been promised. Raftery and Hout (1993) indicated that, unless educational capacity reaches its maximum demand for the privileged groups, educational inequalities will perpetuate. In Taiwan, most K-12 educational systems are either government-run or private-run, and the options of school choice are not as diverse as they are in the U.S. However, the experiences of school choice might be more unpleasant due to its local contexts.

**Chooser, Non-chooser, or Default Chooser**

Three decades after the introduction of neoliberalism, the freedom and competition were objectified in the school choice policies across education systems in developed societies. Examined through these school choice decisions, all families can be roughly categorized as choosers or non-choosers. If we further dissected the category of non-choosers, those who fall into this category as default choosers or non-choosers can be polarized into two groups and they
are differentiated by the residential areas. The economic advantage groups were able to choose any locations to reside thus they already made school choice decision the moment they purchased their house. However, those disadvantaged fractions’ voices were silenced, since they were not mobile enough to move to the areas they wanted and ended up choosing a school according to their school district. The advantaged families inherently have choice, and they take advantage of it (Nathan, 1998). This polarized situation is further reinforced as a dominant-subordinated dichotomy, and the subordinated groups are often perceived as the deficit model which need to be “modified” (Gewirtz, 2001).

Lyken-Segosebe and Hinz (2015) studied the educational opportunity-seeking behavior of middle-, working, and lower-class families in the U.S. Using rational choice and interest group theories to examine the politics of middle-class opportunity hoarding and laws supported by lower- and working-class parents’ opportunity prying, Lyken-Segosebe and Hinz stated that parental school choice and access to educational opportunity remained stratified by class. Inherited with economic capital, middle-class families tended to choose better residential areas than those low-socioeconomic families. Middle-class and above families believed residing in desirable neighborhoods where the schools in the catchment area are high performing would provide their children better academic and social capital (Bell, 2009b).

In the U.S., when an area is classified as “bad” or a “bad” neighborhood, the result is that the schools within these neighborhoods are labeled as “unpopular” schools (Lipman, 2011). Therefore, it is like the dilemma of the chicken or the egg, does the social stratification cause the issues of the undesired neighborhood or vice versa? The underprivileged are often trapped in these notorious areas, whereas the middle-class families exercise their choice by buying a house in a desirable neighborhood (Ball, 2003, Chubb & Moe, 1990b; Holme, 2002; Kosunen, 2014;
Lipman, 2011). Hence, the powerless people end up choosing a school in their catchment area and become default-choosers. Even though they are categorized this way, they seldom make the choice voluntarily.

In discussing school choice policies, Delale-O’Connor (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study to understand the framework that goes beyond chooser and non-chooser dichotomy to low-income and working-class parents in Chicago. Examining these groups through the terminology of Dewirtz et al. (1995) who described choosers as skilled, semiskilled, or disconnected with different level of inclination and capacity, this study indicated that default choosers in a degree did the same thing (i.e. gathering information, knowing the gatekeepers, and acknowledging the application due date, etc.) as their chooser counterparts. The level of capacity, inclination, and preference differentiated them from those labeled as choosers. Those labeled as non-choosers or defaulters were actively engaging in the school choice process, yet, they “lack capacity or have their capacity thwarted by systemic barriers”. Hence, understanding defaulters’ school choice process help future researchers understand the barriers they faced when making choice.

Though the phrase “chooser” does not do justice to all categorized decision makers, the powerful groups often utilize their strategies better than their counterparts. Shuls (2018) conducted a mixed-method study of personal and political support for school choice programs in Missouri with 35 parents. Results were illustrated with descriptive statistics about interviewees’ demographic information and annual household income, and textual evidence about these parents’ responses. The author indicated that more than 76% of the interviewees supported school choice, for they chose what they thought was best for their children. However, most parents have reservations about school choice. They pointed out that “school choice may hurt
traditional public schools”, for it “gives the public less control of the school system, may lower the quality of private schools, and does not solve the larger problem of concentrated poverty” (pp. 89-91). So, school choice policy gave them mixed feelings. In one way, they want to support governmental policies; in another, middle-class families worried what school choice policies would bring to their class. Therefore, the middle class was, as Ball (2003) argued, “active in various ways in influencing and effecting education policies in their own interests” (p. 25).

**Ranking and Differential**

Studies (Apple, 2001, 2006, 2014; Ball, 1993, 2003; Ball et al., 1994; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Gewirtz et al., 1995) have shown that, under the influence of education marketization, commercial principles deviated schools’ main mission from education to markets. In order to be viewed as an effective school, more and more institutions structure recruitment criteria and methods to seek “able” students and “motivated” parents. These middle-class students were more likely to perform well on examinations and thus help maintain stability and accountability.

Jabbar (2016) proposed that marketing solutions in education can directly affect students’ educational opportunities. As a result, schools tend to cream-skim high-performing students, thus disturbing the original intention of resource allocation. Yoon (2016) noticed there is a new group of “elite schooling,” and explored how the students who received elite education visualize their privileged futures within neoliberal reforms of school choice in the public education system. The mechanisms of competition, choice, and mobility demonstrated in this neoliberal school choice meshed with Bourdieu’s theory of capital. Yoon carried out an ethnographic study to understand these elite students’ meaning making. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2009 and 2010 with 59 students’ perspectives (aged 11-19) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The findings indicated that these students saw “selective public choice schools as offering a new
route to elite positions” (p. 382). What’s more, the neoliberal agenda of competition and choice enhance their global imaginations of “where they fit in” (p. 382). Hence, their image of being a new elite was imperceptibly adopted and further reproduced.

Foster (2013) described school choice policies as a win-win solution that showed positive results both for the families and the public schools. In Europe, Põder and Lauri (2014) examined how students and schools are matched to the social structure of ‘good’ and ‘not-so-good’ schools in Estonia. They test whether entrance examinations stratify students and whether the reproduction of the elite stratum is based on parental pre-training strategies and residential choice or, rather, on economic capital. A quantitative study was carried with 840 parents who answered an internet survey about their demographic backgrounds. Results indicated that the Estonian public-school system has been socially segregated. A mother’s education is statistically more significant than a father’s education. However, parental educational attainment showed a smaller impact than income on the probability of getting accepted to an elite school. Still, not all prep-school programs guaranteed acceptance to the elite schools, only elite prep-schools indicated a positive coefficient. Though the segregating effect on school choice might exacerbate social inequality in Estonia, the authors ended the study with some suggestions. To properly implement school choice policies, parents must be informed about the qualities of the alternatives. A school should be allowed to structure its own recruitment policies, and ensure that the market competition is real (i.e., money follows the children) (p. 231).

Natural Selection

The perception of market within neoliberalist reform is a controversial topic of concern. School choice in the 21st century becomes a mechanism to screen those un-favored and to market them as “bad” products, be they schools or students (Ball & Vincent, 1998). In a broader
picture, human societies are constantly under classification. When this free-market competition is applied to the arena of education, in the language of game theory, it becomes a zero-sum game (Apple, 2014; Hirsch, 1976). When interests conflict among two groups of people, it is either “I win”, or “you lose”. On the demand side, the dominant class understands that there is not enough room for everyone to be a winner, and thus they often adopt aggressive approaches toward education (Ball et al., 1994, 1995; Chubb & Moe, 1990a, 1990b; Gewirtz, 2001; Raftery & Hout, 1993) or create beneficial conditions for class formation (Harvey, 2005). These “cultural capital heavy” parents (Jæger, 2009) understand that educational return depends on their investment. On the supply side, the policies are written to cater to the needs of a miniscule quota and favor the privileged and their rights, from the curriculum to the methodology to which they supported (Apple, 2001, 2014; Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Harvey, 2005).

To be labeled as successful schools and maintain their markets, schools are paying more attention to student recruitment under neoliberalism. The commodification of education has categorized schools and stratified reputations. If a school attracts more “motivated” parents and “able” children, these consumers are more likely to enhance the school’s local, if not national, competitiveness (Ball et al., 1994). Those advantaged groups were ordained with a great volume of capital and often monopolized the flow of information (Harvey, 2005). Thus, the powerless groups’ educational opportunities fell further behind. School choice policies served as a distinction, and was disguised under the idea that choice and failure were always voluntary (Harvey, 2005).

Rodgers (2014) examined small school movement in New York City and noted the increase accountability and transparency in education and improve educational equality and opportunities for students. Rodgers briefly introduced the history of the small school movement,
which was founded by Deborah Meier who tried to create schools that “gave students, parents, teachers, and all stakeholders in the communities they served a voice in education” (p. 126). This movement was heartedly supported by business and political elites. However, the result was that a student’s “worth” was weighted as a new measurement of evaluating a good and bad school. Next, building on Apple’s Educating the “right” way, (Apple, 2006), Rawls’ the theory of original position (Rawls, 2005), and Bull (2008), Rodgers argued that this neoliberal school choice created greater disparity among students from different socioeconomic background and educational choice for the disadvantaged groups was inequitable from the start. The neoliberal school choice practices entrenched those in-need in this almost “inescapable caste system” (p. 135).

To maintain a school’s stability, school leaders used different marketing strategies as a response to free-market competition. Jabbar (2016) examined how school administrators in the market-based environment of post-Katrina New Orleans used explicit and implicit marketing strategies to recruit and screen target students. Also, applying Gewirtz et al. (1995) theory, but using the idea of “glossification,” a qualitative case study was carried out drawing a stratified random sample of 30 schools. The study showed that 24 out of 30 schools used some marketing strategy, be it formal (i.e. billboards) or informal (i.e. hosting invitation-only parent events) to attract and select students. The author argued that these actions were meant to attract students with more involved parents, families with greater economic capital, and higher achieving students. Jabbar found that some oversubscribed schools were so desirable that they sometimes did not market in order to keep their accountability and control of selecting student bodies. These market-orientated strategies perpetuated educational inequality as had been stated in Ball et al. (1994). Jabbar concluded with final remarks that most schools in the study invested time and
resources into marketing, and since money was being invested in advertising and marketing, future research on school choice policies might examine the breakdown of money in marketing expenses.

When school choice was practiced in the public-school system, it became highly selective and competitive and, thus, widened the gap of educational opportunities (Chou, 2019). Standardized examinations and examination league tables reflected the neoliberal characteristics of competition and choice. Though they are vociferously debated, they are tacitly accepted in present education practices (Pöder & Lauri, 2014; Yoon, 2016). These two systems had long been practiced in Taiwan long before the era of neoliberalism. Mao (2015) noted that global neoliberal education reform influenced the introduction of choice under the local Fundamental Education Act of 1999 in Taiwan. This paper indicated the complex relationship between global policy on school choice and local practice of school choice. Unlike many studies done in Western countries which indicated that one’s location of residency significantly affected the quality of one’ education experience, the author stated that “for some parents in Taiwan, this quality is more an issue of which schools your child attends than an issue of where you live” (p. 103). A quantitative study was conducted to compare two junior-high schools in Taipei, Taiwan, and the data was collected during September 2008 to June 2009. Mao stated that the global notion of neoliberal education reform has influenced education practices around the world. However, this idea does not always correspond to the same formula in Western countries. Thus, it should be examined in the local discourse. The results demonstrated that Taiwan’s education policy sought to promote civil rights (i.e. parental participation) and free-market competition, however, with limited choices of curriculum, schools, and programs, it continued exacerbating social equality.
Neoliberal education policies facilitated a greater concentration and centralization of privileged power and became a mechanism of class filter. Therefore, diametrically opposed to its intent, school choice policies naturally entrenched status hierarchy and social and cultural reproduction (Ball, 1993) and the playing field of people of different social background were not leveled. The neoliberal turn of education reform was “in some way and to some degree associated with the restoration or reconstruction of the power of economic elites” (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). The governmental policies provided from above the extrinsic social stratification and class reproduction. Next, I will describe how Bourdiesian theories presented the intrinsic factors of parental choice.

**Reproduction and Exclusion in Education**

Durkheim defined an educational system as “the conservation of a culture inherited from the past” (as cited in Bourdieu, 1973), meaning that the accumulated knowledge, theories, and rules pass from generation to generation, and divide one class from another. It preserves memories and practices shared by certain group of people and allows societies to work in harmonious ways. As Woodson (2000) stated, education helps people to find their “proper place,” which allows society to function like an orchestra (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990). Class stratification is endlessly reproduced by education, and academic attainment depends on “inherited cultural capital and on the propensity to invest in the educational system” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 116). Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction fits neatly within the results of sociological research on the impacts of school choice. While Bourdieu was an opponent of globalization, it is undeniable that his theories somewhat intersect with the reality school choice policies in the 21st century.
Examining through the lens of neoliberalism, advocates for school choice believe that competition and democratic citizenship create virtuous circles for educational and social equality. However, as I stated earlier in the neoliberalism section, *choice* is a disguised term that translates differently for people within different classes and class fractions. This global neoliberal turn varies from context to context. The external factors, such as school performance, proximity of a school, examination league tables, and governmental policies (Ball, 1993, 2003; Ball et al., 1994, 1995; Chou, 2019; Chubb & Moe, 1990a, 1990b; Harvey, 2005) have proven to impact school choice. Ball (1993, 2003) and Apple (2001, 2014) further explained the intrinsic factors such as the volume of families’ capital behind it. Though the parents’ decision on schooling is generally made behind closed doors, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) theory of practice can elucidate the factors behind it. Though Bourdieu (1979/1984) viewed his idea as “very French,” the key terms of “habitus,” “field,” and “capital” have traveled and settled geographically in different contexts (Kenway & Koh, 2013) and have been widely applied to explain parental school choice.

According to neoliberal thinking, high quality schools are rare and the allocation of them should be scarce (Hirsch, 1976). Citizens will then compete for education as a valuable good based on the volume of capital they hold. In the arena of education, the dominant groups are able to understand the “rules of the game” better than those dominated groups (Lareau et al., 2016). Families from different socioeconomic backgrounds have different perceptions of educational decisions. For the dominant groups, school choice is a means of social distinction. Bourdieu (1979/1984) stated that an educational system serves as one of the fundamental agencies of “maintenance of social order” (p. 388). As Gewirtz (2001) stated, the British government of Blair era thought the dominated groups needed to be inculcated in order to be kept in the “right”
place. In other words, the social structure was first built from the rudimentary inculcation of families from different social classes, then later inculcated with the practices of schools, in order to form a harmonious society (Bourdieu, 1973).

**Theories of Capital**

In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu explained the complicated nature of human activity with this formulation: \[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})\] + field = practice (p. 95). These three key terms proposed by Bourdieu illustrated the diverse lifestyles across human societies and structured symbolic spaces among people. To begin with, Bourdieu (1972/1977) defined habitus as,

systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practice and representation which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (p. 72, emphasis in original)

In other words, Bourdieu believed that habitus brought an individual’s collective history into the present. Through early socialization, one’s upbringing, education, colloquialism, worldviews, mannerisms, dispositions, tastes of food and clothes, etc. is accumulated and internalized both consciously and unconsciously. They leave a trace of an individual’s accumulated history. Though habitus is inherited from parents, their continuity and existence depended on ongoing social interactions. Though he did not lay out explicit rules, habitus, in Bourdieu’s (1979/1984) word, was “structured and structuring structure” (p.167). The second ingredient in his formulation was capital. Bourdieu (1986) stated three main forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Capital, an idea proposed by Marx (1887/1999), is

not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character. Capital is not the sum of the material and produced means of
production. Capital is rather the means of production transformed into capital, which in themselves are no more capital than gold or silver in itself is money. (p. 465)

Essentially, Marx (1887/1999) was saying that human society functions through continuous and endless capital exchanges. This idea has been widely adopted to explain the social production process. Bourdieu (1986) built on Marx’s theory and further proposed different forms of capital. Capital, in its rudimentary form, is economic capital, which was explained by Marx (1887/1999) as money. The circulation of economic capital creates production reproduction in society. At first, human beings performed mercantile exchange. Later, with the birth of capitalism, some goods that were scarce, hard to acquire, or things that could not be transmitted simultaneously were also assigned monetary values. Though attributed value, these goods were not always exchangeable with money. Thus, economic capital could be converted into social capital and cultural capital.

Yet, “the exchange rates vary in accordance with the power relation between the holders of the different forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 119). The higher the exchange rate, the more powerful the holder of this form of capital is. Depending on the fields in which capital functions, it can be further identified as social and cultural ones (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu, social capital was “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). Cultural capital was also convertible, in certain conditions, to economic capital. It could be further categorized into three states: embodied, objectified, and institutional. The embodied state was described as the internalized ability to structured one’s habitus. The objectified state was depicted as cultural properties, such as collection of art. The institutional state was interpreted as academic qualifications and educational credentials conferred by legalized institutions (Bourdieu, 1986). Lastly, the final
ingredient in Bourdieu’s formulation was the term field. Swartz (2013) explained fields as “arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize these different kinds of power resources” (p. 57). In other words, Swartz stated that fields were the settings where homogenous groups of people objectify their class condition and conditioning it entailed.

The three key terms have been extensively used among scholars to explain cultural and social reproductions in various states. When examining social stratification, Bourdieu’s theory of capitals has often been used to explain educational inequality. DiMaggio (1982) indicated that, owing to the different volume of capital and mode of acquisitions, that fractions with high volume of capital know better how to maximize their benefit from their educational choices. The relationship between cultural capital and school choice was generic and determinate. Ball et al. (1995) stated that middle-class families and working-class families made different school choices due to the difference in cultural capital. It was determinate, in the sense that powerful fractions know that this capital is culturally arbitrary and “capable of perpetuating itself” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990, p. 31). “Culture-capital-heavy” parents (Jæger, 2009) tend to understand the reward of educational capital. Bourdieu (1979/1984) stated that in highly differentiated societies, two social agencies are responsible for cultural capital inculcation: the family and the school. In Bourdieu’s (1973) earlier work, he contended that parents

[W]hich are richest in cultural capital are more inclined to invest in their children’s education at the same time as in cultural practices liable to maintain and increase their specific rarity; those sections which are richest in economic capital set aside cultural and educational investments to the benefit of economic investments. (pp. 92-93)

In making this comment, Bourdieu argued that the powerful classes have the capacity to translate complex messages, be it governmental policies or search of gatekeepers, to fit their interests and
needs. Educational institutions are often dedicated to inculcating the dominant culture and reproducing legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1973, 1996; Foucault, 1975/1977; Lin, 2001). Unlike communication within a family, the previous possession of resources students bring to a school are unevenly distributed, communication in the educational institution is highly stratified and imbalanced. Thus, capital-heavy parents (Jæger, 2009) are more capable of maintaining resources and accumulation through pedagogic actions (Bourdieu, 1996). They generally inherit more cultural capital and are more capable of maintaining their position in the same social stratum, as well as being more time-rich (Ball et al., 1994, 1995). These parents know the “rules of the game” and are much more communicable and able to decode significant information (Apple, 2001; Hasting & Weinstein, 2008).

Granovetter (1973) indicated that there are two types of ties, strong and weak. While most people emphasize the strong ties, the weak ties enable the micro-level phenomena of social mobility and their influence should not be underestimated. The ties that one build can be described in Bourdieu’ concept as social capital. Bourdieu (1986) noted that economic capital can be converted to social capital through an exchange of gifts or words. The accumulation and exchange of information and resources within people in the same social stratum help to produce and build mutual knowledge. As irksome as school choice can be, parents often rely on acquaintances for consultations. Ball and Vincent (1998) examined the notion of “grapevine” in the U.K. and found that parents consult their close friends, relatives, and neighbors for their school choice decision. Social networks significantly influence the way in which people identify good and bad schools (Holme, 2002; Raveaud & Van Zanten, 2007; Rowe & Windle, 2012). Parents within the same class tend to exchange ideas with other like-minded parents, i.e. the strong ties (Ball & Vincent, 1998), to main and accumulate profit. Inasmuch, the knowledge
circulation and networking system within the dominant groups are confined to certain occasions, places, or practices, and therefore, tend to exclude the dominated ones (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986; Lipman, 2011).

Educational institutions (i.e. family, school) are deemed as fields of reproduction of power relationships and symbolic relations within classes and class fractions. Education, in its way, is “symbolic violence” which valorizes cultural and social reproduction in society, and exacerbates and manipulates the initial inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1991, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Lin, 2001). Bourdieu’s theories explained the symbolic systems in social classes and the social boundaries within the societies. These intrinsic factors together with extrinsic factors (i.e. the 12-Year BEC) have had a powerful effect on parental school choice in Taiwan.

**Economic Capital and Capacity to Choose**

As noted above, governmental policies served as the extrinsic factors that influenced parental school choice. In this section, readers are invited to examine the theory of capital as a crucial intrinsic factor behind this choice. “Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm’s length” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 48). Families from different social strata have different definitions of necessity, thus the lifestyle and capacity to make choices are different. Bourdieu (1986) stated that economic capital could be converted into different forms. Ball (1993, 2003) indicated that middle-class families tend to pay more attention to the duration of capital position and are more ambitious about educational investments. In the following, the utilization of economic capital will be described in detail.

Apple (2014) noted that dominant economic and political elites “are intent on ‘modernizing’ the economy and the institutions connected to it” (p. xl). Apple’s point was that
the economic-advantaged would like to normalize their belief to others and, thus, maintain their privilege. According to neoliberal literature, middle-class parents tend to better understand the rules of the game and understand the pros and cons of being default choosers. The prerequisite of being a default chooser at an effective school is rooted in one’s residential area (i.e., zip code). Under the regime of neoliberalism, the competition and choice traits have allowed educational resources to converge on the effective schools, and, more often than not, these schools are located in exclusive neighborhoods. Studies (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Eyer, 2018; Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015; Pöder & Lauri, 2014; Posey-Maddox et al., 2016; Shuls, 2018; Yoon et al., 2018) indicate that people who live in these neighborhoods tend to enjoy greater amount of economic capital and high mobility, and move to better neighborhoods even when the assigned school is oversubscribed or does not meet their expectations. On the other hand, the poor “non-choosers,” who inherited limited resources and capacity, have no choice but to stay in the not-so-desirable neighborhoods and thus become default choosers.

Thus, it could be inferred that those who are economically privileged have not only shaped governmental policies but have seized the space they preferred. Bunar and Ambrose (2016) investigated how urban space was polarized by class and ethnicity in a market system and how the symbolic capital, or “hot knowledge,” of the market affected schools and neighborhoods. The researchers collected ethnographic data during the 2012-2013 academic year from three compulsory schools and their neighborhoods in Sweden. The results indicated that though intended to be fair, transparent, and integrated, school choice policy still privileged certain groups. Neighborhoods with good reputations generally have high real estate prices and people with hegemonic qualities (i.e., ethnicity, economic capitals). By reenforcing the labels of
“good” and “bad,” school choice policy aggravated the segregation of education and housing markets.

A similar situation can be observed in Vancouver, a city with increasing social and economic polarization. Applying Bourdieu’s theory of site to examine the spatial patterns of school-choice decision through geographic methodology (Geographic Information System), Yoon et al. (2018) studied the impact of school choice policy on secondary school students’ enrollment patterns. The study indicated that families with a high amount of capital tended to opt out of the undersubscribed schools and opt into those oversubscribed schools. The authors found that parents chose schools based on socio-economic characteristics of schools rather than school quality. Within the system of school choice, working-class families tend to be left behind and continue to be assigned to under-resourced schools and areas.

Economically privileged families are not only capable of choosing their residential areas and oversubscribed schools, they also have high mobility when choosing a non-catchment-area school. Eyer (2018) studied the value of school quality using a random utility model framework in Texas, U.S. Eyer made a comparison between hedonic models and travel-cost models. The former estimated how much more homes were worth near good schools, and the later helped to understand how much families were willing to spend in order to send their children to the ideal public school. Drawing data from 4,313 high school applications the author stated that the implicit cost of transportation played an important role in parents’ school choice. The capital-heavy families not only have access to desirable residential areas but also high-quality schools. Eyer’s study did not focus on the value of a space like Bunar and Ambrose (2016) and Yoon et al. (2018). However, the ability of parents and students to estimate the quality of a school from a
student’s travel cost shed some light on the relationship between school choice and families’ holding of capital.

**Cultural Capital Obtains Through Academic Qualification**

Numerous school choice studies draw on the concepts of “cultural capital” and “social capital” advanced by Bourdieu to explain perpetual social inequalities. Bourdieu theorized that class differences and social inequalities are inculcated and reproduced through education (Bourdieu, 1973, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990). Bourdieu’s work on cultural capital was widely used by researchers in Western countries. In DiMaggio’s (1982) seminal piece, cultural capital was viewed as a direct influence on students’ high school academic attainment. In France, Bourdieu (1996) indicated that the academic hierarchy of disciplines often coincided with future career paths. Bourdieu (1996) stated,

> Differences among disciplines both cover up and recover social differences, the canonical disciplines, such as French or classics and mathematics or physics, socially designated as the most important and most noble, consecrated students who come most often from well-disciplined families with abundant cultural capital, correspondingly more of whom have followed the royal path of lycées and classical tracks from the *sixième* to the *terminale* and skipped grades in the course of their secondary schooling, and who are better informed about possible vocations and careers. (p. 19, emphasis in original)

While cultural capital was a factor intricately correlated to school choice, in the study of Harris et al. (2012), the authors indicated that disparities of curricula in Britain were also one of the central factors. Their research suggested that the discrepancy between available school disciplines (e.g., history) restricted students’ access to “powerful knowledge.”

In the same vein, English (2009) indicated that some Australian parents believed that by sending their children to a school with value-added cultural capital, they were “buying their children a better life” (p. 98). Since most of the secondary school choice decisions were made by parents, parents’ prerequisite resources alter their decision-making. Parents’ cultural capital not
only influenced their school choice, but further sorted their children into different pathways. Later, Chesters (2015) indicated that stratification was intensified under the comprehensive school system in Australia. Students whose parents graduated with higher education certificates are shown to have higher percentage of finishing higher education, while students with lower-educated parents tend to choose vocational education and training (VET) as alternative pathways. As the Australian labor market changed in the 1980s and 1990s, more and more students finished high school, and many chose vocational education and VET. Chester conducted a study to investigate whether there was a link between parents’ educational attainment and a students’ pathway to vocational education. Chester applied human capital theory to this quantitative study. Multinomial logistic regressions showed a similar result as English’s study. Chester further demonstrated that social stratification was reinforced by students’ parental education and entrenched by socio-economic status.

Likewise, Stacey (2016) examined middle-class parents’ involvement in an academically selective public high school in Australia. A qualitative study was conducted that included parents and teachers’ opinions. Examined through Lareau’s (2011) work which drew on Bourdieu’s concepts of “natural growth” and “concerted cultivation,” Stacey tested working-class and middle-class’ educational approaches. The findings showed that middle-class parents worked to nurture their children’s schooling. The parents’ involvement was a combination of altruism and desire to enhance the advantage of their children, and finally, their communication and use of parental resources were being experienced and utilized differently from working-class families.

However, higher education aspirations, more often than not, were socially stratified. Wilks and Wilson (2012) investigated primary and secondary school educational aspirations and barriers of lower socioeconomic students in rural and regional areas of New South Wales,
Australia. A mixed-methods study was conducted with 143 children, school principals, and 85 parents returned questionnaires. The findings resonated with other studies focusing on Australian education reform (Chesters, 2015; English, 2009; Stacey, 2016). Wilks and Wilson showed that students’ higher education aspirations were affected by family (i.e., cultural capital) and residential location (i.e., social capital), “especially in the last two years of primary, and the first two years of secondary school” (p. 83). The study participants understood the value of education but faced a dilemma of whether to follow a path similar to their family members or to leave their family and pursue higher education. Some participants held a reserved attitude towards moving away and going to university because they valued the importance of maintaining family ties. The authors suggested that future education policies should provide alternative pathways to help those students who hold higher education aspirations but prefer to stay in rural and regional areas to fulfill these aspirations.

In Denmark, Jæger (2009) argued that existing studies of cultural capital and academic success did not distinguish which kind of cultural capital produces the best outcome. The author stated that three factors must be held together for cultural capital to positively effect educational success. First, “parents must possess a ‘stock’ of cultural capital,” second, “parents must invest time and energy in making sure that their cultural capital is transmitted to children,” and finally, “children must absorb parents’ cultural capital and use this capital actively to obtain success in the educational system” (pp. 1947-1948). Jæger carried out an empirical study to analyze Danish students’ choice of secondary education. The finding indicated that when students hold great volume of cultural capital and are high performing, they tend to choose “cultural capital heavy” upper secondary education over “cultural capital light” vocational school (p. 1965). Jæger
suggested that those families who sought to obtain advantages by utilizing different forms of
capital got the highest rate of return in the educational field.

Rasmusson (2016) investigated to what extent external factors on both the student level
and the school level in Norway and Sweden, such as cultural and economic capital, parental
pressure, and school choice, were related to achievement in digital reading and in overall reading
for 15-year-old students. A quantitative study utilized PISA 2009 survey from the two
Scandinavian countries. The author concluded that school type influenced overall reading in the
Swedish data but not in the Norwegian data, and parental pressure rendered the opposite pattern.
The Norwegian curriculum proposes cooperation between parents and schools, while in Sweden,
parents have free school choice to whichever school they prefer. From the above two studies in
Nordic countries, it is clear that social class inequalities in educational attainment happens
globally, locally, and institutionally. Thus, when examining the relationship between cultural
capital and educational outcome, researchers need to consider the effects of local context.

The following two studies on immigrations’ educational choice exemplify the impact of
cultural capital in a different context. When immigrants’ original cultures are deemed as
subordinated, the old cultural capital might increase or decrease the effect of their next
generation’s educational attainment. In Italy, Bonizzoni et al. (2016) indicated that students of
foreign origins more often choose a vocational track than a university degree track. This mixed-
methods study started with 26 qualitative interviews with teachers and headmaster and their
simulated comments on 1,356 students based on their grades and recommendations collected by
the authors from the administrative offices. This social phenomenon has long been observed
among many European countries, and many studies have ascribed it to the influence of family
economic, cultural, and social capital. In Italy, teachers’ recommendations play a role in
students’ school choice. However, immigrant students’ opportunities to pursue university degree are limited due to the language barrier and lack of communication between teachers and their parents. Immigrant parents often are not familiar with educational policies and have limited knowledge and, therefore, they tend to “absent” from most of meetings. The authors concluded that foreign-origin students were more prone to take vocational tracks than their counter parts and faced greater educational disadvantages. On the one hand, teachers did not communicate well with both immigrant parents and students. On the other, immigrant children got inadequate help from their parents.

On the other side of the Earth in Japan, foreign-origin students tend to have a different experience with school choice. Velliaris and Willis (2014) studied nine international families in Tokyo. They indicated that, in the era of globalization, travel and immigration to other countries have become common. They wanted to know, in this age of dual citizenship, how immigrant parents make school choices in Tokyo. Families were split into three types, “dual Japanese internationally oriented parents,” “Japanese intercultural parents,” and “dual foreign internationally mobile parents” (p. 237). Though these families have different modes of cultural practice, the author indicated that the parents’ power to determine school is rooted in the core culture. Unlike European countries, international families in Japan have a plethora of opportunities to choose a school for their children according to their core culture, be it free local Japanese national schools or exclusive non-Japanese international schools. Language barriers do not weigh on these families, and multilingual ability is valued.

In Croatia, Košutić (2017) explored the effect of social inequality on academic success and students’ higher education trajectory. Based on the assumption that cultural capital can be converted into educational capital and is positively related to students’ educational success
(DiMaggio, 1982), a questionnaire survey study was conducted with 534 students in the 12th grade. The bivariate (Pearson) correlations analysis was used to analyze the data and the results indicated a strong correlation between parents’ cultural capital and family socio-economic status. The study supported Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction that students from high socioeconomic background tend to perform better on academic than the students from underprivileged families. These high socioeconomic students are more successful in obtaining a university certificate.

Seeing that existing articles often assessed cultural capital and its effect on educational outcome, Pitzalis and Porcu (2017) drew on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to explore different educational strategies adopted by different families and their relationship to educational inequalities in Italy. A quantitative study was conducted, utilizing data from the PISA 2009 survey which was provided by OECD. A Latent Class Regression Analysis (LCRA) showed that a structural difference exists between homogenous groups of students. The probability of school choice was closely related to their socio-economic status (SES), and school choice was influenced by the cultural dispositions of individuals and families. The authors concluded that “the educational achievement is not an outcome but it is a process (of which the school choice is an essential element)” (p. 970).

Social Capital Accesses Through Social Relation

As was demonstrated above, the concept of cultural capital is often used to explain its effects on academic outcomes, educational inequalities, and one’s taste. In this section, the idea of social capital is widely used to explain the importance of social resources and network to achieve goals. Through calculating individual production and profits, social capital can be an essential factor of school choice. It is defined as “investment in social relations with expected
return in marketplace” (Lin, 2001, p. 19). Hence, it is closely estimated in terms of one’s production and profit, and often this action is often invisible. Social capital is used not to explain its correlation with academic outcomes but to illustrate one’s defining of sense of belongings (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Khan, 2011) and influence of strength-of-tie (Lin, 2001).

In the research and analysis of elite schooling, privilege is the dominant factor (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Khan, 2011). In elite schools, the admissions are often financially or academically selective, and those who attend such school often hold clear agenda and hope to maintain certain power, status, and entitlement to resources. Gaztambide-Fernández and Parekh (2017) indicated that though stated as school choice, the exclusiveness of elite schooling, on one hand, helps enrolled students feel a sense of belonging. On the other, it reproduces structural inequality. In Privilege, Khan (2011) described his experience of attending an elite high school as “the ultimate mark of success in our bourgeois suburban world” (p. 3). By saying this, Khan demonstrated how success is defined in his community. Indeed, different historical and social contexts give elite schooling different meanings. While some believe in the merit of studying in a homogeneous environment, in Cucchiara and Horvat’s (2014) study, they found some middle-class parents purposefully chose a heterogenous public school for their children so that their offspring could benefit from diversity. Still, they believed that by choosing public schooling they were standing up for the common good. Hence, the process of parental school choice is complicated because it involves rational factors such as tuition and demographics together with underlying factors such as political ideology and parental identity.
While families tend to meticulously calculate the return of social capital, knowing how to attain better social capital is essential to maintaining class position. Lin (2001) states that the attainment and maintenance of social capital depends on “(1) the position of ego in hierarchical structures, (2) the nature of the tie between ego and the other actors, and (3) the location of the ties in the networks” (p. 63). In Kosunen’s (2014) study, it was demonstrated that one’s position in the social hierarchy determines an investment one can make, thus, for underprivileged families in Finland, their social disadvantage was entrenched through the market trend of school choice. Middle class parents tend to utilize their grapevines to acquire information on school reputations. Thus, this information access leads can stratify social position and reproduce social inequalities.

By the same token, Carolan and Matthews (2015) examined a U.S. high school where students utilized their social networks (hot knowledge) to make curricular choices relative to their math achievements. Their study echoes back to Lin’s position that a diversified social network does not guarantee a high math achievement, it is the right social tie that counts.

The concept of social capital is also widely applied to the identity formation of immigrants and sub-culture groups (Gabay-Egozi, 2016; Groves & O’Connor, 2018; Miller et al., 2016; Siah et al., 2018). Some studies have noted that places, spaces, or schools could hold specific meaning to these parents, and by making a school choice, they are also demarcating themselves from others (Gabay-Egozi, 2016; Miller et al, 2016). The action of school choice is a way to consciously put themselves in a mindset of social hierarchy. They want their children to get along with “people like us” and they are looking for an exclusive social network. Similar ideas of social ties were also identified in the utilization of language. Siah et al. (2018) demonstrated that in a multicultural country like Malaysia, the sub-Malaysian Chinese parents make Chinese cultural and Mandarin acquisition the top priorities when considering a secondary
school choice. These parents hope that, besides the official languages of Malay or English, the ability to speak Mandarin will help their children build exclusive circles and maintain global advantages.

Interestingly, Siah et al. (2018) indicated that the concepts of language acquisition and school choice echo with a notable Groves and O’Connor (2018) study. Groves and O’Connor examined school choices made by western expatriate parents in post-colonial Hong Kong in order to understand the notion of global citizenship and educational inequalities between classes and ethnics. These Western expatriates described the criteria of the ideal school as a “Chinese school with an international attitude” (p. 390). No matter which corner of the earth these people reside, the core belief and sense of belonging of these sub-cultural groups are the driving forces when making a school choice.

Gaps

Owing to the built-in belief of credentialism in Taiwanese culture, the mandate of the 12-Year BEC appears to entrench rather than alleviate educational inequalities. What’s more, the market trend of education and the institutionalized management of teachers’ responsibility and efficiency have slowly changed the harmony between schools and institutions and the symbiotic relationship between teachers and pupils. Most contemporary works on school choice follow Ball’s (1993, 1994, 1995, 2003) steps and examine neoliberal policies within local contexts. They tend to focus on studying the English-speaking contexts (i.e. the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Australia) (Ball, 2003; English, 2009; Lipman, 2011; Mao, 2015), and comparisons between the middle- and working-classes (Ball, 1993, 2003; Ball et al., 1995; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Gewirtz, 2001; Stacey, 2016). Rare studies have examined the neoliberal education reform from non-Western perspectives. Most articles on the education market have focused on how it has
affected parental school choice (Ball et al., 1995; Lovenheim & Walsh, 2018; Pöder & Lauri, 2014), perpetuated systematic inequalities in the societies (Harvey, 2005; Holmes, 2002; Lauder & Hughes, 1999), changed the terrain of school recruitment strategies (Jabbar, 2016), and centered state governance (Chubb & Moe, 1990b; Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011). Less has been done to examine how the education market affects teacher-pupil relationship and teachers’ productivity and professional efficiency. Analysis of middle-class strategies and cultural practices towards school choice and how the producers (i.e. teachers and school administrators) handle the market trends have also been lacking.

Even rarer are studies examining the discourses from the upper middle-class side. Nader (1972) stated that most studies were “studying down” to understand the inequalities and power relationship, and seldom did researchers “studying up” to give a fuller picture of the society. The middle-class population is expanding, and, within the middle-class, it can be further dissected into upper-middle, middle, and lower-middle fractions. Much of the studies investigating school choice targeted populations on the bottom strata of social hierarchy (Bonizzoni et al., 2016; Delale-O’Connor, 2018; Hastings & Weinstein, 2008; Jabbar 2016; Wilks & Wilson, 2012). Yet, few studies were done to collect perspectives to understand “redistributive effects” and “social inequalities” from the dominant sides. Also, according to Cheng and Jacob (2012), the middle class has a higher rate of school enrollment compared to that of working class. As the enrollment of students from middle class has increased, the value of educational degrees or credentials has decreased (Hirsch, 1976). Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986) theories illustrated the effect of volume of capital on education and its lasting influence on social inequalities. Thus, this dissertation aims to understand the educational strategies of the Taiwanese middle-class and above as a special niche from the dominant side.
With the goals of replacing the rigid standardized curriculum and examinations and easing academic stress for students from different social origins, the 12-Year BEC was introduced to the public in 2014. The intension was to inspire students “to unleash their full potential, teach and develop students’ knowledge about life, promote students’ career development, and inculcate students’ civic responsibility” (NAER, 2014, p. 4). The most relevant provision of the 12-Year BEC was to grant more democratic control to markets and schools. Thus, along with implementing the ministry-mandated curriculum, the 12-Year BEC allowed schools to structure school-developed curriculum according to their interests. Thus, the resource discrepancy between schools and the enrollment of students would impact the institutionalization of the curriculum. For this study the middle school educational stage was chosen because, for one thing, it is a watershed stage that is crucial to a student’s trajectory and social development (Baumrind, 1971; Schneider, 1993; Wilks & Wilson, 2012). For another, the culturally instilled belief of credentialism becomes more noticeable at this educational stage. Thus, by examining the voices of middle-class families, teachers and school stakeholders at a private secondary school along with school documents and governmental policies, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions. Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

The analysis focuses on school choices made by middle-class families behind closed doors. It does not try to prescribe a panacea to social inequalities. Rather, it simply tries to describe the mechanism of school choice utilized by middle-class families in Taiwan. It also examines how
neoliberal education reform affected the definition of a good school and how private schools distinguished themselves without equal subsidies from the governments.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I demonstrated the history of education reform in Taiwan and elaborated on the policies of the 12-Year BEC. Then, I conducted a literature review on school choice and cultural and social reproduction focused especially on the past five years of scholarship (2014 - 2018). Utilizing Bourdieu’s concepts and neoliberalism, these two theoretical foundations provided a map for readers to understand the history and influence of school choice policies. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction and neoliberalism are the backbone of this dissertation. They are intrinsic in the sense that families from different social origins have a different volume of resources, agency, and mode of acquisition. A person’s ordinary choices in daily life, such as food, music, or clothing, demonstrate one’s “naked taste” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) which are mostly class inherited and distinctively linked to one’s social origin. They are extrinsic in the sense that the neoliberal idea of *choice* (identified in italics for its disguised meaning) is an emblematic term which privileged and favored the dominant side’s advantages. In making a school choice, these two factors interact and intra-act as taste-markers, thus “naturally” mark boundaries between people from different classes. According to Bourdieu (1979/1984), “choices always owe part of their value to the value of the chooser, and because, to a large extent, this value makes itself known and recognized through the manner of choosing” (p. 84).

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of how this research is done step by step. This is followed by an examination of the middle-class mode of acquisition via a dissection of school as the knowledge provider, structured school-developed curriculum, practices to normalize the dominant standards, and pedagogical didactics.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain the reach design and methodology of this study, with special emphasis on the researcher’s positionality and epistemology. Next, I describe the research site, data collection methods, methodological approach, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Later, I discuss the validity and reliability of this research. As noted in chapter 2, the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum outlined seven goals, encouraged parental participation, granted schools great autonomy, and decentralized governmental authority. The intention was for the school-developed curriculum to integrate community resources to meet the interests and needs of the students (NAER, 2014). However, this failed to consider the noticeable learning gap between urban and rural, the disparate distribution of educational resources, and the gnawing anxiety of exam-free admission. As a matter of fact, the 12-Year BEC yielded mixed reactions and experiences from the targeted middle-class parents.

The modernization of Taiwan’s social structure and demography, along with the impact of globalization, led to an increase in student enrollment as compulsory education was extended. In response, the middle class often demonstrated prudent strategies to maintain, if not hoard, the advantage of education. In modern Taiwanese culture, education had transformed into a tradable commodity with “tangible exchange value” (Playfair, 2015). This impacted the relationship between teachers, pupils, and school. Under the 12-Year BEC reforms, different school systems and geographic areas had differing responses to the market incentives. It was naïve to think that the successful experiences that the 12-Year BEC advocates sought to replicate were easily transferable. This case study sought to understand the impact of the 12-Year BEC on the relationship between Taiwanese middle-class school choice and the education market, and to explore how school stakeholders, teachers, and school curriculum reacted to market trends.
Research Design

Before diving into data collection, I followed the case study protocol suggested by Yin (2018). Yin described research design as a “blueprint” for the research (p. 26), “a logical plan for getting from here to there” (p. 26, emphasis in original). To understand the impact of the 12-Year BEC on the relationship between teaching and learning and how middle-class families secure their educational advantages, a “blueprint” such as this was created and utilized. Derived from neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s theories of reproduction, the 12-Year BEC affected private and public schools and people from different social strata in various ways. As Chubb and Moe (1990b) stated, under the competitive markets, it would be ignorant to think that the experiences of the better performing schools could easily serve as models for the others. For these successful experiences were a product of deeply rooted cultural factors, and not just simple design or luck.

Research Questions

According to Yin (2018), the niche of case studies provides evidence-based answer to “how” and “why” questions. This study, via observation, interviews, and documentation provides evidence to address these questions. A semi-structured interview, in Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) definition, “allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee’s responses” (p. 88). Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

As noted in the literature review in chapter 2, neoliberal education reform has swept the globe and impacted Taiwan’s local practices and characteristics. Also, social changes have impacted
population structure and, thus, the middle-class is growing. To understand education inequality and inequity, Nader (1972) implored researchers to not only study down but also “study up” to get a holistic picture of the society. Exploring the impact of the 12-Year BEC on the middle-class families’ educational strategies provides an opportunity to “study up” by analyzing the role of private schools in overall market trends.

Case Study

To answer the questions I have posed, I initiated case study research with a single-case design (Yin, 2018) to examine education inequality in the competitive education market from the perspective of students and their families at a private secondary school in central Taiwan. This area is often neglected by the government compared to other regions, resulting in the uneven allocation of educational resources and a growing learning gap between urban and rural (Chou, 2019). The establishment of exam-free admission by the 12-Year BEC should be examined through the ratio of middle schools to high schools in different regions. In central Taiwan the ratio is in great disparity, meaning the anxiety of exam-free admission varies according to one’s residential region. That is to say, not all middle school graduates can be admitted to high schools through the policy of “exam-free admission.” Hence, the mandate of the 12-Year BEC had brough greater competition and anxiety for both middle-class parents and schools.

The academic pressure on middle school students is a prevalent issue in Taiwan, and the source of this pressure is CAP (Su, 2012). Credentialism is a deeply rooted belief for Taiwanese parents. Most Taiwanese parents believed that a “head start” results in a promising future to the next generation, and choosing the right middle school helps establish a great foundation for secondary education. They believe inculcation should start as early as possible, and middle
school students are more malleable and open to positive influence when put into the “right” environment. Hence, I turned to a high performing private secondary school in central Taiwan.

This study was conducted in two streams. In the one stream, middle-class families’ perspectives on school choice and their educational strategies were gathered. In the other, perspectives of teachers and school administrators from a private secondary school were collected in order to understand the market system. These two streams seemed to flow separately on the surface. However, they eventually merged into a single stream as the middle-class navigated the education market in Taiwan. Two main methods were used. First, school-generated documents were collected from the school administrators and school website, such as parents’ occupational information, enrollment policies, curriculum, and examination league tables. I also collected the 12-Year BEC document from the Ministry of Education website. The second method was data collection comprised of qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Davidson, 2009; Kvale, 1996b, 1999; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lune & Berg, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Stake, 2010, Yin, 2018), documentation, and observations (Becker & Geer, 1957).

**Mode of Inquiry**

Applying neoliberalism and Bourdieusian theories, this study used “commodification,” “valuing and ranking,” “competition,” “choice,” “habitus,” “capital,” and “field” to investigate the mechanisms employed by middle-class families and market schools. I indicated in chapter 2 that the market system had fermented competition and institutional rankings, thus, increasing the emphasis on the display of league tables and demands for greater teacher efficiency. It was also noted that the admission and enrollment of “able” students play a determined role on students’
retention rate, graduation rate, and academic performance. Thus, Bourdieu’s theories shed light on social and educational inequality.

The Research Site

In this section, I provide a brief historical and geographic background of the research site. Among many private schools in the central region, Lakeside Secondary School (a pseudonym) in Bell County (a pseudonym) was chosen. Bell County is located in central Taiwan with a size that is approximately 394 times smaller than that of the state of California. With a population around 1,260,000 during the time of research, Bell is known as an agricultural county where rice, grape, and pineapple cover the landscape during the growing seasons. Public transit resources such as trains, buses, and the bike-sharing program YouBike increase citizens’ mobility. With the advent of modern technology and globalization, the farmlands had slowly transformed into factories and tall buildings. Bell County’s skyline has changed gradually over the past decade.

Bell County, in comparison to other central counties, has the widest discrepancy between population and secondary education schools (MOE, 2020b). Thus, not all middle school graduates can get admitted to high schools through exam-free admission. Lakeside Secondary School (hereafter Lakeside) is a private secondary school with divisions of middle school and high school. It is the most prestigious private school in Bell County. Lakeside, in this research, is like other types of government-sanctioned schools, where the school mission is on empowering each child to nurture individual potential and facilitate lifelong learning through its curricular and extracurricular offering.

Lakeside is situated in the suburban area of northern Bell with modern buildings and its own school bus transportation. It has a more than 60-year history. As a private school, the recruitment of Lakeside is not limited to its geographical catchment area, thus, it enrolls students
from near and far. The Lakeside school buses service accommodates the transportation needs of students living both in and outside of Bell County. Students also rely on parent pick-up and public transit systems. According to the recruitment information and school website, there are currently around 3,300 students, 186 qualified teachers, and 40 staff at Lakeside. Lakeside receives students from 7th to 12th, with 30 classes for high school and 39 classes for middle school. It is a school with a complete secondary education system. Because private schools do not receive the same amount of State subsidies as public schools, the success or failure of Lakeside depends on its reputation and exam success rates. Hence, to stay competitive in the educational market, Lakeside must recruit promising students to maintain the high exam success rates, especially on college entrance examinations.

The school curriculum spans six grades and provides students a smooth transition from elementary school to higher education. The 12-Year BEC requires school-developed curriculum to extend learning beyond subject matters and school walls. Lakeside invites parents and community members to contribute their resources and knowledge to the structure and teaching of the school-developed curriculum. Though students’ academic performances are highly valued, Lakeside also emphasizes students’ participation in sports or performing arts. At the time of research, Lakeside had ranked as the top secondary school in Bell County for 9 consecutive years, with graduates accepted to prestigious institutions such as the National Taiwan University School of Medicine.

Lakeside was selected for four reasons. First, it has a recent history of distinguished academic performance by its student body. According to the school website, Lakeside students represent Taiwan annually in the international academic competitions. Second, it was chosen because of location. Unlike other high performing schools in central Taiwan, Lakeside is located
in a suburban area rather than the hub of a city. Therefore, transportation to Lakeside relied heavily on parent pick-up or school bus. The transportation fee and time were economic factors to be considered besides tuition when examining the impact of neoliberalism. Third, it is a private school that enrolls students not according to catchment area but through admission examinations. The results of the admission exams are released in a league table, and admission is often based on ones’ ranking. The acceptance rate is less than 50%. Fourth, Lakeside is a comprehensive high school, meaning it has a thorough secondary education system. Lakeside is abundant in educational resources (i.e. teachers, personnel, students, and parents) compared to the schools with middle school education or high school education only. Its curriculum spans from 7th grade to 12th grade, which provides an excellent site for keeping up with the latest trend of the 12-Year BEC.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

As many researchers (Bachor, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 2018) have noted, the believability of a case study is dependent on elements such as pre-research considerations, technically sound evidence-gathering procedures, careful interpretation, and clear reporting. Bachor (2002) suggests that before presenting these details, it is essential to state the researcher’s positionality and current beliefs. My unique learning experience from two continents, two systems, and many different roles has provided me fuel for research. My epistemology is based on my belief that there are ultimate truths in the world. I used the plural form because truth depends on an individual’s belief system, including both the researcher and the subjects (Barad, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Foucault, 1975/1977; Gould, 1996; Shorto, 2008). In this section, I follow Bourdieu’s reflexivity (Wacquant, 1989), Peshkin’s (1988) six subjectivities, and my belief system that I stayed mindful of while doing the research.
In a workshop focused on the researcher’s role, Bourdieu stated that his work involved not only telling the truth, but also showing that “this world is the site of an ongoing struggle to tell the truth of this world” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 35). Bourdieu stated that a researcher was fallible and subject to bias. It is important for a researcher to constantly be reflexive in order to retain one’s values and avoid deceiving, as well as being deceived. Bourdieu further indicated that

[t]he necessity of the reflexive return is not the expression of a sort of epistemological ‘sense of honor’ but a principle that leads to constructing scientific objects into which the relation of the analyst to the object is not unconsciously projected. (Wacquant, 1989, pp. 34-35)

The essence of Bourdieu’s argument was that researchers should both tell the truth and explaining how “biases” or agents have consciously structured their actions or examinations. Through the reading of An Invitation to Reflexive Society (1992), I was invited by the authors to rethink my subjectivity as a researcher. Though I am vulnerable to numerous subjectivities, some of which I may not be aware of, I will start with the one referred to as Ethnic-Maintenance I.

Born into a Taiwanese middle-class family, I completed kindergarten through undergraduate education in Taiwan. Before pursuing a graduate degree in the U.S., I was a certified high school English teacher. I was raised in a test-driven and bureaucracy-centered era, and standardized examinations instilled a belief that “academic success is the fastest way to social mobility” and “hard-work will be rewarded.” Though different races and ethnicities mingled on this island, very little social tension emanated from this. During my teenage years, I studied at a rigid and high-performing private school, where most of my classmates were in the similar social echelon as I was and, thus, had a harmonious school life. Surrounded by like-minded peers with a similar worldview, I was ignorant of the inherent social and educational inequality around me. Later, as I began pursuing a graduate degree in the United States, the
celebration of individual autonomy and multiple ethnicities in U.S. society made me re-examine my uniformed and “vanilla” learning experience in Taiwan. As I identified with the “Asian” parenting approach and education philosophy stated in *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (Chua, 2011), I understood the global parenting debate ignited by this provocative work.

Next, the Community-Maintenance I. Holding dual citizenship, I traveled back and forth across the Pacific Ocean. This dual citizenship endowed me with privilege to use English and Chinese alternately and experience different lifestyles as a global citizen. In Taiwan, I saw myself as an educator with high social esteem. In the U.S., I am a newcomer whose nostalgia is constantly competing with my cultural assimilation.

Third, I kept acute awareness of a subjectivity referred to as the Pedagogical-Meliorist I. My schooling experience in the U.S. made me realize that historical systemic inequalities were hard to break. As a high school English teacher in Taiwan, I disseminated the middle-class mode of acquisition as a norm through my pedagogical didacticism and followed the rigid “teaching to the test” curriculum. Little did I realize that this top-down model had encumbered the development of other skills and not “all” students inherit the same amount of resources and capital. Studying in a research university in a southeastern state of the U.S. enhanced my awareness of different ontologies and epistemologies, especially through the neoliberal agenda. Bourdieu’s notion of education as “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990) and Foucault’s (1975/1977) conception of “docile bodies” led to question the essence of education. To maintain, if not control, power, dominant social values are acquired and inculcated through education. Thus, the ideas of “competition,” “choice,” and “ranking” trickle down to shape social structure. Though the 12-Year BEC promoted great individual autonomy, and exam-free
admission focused more on individual performance and less on “teaching to the test” curriculum, it remains a privilege-based model that needs to be redressed.

Besides the subjectivities described by Peshkin (1988), I uncovered my own personalized subjectivity as a researcher. I acknowledge that “research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Smith, 2012, p. 5). As examined through the notion of “Ethnic-Maintenance I” (Peshkin, 1988), being an Asian female shapes my perspectives towards the world. I am not trying to promote one educational system over another. Rather, I am trying to explain the structural differences through a critical lens. Aided by the fusion of the Taiwanese middle-class values and Western worldviews that shaped my learning experiences, during the data collection phase, I established good rapport with the gatekeepers, school administrators, and interviewees. They understood my background as both a former high school English teacher and a graduate student in the U.S., and, thus, they were more than willing to share their knowledge with me. Though during data collection some of the participants addressed me as “teacher,” I did not treat this relationship with an air of superiority and command. This research should be understood in the context of the researcher’s cross-Pacific educational background, specially situated in the post-neoliberal educational reform era.

Participants

In this section, I address the criteria and the recruitment of interview participants. To understand middle-class strategies and the education market, I narrowed down my target group of informants to the middle-class parents at Lakeside. As I noted earlier, I contacted gatekeepers to gain permission before initiating research. Among the six grades at Lakeside, the eighth grade was chosen for close analysis. Compared to other two middle-school educational stages, it was
the most suitable. Though seventh graders and their parents might retain fresh memories about the process of school choice, seventh grade retention was unpredictable and not guaranteed. Besides, it offered less academic performance to reference, and my intention was to study high-performing students. As for the ninth graders, they were in preparations for “exam-free admission” to high schools and their school life was distinctly time-poor. What’s more, the students’ memories of their middle school choice might have already faded away.

According to developmental psychology, these early adolescents, eighth graders, were more inclined to be dependent on their parents (Baumrind, 1971). Thus, parental choice was highly influential during this phase. Further, scholars (Shih, 2015; Tsai et al., 2013) in Taiwan indicate that middle school students cope with a high level of academic stress. Compared to the seventh graders, the eighth grades were more adapted to the middle school environment, yet not under the pressure of senior high entrance examination like ninth graders.

Once eighth grade was chosen, I selected the target students and recruited the parents and teachers connected to these students. My final recruit was the school principal. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants and their community, the names of all participants, schools, locations, and counties are pseudonyms. Only the students will be named, and their parents will be addressed by the first initial of their children’s names with their role. The schoolteachers and administrator were given botanical names to distinguish them from students. All participants were provided with study information, consent forms, and release forms approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to participation.

Eighth Graders and their Parents

According to the Academic Affairs office of Lakeside, there were 13 classes with around 670 students in the eighth grade. To understand how middle-class families secure educational
advantages, I adopted Nader’s (1972) way of “studying-up” to narrow down the target students to high academic performance eighth graders. Acknowledging that admission to Lakeside was predominantly via examinations, I chose to build on this admission model and recruit the top students. I recruited eighth graders with academic performance among the top percentage based on their seventh-grade year. These high academic achievers served as a special niche at Lakeside, where most students’ parents were prone to be “cultural capital-heavy” (Jæger, 2009). With the help of school administrators, the recruitment pool was narrowed down to 66 students. Lakeside practiced the homogeneous grouping of a tracking system; thus, these 66 students were clustered in a few classes. I, further, obtained the allocation of these 66 students and asked the homeroom teachers to assist in securing interviews with both the students and their parents.

A thorough analysis of middle-class strategies required both students and their parents to participate in research. During the initial stage of recruitment, more than 12 students were willing to take part. However, some of their parents were not available. After further communication, seven students (four boys and three girls), along with their parents, agreed to be interviewed. The parental representation could be parents’ participations or selected one to represent the parental opinions. These homeroom teachers not only helped build a communication bridge between these parents and me, but also provided crucial family background information and constellation.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and students and their parents were interviewed separately. All parental participants selected one parent to attend the interview, with six mothers and one father (see Table 3.1) chosen. All students were interviewed at Lakeside during regular school hours with the permission of homeroom teachers, class teachers, and school administrators. The interviews with students each took around an hour. Some of the
parents were interviewed at school for the convenience of transportation. Most of them live far from campus and it was more convenient for them to conduct an interview after they dropped off their children or before the end of school time. I met others outside of school to conduct off-site interviews at locations such as Starbucks or a 7-11 convenience store. One of the parents invited me to their home to hold the interview.

To better understand the background of the chosen families, parental interviewees were asked to provide demographic information such as age, household annual income, family constellation, as well as educational qualifications and occupations for both parents and the children’s grandfathers, etc. (see Appendix G). The duration of interviews with parents ranged from approximately 60 to 120 minutes. The basic information of the seven families are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Basic Information of the Seven Middle-Class Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>PI</th>
<th>PI Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>NC</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50,001 – 100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50,001 – 100,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50,001 – 100,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>More than 200,001</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100,001 – 200,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20,001 – 50,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50,000 – 100,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PI = parental interviewee, PI Age = parental interviewee’s age, Income = Annual Household Income in USD, NC = number of children, # = birth order of the interview child

**Teachers and School Administrator**

The homeroom teachers served as the initial liaisons between the parents and me. They contacted the parents and me back and forth. The student recruitment also determined the teacher selection. To increase the validity of this research, the teacher selection criteria was limited to those who taught these high-performing eighth graders. The seven chosen students’ homeroom
teachers were primarily recruited. In Taiwan, a teacher not only serves as a subject teacher but also a homeroom teacher. As a homeroom teacher, he or she follows students throughout the whole middle-school learning stages or high-school years. Hence, they were more familiar with the students’ learning progress, peer interactions, and the family background.

The teachers of the most highly emphasized subjects in Taiwan, such as Mathematics or English, also tend serve as homeroom teachers. Thus, to increase the validity of the research, some subject teachers were recruited to provide an in-depth understanding of the structure of school-developed curriculum and education market strategies. In total, five teachers were recruited for on-campus interviews. Each interview lasted from 50 to 70 minutes. As the leading figure representing Lakeside’s mission, the school principal was chosen for interview in order to establish his educational philosophy in relation to the crucial role of decision-making regarding school policies. This interview took about 80 minutes in the school principal’s office.

Table 3.2. Basic Information of Teachers and School Administrator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers / School Administrator</th>
<th>Subject of Teaching</th>
<th>Highest Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hyacinth</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Iris</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jasmine</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lavender</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Maple</td>
<td>Science/Physics</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Oak</td>
<td>Science/Chemistry</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Methods

Context is seen as fundamentally arbitrary within a specific time and space (Cresswell, 2015; Denscombe, 2014; Erickson, 1986; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Yin, 2018). As I described in the research site section, the patterns of middle-class practice within Lakeside was the focus of the study, and the data interpretation was relational to the 12-Year BEC. To answer “how”
questions, I utilized qualitative inquiry to understand the phenomenon in chronological order. To understand the strategies of the middle class and schoolteachers, as well as the market-based strategies of stakeholders, this study combined the analysis of qualitative data with documents, interviews, and observations. This study was done in two simultaneous streams: one with the middle-class families and the other with teachers and school administrators. The former was to understand the creation of bourgeoisie and middle-class strategies. The latter was based on the logic of a competitive market to understand how private school teachers and school stakeholders deal with the marketization of education.

In the initial phase, I constructed a pilot study to test validity and to my tweak semi-structured interview protocol (Patton, 2015). I contacted school gatekeepers to get permission. I searched the academic calendar of Lakeside to ascertain the availability and willingness of participants. At the same time, I prepared Institutional Review Board (IRB) materials for my institution. After I garnered IRB approvals, I used the research protocol (see Appendix B) to recruit participants. After a few recruitment, seven families, five teachers, and one school administrator agreed to participate in the research. My original intention was to involve the families who were making middle school choice for the first time. Later, I recruited families who had already made a middle school choice before (i.e., the target students with older siblings) to do pattern matching (Yin, 2018). Considering that the 12-Year BEC was mandate in 2019 and its concepts were quite nebulous to most Taiwanese parents, both sets of subjects would provide vital comparative feedback. This will be further elaborated in the participant section.

Next, I collected school-generated documents and information, such as Lakeside’s demography and history, parents’ occupations, curriculum, enrollment criteria, school activities, billboards, and league tables. Also, government-generated documents, such as the 12-Year BEC
policies, educational demography, and educational statistics were collected from the government website. To strengthen the validity of this research, beside document and interviews, I made daily observations both inside and outside Lakeside and its neighborhood by jotting down fieldnotes and taking photographs (Becker & Geer, 1957; Denscombe, 2014; Yin, 2018).

**Documentation**

As Yin (2018) noted, “documentation can play a prominent role in any data collection in doing case study research” (p. 115). Prior to doing fieldwork, I searched online and kept notes and memo writings in order to narrow down research goals and interview questions. The documents were mainly collected from two sources: The Ministry of Education R.O.C. (Taiwan) (MOE) website and Lakeside website. The former provided the latest remediation of education policies and various types education statistics. The 12-Year BEC was put into practiced in 2014, yet it was not mandated until 2019. Thus, during the trial years, it went through several reforms and statistics were changed as well. All these were gathered from the MOE.

Unlike other government-run schools that admit students from the catchment area, Lakeside has its own admission criteria. Thus, the past five years of recruitment information was gathered from the school website to establish a detailed understanding of Lakeside’s criteria and requirements. Each year, the flyers were distributed physically and virtually. Thus, they were easy to retrieve. During fieldwork, I gained access to Lakeside files such as students’ examination rankings, parents’ occupations, students’ personal information, and school-developed curriculum. Lakeside’s curriculum for middle school (the focus of this study) was collected in order to examine the influence of the 12-Year BEC. Information regarding school activities (i.e. clubs, garden parties, holiday events, etc.) and examinations league tables were also gathered to get a fuller picture of the school life.
Also, I arranged several campus tours to observe students’ recess, lunch, and other daily activities, including canteen going, technology, physical education, along with participation in the foreign language classes and the “Parent-Child Education Camp.” With so much information to obtain, I took pictures of league tables, school lab sage, facilities with the latest technology, modernized language-learning classrooms, and teacher-student interaction. All of these were done with the permission of gatekeepers.

**Interviews**

Scholars indicate that, compared to questionnaires, interviews are powerful research instrument that allow researchers to collect narrative data in great depth (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale, 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2003; Lune & Berg, 2017). According to Fontana and Frey (2005), the interview is the modern method used to acquire information. They remind us that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results. Thus, the focus of interviews is moving to encompass the *hows* of people’s lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional *whats* (the activities of everyday life). (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 698, emphasis in original)

Hence, to understand middle school choice in Taiwan in the era of education reform, I paid attention to the culture and language of the informants. My process was adopted from Kvale’s (1996b) seven stages of conducting in-depth interviews. Later, I added “translating,” because this study was mainly conducted in Chinese. So, my strategy included thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, “translating,” and reporting. In this part, only the first three steps will be mentioned, and the rest of the steps will be discussed in the data analysis.
section. With the themes of middle-class strategies and education market in mind, I designed four separate sets of interview questions for parents, students, teachers, and school administrator (see Appendix C-F).

Each interview was audio recorded and each conversation was mixed with Chinese, Taiwanese (e.g. a branch of Chinese is spoken in most of Taiwan as a dialect), and some English. This research aimed to understand the cultural practices of middle-class families and teachers, as well as the perspectives of school administrators at Lakeside under the implementation of the 12-Year BEC. Examined through a cross-pacific context, interviews were best held in the interviewees’ mother tongue. Though the daily conversations in Taiwan is a fusion of Chinese, Taiwanese, Hakka, Formosan languages, and English, the goal of this research is not to understand linguistic forms but the exercise of power and cultural practices embedded in the linguistic patterns (Fairclough, 2010). I discuss this more in the data analysis section.

Besides establishing a rapport with informants, I informed interviewees of their rights and the purpose of the research. Consent forms were signed before the interviews. My time with time allowed me to understand the situation from their point of view rather than superimposing my thoughts on them (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Before the interviews, “checklists” were included in each interview protocol to ensure vital questions were covered and the conversations did not drift away (Lune & Berg, 2017).

**Observations**

During data collection, I lived near the Lakeside campus and conduct direct observations for two consecutive months. Becker and Geer (1957) stated observation is “a model which can serve to let us know what orders of information escape us when we use other methods” (p. 28). Observation helps add accuracy to my data collection as it provides information that cannot be
obtain through a formal interview. To collect empirical observations of routine student life without direct interpretations, I had breakfast in a convenience store in the morning to observe parent pick-ups, expenditure habits, and peer interactions. I received permission from school gatekeepers to join some school activities before and after the interviews to carry on-site observations. I took fieldnotes on drew scratches of the teacher-pupil interactions, and toured school buildings, soaking in the proud displays of in-campus billboards and league tables.

**Ethical Considerations**

I obtained IRB approval (Appendix A) prior to the initiation of research. I followed procedures and code of conduct drawn up by both IRB and APA. The interviewees’ rights were listed on the consent forms and read aloud by the researcher before the commencement of interviews. Since the target informants knew my background as a high school teacher, they were willing to share knowledge with me. Hence, during the interview, I “listened” carefully to the new information and tried to be an unbiased listener, which was one of the skills that Yin (2018) highlighted for doing good case studies. Being a good “listener” means to “follow not only what might have been said but also what was meant” (Yin, 2018, p. 84). Some questions might inadvertently recall some memories be it good or bad, and I made sure that their information was confidential and tried to stay adaptive during the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, I lay out the steps and methods of data analysis. In the data collection phase, I accumulated multiple sources of evidences including documentations, interviews, and observations. These sources would help me understand how Taiwanese middle-class families make school choices and the influence of the education market on private schools under the implementation of the 12-Year BEC. To analyze this sizeable amount of data, the researcher
utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA). The specific social practices of Lakeside and the central Taiwan region would be examined through the discourses to find the form and functions of language and their correlations to specific social practices through Critical Discourse Analysis. Further, I utilized thematic analysis (TA) for the interview transcripts to systemically investigate the seemingly unrelated discourses.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a commonly used approach on the area of language study. It views discourse as “a form of social practice” that should be examined through different contexts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The main proponents in this area include Fairclough (1989, 1992, 2010), Wodak (2001), Gee (2004), and van Dijk (1995). Each author based their approach on different theoretical origins. Fairclough (2010) stated CDA “is not analysis of discourse ‘in itself’ as one might take it to be, but analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse (p.4, emphasis in original). “The objects, elements, or moments” that Fairclough (2010) referred to, in my understanding, could be ways of being, body languages, intonations in speech, and any “discursive practices.”

The key principles of CDA are:

1. It addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory

8. Discourse is a form of social action. (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997)

It is different from conversation analysis, in that the latter is used to analyze the micro-level conversations in everyday action and does not make connections to society at a macro level (Fairclough, 1989). CDA is distinct from discourse analysis in that it focuses on power asymmetries in many aspects of society, such as education, media, and politics (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Still, Fairclough (1989) explained the role of language in discourse. Language is a system of communication used by members of the same community, while discourse is “language use conceived of as socially determined” (p. 22). As can be indicated from the definition, the focus of CDA is on ideological power, to find out the social practices of certain people and their “common sense” embodied in discourse (Fairclough, 1989, 2010; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 2004; Janks, 1997; Rogers et al., 2005; van Dijk, 1995; Wodak, 2001).

Fairclough (1989) indicated that when conversing you “do not simply ‘decode’ an utterance, you arrive at an interpretation through an active process of matching features of the utterance at various levels with representations you have stored in your long-term memory” (pp. 10-11). The word usage, grammatical sentences, situational thought exchanges, and so forth are all presented in our conversation, referred to Fairclough as “members’ resources” or MR. MR, are “socially determined and ideologically shaped” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 11). In human societies, both written texts and spoken texts produce, exchange, interact, and reproduce in a preestablished harmonic order (Fairclough, 2010).

Thus, I began the difficult task of pinning down the steps of CDA and applying it to my research searching for characteristics such as “systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourses and other forms of social process” (Fairclough, 2010, p.10). CDA is “not just
general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts” and “[it] addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them” (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 10-11). In other words, through the systemic analysis of language and society, the uneven power relations between all domains in social life will be revealed. As indicated in Locke (2004), “when we accept a position that a text appears to be offering to us or calling us to accept, we can be described as *interpellated* by it” (p. 6). Althusser’s term, as cited in Locke (2004), means that we encounter an ideology or discourse and internalize it. Thus, it gives an individual a particular place in society. I applied CDA to analyze the school-generated documents and governmental policies with the intention of uncovering the power relations behind these written texts in Taiwanese context. Thus, the stages of analysis were adopted from Fairclough’s (1989) ten questions for language description (pp.110-111) and four questions for language interpretation (pp. 143-144), combined Gee’s (2004) “four analytic tools: social languages, situated meanings, cultural models, and Discourses (with a capital “D”)” (p. 41). I aimed to prove that “discourse is socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped” (p. 258, emphasis in original).

*Stage One: Organizing and Interpreting the Social Languages*

I numbered and separated the school-generated documents and governmental policies into different discourse types. The 12-Year BEC covers educational stages from K to 12 with different curriculum. I read it thoroughly, and then highlighted the parts related to secondary education, especially the middle school policies (from 7th to 9th). For the school-generated documents, the recruitment information for the past five years (2016-2020) was examined for words and phrases which revealed the texts’ attitude to its subjects. The school-developed curriculum was classified into different subject domains and compared to the educational
policies. As for the league tables, I looked for the assumed interpretations that these texts contained, the format and design of these texts, and the link between these texts to Taiwanese society. All the school-generated documents for the 8th grade were carefully analyzed under the context of neoliberal education reform in central Taiwan.

Next, I identified the text’s contexts, subjects, relations, connections, and included or excluded readers from a community. Fairclough (1989) indicated that when people interpret spoken or written texts, the interpretations “have the important property of being ‘top-down’ (higher-level interpretations shape lower-level) as well as ‘bottom-up’” (p. 145). By this, Fairclough meant that an interpreter makes an assumption about contexts based on one’s MR, or background knowledge, and this assumption might affect the interpretation of a text. Furthermore, Fairclough (2010) indicated that text “can be seen as a product and as process” (p. 360). Text is a process in that it is contingent and on and made under the influence of social practices. Under the influence of the 12-Year BEC, the idea of “commodification” affected the education market and changed the middle-class families’ attitude towards “competition and choice,” thus, the school-generated documents reflected the differences and changes.

**Stage Two: Analyzing the Texts’ Situated Meanings**

In Taiwan, “elite education” and “education equality” has situated meanings in different regions towards different group of people. The 12-Year BEC tried to reduce the influence of top high schools (10th to 12th grade) and encourage students to attend schools in their catchment areas. However, the incomplete measures of the policies and the discrepancy of educational resources between different communities and regions created doubts among parents and children. In this phase, I first considered the way that these school-generated texts had been produced. Next, I examined the form of the documents and considered who had access to them. Last, for
the five years of recruitment information for the past five years, I analyzed the words and phrases that were printed in larger fonts and some quotations in these texts.

**Stage Three: Indicating Power in Social Practices**

In the neoliberal era, education reform was presented as a top-down model. Under the mandated the 12-Year BEC, the dominant ideology tricked down from the educational elites to local and regional schools and institutions. Under the influence of this neoliberal reform, schools began to structure their curriculum in a way that prepared students to survive in the education market. Moreover, in order to maintain the title of “high-performing school,” some institutions offered “services or goods” to entice “able” students and “motived” families. This market trend resonated with Gee’s (2004) statement that “power can run in both directions” (p. 47). Examined through the 12-Year BEC, it was clear that the neoliberalists tended to privilege certain discourses over others when structuring curriculum and pedagogy. Still, I examined the texts of the school-developed curriculum and recruitment information as cultural models to “determine, often unconsciously, what counts as relevant and irrelevant in given situations” (Gee, 2004, p. 45). The model perpetuated by Lakeside was unconsciously privileged. Using these models to understand Lakeside helped demonstrate the asymmetry of power presented in the educational arenas and explain the behaviors and special knowledge shared by the middle-class families in Taiwan. It aided my comprehension of concepts promoted by the neoliberal agenda such as “values” and “rankings” in the education market.

**Stage Four: Considering the Cultural Norms’ Existence Internationally**

Last, I examined the texts to explain how they revealed the dominant ideology in Taiwanese society. Though social practices differ across regions, the ideology of “elite education” can be found in similar types of texts produced by other secondary schools in Taiwan.
I compared Lakeside’s information with texts from other schools to examine difference between the social cultures. While privilege models were sustained through the 12-Year BEC, I attempted to determine whether norms specific to educational culture in central Taiwan were practiced across other cultures and by other sub-cultures.

**Thematic Analysis**

Next, thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts, field notes, and memos to identify middle-class strategies in the education market. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail… and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (p. 79). Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative methods that “many have used in the past without articulating the specific techniques” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vi). Before it was officially demarcated as a qualitative approach, many researchers applied it in their studies without acknowledging it (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Recently, it gained increasing popularity and is widely used for examining patterns or themes within data. Researchers (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2013) define themes in various ways. According to (Saldaña, 2013) themes are “interpretive, insightful discovers – written attempts to get at the ‘notions’ of data to make sense of them and give them shape” (p. 176).

Because it is difficult to pin down the steps of theme determination in one sentence, Braun and Clarke (2006) encouraged researchers to think about the decision to include a rich description or nuanced account of a particular aspect. One should consider deductive or inductive analysis, the level of analysis (i.e., manifest or latent), and researchers’ epistemology before starting thematic analysis. I adapted Boyatzis’ (1998) theory-driven method for thematic
analysis. To effectively conduct TA, I adapted the following five-phase analysis from the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Kvale’s (1996) stages of in-depth interview. In the following section, I demonstrate a five-phase thematic analysis with interview transcripts. Kvale separated the step of transcribing, from analyzing, so, to avoid confusion, I put the step transcribing into the data analysis section.

**Phase One: Transcribing and Befriending the Data**

To me, transcribing initiates the process of transforming the audio sounds into visual words. All audio recordings were transcribed directly after the interview. With a total of 20 informants and around 22 hours of verbal data, and considering my ethical responsibilities to the interviewees, I decided to befriend my data. This friendship took three months to establish. This time allowed me to contemplate and determine the choice of coding methods before data analysis and let me “develop a far more thorough understanding of you data through having transcribed it” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Though there is no one method for transcribing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Oliver et al., 2005), it is better to stick the same mode throughout the process. I used the website oTranscribe to complete the transcribing. It is free and does not require a lot of tutorials to grasp.

For the transcription mode, I followed the method of denaturalism endorsed by Oliver et al. (2005). They stated there two modes of transcription, naturalism, “in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible” and denaturalism, “in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations) are removed” (pp. 1273-1274). Considering the purpose of my research is to study power relationships in everyday practices, a denaturalized approach appeared more suitable for my purposes.
After transcription, I “repeated reading” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) the hardcopy of interview transcripts several times along with the notes and ideas highlighted and jotted down in the margins. I went back to the audio data when the transcripts sounded ambiguous. Hence, I spent another month clarifying the transcripts. Kim (2016) used the notion of “flirtation” to describe the interaction of researchers and data. In this phase, “flirting with data is an attempt to analyze and interpret the research data to exploit the idea of surprise and curiosity, as we don’t know what is going to evolve and emerge until we deal with the data” (p. 188). Before the formal coding process, I immersed myself in the data, read the transcripts, and went back to the audio data several times to “feel” and “play with” them (Yin, 2018).

**Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes**

In this phase, I applied “themeing” the data (Saldaña, 2013) as one of the coding methods. With Bourdieu’s “cultural reproduction” and “neoliberalism” in mind, I read interview transcripts to generate initial codes. Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guideline, I worked “systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identified interesting aspects in the data that might form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set” (p. 89, emphasis in original). I analyzed the transcripts following Saldaña’s procedures. I then listed “PEERS,” “RESOURCE,” “DIVERSITY,” “COMPETITION,” “RANKING,” “CHOICE,” and “SCHOOL CURRICULUM” as some deductive codes. Codes are shown in uppercase to separate them from themes. Some provisional codes were integrated with emerging codes. With several reads, “HARMONY,” “TIME,” and “STUDENT SUCCESS RATE” etc. were listed as emerging codes. A few examples are presented below.
Table 3.3. Initial Code at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code/Theme</th>
<th>Datum Supporting the Code or Theme</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretive Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIVERSITY</td>
<td>“那我有發現公立的孩子.... 恩...可能家裡很.....呵，我會講比較「多元」，可能就是有外籍阿，配偶，或是什麼，”</td>
<td>The word DIVERSITY is often linked to the families from the lower social status, based on the social change in Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I found the kids at public schools... umm... their families are very... ha, I would say “diverse”. Like immigrants, their spouses, or something like that”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPETITION</td>
<td>“現在目前在他們這個班級，在OO這邊，因為他他也還不錯，他同學，像那幾個男生比較好的，他們也會就是互相競爭，對，會彼此鼓勵，會互相學習，對”</td>
<td>COMPETITION creates a virtuous circle for academic performance towards the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In his class, here at Lakeside, because he is a good student, and his classmates, those who are close to him, they will compete with each other, right, they will encourage each other, and emulate each other, right”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANKING</td>
<td>“那考進來的名次，也可以在OO.... OO他們有做一些能力分班的這種，剛好可以在前一個階段，第一、第二這樣子，就這樣。”</td>
<td>RANKING decides the learning level of student at Lakeside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“He was the top ranking of the admission exams, when he got admitted to Lakeside... Lakeside did the tracking, so he could be on the top level, the second level class, something like that.”</td>
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**Phase Three: Searching for Themes**

After several reads and revisions of phase two, more than 100 codes were listed. As some codes shared similar ideas and overlapped, I began phrase three by sorting. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that this phase engaged “sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes” (p. 89). Hence, I listed all the codes and categorized them to make a “thematic map.” By utilizing the “thematic map,” it helped me connect all the dots and later into map. The results of addressing the two overarching questions with the sorted data could be divided into two main themes: meritocracy and marketization of education. Figure 3.1 demonstrates one of the initial thematic maps, showing three main themes.

![Initial Thematic Map](image)

**Figure 3.1. Initial Thematic Map**

**Phase Four: Reviewing the Themes**

In this phase, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) methodology includes two levels, reviewing and refining. In the first level, I reviewed the candidate themes to see if there were logical patterns in the interview transcripts. I then revised the candidate themes to redesign a thematic map. In the
second level, I checked the internal validity for pattern matching (Yin, 2018). Again, I checked and revised for the refinement of my thematic map. At the same time, I went back to the theoretical framework to make sure the themes did not deviate from the theories.

**Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes**

After phrase four was satisfactorily completed, I initiated phase five. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that in this phase, researchers need to identify “the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall)” and determine “what aspect of the data each theme captures” (p. 92). They highlight the importance of the hierarchy of themes and sub-themes and the relations of each theme to others. Still, they indicated that researchers at the end of this phase should be able to precisely define their themes.

**Translation**

In the section of data analysis, my analyzing processes were done in a bilingual fashion. Some of the documentation detailing governmental policies were presented in Chinese as well as English, thus, I did minor translation regarding these data. As for Lakeside’s school-generated documents, I performed translation after the data analysis. Also, the interviews were mainly conducted in Chinese, therefore the audio recordings were transcribed in Chinese. However, the coding and thematic maps were created and presented in English. As a multilingual researcher, I was able to easily code-switch between English and Chinese. Still, the whole process was done in a systemic way.

After all the codes and themes were chosen, I immediately translated them. Among the many available methods, I chose to employ Newmark’s (1988) faithful translation,

A faithful Translation attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. It ‘transfers’ cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical ‘abnormality’ (deviation from
SL norms) in the translation. It attempts to be completely faithful to the intentions and the text-realisation of the SL writer. (p. 46)

Newmark (1998) demonstrated different methods of translation from source language (SL) to target language (TL), but noted that a researcher’s chosen method should be determined by the goal of translation. My research goals were to explain the educational choice of middle-class families in central Taiwan and to understand the influence of education marketization. Hence, the method of faithful translation suited my purposes. The original conversation and word choices from the interview data needed be maintained to demonstrate the power dynamics and the mode of acquisition and show the habitus of an individual. Though it is often impossible to find an identical word across different languages, I did my best to use my knowledge and understanding of the two cultures to translate faithfully. Since there is no upper and lower case in Chinese, the exclamations or emphases from the interview transcripts will be italics, whereas the English translation will be indicated in upper case.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research has often been criticized for lacking rigorous scientific analysis compared to quantitative research (Atkinson et al., 2003; Bachor, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). To increase the believability of a qualitative research, researchers must carefully address consideration, clear data collection procedures, structured data analysis methods, and interpretations. Trustworthiness is to qualitative research as rigor is to quantitative research. As the research processes were discussed in the previous sections, in this section I addressed various quality criteria for reporting a study such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and authenticity (Cope, 2014; Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). Credibility refers to the truth and the interpretation of the data, transferability indicates that findings can be applied to other settings, dependability addresses the constancy of
data over similar conditions, confirmability denotes that the researcher’s ability to present the findings in the participants’ point of view rather than the researchers’ biases, and authenticity builds on top of confirmability refers to the “ability and extent to which the researcher expresses the feelings and emotions of the participants’ experience in a faithful manner” (Cope, 2014, p. 89). When a qualitative study meets these five criteria, it is trustworthy.

Among the tools for apprising trustworthiness of a qualitative study, Curtin and Fossey (2007) state that “a full description of the setting, participants and the events investigated within the methods and findings sections” (p. 89) helps achieve this goal. To support the credibility of a study, methods such as triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity can be used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). In the following, I will describe the employment of “thick description.”

**A Thick Description**

Thick description is a term first used by Gilbert Ryle and later borrowed by Geertz (1973) in anthropology. It can be defined as building “up a clear picture of the individuals and groups in the context of their culture and the setting in which they live …” it “can be contrasted with thin description, which is a superficial account and does not explore the underlying meanings of cultural members” (Holloway, 1997, p. 154). Owing to the culture differences between Taiwanese culture and U.S. culture, the detailed and full descriptions in the findings chapter of the middle-class parents’ viewpoints and teachers and stakeholders at Lakeside will provide a clear depiction for non-Taiwanese readers.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a method for increasing validity and reliability by collecting multiple sources of data. Still, scholars (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018) indicate that the main rationales for employing multiple sources of case study research are being in-depth and contextual. To
understand how middle-class families and Lakeside school stakeholders reacted to the 12-Year BEC, during the data collection, I cross-checked data during data collection by accumulating different types of data, methods, participants, and settings in order to meet Yin’s rational. Teachers’ and school administrators’ transcripts, school-generated documents, and perspectives of parents and children were triangulated for confirmation and validation. The governmental policies and documents were also analyzed and compared with the viewpoints of interview informants and Lakeside school documents.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is defined as “an opportunity for members (participants) to check (approve) particular aspects of the interpretations of data they provided” (Carlson, 2010, p.1105). After data transcription, I began data analysis. Because member checking can be utilized in many ways, Carlson indicates that it is better to provide “polished” paragraphs with themes and patterns interpreted to informants instead of all transcripts. After the first draft, I sent the initial findings to the informants and asked them to verify and check the accuracy of the interpretations. I asked them to share their thoughts and comments. At the same time, I continually revisited and checked the coherence, meaningfulness, and accuracy of the interpreted data. It is notable that most interviewees reflected on their subjectivity and bias towards language learning and worldview, admitting that their viewpoints were impacted by the unique historical and geographical background of Taiwan. They acknowledged the influence of credentialism. While these parents were looking forward to better schooling experiences after the education reform, they called into question the practices of the 12-Year BEC. After the interviews, some parents and teachers remarked that, in the future when discussing education reforms, they will be more open-minded to not just the local context but the global and international context as well.
**Reflexivity**

As I stated in the researcher’s positionality section, I played different roles at different times during research. Curtin and Fossey (2007) indicated that researchers “need to be explicit about personal biases, assumptions and values that they hold as these have some influence on the research process” (p. 93). As a researcher, my core values, educational background, and previous experiences all affected my research process. However, it is not simple to present the real-life Taiwanese context in relation to the U.S. and to explain this phenomenon. The ideas related to dominant culture in Taiwan did not need further elaboration for the people in Taiwan. However, in the U.S., a detailed description was needed, and I paid attention to the minor culture differences regarding educational philosophy and credentialism. Still, at the same time I tried not to get lost in translation or overelaborate. I made reference to plausible rival explanations from the public schools and proponents for the 12-Year BEC and made references to the viewpoint of a “stranger” from a different culture to increase internal validity. These multiple sources of evidence were integrated into a coherent finding.

**Reliability**

The objective of reliability indicated that if future researchers follow the same procedures as earlier investigators, they should arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 2018). Hence, to achieve this goal, I carefully documented each research step by using case study protocol (see Appendix B) so that I could constantly follow and reexamine the steps and develop a case study database. In accordance with this protocol, I followed Yin’s (2018) suggestion, and listed the overview of the case study, data collection procedures, protocol questions, and outline of the report.
Summary

In this chapter, I discussed data collection, participants, methods of data analysis, translation, credibility of this study, and the researcher’ reflexivity throughout the research. The Taiwanese middle-class school choice and the influence of the 12-Year BEC were examined through the utilization of CDA and TA. According to Fairclough (1989), interpretation can be investigated through three levels of social organization, societal, institutional, and situational level (p. 163). Building upon these three levels of social organization, the ideologies in Taiwanese MR and the effects of discourse also influenced the interpretation. Next, I addressed the ethical consideration of the research and examined the trustworthiness of the study. In chapter 4, I will present the findings of the overarching questions with two thematic maps.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The neoliberal economic theory first came to prominence when it was adopted by many progressive scholars as a response to economic instability in 1970s (Harvey, 2005). This neoliberal wave later expanded and transformed many aspects of global culture toward the end of the 20th century. The modernization of Taiwan’s social structural along with the influence of globalization led to education reform. The implementation of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum was a product of this trend and compulsory education was prolonged to senior high school. It aimed to shorten the academic performance gap between urban and rural, ease the burden of high school admission, and encourage students to attend schools in their catchment areas to blur the notion of elite schools. Although the resulting educational statistics indicated promising results for the mandated policy (MOE, 2020a), the disparity between local and elite schools and the burden of college entrance examinations still exist (Chou & Ching, 2012). The external reality, together with the fact that, internally, most Taiwanese view education capital and social class as crucial predictors for one’s future, has heightened the competition for education certificates under the neoliberal regime. In this chapter, I present the findings of the case study centered around the 12-Year BEC, middle-class families, teachers, and school administrators at a private secondary school in central Taiwan. The overarching research questions are as follows. Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

These questions are pivotal to the research and will lead readers to understand middle-class strategies and education marketing in Taiwan. The findings of these two overarching questions
are presented in order and accompanied with a thematic map. Excerpts of interview transcripts are quoted in Chinese and translated into English. Due to the large number of participants, I replaced the parents’ names with the first initial identified by their children and their role. The researcher’s initials are shown as AY on the interview transcripts to hasten reading. Lakeside school-generated documents such as curriculum and recruitment information are only printed in Chinese and, therefore, the English translation was added by the author. As for the 12-Year BEC, the state published it in both Chinese and English, thus, only the English version is included here. The findings were categorized into two parts: middle-class strategies and definition of a “good” school. Before discussing the findings, I will briefly provide, for context, some geographical background on Lakeside.

**Lakeside Secondary School**

As soon as you walk into Lakeside, the clean and magnificent entrance emblemed with the school's name in golden characters catches your eyes. Outside of the school walls, story-tall league tables displaying students’ names in bold print amidst a bright red background cannot be missed. These league tables celebrate the glorious examination achievements of the graduates, academic performance of current students, and the hard work of the teachers. At the entrance, security records visitor names for campus safety. A row of banyan trees greets visitors as they enter. The main classroom buildings are built in an L-shape and connected for optimal mobility. Each inch of the eight acres of school property is used efficiently. The exterior of the school buildings is coated in linen white, giving a crisp and airy feel. The lively red runways and green concrete playground, in the groove of the L-shape buildings, makes for a sharp contrast to the quiescent classrooms and enhances the effect of an open, transparent learning environment. Just past the entrance is the school office, where league tables are once again displayed as news
tickers on electric boards, highlighting current student performances in academics, sports, and fine arts.

Beyond the school office, visitors can explore special classrooms, laboratories, and theaters. The special classrooms are equipped with the latest technology, such as the 3D printers and electric whiteboards. The modern classrooms range from 4C classrooms, sawing classrooms, semi-simulation classrooms for acting and news broadcasting, to Faraday classrooms equipped for physics instruction. According to the school administrators, Lakeside has been chosen as a model secondary school in central Taiwan for its advanced equipment and infrastructure. Almost all top-tier high schools in the middle regions of Taiwan have visited Lakeside to get fresh ideas about technology renovation.

**Middle-Class Strategies**

As has been stated in chapter 1, Taiwanese middle-class population has expanded rapidly and their viewpoints sheds light on cultural reproduction and class inequality in education. Since the discrepancy on educational investment and mode of acquisition are both external of families from different social strata and internal for families at the same social stratum. The implementation of the 12-Year BEC, though structured under the belief of a universal, free, and equal education for students at all levels and class. It also invites citizens to join in the class debate of “Education: Luxury or Necessity.” Following, these middle-class informants provide insight into the first research question, how do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school? The findings of this question are presented in three themes, cultural, economic, and social capital (Figure 4.1). They are shown in uppercase to distinguish from sub-themes. To better reflect Taiwanese middle-class culture, when an informant is quoted for the
first time, physical descriptions are provided to add vivid detail to the process. Following, I start with economic capital.

![Diagram of themes of Taiwanese Middle-Class Educational Strategies](image)

**Figure 4.1. Themes of Taiwanese Middle-Class Educational Strategies**

**Economic Capital**

Economic capital, the rudimentary form of capital, is money. According to Bourdieu, it is often used to explain the often-applied metaphor of “social ladder,” i.e. social stratification. The social mobility, the rises and falls on this ladder, can be best examined through the accumulation of forms of capital. As stated in Bourdieu, economic capital is the foundation of all other forms of capital, and it can be converted into another. Through these seven middle-class families’ lens, they believe the meticulous investment of economic capital is worthwhile when it is converted to educational capital. The first sub-theme, elite education, its’ definition is subject to change depending on history and space. Mostly, admission to elite schools are highly selective, be it academically or financially. In Lakeside’s case, it is both. Many evidences in this section are somewhat overlapped with other two themes, cultural and social capital. As economic capital is the main divider of social class, its influence is far-reaching.
Elite Education

These seven families believed that admission through academic selection will yield a satisfactory outcome they expected. They had similar reaction to the universal, free, and equal idea from the 12-Year BEC. Though understanding the good intention of the government, they indicated that education should not be free, except for some certain circumstances. For one thing, they believed that every student had different aptitudes, when a student needed advanced programs, he or she had the freewill to invest economic capital to get for what they want. For another, they believed educational attainment was a positional and private goods which should not be easily obtained, thus, it cannot be free. Vested this idea in mind, they wanted their children to get along with like-minded peers in an academic competitive learning environment, thus, they chose Lakeside.

For many Taiwanese parents, they believe in the “halo” of elite schools. The “halo,” in Taiwanese culture, meant that graduates from elite secondary schools were often guaranteed higher academic performance and a better chance of squeezing in the narrow door of elite universities. By the same token, the parent informants supposed that the public secondary education system could not meet their standard of schooling, thus, choosing Lakeside seemed to be a better option. Having doubts of the education quality of the public schools, these parents preferred to send their children to a private elite school for high quality goods and services. They hope by doing this, they maintain mental health and the entitlement to resources. According to these parents, the cost difference between public-school and private-school tuition naturally drew a demarcation in the volume of economic capital holding by a family household and it indicated the services and goods that a “business” guaranteed. To them, school choice was a practice of capitalism that they utilized their individual autonomy and found the services to their interest.
Due to the extension of the compulsory education and low birth rate in Taiwan, choosing to study in elite secondary schools has become a new trend.

Although the parent informants acknowledge education as a human right and shall be accessible to all. While the 12-Year BEC addressed to bridge the educational gap between the poor and wealthy, its proponents overlooked the needs of advanced educational resources for the high academic achievers. Thus, the admission exams of Lakeside serve with two functions. First, it drew a not-so-invisible line in their recruitment pool right out of the gate. Those who were not able to pay the fee for the exam would be naturally disqualified from the game. Second, this recruitment method indicated an academic competitive learning environment with “able” students. Thus, the nexus between academic success and class classifying through admission methods made these parents believe they were buying their offspring a better future. Most examples in this section are from the parent informants. I start with David’s Father (DF). He stated,

DF: 免費像我們目前在國民義務教育是到國中嘛，那高中有延伸，那基本他其實跟國外的義務、免費的是有差距的，在國中小的部分我是贊成免費啦，那另外在高中的部分可能就是...弱勢生的部分，那個部份要做...
AY: 幫一些忙這樣
DF: 對對對，那其實的，使用者付費，我覺得是應該的，就這樣的。 (DF, lines 7-11)

Translation

DF: Free, now we talked about the mandatory education reaches to the middle school level, and above high school there are extension. Basically, it’s different from the mandatory and free education like those in the foreign countries. I approve the idea of free education for elementary and middle schools, and for the high school students… those underprivileged students, the government should pay attention to that part…
AY: To help
DF: Right right right, and the truth is, user charge, I think should be, should be like this.
From the above quotation, DF believed that the government need to provide more subsidies to the underprivileged and to protect their basic human rights. By doing this, the government could at least level the playing field for them. However, as an elementary teacher, DF had some thoughts regard to education policies and experienced the pros and cons from the past education reforms. Both DF and his wife were elementary school teachers and they have three children. David was the youngest among the three siblings. During the interview, DF’s epistemology, his sharp eyes, and colloquialisms revealed himself as a sophisticated educator. DF acknowledged that under influence of the 12-Year BEC, the ideas of competitions and rankings had changed the qualities of teaching and learning at schools. Thus, for secondary education and above, DF thought for those who seek for better schooling, more fees or tuitions should be charged.

Still, DF’s idea reflected the neoliberal agenda of competitions and rankings. DF viewed higher education educational attainment as a positional goods, and while more and more students competed for it, less and less opportunities existed. Thus, for DF, Lakeside appeared to provide a satisfied learning environment where elite students competed for better academic performance and teachers took pride in the outcomes of teaching. “User charge” means one is charged for the use of good or service. By using this phrase “user charge,” DF demonstrated the ambition towards educational credentials and reflected that in the arena of education, the government should not invariably think about equality, they should also hear the voices from those “able” students. That is, the uniform and standardized curriculum cannot be one-size fit all. For DF, the “equality” of the 12-Year BEC should be practiced under caution less it might infringe education “equity.”

Furthermore, Bobby’s Mother (BM) shared a similar idea to DF. Building on the idea of “economic-heavy,” BM linked the mandate of the 12-Year BEC to the systematical social
stratification. Since the dominant classes were endowed with more volume of capital, they could swiftly make response to any education reform policies. BM works as an accountant in a public middle school. Though the constant changes of educational policies did not crossover with her job, BM felt the fatigue from her school coworkers. BM stated her worries and naysay to the 12-Year BEC in the following statement.

就像現在 108 課綱在講說要學習歷程, 那我們就會覺得這個根本是為...有權有勢有錢的人設, 因為....我們是還好, 我們卡在中間, 我們覺得好像....但是你又覺得.....你沒有像下面那一層那麼....那麼樣的....好像, 第一個他們可能經濟上面比較弱, 或者是他們父母親的學經歷可能, 或者知識來源不多, 所以他們根本就不知道 108 在搞什麼，在做什麼。反正他們就是跟著學校走，但是我們又沒有像上面那一層比較有能力去.....去 handle 什麼事情，譬如說我們就可以孩子什麼去一大堆的培訓，或參加什麼什麼，有經濟上面的不用考量，就是甚至用經濟去 push 孩子，鞏固孩子那一堆東西，可是我們就是卡在，大部分的人應該都是卡在中間的這一塊，那你變成說那那怎麼辦，只能孩子他自己，他剛好本身或者他自己的興趣有的東西，然後他自己願意去的話，我覺得還是有一點點運氣吧，譬如說碰到對的老師，或者碰到好的老師剛好就有同學，他們就剛好一起....那也許就很幸運就有那一塊… (BM, lines 8-19)

Translation

For example, the 12-Year BEC talks about learning portfolio, then we feel like this is totally catered for the privileged and dominant classes, cuz....we are okay, we are in between, we think like...but at the same time you also think...that we are not like those at the bottom...that...so.....umm... First, they have low income or their parents’ societal, educational might not...or...their knowledge is limited, so they did not even know what the 12-Year BEC is about. Anyway, they just follow what the school tells them, but we are not like those on the top echelon who are capable of handling things. For example, they can send their kids to all kinds of academic trainings or join some camps, money is not an issue for them, they even use money to push their kids. But we are just in the middle, and most families fall in this stratum. So, it turns out to be ...now what? All my kid can do is depend on himself. He happens to find something that he is interested, and he happened to be willingly to learn. I feel it is a little bit of luck, like he happens to have the right teacher or meet an excellent teacher and happens to have students with same interest. They happen to be here... and all these things add up together, you might be lucky to have such chance...

The reply of BM illustrated that their awkward situation in the social hierarchy. She did not perceive her family to be underprivileged and lacking recourse and knowledge. Yet, compared to
the upper classes, the neoliberal education policies did not treat them fairly. BM was an elegant lady talking in refined speech with a smile on her face during our interview. Her husband is a pharmacist in a high-performing hospital in Bell County. Both have university credentials. They have three children, and BM addressed her children by birth ranking. Like David, Bobby has two older siblings in the family. Therefore, BM and DF had experienced the quandary of educational choices prior to being faced with making the decision for their youngest.

At first, she wanted Bobby to follow his siblings’ steps to get to public secondary school. However, the constant changes of educational policies and the bad memories from the older children led her to lose faith in the public systems. Though this was BM’s third time making educational choices for one of her children, she still felt like a novice since the mandate of the 12-Year BEC was instated as Bobby entered middle school. Thus, when BM had to make a middle school choice for Bobby, she thought Lakeside’s admission methods suited Bobby and thus, she chose Lakeside. As much as the new policy irked BM, she was thankful that Bobby was a highly disciplined child and was able to adapt to a competitive learning environment quickly.

Both DF and BM were looking forward to the rewards of “user charge.” Under the market system, competitions and rankings were the methods for maintaining the value and status of goods and services. These parents used phrases such as “underprivileged,” “privileged and dominant ones,” “at the bottom,” and “economic capital light” to describe families and students from different social strata. These word choices illustrate how educational opportunities are stratified according to the volume of economic capital held. Though BM said they were lucky to be in the middle, she still felt the financial burdens from the education market. It sounded reasonable to choose secondary schools and to invest capital for the interests of individuals. However, as more and more people began competing for the valuable positional goods, the
distance between the top and the bottom of social hierarchy eventually widened, even for groups in the same social echelon.

To these parents, education is a long-term investment. They might not get immediate rewards, but the influence is lasting. Along with the idea of a “user charge,” BM referenced the trend of the “learning portfolio” in the 12-Year BEC. One of the goals of the 12-Year BEC was to “ease the academic pressure, to guide a balanced learning-teaching with five ways of life (moral, intellectual, physical, group, and aesthetic education) in middle schools” (MOE, 2017). To reach this goal, the proponents of the 12-Year BEC promoted “exam-free admission” to high school and suggested it allowed teachers for different educational stages to faithfully record an individual’s learning progress and achievements. They also argued that the Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students (hereafter CAP), the entrance exam for middle school graduates, would be formative assessment rather than placement assessment. In the future, the enrollment to high school would partially be determined by the results of the CAP and partially by one’s “learning portfolio” during middle school learning stages. Since the word “partially” was never clearly defined in the 12-Year BEC, in the mind of these parents, such a good intention was only a utopian vision. As long as there was an examination, there would be rankings. It is just old wine in a new bottle, and adds a new ingredient called “autonomy.” Under the neoliberal regime, only those “motivated” parents and “able” students utilized individual autonomy to its maximum. How does this work?

Luxury Necessity

While education should be a fundamental right accessible for all, under certain time and circumstance, it is viewed as luxury. In this study, luxury necessity, is used to explain that though these seven middle-class families acknowledged it as a necessity for all, under the
mandate of the 12-Year BEC, it becomes a luxury. Because these seven capital-heavy middle-
class parents are capable of making wide range of school choice and prefer elite schools. Thus,
luxury necessity is thus defined. The examples from DF and BM demonstrated that the idea of
“user charge” had gradually permeated through these parent informants. In this section, more
examples are shown to exemplify these parents’ conscientious education plans for their children.

The changing nature of education policies and implementations aroused more doubts
among parents. These parents thought the amount time and effort invested on familiarizing
themselves with the policies was in inversely proportional to the changing pace. Thus, they
would rather delegate this job to professionals, i.e., educators and teachers and spend their spare
time “meaningfully.” The sub-theme, luxury necessity can be best explained in the usage of the
“learning portfolio” and spare time.

The advocates of the 12-Year BEC stated that the rigid form of the CAP had hindered the
development of students’ aptitude beyond that of academic. The learning portfolio was seen as
the remedy to it, for it showed the history of an individual’s learning and is a good reference for
future teachers to use. It also allowed teachers to focus on the differences of each student.
According to the 12-Year BEC, the learning portfolio would be used to determine admission to
high school. However, a closer look at the 12-Year BEC reveals that there are no standards for
recording a learning portfolio and each school and teacher can come up with their own systems.

The caveat was that the usage of the learning portfolio added extra burden on all families,
especially on the parents. For one thing, the validity of the learning portfolio was inconsistent.
There was no clear description for schools to follow and it fell into the gray area of grading.
Therefore, it made more parents nostalgic for the traditional and reliable CAP. For another, as
had been mentioned by BM, the complexity of the 12-Year BEC structure presented barriers
after barriers for the underprivileged families. According to BM, the registers of the language of the 12-Year BEC was high, which targeted those with higher educational qualifications. In a word, the education reform not only failed to physically release students’ burden from entrance exam but put more pressure on parents under the name of “autonomy.” The learning portfolio, thus, was not a learning record for an individual but a manifestation of the volume of capital that a family held. Those who held less economic capital and had difficulty in deciphering policies would be doomed to lag far behind. In the following example, Felix’s Mother (FM) stated her belief in the traditional way and described her school choice in this way,

 […] 再加上台灣教育制度的改變，就是整個課綱阿，什麼的，改變，還有會考的改變，我們就決定沒有那麼多精神去弄一些有的沒的，呵呵，還是覺得走正規的，比較傳統的，就到私立學校去，然後就是先以讀書… (FM, lines 26-28)

Translation

 […] Plus the education system reform in Taiwan, the curriculum, those stuffs, change, and the change of the Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students. We decided that we don’t have so much energy to understand that, ha ha, and we thought it’s better to take the regular path, more traditional, so we chose private school, and focused on academics…

When FM described the education system in Taiwan, she stated the reasons that she believed the teachers and school administrators at Lakeside paid more attention to the “traditional” way of learning and teaching. That is to say, Lakeside focused more on students’ academic performance. As for the constant changes of education reforms, she did not have time for that. Besides, she believed that private school teachers were the education professionals. FM used to be a nurse before marriage, and during the interview she was a stay-at-home mom. Her husband was a doctor with a busy schedule. They had three children who were in three different educational stages. At the date of interview, FM arrived at Lakeside and walked into the campus with the latest designer bag with embossed logo, dressed in plain, dark outfits. Her pumps
brought out the silhouette in a classy way. In the above quotation, FM implied that even with the new trend of the “learning portfolio” and “exam-free admission” for high school, the traditional method of standardized examination was still the criterion for admission. Since the admission to high school is “partially” determined by the results of CAP and “partially” determined by “learning portfolio,” she may as well invest all her effort on enhancing academic performance.

Afterschool programs are defined as all activities related to academic learning. In Asia, it is a common phenomenon that after regular school hours (from 7:30 to 17:00), students attend programs right after school. In order to separate it from the activities related to fine arts or sports, in this section, I focus on the afterschool programs of academic subjects. Bray (1999, 2007, 2013, 2017) named it shadow education, for it mimicked the school curriculum but occurs as an informal education outside of regular schooling time and space. Private tutoring and supplementation could be a form of it. Six student informants attended afterschool programs. To them, afterschool programs boost their academic performance. Because the turmoil of education reforms aroused more uncertainty than trust in the regular schooling system, both parent and children informants articulated they were willing to invest more in academic learning to be high academic achievers. Since high school admission still depended “partially” on the results of CAP, thus, these families wanted to make sure that their children excel on the exam. Thus, going to afterschool programs sounded like a fair investment.

For one thing, the entrance exams in Taiwan focused on neither the student’s creativities nor learning outcomes but learning facts and memories. Hence, more drills and practices from afterschool programs might help. For another, the time devoted to school-developed curriculum can be compensated through afterschool programs. Thanks to decentralization, local schools are endowed with greater autonomy to add more characters to school-developed curriculum.
However, due to the nature of lacking standardized criteria, the school-developed curriculum plays insignificant role in enhancing students’ academic performance. Hence, afterschool programs are inseparable to most Taiwanese’ daily routines.

From Lakeside’s recruitment information, students who intended to study here were asked to take the admission exams at the spring semester of the sixth grade. Owing to the good school reputation, each year Lakeside received applications more than it could accommodate. Therefore, with the help of admission examinations, ordinary performers would automatically winnow out from the pile of applications. According to the parent informants, enrollment to afterschool programs cannot start too early. All parents indicated that they had started the preparations for private secondary school admission exams when their children reached the fifth grade otherwise it would be too late. Carol’s Mother (CM) stated,

六年級才決定太慢了，因為.....考私校需要準備考試，六年級的話....因為考私校是三月份就考，所以她已經是六下就考試了，就是六年級下學期才剛開始就考試了，其實孩子是來不及的 (CM, lines 27-29).

Translation

It would be too late to make decision during the sixth grade, because… to take the entrance examination for private schools you need preparation, at sixth grade…because the examination happens on March, so that means the examination is held at the spring semester of the sixth grade, at the beginning of the spring semester of the sixth grade, and actually kids won’t be ready for it.

Most parents had similar response to CM, they emphasized the necessity of after school programs. While some felt complacent about their decision, some stated they would have their children prepared even earlier if they had known the admission process better. To some degree, these parents believed the investment in afterschool programs would increase their children’s academic attainment. These parents not only trusted the rewards of afterschool programs but also
believed it was better to get a head start. DM further pointed out the positive side about afterschool programs, by saying,

因為小學的課程其實很鬆，對，就是課業上的壓力很少，如果說有多一點的時間讓他們去學習，而且小朋友是可以接受的，那我覺得補習他會加深深廣，這是一個蠻有效率的方式。 (DF, lines 76-78)

Translation

Because the curriculum for elementary school is very relaxed, right, meaning less academic stress from schooling, so if we let them invest more time on learning, and kids are willing to accept it, then, I think the afterschool programs will widen and deepen their knowledge, this is a very efficient method.

The response of DM illustrated his opinions on education planning. By using the word “efficient,” DM reflected the idea of individual autonomy. Seeing that David wanted advanced programs, DM invested more economic capital and educational resources on him. This idea of a head start resonated with other parents throughout the interviews. They linked the decision-making of choosing secondary schools to attending afterschool programs. Since they had no clues about the admission exams for private secondary schools, they thought sending their children to afterschool programs would gain the most rate of return. These programs, according to the parent informants, did the drills and trainings in systemic ways. Thus, they felt relief that there were some organizations besides schools that could help enhance their children’s academic attainment.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of attending afterschool programs gets more popular when the educational stage levels up. Six out of seven students continued the afterschool programs in middle school. Still, for some students, afterschool programs took a large proportion of their daily life. Bobby was the only student that did not attend afterschool programs in middle school. According to BM, he was a carnivorous reader and who was disciplined. Thus, Bobby bought a lot of advanced learning materials for self-learning. While most of them attended these programs
to maintain academic performance, some of them took advanced courses to get head start. Some examples were listed in the following:

Translation

I asked Ms. Lavender that if afterschool programs are mandatory for private school? Because Carol had difficulty in class, some materials were not explained clearly. Then, I asked her… how come your classmates understand it? She said, Mom, everybody already attended the afterschool programs, they had prepared it since fifth grade, they prepared it for the private schools, so they had great foundations. So… Carol told me she wanted to go to afterschool programs.

唉………不補習不行喔，我是覺得去補我們家長會比較安心，行不行不知道，但是不補你是會擔心，像 OO 英文沒有補習，那你就會覺得說他這樣可以嗎? (DF, lines 301-302)

Translation

Sigh……… Afterschool programs are a must, I feel its more comfort for us, parents, to see our kids going to it. I am not sure about its results. But, if you don’t attend it, you worry about it. Like David didn’t go to afterschool program for English, you feel like is that okay?

數學是因為她覺得...她數學科目她從國小就比較弱一點，她覺得她跟不上，所以她數學也沒有一開始就去上課，她就是不知道上什麼時候...就是上了 OO 之後，她一直都覺得她數學...不太行，一直不行，她就是數學部分一直不是很 ok，所以她才去上 (HM, lines 592-595)

Translation

Taking math was because she thought… she was weak in math since elementary school, she thought she was behind. At first, she didn’t attend it, then one day… maybe after she went to Lakeside, she felt her math was…behind, so behind, I mean she felt she could not keep up and it was not ok, so she attended it.

From the previous excerpts, these parents focused on terms such as “head start,” “efficient,” “too late,” and “plan” for their children’ education. For them, laying out an education
blueprint meant making the most of “time.” According to the student informants, they spent around 12 to 16 hours a day doing things related to schoolwork and they were constantly being sleep-deprived. Still, parental involvement plays crucial role in children’s education journey. To these parents, education requires a cautious and well-laid plan, it cannot be made on a whim. The following excerpt with Emma’s Mother (EM) further manifested this idea. EM stated the preconditions of attending afterschool programs and how she planned ahead.

EM: […] 國中當然就是補跟 OO 相關的學科, 那理化因為...五六年級我讓她去補自然, 那個自然是偏生物, 因為我們要考私校, 我是沒有讓她去加強專門考私校的...可是我讓她去補自然, 這個生物是攸關我們要考私校他會考的東西, 到了國中, 鄉一就是補物理跟化學, 但我沒有讓她同時並進喔, 我是先讓她補...

AY: 國一就補物理化學?
EM: 一定要喔！哈哈哈, 一定要喔！一定要喔！我們國一的時候...那麼時候我就問老師, 因為國一的時候同時有開物理跟化學兩門課, 都是小班制, 我自己找老師, 我就問老師, OO 要先補物理還是化學？因為我不懂, 我不曉得現在教育是怎麼樣, 現在學校的體制, 那他就說先讓 OO 補化學, 化學補一年完, 我們再加進來物理, (EM, lines 430-440)

Translation

EM: […] In the middle school, she attended the programs to learn subjects relate to Lakeside, as for science and physics… during her fifth and sixth grades, I let her take the subject of natural science, it was more like a biology course, because we were preparing for the private school admission exams, I didn’t let her take the training courses for private schools… instead I let her took natural science. This biology learning was close related to the materials that might appear on the admission exams. Now in the middle school, for the seventh grade, it’s time for physics and science, I didn’t let her take the courses simultaneously, I let her take…

AY: Taking physics and science at seventh grade?
EM: It’s a must! Ha Ha Ha, a must! Definitely a must! When we were in the seventh grade… I asked the teacher, because there were different programs for physics and science, they were all small-group classes, I found the teachers myself, I asked that teacher, which subject should Emma take first, physics or science? Because I don’t understand, I don’t know what the educational situation is, and I don’t know the school systems. Then he told me to let Emma take science first, after she finished science at the end of the seventh grade, we take physics.

In this excerpt, EM used “we” several times when she was referring to Emma. Also, it could be inferred from this quotation that EM accompanied Emma throughout her learning and could
make timely learning adjustment. For these parents, the influence of afterschool programs cannot be underestimated. From the interviews, most parents indicated that schools and places for afterschool programs were the most frequent places for them during the semesters for they viewed education as a necessity.

The mandate of the 12-Year BEC put parents from all social classes in disturbance. By giving citizens more “autonomy,” the advocates believed that a family could choose what it best for their interest. Little did they know that the ability to “choose” was closely related to one’s volume of capital. The more economic capital one held, the more choices he or she had. Still, the goals of “exam-free admission” and the use of the “learning portfolio” on the surface, appeared to release the burden of a middle school student. But, in reality, it audaciously put one’s social class and parents’ capital into competition. The more capital the parents held and higher the social stratum one was in, the more choices and salient learning portfolio one could build.

Let me make a comparison. An average eighth grader at Lakeside might pay around 2,550 USD to 9,350 USD per semester comparing to 30 USD to 60 USD for one who studied at public school and did not take any afterschool programs (MOE, 2020). Because afterschool programs are not regulated by MOE, they are optional. Parents and children can choose to attend afterschool programs or not. According to the parents, tuition fees could range from 300 USD to 2,000 USD per month depending on the level of subjects and the demand of market. In a word, to study at Lakeside, the average expenditure on academic related activities might be a lot higher compared to those chose to study at public secondary schools. Hence, the implementation of 12-Year BEC might unconsciously turn education into luxury.

After all, the stage of middle school was considered by the interviewed parents to be preparatory for high school, and their long-term goal was the higher education certificates. Thus,
the economic-capital-heavy parents believe educational success could be achieved through elite schooling and view education as a luxury necessity. These middle-class families take advantage of their inherited capital and cleverly utilize it in their best interest. Next, I elaborate on the convertibility of economic capital to cultural capital to see how these middle-class families define taste and how they pass their mode of acquisition to their offspring.

**Cultural Capital**

The notion “taste” is closely related to cultural capital. In this section, cultural capital can be described as cultural properties, educational qualifications, lifestyle, and one’s temperament. The cultural capital of the Bourgeoisie affects not only their offspring’s educational trajectory but also their lifestyle. DiMaggio (1982) stated that parents with higher education qualifications would increase their children’s advantage from educational choice and their children had a higher chance to acquire at least the same level of educational qualification as they did. Still, according to Bourdieu (1979/1984) these parents understood the benefits derived from cultural capital and would attach throughout one’s life, thus, they cultivated certain talents and tastes so that they could keep “connections” and their professions. By certain talents, I meant the acquiring pictorial or musical culture.

In this section, I start with the influence of parental higher education certificates on their children. From the interviews, the seven parent informants’ highest educational qualification and occupations are listed in Table 4.1. Each of the parents completed higher education. With the mode of acquisition passed from generation to generation, the seven student informants all had pre-determined goals set for themselves and their targets were normally higher than the ones of their parents.
Table 4.1 Parents’ Educational Qualifications and Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>F’s HEQ</th>
<th>F’s Occupation</th>
<th>M’s HEQ</th>
<th>M’s Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>pharmacist</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>small entrepreneur</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>director of an elementary school</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>elementary school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>manager of a shoe factory</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>kindergarten teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>manager of an environmental quality management company</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>baker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. F’s HEQ: Father’s highest educational qualification, M’s HEQ: Mothers’ highest educational qualification.

Higher Education Certificates

In Carol’s instance, building on the concept of “free education,” the reply of CM went beyond the concept of economic capital. Carol has three younger siblings, her father owns a small business which deals with international customers, and their parental grandmother lives with them. CM wants to take good care of this big family; thus, she chooses to be a housewife. We arranged the interview at a coffeehouse next to Lakeside, and she arrived earlier than the scheduled time. CM has a fine physique, athletic build, during our short encounter she wore sporty outfit with no makeup. She greeted me gently and told me she needed to be on the dot to pick-up and drop-off her children after the interview. I got the sense that “convenience” was her biggest concern when choosing school before we started the interview. CM stated the intention of the 12-Year BEC was good, but it was impossible.

Sentence in Chinese: 不可能是因為家庭背景、家庭經濟能力....還有觀念吧，原生家庭帶過來的教育觀念，態度....有的原生家庭本身父母對教育這一塊，他就沒有想要栽培的意思，或者不重視教育這一塊，對小孩子其實是有差別的，會影響到孩子的教育觀，就是這樣....所以我覺得不可能公平阿! (CM, lines 2-5)

Translation
It is impossible because the family background, the economic capital of the family… and their beliefs. The education attitude brought by the original families, attitudes…some parents’ attitude from the original families, like he doesn’t want to cultivate the child, or he doesn’t pay attention to education. This causes great difference towards their kids, and it affects kids’ attitude towards education. Something like that, so I think it’s not possible to be equal.

Basically, CM was saying that the values of the core families affected children’s attitude towards education. Further, she elaborated the different personalities of her four children. Thus, the standard did not fit for all. CM used the word “cultivate” to explain the education process. In this excerpt, CM demonstrated her belief that children should be inculcated carefully in order to develop certain qualities and skills. However, she pointed out that not all parents had the same perspective towards learning and education. Thus, even if the 12-Year BEC pursued a “universal, free, and equal” education, her stance would depend on the core belief of a family. Hence, even when all the students were endorsed with equal education opportunities, the disparity between different social strata could not be easily overcome.

Families from different social strata not only have different attitudes towards education, but also have different expectations towards educational trajectories. In Asia, being a medical doctor is viewed as the highest academic achievement one can attain. As expected, when asked about the vocation or career they plan to pursue as an adult, the seven students answered with standard answers such as “doctor/dentist,” “teacher,” and “lawyer.” Still, they stated their strategic planning to achieve their goals. As was apparent in the economic capital section, middle-class families view education as a long-term investment and the efforts their children made towards academic performance are not instantly realized. Therefore, these seven parents often contemplated their children’s education trajectory at an early age. Take Bobby for instance, Bobby made becoming a physician his life-long goal. Thus, he understood the harsh requirement for maintaining perfect scores all the way through high school. Still, he listed the medical school
application prerequisites, such as proof of working hours as a volunteer. Because Bobby’s father worked in a hospital, he got first-hand information about the recruitment of volunteers and understood how a hospital functioned. Bobby stated,

爸爸的話是藥師，因為就是在...不是自己開小藥局，是到醫院去做那些服務，就會有...像是以後我想到牙醫，醫師，他就會因為周圍的話都是什麼醫藥大學，讀醫學的，可能就會有那種前車之鑑，然後也會帶我們，有時候暑假也可能會我去那些醫院，可能會逛逛介紹一下各部門。(Bobby, lines 288-291)

Translation

My dad is a pharmacist, he doesn’t... he doesn’t own his own pharmacy, he works in a big hospital. So... like I want to be a dentist or doctor in the future, he got acquainted with all the medical school people, those medical graduates... so there are a lot of examples that I can emulate. And he would take me, somethings during the summer vacations, to tour around the different hospital departments.

From Bobby’s excerpt, he clearly got more opportunities to cultivate his interest about medication because of his father’s occupation. Bobby was able to move around in the hospital easily and kept in touch with practicing doctors and interns, receiving the latest information about medical schools. Likewise, Emma enjoyed the same luxury. Like Bobby, Emma was deeply influenced by her father, and secretly told herself that she would follow in his steps and become an ophthalmologist or dentist in the future. Emma’s father owns a clinic which is not far away from home; thus, she observed her father’s work on daily basis. When describing her father, Emma used a joyful tone, using adjectives such as “noble,” “honor,” “adoring,” and “respect” to describe her father and the occupation. Emma said,

AY: 恩，你爸媽的職業對你有什麼樣的影響?
E: 我爸爸就是讓我想當醫生，就覺得當醫生就是......就是.... 那個感覺就是很好啦，因為他也是掛上一個醫生的...名譽，然後我就覺得說....我覺得醫生很高尚，就是很有學問阿，然後懂得東西很多 [...] 就是...一種感覺阿，從小就是覺得當醫生就是很有榮譽感，雖然大家不會知道 [...] 他很有學識吧，因為在家裡不會的問他，他其實也幾乎都會，就是懂得東西真的很多，所以就覺得說很有學問阿，不需要別人去發現但是其實平常也看得出來，就是不會的問他，他也可以幫我解答 [...] 崇拜，其實那些病人也都是很尊敬他，對，就是也有
Translation

AY: Mmmm, please describe the influence of your father or mother’s occupations have on you?
E: My dad is the reason that I want to be a doctor. I feel being a doctor… is… I feel it feels great to be a doctor. Because he has the title of doctor… the reputation, and I feel like… I feel being a doctor is noble, I mean they are well-learned, and know a lot of things […] and… it’s a kind of feeling, I always think there is a sense of honor about being a doctor, although people seldom know it […] He is so knowledgeable, because when at home he got all the answers to my questions, I mean he really is sophisticated, I feel he is knowledgeable. There is no need for others to notice it, but you can tell it in daily life, when I encounter something I don’t know, I asked him and he got the answers […] Adoring, yes, all the patients actually respect him a lot, yeah, the feeling of respect […] Ummm… I feel… I feel they might know I mean it’s a feeling… I mean, Right! She is the daughter of the doctor! The nurses pay more attention on me, because they know I am the doctor’s daughter, ha ha!

Emma knew that being a doctor was a prestigious job and acknowledged that the possessing this competence would “accumulate the capital of honourability they need in order to carry on their professions” (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 294). The daily interactions between her father and the patients, along with the special attention she got from the nurses helped Emma understand the value of medical professions at a young age. A lot of Taiwanese parents want their offspring to attend medical schools. However, they are seldom aware of the benefits of laying out the blueprint as early as possible. To become a medical doctor, having salient academic performance was not enough. Parents’ plans, cultural capital, and aids were also essential. For Bobby and Emma, their parents’ cultural capital offered practical resources to help them devise to their educational plans. Like Bobby and Emma, David stated that he also wanted to be a doctor.

David’s father and mother are both elementary school teachers. Since David maintained good academic performance, all family members had high expectation on his career path. When asking about long-term education plan, David indicated “我…. 我喜歡當老師，但是我想當
醫生” (David, line 329). In translation, “I…I like to be a teacher, but I want to be a doctor.”

From this quotation, David showed the influence of his parents on him. He liked to have academic discussions with peers. He especially enjoyed the feeling that he was capable of teaching others. However, David wanted to achieve something higher. The interviews between David and David’s father were done separately, yet both referred to the motivation behind pursuing a career as a medical doctor in the same way, stating that David wanted to look after the elder family members. The biggest difference between David and Bobby and Emma was that, when asked about the precondition and the preparation for medical school, David said he was not quite sure, and he might get more information at the high school stage.

Last, Felix mentioned he wanted to be a doctor in the future as well. Like Emma, Felix’s father was also a doctor, who currently worked at a noted hospital. Though enjoying all the resources that his father offered, Felix was not determined to stick to one plan. Instead, he was open to all possibilities in the future. During the interview, Felix mentioned the influence of his watching his elder brother suffer from academic stress. Thus, when asked about his long-term academic plan, Felix tried to downplay the seriousness.

F: 看看能不能去麻省理工吧，但是這個目標感覺離我有點太遠，
AY: 喔你想要出國，你哥也想要出國嗎?
F: 我不知道欸，我也不曉得他要幹嘛，因為爸爸是醫生嘛，所以他也會跟他說...就是「能當醫生就當醫生」，他也跟我說「能當醫生就去當醫生」，但是...其實我覺得我對...生物就是那一方面有一點點一些興趣啦，所以可能就是不外乎就這幾個方向。(Felix, lines 424-429)

Translation

F: I will see if I can study at MIT, but this goal is a little too unattainable for me
AY: Oh, you wanna study abroad, your brother wants to go abroad as well?
F: I don’t know, I don’t actually know what he wants to be in the future. Because my dad is a doctor, so he tells him… that “Be a doctor if you can”, and he tells me “Be a doctor if you can”, but …the truth is I think my…Biology I am a little interested in Biology, so I would say I will work in this direction.
Felix seemed to be interested in a lot of things, and he was not as firmed as Bobby, Emma, or David about his future career path. Still, the expectation and career of Felix’s father played an important role in his choice. Felix was determined to follow his planned trajectory, but he did not want to narrow his options, less he might experience his brother’s frustration. During the interview with FM, she said she was open to all the possibilities for her Felix. Whatever Felix wanted to be, be it going abroad to MIT or becoming a doctor like his father, she would work to cultivate his dream.

**Classical Instrumental and Artistic Skill Learning**

Bourdieu (1979/1984) stated that one’s personality indicated the quality of an individual, and the uniqueness of a person could be examined through “the appropriation of works of art.” Bourdieu used indices such as “museum-going” or “theater-attending” to distinguish it. Due to the cultural and geographical difference, these are not common activities in Taiwan. Thus, in order to know the propensity to judge artwork, the seven children were asked about their acquisition of art knowledge and training. The results are listed in Table 4.2. To note, though talent learning is also an afterschool program, it is described here to distinguish it from the ones mentioned in the “afterschool programs” section. For our purposes, attending art instruction does not relate to the academic achievement, but to the pursuit of cultural capital. In the following, I draw the examples from the seven children.

Time is a very precious commodity which holds standard value in the market. How people use and value it depends on one’s mode of acquisition. From Bourdieu (1979/1984), the possession of pictorial or musical culture could not be gained in haste, it takes years of immersion and practices to acquire it. In Table 4.2, five children stated they played the “noble” instruments (i.e. violin and piano) and one played trumpet. Four children were good at sketching,
drawing, or painting. From Table 4.2, it can be deduced that, at the time of interview, most of the children had devoted around ten years to artistic talent acquisition. Indeed, while the afterschool programs of academic subjects might demonstrate quick results with multiple drills, artistic talent acquisition accumulates slowly over time.

Table 4.2 Middle-Class Children’s Artistic or Musical Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pictorial or Musical Culture</th>
<th>Started Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bobby sketching</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol piano, accordion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David violin</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma painting, Chinese calligraphy, piano, flute</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix trumpet</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg violin</td>
<td>1st grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley drawing, piano</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some parents recalled their childhood memories of not being able to acquire art culture, and, hence, wanted their children to start at a young age. Some even used “regret” to indicate their lack of art culture. According to Table 4.2, most children started pictorial or musical acquisition at kindergarten, showing the early plans made by their parents. Almost all parents who had children cultivate musical culture detailed the reasons that the violin should be learned prior to piano, such as knowledge, rhythmic patterns, groove, and body coordination, etc. Therefore, when mentioning the selection of musical instrument, most parents gave priority to the learning order. After a few years of learning and practice, most children indicated that they were appraised by teachers and joined recitals or qualification verifications. As for the learning of sketching or painting, the children highlighted the need of this culture skill for the preparation of college entrance examinations. For these seven families, the reasons behind the acquisition of musical and pictorial culture were different. The former leans more to the disposition cultivated
and the latter was for more practical reasons. But one thing is for sure, the acquisition of artistic skills demonstrated the strategic consumption and devotion of time.

As had been stated, in Taiwan, most students worked within a tight academic schedule and most parents believed in the rewards of a head start. Thus, most Taiwanese parents did not want their children to idle away, and carefully planned all kinds of afterschool programs for them. If they must choose one, afterschool programs were always favored over artistic instruction. Especially under the reform of the 12-Year BEC, some parents had more doubts about the incomplete measures. Hence, being capable of acquiring pictorial or musical culture did not have the exact same meanings as it did in France. Though possessing artistic training still indicated one’s social status and how one valued time, the possession of the culture was also the preparation for the future.

Bobby mentioned that, to apply for most medical schools or dentistry in Taiwan, the ability to sketch and draw are prerequisites. As had been mentioned in the educational qualification section, Bobby got a lot of information and knowledge from his father and the coworkers of his father. The skills of sketching and drawing as the perquisites was not mentioned by David, who was also aiming at applying to medical schools in the future. From the interviews, only Bobby and Emma acknowledged this information. Bobby indicated his art learning in the following way.

繪畫的方面就是有，可能是因為，以後可能...因為我的成績比較好，所以可能會是當醫生，會需要雕塑那些內容部分，所以才會讓我去這種...(Bobby, lines 212-214)

Translation

The painting part is, is because, in the future that I may... because my academic performance is great, so it is possible that I may become doctor, I will need to learn the sculpture and things like that, so they let me take this...
It was interesting to note that Bobby was aware of the blueprint of his educational journey and knew that his parents invested in him strategically. Hence, Bobby was put into these classes so that he could acquire the basic knowledge and culture along the way. Bobby had made the connection between sketching and medical school, and during his leisure time he would self-practice to enhance his skills. Bobby was still in the middle school stage, and his future was not yet told. To follow the path of pursuing a medical degree, Bobby’s family knew where to invest their time. Like Bobby, Emma learned to sketch at a young age for a similar reason. EM noticed Emma was gifted in drawing and was a fast learner. EM sent Emma to art classes to develop her interests. However, when it was time to make a secondary school choice, Emma was in a tug-of-war deciding on attending a gifted program for art or inheriting her father’s legacy. Emma stated her dilemma:

E: 我國小六年級的時候原本想要讀那個美術班，可是被阻止了，因為他們說你現在很喜歡，但是不代表你以後會喜歡，因為會被框住，
AY: 那你現在覺得呢?
E: 現在覺得應該是走對...因為我覺得讀書比較好，然後...現在也覺得走美術的路可能會比較少，很窄，就是當牙醫，然後把美術當興趣就好了。(Emma, lines 311-315)

Translation

E: When I was in sixth grade, I really wanted to study in a gifted art program, but I was prohibited. Because they told me that you might like it now, but it doesn’t mean that you will still like it later on. Because it limits you.
AY: And how do you feel now?
E: I think I took the right path... because I think academics is better, and... now I feel the trajectory for arts is bleak, and narrow. I want to be a dentist, and then take arts as my hobby.

From the quotation, it is clear that Emma’s passion for art culture was hindered not because of art itself, but because of the reality of the Taiwanese educational environment. After years of cultivation and practice, Emma entered many contests and was accepted to a prestigious gifted program in the central Taiwan. However, for Emma’s parents, the possession of pictorial culture
did not guarantee a bright future for their daughter. Emma has an elder sibling who is a talented cellist. Emma watched her sibling’s trajectory and learned that it was very difficult to stand out through pursuing arts. In the end, Emma compromised with her parents. She believed high academic performance was the legitimate way to success in life and art acquisition would be for leisure time.

The acquisition of artistic skill, according to FM, was very expensive compared to the learning of academic subjects, and its possession was for pleasure and distinction. Practicing art was more for shaping habitus than influencing academic performance. Still, the possession of musical or pictorial culture could not be gained overnight or in haste. These families’ devotion to time consumption and devotion to artistic skill acquisition showed how they handle the commodity of time. These parents not only thought about the inculcation of culture, but also made preparation for career trajectory. In other words, these middle-class parents held a great volume of cultural capital and were more capable of drawing educational blueprints and planned thoroughly. They see a future different from their present and are more ambitious to make high educational investments.

**Overseas Trips**

As stated by Bourdieu (1979/1984), the middle-class attitude towards holidays, traveling time, and access to certain geographic spaces might provide some clues to the nature of cultural capital. The ability to take “foreign travel” demonstrates a cosmopolitan disposition, a characteristic of the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). It is considered to add character to a person and colorize one’s learning portfolio, and the limited and isolated geography of Taiwan exponentially enhanced the impact on both the portfolio and the students’ worldview. The ability to take overseas trips demonstrates one’s access to transportation of air, volumes of economic
capital, and global mobility and awareness through cultural capital. The parental interviewees described international traveling as “a must” during the winter and summer vacations. When time is limited, they shift to domestic travel.

Six interviewed families indicated that they travel internationally during summer and winter vacations. They all used affirmative tones with different exclamations demonstrating the privilege of overseas trips. However, overseas trips were circumscribed due to the pandemic in 2020. Although during the time of interviews, many parent informants had made foreign travel plans with coordination to their children’s academic calendars, they had to cancel due to health risks. After a few months of travel stagnation, the timely control measures made by Taiwan Centers for Disease Control has made the long-silent tourism industry come back to life. These middle-class families joined the wave of “revenge” travel and took domestic trips.

Following I use an example from Greg’s family. They go camping all the time. Greg is the eldest son in the family, and his brother is one year younger than him. Among the seven students, he lives the furthest from Lakeside and commutes to Lakeside by school bus. Greg’s Mother (GM) works as a qualified kindergarten teacher, and his father is a manager in a famous shoe company. As an outdoor lover, GM prefers to get close to nature in her spare time. Recently, her passion towards camping was inflamed. We arranged an interview at a coffee shop. On the day of interview, GM walked into the shop with brisk footsteps. Her pink hoodie matched well with her stylish short bob. When describing what do they do in their free time, GM stated their craze for camping in the following details:

GM: 我們玩五年了，我們玩五年了，我們玩露營玩五年了，然後就當時也是...老公其實早就很有興趣了，他只是說一直不敢...不敢入門妳知道嗎，後來就是因為朋友，就幾個朋友就覺得有興趣，所以我們就一起....然後就一起去約，我們一開始是先跟人家借帳篷，然後先去體驗一次，體驗完之後我們覺得還蠻好玩的，後來就自己陸陸續續

AY: 買那個器材
GM: 對，真的就是像一個無底洞，哈哈哈哈，就一直買一直買，對，還蠻好玩的，就去小朋友也是要幫忙搭帳篷阿，
AY: 野炊
GM: 然後野炊煮飯，幹嘛的，對，對，收東西
AY: 你們有特別喜歡去哪個地方嗎?
GM: 恩....最近...最近幾次比較喜歡就是....能...有溪邊，可以釣魚的地方，
AY: 真的釣魚來吃嗎?
GM: 真的釣魚，真的，真的釣魚的，因為最近是朋友...因為一些....爸爸都愛釣魚你知道嗎，所以我們最近就找那種有溪邊的，然後可以釣魚的，可以抓蝦的，
AY: 是你們的私房景點嗎?
GM: 沒有，即使我們去露營的地方，因為現在台灣露營是非常的...熱門的嗎？然後所以呢，很多那種就是在溪邊的營區，我們會盡量找，
[...]
AY: 所以你們還要買釣魚的設備?
GM: 釣魚的設備....我們家是沒有買，但是就是朋友他們都有買，所以就是小朋友去就是他們一起去玩，對阿，捕蝦籠阿，什麼那麼我們都有，真的！
(GM, lines 163-189)

Translation

GM: We had this hobby for almost five years, for five years, we been outdoor camping for five years. At that time it was… actually my husband was a big fan of it, and he was like… he couldn’t decide if he wanted to spend the money, you know, and then his friends, a few of his friends were interested about it, so we took a trip…took a trip together. At first, we borrowed tents from friends, to experience it first, after it, we loved that feeling, then we started to buy
AY: gears
GM: Right, it feels like a blackhole, ha ha ha ha, we bought this and that, yeah, and it was actually very interesting, and our kids also help put the tents
AY: outdoors cooking
GM: And cooking, things like that, yeah, yeah, and organize things
AY: Are there particular spots that you like the most?
GM: Um…. recently…recently…we like to…to the spot near river, where we can go fishing
AY: Fishing and then cook?
GM: Yeah, for real, real, yes, fishing. Because our friends recently…recently…because you know that dads love fishing, so we find the spots with rivers, so they can fish, and trap shrimps
AY: Is this your secret location?
GM: No, even if the places we went, because nowadays in Taiwan camping is very… popular? So, a lot of the campgrounds are next to the rivers, we would find places near those places particularly
[...]
AY: And you bought the fishing equipment?
GM: The fishing equipment…we haven’t bought them yet, but our friends are well-equipped, so all the kids would gather and use the equipment from that family, yeah, prawn traps, anything you can think of, we are all set, for real!

Recently, camping became a trend in Taiwan. Its popularity might be due to the relaxing feelings of getting away from the hustle and bustle city life. It might also be because of the dynamically changing lifestyle and culture. Let me remind you that Taiwan is an island with a dense population, with 673 people per square kilometer (United Nations, 2020). Due to geographic limitations, it is not an activity that one can do on impulse. It takes time to apply for camping locations. Storage space for camping gears is another problem, considering the small living areas for most Taiwanese households. Though it has gotten more and more popular in Taiwan, “camping” is often viewed as a form of luxurious outdoor activity. This lengthy excerpt between me and GM showed that at first, GM sat on the fence to see if this passion would last. After several camping trips, GM finally decided to invest in entry level equipment and then slowly level up. This example also demonstrated her knowledge and careful planning of the spare time. To GM, this was not only a bonding time but also a time to find the tranquility and relaxation in nature. Note that the phrase “black hole” was used to describe the purchases of equipment, which also hinted that GM acknowledge that the gear was not a daily necessity.

For Greg, he learned more in nature than he could ever imagine from a textbook. In the middle-school stage, scouting is listed as one of the subjects and each school should hold a camping activity once during this stage. For Lakeside, it is held during the fall semester of the eighth grade. With abundant experiences and knowledge of camping, Greg reflected on his memories of the recent camping trip.
As for camping… I think everybody loves participating in it. At least there are no worries about school, we can utilize all the knowledge we learned in the scouting. You know, scouting, we separate the main subjects from the non-academic subject, for the… non-academic subjects… we, as students…. for the test-oriented learning environment in Taiwan, right, you need to have high academic performance in order to get a well-paid job. Thus, we would not pay a lot of attention to these non-academic subjects. So… most of us did not pay attention to the non-academic subjects, just take it as a course… let it be just a course… so I think camping could recall the knowledge that we have learned from scouting.

Greg has had more camping experiences than his peers. Thus, he not only shared his opinions about the 12-Year BEC but also connected his experiences and put that into practices. These unique experiences could spice up his learning portfolio and distinguish it from others. Thus, in Greg example, cultural capital is passed down through outdoor activities.

**Philanthropic Acts**

By examining these families’ pursuit of musical or pictorial culture, I had already demonstrated that the devotion of time is an index of cultural capital. In this section, I will delve deeper into the notion of time from parents’ perspective to examine cultural capital.

Philanthropic acts include money donating and being a volunteer. Being a volunteer is considered to be a noble deed that shows a devotion of time and effort to help the larger community. Some parents stated that they love “being a volunteer” at schools and hospitals. EM was as a volunteer at her Emma’s elementary school by teaching a morning period. EM had devoted her time since her first child was a first grader, and she had led student activities in the morning for almost nine years. Stating that her daughters’ teachers thought the first period was too valuable to be wasted on mandatory school drillings, EM decided to come up with some fun
activities for the students during meeting of Parent Teacher Association. EM described as follows.

EM: [...] the Wonderful Morning Time, from 7:40 to 8:30
AY: The morning self-study period?
EM: Oh, that sounds so serious. Wonderful Morning, the wonderful morning period. When we were having the PTA meeting, the teacher asked if we have any thoughts, for this period to let kids learn and do something? Don’t waste it, because teachers might need to attend meetings, and kids, my kid’s teacher is so great, she said that I don’t want my kids to do drill for math or Chinese in the early morning, she felt kids started the wonderful day with something so serious and dull, and besides kids came to school still sleepy. So we suggested that, I can bring the picture books of Chinese poetry, Chinese poetry, to let them do some drawing. Through the Chinese poetry, I read it through the way of story-telling, and asked them to draw pictures according to their understanding of the poetry. This became
From EM’s description, it is obvious that she spent a large amount of time designing extracurricular activities. EM would also be the teacher’s assistant to guide students through the puzzle games and collect students’ work to make learning portfolios for them. Yet, EM humbly stated her devotion was “because I think that I am a housewife,” meaning that household provided great autonomy towards time, though this was usually not the case for housewives. I had the interview with EM at Starbucks coffeehouse. Since we had not seen each other before, she provided some traits for me to identify. On the phone EM said, “I am wearing a beige Issey Miyake, you will find me when you get inside.” I found EM in no time; the iconic washboard rows of vertical pleats matched well with her low wavy ponytail. The happy smile and gestures of EM indicated a disciplined and organized woman. Her detailed description of being a volunteer at elementary school demonstrated a devotion of time that an ordinary “housewife” could not afford.
Likewise, FM loved being a volunteer at hospitals. She stated that since her three children were in three different learning stages, she had a very busy schedule. However, whenever she had free time, she loved to serve as a volunteer. FM indicated her interest in psychological counseling and her profession as a trained nurse. FM said,

去醫院當志工也好，因為我覺得可能是因為我工作的關係，很長一段時間...那我會覺得我還蠻喜歡去面對病人的，是這樣，或者說面對孩子，其實，我也蠻喜歡孩子的，是這樣。(FM, lines 164-166)

Translation

Being a volunteer at hospitals is fine as well, because I think it might be because of my job, for a long time... and I think I am willingly interacting with patients, things like this, or interact with kids. In fact, I love kids a lot, things like this.

From the examples, the charitable acts showed generous deeds from EM and FM, but also indicated the underlying status distinctions and ability to serve others through the exercise of power. The formation of the society is an endless stratification, and the elites often have more capacity to facilitate great power regardless the organization. Hence, by devoting their time as volunteers, EM and FM demarcated their social status and transmitted their ideologies as the dominated. In examining Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, possessing a great volume of economic capital could fulfill a human’s basic physiological and safety needs. According to Maslow, it is only when basic needs are met that humans will search for the higher-level needs. Middle-class families are inclined to have a steadier life compared to working-class families; hence, they are prone to invest more on self-fulfillment needs. In the next section, I explain the needs between the two, psychological needs, through social capital.

Social Capital

Economic capital is the foundation of other forms of capital. From the previous section, these middle-class parent informants all have higher education diplomas and envision a future
better than their present for their offspring. Thus, they devoted a lot to educational investment. Social capital meant one’s social network, the choice of friends, the connections in the society through interpersonal relationships, shared values, norms, and a sense of belonging based on reciprocity and mutual benefit. When making a secondary school choice, most parent informants stated that they consulted opinions from others. Their social networks covered ties from loose to strong. In this section, I elaborate on how these seven families’ social networks helped their children to gain more advantages in education. Since social capital was hard to measure and attribute to one theme, in the following, I will provide examples for three themes based on the ideas of “position of origin,” “strength of ties,” and “sense of belonging.”

As I demonstrated in the previous sections, middle-class parents in Taiwan are more ambitious about education planning. Most parent informants indicated the determinate influence of peers in secondary education choices. For one thing, these early adolescents were highly affected by their peers during this phase. For another, the schools were places that they spent most of their time during the day. Hence, these parents stated they could not be too prudent when making a school choice. As character-building is often mentioned as their top priority, they wanted their offspring to begin cultivating social capital and to find a sense of belonging through meritocracy. First, I start with belonging.

**Belonging**

One’s investment in social relations and expectation for returns can be described as one’s searching of a sense of belonging. In Emma’s example, she knew she would attend private secondary schools when she was in elementary school. When it was time for Emma to make a school choice, she was indecisive. Judging the pros and cons from different private schools, Emma needed more opinions from others. To note, Emma had passed the admission exams for
two private schools and both had sent invitations. Hence, she was the “able” student that most private schools desired.

Thus, EM suggested that they should get their neighbors’ perspectives. EM stated, “因為我們社區很多讀OO的，醫生的小孩，我們隔壁，隔壁都讀OO的阿” (EM, lines 287-288). In translation, “because there are so many kids that study at Lakeside in our neighborhood, a lot of doctor’s kids, one lives next to us, and the one next to it is also studying at Lakeside.” That is to say, the grapevine in Emma’s neighborhood is slightly different from other communities. The neighborhood they live in is an exclusive country club in Bell County where the HOA checks the familial background before granting the house purchasing. Inside this club there was 24-7 security and all-inclusive facilities, which denotes a high yearly HOA fee. It is a neighborhood not easily affordable for ordinary household. The phrase “doctor’s kids” was used to describe their neighbors, indicating that, when seeking opinions from others, EM thought it was better to contact people with the same social status as them. “Neighbors” is defined as the people one becomes acquainted with through the choice of residential locations and communities, i.e. zip code. Thus, one’s identity formation can be examined through choice of residency. In the literature review section, I indicated that one’s zip code not only determined one’s status as chooser, non-chooser, or default choosers to the school in catchment area, it, furthermore, attributed to the formation of neighbors. Unlike choosing amongst public secondary schools, the choice of private schools was not circumscribed by zip codes.

As the saying goes “birds of the feather flock together.” Emma’s family perches in a neighborhood that is packed with people from the economic-capital-heavy faction. One thing they had in common was that almost all the students in Emma’s neighborhood chose to attend private schools instead of the school in the catchment area. This is likely because the school in
the catchment area did not perform well, or because of the belief of meritocracy in this community. Though the idea of meritocracy was subtle, from EM’s description, it left some traces. EM expressed the shared values, shared identity, and shared norms in this neighborhood, hence, suggestions from “other doctors” would be trustworthy and reliable.

One can choose neighbors or friends, but one cannot choose one’s relatives. In Taiwan, most families build strong ties with relatives. In Greg’s example, his cousins are his role models. According to GM, Greg built strong ties with his cousins and took advice from them. His cousins graduated from Lakeside a few years before and spoke of the years at Lakeside in terms of praise. Since Greg was determined to put his focus on academia, his cousins suggested GM should get him registered in private schools for it would be beneficial to Greg’s education. GM did not seek opinions afar, but from the inner circles of the family. She thought the successful experiences from Greg’s cousins could be copied. GM stated,

[...] 对，當時就是覺得説表姊妹，因為我們家兩個表姊妹都表現得很好，然後...他們也是覺得説像姐姐是跟我們分享説，孩子愛讀書了，妳就要去給他一個...喜歡讀書的環境，一個就是愛讀書的環境，所以呢，我們那時候就想説好吧，那就讓...小朋友也去讀，讀私立中學，對，(GM, lines 66-70)

Translation

[...] Right, at that time we thought his cousin, because his two cousins were excellent in school, and then... they thought that the cousins shared things with us, if children love to study, then you should provide him a place... an environment for studying, an academic-oriented environment, therefore, we thought well okay, well... we should let our kids to study, to study at private school too. Right.

During the interview, GM shared her concerns about the middle school in the catchment area. She worried the diversity in the learning environment might incur bad influence on Greg. From Greg’s cousins, the idea of meritocracy was mentioned. Most of the students came from “well-bred” families, and Lakeside was the right place. It can be inferred from the excerpt that academic attainment was highly valued in Greg’s family. Hence, they consulted advice from the
successful ones and emulated them. As a kindergarten teacher, GM interacted with parents from different social stratum. Thus, her response resonated with DF that they prefer their offspring to associate with the “well-bred” peers. Though Greg’s family income was mediocre, attending Lakeside would be much preferred, considering the bad reputation and low academic performance of the middle school in their catchment area.

Networks

From Emma’s example, it is clear that one’s zip code determines the pool of neighbors and further decides the kind of information one would gather from suggestions. In David’s example, as a schoolteacher, DF got to meet families from different social stratum. Thus, when making school choice, DF was the source of information. The experience and knowledge DF acquired was through years of interactions with different parents and co-workers. Hence, DF was placed here to demonstrate his social bonding from a different array of loose to strong social networking. DF indicated that “well-bred” peers and a cultivated learning environment would play crucial roles in one’s life since children spent so many hours at school. Thus, when buying their house many years ago, DF purposefully searched for one close to Lakeside. When it was time for his children to make a secondary school choice, depending on the impact of education reforms on the school in the catchment area, Lakeside would be another option. Different from Emma’s family, DF stated that they were an average middle-class family and their household income could not compare to those of entrepreneurs. However, DF’s knowledge and experience helped David to build benign social capital at Lakeside. DF indicated,
以後可能你的玩伴就是將來你事業夥伴，然後他們的家長就彼此認識，大家魚幫水水幫魚，讀私校...也有這樣的想法。 (DF, lines 123-130)

Translation

About this, I would say yes, mostly it is because... because there are limited private schools, and most people still go to public schools. In fact as a teacher at elementary school, you see the students level become uneven after six years of education, including characters, and parental socio-economic status, so if you attend private school, it will filter for you, things such as like-minded peers. Beside, attending private schools, in general... the socio-economic status would be higher than those in public schools, this might need further research I am not sure about that, this is solely my opinions, I think it would be better, so the discrepancy is even salient in urban schools. They probably attended private schools at elementary schools, because those who you get along with your playmates might become your business partners in the future, and their parents know each other. You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours, attending private schools... I had thought about that.

DF’ idea reflected that the student’s habitus was one thing that he put into consideration when structuring education plans. The three forms of capital influenced each other reciprocally. DF summed it up by saying that meritocracy would create a virtuous cycle for David that in the future, might be rewarded. As a seasoned teacher, DF had witnessed how one took the bad attributes of one’s associates. Therefore, in David’s case, DF’s social capital derived from the education environment helped him make the decision. DF did not have to seek information afar; he and his wife not only had enough to share but also built strong networks with others.

As was already made evident in the section on cultural capital, middle-class families are more ambitious about educational planning. From DF’s excerpt, he put David’ future social circle into focus and imagined that hanging with like-minded peers would yield positive results on both David’s academic performance and social network. At the same time, DF unconsciously distinguished the social status from others believing that the reciprocity and mutual benefit of the learning environment would yield the result that the family was looking for. By stating the admission criteria for Lakeside, DF gave hint that the filtering mechanism would put
homogeneous people in the same box and separate the “unable” ones. In Bourdieu’s (1979/1984) word, “the members of the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it” (p. 318). From the intention to gather with “well-bred” friends, DF showed the unconditional testimony of social influence.

In Felix’s instance, FM said that they were acquainted with several teachers, so when they were about to make a middle school choice, they asked opinions from these teachers. The response that Felix’s family got was unanimous: these teachers all picked private schools over public schools. Their perspectives resonated with DF. They told FM that those who went to private schools were often from the privileged families and therefore these students might have better characters and qualities. Putting social problems into consideration, such as drug use and bullies, these teachers stated that amiable environment of private schools were more suitable for learning. Still, while FM arbitrarily chose Lakeside for Felix without further discussion, FM had some concerns about studying at private schools. FM stated in the following:

雖然在這個私立學校也是有他的缺點拉，譬如說都是...經濟上比較有能力的人會來讀，那小孩很多其實也會有炫富的情況，但這個就要看父母親怎麼去...這個也是一個點啦，但是我覺得跟毒品比起來炫富...對阿，你遇到不好的同學或怎樣，這個就比較殘害終身，炫富還可以矯正，哈哈哈 (FM, lines 77-80)

Translation

Although studying in a private school has its downside, for example, all the families…the privileged will come to this school, and a lot of students here love to flaunt their wealth. But this depends on how their parents handle… handle this situation. But I feel that compared to drug usage, flaunt the wealth…right, if you meet the bad peers or what, this could cause permanent damage, but flaunt the wealth can be corrected. Ha ha ha ha

In other words, FM held the power to make a decision about the education trajectory for her children. After weighing pros and cons from the information she gathered from those teachers, she thought of character building as her top priority. Even if she knew that the meritocracy at Lakeside might limit her Felix to acquire the perspective and worldview from the top of the
social hierarchy compared to the multiplicity of students in the public schools, she chose to let her son experience the privileged side. FM indicated nothing could override character-building and health education, and it would be hard to correct once one had trodden on the wrong path.

The same idea was described by Haley’s Mother. Haley was the oldest child in the family, her sibling six years younger than she. When HM was about to make a middle school choice, she did not have a clue. HM used to work as a clock-in and clock-out office lady for more than a decade, she later discovered her interest in baking and decided to resign to follow her passion. HM passed the examination and became a professional baker. Now she owns a shop and her cakes are pre-order only. Haley’s father works in an environmental quality management company and is a licensed street artist. He would sometimes volunteer to perform at his children’s schools. Since Haley’s parents had good interactions with teachers, Haley’s teacher paid attention to her educational trajectory. As previously noted, to be admitted to private schools one needed to prepare for the admission exams. In one of the PTAs, Haley’s teacher asked HM for their secondary school choice. She then realized the necessary prerequisites and preparation for attending private secondary school. If Haley’s teacher had not reminded HM of the recruitment process, she might have missed the chance of enrolling in Lakeside.

Social capital can be assessed through one’s ego position, ties to the actors, and bridge in the network (Lin, 2001). Thus, the two sub-themes, belonging and network provide explanations on how Taiwanese middle-class families’ social capital correlated with school choice. The middle-class families are more capable of choosing the preferred residential areas to their interest and are prone to let their children stay in an amiable environment (i.e. homogeneity) regardless of homes or schools. Further, they hope their children to find or feel the sense of belonging through their educational plan.
The three forms of capital together interacted and separately influenced middle-class families’ decision towards middle school choice. Also, the great volume of capital helped these families envision a brighter future than their present. Thus, they drew the blueprint when their children were still young. As could be seen from the previous examples, these middle-class families made good use of the resources they enjoyed and intended to maintain, if not increase their advantages in schooling through careful choice of secondary education. However, from the perspective of the economically deprived families, the 12-Year BEC was like adding insult to injury. Still, viewed from the middle-class strata, the demand for education equality of the 12-Year BEC was practiced on the sacrifice of education equity. The message was clear: if it should fail, then it was the parents that should take the blame, not the government. Next, I will elaborate on the second overarching research question to understand the definition of an effective school from middle-class families, teachers, and school stakeholders in the neoliberal era.

“Good” School

The definition of a good school varies according to different times and places. Within the neoliberal regime of Taiwan, the market system had transformed schools and institutions from arenas of knowledge accumulation to product exportation. Viewing educational qualification as a positional good with natural selection determined by the education market along with middle-class families and Lakeside teachers and administrator, the definition of a “good” school, under the neoliberal education reform, could be pinned down to seven themes. A thematic map (Figure 4.2) provides visual representation of this question, how is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders? In the following section, I start from the “positive rapport with teachers and students/parents” and go counterclockwise. To note, “bilingual learning” is shown in uppercase with different shape to indicate its reflection and
recreation of power and its situated meanings in Taiwan. This was particularly analyzed by Critical Discourse Analysis and I will elaborate more when we reach to this theme.

Figure 4.2. Themes of a “Good” School

*Note.* Bilingual learning is shown in uppercase with different shape to indicate its reflection and recreation of power.

**Positive Rapport Between Teachers and Students/Parents**

The first theme illustrates how teachers build a good relationship and interact with students and parents. To begin with, all parent informants placed a good parent-teacher relationship as top priority when choosing a middle school. Like most Asian countries, Taiwan is known for having long schooling hours (Chou & Ho, 2007), and, therefore, schools are the
places that students stay the longest besides homes. Building a good relationship between teachers and parents provides a mutual benefit to both sides. For these parents, teachers not only inculcate students but are also role models to their children. They bridge the gap between parents and children and push their children to higher academic performance.

Teachers at Lakeside were said to have a tight schedule. They served the title busy bees well and they were excellent time managers. They arrived at school before 7:30 am and finished the last class at 5:00 pm. According to my observations, within these 570 minutes, they prepared for the classes, taught lessons, managed students’ daily behaviors, graded students’ work, attended school meetings, and sometimes took training courses. Along with the physical work mentioned above, teachers at Lakeside understood the importance of building good rapport with students and parents. The interaction between them and the students and parents took time and might not directly induce high academic performance from students. However, given their awareness of the education market, they often viewed these middle-class families as “customers.” The higher the customer satisfaction is, the higher the customer retention rate will be. Trying to understand the needs and home environments of students and to imparting a good impression to these “customers” was, therefore, part of Lakeside teachers’ daily routines.

As the 12-Year BEC specified the need for education reform, some teachers at Lakeside become aware of the evolving teacher-pupil interactions in the new era. Ms. Iris, a math teacher, stated that teachers needed to be flexible to the changing environment to avoid becoming washed-up. Strict upbringings and old-school instruction were not applicable to modern students. Therefore, Ms. Iris indicated she was willing to revise her perception and go with the flow.

因為其實這些年的學生素質已經跟我們以前不太一樣了，他們可能有一種比較隨便，然後對於老師可能也沒有很尊重，好像就是有點像朋友一樣，但是其實我不會很討厭這樣的一個互動模式，因為我覺得...這樣可能可以比較能夠親近他們，那他
們也不會因為你是老師就不敢跟你說些什麼，或問些什麼事情。（Ms. Iris, lines 100-104)

Translation

Because in recent years, the qualities of students have changed and are different from the older generation, they are more casual, and might not respect teachers like they used to be, it is more like hanging out with friends. But I actually am not against this kind of interaction, for I think that … this might let you get close to them, and they won’t regard you as a teacher and hold things back, or don’t dare to ask questions.

Basically, Ms. Iris tried to explain that teachers need to be adaptive like a chameleon to get used to the constantly changing teaching environment. The old-school might think teachers need to pay attention to nothing but their profession. To Ms. Iris, however, teaching was just part of her education career. Student upbringing, character-building, and interpersonal relationships to name a few, were part of a teachers’ responsibilities. At Lakeside, the average number of students in a class was 50. Therefore, with 50 different personalities and characters, Ms. Iris paid attentions to their unique differences and hoping to impact them with positive influence. At the same time, she was conscious of her role and knew it was important to bridge the relationship with parents. “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” and neither is a good rapport with students and parents. Ms. Iris reported that contacting parents was part of her daily routine. According to all teacher informants, they spent around an hour a day contacting parents. Sometimes, on special occasions, they could spend hours on the phone with parents even after regular school hours, and these extra workhours were not paid.

As another example, Mr. Maple, a science teacher shared his opinions on the interaction with the parents. To Mr. Maple, “no news is good news,” and he would, therefore, not contact parents for the sake of building a relationship. Mr. Maple stated that, though this contact was not required and took a lot of time, the effort was rewarding. He stated, “可是不見得是成正比啦，但是至少是成正相關” (Mt. Maple, lines 51-52). In translation, “it is not necessarily in direct
proportional to my effort, but at least it is a positive correlation.” That is to say, the efforts Mr. Maple made to building relationships might not yield the same amount of rewards. However, it helped him to know students’ situations better so that he could provide the suitable teaching methods. The most effective teaching results can be reached when teachers and parents work well with each other. During regular school hours, Mr. Maple was busy teaching, grading, and taking care of students’ daily life; and after school hours, he was busy learning each student’s needs by having conversations with parents. Though it might seem tiring, under the influence of neoliberal education reform, these services result in positive rewards from these “customers.”

On the middle-class family side, it is notable that the birth ranking of the interviewed students played a crucial role on parents’ secondary school choices. Three parent informants indicated that when making school choice for the interviewed children, they could not help but relate to the experiences from their older children. Some of them made different educational choices, sending their eldest child to a public middle school. Two of them expressed disappointment in the lack of teacher-parent interactions and the teacher quality in public schools. One of them used the adjective “frightened” to describe her previous experiences. EM recalled her nightmare with her first child’s homeroom teacher at a public school. The child was bullied, and when she noticed the seriousness of the situation, she tried to contact the teacher for further information. The passive attitude of the homeroom teacher irritated EM. Though the incident had a positive ending, this memory left a dent in her trust to public schooling system. EM said,

因為我被公立的嚇到，因為公立的老師可能就是上下班，不要找我麻煩，那孩子走偏了那也是妳的事情，孩子不要來找我麻煩，家長不要來找我麻煩就好。(EM, lines 195-197)

Translation
I was frightened by the public school because the teachers at public schools are just
clock-in and clock-out and stay away from any hassle. If a child deviates from the right
track, then that’s your problem. As long as the children don’t bother me, and their parents
don’t come to me, then it’s fine.

Therefore, when it was time for Emma to make a secondary school choice, EM decided to send
her to a private school. Throughout the years at Lakeside, EM built strong bonds with Emma’s
teachers and they made frequent contacts. When comparing the two experiences, EM laughed
and said “我覺得 OO 是有業績壓力嗎? 我會覺得也是很拼欸，哈哈哈哈，我覺得老師都很
用心” (EM, lines 314-315). In translation, “Is there a performance pressure for teachers at
Lakeside? I feel the teachers work so hard, ha ha ha ha, and I feel the teachers are so attentive.”

Similar to Emma’s situation, Bobby’s older siblings went to public middle schools. BM
described the diversity of the student body and free rein from the teachers hindered her
children’s learning experiences. BM thought “公立的老師比較沒有…我是覺得老師比較沒有
用開放的心去接受孩子” (BM, lines 457-458). In translation, “Teachers at public schools
lack…I mean, they don’t open their hearts to accept all children as who they are.” In other
words, though the students were more diverse and came from families with different social-
economic background, the teachers at public schools were not being openminded to all.

In another example, CM described the positive rapport as mutual rather than one-way.
CM heard that her Carol’s classmates held a birthday party from their homeroom teacher Ms.
Lavender. CM described Carol’s teacher in the following ways,

我真的覺得 OO 讀書運很好，又遇到一個這麼好的老師，因為她們班上之前好像也
風風雨雨，一些小朋友的問題，我覺得 OO 老師肯去處理，肯去解決，孩子之間的
糾紛或是什麼很圓融，她可以把孩子的心帶很好，妳看到生日阿，什麼的，孩子願
意花時間去寫卡片，願意為老師慶生，我覺得這是沒辦法，就是沒有帶到心的老師
孩子是不可能去做這些事情的，甚至家長也不可能去這樣做…(CM, lines 490-494)

Translation
I really think Carol has good luck in school and meets such a wonderful homeroom teacher. There was some trials and tribulations in her class, some children had problems. I think Ms. Lavender was determined to deal with it and solved it, she smoothed out the bumpiness on the road, she led the children with her heart. You see that on her birthday or something like that, her students are willing to write birthday cards and celebrate her birthday, I don’t think that’s possible for those teachers who don’t lead with their hearts, even parents wouldn’t do it…

Indeed, celebrating a teacher’s birthday was not common. CM felt blessed that her daughter could have a teacher like Ms. Lavender. With a such attentive teacher, she felt comfortable leaving Carol to Ms. Lavender while CM could manage her time well on other family members.

The students indicated that they enjoyed the daily interaction with schoolteachers and school administrators at Lakeside. Like their parents, they used “attentive,” “thoughtful,” and “earnest” to describe the characteristics of the teachers and they felt lucky to have such great interactions. When taking about teachers, the examples are listed as follows:

就像他讀這裡成績也不錯, 就想說應該也會...就是老師可能也很用心, 然後就跟著他一起就讀這裡。 (Bobby, lines 15-16)

Translation

My dad used to study here, and he got great grades, and I thought … the teachers must be very attentive, so I wanted to follow his path.

如果遇到沒那麼認真的老師，就覺得浪費時間...... (Carol, line 298)

Translation

If I didn’t meet such earnest teachers, I would feel like I had wasted my time studying at a school......

就是...因為我都會去額外買一些書，就是題目, 我做完之後，有額外的題目就會去問老師，老師也都很細心地講給我聽，因為我的問題真的很多，所以我就覺得....這樣，然後在問的過程中，就是也不會覺得很有壓力。 (David, lines 227-229)

Translation

I mean... I also purchased some extra books, for practice, every time I finished the lesson, and I had some questions, I always asked teachers. They would explain them to
me patiently, because I have a lot of questions to ask, so I feel… this way. During the questioning time, I didn’t feel stress.

恩…..有時候被罵會不開心，但是……呃….媽媽會說想一想就是她在為我好嘛，其實也是真的，不然可能會容易走偏嘛，如果這個時期的話，就雖然有時候會不開心，但是其實過了就好了，其實就也覺得沒有什麼事，自己也變好就好，因為我覺得我要拼醫科班，所以也不能走偏吧，就是在這個時候一定不能走偏(笑)，所以….被老師盯也是好的嘛！ (Emma, lines 257-261)

Hmm…. Sometimes I feel bad when being admonished, but…. hmmm…….mom says during this phase, it is for my own good…actually, I felt it too. Otherwise I might go on the wrong path, especially for this learning stage. Although I feel unhappy sometimes, once it’s passed, I feel okay. Actually those admonishments were really nothing, if I could be a better student I would be glad too. Because I want to be a doctor in the future, so I can’t go on the wrong path, especially at such a critical phase like this (Ha), so… I feel it’s good to have a teacher like this!

然後老師….我就是覺得國文老師就是一個很貼心，很懂學生的心，就蠻會跟我們聊天吧！ （Haley, lines 374-375）

Translation

Then these teachers… I feel our Chinese teacher is so thoughtful, she understands us, and knows how to converse with us!

Though these students did not have any learning experience in public secondary schools, they could not make comparisons, nor to imagine the teacher-pupil interactions there. From the replies above, they felt the cares and attention from the teachers at Lakeside and they thought teachers worked hard and were close to them. At the same time, teachers felt the friend-like interactions helped to build close bonds to teachers and parents.

Homogeneous Student Body

Homogeneous is defined as “of the same or a similar kind or nature” by Merriam-Webster (2020). To the parent and teacher informants, this is the favorable for education. However, the biggest selling point for the 12-Year BEC is “diversity.” As its advocates suggested, this could ameliorate the learning gap between urban and rural, the north and the south, or the rich and the poor in Taiwan. In the eyes of the middle-class families, the word
“diversity” raised an alarm. As a famous proverb goes, “One takes the behavior of one’s company.” These parent informants stated adolescents were easily influenced by their company. Therefore, when choosing secondary school, they wanted their children to get close to those “well-bred” peers or “people like them.” Lakeside seemed to the right place for their interests. I will start with parents’ examples. BM stated:

最主要是因為同學後來都決定，決定要來，那他才決定說好那我也要去。跟他很好的幾個同學，成績也都不錯，然後他們就決定說要來這裡，然後後來就說好那我們來這裡，好。是這樣決定的。(BM, line 63-65)

Translation

The most crucial part is that his classmates decided to come here, they decided to study here, thus, he made up his mind and said, “I am going to study here”. Those few who are close to him are also good students, so when they made the decision to study here, we made up our decision, too. Yes, it was like this.

因為同儕，你要跟誰同班，那個都是一個緣分，阿萬一你碰到好的，當然你一般也不會有這麼齊的好的，像這裡我就會覺得他們會比較齊，那個同質性會比較齊。(BM, line 163-165)

Translation

Because of peers, fate decides who you are classmates with, if you, by chance, meet a good classmate, of course it’s unusual to have the same level classmates in terms of academic ability. But here, I feel their levels are more even, and its more homogenous.

Still, when describing the peers that their children were going to get along with, they could not help but relate to the students in public schools. BM believed the like-minded peers would be positive influence on Bobby. Like BM, other parents described the learning environment and peers at public schools with terms such as “fights,” “smoke,” “drug problem,” and “diversity.” Counter to the good intentions of the 12-Year BEC, these parents did not appreciate the influences that diversity might bring. CM thought that early teenagers were highly affected by their peers, and she said the public school in her catchment area had a bad reputation. Thus, she
thought a homogeneous learning environment would be essential for this learning stage. The
response of GM echoed with CM. GM indicated in detail that:

Nowadays the parents are difficult to... to deal with, and with the so-called education of
love, so, teachers are afraid to punish children, so the children nowadays... Especially, in
the middle school stage, this is a more rebellious stage, so, children might take a more
aggressive approach to... to let off some steam. Umm, being young and vigorous, and
reckless, so if studying at a public school, we are afraid that, because we know our kids,
my oldest one, the one you interviewed, he personally loves to study, oh, he is highly
self-motivated, and we were hoping he could be better, so, we chose private school, yes!
We didn’t let him enroll in the public school, if he studied in the public school, we were
worried that he might be affected by peers.

As could be inferred from GM, the modern “love education” might not always yield the
promising result that she hoped for. GM understood her Greg’s personality well and believed
that, with such a highly disciplined child, she could provide him a more beneficial learning
environment and allow Greg to find a sense of belonging. Likewise, HM indicated that her Haley
was a quiet child. Since HM and her husband used to receive education from public secondary
schools, they perfectly understood the situation in the public schools. Considering Haley’s
introverted personality, they decided that Lakeside would be suitable for her.
Translation

I think private schools will manage students’ behaviors better, and…in the middle school stage, I think what worries most parents is not the academic performance but her behavior and some…some… ha…right, that’s because we, my husband and I studied in public schools, and we saw the situation inside, and we saw a lot, I think Lakeside, it would be impossible to see the situation in private schools. I mean…a lot of bullies, and fights, and the gap between good students and bad students… are… disparate.

Indeed, the learning gap, the different mode of acquisitions, and cultural backgrounds were the greatest concerns for HM. Even if the situation might be different from her time, she still did not think “diversity” would be a good idea for Haley.

Like BM, EM had made a secondary school choice before. EM stated that when she was making the secondary school choice for her first child, she trusted the government and believed the gap between the dominant and the dominated would not be that salient. Her first child, Emma’ sister, a talented cellist with perfect pitch, was determined to take music as her lifelong career. EM’s options were limited because, during this time, none of the private schools in central Taiwan had gifted programs for music. Thus, EM could only choose one among the public schools. At first, EM thought the social backgrounds for children who study music should be similar. However, she was wrong, and was terrified by the uneven qualities in the public school. Her first child was bullied because of her talent and outstanding performance and the different mode of acquisitions from other peers. EM understood the efforts her daughter had to make on the journey to become a great musician, and there was no turning back. Thus, she was not satisfied with the system and learning environment in the public school. When EM had to make a secondary school choice for her Emma, she locked her target on private schools. EM indicated that,

我就是喜歡那種私校的單純，我覺得私校的小孩品格、人格、或是家長社經地位，我都覺得應該會比公立的還優質。(EM, lines 31-32)
Translation

I just like the homogeneous nature in the private school, I feel the students’ characters, personalities, or the socioeconomic background of the parents of the private schools, I think the qualities are better than the public schools.

EM was saying that it would be better for her children to hang around with people like them. For one thing, the homogeneous environment was good for academic learning. For another, the parents who sent their children to Lakeside had similar long-term goals.

Though most parents accepted the intention of “diversity,” they believed that education should be fair, free, and treat each student equally. They stated that, in the secondary school learning stage, different students should be sorted according to their abilities. By doing this, each child could reach his or her “zone of proximal development.” DF thought that when students reached early adolescence, tracking helped teachers to utilize proper teaching methods and materials to guide students to the most satisfying learning results. DF indicated,

我覺得要能力分班，我覺得能力分班是一個，不能放棄孩子，但是你要因材施教，對不同程度的孩子你用同一套教材，老師真的很難教，這個跟我們現行的法令是...但是我自已當老師我自己覺得是如此，對，那法令上他就是在立足的公平點。(DF, lines 145-148)

Translation

I think it’s necessary to do the tracking, I think tracking is a method that… you should not give up on children, but you must teach according to their abilities. Using the same teaching materials for the students of various levels is quite hard for teachers, and the policies now are… I am a teacher myself, I think, right, that’s the equality of the policies.

In the opinion of DF, the educational equality of the 12-Year BEC did not yield the same happy result for everyone. DF believed in educational equity. DF described the learning stage like building a skyscraper, if the foundation was not steady, the building could easily topple over.

Moreover, when the students reached the secondary education stage, it became harder to rebuild the shaky and unsteady lower stories. DF further described,
So, at the elementary stage I don’t approve of tracking, really, at the elementary stage I don’t approve of tracking, but for middle schools and above, I think it’s necessary to sort students. For those lower academic performers, if you use different sets of teaching materials, you can still teach them well. We call this the zone of proximal development. In education we say there is a maximum development. If you put this child in a school and say that good peers can influence this child... the reality is, to my knowledge, is very difficult to manage this influence.

As an educator, DF was aware that the educational equality meant the sacrifice of the educational equity of some students. Thus, he believed for different learning stages there should be different approaches, and diversity might not be great for secondary school students. The students enjoyed hanging around with “well-bred” peers and they chose their peers wisely. When describing the feeling towards Lakeside, Bobby replied,

Translation

Like, I should say I like Lakeside VERY MUCH. Because... our classmates have tight coherence, like in public schools, if one classmate stands out, other classmates would verbal bully that person... but in this environment, when one who’s salient on academic performance then everybody would emulate this, and then all the classmates would work harder together.

“Birds of the same feathers flock together.” From Bobby’s reply, he found the sense of belonging from the peers at Lakeside. He did not want his effort towards academic performance being mocked or laughed at. The phrase “verbal bully” was used to describe the possible
situations at the public schools. Bobby emphasized the peers he met at Lakeside and used words such as “VERY MUCH” to indicate his feeling. He further described the happiness of getting together with like-minded peers who had similar goals to his own. Though at his age Bobby was unable to articulate the differences between students from different social stratum, he got the sense that homogeneity would be good for him.

**High Student Success Rate**

The term success rate, in this instance, is used in relation to the students’ academic performance, especially on students’ salient entrance exam performances and high acceptance rates. Under the neoliberal regime, ranking and values are tightly connected. The ranking of students’ academic performance is directly related a school’s reputation. In Taiwan, the reputation for middle schools and above are mostly determined by the graduates’ performance on entrance exams. Therefore, after the results of the exams, all schools are in a hurry to publicize the success rate on league tables. They are statistics, but also a beacon to many young students. In this section, I elaborate on the meaning of success rate and illustrate the importance of “league table.” A league table is a chart that shows and ranks students’ performance. Most of the time, it lists students’ academic performance from the top to the last. Sometimes, it lists just the top ones. Although all kinds of performances can be listed on a league table, in Taiwan, most schools love to demonstrate academic success.

League tables are omnipresent in every corner of Lakeside campus. They are on the walls of school entrance, run through news tickers, on bright hallway television screens, and prominently display in recruitment information. For parent informants, high student success rate was one of the factors that drove them to choose Lakeside, for this was the most direct way to
measure performance. Four parents repeatedly referred to student success rate as a determining factor. BM indicated that,

因為沒有進來，我們兩個姐姐也不是在這邊，所以我們也看不到看到它實質面，只是說外在的宣傳，他是很快，然後榜單很漂亮這樣。或者是說網路上面你一個學測、指考，劈裡啪啦，人家就開始新聞就出來了。(BM, lines 252-255)

Translation

Because we didn’t actually visit the school, and our two elder kids didn’t study here. So, we couldn’t see the substantial side of the school, we only knew it from the publicity outside of the school, they propagated it very quickly, and the exam success rate is salient. Or on the internet, the General Scholastic Ability Test, Advanced Subjects Test, etc., they release it to the press quickly.

As could be inferred by BM’s description, from a parent’s perspective the teaching and learning activities were mostly done in subtle and undetectable ways. In other words, without physically joining the classroom activities in person, parents have no way of knowing how children are doing at a school. Thus, with the help of success rate statistics, the abstract and nebulous nature of teaching and learning are transformed into substantial forms. This idea echoed with GM, who stated that student success rate was the most “practical” index of a school. The following examples from parent informants demonstrated similar thoughts when defining a good school.

[...] 再來就是對阿，就是綜合各方面他的升學績效，不錯，學生表現蠻好的。 (DF, lines 90-91)

Translation

[...]and then right, the whole performance of Lakeside, the student success rate is very high, very good, students have great academic performance.

制度跟出來的成績，這個是最現實的東西，就是看成績，然後就有大概比較一下，對對！(GM, lines 94-95)

Translation

School system and the student success rate, this is the most practical index, the exam results, and then I roughly made comparisons, yeah!
That is to say, searching for the student success rate appeared to these parents to be the most straightforward way to determine school quality, for this showed the efforts of all the teachers and staff and the quality of the enrolled students.

Some teachers at Lakeside had mixed feelings about posting students’ academic performance at every corner of school. From the teacher informants’ perspective, the intention of displaying academic performance was a good way to enhance students’ fulfillment, but it failed to demonstrate the diversity amongst different subject domains. Miss Hyacinth, an English teacher, was opposite to the display of students’ academic performance at first, yet, she later determined that the feeling of fulfillment could be boosted through it. Miss Hyacinth indicated that,

因為讀書這方面的你不像一個體育競賽你可以很明顯的，都是靠成績嘛，那我覺得
弄出來榜單沒什麼不好阿，但是我覺得榜單而言，榜單而言，不應該只是限制在只有學科能力，應該是綜合性都要有，對。我覺得榜單是需要的，因為他們是需要一個讚揚，被讚賞被看到，當然有些人不喜歡被看到，但是我覺得那是也是一個鼓勵方式。(Miss Hyacinth, lines 192-195)

Translation

Unlike athletic competitions that could be easily determined, academic performance is totally based on the grades. So, I think it’s acceptable to use league tables, but I think league tables, league tables should not be limited to the academic performance, it should be comprehensive. Yeah, I think league tables are necessary, because the students need encouragement, to be admired and to be seen. Of course, there are low-profile people, but I think the tables are a means of encouragement.

Indeed, unlike sports events, with competitions that are often held with cheering audiences in open arenas, academic competitions are often static and neglected. Miss Hyacinth’s response went beyond that of BM. Not only do parents want to find out the results of the mysterious teaching and learning activities at a school, but the hard-working students are eager to be noticed. The effort of the hard-working students towards academic is not less than the trainings of athletes. Thus, in the arena of academics, Miss Hyacinth thought it would be fair and
reasonable to demonstrate the results of learning, though it should be diversified with comprehensive competitions. However, Miss Jasmine, also an English teacher, had a different interpretation of demonstrating students’ academic performance. Miss Jasmine stated,

我覺得對學校的形象有很大的提升拉，但是對於學生有沒有幫助…我覺得還好。可是那本來就不是為了學生而放的阿，他本來就是為了讓學校形象更好而放的阿！
(Miss Jasmine, lines 228-230)

Translation

I feel that it raises the reputation of our school. As for its effect on students…I think it’s just okay. But the display of it was not meant for students, it’s to create an image of our school!

Regardless of the different views towards touting students’ academic performance, this physical demonstration of students’ academic performance and teachers’ contribution attracted publicity in a good way. The higher the student success rate, the higher the possibility of recruiting new elites.

The league tables posted prominently on the wall of the school entrance purposefully demonstrated the results of entrance exams in a certain order. They were not in alphabetical or by regional order. Rather, they were listed according to the ranking of the universities. By demonstrating the league tables at the school entrance, school websites, and recruitment flyers, Lakeside not only sent out the message that its graduates had salient outcomes and were blessed with great teacher efficacy, it validated the school’s value in the education market. The phrases “the most in Bell county” and “the most in central Taiwan” were intended to catch the attention of “able” students and “motivated” parents. For parents, league tables were indices of a good school. For current students, they were barometers for their futures. BM stated that Bobby paid a lot of attention to the yearly league tables and he used them to project his educational trajectory.

BM said that,
Because my son is quirky, because after the Scholastic Ability Test every year, or the results of the Advanced Subjects Test, he would count the number of people, the league tables would show the number of people, and then he would count the proportion and… umm… does that mean… he knew that when he was in the seventh grade. He did this when he was in the seventh grade, saying, if I maintain the first ranking at school, does that mean that I am a prospective medical student, like he is almost a medical student, something like that!

From this excerpt, it is clear that Bobby invested his emotions in the league tables. He was experiencing the Pygmalion effect, a psychological phenomenon where high expectations fuel improved performances in certain areas. Imagine a little boy standing in front of a story-tall league table, examining it, and secretly telling himself that one day he will be on the top of the tables and become the one being admired. BM described her son’s reaction to the league tables in an amusing and anticipatory way. According to her description, Bobby aimed high for himself and hoped to replicate the graduates’ successful experiences. The Pygmalion effect not only worked on Bobby but also David. In David’s example, he indicated he liked Lakeside a lot by indirectly referring to the display of league tables. David stated,

Because I feel…I mean the graduates got accepted into a great university, so I feel the spirit of this school is…the spirit of the elite classes is good…… because news would report, and the news, my dad and my mom would tell me that the graduates of Lakeside
are…and our teachers would talk about those graduates, and said such, such, and such got accepted to where, and later became what profession…

On the one hand, the display of the league tables might hint at a promising future for the current students and give them something to look forward to and further influence students’ perception of Lakeside as a good school. On the other hand, the high exam success rate of Lakeside helped to arouse public attention and proved its high value in the education market.

**Variety of School-Developed Curriculum**

Understanding the changes brought by neoliberalism, Lakeside aimed at nurturing students to become global citizens. One of the most obvious ways was to join the international academic competitions. Due to the methods of recruitment, a lot of elite students in Bell County were competing with the each other at school. To further improve their ability and lessen the feeling of fatigue, these students aspired to international competitions. Among the international academic competitions, “Teen Diplomatic Envoys” and “Olympiad” were highly promoted by secondary schools in Taiwan. “Olympiad” was held with different subjects, such as International Physics Olympiad, International Chemistry Olympiad, International Mathematical Olympiad, etc. “Teen Diplomatic Envoys” is a competition held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China (Taiwan). Its objective is “all out diplomacy” (MOE, 2020) and it seeks to enhance students’ global awareness and mobility. Only the high school students are qualified to join the competitions. The final winning teams represent Taiwan and visit other nations for cultural exchanges with international students. Through a series of trials only the most excellent ones move on to represent Taiwan in the international competition.

While one of the goals of the 12-Year BEC was “exam-free admission,” in practice, high school admission was not exactly “exam-free.” Students were still required to join the CAP, and its result would be examined within the record of the “learning portfolio.” Thus, students’
different aptitudes were emphasized. “The sky is the limit,” so is the “learning portfolio.”

Besides the school competitions, these off-campus competitions are perceived to add value to one’s learning portfolio. For consecutive years, Lakeside recruitment information listed results of international academic performances for current students, demonstrating that it not only had qualified teachers to prepare students for these competition trainings but also bridged Lakeside students to the world.

For its “customers,” this seemed like an effective way for Lakeside to market the idea of global awareness. Most of the parent interviews mentioned academic performance as an index of distinction at Lakeside. From the perspective of the Lakeside teachers, one should not neglect the role of their hard work in achieving this outstanding performance. According to Mr. Maple, to be qualified as an “Olympiad” training teacher, they must take courses to be familiar with all the rules and materials. What’s more, the student training could take months or years. Therefore, without teacher collaboration and well-planned academic schedules, it would be hard to retain such outstanding students. To enhance students’ global awareness, Lakeside internalized this idea subtly through school-developed curriculum, school clubs, and school activities. Bobby noted that before attending Lakeside, he did online searches about the school’s academic trainings and school clubs for different secondary schools. During the interviews, Bobby and Carol were participating in these different trainings. For Bobby, the outstanding international academic performance of the graduates was one of the incentives for him to choose Lakeside.

AY: 你特別注重哪一類的培訓跟社團？
B: 呃....社團的話就像是.....機關王社，是.....像是樂高，組樂高，然後他們也有寫程式、也有組的、也有寫的，
AY: 電腦的程式嗎？
B: 恩，就是有一款機器人，叫 EV3，樂高的 EV3，他就是有一個主機、然後也有零件，你就可以把主機配合零件，這樣裝上去，然後主機就可以灌程式，當然也有馬達，馬達就是那個主機就可以驅使馬達。

[...]
AY: 那培訓呢?
B: 培訓的話是因為 OO 有很多的.... 有專門的奧林匹亞的那些培訓，然後成績
也都是....很頂尖，然後我就想說也可以這樣來試看看。(Bobby, lines 39-59)

Translation

AY: What kind of training and clubs do you pay attention to?
B: Umm….for clubs…World Green Mech Club, such as….Lego, building Lego, and they have coding, some building and coding
AY: The computer programming?
B: Right, there is a model robot, which is called EV3, the EV3 of Lego, there is a chip, and some parts, you can put the chip with the parts together, and build it altogether. Then you can program the chip, of course there is motor, and the motor is, the chip is used to drive the motor.

[...]
AY: How about the training?
B: As for training, because Lakeside has a lot of… the academic Olympiad training, and the results of the competitions were … salient, then I thought I can emulate them and try it out.

As for Carol, she never thought about international competitions before coming to Lakeside. Yet, she was elated to be chosen as one of the seeds for the English speech competition. She had also begun training for “Teen Diplomatic Envoys,” though she noted that she would not participate in off-campus competitions until the tenth grade. Lakeside handled their future Olympiad contestants in a similar fashion. Though these competitions targeted high school students, Lakeside often began training for them in middle school. Lakeside enrolled six grades of students, and there was no guarantee that the middle school graduates would continue attending. Preparing and recruiting contestants early helped retain the elite students. These competitions also took years of training and practice, which Lakeside could not begin early enough in order to ensure the results that they desired.

Therefore, the curriculum at Lakeside was not only developed in multi-faceted dimensions, it was also bolstered by club activities and competition training. The school-developed curriculum required by the 12-Year BEC was fully developed by Lakeside. It
successfully integrated the needs of students with the crucial resource of quality character amongst teachers and parents and included a multitude of subjects. While most courses were lectured by the schoolteachers, a few were appointed to teachers in other institutions. The ministry-mandated courses for Lakeside did not differentiate much from the structure of the 12-Year BEC. Instead, it reflected the dominant ideology with an added emphasis on English education. As for the school-developed courses, Lakeside was shrewd enough to integrate insights from parents to further distinguish itself from other schools. The school-developed curriculum for the eighth grade at Lakeside is presented below in Table 4.3. According to the school administrator and teachers, students filled out a scantron with their favorite course in order and were later enrolled in accordance with these lists.

Table 4.3. School-Developed Curriculum for the Eighth Grader Fall 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Title of Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Writing Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>School Leadership English Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>English Team Leadership Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Paper, scissors, rock. Writing Course (level 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Math and Science</td>
<td>Science DIY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Math and Science</td>
<td>Marine Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Digital DIY (advanced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Codercoding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Volleyball level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Basketball level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Basketball level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Scouting level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Home Remodel level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Clay DIY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Soap DIY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Sewing DIY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Van Gogh Painting Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Arts and Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>Board Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Korean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to other public schools, Lakeside students could choose from a greater variety of school-developed courses. Thus, the curriculum was a kaleidoscope of subjects, aims, and interests. Students could pick static courses like writing or language learning or active ones like sports. This process of choosing from a broad variety of school-developed courses echoed the neoliberal trend of “competition and choice.” Students learned to take responsibility for their choices, understanding the vital lesson of decision making. Moreover, Mr. Oak explained that simply providing a diverse array of courses was not enough. He wanted to connect the school-developed courses to the students’ daily life. As school-developed curriculum is restructured at the beginning of each semester to cater to the needs and interests of different students, Mr. Oak elaborated on possible spring curriculum revisions for 2020 in the following ways:

也许我們會有修腳踏車的課程，會有什麼課程。我們也許今年的寒假就會改變，譬如說寒假輔導課，我，學校有一個校定的課程，譬如說，五天輔導課，我校定的課程是二十節，每天早上四節，班訂課程就是每天下午三節課，一共十五節課，你這個班要去聘，我們有一個師資群，班級可以自己選，譬如說我們有一個家長很會做那個雕花蛋糕果凍，他拿到世界金牌，他就開了一門課，八節課，啊……我們也許會有一些經濟學啦，或是… (Mr. Oak, lines 123-129)

Translation

Maybe we will have a bicycle-repairing course, and we might have a course of x y z. Maybe we will make some adjustments this winter, for example the winter supplementary session. I, the school has its school-mandated curriculum, for example, the five-day supplementary classes, our school-mandated curriculum is 20 classes, 4 classes every morning. Class-mandated curriculum is the 3 classes in the afternoon, 15 in total. Each class must hire teachers, we have teacher faculty, each class can choose their own class. For example, one of our parents who is good at making floral jelly cake, she got the golden metal in a competition, she lectured a class, thus, she got 8 classes. Um……we might have some economics classes, or….

From this quotation, Mr. Oak was determined to utilize parental resources and to make practical use of the school-developed curriculum. The premise of structuring these courses was based on utilizing the extra capital enjoyed by Lakeside parents. Resources, such as a parent who won an international competition for her floral jelly cake, or parent who was a university economics
professor, were something that Mr. Oak would not forsake. Though these courses were not commonly seen in the secondary education market, they related more closely to daily life. As could be inferred from the school-developed courses that Mr. Oak mentioned, parental resources and daily life were put into consideration when planning the curriculum. To note, the materials for these courses were not included in the regular tuition, thus, students needed to pay an extra fee for materials and textbooks. The fee varied according to the kind of school-developed course a student selected. Thus, it might be understandable that Lakeside would have more choices compared to public schools in order to recruit economically advantaged students.

Additionally, Mr. Oak indicated that most students were highly interested in the school-developed courses because they were interesting and more applicable to real life. Yet, in reality, students’ academic performance and school efficacy was often dictated by the results of entrance exams. They forced many secondary schools in Taiwan to forgo fun and practical additions to school-developed curriculum and put more attention on the ministry-mandatory curriculum. Facing this dilemma, Mr. Oak stated that he pondered ways to connect the new knowledge to the old and further reinforced students’ learning results in a more enjoyable way. For this, Mr. Oak promoted “Stripe Course,” a class that helps to link students’ learning and interests in a robust way. This would allow Lakeside to not only provide ministry-mandated courses and maintain its’ academic performance but also integrate the school’s spirit of holistic education to make this course likable. It was a combination of teaching the mandatory courses and connecting students’ daily life in a fun way. Mr. Oak further explained “Stripe Course” as,

**MO:** …我請這個老師幫我開，譬如說英文，你開一個讀報，China Post, 讀報，讓學生每一天去讀一篇文章，你開這一個讀報課程，然後看學生輔導課自由選，我有八節課，這個八節課要多少 pay，你開出來。所以 OO 現在就是每一個老師在這種帶狀課程的 pay 是不一樣，他就看你吸引多少學生，

**AY:** 是希望可以延續一路從高一學到高三嗎?
MO: 對對對，就像我在 OOOO 一樣，我就取消輔導課讓老師自己開課程，啊你自己定價錢(笑)，上我這個課一堂課要二十塊，啊我整個課程是幾節課，十節課你要繳兩百塊。或是這個我一堂課要五十塊，讓學生自己去選 (Mr. Oak, lines 423-431).

Translation

MO: … I asked the teacher to teach a course, for example, English, newspaper reading, China Post, newspaper reading, let students read a piece of news daily, you teach a newspaper reading course, and students select the courses according to their will, I have eight courses, and how much do I want to be paid, you tell us. Now Glacier High is in this stripe course system, and the pay is different, it totally depends on how many students are enrolled in your course.

AY: So, the system goes all the way from 10th grade to 12th grade?

MO: Right, right, right, just like when I was at Plateau High I canceled the tutorial courses and let teachers teach the courses they like, and you can decide the tuition you want (laugh), taking my course at less than 1 dollar per lesson, if the total amount of my course is 10 lessons, then you pay less than 10 dollars. Or you set 1.5 dollars per lesson, I let students select the courses they want.

In the above excerpt, Mr. Oak explained the idea of “Stripe Course” and the fees for different choices. He thought curriculum design would provide students continuous learning experiences that connect to one’s daily life, given that Lakeside must consider ways to maintain high exam success rate and, at the same time, be adaptive to the market system of education. The “Stripe Course” might be one of the selling points of Lakeside. Mr. Oak stated that under the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, Lakeside, like many secondary schools, had invested more effort on planning and brainstorming for the school-developed curriculum. As the saying goes, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” A balanced and rounded learning experience were what the “customers” of Lakeside were looking for. By structuring the school-developed curriculum, Lakeside was also showcasing the great faculty and advanced special classrooms. Though this might place an extra burden on teachers, making them spend more time figuring out how to connect curriculum to one’s knowledge, the rewards might be handsome. As was been stated in the previous section, when a school provides services and goods that “customers” like, they will
automictically share their satisfied experiences with their families and friends. Hence, a little extra effort on the drafting of the courses will pay off in the long run.

From Mr. Oak’s perspective, providing competitions, school-developed courses and offering courses variety is a must under the current regime. Furthermore, he understood the gap between urban and rural. Thus, he hoped that by mandating the stripe courses in a more formal and connected way, the resources could be maximized, and students could reach their full potential. As can be inferred from the above examples, students feel that they gain access to the positional goods they want through competitions and a wider variety of choices. Sometimes it was better to hand-off to others based on your resources.

**Staff Harmony**

For a society to reach harmony, an individual must play his or her role. The same idea applies to a “good” school. Some parent informants had previously spent some time with teachers from public schools. They said that, from their experiences, these teachers worked individually and did not form the habit of collaboration with each other. Thus, they felt some schools did not perform up to their full potential. Also, as could be inferred from the previously examined factor, high student success rate, worthy examination results could not be achieved without a positive rapport between teachers, students, parents, and teacher collaboration. Most parental informants talked about the college acceptance rate as one of the driving forces behind choosing Lakeside. To many middle-class families, Lakeside served as a springboard, elevating the next generation to a better and brighter future.

To meet the high expectations of parents, subject teachers and homeroom teachers at Lakeside were fully aware of their roles and know that they needed to build collaborative relationships to fulfill school missions. They understood that “no man is an island.” Having a
tight schedule at school did not guarantee intimacy between teachers and staff, and sometimes it was just the opposite. However, they believed that in the era of education marketization, members at private schools should work extra hard to maintain market value. Therefore, it would be better to think of ways to bring all the members at Lakeside together than to work in isolation. From the teacher informants, the teachers at Lakeside seemed to work in a collaborative manner. Miss Hyacinth stated,

我覺得好的學校包含就是....像我是老師，同事之間的那種氣氛，氛圍，合作的還是惡性的...在競爭，我覺得我們是合作跟良性競爭，這是一個很好的環境。（Miss Hyacinth, lines 95-96）

Translation

I feel a good school includes … like I am a teacher, the atmosphere, the vibes between coworkers is collaborative or malignant competition. I feel ours is collaborative and virtuous competitions, this is a great environment.

The vibes between coworkers were very subjective and dependent on teachers’ personalities. However, it could be inferred from Miss Hyacinth that the virtuous competitions between she and her coworkers were one index for her to determine the quality of a school. The good vibes in the workplace created an inviting atmosphere for good spirits. While different subject teachers teach solely, the results of examinations were the product of a collaboration between all members at Lakeside and it was a celebration for all. The teachers worked together consciously for the sake of good reputation of Lakeside.

Under the reforms of the 12-Year BEC, teachers of the same subject might need to cooperate with each to co-teach or structure the school-developed curriculum. According to Ms. Lavender, a seasoned Chinese teacher, the education reforms gave different schools free rein to create the courses that were tailored to the needs and interests of the students. At the same time, however, they added burdens to the already tight schedules. Therefore, for the school-developed
curriculum, they preferred to do brainstorming and co-teach a course. Ms. Lavender elaborated how the preparatory work was done for the school-developed curriculum.

所以大部分國文科可能需要開四到六個，然後而且他也是，你也不限定就是只有你一個人開，你可以跟人家合作，就是這個課程可能是四個老師一起合作，就是這個課程，特色課程是每學期一定要有的，只是開的人，你們可以自己決定誰要開，誰要開，所以也是每一個人都必須有開到，只要那個課程滿了，整體的課程數滿了，就可以了，可是他好像就變成一個趨勢了拉，因為結合 108 高中的課程，反正就是一定會有這些特色課程要開，(Ms. Lavender, lines 179-185)

Translation

So the Chinese subject might need four to six classes, and besides… it is also, you are not limited to teaching the course by yourself, you can work with others, that is you can split the teaching between four teachers. This course, this school-developed curriculum, is required every semester, it is just that, you can decide who is going to teach, who is going to teach, so everyone must teach a course, as long as the course is full, and the whole subject is full, that’s fine. But this has become a trend, because combined with the 12-Year BEC, anyways, the school-developed course is a must.

In this excerpt, Ms. Lavender explained the process of implementing the school-developed curriculum into practice and elaborated on how teachers with different talents could work together to come up with a course that was tailored for the students at Lakeside. A successful school-developed curriculum would not be possible without the collaboration of subject teachers and school staff. It not only enhanced students’ subject-related knowledge, but also demonstrated the essence and resources of Lakeside. Hence, Ms. Lavender indicated the harmony between teachers and staff is a crucial part of being a “good” school.

Besides the collaboration of structuring school-developed curriculum, Ms. Lavender further noted that, as an effective private school, Lakeside was too humble and low-profile to let the world know its salient performance. Hence, outside the regular school hours, some teachers voluntarily set up and ran a fan page to market the good aspects of Lakeside on Facebook. These teachers wanted to promote the visibility of Lakeside in the education market. Ms. Lavender indicated as follows:
我們的好都沒有讓外面的人知道，所以變成其實是有一部分的老師，他們很積極很認為的自己自發性的在自己的臉書上作宣傳，然後譬如說有幾個導師，他們成立了一個群組或成立了一個粉絲團，現在變成這個是一個不是學校，不是官方粉絲團，是一群導師們自己弄了一個 OO 的粉絲團，然後把 OO 的這些美的，好的，優秀的事 po 在那粉絲團上，然後去把他作一個文宣，去把他做一個新聞的編輯，所以這個現在是有部分老師自己做這些事情，自發性的，他不是一個官方網站，變成這樣子，所以這邊老師真的是很積極，呵呵，(Ms. Lavender, lines 298-305)

Translation

The good parts of Lakeside are widely broadcasted to the world, so it turns out that some of our teachers, they are very motivated and earnest to set up the fan page voluntarily to promote the good news about Lakeside. Like a few homeroom teachers, they set up the groups or fan pages, and now it turns out to be not from the school side, not the official school fan page, but a few homeroom teachers, they set up a Lakeside fan page, and then they post the wonderful, the good, the excellent stuff on that fan page. They use it as a marketing strategy, as editing news. So right now, there are a few teachers doing it voluntarily. It’s not from the school side, right. So teachers at Lakeside are VERY MOTIVATED. Ha ha.

Ms. Lavender used the word “aggressive” to describe the teachers at Lakeside, meaning they eagerly looked for ways to mutually benefit both the school and their career. Even though the action of teaching could be done alone as a subject teacher, the glory of the school was shared by all members at Lakeside. Therefore, according to Ms. Lavender, most teachers were willing to contribute advice and efforts to maintain a harmonious environment at school.

Students at Lakeside not only joined the competitions on campus, a lot of them participated the off-campus competitions. Thus, besides structuring and teaching of curriculum, teachers were also responsible for training students for these competitions. Those responsible for the trainings might also need to take care of the students’ accommodation and transportation. For under the education reform, the on-campus and off-campus competitions added value to one’s learning portfolio. Hence, trainings for academic competitions was very much valued by both parents and school stakeholders. Most of the time, teachers rotated these responsibilities, and, once the top students were picked by school, these teachers would spend weeks and months
training these students. As tedious as it might seem, teachers at Lakeside were said to cooperate with each other harmoniously. Mr. Maple indicated,

MM: 國一，國一就開始挑了，可是不是我挑的，教務處他會提供成績，然後其他老師自己教，他就會有感覺啊，
AY: 需要口試面試嗎?
MM: 應該是先培訓吧! 然後再來篩選，先培訓個幾周，一個學期吧! (Mr. Maple, lines 158-161)

Translation

MM: Seventh grade, they picked the students when they were in seventh grade, but I didn’t pick them. The Office of Academic Affairs would offer their learning scores, and other teachers that personally taught these students, they should know their abilities.
AY: Did they need to be interviewed?
MM: They were trained at first. Then, filtered, then trained for a few weeks, oh, a semester.

So, the teachers spent extra hours and, through discussions between co-workers, picked the most salient students among the already outstanding students. Teachers, therefore, spent their none-office hours training these students. Mr. Maple stated that most teachers at public secondary schools might not spend such a considerable amount of time on training students. Since Lakeside enrolled students in up to six grades, with greater number of students, they had more teachers to rotate for this job. With the job distributed to different teachers each year, it helped maintain the harmony between teachers and staff.

Advanced Equipment and Infrastructure

Lakeside consistently updated school facilities with educational aids and enhancements for students. Through the education reforms, learning materials were revised and teachers were required to integrate technology into instruction. Hence, to keep up with the pace of time, the teaching equipment and classroom infrastructure needed to be updated as well. As a private school, Lakeside was famous for its state-of-the-art technological devices and infrastructure.
First, all classrooms were built with air conditioning (AC). Considering that Taiwan is located in a sub-tropical zone, AC should be a must for all schools. In the summertime, the humidity and heat can have a detrimental effect on students’ learning spirits and teachers’ motivation. However, not all secondary schools in Taiwan received government subsidies for classroom AC. Lakeside was a pioneer of AC installation in central Taiwan. When most students were suffering from the summer heat, the students at Lakeside could enjoy a much cozy learning environment back as far back as the early 2000s.

Second, computer software and hardware were updated, and classrooms were transformed into modern spaces. The mandate of the 12-Year BEC ushered in fresh demands for deleting obsolete teaching aids in secondary schools. According to teachers and school administrators, Lakeside was a leader in technology updates. Mr. Oak stated that a big portion of the school income was put into the remodeling and upgrading teaching equipment. He further indicated it was because of the outstanding academic performances in recent years that Lakeside was gaining more and more publicity. Therefore, Lakeside’s marketing budget could be appropriated for upgrading infrastructure. Mr. Oak described,

MO: 喔,我們這幾年就是,其實,我們這幾年投注在學生硬體上,硬體上面投資了不少,你知道我們上面都變成特別教室嗎?
AY: 我不知道
MO: 我們曾經中部地區的所有的公私立學校都來參觀我們的這個教室,
AY: 新的那棟嗎? 還是?
MO: 就這上面,那是四年前左右的事情
AY: 變成是互動教室還是是?
MO: 也有互動,也有一些現在科技運用的教室。因為我有時候出去看,看了以後就把東西...改良以後,在我們學校裡面...我們現在也有家政教室、也有禮儀教室、也有裁縫教室。(Mr. Oak, lines 308-318)

Translation
MO: Oh, these past few years, actually, we spent a lot on... spent a lot of on updating the students’ physical facilities recently. Do you know that the classrooms upstairs are now special classrooms?
AY: Oh, really?
MO: All of the schools in central Taiwan, be it public or private have visited our special classrooms.
AY: That new building? Or?
MO: This one, the classrooms upstairs, which happened around 4 years ago
AY: They all remodeled to interactive classrooms?
MO: Some are interactive, some are equipped with the updated technology. Because sometimes I would visit other schools, and what I saw there, I might come back... and modify. Nowadays, we have... we have home economics classroom, etiquette classroom, and a sawing classroom.

Lakeside was famous for its high student success rate, and these days with the re-modeled classrooms and equipment, the state-of-the-art facilities had aroused the attention of the schools in central Taiwan. They visited Lakeside to get fresh inspiration for enhancing learning outcomes with the installation of latest technology. Indeed, during my visits to Lakeside, the special classrooms could be accessed via application by both teachers and students. The size of these classrooms was larger than traditional ones, and the arrangement of desks and chairs was versatile. According to the teacher who oversaw these classrooms, the software had been updated to the latest version. Hence, whatever the ministry of education was promoting, Lakeside was sure to be the leader.

The students loved the inclusive nature of the special classrooms. Since Bobby was one of the seed players for the school science competition, he used these special classrooms constantly. Therefore, among the seven interviewed students, he was the most knowledgeable about the equipment. According to Bobby’s description of a classroom referred to as “Faraday,” he elaborated as follows:

就在 4C 教室的樓下，下一樓，然後315(566,751),(614,817)的對面，然後我們培訓的時候也會在那邊上，有時候也會在法拉第教室上。然後那邊的話就是有很特殊的教具，像是...就是有發電的，就是會滾輪，然後他就可以發電，然後我不知道那是...就是有那些物理的電學、光學教具幾乎都有，然後那邊也
有點像是 4C，就是也是一個像是電子白板的東西，咦...那邊也有像是投影幕，但是沒有電子白板，我記得，他是黑板，然後旁邊也是有電視，然後那邊有一台，像是...也有主控，就是主控台，然後老師就可以接電腦上去，然後也是一樣就可以用電腦來 show，他想教的東西，然後那個教室就是很常，學長可能就會在那邊，用那些教具阿，或者是...在那邊練，因為那邊也像是討論，這種討論那些桌子，就是也是討論跟 4C 還有魔數空間都很像，就是討論，然後...我們 JHMC 也有在那邊練，就是每個禮拜三。 (Bobby, lines 308-318)

Translation

It is right downstairs from classroom 4C, the lower floor, and then there is a classroom called “Faraday” with a plate. It’s right crossed from classroom 315, and we sometimes receive training in that classroom, and sometimes we take classes in the Faraday classroom. There are special teaching aids in the classroom, such as…the electricity, things that roll, and it can create electricity. And I don’t know what...I mean the classrooms are all equipped with teaching aids for electricity of physics, optics of physics. The Faraday classroom is like 4C, there is an electronic whiteboard, well…I think there is a projector, but no electronic whiteboard, I remember, it’s a blackboard, and there are televisions, and there is one...something like a monitor, yes monitor. Teachers can connect it to a computer, and they can show things through the computer, the things he wants to teach. That classroom is often packed with… the high schoolers will stay there, use the aids, or stay there for … for the training, because the setting there is like, like the table that is designed for discussion. Just the discussion and 4C, they all have similar functions like the Magic Number classroom, just discussion, and then...we, JHMC would sometimes train in that classroom, like every Wednesday.

When Bobby was describing the equipment in the Faraday classroom, he talked quickly with excitement. With fingers pointed here and there, he used gestures to show lengths and shapes of different teaching aids. Bobby was trying to provide a vicarious experience of doing experiment in the classroom to me. In the traditional classrooms, when teachers taught the concept of static electricity, students could only use their imagination to picture it. However, the teaching aids in the Faraday classroom could simulate the reaction of static electricity, hence turning the abstract ideas into practical ones. Still, with larger spaces like this, students could easily move from desk to desk so that they could converse and discuss with their classmates efficiently.

Third, Lakeside hires certified teachers with all kinds of talents and teaching resources. Mr. Maple mentioned that, other than the advanced technology in the classrooms, trained
teachers could be viewed as part of the “software” of Lakeside. For one thing, teachers with nimble, trained hands knew how to use technology to enhance educational results. For another, trained teachers provided students with different kinds of resources and learning needs. Mr. Maple indicated that,

各式各樣的資源，設備、師資、或者是....甚至不同師資也是一種資源阿，因為不見得每個老師所會的東西都是一樣的，譬如說，我現在所想到反而是國文欸，我可以用國文來舉例，譬如說國文他要訓練朗讀比賽，可是不見得每個國文老師他都會朗讀阿，他是不是可以去挑會朗讀的國文老師，那 OO 剛好師資也算蠻完整的，我今天想要比演說，那我是不是可以挑一個專門訓練演說比賽的老師，一樣的道理啊，這應該算是師資。(Mr. Maple, lines 63-68)

Translation

All kinds of resources, equipment, qualified teachers... or... even different types of teachers are part of the resources, because different teachers are good at teaching different subjects. For example, now I think of Chinese teachers, I will use Chinese teachers as an example. For example, the Chinese teachers need to train contestants for recital competitions. However, not all Chinese teachers know how to recite, not all schools can find Chinese teachers who can recite, and Lakeside happened to have all kinds of certified teachers. If I want to enter a contest today, I can pick one teacher who will focus on recital training, that’s the same thing. The qualified teacher resources should be included.

Based on this example, it is clear that Lakeside was fully equipped with qualified Chinese teachers to train students properly for all kinds of competitions. This resonated with the trend of “learning portfolios.” When a school was equipped with high-quality teachers, then students could not only boost their academic performance but also receive better training for academic competitions. Thus, they could be nurtured by their learning environment.

The above six indices provided explanations for the definition of a “good” school from the perspective of the middle-class families and teachers and school stakeholders at Lakeside. While these indices can stand alone, they are somewhat intertwined with each other. In the next section, bilingual learning, it provides explanations from the school-generated document, recruitment information. It illustrates how Lakeside reacts to the trend of education
marketization, distinguishes itself from one another, and exhibits the power relationship between text and society.

**Bilingual Learning**

In the 21st century, being multilingual opens many doors to far-stretched opportunities. For many Taiwanese, being bilingual is viewed as a necessary trend for both historical and geographical reasons. In this section, I explain how the neoliberal market trend affected Lakeside and how it reacted to the 12-Year BEC, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis. To understand the power behind Lakeside’s discourse and text, I turned to its latest recruitment information, which included admission steps, current school status, school curriculum, school mission, and scholarship incentives. It displays how Lakeside positions itself in the education market and indicates its desire for high-end “customers.”

In the era of neoliberalism, the success of a school depends on its market value. Advocates of the 12-Year BEC believed that economy should be deregulated and privatized, and all successful experiences from the private sector should, therefore, be applied to the public sector. The 12-Year BEC aimed to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas and ease pressure on middle-school students by offering exam-free admission, a reallocation of educational resources, and deregulation of special curricula. While the government tried to break the myth of “elite schools,” the incomplete measures of the 12-Year BEC aroused more qualms among parents and students. Credentialism was deeply rooted in many Taiwanese parents, and they believed that elite schools and academic success would guarantee a promising future. This century-old belief fermented by the neoliberal education reform had thus propelled private secondary schools to contemplate ways to distinguish themselves.
Under neoliberal education reform, schools and institutions were no longer spaces for knowledge transfer, but places offering services and goods tailored to their customers’ tastes. In this fierce education market, it might be prudent for school stakeholders to find ways to enhance the visualization of the “brand.” To position a brand, a “business” needs to specify what the core value is, who the target customers are, and how their rivals can compete. Under the influence of the neoliberal agenda of “competition,” “choice,” “ranking,” and “natural selection,” the myth of the “elite school” was not dispelled as proponents had suggested. Instead, when the wave of neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social reproduction met, they formed into a bigger wave of meritocracy.

Young (1994) first defined meritocracy as “IQ + Effort = Merit.” It allows one’s values to be determined by skills and aptitude and not by one’s social origin or birth. It also suggests a society ruled by the wise and capable. However, as was already made evident in previous sections, Taiwanese middle-class families utilize their advantages to enhance their offspring’s academic performance, and the result is, thus, augmented. Today, the term meritocracy is simply another version of education inequality. For the elites want to maintain their status and they do not want opportunities open to all. This idea forced Lakeside to step back and think about ways to attract its target customers with abundant appeals and a politically correct image. Though using the business phrase “brand” to describe an educational entity like Lakeside might sound unpleasant, considering the disparity of the governmental subsidies it receives compared that to that of public schools, it is a fair to call for Lakeside to position itself as a “brand.”
Figure 4.3 shows recruitment flyer distributed in 2020. It displays students’ full names with their awards, activities, pictures, and competitions they participated in. To protect personal information, the names and competitions are covered, and the pictures are pixelated. Figure 4.3 magnifies a portion of the lasted recruitment information posted on the Lakeside website. An English translation version is provided for reference. The magnified part shows Lakeside’s distinctive teaching model and school mission and the achievement of the 2019 class in the context of this emphasis on bilingual learning. Let us look at this text “Our School
PRIORITIZES English Education, Grade 7-12 Bilingual Learning, Connect International Practices and Access the World” on the recruitment flyer. This text is not neutral, and it explains the ideology, epistemology, and power relationship of class inequality and Taiwanese middle-class reproduction. Since the analysis of CDA is complicated, historical, and spatialized, I use Figure 4.4 to present it.

On Lakeside’s recruitment flyer, “bilingual” education is the top selling point, which not only reflects the dominant ideology of ministry-mandated courses but sends out the message that, with the ability to communicate in English, the students hold a ticket to “Connect Interactional Practices and Access the World.” However, this text and discourse is full of ideology and power. To understand the text’s situated meanings, the reasons are listed as follows.

Figure 4.4. CDA Interpretation of Lakeside’s Recruitment Flyer
First, the meaning of bilingual can be examined at both a societal and an institutional level. “Bilingual” is defined by Merriam-Webster (2020) as “having or expressed in two languages” or “using or able to use two languages especially with equal fluency.” This institutional explanation can be applied to all cultures. However, in the context of Taiwan society, it is narrowly defined as the ability to speak Mandarin and English. Per institutional definition, most Taiwanese students are already bilingual or multilingual due to Taiwan’s unique geographic location and historical background (see chapter 1). For Lakeside’s promotional purposes, however, the definition of “bilingual learning” was specifically focused on the ability to speak English. After WWII, the influence of Eurocentrism has become gradually noticeable and English is considered an official language around the world. This dominant ideology has trickled down from the 12-Year BEC to the recruitment flyers of Lakeside. On the flyer, Lakeside put stress on the text of “bilingual” learning environment, its priority to English education, and the emphasis on authentic English learning with qualified native speakers. This language learning environment gives parents a hint that instead of sending students to afterschool programs to enhance the academic performance of English subject, Lakeside provides thorough, lively, and life-changing curriculum for students seeking for access to global culture.

Second, language learning is correlated with the location of Taiwan. Taiwan is an island surrounded by oceans with no bordering countries. This geographical situation has made Taiwanese parents value the ability to be multilingual. Especially, in this era of globalization, language ability helps one to be “international” and to have global awareness. Still, for Taiwanese citizens to become “international,” they must be equipped with the ability to speak English in order to “Access the World.” Eurocentrism has deeply influenced many aspects of
daily life in Taiwan, the idea of “World” included not just Taiwan, but those states which lead world economy. This text is produced under the dominant ideology which valorizes English and legitimates it as the “second” language for Taiwanese people. It downplays the fact that English is not one of Taiwan’s mother tongues and its acquisition took time and effort. As “ideology is pervasively present in language” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3). Taiwanese daily discourse is a combination of Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, Japanese, English, and aboriginal languages, and Taiwanese ideology shapes and is being shaped with the usage of multiple languages. There is no official “second” language. Hence, to distinguish itself from the education market, Lakeside responded with this seemingly inevitable trend of globalization by valuing “bilingual” learning with a focus on English education.

As can be inferred from above, the absolute location of Taiwan has influenced most citizens’ viewpoint towards learning acquisition. Building on the second reason, the domestic geographic situation also plays a crucial role in the development of different regions. The Central Mountain Range divides Taiwan in two. The terrain of the western portion is relatively flat, while mountains cover the eastern parts. Because of this geography, the western parts are much more advanced with local transportation and modern buildings compared to that of the eastern part. The heart of Taiwan is in the northern section, where the capital resides. It is here, in this “good business climate,” that neoliberalism had its greatest impact in recent years (Harvey, 2005). Hence, the imbalance of educational resources in the north and south is constantly under debate by educators and politicians in Taiwan. Since Taipei is marketed as the “face” of Taiwan, resources were also centered on infrastructure in the education budget. Because of the diverse population and culture constituted by different racial and ethnic groups, citizens in Taipei have more opportunities to utilize English as well as other languages compare to residents in other
counties. Hence, when this text is interpreted in the context of Bell County, in its societal level, English learning can be also portrayed as an indicator of power and status. For the education gap between rural and urban is perceivable through language learning. Hence, combining the historical and geographic reasons above, being “bilingual” (in Lakeside’s context, it means Mandarin and English) implies one’s high social status and thus shows one’s ability to be international and further to access the world.

Fourth, in order to get the attention of the “able” students and “motivated” parents, the correlation between “English Education” and a promising future is intensified. As has been repeatedly stated, the geographic situation and historical background of Taiwan make a lot of citizens put emphasis on the “Ability to Access the World.” English is listed as one of the dominant subjects on almost all standardized examinations. In the era of neoliberalism, with the freedom to manipulate its school-developed curriculum, Lakeside provides a variety of choices of language-related courses. It not only shows its ambition to become the pioneer of “bilingual” learning school in central Taiwan, but also reiterates its core belief of maintaining the traditional and dominant curriculum. Hence, those who value academic success will find Lakeside as the right place to keep up with global trends and maintain, if not advance, the performance on ministry-mandated standardized examinations. In short, this discourse diffuses the Eurocentrism ideology and dominant culture, and it targets the parents who are more ambitious for their children.

Under the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, the essence of a “good” school is enhanced with some market colors. The findings indicated that the rapport between teachers and students/parents, sources of student body, student exam rate, school-developed curriculum, the interaction between staff, the teaching aids and school infrastructure, and school mission are
factors that determine the value of a “good” school. Due to the competitive characteristic of the Taiwanese education market and the expectation of rewards of academic achievement, more and more middle-class parents hope to put their offspring into a learning environment that can be beneficial to their children. Thus, the schools need to contemplate ways to distinguish themselves and maintain sustainability.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the findings of two research questions were elaborated on. Examining the case study in central Taiwan, the first question examined the perpetuated social structure and its influence on educational attainment through the use of capital from the middle-class families’ viewpoint. It led to the second question of the definition of a “good” school by the middle-class families and teachers in Taiwan. Under the influence of neoliberalism, schools and institutions had become more than places of knowledge transmission, but arenas that gathered like-minded children and hard-working teachers who could help guard a school’s good reputation. It also addressed how the market trend of education reform changed the school mission and philosophy of a private secondary school in Taiwan. To distinguish oneself in the fierce competition of the education market, private secondary schools in Taiwan needed to establish unique characteristics and recruit students according to their interests. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings of chapter 4, and offer some suggestions for future researchers.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study is to understand Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction and the responses of teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. Understanding the transformations to Taiwanese society brought on by low birth rate, globalization, and internationalization, the government thus mandated the 12-Year BEC and prolonged compulsory education. Proponents suggested that prolonging compulsory education would lessen academic pressure placed on middle-school students, bridge the educational gap between urban and rural areas, and better allocate educational resources (NAER, 2017). The new education policies promoted the usage of a “learning portfolio” to assist “exam-free admission” to high schools. However, due to unforeseen factors, these worthy goals might not be realized. The century-old belief of credentialism together with the incomplete measures of the 12-Year BEC have increased, rather than lessened the uncertainty of Taiwanese parents and students. Despite the initial intentions of the state, the 12-Year BEC has acted as a manifesto of reassurance, using the social concepts of “autonomy” and “freedom to choose” to coax resource allocation and further cement the established social order.

Utilizing neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s concepts about social and cultural reproduction as theoretical framework, a case study was conducted at a private secondary school in central Taiwan. Schooling, according to Bourdieu (1979/1984, 1991) is “symbolic violence,” by legitimizing the dominant cultures, pedagogic actions reproduced social inequality and added exclusion to certain disciplines and group of people. Bourdieu (1979/1984) further described an educational system as “one of the fundamental agencies of the maintenance of the social order” (p. 388). Hence, to secure an educational advantage, middle-class families might demand more
from schools. The overarching research questions for this study are as follows. Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

Seven middle-class families along with five schoolteachers and one administrator participated in this study. Their viewpoints towards education were examined in the context of Lakeside’s school curriculum and the 12-Year BEC policy to understand middle-class educational strategies and education marketization. I applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA) as two data analysis methods. The findings indicated that the volume of capital holdings correlates with one’s educational attainment, and that neoliberalism has slowly changed the essence of education. In this chapter, I summarize the findings, discuss their relation to the literature review and theoretical framework, fulfill the aims and objectives of this study, offer my personal viewpoint, and state the contributions I made to the fields of educational inequality and social exclusion, neoliberalism, and curriculum studies.

Two main themes emerged from the results: meritocracy and marketization of education. The findings from the first question showed that the inherited resources and the volume of capital of parents directly affects the family’s perception towards middle school choice. This choice further influences children’s expectation towards their academic outcome and educational trajectory. The findings of the second question answered how a good school was defined in the neoliberal era. They demonstrated a power imbalance within the education market behind the themes of traditional and new. They also shed light on how a private secondary school delivered
services and goods to its customers in order to create a virtuous cycle of inviting more
customers, increasing its publicity and maintaining sustainability.

**Meritocracy**

In chapter 1, I used *meritocracy* in italics to indicate that it holds a specific meaning in
the context of this study. Broadly speaking, *meritocracy* means a society values intelligence and
aptitudes above all else, and it allows one’s value be determined by one’s skills and often
through examinations (Kennedy & Power, 2010; Young, 1994). This idea resonates with the
deeply rooted Taiwanese belief in credentialism that the best way to access one’s merits is
through academic achievement. However, the dominant groups are vested with more resources
and volume of capital, and they believe academic success means holding a ticket to power and
status. Thus, after the implementation of the 12-Year BEC, the notion of *meritocracy* in
education was not immune to corruption. This system propagated the benefits of academic
success and led to the prosperity of elite schooling, and further made elite schools more
exclusive, and social mobility more difficult. Hence, a new definition of meritocracy, linked to
elitism, has emerged, and evolved into a new characteristic of education inequality in Taiwanese
society.

The findings indicated that these seven middle-class families, vested with clear
educational strategies in mind, hoped their culture could be reproduced not just at home but
through education as well. By sending their offspring to a high performing private secondary
school, these parents purposefully drew a line of demarcation and hoped their children could
receive positive influence, develop certain attitudes, and achieve academic success with “people
like them.” Meritocratic education used to put attention on an individual’s aptitude and
achievement rather than social class and origin (Kennedy & Power, 2010; Young, 1994).
However, understanding the dynamic nature of social mobility, these seven middle-class families hoped to maintain, if not increase, their social mobility through the accomplishment of educational qualification. The idea of new meritocracy can be discussed in the following three categories: necessity, taste, and identity.

**Necessity**

To these seven middle-class informants, an excellent educational qualification is viewed as a necessity. As Bourdieu (1979/1984) mentioned, economic power keeps the necessity at arm’s length. With great volume of economic capital and seeing academic success as the path to power and status, these parents pondered over the rate of return from middle school choice. According to them, the decision of middle-school choice cannot be done in a perfunctory manner, for it is a crucial educational stage. Hence, as good as the free-tuition policy in public schools from the 12-Year BEC might sound, they look at education as a long-term investment, and they are willing to pay more for what they perceive as better services and goods. Thus, after multiple contemplations, sending their offspring to a high performing private secondary school was deemed to be the best decision.

Though not directly stated by informants or school itself, Lakeside functions as an elite school, and utilizes certain selective methods. The admission examinations and high tuition indicate that Lakeside is an academically and financially selective school, the criteria these parents valued the most when they chose a middle school (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Khan, 2011). Through the admission examinations, students are automatically sorted into different categories, thus, their children have higher chance to get along with like-minded peers. These parent informants’ ideas resonated with Yoon et al. (2018) study
in that they valued the socio-economic characteristics of the school and believed selective admission through economic capital helped their children get acquainted with concurring peers.

The informants also understood that the pedagogic actions were mostly done in a top-down model and standardized examinations, such as the CAP, are still the mainstay of admission to high school and university. The opportunity to take advantage of afterschool academic learning programs would increase their chances of success and help them access positional goods. Though the practices of “free-exam admission” and the usage of the “learning portfolio” are widely broadcasted, after the mandate of the 12-Year BEC, the CAP is still the predominant method for high school admission. In these parents’ views, the usage of the “learning portfolio,” was a game ingeniously designed for the powerful and rich stratum due to its lack of standards and measures. All kinds of talents and aptitudes could be listed, leading to an absence of distinction. Hence, these parent informants believed the traditional schooling, with more emphasis on academic learning, would be more suitable for their children.

Taste

Bourdieu’s cultural capital is in relation to one’s taste. Though the formation of taste and attitude is not easily detectable at school or through interviews, according to the findings, it could be inferred that these seven middle-class parents want to extend the influence of middle-class attitude formation not just at home, but also at this elite school. According to the self-reported demographic questionnaire, all of the parent informants had a higher education degree and demonstrated a higher ambition for their children’s education planning (Bourdieu, 1973, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Chesters, 2015; DiMaggio, 1982; English, 2009; Jæger 2009; Košutić, 2017; Pitzalis & Porcu, 2017; Rasmusson, 2016). These students are still at the middle-school stage, their future is not yet written. However, from the strategic educational
blueprints that their parents made for them, it is evidential that these parents see a future different from their present and had high expectations for their children. Classical instrument lessons, art classes, and overseas trips all illustrated the pursuit of these parents for a higher level of education, and ultimately, a higher quality of life for their children. To them, taste and attitude formation are equally important. Besides studying hard, they also want their children to play hard, cultivate taste, and formulate the appropriate class-based attitude.

**Identity**

The findings indicated that one’s volume of social capital correlated with the search for identity. The literature review in chapter 2, studies (Carolan & Matthews, 2015; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Gabay-Egozi, 2016; Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017; Groves and O’Connor, 2018; Kosunen, 2014; Miller et al., 2016; Siah et al., 2018; Stacey, 2016) showed that when making a school choice, parents were influenced by volume of capital, student body character, school reputation, social networks, geographical location, parental involvement, and language instruction. The Lakeside example demonstrated that, to achieve academic success, these seven middle-class parents believed at the congruent companions are essential to their offspring’s schooling.

By consulting their social network and navigating the strong and weak ties, these parent informants defined “who they are and who they are not” in their middle school choice. Their opinions aligned with the study of Miller et al. (2016) in that Lakeside provided an exclusive social network for students to learn with homogeneous study bodies. Miller et al. explored that exclusiveness of school choice in a Jewish community, while my Lakeside study investigated a similar exclusiveness through academic performance rather than ethnicity. The neighbors were usually acquainted through the choice of residential areas. The zip code was decided by one’s
economic autonomy and cultural taste. These factors resonated with Lyken-Segosebe and Hinz’s (2015) findings that the economically-privileged tended to choose better residential areas. Thus, gathering opinions from neighbors reinforced the social identity the parents had of themselves.

The three characteristics of necessity, taste, and identity are intertwined with each other. The century-old belief of credentialism shows no sign of abating in Taiwan, and the feeling of privilege brought on by academic success is common given that it is highly valued and is often attributed to one’s power and status. Thus, to these seven middle-class families, it was essential for them to utilize capital to help maintain their children’s advantage in school. For parents, Lakeside provides the academic exclusiveness they are looking for.

**Marketization of Education**

By the turn of the 21st century, neoliberalism had spread to many countries and Taiwan was no exception, though it was adopted with some Taiwanese characteristics (Mao, 2015). The neoliberal ideas of deregulation, competition, and choices were embedded in the 12-Year BEC, which aimed to empower individuals and make schooling a more constructive environment to develop social adaptability. It allowed schools in different regions to structure their own curriculum and to develop character. The advocates hoped that, by doing this, they could retain elite students in their catchment areas and appropriately allocate education resources (MOE, 2020a). However, this neoliberal agenda of “choice,” “competition,” “ranking,” and “natural selection” had its consequences in the education market. Since most Taiwanese families are looking forward to the rewards of credentialism, schools, as the knowledge providers, must search for methods to maintain sustainability and good reputations.

Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum, the definition of a “good” is rooted in a hybrid of traditional and new cultural viewpoints. While the parent
Informants acknowledged the inevitable changes brought on by the 12-Year BEC, they indicated that “high student success rate” is still their top priority when defining a “good” school. As a customer, the parents believe league tables are the most practical indices for outsiders to judge a school’s performance, and students see them as beacons of their brighter future. As a “business,” Lakeside needs to exploit its homogeneous student body from a harmonious social class as an economic strength, and propagate its teaching and learning results through the demonstration of league tables.

Lakeside is a high performing private secondary school with an outstanding student success rate. The neoliberal trend has impacted Taiwanese education tremendously and forces institutions to contemplate ways to distinguish themselves within the education market. Lakeside updates their equipment and infrastructure regularly to keep up with the pace of modernization. It also remodeled its classrooms to allow teachers to integrate technology into education. In the era of globalization, the update of technology inevitably requires teachers to receive frequent training with the latest equipment and facilities.

What’s more, Lakeside integrated a cosmopolitan view with local Taiwanese culture to develop its varied curriculum. It emphasizes a clear school mission of “bilingual learning.” Lakeside is viewed as the mantle of meritocracy where middle-class privilege, power, and status are sustained. Due to the island’s unique historical background and geographical location, most Taiwanese are bilingual or multilingual in daily conversation. However, the text “bilingual learning” in the recruitment information of Lakeside has a situated meaning, teaching the use of Mandarin and English with equal fluency. For one thing, as a post-colonial country, Taiwan has adopted Eurocentrism for decades. Being able to express oneself in English paves the way for not just local but international opportunities. For English is not only highly valued as a language...
but also as a dominant subject on standardized exams. Lakeside provides students with distinct resources, from more English classes, to conversation classes with native speakers, to authentic study abroad programs.

As Connell (2013) stated that “[e]ducation itself cannot be commodified; but access to education can be” (p. 99). Lakeside demonstrates its versatility by combining traditional and new trends. By focusing on the traditional manner of “teaching to the test,” the dominant national curriculum, and the individual autonomy of students with broader choices with the school-developed curriculum, Lakeside serves as the quintessential example of a hybrid neoliberal school. Its emphasis on academic success allows those elite students to compete with like-minded peers, and its diversity of curriculum allows students to cultivate taste and formulate class-based attitudes according to their interests. Education marketization has forced Lakeside to provide a higher quality of services and goods to invite more customers and has fundamentally changed the essence of schooling to be a mix of old and new traditions.

**Limitations**

The literature review of studies within the past five years (2014 - 2018) shed light on the nature of modern education market through the discourse of parental school choice. The logic and impact of neoliberalism should be examined both globally and locally. As thorough as the literature reviews was, specific global localities might offer exceptions to the findings. This study was relatively small-scale with 20 participants. Their perspectives present a potential for subconscious bias. Parents’ perceptions might also change over time due to their children’s learning circumstance and performance. When studying middle-school choice, researchers in the future might follow the target families to conduct longitudinal studies post-middle school to
determine whether the influence of economic, cultural, and social capital embedded in parental choice wanes throughout different educational stages.

As for the research site, I turned to Lakeside as a representative case of social and cultural classification and drew parallels with other private secondary schools in Taiwan. I do not claim that this private secondary school is representative nor that researchers should generalize from it to understand other public secondary schools in Taiwan. By no means do I try to silence other classes’ voices, nor do I try to normalize middle-class families’ perspectives. This study was not intended to find a solution for this century-old condition, credentialism. Instead, by understanding the daily practices at Lakeside, I try to invite scholars, practitioners, policymakers, teachers, and parents to join a conversation and to provide food for thought for future education reform.

The study excluded factors such as birth rank and gender, and it focused mainly on the influence of the 12-Year BEC on parental middle-school choice. Therefore, if the interviewed child was not the first born in the family, he or she might just follow the same educational path that his or her parents made for older siblings. What’s more, even under the same roof, not all children enjoy the same amount of attention when it comes to education. Gender might be a lurking factor that affected parents’ perspectives towards children’ education trajectory. While it was not directly indicated, when the interviewed children were male, parents showed higher anticipation towards their career choice, i.e. medical doctor. Some parent informants indicated that they made different choices for their children because of the changing nature of education policies. Since the implementation of the 12-Year BEC was officially implemented in 2019, it is relatively new. It was unclear whether these parents would have made the same decision prior to the implementation of the 12-Year BEC. During the time of interviews, they showed more
doubts and worries than trusts towards the mandate of the 12-Year BEC. Had the 12-Year BEC proved to be trustworthy, these parents might make different middle-school choice.

**Recommendations**

This study contributes to the fast-growing research fields of education inequality and education marketization, from the Taiwanese middle-class perspective. It demonstrates that education gentrification is not only a micro-level phenomenon in the U.S., but also a prominent factor in macro-level global discourse. What’s more, it provides a unique lens for educators to examine education inequality and class discrepancy by “studying up” (Nader, 1972). It sheds light on the perennial hot-button issues of credentialism and school choice and their impacts on class reproduction. While the middle-class population has expanded rapidly in developed countries, the voices within this sizeable population are often less examined. Most studies on class inequality in education often focus on those with low socioeconomic backgrounds and ignore the fact that class discrepancy can and does exist within the same social echelon. Thus, amplifying middle-class voices and examining these issues from the dominant viewpoint clears up this complexity and adds to the contemporary understanding of education inequality.

Next, the responses of schoolteachers and school stakeholders to education marketization demonstrated that implementation of neoliberal policies can be effective and life-changing to students as well as parents, and the success of institutions such as Lakeside can be duplicated. To combat the built-in belief of credentialism, we need to first understand how it has continued to perpetuate in Taiwanese society. The expansion of compulsory education in Taiwan demands thorough examination and consideration, and pathways to academic success should be highlighted and communicated to all populations. Thus, the detailed and prudent educational strategies demonstrated by middle-class families in this study shows that, though there might not
be enough room for everyone to be a winner, it would be helpful for parents of all classes to have a clear educational blueprint.

The literature review in chapter 2 provides a thorough narrative review on school choice and its relationship to neoliberalism from 2014 - 2018. It outlined the effect of neoliberalism on the Taiwanese education and married it to Bourdieu’s concepts of social and cultural reproduction. It examined the latest literature on education inequality and education marketization around the globe and provided a global context in which to examine these issues in Taiwan.

For parents and children, this study helps to clarify education as a passive and active civil right. To embrace individual autonomy, they might consider taking active responsibility to structure clear educational blueprints for their offspring, rather than passively following the State policy. Success can be defined in various ways, and Taiwanese parents and children need to understand that academic success is just one pathway. To break the myth of credentialism, a thorough blueprint that is adaptive to children’s needs and interests is crucial. Only by actively embracing individual autonomy can the parents help their next generation to achieve success on their own terms.

For teachers and school stakeholders, this study demonstrates that, in this neoliberal era, a “good” school must be defined in the context of both old and new measures. Because standardized exams are still widely practiced in Taiwan, teachers need to be fluent in the “teaching to the test” curriculum but also be versatile enough to handle the school-developed curriculum in order to make subjects more applicable to real life. To maintain sustainability and reputation, schools should focus not just on students’ academic performance but also
opportunities for extracurricular activities. That way, a “good” school under the neoliberal influence can be well-balanced between traditional and modern.

Policymakers reading this study will understand that to fight against the century-old habit of credentialism, the measures of the 12-Year BEC needs to be more clearly explained. Raising the average educational level is not going to fundamentally alleviate the power imbalance ingrained in credentialism. While some are looking for academic success, others are looking for the benefits made possible by other aptitudes. The policymakers need to provide practical alternatives such as proper technical training or job opportunities. Otherwise, raising the average educational level in Taiwan will not only expand education inequality but also inflate education credentials. The policymakers should demonstrate that all vocations are essential in Taiwan, and all careers should be equally respected.

Conclusion

In Taiwan, credentialism is prevalent and secondary school students are suffering under a rigid education system and class inequality that produces debilitating anxiety related to academic failure. The mandate of the 12-Year BEC is viewed by Taiwanese leaders as a timely remedy to this phenomenon, and its advocates hope it will slowly bridge the gap between urban and rural, localize unique school characteristics, and lessen the influence of meritocracy. However, the incomplete measures of the 12-Year BEC altered the game of gauging one’s aptitude through entrance exams by subtly and unintentionally inserting the factor of social origin. On the one hand, the intrinsic disparity of volume of capital in different households is genetic to education inequality. On the other hand, the mandate of the State policies legitimizes this zero-sum game via class reassurance and resources redistribution. Using a case study research, this study provided explanations for cultural reproduction and education marketization from the
perspectives of seven middle-class families, five schoolteachers, one school principal at a high
performing private secondary school in central Taiwan and answered two overarching research
questions.

The findings can be discussed in two themes: meritocracy and marketization of
education. It indicated that, in the context of the 12-Year BEC, these seven middle-class families
calculated the rate and of return and exploited economic, cultural, and social capital to the
maximum. They felt the pressure of gradual middle-class expansion and hoped to secure their
positions through prudent educational strategies. They felt the 12-Year BEC was not treating
them “equally” as well. Thus, for their high-academic-performing children, they believed
Lakeside provided an amiable learning environment and met the demands and needs of their
children. The admission exams filter target students both academically and financially and, thus,
at Lakeside, students can learn and build a sense of identity with people like them. The neoliberal
influences of marketization changed the essence of teacher and pupil interaction. Mindful, caring
teachers and better educational services and goods are the new indices that modern parents seek
from a “good” school. An effective school should combine traditional measures with innovative
ideas.

This study is distinctive and informative in that it examines educational inequality from a
middle-class perspective and analyzes education marketization by considering a successful
example in rural Taiwan. Analysis of middle-class educational strategies makes it clear that the
century-old habit of credentialism will not be easily broken. Instead, their viewpoints give
policymakers something to think about. In the future, when thinking about providing “education
equality,” policymakers should consider the endogenous capital disparity among different
families and consider the varying aptitudes of individual students. Instead of lessening the short-
term stress of entrance exams, they should view education as a long-term goal and provide alternatives to students with abilities that may not fit into the traditional academic framework.

This study explores the impact of the century-old belief of credentialism and social and cultural reproduction from the perspectives of Taiwanese middle-class families and responses of teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. Though some things are hard to break, such as credentialism and social and cultural reproduction, we should not lose hope. The Little Prince said, “What makes the desert beautiful, … is that somewhere it hides a well” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2004, p. 84). Though the myth of credentialism continues, we can be the first generation to mollify its influence in Taiwan. By offering alternative choices towards job training and vocation and not just focusing narrowly on raising the average education level, we can help to change the common attitude in this society. Not everyone needs to define success through academic achievement, and everyone can be a winner with suitable education measures.
APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Amanda Yang
   Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
      Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 4, 2019

RE: IRB# E11926

TITLE: School Choice and Marketisation of Education: Middle-Class Values in a Private High School in Taiwan


Review Date: 10/31/2019

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 11/4/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 11/3/2022

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1. 2a.b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: Three years

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation. The principal’s supervisor must also sign the school administrator consent form.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B. RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Protocol for Conducting Case Studies of Middle-Class Strategies and Education Market

Overview of the Case Study

To examine the intertwining of 12-Year BEC and middle-class strategies. The purpose is to understand Taiwanese middle-class cultural reproduction and the responses of teachers and school stakeholders to education marketization under the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum. How do they achieve the decision of middle school choice? How do school administrators and teachers address the education market? Theoretical frameworks built on Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and social reproduction and neoliberalism.

Research Questions

Under the mandate of the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum,

1. How do Taiwanese middle-class families secure advantages in school?
2. How is a “good” school defined and measured by parents, students, teachers, and school stakeholders?

Methodology

1. Contact gatekeepers in Lakeside Secondary School
2. Collect ministry-mandated curriculum, and all the following data about Lakeside High School, such as enrollment criteria, league tables, basic demography of the interviewed families, curriculum, school-developed curriculum, high academic performance students (top 10%) in the 8th grade, and observe teacher-pupil interactions during and off classes
3. Check Lakeside calendar and check interviewees’ schedules and availability
4. On-site observations will be carried with limited intrusions to students and classroom actives
5. Interviews with high academic performance 8th graders, their parents, their homeroom and subject teachers, and school administrator will be conducted
6. Imagines of league tables at all corners of Lakeside Secondary School will be captured
7. Data analysis methods: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA)

Tentative Outline for the Case Study Report

1. State policies that influence parental decision about secondary school choice, parents of all socioeconomic background, teachers, and school stakeholders
2. Data collection: a. documents: government documents such as the 12-Year BEC and education statistics. School-generated documents such as examination league tables, admission files, and school-developed curriculum. b. interviews: seven middle-class families (seven dyads), five teachers, and one school administrator. c. observation.
3. Two main streams, cultural practices of the middle-class families and education marketization
4. Educational and social equity not just for the capital-light but also the capital-heavy
5. Findings will be laid out thematically. Following the order of the overarching questions. The increasing teacher responsibility and accountability aroused by market system of natural selection
6. Schools are no longer knowledge transmitters but also product producers and class filters
APPENDIX C. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

School Administrator Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Gender:

Interviewee:

Teaching Subject:

Highest Educational Qualification:

Tenure:

_____ Described Purpose of Study
_____ What will be done with the data
_____ How long interview will take
_____ Confidentiality Information
_____ Read and Signed Consent Form (two copies)
_____ Personal Information
_____ Record

Interview Questions

1. How did you hear about Lakeside?

2. When and for what reason that you decided to take the job of principle at Lakeside?

3. Can you describe your educational philosophy?

4. You have worked at both private and public schools, and now you work at Lakeside. Can you describe that in the 21st century, when it comes to the term “to access the world,” what are the advantages of Lakeside?

5. On the school website, it highlights the special curricula and classes that distinguish Lakeside from other secondary schools. What were the inspirations and the implementation of the curriculum? Have you participated in the decision-making process?
6. Do these special curricula enhance the school recruitment and raise the school popularity?

7. How do you feel about the "fair and equal" education reform? Do you think education should be a fair and equal competition and emphasize on educational equality?

8. The education market is fierce these days, how do you feel about the teachers taking training courses on "marketing strategies"?

9. Does the school budget for recruitment increase every year? (Would you utilize this budget, to increase the level of academic performances by purchasing hardware and software...)

10. How do you advertise Lakeside to increase the visibility?

11. Under the reform of the 12-Year BEC, students have multi-admission methods to school. Most parents have high expectations on their children once they chose Lakeside, then what will school do to meet these parents' expectations?

12. How much do you value your interactions with parents?

13. How do you increase the performance of students?

14. How do you maintain the performance of teachers?

15. In comparison to other private secondary schools in central Taiwan, how do you increase Lakeside's recruitment rate?

16. Any questions you would like to add?

(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

------ End recording
APPENDIX D. SCHOOL TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teachers Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Gender:
Teaching Subject:
Highest Educational Qualification:
Tenure:

Interviewee:

_____ Described Purpose of Study
_____ What will be done with the data
_____ How long interview will take
_____ Confidentiality Information
_____ Read and Signed Consent Form (two copies)
_____ Personal Information
_____ Record

Interview Questions

1. How do you hear about Lakeside?
2. Have you taught in public schools before? If so, why did you choose Lakeside?
3. Please describe your educational philosophy.
4. How do you define “effective teaching”? Should the teaching performances be evaluated by school administrators?
5. How much time do you spend, in average, during a week, interacting with parents or dealing with students on non-academic-related issues?
6. Besides teaching, do you think interacting with parents/students help with their learning? If so, please explain.
7. Do you consider Lakeside to be a good school? How do you define a good school?

8. Do you feel pressure about student recruitment and students’ success rate from the school administrators and stakeholders?

9. Regarding curriculum-structuring, do you have any input? Does school administrators welcome your input?)

10. How is the curriculum at Lakeside different from that of public schools?

11. What influences, if any, does a Parent Teacher Association have on you?

12. How are your interactions with parents during PTA meetings?

13. How do you react to the league tables about students’ academic performances on the wall at the entrance of school?

14. How do you increase students’ academic performance?

15. How do you maintain your students’ motivation in learning?

16. Are there any school activities stand out from other schools in the region? If so, please explain.

17. If anyone ask for recommendation, will you recommend Lakeside?

18. What, if anything, can a school do to raise its popularity? Please describe.

19. Anything else you would like to add?

(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

______ End recording
APPENDIX E. PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Parents Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Gender:
Age:
Interviewee:

_____ Described Purpose of Study
_____ What will be done with the data
_____ How long interview will take
_____ Confidentiality Information (State: all the answers will not interfere with your kid’s school performance and social life)
_____ Read and Signed Consent Form (two copies)
_____ Self-reported Questionnaire
_____ Record

Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the education reform? Do you think education should be universal, free, and equal for all?
2. Please describe your process towards secondary school choice.
3. When did you start making plans for your child’s secondary school? Why did you choose Lakeside?
4. Have you reviewed any information and resources prior to choosing Lakeside?
5. Have you discussed with your acquaintance (i.e. relatives, neighbors, friends, or classmates) for their opinions in choosing a secondary school? If so, anything in particular?
   ➢ You chose Lakeside for your kid
      • for academics or trade (Academics/Trade)
because it was close to home (Proximity)
to get away from certain peers (Peers Away)
to be close to certain peers (Peers Close)
because a family member studied here in the past (Family Legacy)

6. Have you compared Lakeside with other private secondary schools in the region?

7. How did you know the recruitment information? Did you check Lakeside’s website?

8. Did you make the final decision yourself, or did other members in your family (i.e. spouse, grandparents, and children) have a say in decision making?

9. Did your child participate in the decision making of school choice?

10. What are your hobbies? How do you spend your leisure time? How do you describe your hobbies and social life and their influence on your child?

11. Was there any requirement for technology, software, or hardware that listed as must-have before enrolling your child into Lakeside?

12. Please describe the types of technologies/hardware that you feel are a must for education.

13. Does your child participate (the eighth grader) in any after-school activities? Why did you choose these activities for your child? Are there any special skills that you want your child to learn? Please describe.

14. Does your child (the eighth grader) participate in any shadow education/tutoring/skill trainings? If so, please elaborate.

15. How do you make plans for your child’s summer/winter breaks?

16. Do you make plans for your child’s time after school? Or do you give them the freedom to pick their own activities?

17. Lakeside is known for its bilingual education. How much do you value the experience of travel/study abroad? Is there any country you like the most?
18. According to the demographic questionnaire, you live in _____, do you pick up your child to and from school or let them take the school bus? (Is it more convenient to take the school bus? Does taking school bus affect his/her sleep schedule? If you prefer to pick up your child, is it for safety reason? How do you interact with your children during pick-ups?)

19. How do you describe the role of teachers at Lakeside in your child’s education/learning experience?

20. How often do you interact with teachers? (by phone, in person, or...)

21. What are your expectations for Lakeside?

22. Anything else you would like to add?

(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

_____ End recording
APPENDIX F. CHILDREN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Children Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Gender:

Age:

Interviewee:

_____ Described Purpose of Study
_____ What will be done with the data
_____ How long interview will take
_____ Confidentiality Information (State: all the answers will not interfere with your school performance and social life)

_____ Read and Signed Consent Form (two copies)

_____ Personal Information

 _____ Record

Interview Questions

1. How did you hear about Lakeside?

2. When did you decide to attend Lakeside? How did you discuss your decision with your parents? (Did you have a choice in choosing the school?)

   ➢ You chose Lakeside
     • for academics or trade (Academics/Trade)
     • because it was close to home (Proximity)
     • to get away from certain peers (Peers Away)
     • to be close to certain peers (Peers Close)
     • because a family member attended here in the past (Family Legacy)
3. Have you discussed your choice with your friends?

4. How do you define a good student?

5. Are there any school activities that you like the most? If yes, please describe.

6. What do you think about school's infrastructure? (Classrooms and technology obsolete, modern, …) Please explain.

7. What do you think about school's software? (Teachers, computer software) Please explain.

8. Among different classes, what is your favorite class? Please describe the class interactions.

9. What's your ideas about school uniform?

10. How do you see yourself when you are in Lakeside's uniform? How do you feel when you run into your public-school peers while wearing Lakeside uniform?

11. Do you attend any shadow education/tutoring/skill learning? If yes, please describe.


13. How do you socialize with your classmate when you are not in school? Please describe.

14. Have you acquired any artistic or musical skills? (Passed certification/ attended performances or competitions)

15. If you or your friends are going to have a birthday party, where do you want it to be held?

16. What do you usually do when you have long vacation? Do you make plans?

17. Have you set an academic goal for yourself?

18. Do you like Lakeside? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

19. Do you think your parents' occupations have influence on you? Please explain.

20. Is there anything else you would like to add?

(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

_____ End recording
APPENDIX G. SELF-REPORTED DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

Demographic Questionnaire

- Name: ____________________ (Parent of ____________________)
- Gender: ____________________
- Birth year: ____________________
- Status of Marriage: ____________________
- You have ____________________, and they are in the grade of,
  the oldest ____________________,
  the second ____________________,
  the third ____________________;
  and the fourth ____________________.
- You reside in ____________________ County, ____________________ region
- Your highest educational qualification: ____________________
- Profession (as detailed as possible): ____________________
- Your father and grandfather's highest educational qualification and profession:
  Father: ____________________; profession (as detailed as possible):
  ____________________
  Grandfather: ____________________; profession (as detailed as possible):
  ____________________
- Approximate annual household income (Choose one)
  Less than 20,000
  20,001 to 50,000
  50,001 to 100,000
  100,001 to 200,000
  More than 200,001
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VITA

Amanda Shufang Yang was born and raised in Taiwan. She is a certified secondary school teacher and taught in a high performing secondary school in Taiwan for several years after receiving her bachelor’s degree from National Changhua University of Education. During these years, she structured part of the school-developed curriculum and was the director of study abroad program. Her teaching experience was not circumscribed in Taiwan, but also in the U.K., the U.S., and Chile. She was fortunate to learn the diverse educational cultures at first hand. With a growing interest in education equality, she decided to further her education. Her research interests include sociology of education, curriculum studies, elite schools, and inequality & social exclusion. She anticipates graduating with Doctoral of Philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction in May 2021.