Exploring the Learning Experiences of Ethnic Minority Female Students at a British University

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Social justice, Equality, Inclusion, Social mobility

- Higher education has the potential to transform students' lives and impact society. Previous studies have examined the increase in female students' involvement in higher education and its socio-cultural implications.

- This presentation will explore the experiences of ethnic minority female students, their learning opportunities, challenges, and how these experiences impact their learning experiences and satisfaction.

- Using a phenomenological approach, the study focuses on female students' perspectives at a post-1992 University in England.

Theory of Action: Bourdieusian Thinking Tools

$$(Habitus * Capital) + Field = Practice$$

Habitus
- Dispositions
- Norms
- Rules
- Principles of action and classification

Field
- Positions
- Forces (relations between positions)

Capital
- Economic
- Social
- Cultural
- Symbolic

Symbolic Capital
- Prestige
- Status
- Honour
- Makes all other forms legitimate

Cultural Capital
- Embodied
- Objectified
- Institutionalised objective (like degree)
- Long-lasting
- Cultural goods (material)

Social Capital
- Strong types (friends, family)
- Weak types (acquaintances)

Economic Capital
- Economic resources (cash and property)

Habitus → Capital → Field

Intertwining: Symbolic Capital, Social Capital, Cultural Capital, Economic Capital
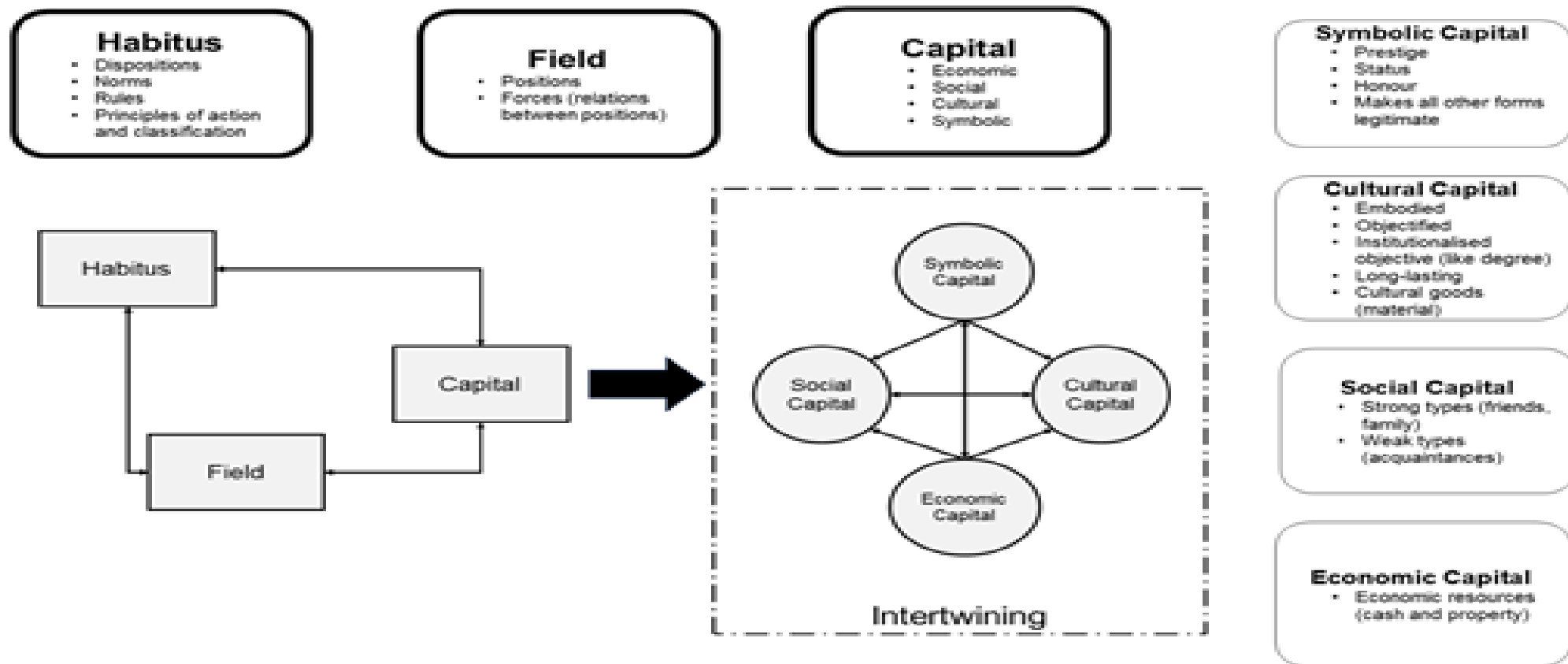
Figure 1. Pierre Bourdieu Key concepts

Teaching Boot and Shoe students
Northampton College of Technology c.1950's

Technical drawing
Northampton School of Art 1959

Senior Typing Class, 1960
Northampton College of Technology

Students relaxing by the Brampton
Building, School of Health 1992

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Within the last ten years, we've seen…

- Increasing competition

- A growing number of GEM students

- 680,000 international students/ year

- Students contributes £30 billion net

Once upon a time the

University would have served

the county

of Northamptonshire's needs….

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GEM communities: Not a homogenous group

1. Black: African or Caribbean descent

2. South Asian: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan descent

3. Chinese:

4. Mixed-Race:

5. Middle Eastern: Arab and Iranian

6. Southeast Asian: Vietnamese, Thai, and Malaysian,

Challenges Faced by GEM Students in HE

- Cultural adjustment
- Different education systems and assessment standards for international students
- Racism and discrimination
- Financial difficulties
- Deficit model
- Accommodation living black
- Academic misconduct offences
- Access to university services
- Mental health issues
- Effects of long commuting
- Non-inclusive curriculum

Methodology

- This study uses a phenomenological approach to understanding the academic, social, and cultural aspects of ethnic minority female students' learning experiences.

- The study focused on female students' perspectives at a post-1992 University in England.

- A total of eleven semi-structed interviews were conducted among undergraduate and postgraduate students participated in the study.

Factors associated with learning

Factors Associated with Learning

Content related
- Design and course structure
- Choices and options
- Critical thinking, reading and writing
- Essay dominance in assessment

Process Related
- Session designing and plan (Pre- and post-session activity)
- ABL
- Participations barriers in the sessions

'Only ever had a couple of modules that were compulsory course and then the rest of them I got to choose myself. So, I already was going into the course knowing that I'm choosing things that appeal to me and that I would like to learn more or out.''(Case 1)''

''I'm glad that tutors are giving us pre-session activity. It doesn't matter if I have time or not but before class starts, I will make sure that, yes, I know something about the pre-session activity before going into the class; this helps me keep informed and give active participation''(Case 9)

Psychological Factors

Psychological Factors
- Balancing the interest of each role (mother, student, wife and employee)

- Stress management

- Managing family related issues.

- Self-esteem and confidence

"*'So yes, due to life events such as employment loss, and visa issues, my kid's studies and they are being at home. I think the time was stressful and I think that directly and indirectly it did impact education, maybe my performance in the back of the mind'. (Case 8)*

- *'I have to be strong. I'm a mother, I'm a wife and then I am students, And then, you know, when the kids are there, they take priority, so you need to be able to share yourself into different, Cocoons, so you'll be able to manage an aspect of your life.''(Case 10)*

- *' I'm quite optimistic and I feel like, I have a lot of agency in terms of the future. (Case 2).*

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Social Factors

Social Factors

- Communication challenges

- Lack of social engagement outside of the classroom.

- Diversity and multi-nationality group

- Racism and discrimination

''It was a challenge to communicate with your peers or in online classes.''(Case 1)

''In my professional experience, i had the opportunity to collaborate with people from a different nationality, which has also helped in collaboration with my group.''(Case 9)

'It was quite difficult to get them involved. And to ask, I mean, I was working as a lead of the team, so I have to force them to send that out and to get involved in, to participate in the meetings because we don't know each other.'(Case 10)

Support Factors

- Support Factors
- Technology and online library resources
- Academic support and staff co-operation
- Delay in response from the admission team
- Friends and Family support

- *''Looking at the technology at the university, I'll be able to slide the technology know-how, the technology that we have now the helped to proceed in the same level where we have what we look for, what we had face-to-face. This is commendable… highly commendable.''(Case, 10)*

- *'The most important factor that help us grow in this pandemic is online library. I will keep mentioning the library because I love library, I also found the online academic writing resources so useful (Case, 2)''*

I take one-to-one with the librarian and the academic support staff I send my draft to them, I get it corrected and I can get that feedback. (Case, 5)

'Absolutely. I would say they were very supportive, especially the fee department. the deadline to submit our fees was extended, and they had shown an understanding in this. We do keep getting communication from the University about everything that this is the next step. So, I think in the current situation, the best way is to keep us informed this is happening.''(Case, 12)

Coping Mechanism

Coping Mechanism

- Self discipline
- Leisure hour
- Exercises and physical activity
- Positive thinking and affirmations
- Being proactive and strategic
- Social networking with friends and family
- Online classes supported the work-life balance

''We did get used to the online learning and other things and then it became better. And I think for some of us, it became much more convenient than face-to-face because it was easier to manage work-life balance.''(Case 4).

Hanging around friend even though with limitation has been reported as source of energy.

''So I just made a timetable know for my work. I've just kept Friday, Saturday for me and Sunday and weekdays for them their homework.''

''I have taken up cooking quite a lot. So I did a lot of cooking. Lot of cooking. So it helped me to stay calm''

Recommendations

- Implications for practice and policy: universities need to better support ethnic minority female students.

- Need for targeted support programs for ethnic minority female students.

- COVID-19 has worsened challenges, including digital access and technological literacy.

- Nuanced understanding of challenges and experiences is crucial for effective support.

- Inclusive and supportive higher education system could have positive impacts on individuals and society.

Conclusion

- Universities need to do more by supportive by creating more conducive teaching and learning environment for GEM/BAME female students.

- There is need for further research to better understand and support ethnic minority female students in higher education.

- The significant influence of family, friends and social networks cannot be over emphasised as it tends to provide the support needed by female GEM/BAME students to easily navigate their coping strategies while working to attain their academic pursuit.

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*Thank you
for listening*

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