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Manifestations of Differential Cultural Capital in a University Classroom: Views from Classroom Observations and Focus Group Discussions in a South African University

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Abstract

Based predominantly on Pierre Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theory, particularly his notions of cultural capital and symbolic violence, this paper explores how first year post graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) university students from diverse socio-linguistic backgrounds differ in the levels at which they understand and express themselves in classroom activities. The paper's thesis is that the diverse nature of South African classrooms presents a number of challenges not only for students but also for educators in terms of the use of English as a medium of instruction or the language for learning and teaching (LOLT). Owing to the fact that the South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 empowers both learners and educators in schools to use any of the eleven South African official languages as a LOLT wherever that is reasonably possible, students whose English backgrounds were deficient in enculturating them in the use of English as a learning tool often encounter challenges in expressing their ideas in the classroom, whether in writing or in oral presentations. The discussion is anchored in the data elicited through two data collection methods, lesson observations in a Diploma in Higher Education, Research class composed of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and through focus group discussion sessions with 40 multi-ethnic Diploma in Higher Education students from the same classroom. The data management and analysis for this study was done thematically, with views emerging from the observations and focus group discussions being clustered into superordinate themes for convenience of the discussion of the findings. The findings of this study were that students from affluent socio-economic backgrounds who enter university with a rich and relevant English linguistic capital, values and attitudes enjoy an enormous advantage compared to their counterparts whose social class and linguistic backgrounds lack the cultural capital cherished in university as conducive for educational success. The study thus recommends that the South African LiEP policy needs to be repealed so that it spells out unequivocally the LOLT especially in institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: differential cultural capital, focus group discussions, language for learning and teaching

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Introduction and Background to the Study

The on-going world-wide search for ways to rectify educational injustices has foregrounded pedagogical discourses in various fora where academics meet to compare notes on trends in their diverse educational settings. Among the issues emerging from the current global educational conferences is the view that education is failing to resolve the problem of social inequalities (Carrim & Keet, 2005). The South African Department of Education White paper 6 of 2001 outlines some of the attempts made in a bid to achieve a realistic equality of educational opportunity and outcomes but which have not yielded the desired results. Carrim and Keet (2005) further note that the determinants of race, ethnicity, social class and gender permeate the stratification role of education. They further argue that class often interacts with race, ethnicity and gender not only in the teachers' minds but also in the learners' parental perceptions and role expectations for their sons and daughters at school and in the world of work. As a result, despite the existence of educational policies enacted to promote equality and equity in educational institutions, pupils from the different social class backgrounds tend to get influenced by these expectations in their educational involvement and aspirations. For example, within the South African education context of an inclusive educational classroom, the White paper 6 legislation of 2001 stipulates that all learners regardless of the socio-cultural, socio-economic diversity or other challenges such as disability that the individual learners face, they belong in schools and classrooms where the concept of community, inclusion, collaboration, democracy and diversity should be embraced in the school philosophy and organizational system (Department of Education, White paper 6, 2001). The legislation further prescribe that there must be a commitment by institutions to educate each child to the maximum extent possible in the school and classroom he or she wishes to attend. Although this implies offering an educational curriculum that is non-discriminatory on the grounds of language, social class, race, ethnicity, disability, culture, gender or other learner attributes, educational institutions continue to reproduce these inequalities through visible and invisible pedagogies (Bernstein, 2000) or by the way educators celebrate their learners' ability to express themselves in the LOLT, which in many universities is English. Deploying Bourdieu's cultural capital theory in this study, students who demonstrate a high proficiency level in the LOLT can be considered as possessing a relevant cultural capital, which advantages them educationally (linguistic capital). On the contrary their counterparts whose ability to express themselves well in the LOLT is deficient are considered to possess a cultural capital that is not conducive to education and which often disadvantages them educationally. For instance, university students who use a home language or mother tongue that is different from their LOLT are in Bourdieu's terminology often subjected to *symbolic violence* when their LOLT is a language other than their home mother tongue. A good example of symbolic violence in the South African context of education occurred during the apartheid era when Afrikaans was imposed on students not only as a medium of instruction in schools but also as subject of study. It was the students from Afrikaans speaking social class backgrounds who enjoyed the advantage of a rich Afrikaans linguistic background (relevant cultural capital). Such students would also have endured symbolic violence where they to be forced to learn any of the vernacular languages of South Africa. It must be noted that in this study Bourdieu's concept of relevant cultural capital in educational institutions covers all forms of background knowledge such as experiences, language, values, beliefs, attitudes and other dispositions that advantage certain social groups or individuals in education over others. The paper argues that although important efforts are being made to bridge the educational gap produced by the previous regime (Christie, 2008), it would be over-optimistic for us to assume that the educational curriculum or activities offered in the South African school context would help achieve total learning equity in both processes and outcomes particularly in view of the racial, ethnic, cultural, social and economic diversity of the South African population composition. In the context of this study, learning equity is viewed as a process that transcends giving learners equality of educational opportunities to include the way they are treated in the various educational institutions they attend (Eisner, 2005). A detailed discussion of the theoretical perspectives employed to examine the indications of differences in the students' levels of cultural capital is given in the subsequent account.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Despite the view that the major perspective deployed in this study is Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theory, the views of other relevant theorists behind the explanation of educational inequalities (eg., Althusser, 1972; Apple, 2002; Bernstein, 2000; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Christie, 2008; Willis, 1977) are also employed. The rationale for this is that issues relating to social class differences are complex and multifaceted and thus call for multiple perspectives if one is to gain or generate a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the subject. The other objective of this was to demonstrate

clearly that in the South African context of education schooling serves the interests of particular individual and social groups. The aforementioned implies that education serves as a mechanism for promoting social and cultural inequalities among learners. Christie (2008) concurs by saying that in passing on differently valued knowledge to the young people educational institutions prepare them for not only different but unequal social and economic roles, for civic participation, and to take up different places in the economy. From Bowles and Gintis' (1976) assertion that there exists a correspondence between the social structural relations of the school and the relations governing activities in the workplace, it might be argued that schooling does not only engender social inequalities of class but also those based on such cultural elements as language, gender, race or ethnicity. As Bourdieu and Passeron (2002) argue, education thus reproduces and perpetuates unequal social class relations by making schooling part and parcel of a pattern where the dominant social class strives to maintain and enjoy the status quo of class inequalities that culminates in the realization of a docile or uncritical labour force with the attributes needed for a capitalist society. Theorists who subscribe to the notion of functional division of labour for society (eg., Durkheim, Parsons, Davis and Moore) regard educational inequalities as important for social order or stability. They argue that schooling is useful in creating social cohesion and would thus favour the expansion of schooling in order to prepare learners for different roles in civic and economic participation (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). According to such approaches schools thus have a conservative role in maintaining traditions and passing them on to future generations.

Contrary to the foregoing discussion, contemporary perspectives, for instance, neo-Marxists or theorists of social and cultural reproduction (eg., Althusser's, Bernstein, Bourdieu and Passeron) regard schooling as part of the problem of social inequality, rather than a solution to it. According to Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists of social and cultural reproduction such as Bourdieu (2002) educational institutions, schools, colleges and universities claim to offer equal opportunities to learners, but when the facts on the ground are examined, they do not. Instead they reproduce class inequalities and at the same time make those inequalities appear fair and just by making them look like a result of differential individual abilities in society.

Bourdieu uses the notion of forms of capital to account for educational inequalities in society and argues that possession of different levels or forms of capital (social, cultural and economic) predisposes different learners to different life chances (Msila, 2007; Spillane, Hallet & Diamond, 2008). The term cultural capital thus refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2001). Examples can include previous educational experiences, intellect and style of speech, dress, or physical appearance. Cultural capital (French: *ie. capital culturel*) is a sociological concept that has gained widespread popularity since it was first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2008). Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron first used the term in their endeavor to explain differences in children's outcomes in France during the 1960s. It has since been elaborated and developed in terms of other types of capital and in terms of higher education, for instance, in *The State Nobility* (1996). In the context of a school, college or university, it describes the forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a student has, which give them an edge over others in the school, college or university and ultimately in society (Spillane, et al., 2008). The source of such capital can be parents, who provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system.

For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation and cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status (Bourdieu, 2008). On the other hand, social capital covers resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support (Spillane et al., 2008). Bourdieu thus views social capital as 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 (Spillane et al., 2008). He (Bourdieu) later on adds the notion of symbolic capital to describe resources available to an individual on the basis of honor, prestige or recognition. In Bourdieu's (2002) assertion cultural capital is thus basically three-pronged; the embodied state, that is, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state as cultural goods such as books, technology or machines, which are the traces or realization of theories and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification, which must be set apart because it confers original properties on the cultural capital which it is assumed to guarantee (Spillane, Hallet & Diamond, 2008). For Bourdieu, economic capital covers possession of financial muscle to access the highly valued knowledge or education. It implies command over economic resources (cash, assets) while social capital entails the social net-works that are available to people and which they can obtain through certain forms

of educational knowledge, for example as members of particular educational institutions, private or public (Spillane, Hallet & Diamond, 2008).

Such a form of capital can be converted to position certain people in positions of power and authority as would be the case of former students or alumni of certain educational institutions who decide to establish an entrepreneurial network to set up or buttress their business acumen. It is in this sense that this paper maintains that in many educational institutions, all three forms of capital are instrumental in producing social inequality among learners instead of alleviating it.

Drawing on Bourdieu's social theory, the discourse of this paper posits that the distribution of education by class, race and sex is well documented as a most decisive factor in child socialization and frequently argued to be a key determinant for social inequality and unless parental or society's gender-specific expectations are re-examine it will not be easy to achieve social equity in this regard (Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu's theoretical framework on education and social inequality is premised on the view that child socialization based on social class plays a major role in perpetuating gender inequalities in society. Attempting to unpack the process in which class is reproduced and realized, Bourdieu (2008) has outlined the notion of '*habitus*', which traces social class inequality back to socialization in the human beings' various social settings, such as the family, education, economy and polity (Bourdieu, 2002). Bourdieu defines habitus as 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions and structures predisposed to function as structuring structures. Interpreting Bourdieu, Layder (2008) notes that habitus emerges as a result of socialization and people's social experience in certain backgrounds and circumstances (class, ethnicity, gender, among other determinants of inequality). People's experiences in their social settings and circumstances and their long-term occupation of a position within the social world predisposes them to approach their educational world with the knowledge and interactional resources that they have acquired in those circumstances (Layder, 2008). Bourdieu (2002) argues that class is socially constructed and so is a class-differentiated habitus. According to him, the division of the classes is not only present in the objectified state but also in the embodied state, that is in the habitus of the agent, as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action (Bourdieu, 2008:8). Drawing on Bourdieu's views, Kraus (2003) notes that through the socialization process, every agent inevitably acquires a class based habitus. That is an identity incorporating the existing division of values, beliefs, attitudes and other cultural dispositions leading to a people's experience of different life chances. Such a division (class stratification) is largely based on indicators of an individual's socio-economic status such as, level of wealth, income or education (Bilton, 2010). These class indices often define who is included in and excluded from a given realm of social life such as in accessing a highly valued educational curriculum (Bilton, 2010). It is basically some of the aforementioned indices that give rise to tacit agreement about class borders (Bourdieu, 2001). Consequently, the individuals who share similar life chances (class) would come to perceive themselves as belonging to the particular categories (class) that they have been assigned to. They even make a virtue of this affiliation so that the domination by certain individuals or groups goes without being recognized as such (Bourdieu, 2002). Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) describe processes like these as symbolic violence, which is:

... a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling (Bourdieu, 2002:2)

It works when subjective structures, the habitus, and objective structures such as class, gender or racial divisions are in accord with each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004). According to Bourdieu, traditional class stereotypes have proved to be especially harmful for different learners in education especially to those learners being subjected to symbolic violence in the educational institution because they belong to a perceived inferior social class background.

Despite having propounded a coherent theory that demonstrates how learners from different social class backgrounds usually experience education differently, Bourdieu's perspective is not without its critics. His theory has been criticized for a structural bias or cultural determinism by locating differential achievement by learners from the different social class backgrounds in their social class differences (Spillane, Hallet & Diamond, 2008). Bourdon (2004) also accuses Bourdieu's educational theory for being silent on the achievement of learners from middle class backgrounds who excel to the extent of even surpassing their counterparts from the middle class background despite lacking a relevant cultural capital. However, applying Bourdieu's perspective to an exploration of the implications of his theory for educators and learners does not necessarily suggest a deterministic view. Rather, it is to recognize that teachers and parental expectations are an important element in child socialization and have a major impact to make on the inequalities that stem from children's educational experiences as subjects and hence on the evolving individual identity and ultimate differences in their life chances. Although educational inequalities caused by class, ethnicity, race and gender stereotypes have been repeatedly documented and labeled as incongruent with social development in contemporary society

and thus they are becoming increasingly unacceptable (Christie, 2008), research shows that parents, peers, teachers among other people, continue to hold and reinforce class, race and ethnic stereotypes in many cases (Christie, 2008; Bourdieu, 2002).

Bourdieu's perspective dovetails with Bernstein's framework in explaining how educators help maintain the status quo of class inequality by celebrating and rewarding the use of an elaborated code in the school and classroom by learners from the middle class backgrounds while denigrating the use of a restricted code by learners from the working class (Bernstein, 2000). Using notions of visible and invisible pedagogies Bernstein also exemplifies how educational activities can stratify learners leading to the reproduction of social class inequalities. The basic view of Bernstein's argument is that whether people consider the opposition between conservative and progressive or the opposition between market and knowledge-oriented pedagogic practices, present social class inequalities are likely to continue to be reproduced through educational institutions (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein's assertion seems to hold water particularly if one examines the issues of what students wittingly learn by means of the visible pedagogy (explicit methods) and what they tacitly learn through invisible pedagogies. For example, through visible pedagogies learners are oriented to literacy and numeracy skills so that they function effectively in their social, political and economic activities (Bernstein, 2000). By means of the invisible pedagogies educators subtly socialize learners to accept such ideologies as those pertaining to patriarchy, gender-role differences, racial and ethnic supremacy in society. The hidden curriculum (tacit teaching and learning) also communicates these ideologies to learners through various discourses and actions, thereby promoting social class inequalities. It is also in this connection that Bernstein (2008) argues that how a society selects and distributes what it considers as valuable knowledge reflects that society's structural arrangements or its stratification system. Bernstein's sentiments on how education stratifies society instead of equalizing it are also shared by Muller (2000) in his critique of constructivism (a paradigm that posits human beings construct own knowledge through social interaction) when he contends that educational knowledge is of a vertical nature and requires processes of recontextualisations in relation to the domain of the sacred or what is set aside or sanctified according to the Durkheimian perspective. Muller used the example of a farm worker who acquired a specific utilitarian form of knowledge that enabled him to build wagons as a kind of sacred form of knowledge.

Verran (2009) also shares the contention that classroom knowledge itself is stratified and unequal in terms of value and or importance to different social groups. This view is evident in her critique of the dominance of the western forms of knowledge, which she notes is embodied in the culture of many dominant social groups in African societies. Her argument that a different logic is needed affirms the need for a different approach to the conception of what counts as highly valued knowledge in a given society. It implies that educational inequalities typical of many societies including South Africa certainly need redress. This idea is consistent with that of Apple (2007) who argues that education is a site of struggle and compromise because it serves as a proxy as well for larger battles over what institutions should do, whom they should serve, and who should make these decisions and yet by itself it is one of the major arenas in which resources, power and ideology specific to policy, finance, curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation in education are worked through.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The goal of this study was to explore how first year post graduate diploma in higher education (PGDHE) university students from diverse socio-linguistic backgrounds differ in the levels at which they express themselves during classroom activities. Pursuant to this aim, the objective was thus to identify the nature of the linguistic challenges they encounter in the classroom since they come to university with varying levels of proficiency in the university's LOLT, having been taught in the different languages considered official in the South African educational context as spelt out in the LiEP of 1997.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions: What differences do first year university students from diverse backgrounds exhibit in their levels of classroom participation? What, if any, are the determinants of their different levels of classroom participation?

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) which Finlay and Ballinger (2006) define as a variant of phenomenology aimed at exploring the participants'

perceptions of their lived experiences in a given social setting. The approach has its roots in social psychology. It recognises the central role of the analyst in making sense of the personal experiences of his or her research participants (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) contend that this approach to experiential research has gained momentum and popularity in the last two decades. It examines lived experiences from the perspectives of both the researcher and his subjects by bracketing taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). Epistemologically speaking, the approach is based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and thus emphasizes the importance of subjectivism as the overarching ontology (Rorty, 2009). Proponents of the IPA (eg, Berger & Luckmann, 1990; Biggerstaff & Thompson 2008; Rorty, 2009, Smith & Osborn, 2008) argue that it offers invaluable insights in identifying and illuminating specific social phenomena through interpreting them in multiple perspectives. Smith et al (2009) point out that it is this view that distinguishes IPA in part from more descriptive phenomenological approaches, such as those advocated by Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology. Taking an idiographic approach, the focus of IPA in this study was on how university students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds cope with their LOLT in the wake of coming from a diversity of linguistic backgrounds. The choice of approach to this study was inspired by Smith et al., (2009) who assert that such researches are capable of addressing the wholeness and uniqueness of the participants by giving a complete and in-depth picture of their lived experiences of being in the world. My quest to generate thick descriptions of the participants' in-school language experiences of their encounter with the university's LOLT made embracing it (IPA) the best option as an approach. I thus adopted the approach as an inductive, holistic, emic and subjective approach to help me interpret and understand the experiences of post graduate diploma in higher education students as social actors in their classrooms. As subjects, these students were embodied in a world that was multifaceted and expected to reveal the linguistic strengths and weaknesses encountered in the classroom as the reality that I intended to explore. This thus involved giving attention to the classroom activities in which the different students expressed their ideas in English. The objective was to record their differences in proficiency in the use of the LOLT. This procedure helped me unravel taken-for-granted assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, values and conventional wisdom as I sought to gain deep insights into the students' abilities to communicate ideas using the medium of classroom instruction.

Population and sampling

The target population for this study was students studying towards a Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education. These were mature students some of whom possess Bachelors and Masters Degrees in disciplines outside of education (e.g B.Com, B.Tech, M.Com, Msc or M.Tech. degree). The sample size comprised 40 multi-racial and multi-ethnic students purposively sampled to provide some insights into how possession of relevant cultural capital by students impact on their learning experiences and outcomes (Bourdieu, 2008). As a result, the sampling strategy took into account Patton's (2000) argument that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases. Further drawing insights from Straus and Cobin' (2008) assertion that in-depth data illuminates patterns, concepts, categories, properties and dimensions of given social phenomena, I realised it was crucial that I got an appropriate sample in order to generate adequate data, which Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) maintain is determined by theoretical saturation. According to the authors, this often occurs when no new data keeps emerging in a study.

Research Methods

Drawing insights from Apter and Garnsey (2004), Giddens (2001) and Willis (1977) who advise that in order to have a satisfactory understanding of how the symbolic power of structural determination functions within the mediating realm of the human cultural institution of universities, colleges and schools, there is a strong need for triangulation of perceptions to clarify meanings, the data collection process for this study was conducted using classroom observations and focus group discussion interviews. The choice of these data collection instruments was driven by the researcher's quest for generating in-depth data (Nieuwenhuis, 2012), which Hesse-Biber (2010) argues is easy to elicit through classroom observation and focus group discussions.

Proponents of observation as a qualitative research instrument (eg., Howe 2003; Hesse-Biber 2010; Nieuwenhuis 2012) suggest that there are basically four types: complete observer, where the researcher is a non-participant observer looking at the situation from a distance (emic or outsider perspective); complete participant, where the researcher gets completely covertly involved in the

research setting to an extent that those being observed do not even know that they are the subjects of a study; participant as observer, which involves the researcher becoming part of the research process by involving himself in a chosen setting to gain an insider perspective (emic perspective) of the setting. This was the technique adopted for this study since the researcher chose to sit in the classrooms to observe interactions unfolding in naturalistic settings (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005). To do this required that he immersed himself into the school and classroom settings but remaining strictly focused on the role of overt observer. This helped me witness the discourses that reflected the different forms of cultural capital among the students as well as the prejudicial attitudes of their lecturers. My observations in this regard were guided by Walum's (2008) assertion that language, actions or discourse are the main tools that enable social interaction particularly the cultural transmission process by conveying both the subtle and explicit messages regarding cultural expectations and language proficiencies of the students.

Ten focus groups were established for the 120 post graduate diploma in higher education students. Each group consisted of 12 students, who were interviewed 2 times over 4 weeks for purposes of widening the range of responses, activate forgotten details of their lived experiences and to also allow them enough room for releasing inhibitions that would otherwise have discouraged them from disclosing pertinent data were they to be interviewed as individuals (Fayisetani, 2004). The venues for the focus group discussions were their classrooms and each focus group discussion lasted for 40 minutes in order to afford the participants ample opportunities to fully express their views and address all the discussion items on the agenda. The process began with a semi-structured set of questions that allowed the girls easy access into the deep discussions. The technique facilitated an encouraging rapport between the researcher and the participants by allaying the latter's fears in expressing their views on language use in the classroom, particularly how their levels of proficiency influenced their classroom participation and overall attainment.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the study ethical clearance and informed consent were sought from the University's Higher Degrees Ethics Committee (HDEC) and the participants by way of consent letters, which they had to sign. The classroom observations and focus group discussion interviews commenced with the researcher clarifying the purpose of the study to the participants and reassuring them of their rights during the course of his classroom observations and focus group discussions with them. Before observing each lesson, participants were reminded that the data gathered through the observations and focus group discussion with them was to remain confidential and that their identities would also be protected. Under no circumstances were their names to be divulged in the study (principle of anonymity). In addition, they were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment without any penalties should they decide to do so. None of them withdrew however.

Data Management, Processing and Analysis

Guided by Hesse-Biber (2010) and Howe's (2003) advice that in qualitative research once the researcher begins to collect the data, it is time to also begin to analyze it to fit the pieces of the research puzzle together, the data analysis process for this study commenced during each data collection session and continued as the researcher immersed himself in the data by either reading, re-reading it or playing back the recorded transcripts. Given that there was no clear cut distinction between the data gathering and analysis process in terms of stages, the process was therefore recursive such that the insights gained from the classroom observations continued to provide a basis for further inquiry into the participants' perceptions of the language factor in their classrooms. Two fundamental data management procedures namely, coding segments of the participants' responses with more than one label (co-occurring codes) and considering the amount of the text or answer to a question (Tesch, 2009) were done. The presentation and discussion of the findings were guided by Koch (2009) and Smith et al., (2009) who contend that in virtually all IPA studies, the objective is to illustrate, inform, interpret, master and develop themes and meanings of the participants' lived experiences by firmly anchoring findings in the quotes from the participants' accounts. It is in this sense that the discussion of findings for this study are anchored in the themes that emerged from the observations and focus group interviews as shown in the subsequent discussion.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are analysed and discussed under the following themes: different levels of proficiency in LOLT as a determinant of differential cultural capital; preferential treatment as a result of perceived relevant cultural capital; impact of cultural capital on academic success; the link of social class, cultural capital and education; cultural diversity and differential cultural capital among students and other classroom factors reflecting students' differential cultural capital.

Different levels of proficiency in LOLT as a determinant of differential cultural capital

Different forms of cultural capital typical of university classroom were evident in the classroom observations as well as in the focus group interview responses by the participants. The study revealed several determinants of cultural capital and its different forms; embodied, objectified, or institutionalized as argued by Bourdieu (2008) as discussed in the subsequent sections. The findings from the focus group discussion interviews revealed that different measures of cultural capital are linked to academic achievement and with educational attainment. This finding lends credence to previous studies by for example, Cheadle (2008) and Werfhorst and Hofstede (2007), who assert that there are different mechanisms through which cultural capital generates educational success. It emerged from the focus group discussions that the lecturers' misconceptions of students' cultural capital are sometimes instrumental in their assessment procedures. Participants pointed out that sometimes a high level of verbal fluency in English, the language of teaching and learning in university can be misconstrued as academic brilliance and some students end up benefitting unfairly over their counterparts who speak a restricted code in the classroom due to home background linguistic deprivation, which may have nothing to do with intelligence. In their justification of attributing a high linguistic proficiency to academic brilliance many participants argued that within their families, students are socialised into a cultural capital typical of their socio-economic background or status through their parents and older siblings. They argued that this occurs wittingly or unwittingly through their exposure to parental values, beliefs and attitudes to education. Drawing from Bourdieu's typology of cultural capital, this would be a cultural capital embedded in the children's knowledge, language, and mannerisms or what Bourdieu himself calls their *habitus* (Dumais 2002; Swartz 2007). Thus, such a typology of cultural capital equips children with cultural endowments and, in its embodied state, with skills with which to demonstrate their cultural endowments. Given that, generally the educational system is designed to recognize and reward a relevant cultural capital, it normally follows that This social structural mechanism means that lecturers, tutors and other gatekeepers systematically misinterpret students' cultural capital that is, the students' demonstrated familiarity with high-status cultural signals, such as English linguistic proficiency is often construed as manifestations of actual academic brilliance. The above views are reflected in the following excerpts given by some interviewees during the focus group interviews:

Jan (pseudonym): Even if a person is clever, if he or she cannot express his cleverness in a coherent or comprehensive, chances are that he or she is treated as foolish person.

Yvonne (pseudonym): An inability to communicate in the medium of classroom instruction implies that one cannot express himself or herself academically and therefore his academic ability is thwarted. As a result, he comes through as a dull person

Preferential treatment as a result of perceived relevant cultural capital

The results of both the classroom observations and focus group discussions indicated that the lecturers' and tutors' biased perceptions of students who possess a relevant cultural capital for education tend to yield in them positive and possibly accumulative returns in terms of lecturer or tutor attention because of the popular contention of the cultural reproduction theory that cultural capital, transferred over generations and possessed by families and individuals, is an important resource which contributes to individuals' educational success (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). As a scarce resource which equips individual student with knowledge, practical skills, and a sense of the rules of the game (*habitus*) in the educational system, a relevant cultural capital in the form of background knowledge and skills is highly recognized and rewarded by institutional gatekeepers and peers. This makes lecturers and tutors give students from the middle class affluent socio-economic backgrounds preferential treatment over their counterparts from working class non-affluent social class backgrounds (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). Some of the respondents argued that once their lecturers have developed impressions about some students' level of language proficiency (linguistic capital), regardless of whether such impressions are biased, they become blind to all other relevant explanatory factors which

impede the development of relevant cultural capital and which may only affect verbal proficiency and not necessarily educational success.

Impact of cultural capital on academic success

Asked to explain the influence of a relevant cultural capital on academic attainment, the participants' responses indicated the following aspects: relevant cultural capital variables often pertain to family characteristics such as the fact that families which possess high levels of cultural capital also tend to possess other socioeconomic resources which have a positive effect on their children's educational success. These views vindicated assertions by Jaeger (2009) and Sullivan (2001) that children who possess high levels of cultural capital typically also possess other skills which promote educational success (e.g. high innate abilities and high educational aspirations). For Jaeger (2009), if relevant family- and individual-specific variables are left out of the analysis of determinants of cultural capital, then, it is unlikely that the true causal effect of relevant or non-relevant cultural capital on educational success or failure is dealt with because cultural capital encapsulates individual socio-cultural attributes that accrue from both the favourable or unfavourable environmental conditions and experiences enjoyed or endured by people subjected to different life chances (Giddens, 2010). Implicit in the above finding is the view that a deprived socio-economic background is counter-productive to children's academic success because it offers them a cultural capital that is not conducive to educational success in the form of attitudes, beliefs and values that are not in tandem with those celebrated in academia. This also vindicates Bourdieu's contention that, cultural capital is principally an asset possessed by families and individuals in socioeconomically advantaged environments.

The link of social class, cultural capital and education

The evidence from the classroom observations and focus group interviews indicated that returns in cultural capital are higher for students from middle class or advantaged socio-economic backgrounds than they are for those from working class or disadvantaged social class backgrounds because not only does the former group possess more relevant cultural capital than the latter, but it also uses this cultural capital in environments (schools, peer groups, colleges and universities) to pass on or reproduce its cherished values, beliefs, aspirations and other economic dispositions celebrated in society (relevant cultural capital or habitus). It is largely in this sense that Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory argues that cultural capital has a causal effect on the educational success or failure of children. Those who possess relevant cultural capital, particularly those in high socio-economic status environments are esteemed highly and, as a consequence, they develop better academic skills and often fare better in life compared to their counterparts in low socio-economic environments, who often has to grapple with symbolic violence in their academic journey due to the unfamiliar culture they encounter in academia (Ballantine & Spade, 2008). This view is reflected in the excerpts below, captured from the responses by interviewees, Vaughan and Simphiwe (pseudonyms).

Vaughan: *some of us struggle in class because we have to learn in a language that we are not familiar with. If I was to be taught in Afrikaans, my mother tongue, I tell you my story would be different in terms of understanding the content.*

Simphiwe: *To some of us English is third language. It is not even my second language. I speak IsiZulu almost all the time and when I come to university I am expected not only to read English but also to sit in class for several hours learning in a foreign language with some words that I do not understand.*

Contrary to the above views, some respondents argued that in a meritocratic society, what students bring from home benefits everybody equally except that students from the lower socio-economic status backgrounds have an extra incentive to invest in cultural capital in order to offset their comparative disadvantage in other domains.

In response to the question of why some students' level of participation in class discussions appeared to be very subdued, the following responses were given: language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents, emotional barriers especially for those students who find it difficult to express themselves coherently and end up the laughing stocks of the class, differences in perception and viewpoints, expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping, cultural differences, which arise due to the fact that the norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed. One respondent had this to say as a way of explaining her viewpoint on the above subject:

Rina: Some students and even lecturers and tutors do not seem to respect the fact that *the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings. As a result, the way they handle student responses when they do not understand certain cultural aspects leaves a lot to be desired.*

The aforementioned responses clearly indicate that a skilled communicator needs to be aware of these cultural barriers and try to reduce their impact by continually checking understanding and by offering appropriate feedback to cater for the students' different linguistic levels of proficiency in the LOLT, which in South African universities is predominantly English.

Cultural diversity and differential cultural capital among students

One participant remarked that even when communicating in the same language, the terminology used in a message may pose a barrier if it is not fully understood by the receiver(s). Asked to elaborate, she cited as an example, a message that includes a lot of specialist jargon and abbreviations arguing that it will not be understood by a receiver who is not familiar with the terminology used. Regional colloquialisms and expressions were also cited as some of the determinants of a cultural capital that distinguishes some students from others in a university classroom. The following excerpt reflects this view:

Nomsa: *Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging in our university such that sometimes one just keeps quiet in class preferring to express herself in written form where she is not misconstrued as happens when one is expressing herself verbally.*

What the above response reflects is that cultures provide people with ways of thinking, seeing their reality, hearing and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the same language. When the languages are different and translation has to be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstandings increases. It is also in this light that differences in cultural capital manifest themselves because people who share a particular habitus will be able to get on while those with a different one can be bogged down. This dovetails with Toomey's (2010) contention in which she describes three ways in which cultural differences can interfere with effective cross-cultural understanding. First is what she calls cognitive constraints, which are the frames of reference or world views that provide a backdrop that all new information is compared to or inserted into. Second are behavioural constraints emanating from the view that each culture has its own rules about proper behavior which affect verbal and nonverbal communication. Whether one looks the another person in the eye-or not; whether one says what one means overtly or talks around the issue; how close the people stand to each other when they are talking (Toomey, 2010). All of these and many more are rules of politeness which differ from culture to culture and in a classroom situation affect the levels of verbal participation among students from diverse cultures. Toomey's third factor is emotional constraints, which arise from the fact that different cultures regulate the display of emotion differently. Some cultures get very emotional when they are debating an issue. They yell, they cry, they exhibit their anger, fear, frustration, and other feelings openly. Other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden, exhibiting or sharing only the rational or factual aspects of the situation. In a classroom situation this can inhibit participation in certain students leading to misconceptions by their lecturers and tutors.

All of these differences tend to lead to communication problems. If the people involved are not aware of the potential for such problems, they are even more likely to fall victim to them, although it takes more than awareness to overcome these problems and communicate effectively across cultures.

Other classroom factors reflecting students' differential cultural capital

In their responses to the question of other factors that influence students' participation in verbal classroom activities, the participants gave a list of factors ranging from socioeconomic backgrounds or social class habitus, home environment and economic status. The main contention was that the level of participation of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds was limited compared to their higher socioeconomic counterparts. Furthermore, students' cultural, physical and economic capital were cited as among the salient factors in their involvement in physical classroom activity settings. These findings lent credence to Thomas' (2012) assertion that stresses the need for better and wider provision of structured physical activity in institutions of learning especially in economically deprived countries to compensate for lower participation levels. Since effective teaching and learning is grounded in the quality of communication and interaction in the classroom (Thomas, 2012), these aspects need to be stepped up to ensure that students' participation and academic outcomes are given

some priority in the teaching and learning processes. Participants cited several other factors that they claimed affect the classroom participation and overall academic attainment, such as, having different responsibilities, not studying course topics regularly and not having enough interactive activities in their university classrooms, which they say prefer lecture methods to more interactive modes of knowledge construction and delivery.

Conclusion

The results of this study have revealed that possession of a relevant cultural capital promotes educational success through different channels because it is usually embedded in children's knowledge, language, and mannerisms (*habitus*). However, notwithstanding the participants' reference to innate cognitive abilities as among the determinants of some of their success, what the study has not been able to prove unequivocally is the success story of students who succeed academically despite the deprivation typical of their social class backgrounds, which fail to equip them with a cultural capital relevant to education. Despite having confirmed Bourdieu's famous cultural reproduction theory that cultural capital, transferred over generations and possessed by families and individuals, is an important resource which contributes to the individuals' educational success, the results of this study have not been able to show why some students from the lower socio-economic status or poor backgrounds are able to succeed with some even surpassing their counterparts from higher socio-economic backgrounds. What was evident from the participants' responses during both classroom observations and focus group discussions was the existence of a different form of *habitus* among the university students constituting the target population for the study. *Habitus* as a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action) has been found to impact heavily on the students' academic success. This was because the individual agents develop these dispositions in response to the objective conditions encountered as part of enculturation. It is in this sense that Bourdieu theorizes the inculcation of objective social structures into the subjective, mental experience of agents. Based on the findings discussed herein, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

The following interventions might help to alleviate the inequalities fostered by education in a society such as the South African context where social diversity is endemic. If higher education institutions such as universities and colleges need to really provide an environment where teaching and learning take place under conditions of social equity then a strong response such as the introduction of multiple modes of address (e.g. the use of multi-media or languages of instruction) might be a worthwhile mechanism for promoting educational equity in society. Christie suggests that another technique would be to try and bring different knowledge and learning approaches to education, so that they mirror the stratification typical of the broader social structure. Lecturers and tutors need to be cognisant of the existence of the differences in their students' cultural capital and find suitable ways of effectively communicating with their diverse students without affording others preferential treatment at the expense of others.

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