

*Experiences of international students studying in a UK university: how do international students studying in the UK's Higher Education sector build academic resilience?*

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration by:

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## DECLARATION

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

## ABSTRACT

With the ever-increasing number of international students entering the global market, many of which enrol on post-graduate Higher Education (HE) programmes in the UK, current research offers limited insight into the key role academic resilience plays in enabling international cohorts' progression and achievement. This study aims to fill the gap by investigating how international students studying in the UK build academic resilience, contributing to the literature and informing governmental policies and university practices. Guided by Bourdieu's seminal concepts of social capital generation and conversion, this work develops the theories of other researchers in building capital to enhance the academic resilience of students. It achieves this by adopting a qualitative interpretivist paradigm aligned to similar studies, using a longitudinal representative case study in the UK. Over a period of 42-months, 36 respondents formed four non-probability samples. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, a focus group and questionnaire, the findings of which were analysed using grounded theory methods and supported by computer-aided qualitative analysis software. The results identify six prevalent capitals that students either generate prior to their arrival in the UK or are socially constructed with newly formed peer-groups. Notably, the emergence of neo-familial capital akin to concepts of fictive kinship offers a fresh perspective on the need to formally address the importance academic resilience has on the international student's learning experience and progression. The findings provide insight into the sources of international students' academic resilience and how these can change over space and time. This insight offers universities with theoretical and practical guidance on the need to embed proactive student support systems that stimulate academic resilience amongst its international students. It also informs governmental policies on attracting students from overseas as it seeks to enhance the UK's HE offer to global markets.

## SUMMARY OF PORTFOLIO

Stage	Critical insights and developments
<p><b>Pre-thesis</b></p>	<p>In the early stages of developing the focus of this thesis, the literature offered many perspectives on how to approach the subject of academic resilience. It provided insight into the relationship between the students' lived experiences and their progression and achievement. Yosso's (2005) Community of Cultural Wealth framework suggested an interesting basis from which to approach the research, proposing that template analysis maybe a method to develop a practical way to think about how international students build and convert capital as they strive to overcome adversity. It also offered definitions for capitals should they feature in this research. O'Shea's (2015) study into Australian HE students' resilience made theoretical links between how students build capitals and Bourdieu's theory on social capital (1977, 1986). Further reading helped to reveal a gap in the literature; that little was known about the lived experiences of international students studying in the UK on Master's programmes, in terms of looking at building academic resilience conceptualised in terms of resilience being generated by specific types of capital. Further reading helped to set the scope of this research. It could have been approached in many ways, from how it can be gained (Shapiro, 2018), how to recognise it (Yosso, 2005), how it can change (Sato, 2016), and the net effects it could have on students' transnational identities (Gu &amp; Schweisfurth, 2015). An initial conceptual model was developed to help understand the entire journey, similar to Figure 4. Reflecting on the model revealed the lack of understanding of how international students were dealing with the rigors of their studies. As such, the practical problem was established as being the lack of support internationals students are afforded outside the academic environment. There were passive systems of support but no active mechanisms which specifically acknowledged what support they were most likely to need and when, and how to deliver it. This helped to set the scope of the study, focusing on the students' lived experience while they were on course. This approach featured in the IS8004 Portfolio which was submitted for assessment to the supervisory team in July 2017 and approved, after which the main thesis was embarked upon.</p>
<p><b>Thesis – Preliminary study</b></p>	<p>From the literature, eight capitals were identified as the most likely to feature in the findings. Only six were evidenced by the respondents. The data also revealed several interesting observations. These included the idea that the students were dealing with the rigors of the programme in very similar ways, that capitals were being built as they progressed through their academic journey, and some of these seemed to replace others - noting the comparative strength of aspirational capital and the emergence of neo-familial capital. The conceptual model at Figure 4 was revised and helped to shape the researcher's approach to the main cohort.</p>
<p><b>Thesis – Main cohort</b></p>	<p>The literature was reviewed owing to the emergence and</p>

	<p>prominence of neo-familial capital and links with fictive kinships (Fordham, 1988) were established. The findings from this cohort were very similar to the earlier cohort, building confidence in the underpinning literature and the researcher's choice of research instruments and reflexivity.</p>
<p><b>Thesis – Focus group</b></p>	<p>The findings from this cohort offered further supportive evidence for all the findings from the previous cohorts. The potential for respondent validation and the transferability of the findings outside the case study was evident. These were tested in the next cohort, with very similar demographics to those in the case study but had graduated and had not studied at the case study institution.</p>
<p><b>Thesis – Questionnaire cohort</b></p>	<p>The questionnaire cohort did offer respondent validation in many areas and the potential for the transferability of the findings was evident. The contribution to theory and practice had been established, linking back to the need to better understand how international students build academic resilience, how this should be reflected in governmental policies for attracting HE PG students from overseas, and what measures UK HE institutions should take to respond to the government's guidance.</p>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing these acknowledges, I reflect on the past 5 years and the changes which have affected not only this thesis but the world. This period spans 2016, when I first approached the doctoral team at the University of Chester's Business School, to 2021, as I hand in the completed thesis. My early discussions with Dr Neil Moore, Dr Madeleine Mansfield, and Professor Paul Manning helped to shape my thinking on what area I would like to research and any contribution I could make to theory and practice. Neil's clarity of thought, ability to conceptualise what I was keen to explore and overall guidance, provided the basis from which to launch my studies. Maddie's focus on the essential elements of Level 8 studies helped to pinpoint what it was I was studying. And discussions with Paul, an expert in the field of social capital, helped to build confidence in the approach I intended to take and in signposting the theoretical perspectives mostly likely to inform my work. These foundational discussions provided the bedrock from which I embarked on my academic journey; knowing that Neil, Maddie and Paul believed and supported my proposed line of research. As my principal supervisor, Neil continued to offer periodic feedback which always helped. Although Maddie and Paul moved to other roles, Dr Farid Ullah (also of the Chester Business School) joined the supervisory team and immediately made valuable contributions to help shape and enhance my work. To my supervisory team, I offer my heartfelt thanks – I simply could not have done this without all of you.

As the research developed and the primary data was collected, the Coronavirus pandemic started to affect the availability of potential respondents and University staff. Conscious as I was that respondent numbers ideally needed to increase, Associate Professor Colin Potts (Chester Business School) made every effort to put me in touch with potential respondents; which positively impacted on the research. Even though Colin was as busy as everyone else, he still helped me – for which I am very grateful. Increasing respondent numbers remained a concern but this was helped by the support of Dr Nicos Nicolaou (CEO Unicaf), who allowed me to contact members of his staff with very similar characteristics of those in the other primary research cohorts. They formed the questionnaire cohort to consider the potential transferability of the findings outside the case study. Nicos' support is very much appreciated. This appreciation is also extended to all the participants in the research. They were asked to speak freely as they reflected on their learning journeys to the UK. Their honest and open views gave this study the insight into the human experience it had hoped for.

My mother, Brenda, has always supported any venture I ever had – including the bizarre and absurd, of which there have been a few. Her support was felt throughout this academic journey. Her willingness to discuss developments and seek continual updates on progress motivated its eventual completion. I know she will take great pride in this academic achievement, for which she should take her share – she deserves it. And to my wife, Emily, I really do not have the words to express

how important her role has been. From helping to clarify the technical academic elements of the methodology to discussing the findings and contribution – mostly over our evening meals – her sharp intellect and enquiring mind tested each element as it developed. This contribution was made in tandem with bringing up our sons, Harry and Harvey, over the past few years in often challenging yet rewarding circumstances. She is simply the best – thank you.

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## 1 - INTRODUCTION

This study is fundamentally about knowing how to support international Higher Education (HE) students on their academic journey to the United Kingdom (UK) and guide governmental and university policies to promote and improve international academic resilience strategies. It recognises that not only are visiting students dealing with the academic rigours of studying in the UK on Master's programmes, but they are also studying in their second language using academic terminology, with students and staff from different countries and backgrounds, with expectations they place on themselves and from their families. They temporarily live in new and unfamiliar surroundings, use different currency to buy unusual foods, deal with strange customs and practices, in a different and often colder climate, yet are still having to perform at previously unexperienced academic levels with total strangers. These students have to deal with challenges that their UK-domiciled colleagues will not be experiencing. The visitors will not have family and friends close by to meet with at the end of the day, to discuss the subjects, people and systems they have had to deal with whilst trying to learn and think in a higher order. Many arrive in the UK having been through recruitment agents back in their home countries, with expectations set by them, the international media and other friends and colleagues. For some, it may be the first time they have been able to walk in a town without a male chaperone or wear what they choose. Yet, limited research has been conducted to identify the constituents of academic resilience generated by international students studying in the UK on postgraduate (PG) programmes, the resultant of which reveals the need to develop student support interventions which could start even before students arrive in the UK to begin their studies.

### **Motivation for research**

The researcher's motivation for this study resulted from their observations of an international student studying on a Master's programme in 2017. At an experiential event where students were invited to use the media of outdoor adventurous activities to reflect on leadership theory and practice, one student reflected on her experience in totally unexpected ways. During the event's plenary session, rather than reviewing the academic content she reflected on being able to walk in public places without a chaperon, use communal changing rooms and dress in unfamiliar activewear. She made direct parallels with these elements to her progression through the Master's programme, referencing similar experiences that played a major role in how she was dealing with the rigors of her academic journey. For the researcher, this revealed a new way to think of the international students' lived experiences and the lack of institutional policies and practices that recognise these challenges and how students were coping with them. The researcher was familiar with literature which drew from the experiences of Australian HE students and how they coped with the rigors of their academic journey (O'Shea, 2015), in terms of building resilience through the generation of various capitals linked to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social capital. Also, Caruana's (2014) research

investigates the accounts of international HE students studying in the UK and their resilient responses to the challenges encountered on their journeys. Her study focuses on the diversity of international students' acting as a resource which can be harnessed to promote intercultural understanding and develop graduates as global citizens. However, the literature review revealed no directly related research on international students' academic resilience in the UK's PG sector which focuses on the specific capitals that constituent academic capital and how these can change of space and time.

### **Overall approach**

For this study, data is collected from a variety of credible sources to help build the picture of what the UK HE sector needs and how it could approach enhancing the international students' learning experience as well as their overall progression. In reviewing the literature, a number of key terms are used to identify related research that informs this study: resilience, academic resilience, social capital, international students, and higher education. University library resources are used to generate the most credible literature available, filtered to show only scholarly, peer-reviewed articles in the field of education over recent years. From these, a systematic review is conducted to help build a contemporary understanding of the seminal writers on social capital: Bourdieu (1977), Coleman (1994) and Putnam (2000). Bourdieu's original concept provides the principal view of the constituents of social capital, its conversion, applicability to academic resilience and how to study it. The discussion on research methodologies identifies the challenges and various methods available to undertake this research, with the preferred qualitative method selected and justified. The case study and non-probability samples are discussed, and the data collection tools and techniques are established, with links to the literature to demonstrate the effectiveness and appropriateness of these methods in generating credible findings. These include opportunities to triangulate the observations and consider the potential for transferring the main findings outside the confines of the case study. The data collected from the main sets of respondents is formatted using NVivo, helping to codify the key themes and to establish the linkages between these themes with supporting evidence. The findings include data tables and figures to help identify and understand the main observations. In analysis, the evidence is assessed against the theoretical background and discussed in the contemporary context, leading to the research contribution and implications. Although the limitations of qualitative research are acknowledged, the validity and credibility of this study is argued. Three key findings on how international students build academic capital are presented that could inform wider research and subsequently support current governmental policies and universities practices.

The complexities international students face and how they successfully overcome these is an important research topic, as it helps to recognise the challenges they face and support the

development of interventions that offer practical help prior to and throughout their learning experience in the UK. It also seeks to contribute to new knowledge in this field. As such, this study responds to the call for research to increase understanding of how students in the HE sector use academic resilience to support their learning journeys. It also looks to address the challenges facing the UK Government as it attempts to generate 600,000 students from overseas by 2030. In doing so, the following section sets out the economic and political challenges, the gap in the practice knowledge and leads of the research questions and aims.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION – THE PROBLEM**

This research takes a neo-capital theoretical perspective (Manning, 2010) where ‘capital’ can be considered as a ‘resource’ and multiple resources build ‘resilience’. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the types of capital used to build the resilience levels of international Master’s students and if these develop or erode over space and time. Empirical evidence to suggest that academic resilience can be built to support the international students’ learning journey and that these can either increase or erode over space and time, can inform the wider debate concerned with overall student progression, experience and possibly levels of achievement. Furthermore, understanding the individual’s academic journey in terms of academic resilience helps appreciate the developmental potential of studying on UK PG programmes for overseas communities. It is argued that the UK Government’s approach to attracting overseas students should reflect the outcomes of this line of research, as should UK HE institutions’ policies for how to support international students through their academic journey, from pre-arrival to arrival to departure; an under-researched area in the UK. This section will contextualise the significance of this line of research - both nationally and internationally - and describe the gap in current knowledge to help draw attention to its significance.

### **Economic context**

Data retrieved from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) offers an interesting insight into the levels of international students studying in the UK over recent years. In 2012/13 there were 425,265 international students studying with UK HE providers, with the largest numbers of students coming from the world's two most highly populated countries, China and India. Figure 1 (HESA, 2017) shows that in more recent years, numbers have increased.

Region of domicile	2014/15	2015/16
Other European Union	124,575	127,440
Other Europe	19,920	19,490
Africa	35,070	33,610
Asia	192,320	191,660
Australasia	2,565	2,675
Middle East	28,525	29,420
North America	27,610	28,040
South America	5,995	5,675
Total non-UK domicile	436,585	438,010

Figure 1. Region of domicile of non-UK domicile students 2014/15 and 2015/16

Figure 2 (HESA, 2017) separates out the student numbers from non-EU countries. It reflects an increase in HE student numbers from China but a marked decrease in HE students from India.

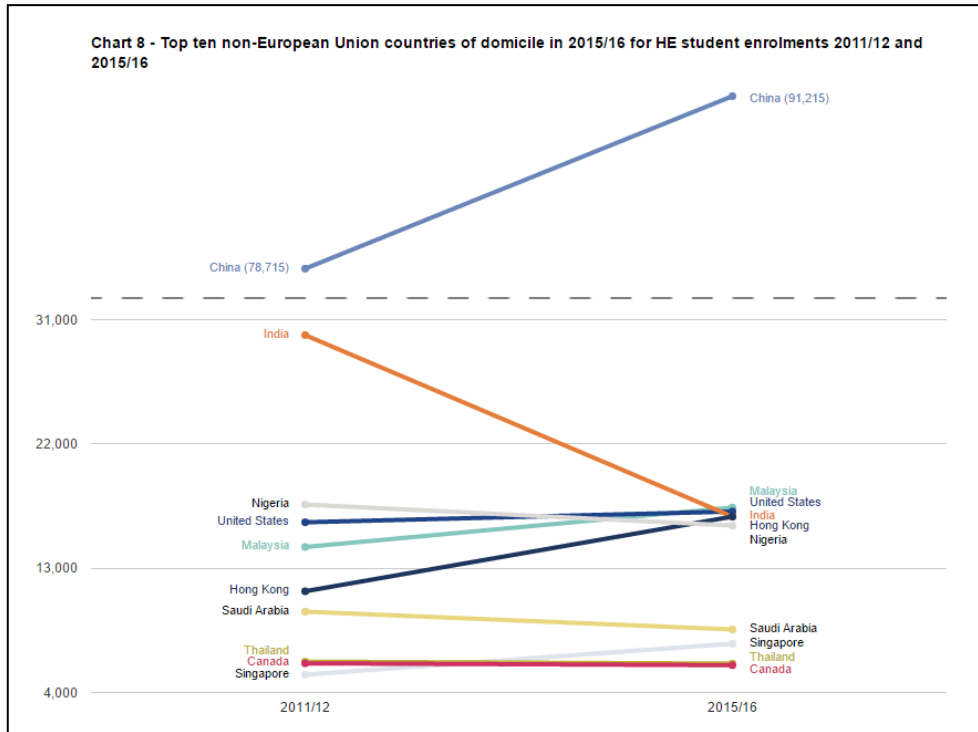


Figure 2. Top-10 non-European Union countries for HE student enrolments 2011/12 and 2015/16

Furthermore, statistics published by the Home Office in December 2016 compares the year ending September 2016 with the year ending September 2015, showing there were 3% fewer study-related

visas granted: a drop to 207,522. Over the same period, the number of university-sponsored study visa applications fell by 1% to 167,208 (Home Office, 2016). Even with these reductions, there was a steady increase in non-domiciled HE students studying in the UK with the majority flowing from the EU, that the largest community of HE students from non-EU countries is China, and there has been a marked decrease in HE students from India. This trend continued over the following years, evident in 2018/2019 HESA statistics that showed there were 485,645 international students studying UK HE programmes (International Student Statistics, 2020). The UK's policy to reduce immigration numbers and limit the time overseas students could spend in the UK changed in 2015, placing strict regulations on international student visas and adversely affecting HE student applications. Following the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2019 and increased concerns of reducing numbers of overseas students, the UK Government issued the International Education Strategy (March 2019) to set out how it intends to generate 600,000 students studying in the UK by 2030. The publication recognises the increased challenges the HE-sector faces in attracting students from overseas and seeks to address this by providing a "high-quality student experience at the heart of the offer" (p.13). Action Point 5 reflects the need to enhance the international student experience and Action Point 7 identifies specific global communities that will demand the best learning experiences.

The economic impact of potentially having 600,000 visiting students to the UK should not be underestimated. For example, in 2014/15 spending by international students supported 206,600 jobs in university towns and cities across England alone, shown in Figure 3 (Universities UK by Oxford Economics, 2017). In total the analysis found that, in 2014/15 on and off campus spending by international students and their visitors generated an additional £25.8 billion in gross output in the UK. As well as tuition fee payments, international students spend money off-campus on a wide range of goods, services, and activities; this amounted to £5.4bn in 2014/15. The transport and retail sectors are also significant beneficiaries of international students' spending. Their off-campus spending added £750 million to the UK transport industry and £690 million to the retail industry (UK Universities, 2017). International students account for over 40% of the UK's total PG community, with over 50% of these undertaking research degrees (UKCISA, 2017). Based on the economic impact PG international students have on the UK's economy, the Government's new plan to generate student numbers is likely to play an important role in stimulating the UK's economy post-Coronavirus. It must reflect the needs of international students in terms of their progression through their programmes of study, their achievement rates and their overall learning experience. As such, there is a need to offer the overseas markets attractive programmes of study and a research-informed system which supports and nurtures the realisation of opportunities and achievement.



# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON THE ENGLISH REGIONS

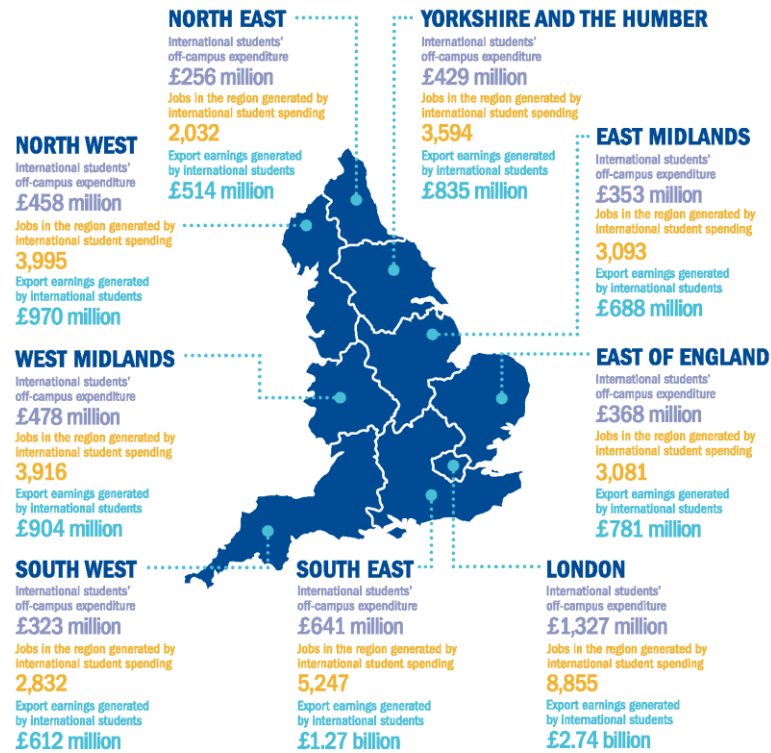


Figure 3. Economic impact of international students in England

## **Political context**

Building student numbers from overseas presents other challenges to the Government. For example, Home Office policy on study visas for EU members previously stated that all rights and obligations of EU membership would remain in place until the UK's exit from the EU (Home Office, 2017). Thereafter, new regulations on study visas would be published which were likely to reflect the Government's aspiration to cut net immigration to below 100,000 per year. Following the UK's departure from the EU in 2020, policies on study visas for the EU market changed, resulting in most applicants requiring a visa after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 (www.gov.uk). This resulted in a marked drop in applications from the EU. Figures from HESA in February 2021 showed that the number of applications from the EU reduced from 43,030 to 26,010 in one year. This loss of market share resulted in initiatives to increase applications from non-EU countries. Initiatives to drive growth had previously been discussed in *The International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity* (published by the Minister for Universities and Science, 2013) which provided a view of many ongoing priorities and approaches to increasing student numbers. Several of these priorities focus on market drives which related to the work of the British Council, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and others to communicate the UK's education offer in key target markets including China, India, USA, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey, South Korea, and Russia. This report shares the same view as the *International Education Strategy* (March 2019) in emphasising the opportunities available and how to engage with them.

Overall, this research investigates how the academic resilience of overseas students can be generated and supported over the course of their learning journey in the UK and the overall impact this may have of their progression. It directly responds to the economic and political challenges the UK faces in needing to build an attractive offer for international markets in an attempt to counteract the adverse effects of reducing numbers of applicants from the EU and the financial challenges of trying to recover from the cost of the Coronavirus pandemic. It directly aligns with the work set out in action points 5 and 7 in the *International Education Strategy* (March 2019).

## **The gap in practice knowledge**

Building on earlier calls for additional qualitative analysis of how students access and apply capital within the HE environment, developing insight into the dynamics of capital conversion and a greater understanding of how best to support students embarking on HE (Nunez, 2009; O'Shea, 2015), this study highlights the limited research published on overseas students' PG HE experiences in the UK. It acknowledges that studies into student resilience, capital and academic achievement have been published in related fields (Caruana, 2014) as well as other countries and communities (Gao, 2021; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Johnson, 2008; O'Shea, 2015; Perera *et al.*, 2015; Singh, 2021) but a review of recent literature confirms that this remains an under-researched area and a new perspective is

needed on the international PG student experience in the UK. This study takes a more detailed focus on the constituents of academic resilience in terms of its association with building social capital as described by Bourdieu (1977) and others (Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000), how it is generated prior to arriving in the UK to study, and how academic resilience develops over space and time. It makes contributions and recommendations to knowledge and offers practical measures to guide UK universities' policies and practices to better support international students' progression.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS**

In summary, the UK Council for International Student Affairs (2017) assessed the total number of PG students studying in the UK from the European Union (EU), non-EU and non-UK domicile in 2014/15 as 21,990, generating an additional £25.8 billion in gross output in the UK. With an ever-increasing number of international students entering the global market, many of which enrol on PG HE programmes, current research offers limited insight into how student resilience can develop over their academic journey, particularly in the UK. As the UK Government seeks to generate increased numbers of HE students from overseas markets and universities look to take more specific measures to generate the academic resilience of its international students, developing a greater understanding of how students build and maintain academic resilience has important implications.

To address the gap in current knowledge and practice, this research considers the nature of academic resilience and sets it in terms akin to a resource built through the acquisition of social capital, which can alter over space and time. It draws on Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Caruana, 2014; O'Shea, 2015) and studies into resilience in the international context (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Singh, 2021), to develop a contemporary understanding of the academic resilience of international students studying on PG programmes in the UK and inform practice. This leads to the research question: How do international students studying in the UK's HE system build academic resilience? To answer this question, the aims of the study are broken down as follows:

1. To investigate and define the key concepts associated with the terms, 'resilience' and 'social capital' and understand their relationship to 'academic resilience'.
2. With reference to the associated literature, determine how the academic resilience of international students studying in the UK develops over space (studying in the UK from overseas) and time (on short-term study visas), and how these impact on student progression.
3. To provide empirically based recommendations on how to generate academic resilience in international students studying Master's programmes in the UK: informing the practices of UK HE institutions to improve how international students are helped to build academic

resilience and guide governmental policies for increasing international student numbers and improve their experiences.

To achieve these aims, this research takes a qualitative, inductive approach to data collection and undertakes thematic analysis derived from the narratives offered by three cohorts of non-probability samples in a case study using semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Supported by data analysis software, it follows the techniques of template analysis to develop greater knowledge of the international students' lived experiences and how they build academic resilience. Respondent validation is conducted with a questionnaire cohort - from a different yet similar group of respondents to that of the case study - with which the findings of the case study were shared and the possible transferability to the findings outside the case study was considered.

### **Chapter summary**

With the ever-increasing number of international students entering the global market (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015), many of which enrol of PG HE programmes, current research offers limited insight into how academic resilience can build and change over the international students' journey and the importance this plays on their progression through the programme of studies. Data from the UK Council for International Student Affairs (2017) assessed the total number of PG HE students studying in the UK from EU, non-EU and non-UK domicile in 2014/15 as 21,990. Owing to the UK's departure from the EU, applications from the EU have significantly reduced. In response, the UK Government seeks to enrol 600,000 overseas students by 2030. Therefore, offering a greater understanding of the generation and impact of an international student's academic resilience and its relationship with social capital, has important implications for UK universities and governmental policies. These include how best to prepare students prior to embarking of their academic journeys and supporting them as they build specific types of capital which will generate academic resilience that may change over the course of their studies, and if supported could have significant benefits on student progression.

## 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter undertakes a review of the literature associated with terms that define, describe and discuss the key concepts associated with resilience and how it is generated by international students. It draws on a broad range of literature to provide the theoretical underpinning for the study and establishes conceptual links between social capital and academic resilience, revealing the current lack of research in this domain and the knowledge gap this study seeks to inform. This chapter is structured in such a way as to first establish the theoretical links between resilience and social capital in the context of this study and, therefore, highlights the need to include literature from three areas: resilience, academic resilience and social capital. The methodological discussion provides the parameters for the inclusion of the literature and how it was reviewed and synthesised. The findings are provided sequentially, from resilience to academic resilience and then conceptualising resilience in the theory of social capital.

The aim of this literature review is to set out the theoretical and practical links between the overarching theme of resilience and the idea that the acquisition of social capital can generate academic resilience; specifically, what types of social capital are converted in helping to overcome the challenges faced by international students studying in the UK and how each capital may change. Social capital is considered a collective term for a number of possible constituents which build academic resilience. As such, the literature reviewed for this study provides the theoretical underpinning for social capital and academic resilience. This chapter therefore, takes a focused approach which defines social capital and resilience without parameters, refines the concepts to that of resilience in an academic context, and investigates what the constituents of academic resilience are and their potential effects in overcoming adversity when studying in the UK. In doing so, it exposes the gap in current knowledge to which this research contributes.

A review of the literature on the nature of resilience and how it manifests in students, or otherwise, reveals a wide range of approaches to this discussion. Linnenlueke's (2015) identifies the development of knowledge of 'resilience' in the field of business and management research; he offers a comprehensive data set of publications on the topics of interest and cites some of the earliest research into resilience. He also presents some of the first discourses in social sciences on the concept of resilience and begins to demonstrate the wide application of the term. Stemming from this early discourse comes the term 'academic resilience', defined by Morales and Trotman (2004) as "the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding" (p.8). Morales (2008) considers the term a phenomenon that is complex, idiosyncratic, multi-dimensional and understudied. The notion that this phenomenon was understudied and required further exploration was also highlighted by earlier researchers (Conchas,

2006; Gordon, 1995; Liddle, 1994; Winfield, 1991). As the field of research into the academic resilience of students widened, a broad diaspora developed ranging from ‘predictors’ of resilience (Jamaludin *et al.*, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2015), to ‘descriptions’ of resilience (Morales, 2008; Sato, 2016), and ‘prescriptives’ of resilience (Kallio, 1995; Palmer, 2016).

Published in the British Educational Research Journal, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) develop the discussion. Their article introduces concepts on theories of transnationalism as a framework for the analysis of the experiences of Chinese graduate returnees. The paper concludes that experiences of returnees (international students) and the way their overseas studies impact on their identity and professional lives over time has been under-researched. Other literature adds to this observation and highlight a knowledge gap in terms of the impact studying overseas can have on first-generation students (Miranda *et al.*, 2016; O’Shea, 2015) returning home following an extended period of study overseas. This study contributes to the debate with a specific focus on the resilience of international students studying in the UK’s PG HE system on short-term study visas. It investigates the journey they take as they generate and convert capital strengths to help overcome the challenges they face while studying. In doing so, it supplements other views of academic achievement and progression (Buyl *et al.*, 2019; Caruana, 2014; Dhiman, 2019; Johnson *et al.*, 2015), and further develops the concept of possible changes to resilience (Dhiman, 2019; Pampaka *et al.*, 2012) and the likely implications this may have on academic progression and achievement (Helfgott, 2018; Hudley, 2016). This research is not concerned with how much academic resilience a student may or may not have or its net effects. Rather, it considers how academic resilience is generated through building levels of capital from a number of constituents and how these capitals can be converted in times of need, as conceived by Bourdieu (1977, 1986).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Search strategy**

This study’s overarching theme is based on the central term ‘resilience’. To gain an understanding of this term and how it has been applied to the academic environment, the initial literature review drew on the 2014 literature search of the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, MELINE and PsycINFO (cited in Linnenlueke, 2015). Although these repositories were mainly aligned to the medical discipline, they were considered relevant as the earliest publications which referred to the concept of ‘resilience’ were scientific in approach (Meyer, 1982; Staw *et al.*, 1981).

To support the longitudinal design of this study, two separate literature reviews were undertaken: 2017 and 2020. Each was conducted using the same method, described as follows.

#### *Resilience*

To identify relevant publications, a search was conducted using the University of Chester's electronic library database using the keywords 'resilience' and 'literature review'. The search filters were refined to limit the results, as follows:

- DATE OF PUBLICATION: within 12 months;
- REFINE SEARCH: scholarly and peer-reviewed;
- CONTENT TYPE: journal articles;
- DISCIPLINE: education;
- SORTED BY: relevance.

The 2017 search identified 303 relevant articles. They were sorted by relevance and reviewed to build a contemporary understanding of how the term 'resilience' has been conceptualised and applied.

#### *The resilience of international students*

The search criteria were further refined in order to identify specific articles of direct relevance to this study's line of discussion, as follows:

- TERMS: resilience, education, international students;
- DATE OF PUBLICATION: within 3 years;
- REFINE SEARCH: scholarly and peer-reviewed;
- CONTENT TYPE: journal articles;
- DISCIPLINE: education;
- SORTED BY: relevance.

The 2017 search identified 48 articles, all of which were reviewed for applicability but were sifted using particular selection criteria. It is worth noting that, in neither the 2017 or 2020 reviews, none of the reviewed literature offered insight into the changing levels of capital, educational or otherwise. A further search over the past 5 years was conducted in 2017 and 2021 with the keywords, 'capital' and 'resilience' with no significant or related results.

## Selection criteria

Studies were selected for inclusion on the basis that they formed part of the overall discussion on the resilience of students studying on PG HE Level 7 programmes, overseas and using a language other than their mother tongue. However, this proved problematic as the search of the available literature offered no specific insight into the resilience of Anglophone international students studying in the UK's PG HE system. Therefore, the selection criteria allowed for articles which offered insight into the resilience of students as either descriptive, predictive and prescriptive. A review of these articles provided a more holistic picture of what student resilience is, how it is developed, and when it is exercised. As such, from the initial review of the 303 papers on the nature of resilience and the identification of the first 10, six were selected based on specific relevance to this area of research. From the 48 articles which offered research into the specific area in interest, 32 were included in the literature review.

## Inclusion and quality

The titles and abstracts of each article which bared specific relevance to this research were screened using inclusion criteria (resilience, education, international students). The articles were also reviewed based on the prominence of the journals they were published in. What became evident was the apparent absence of any research into this specific area in the higher-starred journals. Consequently, the research published in less prominent journals were reviewed to build an understanding of the subject matter and how it had been approached, albeit without being published in starred journals. All the 48 relevant articles were screened using the SPIO criteria (Akers, 2009) to identify those most eligible, shown in Table 1.

	<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
<b>Study Design</b>	Case studies and literature reviews	Quantitative studies and methodological paper
<b>Population</b>	Young adults >16 years, students, experiencing challenges in education overseas	Young people <16 years, non-students
<b>Intervention</b>	Any specifically resilience-based intervention	Non-resilience interventions
<b>Outcomes</b>	Demonstrate resilience, performance outcomes, impact on others	Non-education disciplines

Table 1. SPIO narrow screen inclusion and exclusion



The selection process revealed an author, Qing Gu, who has researched the experience of international students studying overseas and published several articles in the British Educational Research Journal. Although the majority of his work has focused on the undergraduate experience (Gu *et al.*, 2009; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015), the themes of his findings have parallels with this review and, therefore, his research was deemed significant.

The inclusion process also involved a revision of the keywords search. Initially these included the terms resilience, education, and international students. These keywords offered a range of articles, many of which cited other words of interest which may have had bearing on this research topic, including Anglophone and sojourner. Having identified these, the keywords were altered to include them separately. The search with 'Anglophone' provided 10 articles, of which offered no direct contribution to this research line. Rather, they offered insight into, for example, the geographical and professional mobility of scientists (Sidhu *et al.*, 2015) and the complex relationships among student attributes, school context, and student performance in mathematics and science in Trinidad and Tobago (Alexander & Maeda, 2015). When 'sojourner' was added to the search criteria, 11 articles were identified. Of these, one article did offer relevant research (Mesidor & Sly, 2016); however, owing to the need to maintain the quality measures imposed in this research's selection criteria, that article was omitted. The remaining 10 articles contributed to the discipline of Tourism and were deemed disassociated with this line of enquiry.

### **Data extraction**

A data extraction method was developed, which was adapted from the systematic review discussed by Simpson, Booth, Lawrence, Byrne, Mair and Mercer (2014). The data extracted included information on: article details (title, author, date, publication journal), abstract, introduction and topic, description of article search process, method which the article used for data collection and analysis, discussion and conclusions, additional reference list, tables. These were recorded on an excel spreadsheet.

### **Data synthesis**

After the articles were retrieved, reviewed and recorded, the next step was to draw out the key themes in the subject on resilience and how non-first language English students prepare for studying overseas, cope with studies and achieve academic progression. A theoretical diagram was developed which responded to several of the main themes discussed in the articles, specifically capital gains and losses throughout each stage of a student's academic journey overseas, shown at Figure 4.

### **Additional search**

During the collection of the primary data, a previously unreferenced capital in the field of international HE was consistently identified – the strength and support generated between the students on the same HE programmes. This phenomenon was unexpected as it had not been identified in the initial literature review on which capitals could contribute to academic resilience. The discovery of this resource attracted the term ‘neo-familial capital’, derived from the Greek word ‘neos’ meaning ‘new’ and, in this context, referring to the new family from which international students can gain strength which can be converted in times of need. The concept of new strength generated between colleagues in the same or similar circumstances is not new to other fields. A review of the literature revealed that it has been termed ‘fictive kinship’ in several academic disciplines, the findings of which are discussed below.

### **FINDINGS**

There have been several calls for further research into the field of academic resilience (Conchas, 2006; Gordon, 1995; Liddle, 1994; Morales, 2008; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Winfield, 1991). Nunez’s (2009) called for qualitative analysis of how students actually access and convert capital within the PG HE environment, providing insight into the “dynamics of capital conversion” (p.42). This research draws on the Bourdieusian concepts of cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital (Nunez, 2009; Watson *et al.*, 2009; Yosso, 2005) to help develop an understanding of the relationship between the principles of social capital and the development of academic resilience. This literature review, therefore, sets out a synopsis of the nature of resilience and its derivative ‘academic resilience’, conceptualising these in terms of Bourdieusian capital gains (Nunez, 2009): it considers how they may alter over space and time, and reflects on how the resilience of Anglophone international students studying in the UK’s PG HE system on short-term study visas may increase or erode. The discussion offers key observations on capital gains and how these are converted throughout the students’ journey.

#### **The nature of resilience**

Linnenlueke’s (2015) identifies the development of the term ‘resilience’, particularly in the field of business and management. Published in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Linnenlueke provides a list of highly cited papers on resilience, identifying 38 journal publications which refer to the concept of resilience but do not necessarily use the term specifically. Luthans, Avey and Patera (2008) are cited in this list, having published in the *Academy of Management Learning & Education*; the only journal Linnenlueke lists in the field of Learning and Education. Luthans’ (2002) earlier research offers the basis of how to understand resilience, defining it as “those with positive efficacy will bounce back and be resilient when meeting problems or even failure, while low efficacy will tend to give up when obstacles appear” (p.60). Luthans, Avey, Avolio,

Norman and Combs (2006) extend the earlier conception to introduce 'psychological capital', consisting of 4 synergistic factors: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency. In essence, much of the literature from 2001 suggests that resilience is a learnable capacity that can be measured and developed (Avey *et al.*, 2009; Bouckenoghe *et al.*, 2021; Dhiman, 2019; Helfgott, 2018; Luthans, 2002; Luthans *et al.*, 2006; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Windle (2011) concurs with the principle that resilience is a process which, "embraces positive adaption, with protective factors and assets that moderate risk factors and therefore reduces the impact of risk outcomes" (p.156). The nature of resilience is defined by several disciplines in very similar terms, with shared characterisations. However, disciplines such as psychology, education and developmental research offer their own conceptualisations of resilience (Buyl *et al.*, 2019; Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Dudasolav *et al.*, 2021; Gayles, 2005; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Johnson *et al.*, 2015; Martin & Marsh, 2006, 2008).

### **The concept of 'academic resilience'**

In conceptualising resilience, Masten and Reed (2002) state that it refers to a "class of phenomena characterised by patterns of positive adaption in the context of significant adversity or risk" (p.75). Academic resilience is defined by Morales and Trotman (2008) as, "the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding" (p.8). It can also provide strong predictors of performance (De Feyter *et al.*, 2020; Luthans *et al.*, 2016; Patnaik *et al.*, 2021) characterised by educational outcomes such as class participation, enjoyment of school, and general self-esteem (Martin & Marsh, 2006) as well as student engagement (Finn & Rock, 1997). In building resilience for personal success, Richardson, Neiger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990) suggest that social supports have a major part to play in generating high resilience levels which motivate them towards the achievement of personal success. Richardson's (2002) analysis goes on to provide three descriptive sets for resilience: resilience qualities, the resiliency process, and innate resilience. More recent research adds that social supports are strong predictors of resilience, which were shown in first and second generation college students (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007; Feng *et al.*, 2020; Weidong *et al.*, 2012; Yu *et al.*, 2011). Associated with these studies, Hartley (2011) and Swanson, Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant and O'Brien (2011) report that resilience can be a positive trait in educational settings and resilience should predict protective qualities that result in personal achievement. These studies begin to characterise resilience in terms of a process, with predictive attributes for personal academic performance levels which develop, in part, through strong social supports.

Caruana (2014) provides interesting insight into the lived experiences encountered by international HE students studying in the UK and their resilient responses to the challenges encountered in their journeys. She shows that the diversity of co-located international students can act as a resource

which can be harnessed to promote intercultural understanding and develop graduates as global citizens. She concludes that, the adversity students face are most notably cultural dislocation and dissonance and these are overcome through resilient traits and support mechanisms; international students drawing on their cultural backgrounds to generate resilience in the multicultural learning environment and adapt to the unfamiliar cultural setting. This theme is supported by Singh (2021), in which his research into the academic resilience of Malaysian students notes that international students develop resilience strategies through group work and university support services. However, what constituent's academic resilience in terms of social capital, how it can change over space and time and the potential for it to be generated even before the students' international journey to the UK begins, remains an under-researched area.

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Social capital is a simple concept – relationships in peoples' lives can have both positive and negative impact (Field, 2005). Establishing connections through networks can, over time, help them achieve more than they possibly would have alone. The term 'social' therefore, is defined by these interpersonal networks. The term 'capital' refers to a mode of stock which can be applied as strength in times of need. The extent of this can constitute resources, both shared within the networks and used at an individual level. The scholarly work associated with this field of research covers a number of disciplines including, sociology, economics, political science and education among many others. Its impact can be seen across several sectors, from health promotion to technological development to business innovation. The idea that social capital is a valuable asset established through the power of networks draws from three seminal writers: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

### **A new way of thinking - Bourdieu**

The "first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital" (Portes, 1998, p.3) is provided by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a European sociologist. Bourdieusian concepts of cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital (1977) stem from his work on the power dynamics within society. He offers a fresh perspective on the way in which power transfers between individuals and how the social order is maintained. He emphasises the corporeal nature of social life and the role of practice and personification in the social dynamic (Nunez, 2009). It is concluded that 'capital' is a form of strength, socially generated through networks of relationships among people which result in the enablement of personal functional effectiveness (Wenger, 1998). For Bourdieu, structured sets of values and the way people think about these he terms 'the habitus', using the metaphor of cultural capital to help explain the bonds that can be formed based on cultural similarities and ties (Field, 2005). This concept was largely informed by his empirical studies of the French high culture, from which he developed an early definition for social capital which refers to "social relationships which

will provide useful supports; a capital of honorability and respectability which is often indispensable if one desires to attract clients in socially important positions, and which may serve as a currency” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.503). Later, he refines this definition to capture the “sum of resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or group” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119) to reflect how social capital can be generated and that it is constituted by different types of resources. This is a key concept and underpins this research.

Bourdieu also introduces the idea that acquired capital can have a lesser impact in some social settings than others. Furthermore, levels of capital can increase or erode citing the example of educational qualifications having “credential deflation” based on the context and environment (Bourdieu, 1984, p.142); having relied on capital derived from their educational background but in some settings the strength this generates may have a far lesser impact. Using language to suggest multiple capitals can build resources establishes Bourdieu as a theorist with a new way of thinking. Other seminal authors developed the concept of social theory in different ways, generating adaptations to build a wider understanding.

### **Social capital in education – Coleman**

James Coleman (1926-95) was an American sociologist whose empirical research in to social capital initially focused on achievement in private schools compared with public schools. He suggests that religious affiliation, social class and ethnicity account, in part, for higher levels of achievement (Coleman *et al.*, 1982). His early work referred to social capital as a useful resource generated through personal networks but by 1994 this view had developed to one that conceptualised it as bridging the individual with the collective; “capital asset for the individual [is built from] social structural resources” (Coleman, 1994, p.302). Furthermore, whilst Bourdieu’s view of social capital was concerned with social and economic inequality, Coleman’s provided a more functionalist perspective and therefore looked to link the actions of individuals within complex systems to build capital. He summarises that, social capital is not a single entity but a variety of different entities. In applying social capital, Coleman does demonstrate a very similar view to Bourdieu in that it is seen as a resource and can be linked to educational achievement.

### **Networks and relationships as a resource – Putnam**

With a background in political science, Robert Putnam (born 1941) considers the concept of social capital as the property of nations and communities rather than individuals (Dahl Fitjar *et al.*, 2021; Portes, 1998) and links it to mostly societal benefits defined in terms of “democratic goals” (Manning, 2015, p.54). Putnam’s early research looked at political stability and economic prosperity in Italy after which he focused on America, in particular the decline of social capital since the 1940s. Over the 1990s, Putnam’s view of social capital changed based on his observations of the increased

influence of people and less of society (Baron *et al.*, 2000). In his landmark book 'Bowling Alone', Putnam refers to social capital as "social networks [that] have value...that effect the productivity of individuals and groups" (Putnam 2000, p.18-19). His work is widely acknowledged as being the most influential in its field owing to the scale of empirical research he undertook (Field, 2005). Importantly for this research, he adds the element of trying to identify factors that demonstrate the relationship between social capital and events. He links 14 aspects of society to building social capital, from an assessment of levels of social trust to how much people were engaged with civil activities – the more engagement the higher the level of social capital (Putnam, 2000). This concept of identifying the constituents of capital and linking the net effect to achievement is key focus of this research.

### **Summary**

Although neither Putnam, Coleman nor Bourdieu offer a significant distinguishable difference between types of social capital, Michael Woolcock's (2001) useful guide categorises them. Woolcock suggests that, social capital can be conceptualise as consisting of more than one thing – it is generated by a number of constituents, the volume of which can grow or diminish over time. These three include: 'bonding social capital', links between people in similar situations such as family, close friends and neighbours; 'bridging social capital', links between loose friendships and colleagues; 'linking social capital', which includes establishing connections with dissimilar people outside current networks which offers wider ranging resources (Field, 2005). This then offers the theoretical framework by which this study is set – social capital is made up of a number of constituents to build or erode resilience that can directly support international HE students in their studies over space and time.

### **CONCEPTUALISING RESILIENCE AS SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Analysis into how resilience is gained and developed to build various coping mechanisms (Avey *et al.*, 2009; Bouckennooghe *et al.*, 2021; Luthans, 2002; Luthans *et al.*, 2006; Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Windle, 2013; Xie *et al.*, 2019) reveals several possible clusters; groups from which capital can be built (Bourdieu, 1977) and how this concept can be applied to students studying overseas. It is acknowledged that the literature can be interpreted in several ways depending on the respective academic discipline (Johnson *et al.*, 2015), but here it is applied in terms of its contribution to understanding the resilience of students, and particularly those who are studying in challenging conditions for example, studying in different languages, in different countries, in other cultural settings. This research takes the perspective that, when personal functional effectiveness is introduced to various stressors, the ability to deal with these stressors is an indication of levels of resilience; a view shared by Palmer (2016). It is, therefore, important to understand what forms capital can take in the context of the possible strengths needed by Anglophone international

students studying in the UK's PG HE system on short-term study and how these may develop over time.

### **Identifying forms of capital**

For the purposes of this study, refining the list of the many types of capitals discussed in the literature since Bourdieu's initial discussions was achieved through identification of research which focuses on education. When studying cultural capital within communities of colour, Yosso (2005) identifies six forms of capital which communities convert to strength in the educational settings: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant. This way of looking at building capital from a number of sources which can be converted in times of need, aligns with the seminal writers' perspective (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000). To this list, the more recent outcomes of Pitman and Vidovich (2013) studies can be added. They identified the ability of students to equip themselves specifically to deal with the challenges in academic settings, termed 'academic capital'. Finally, Fordham's (1988) research into high-achieving black people in the US revealed the kinship-like connections he terms as 'fictive kin'; established through proximity and shared adversity in pursuit of academic success. For the purposes of this study, this is referred to as the establishment of a new family, or neo-familial capital. These eight capitals establish the theoretical setting of this research and each is discussed in turn.

### **Academic capital**

Morales (2008) conducted a research study to explore the psychology of 50 college students in India who demonstrated success in academia despite overwhelming odds. He claims that the ability to deal with the rigors of academic challenge is defined solely by exceptional academic achievement in the face of adversity. He further identifies several ubiquitous stressors such as: a lack of social and cultural capital; psychosocial issues that arise during the resilience journey; and the compensatory psychological responses necessary to cope with the stress and, ultimately, thrive within the academic environment. Morales (2008) uses the term 'two selves' in that reality essentially requires students to be bicultural, a concept which was defined and supported by several earlier studies (Casey, 2020; Clark, 1991; Gandara, 1993; Gordon, 1995, 1996; Morales & Trotman, 2004); ethnic minorities must have "two selves to be accepted in American academic society" (Morales, 2008, p.156). Morales concludes that there are common issues for academically resilient individuals, including: bicultural, familial polarization, cultural inversion and the burden of achievement. He found that levels of stress are caused primarily by the cultural discontinuity inherent in the resilience journey. The term 'academic resilience' is referred to in a number of settings, but primarily to the systems establishments of education use to maintain their academic integrity (Griffin *et al.*, 2020; Henderson *et al.*, 2018; Rowlands, 2011) and generate individual capabilities which best equip students towards successfully achieving their academic goals (Pitman & Vidovich, 2013). In their

research in Australian universities, Pitman and Vidovich (2013) observed that the students' 'capital conversion' (Bourdieu, 1977) was derived from their economic, social and cultural capital. It is this latter concept of academic capital which informs this research, as it seeks to reveal the most effectual and prevalent capitals bilingual international students use in the process of capital conversion when overcoming the challenges they face. Orta, Murguia and Cruz's (2019) study into the college experiences of Latinas and how they overcame the challenges associated with their academic journeys, suggests that academic capital is characterised by the skills and knowledge that support students' educational persistence towards achievement. Compton-Lilly and Delbridge's (2019) research into the economic impact of the academic capital of learners and their achievements identified resources that help learners build strength to overcome academic challenges. These studies help to demonstrate that academic capital can be considered a convertible resource that supports a learners' academic progression by equipping them with skills, knowledge and resources.

### **Aspirational capital**

As for other forms of capital, Yosso (2005) identified aspirational capital as a strength that can built resilience. Yosso defines aspirational capital as, "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real or perceived barriers" (p.77). However, relatively little has been published in the last 5 years on aspirational capital in education. Responding to Nunez's (2009) earlier call for more qualitative analysis of how students access and convert capital within the HE environment, O'Shea (2015) draws on her research on how the students' journey into a university educational system can enact success. She suggests that individuals rely on existing and established capital reserves in their transition to HE. Her findings identify aspirational capital as a form of resilience: the dreaming of possibilities beyond their present circumstances. In a more recent study, Carmo and Klein's (2019) research investigates the academic trajectories of young adults from low-income families in Brazil. They suggest that, with supporting national socio-economic policies, young peoples' aspirations for personal and professional advancement can be met; as a result, aspirational capital is stimulated and the students convert this towards increased academic achievement.

### **Cultural capital**

Although Yosso (2005) refers to networks of people and communities as social capital, for the purposes of this study the term 'cultural capital' is preferred as it aligns more closely with Bourdieu's view. Among the many forms cultural capital can take, Bourdieu (1986) identifies how cultural capital can be characterised in terms of objective tangible goods, institutionalised academic credentials, and embodied in mind and spirit, for example "the habitus" (O'Shea, 2015, p.63). In an attempt to de-centre the male, white privileged perspective of cultural capital - which Bourdieu was criticised for (Pitman, 2013) - Yosso's Community of Cultural Wealth framework (2005) was



developed to build an understanding that cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed, but developed through the knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by groups in society. As such, cultural capital can be viewed as a resource which individuals can develop through culture participation and the possession of related objects (Mikus *et al.*, 2020; Sullivan 2001; Wildhagen, 2009). Other research conceptualises cultural capital as purely symbolic, arguing that academic staff communicate better with students who are engaged with high status cultures by "...[giving] them more attention and special assistance, and perceive them as more intelligent or gifted than students who lack cultural capital" (DiMaggio, 1982, p.190).

In the internationalisation of education, cross-cultural opportunities have introduced a variety of tensions and visible exclusionary practices. Chen (2014) highlights these and the need for those living in a diversified community to develop cross-cultural competence. Furnham and Bochner (1986) also refer to this view, stating that in the context of international students they face several difficulties which native students do not. These challenges include academic adjustments in terms of the local teaching and learning culture and adapting to the local society. In conceptualising cultural resilience, little has been published. Harper (2015) suggests that this term has been used by researchers in different and disassociated disciplines, yet the characteristics of their understanding can be aligned with the social sciences. The term 'cultural resilience' is evident in the literature, referring to a community's ability to restore essential balance to their lives in the face of profound displacement and loss (Beveridge *et al.*, 2020; Turner *et al.*, 2008). Understanding the premise of a culture is developed by building an individual's affinity with their cultural identity, cultural knowledge, and cultural artefacts (Harper, 2015). Therefore, attaining levels of cultural knowledge builds levels of cultural resilience. Cultural capital can, therefore, be understood as a collective term for the building blocks which - as for academic capital - can be mobilised through 'capital conversion'. Dizon, Malcolm and Park (2020) identified six resources, or capitals, which constitute what they term as "community cultural wealth". In doing so, they separate out "spiritual capital" as a vital source of strength (p.128). For the purposes of this research, spiritual capital and cultural capital are considered as interchangeable owing to the recognised intrinsic relationship there is between all types of strengths that can be derived from close links within a community.

### **Linguistic capital**

Defined by Yosso (2005) as "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p.77), linguistic capital has featured in many studies that frequently focus on spoken language (Chavez, 2018; Denton *et al.*, 2020; Napp-Avelli, 2014; Peralta *et al.*, 2013) rather than other forms of communications, for example signing in the deaf community (Braun *et al.*, 2017). Studies differ in the relative impact linguistic capital can have on those looking to convert it into a strength to overcome challenges. Examples of these in the

scientific community include Zamudio (2015), suggesting that bilinguals' benefit from their linguistic capabilities whereas others suggest that bilinguals can suffer from linguistic fatigue (Peralta *et al.*, 2013). The relative importance the spoken word plays in this case study, centred on a UK university, forms a key area of research. Interestingly, the benefits or disbenefits this may give to international students was an under-research area until more recently. Nishioka and Durrani (2019) apply Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction theory (1977) to a household survey in Malawi to engage with emerging debates on the relationship between language and equitable education, linking language with educational attainment. They conclude that language remains a key competent in reproducing material in education, but their results highlight the continued gap in the research to help identify any relationship between spoken language and achievement. Of course, in the context of academia, the spoken word plays an even more influential role in the progression and potential achievement of students, regardless of their linguistic background. The language of academia has emerged as developing its own accepted high-status terminology and this can indicate that a discipline has succeeded in establishing academic status (Sicurella, 2016). This then further emphasises the role linguistic capital can have on the learning journey of non-first language Anglophones studied in the UK's HE sector.

### **Resistant capital and navigational capital**

Also featuring in Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory, resistant capital is defined as, "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p.77). As such, resistant capital is built up whereby knowledge and skills are developed due to "resistance to subordination" (p.72) for example, people of colour resisting racist messages and subordination. This then generates motivation to challenge norms and behaviours. Yosso defines navigational capital as, "skills of manoeuvring through social institutions" (p.77). This can refer to those who navigate their way to a destination by first acquiring essential skills and expertise at specific locations, often for elite groups (Montes & Ramos, 2020). When they arrive at their destination, they are highly equipped for the challenges they may face. This brief overview of these capitals further supports the notion of constituents that build resilience can come from multiple sources. The direct relevance of resistant capital to this study is considered partial owing to the study's focus on positive impactors. Navigational capital is considered more relevant as international Master's students may have visited the UK before and attribute capital gains to this experience.

### **Familial capital**

Gofen (2009) defines familial capital as an "ensemble of means, strategies, and resources embodied in the family's way of life that influences the future of their children...and is implicitly and explicitly reflected through behavior, emotional processes, and core values" (p.47). Familial capital can be thought of as knowledge nurtured among a family that carries a sense of community, history, and

memory (Cun, 2020; Shapiro, 2018; Yosso, 2005). It can be looked at as strength, generated by direct interventions from family members. Research in education has well established literature on the interplay between familial expectations and behaviours that can play an important part in students educational progress (Hossler *et al.*, 1999; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Shapiro, 2018; Williams-Chase, 2020). This capital is thought of in terms of direct logistical support – administrative and financial – and in building attitudes, values and behaviours towards education and academic achievement (Amlani & Paulson, 2020; Cun, 2020; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Johnson, Taasobshirazi, Kestler and Cordova (2015) provide an interesting perspective on the familial support networks which help prepare international students for their academic journeys. Underpinned by the work of Masten and Tellegen (2012) and Richardson (2002), they develop and test a theoretical model which attempts to capture US college students' ratings of messengers of resilience and models of resilience. Models of resilience are those within a family closest to them who demonstrate persistence on challenging tasks, and messengers are those closest to them who limit encouragement to words. Their results suggest that the influence of messengers diminishes as students become more informed and involved in their studies, but models have a longer lasting influence that develops persistence characteristics in the student. As such, the positive effect models can have over students deemed to be closely associated with them helps to build familial capital (O'Shea, 2015). Other research suggests that familial capital can also have negative effects on students rather than it being considered an asset, including when moving away from family for HE and not having their support for the prospective educational experience overseas (Gofen, 2009; Yosso, 2005). The possible effects of familial relationships are considered a key focus for this research, as these were expected to be prevalent in discussions with those students who experience initial isolation (Hossler *et al.*, 1999; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Poynton, 2021).

### **Neo-familial capital (fictive kinship)**

Following the results of the preliminary study, a different type of capital was identified which the respondents suggested played a significant role in helping them deal with the pressures of studying overseas. For many, this had come as a surprise – their reliance on people they had not previously met yet had an influence over their academic journey. This principle led to a further review of the literature, searching for the term 'new family'. In the academic discipline of 'education', this search offered no supporting literature. However, the associated term 'fictive kinship' did offer limited results in as much as, over a period of 5 years (November 2015 to December 2020) only four journal articles were identified (refined through Full Text Online, Scholarly and Peer-reviewed, Education), all of which focused on multicultural challenges and dealing with skin colour related issues. In widening the search to other disciplines, several references to kinship-like relationships were identified to help define the term and potentially make links with this research. In the wider realm of social science, yet still associated with race issues, Fordham (1988) notes that fictive kin group

“refers to a kinship-like connection between and among persons in a society, not related by blood or marriage, who have maintained essential reciprocal social or economic relationships” (p. 56). Fordham (1988, 1996) discusses the matter of high-achieving black people in the US who chose behaviours which minimise "their relationship to the black community and to the stigma attached to 'blackness'" by adopting a raceless identity to pursue academic success (p.57). The discussion is widened by contrasting views which suggest that adopting a strong racial identity actually promotes academic success for black people in the US (Anderson, 1988; Weinberg, 1977). In this context, the nature of changing behaviours to enhance academic performance is, in part, associated with academic capital but at the US High School level rather than the scope of this research: international Master’s students studying in the UK for a limited period with no prior knowledge of their academic peer-group or notion that they would come to rely on each other in the pursuit of their academic goals. In Margret Nelson’s book, *Like Family* (2020), she describes the development of interpersonal relationships which bind people in similar ways to that of blood-tied relationships based on her studies on white, middle-classed people in the US. Her findings suggest that building fictive kinship ties is an intentional act rather than by chance. She describes the characteristics of fictive kinship, in which she includes the notion that a mutual understanding of the significance of the relationship need not occur – one person may consider their colleagues to be “like family” whereas the other may not (p.76). For the purposes of this research into academic resilience and the generation of capital strengths to support the learning journey, the principle of generating new family-like relationships, akin to the aforementioned term ‘fictive kinship’, is described as ‘neo familial capital’ so as not to confuse it with other related yet potentially different concepts of new ‘like family’ relationships. The term ‘neo familial capital’ also indicates an association with ‘familial capital’ – a capital already included in this study – but something different and new, and perhaps unexpected.

### **Capitals which build academic resilience**

Overcoming the challenges of studying in a different language and in a foreign country, with dissimilar cultural norms, academic systems and other social practices, can result in an individual having to constantly renegotiate, reproduce and expand their own social, cultural and professional identities (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Karakas, 2020; Vertovec, 2009). Building in this concept, this study investigates the view that specific types of capital can build resilience in students before they embark on their international journey. Furthermore, that this capital can change during the period of their journey overseas (space) on a short-term study visa (time). These developments can either generate higher levels of capital and therefore add to personal resilience or erode levels of capital and detract from an individual’s resilience. Several authors have discussed how resilience is generated (Cun, 2020; Johnson *et al.*, 2015; Poynton, 2021), developed (Chen, 2014; Jamaludin *et al.*, 2016; Williams-Chase, 2020) and challenged (Karakas, 2020; O’Shea, 2015; Sato, 2016), although

no literature was found to help explain the most significant developments to resilience or how it is affected in the context of international bilingual students studying in the UK HE sector.

### **Academic resilience versus academic adaptation**

The concept of academic adaptation bears a resemblance to academic resilience, however for the purposes of this study it is important to recognize the difference. Academic adaptation can refer to the psychological and behavioural reflection caused by learning (Zhang & Jiang, 2006). It is said to rely on relationships between students and, students and teachers. A positive teaching environment is said to be reflected in good academic adaptation which can result in high levels of student mental well-being and performance (Chemers *et al.*, 2001; Mestre *et al.*, 2006; Xie *et al.*, 2019). Yu and Wright (2016) suggest that the characteristics of academic adaptation can be seen in how well students cope with their studies, most notably the practical challenges they face rather than the academic difficulties.

Resilience refers to the ability to overcome difficulties or recover for challenges, in this case during PG studies. Whilst there is undoubtedly a similarity between these terms, academic resilience specifically relates to dealing with problems and the struggles students face on their academic journey. This is different from the more practical challenges highlighted by Yu and Wright (2016), the adaptive process Xie *et al.*, (2019) describe as being facilitated between student-student or student-teacher relationships, and the reflective perspective provided by Zhang and Jiang (2006). Academic resilience directly relates to the need to recover, bounce back, and regain ground hence this term is considered a more appropriate concept by which to consider how international students deal with the challenges and setbacks they face on their academic journey to the UK.

### **Resilience, academic resilience and capital**

The plethora of definitions and perspectives identified to help conceptualise and define the term 'resilience' offer several key themes which can be said to characterise its nature. For the purposes of this research, Luthans' (2002) definition provides the basis of understanding, offering an individualistic perspective which highlights both the positive and negative effects of personal resilience and the dynamic environment within which it is generated and deployed. Luthans' (2002) perspective accords with his later research, which emphasises the learnable nature of resilience and that it can be measured and developed (Avey *et al.*, 2009; Kim, 2020; Luthans *et al.*, 2006; Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Shapiro, 2018). As the discussion turns to academic resilience, research focuses on the achievement of academic success by being resilient (Hartley, 2011; Morales & Trotman, 2008; Swanson *et al.*, 2011; Xie *et al.*, 2019). This study is concerned with the generation and erosion of capitals which contribute to the level of resilience (Wenger, 1998) and the way these levels possibly change over space and time (Palmer, 2016). Bourdieusian concepts of cultural, social, and symbolic

forms of capital (1977) provide a framework, concluding that capital is a form of resource which is socially generated through networks of relationships among people, a view supported by other scholars (Amlani & Paulson, 2020; Field, 2003; Wenger, 1998).

The debate concerning the application of Bourdieu is acknowledged, as are the tensions between how researchers apply his concepts. The discourse on cultural capital for example, shows those who see it as a purely symbolic resource rather than a tangible resource which students can draw upon (Breinholt & Jaeger, 2020; DiMaggio, 1982; Kaufman & Gabler, 2004). An excerpt from Krarup and Munk's (2016) article in the *Journal of Sociology of Education* captures the debate on how to measure cultural capital, "Within the real and symbolic individual resource interpretations, comprehensive variation exists that often raises lively discussions over questions such as: exactly what measures are appropriate; how are they distinguished from other relevant ones; and what are the causal 'steps' in intergenerational transmission from parents to children?" (p.765). This begins to show the complexity of trying to understand capital, albeit from a positivistic perspective. In developing this line of research, an interpretivist philosophy is preferred whereby the levels of capital can be assessed using several research methods which attempt to triangulate the data for example, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. As such, the categorisations of the capitals which students consider to be the basis for their resilience during their academic journey can be self-assessed. Importantly, assessing the actual levels of resilience is not considered an appropriate qualitative goal for this study. The value stems from analysis of how resilience is developed and potentially changes over space (where they are studying in relation to their home country) and time (during their studies) by allowing the students to tell their own stories (Miller, 2000).

### **Capital gains and losses: generation and erosion**

The literature review offers a broad range of data to conceptualise, define and apply the terms resilience, academic resilience and capital. Research Aim 2 seeks to consider how the levels of academic resilience of international students studying in the UK can develop over space and time, and how these impact on student progression. To help achieve this, the constituents of social capital which

help to build academic resilience need to be defined and their origins identified in the students' journey. Figure 4 draws from the literature review and offers a conceptual representation of how

### How social capital may change over space and time

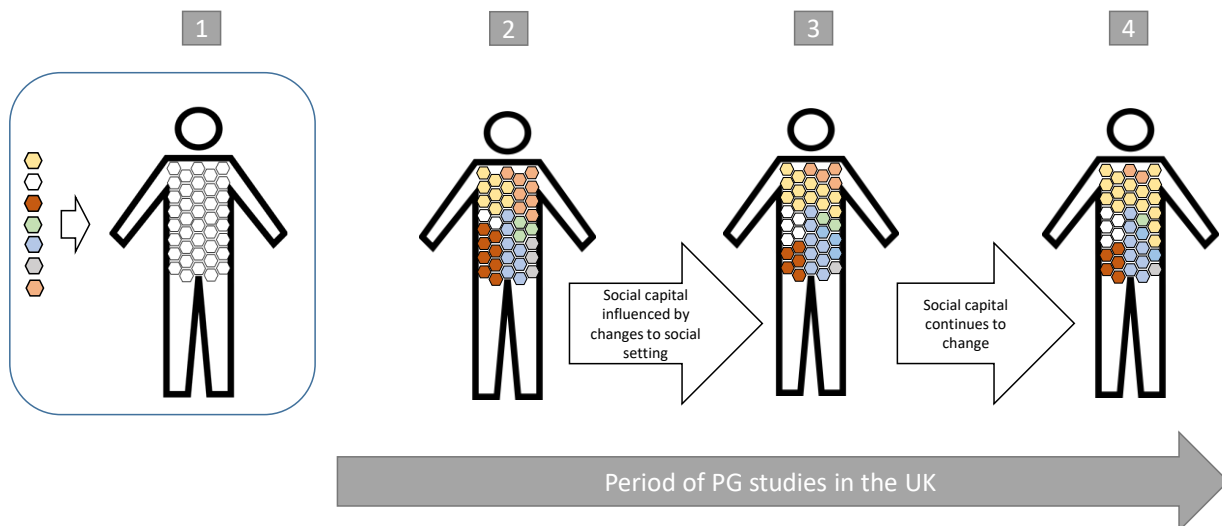


Figure 4. Conceptual representation of how social capital may change over space and time

the constituents of social capital can build over the students' journey. Image 1 shows the variety of social capital constituents which can generate academic resilience (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Manning, 2015), the colours representing the different capitals available. Image 2 represents an international student arriving in the UK ready to start their learning journey equipped with some constituents that make up their overall level of social capital that is ready for conversion in times of need (for example, familial capital (Gofen, 2009) and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005)). Image 3 shows a change to the constituents of social capital owing to the influence of the social setting (for example, greater levels of neo-familial capital (Fordham, 1988) and less of others (Peralta *et al.*, 2013)). Image 4 suggests further changes to social capital as different challenges need to be overcome and the social setting develops (Bourdieu, 1984).

When drawing together the major themes of the nature of resilience, how and when it is gained, when it is used, and how its efficacy can change over space and time, it is possible to conceptualise on how this would be visually represented. Figure 4 offers this simplistic depiction of this process. It shows that academic resilience can be conceptualised in terms of being constituted by different capitals which may increase or erode over time. At the start of the journey - at home - the student will have levels of each capital by which to meet the challenges they are likely to face when studying

overseas (Courtois, 2019; Furnham & Bohner, 1986; Gu, 2009). As the student arrives and attempts to settle into the new academic environment these levels are likely to increase or decline (Courtois, 2019; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; O'Shea, 2015; Sato, 2016; Vertovec, 2009). During the journey, the student's capital profile may change significantly. These changes could affect even the deepest levels of self-identity, supported by Gu (2009). He suggests that for Chinese students studying the UK on undergraduate programmes, perceptions of the self can be changed based on a number of factors including, physical maturity and interculturality. Understanding what the most influential capitals for student resilience are when preparing to study in the UK and how these can change over time could have significant implications to governmental policies and university practices in support international students' progression through their PG studies. It also relates to other areas of research: the net capital gain/loss over the international student's academic journey; capitals erosion over time; identifying the capitals mostly likely to be affected and the support systems needed; capital thresholds that may have significant adverse effects a student resilience; the impact graduates can have on others when they return home.

The literature review does offer some insight into elements of this line of research in terms of what resilience is and how it can be gained (Amlani & Paulson, 2020; Ledesma, 2014; Linnenluecke, 2015; Shapiro, 2018), how to recognise it (Dizon *et al.*, 2020; Morales, 2008; Yosso, 2005; Shapiro, 2018; Zebrowski, 2013), how it can change (Jamaludin *et al.*, 2016; Sato, 2016), and the effects this journey can have on students' transnational identities (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). However, these studies have not focused on how international students studying in the UK on PG HE programme build and convert academic resilience to enable their continued progression – the focus of this study.

### **From the conceptual to the theoretical**

Figure 4 indicates that a student's resilience may change during the academic journey overseas. These changes are depicted in stages in their journey when social settings change and academic challenges need to be overcome. The capitals that make up the levels of resilience can be separate from each other but together may constitute the overall level of academic resilience the student may have. Jabareen (2009) states that, a conceptual framework can support the qualitative process to aid an understanding of a phenomenon. As such, this research project seeks to develop a model from the findings to show how students perceive their progression through their academic journey and how they convert social capital to maintain their progression towards overall achievement – demonstrating their academic resilience. Linked with grounded theory, adopting an inductive approach begins with the research and develops the hypothesis: theory derived from data whereby theory is developed through constantly cross referring between the findings and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the purposes of the early stages of this study, a theoretical perspective is adopted to guide the overarching focus of the research. Underpinned by the literature, this research seeks to



consider the constituents of social capital, when it is converted and how it generates academic resilience. It also seeks to consider if capitals are stronger than other and if they increase or erode over space (studying in a different country) and time (temporary study visa).

### **Chapter summary**

With the ever-increasing number of international students entering the global market, many of which enrol on PG HE, limited research offers insight into how Master's students generate and convert academic resilience over their journey and the possible capital gains or losses their experience may result in. Information from the UK Council for International Student Affairs (2017) and International Education Strategy (March 2019) begin to demonstrate the importance of offering exceptional student support and experiences to all international markets; a situation exacerbated by the falling levels of EU students applying to study in the UK following the UK's exit from the EU. Therefore, developing a greater understanding of how international students build and convert capital throughout their learning journey in the UK could inform national and organisational policies in improving progression rates and experiences. These may also include pre-arrival support prior to students embarking on their academic journey. The three most influential implications are: building greater knowledge and understanding of how international Master's students studying in the UK in their second language achieve academic resilience and progression; informing governmental policies that deliver against the targets set out in the International Education Strategy (March 2019); and, guiding UK HE institutions on new and improved practices to support their delivery of the governmental targets of the UK HE sector.

In conclusion, this chapter considers the idea that academic resilience can be conceptualised as a resource, developed through social capital, and may increase or erode over space and time; specifically, in the case of international students studying Master's programmes in the UK's HE-sector. The literature review responds to Nunez's (2009) call for qualitative analysis into student capital levels in HE, builds on O'Shea's (2015) research into student experience when moving into the HE environment, and reflects on Gu and Schweisfurth's (2015) paper which considers the impact of studying overseas on Chinese students. This leads to a contemporary understanding of the way international students develop resilience before and during their academic HE journey, identifying eight potential capitals which form the basis for this study: academic, aspirational, cultural, familial, linguistic, neo-familial, navigational and resistant. Current research includes studies conducted on mainly Chinese and Australian student bodies, with other research focused on non-first language US citizens studying in US colleges. What is apparent is the lack of research into the resilience of international students studying in the UK on PG programmes and how resilience may change over space and time. Underpinned by the literature, this study seeks to investigate the generation of academic resilience through potentially eight capitals – characterised using Bourdieu's concepts of

social capital (1977, 1986) – to develop an understand of what generates convertible strength in this context and how this may be affected over the period of overseas study. In application, if the experience of international PG students studying in the UK can be understood in these terms, this could potentially have significant implications on policies governing international student support, increase levels of achievement and satisfaction, and influence governmental policy on attracting overseas markets to the UK's HE sector.

### **3 - METHODOLOGY**

Krarup and Munk's (2016) article in the *Journal of Sociology of Education* captures the debate on how to measure cultural capital, "Within the real and symbolic individual resource interpretations, comprehensive variation exists that often raises lively discussions over questions such as: exactly what measures are appropriate; how are they distinguished from other relevant ones; and what are the causal 'steps' in intergenerational transmission from parents to children?" (p.765). This begins to show the complexity in trying to research academic resilience in terms of social capital.

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach in order to offer a comprehensive understanding of any phenomenon identified (Jabareen, 2009), akin to similar studies into social capital and resilience. It aligns with the research methods of some of Bourdieu's (1984) major studies. It takes the line that qualitative analysis plays an important role in integrating states of affairs (structures) with social processes (practices), and informs the interplay between structures and individuals, groups, and institutions (Krarupa & Munk, 2016). This perspective is developed from an ontology which conceptualises capital as a resource (Lin, 2001) for individuals (external) and structures (internal) (Adler & Kwon, 2000). However, the emphasis of this research is on the capitalisation of intangible assets which act as resources that contribute to building an overall level of academic resilience. For the international PG students in the UK, academic resilience can be mobilised to cope with the rigours of overseas studies and, therefore, this research examines capital at its constituent parts (the individual level). To provide a rationale for the structure and approach, the researcher's philosophical and methodological perspectives are discussed followed by a review of the data collection tools, techniques and analytical methods for qualitative research, with the selected paradigm justified. In short, it is split into two parts: theoretical orientation and justification for the selection of a case study paradigm, and how the data was collected, collated and analysed.

#### **THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND JUSTIFICATION**

In seeking to understand how social systems and practices are created, this section sets out the theoretical perspective to help orientate the way the data was gathered and analysed. In doing so, it establishes the ontological and epistemological views that shaped the research and the qualitative approach to data collected from within the case study context.

#### **DISCOURSE CONTEXT AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

##### **Views of discourse**

There are two widely recognised systems to approach the analysis of language: discourse analysis and conversation analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Discourse analysis looks to examine forms of communication, not just the spoken word. It also seeks to derive meaning from many forms of

texts, including websites and emails, and much less emphasis is placed on the naturally occurring forms of discussion. Here, the analytical approach commonly takes two forms: anti-realist and constructionist. For the former, there is an assumption that there is no external knowledge the researcher can reveal; all is derived internally. For the latter, there are things independent of people from which knowledge can be derived (Potter, 1997). Conversation analysis on the other hand, examines conversations in terms of the word choices and utterances, such as pauses and sounds. This “fine-grained analysis of talk” (p.531) happens in naturally occurring instances. Applying this approach can offer the underlying motivations for talk whereby language and social interaction can produce forms of social order (Psathas, 1995). This research takes the conversational analysis approach as it purports the assumption that analysis is grounded in data. As such, meaning from conversations and the construction of them in a natural setting, must be understood in terms of the detailed analysis of what was said and how it was said. Furthermore, conversation analysis takes the view that the pauses, punctuation and overall grammar used in the dialogue can offer even more fine-grained analysis (Heritage, 1987). For the purposes of this research, none of the respondents used English as their first language. If examination and analysis of the grammar was to play a major part in understanding the meaning of the words used, this was considered a risk to the data analysis as errors in grammar could result in the wrong meaning being derived from the words they used. Furthermore, exclamations were also omitted as the international students invited to participate in the research came from several different countries and expressed the English language in many different ways. It was common for them to use intonations on words and phrases as they would in their own language, yet this could be misleading when expressing themselves in English. However, the words and contexts the words used by the respondents did play an important part in the narrative analysis.

### **Qualitative and quantitative research**

Establishing the overall paradigm by which this research was governed helped to set the framework for the selected data gathering and the analytical methods. The commonly used terms for the two approaches to research are ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’. The former is predominantly concerned with generation and analysis of numbers, statistics, and other tangible data which can be measured and potentially generate facts and reliable generalisations. For the latter, data collection can be associated with words and perspectives and the generation of emergent theory to contextualise understanding (Bryman, 1988). As this research seeks to derive meaning from the words and phrases respondents use to articulate how they overcame the challenges they faced during their academic journey to the UK, a qualitative approach was adopted. However, qualitative research has been challenged regarding the potential subjectivity of the analysis and findings, the limitations to replicating the research, its credibility and transferability. Responding to these challenges, this research takes an inductive view, whereby theory is generated from empirical research. It also draws

from the constructionist ontological perspective, deriving meaning from human interactions (Bryman & Burgess, 1999).

The subjectivity of qualitative research often becomes the focus of the challenges to its credibility, specifically the potential for the researcher to be unsystematic and the importance and over-significance they place on the findings (Bryman, 1994). In this research, the data collection processes are aligned to the principles of qualitative research and rigorously followed, set out in Part 2 – data collection, collation and analysis. The respondents were specifically selected as a purposive non-probability sample. The results were expected to potentially provide early indications of data saturation. The relative significance of the findings were provisionally tested on the questionnaire cohort of respondents by exploring any potential transferability. However, the findings recognise the relatively low number of respondents. The challenge to the replicability of this research is difficult to refute as the nature of this case study is bound in space (a UK university) and time (2017 to 2020). Maylor and Blackmon (2005) state that the reliability in a qualitative approach endeavours to ensure that the research design is clear and transparent so the research can be replicated, with a reasonable expectation of comparable results. This research sets out the methods by which the respondents were selected, how the data was gathered, the analytical processes, and how the findings relate to the theoretical underpinning. Furthermore, the validity of the research design is established through its alignment with similar previous studies in social capital and resilience, as well as the analytical approach. Moreover, the application of a method of triangulation adds to the reliability and validity of the results (Hernández, 2010). As much detail as possible has been added to this research to help other researchers reconstruct similar studies, but with the acknowledgement that exact replications would be unachievable.

### **Approach to data collection, collation and analysis**

This research is concerned with how international students cope with the rigours of their studies in a different country to their own and in a second language, with previously unknown colleagues. It seeks to gain meaning from the way the respondents reflect on their experiences in an attempt to identify and understand the dominant factors generated from social constructions in the context of the study environment. This approach aligns with Casey's (1995) study into societal transformation, where she looked to understand the linkages between work, the self and society. This study also reflects Pettigrew's (1990) approach to qualitative research, in which insight is gained by analysing how the respondents speak of their journeys: investigating the sequences and events students followed as they progressed through their course. It looks for actions and activities they describe as significant challenges to their onward progression. Respondents' explanations of how they dealt with these challenges were expected to identify resources they used to help them cope. Furthermore, respondents could offer further explanations of the source of these resources and the

frequency they were used. When the data was collected and collated from all the respondents – from whichever method was used – themes were identified and analysed against the eight social capitals to reveal any common characteristics. These were annotated and later reviewed to help understand how the students coped with the challenges they faced: generating and converting social capital in order to be academically resilient.

Whilst many qualitative research methods can be particularly associated with process, the data collection methods selected for this research allowed for a flexible approach where respondents had the freedom to reflect on their most significant challenges and how they coped. In allowing a genuinely open discussion stimulated by the prompt-questions, respondents were encouraged to speak of things that may not have been previously considered by the researcher (Blumer, 1954). As such, any resources identified by the respondents required analysis. Under analysis, if the identified resources shared characteristics with any of the constituent capitals, a relationship was considered. To confirm this relationship, analysis of the narrative and context within which the resources were used was required. Furthermore, owing to the shared demography of the respondents', the use of language was considered a potentially limiting factor in gaining an accurate account of the students' experiences. Therefore, similar words and phrases that could have been attributed to the characteristics of the constituent capitals were reviewed and contextualising to determine any associations. If any constituents of social capital were consistently spoken of, determining potentially how influential they may have been was important so these were scrutinised to track how frequently they were referred to and in what context. Furthermore, identifying strengths the students arrived with or if they generated them after arrival, helped to understand the cause of these resources. These were also considered to potentially offer indications of any erosion or lessening of the impact of capitals.

These elements of analysis helped to establish whether or not Bourdieu's concept was supported - that social capital has constituents that are socially constructed and can be converted to provide a personal advantage in times of need (1977, 1986). In the context of this study, the constituents that provide academic resilience were provisionally identified and in what circumstances they were likely to be converted. The sources of capitals were discussed in order to provide an indication of any changes to these constituents, for example: new capitals, increased levels of capital or capitals which may erode or have a lesser impact. Owing the expected limitations of the findings of this relatively small-scale study, specific parameters on its design provided the structure and rigour to the process.

## **THE STUDY DESIGN**

### **The case study approach**

Case studies require a detailed account of one specific instance of the research phenomenon. This approach is often applied in business research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), which can include four groupings: a single organisation, a single location, a person, or a single event. Although the main cohort of respondents were part of a single university (organisation), this research also considers the location to be important; it is the respondents' proximity to each other and their social interaction which is of interest (Linstead, 1985), as well as the organisational context and behaviours (Pettigrew, 1985). The selection of the particular location was primarily guided by Stake's (1995) suggestion whereby, the selection of a case should be about the opportunity to learn from the specific instance. The case under review was selected owing to the cluster of international students that had assembled at the location to undertake their Master's studies, all of which were on short-term study visas and at least bilingual. Furthermore, there were no UK domiciled students so the external influences and experiences of all the invited participants were shared; none had the opportunity to live at home or socialise with long term friends or family members in country, and all were dealing with the challenges of studying in a second language. There are recognised limitations to the possible generalisability of the findings derived from a single case study; however, it is possible to claim some degree of theoretical generalisability which could form the basis of wider testing (Lee *et al.*, 2007). The goal of this research is to develop a deep understanding of the complexities international students face while studying in the UK on a Master's programme for one year, but specifically about the academic resilience they demonstrate to support the achievement of their aspirations. The findings are expected to inform larger studies and support the development of the HE sector practices and national policies on how to support international students' progression and achievement.

### **Representative and longitudinal case study**

Yin (2003) suggests that cases for study can be categorised as being associated with five distinct types: critical case – a case is selected based on how likely it would be to prove or disprove the hypothesis; unique case – an extreme case under investigation; revelatory case – researching a previously inaccessible case; representative case – one that exemplifies an everyday situation; and longitudinal case – concerned with a situation that may change over time. Although this study initially considered a critical case based on the availability of a purposive non-probability sample, it takes an inductive approach so there was no hypothesis to test. A representative case was identified owing to the availability of a sample where the participants' 'everyday' lived experiences were known to reflect the topic being researched, and how the case could potentially be replicated at any UK HE institution offering Master's programmes to international applicants. Moreover, the representative case was also expected to demonstrate possible changes to levels of academic

resilience over time, so a blended approach was considered appropriate to reflect this. As such, a longitudinal approach was also adopted, as this case study seeks to consider changes which can occur in the organisational setting (Pettigrew, 1990), the results of which could be considered useful in understanding how phenomena may change over space and time. Of the two main types of longitudinal designs – panel study and cohort study (Bryman & Bell, 2015) – the panel study approach was adopted as it affords researchers the framework by which to invite a sample of respondents from the same organisation (or panel) at different points in time. The cohort study restricts researchers to drawing from a sample of respondents but from one single cohort, made up of similar characteristics having the same experience. As this research primarily identified sample students from one location but on three separate occasions (preliminary study, main cohort and focus group), the panel is the case study university and acts as the consistent theme rather than a specific cohort; three sets of respondents informing this research but from just one institution. It therefore adopted the system which undertakes a sample surveyed in space (in one organisation) and time (during the latter stages of one cohort of respondents' studies) and then surveyed again in space (the same organisation) and later in time (with a different cohort of respondents in the latter stages of their studies).

It is acknowledged that this research does not primarily seek to track potential changes to socially constructed phenomena at specific points in time; however, it does look for changes to socially constructed phenomena over time as reported by the panel study participants. The principles of a representative case and longitudinal design were adopted using the panel as the constant, rather than the cohort, and with the various sample groups offering their views of the changes they experienced over time.

## **HOW THE DATA WAS COLLECTED, COLLATED AND ANALYSED**

Part 1 established the nature of this study in its ontological and epistemological setting and introduced the preferred approach to the research paradigm. Part 2 provides the detail of how the researcher managed the study, how the case study was selected, the ethical considerations, the data collection methods, participants' profiles, and how the data was analysed.

## **THE DATA COLLECTION AND COLLATION PROCESSES**

### **The research context**

This research adopts an interpretive approach to help understand the phenomenon identified in the findings. In order to build a picture of the relationship between people, their surroundings and the systems which influence these, participants needed to be drawn from a social setting within which human actions generate meaning and they act on those meanings (Schutz, 1962). The researcher was the Director for the Master's in Business Administration programme at the University of



Chester, UK, and had observed the challenges international students studying on Master's programmes had faced. It was recognised that all the fulltime Master's students were non-first language English speakers and all were on short-term study visas. Also, that none had had any previous knowledge or relationship with each other. Having been appointed as the personal academic tutor to many of these students, the researcher became aware of the academic challenges each had faced and some of the ways they overcame these difficulties. Interestingly, the students were keen to offer detailed accounts of their experiences during conversations on related topics. These early observations helped to select the preferred way of engaging with the respondents that would cultivate similar conversations but under research conditions; encouraging the students to tell their own stories under interview (Miller, 2000). Respondents for the preliminary study and main cohort were drawn from international student bodies studying on fulltime Master's programmes at the University of Chester in 2017 and 2018, and all had been studying for at least 6 months. These groups were considered ideal samples, from which primary data could be collected and analysed in order to answer the research question associated with building and converting social capital in times of need, thus demonstrating academic resilience. Owing to the adverse effects the 2019 Coronavirus pandemic had on the opportunity to add more respondents with an identical demography at the case study location, a smaller non-probability sample with the same demography to the earlier cohorts was added in 2020 in a focus group; generating data to triangulate the findings. Also, a questionnaire cohort was added in December 2020 to offer additional data to potentially inform the possibility of transferring the findings outside the case study under investigation. By 2020, the researcher's employment had changed so there was no direct professional relationship with the focus group or questionnaire cohort respondents.

### **Ethical considerations**

Discussions into the ethics of business research focus on the role of values in the research process for example, how respondents should be treated and the most appropriate activities by which researchers should engage with respondents. Bryman and Bell (2015) characterise social research ethics under four main terms: Universalism, a perspective which states that ethical precepts should never be broken; Situation Ethics, differs in as much as deception can be considered ethically dependent on the circumstances; Ethical Transgression, considers as pervasive and most research carries with it some element of questionable ethics; Anything Goes, considering the flexibility needed by researchers if they are studying for scientific purposes. However, the overarching issue of harming respondents is referred to as unacceptable if respondents are induced into performing "reprehensible acts" (Diener & Crandall, 1978, p.19). For the purposes of this research, consent and anonymity were regarded as key ethical considerations, providing the prospective respondents with an assurance that they would not be harmed either physically, mentally, or professionally (Bryman & Bell, 2015). These considerations were of particular importance owing to the professional

association the respondents in the preliminary study and main cohort had with the researcher and the case study institution. To ensure the researcher's perspective on this qualitative study was fully transparent, it was important to inform the respondents of the researcher's positioning (Pitard, 2017) with regards to the researcher's motivation for the study, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the potential contribution the findings may offer to practice. These considerations are also supported by the Association of Business Schools Ethics Guide (2012), which emphasises the need to ensure participants in research understand enough about the researcher and process to be able to make informed decisions about taking part. To enable this process, a Participant Information Document (PID) was provided to each prospective respondent with an accompanying consent form. Prior to the preliminary study and main cohort interviews, all participants were provided with the PID version 1 (Appendix 1) which related to the researcher's position at the case study university and respondents were asked to acknowledge their consent. For the focus group and questionnaire cohorts, the PID version 2 (Appendix 2) was provided which had been amended to reflect the researcher's change in role and professional distance from the respondents. This approach responds to the potential limiting effects of the positionality of the researcher to the respondents (Vanner, 2015). Furthermore, owing to the proximity of the researcher to the case study and the first two cohorts of respondents, it was important to acknowledge the possible effects this could have on the researcher's approach to data collection and analysis. To demonstrate the researcher's reflexivity (Cumming-Potvin, 2013), for the first three cohorts the research instruments (Appendix 3) were selected to ensure respondents were encouraged to recount and reflect on their lived experiences without the researcher influencing their views. The self-completion questionnaire was developed from the findings of the earlier cohorts and the data was analysed using commercial software.

### **Data collection methods**

The overall approach to the interviews involved taking a constructionist stance (Bosley *et al.*, 2009). In this way, the experience of the students is viewed as them having engaged with a series of events or stages which involved other individuals who had supported their overall progression. Therefore, investigating the students' lived experiences through interviews was considered key in understanding how they constructed new knowledge and built strength; this strength – or capital – being converted to help successfully cope with the academic challenges they faced. Taking this approach informed the way the data was gathered.

Qualitative methods offer involve a great deal of interviewing, regarded as the most widely used method to conduct qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As the research plan was being developed, consideration was given to the structure of the interviews: no structure, semi-structured, or structured. Although the duration of the interviews was not a factor when considering the best method, the researcher was keen to limit the amount of time for the interviews to ensure that each

respondent had the same limitations when answering. In this way, respondents were discouraged from 'rambling' (a common characteristics in qualitative research interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015)) and have a similar interview experience. For the preliminary study and main cohort, semi-structured interviews were selected as the preferred format for conducting the sessions, providing the researcher a framework by which to undertake each interview. Following the semi-structured method also allowed a degree of flexibility for the respondents to speak freely about the challenges they individually experienced and how they overcame them. This flexible approach to interviews aligns with Leidner's (1993) research, during which she offered participants a degree of structure but also allowed them room to pursue specific topics of interest. In developing the prompt questions by which respondents were encouraged to engage, the focus was on attempting to help students tell their stories (Harfield & Hamilton, 1997). The researcher was keen to record how the students reflected on their lived experience in dealing with the challenges they faced over the course of their studies. Furthermore, when answering the prompt question, "tell me about the most challenging times you faced during your studies and how you overcame them", respondents were encouraged to reconstruct the events in their minds and talk the researcher through their experiences. This method reflects Pettigrew's (1985) approach to his research on ICI where the contemporary and historical lived experiences of the staff were studied. For the focus group, the prompts remained the same as the respondents were encouraged to discuss whatever they considered the most effectual means by which they overcame the adversities they faced during their studies. The participants were of the same demography as the preliminary study and main cohort but the different method of data collection acted as an opportunity to triangulate the earlier findings; taking data on social phenomena from different sources and in different ways to allow an element of cross-checking the findings (Webb, 1966). For the questionnaire cohort, access to the potential respondents was restricted to email. Owing to the limited access imposed by the respondents' senior management, a self-completion questionnaire (Omar *et al.*, 2011) was considered the preferred approach which included one closed question which summarised the prominent findings from the earlier cohorts (respondent validation) and one open question to offer the opportunity to explain their choices. This format was selected to guide the respondents to reflect on the capitals they may have used to overcome the challenges they faced while studying overseas and potentially highlight any similarities or differences with earlier cohorts. It is acknowledged that there are limitations to using this method, as earlier cohorts had the opportunity to tell their stories. However, this format did support potential respondent validation (Marshall, 1995) and the possible transferability of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) outside the case study.

## **Recording and transcription**

When interviewing or conducting data collection with non-first language English respondents, the use of language can be a challenge. These challenges include the level of English language each respondent may have. Heritage (1984) states that, in conversation analysis where attention to language is important, recording interviews is “mandatory” (p.238). As such, data collected during the main cohort and focus group were recorded and manual researcher notes were taken during the preliminary study. The recordings allowed the researcher to listen back to what was said, review areas of potential misunderstanding and clarify the context under which terms and phrases were used. This approach helped to mitigate the risks associated with deriving meaning from recording interviews with respondents who may have issues with the language, highlighted by Xian (2008). His study referred to translating from one language to another and identified areas of concern, including: linguistic challenges, where the use of words can be misleading; and, sociocultural, where idioms in one language may not translate with the same meaning. These were important concerns as it remains an open question of whether or not bilinguals think in their first language and translate prior to speaking, or whether they think in their second language when speaking it (Emmorey, 2019).

The process of transcription, whilst time consuming, was considered a key role the researcher should undertake rather than employing professional services. As discussed by Spender (1989), the researcher’s involvement in the transcription process offers greater insight and detail of what was said and the context within which it was said. As recommended by Poland (1995), re-reading the transcriptions with the recording playing also helped to correct the typing errors and other mistakes made in the initial drafts.

## **Participants**

For all the data collection points, purposive samples were used. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling, referring to the non-random selection of the possible respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This type of sample allows the researcher to identify potential participants who could answer the research question and avoid the randomness of a convenience sample, whereby respondents are selected by chance. This study had a clear research question, and a group of individuals were selected based on how their lived experiences would help answer that question.

In design, the research was developed using the principles of a longitudinal study using representative samples (Clarke *et al.*, 2012) from fulltime Master’s international students at the University of Chester’s Business School, interviewed on two separate occasions. Prior to arranging the interviews with the main cohort of respondents, a preliminary study was conducted with five students with an identical student profile as those who formed the main cohort. Participants in the preliminary study, main cohort and focus group were all non-first language English speaking

students, studying at the same UK university on the same Master's programme on short-term study visas. None of the participants knew each other before their arrival in the UK. Furthermore, all the respondents successfully completed their studies and graduated, although they were all students at the time of the study. Taking this approach – studying within a demography – supports the development of an understanding of social change and the casual influences (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interviews for the preliminary study and main cohorts were semi-structured and all were conducted when students had successfully passed the mid-way point in their Master's programme; having had the chance to experience adversity and successfully overcome it. Forty students were invited to form the main cohort and 12 accepted. For the focus group, 10 students were invited to participant in an online discussion – in-person meetings having been restricted by the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Eight agreed to participate but on the day of the focus group, three had technical issues and two did not join the discussion for unknown reasons.

For the final data collection point, 20 participants were identified who worked in a Europe-based HE organisation and 16 responded. All were selected based on them having recently studied in the UK on a Master's programme, on short-term study visas and whose first language was not English. Access to these respondents was agreed with the organisation's management, with the caveat that the contact would not involve face-to-face interviews because of the restrictions in place owing to the impact of Coronavirus. A short questionnaire was approved for distribution with the understanding that it would not be overly time-consuming to complete.

### **Methodological modifications**

The sample size was affected by a number of external factors and as such, achieving a reasonable number of respondents was a challenge. Mason (2010) offers a view on the appropriate size of a sample based on his examination of 50 grounded theory-based papers, showing sample sizes ranging from 5 to 350. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2015) consider the relationship between the word limit of a thesis and the respective sample size. Conscience of the limited number of respondents who participated in the main cohort and focus group, the case study institution was contacted several times to discuss the possibility of arranging another focus group. The impact of the pandemic effected the availability of staff and students therefore, no further focus groups were arranged. However, investigations into other methods by which to gather data to potentially contribute to the findings derived from qualitative research identified an option. As discussed above, in an effort to demonstrate the potential transferability of the findings from the main cohort and focus group, additional data was collected to reveal and explore any common themes each data set shared (Denzin, 1970). The short questionnaire was produced and sent to the 20 participants who had studied at different UK HE institutions. This methodological modification was considered a necessary step to assist with the validity of the research. Although the case study approach does

not fully support this deviation, the additional data was collected, collated and analysed. Indeed, the results did offer some contribution to the overall findings of the research; tempered by the data collections association with the main methodology rather than its strict adherence.

## **Summary**

The methods applied in this qualitative research commenced with semi-structured interviews for the preliminary study (April 2017) and main cohort (January 2018), which were selected to acknowledge the researcher's positioning and reflexivity, plus their alignment with the data collection methods of similar studies into the respondents' lived experience where meaning is derived from how they reflect on their journeys in a particular context (Caruana, 2014; Casey, 1995; Pettigrew, 1990). To support the iterative approach to data collection and analysis, the participants in the focus group (September 2020) were invited to reflect on their lived experiences and provide examples to triangulate the findings from the earlier respondents. The addition of the questionnaire cohort (December 2020) offered early indications for the possible transferability of the findings from the three previous cohorts.

## **APPROACHES TO DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis in qualitative research can be difficult to navigate owing to the potential complexity of data it creates and its reliance on the ability to find analytical paths which generate in-depth understanding and meaningful findings (Miles, 1979). This section defines, describes and discusses a number of approaches to data analysis and identifies the preferred methods.

Two strategies are generally used in approaching qualitative analysis: analytical induction and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Both systems are said to be iterative as each has an element of repetitive interaction in the collection and analysis of the data, one informing the other as the research develops. The main difference between these approaches can be seen by the way each interplays with the hypothesis. Analytical induction starts with a hypothesis and it is continually refined as the data is analysed and applied (Bansal & Roth, 2000). In contrast, grounded theory generates theory derived from data; theory is developed through constantly cross referring between the findings and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The impact of taking this approach guides the codification of the data, detailed later in this section. Importantly for this study, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that "a set of well developed categories...that are systematically related through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social...or other phenomenon" (p.22) directly relates to the overall approach and how the outcomes of this research are generated.

### **Thematic analysis**

Codifying data in qualitative analysis can be termed 'thematic analysis' as it can establish the common themes or codes by which to cluster related or subordinate references found in the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Understanding the meaning and application of thematic analysis can help with establishing what a code should be. For example, a theme is a category of common data identified through analysis of the evidence and specifically relates to the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This provides the researcher with a basis of the theoretical understanding of the data, helping to organise it and apply the respective literature. For this research, analysis of the data collected from the preliminary study, main cohort and focus group followed this process, helping to establish the commonly cited data associated with the capitals under investigation and the subordinate nodes which helped to link the different ways the references were expressed.

### **Narrative analysis**

Owing to the potential concerns over the use and understanding of the English language by the respondents and researcher – for the preliminary and main cohorts – a narrative analysis approach (Mishler, 1986) was applied to the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews (Arikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012). Structured (Stel *et al.*, 2012) and unstructured (Blumberg *et al.*, 2013) interview techniques were discounted as the research required flexibility in the content and sequence of topics for discussion to help stimulate a conversation on the areas identified by the sample study. Narrative analysis was considered highly suited to the respondents' cultural backgrounds, in general, as the researcher's experience acknowledged the propensity amongst international PG students to opt for discursive dialogues rather than engagement with surveys and questionnaires. Moreover, asking the non-first language English respondents to tell their story (Miller, 2000) allowed them to reflect on and articulate their experiences in terms of a continual journey, with their construction and re-construction of ideas based on lived experiences constantly developing (Becker, 1982). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) further argue that narrative interviews aim to provide the respondent with an opportunity to reconstruct accounts of connections between events and contexts, this being an objective of this research. Analysis of the narratives was also applied to the data collected from the focus group, developed through a discussion on the expressions and examples offered by the participants.

### **Template analysis**

Template analysis was considered as a viable method by which to organise the common themes the respondents spoke of when reflecting on the times they converted the capital strengths needed to overcome the challenges they faced during their studies. This method of analysis provides a system by which to code data into summarised themes derived from the primary research (King, 2012). It establishes a means by which to present the hierarchal coding of the data in an organised and

meaningful way to help demonstrate the connections and differences between the codes and their subordinates. Furthermore, it allows priori codes to be supported or discounted depending on the weight of evidence each attracts. Moreover, emerging themes can also be added to the developing template of prominent findings as they are identified and supported. The final template provides the researcher with the coded data ready for interpretation and analysis (Brooks & King, 2014). This process was selected as the method by which to code the data derived from the analysis of the narrative; identifying words and phrase in the interviews and focus group by which to cluster into the main themes to interpret and analyse. Derived from the findings of the preliminary study, main cohort and focus group, a final template was developed which included the most commonly cited capitals. The content of this formed the basis of the questions posed to the questionnaire cohort; informing the possible transferability of the findings.

### **Triangulation**

The method of triangulation (Denzin, 1970) is used to analyse the sets of data to potentially reveal common themes. This method is often used in qualitative research as a way of confirming or discounting the potential validity of the findings or corroborated evidence between the data sets. Farmer, Robinson and Elliott (2006) suggest that triangulation protocols should be applied to interpret and integrate key findings from a number of data sources. They offer a method which includes the comparison of the key issues identified in the narrative, highlighting any key themes and analysing these themes using all the data sources. This method was applied to this research. Initially, the preliminary study informed the list of capitals which constituted the key components under research. Data from the main cohort was analysed using NVivo21 to identify the commonly cited capitals. The findings helped the researcher to analyse the data collected from the focus group and establish any commonality or differences with the earlier cohorts. The questionnaire cohort looked to identify any convergences or discrepancies in the previous data sets in order to consider the possible transferability of the findings.

### **Thematic saturation**

Purposive samples were applied in the study, using two prominent sample categories: typical case sampling to exemplify the dimension of interest and criterion sampling to sample individuals who meet a specific criterion. These were used to establish groups of individuals highly suited to offering evidence on the main topics of research. Furthermore, the ability to reach a level of thematic saturation can be established in a shorter time (Patton, 1990). The principles for recognising thematic saturation were followed, whereby no new data is found on an established category; categories being well developed properties and new data does not detract from these findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This does not mean that all the respondents will be saying exactly the same thing. Rather, it suggests that the emerging evidence from the data collection will no longer



show new aspects to the theoretical categories. The researcher was mindful of the possibility of thematic saturation when comparing the data collected at the various analytical stages.

### Software to support qualitative analysis - CAQDAS/NVivo

When primary data is collected, computer-aided qualitative analysis software (CAQDAS) can support the identification of common themes represented in the transcribed words of the respondents' and cross-reference these with specific areas of interest and analysis. NVivo software offers this functionality and was used in this study, acting as a key enabler for the collection, collation and analytical processes. Figure 5 outlines Bryman and Bell's (2015) representation of the main steps of qualitative research (p.395), a process that has been followed by other qualitative researchers (Ladge *et al.*, 2012) and which NVivo can support.

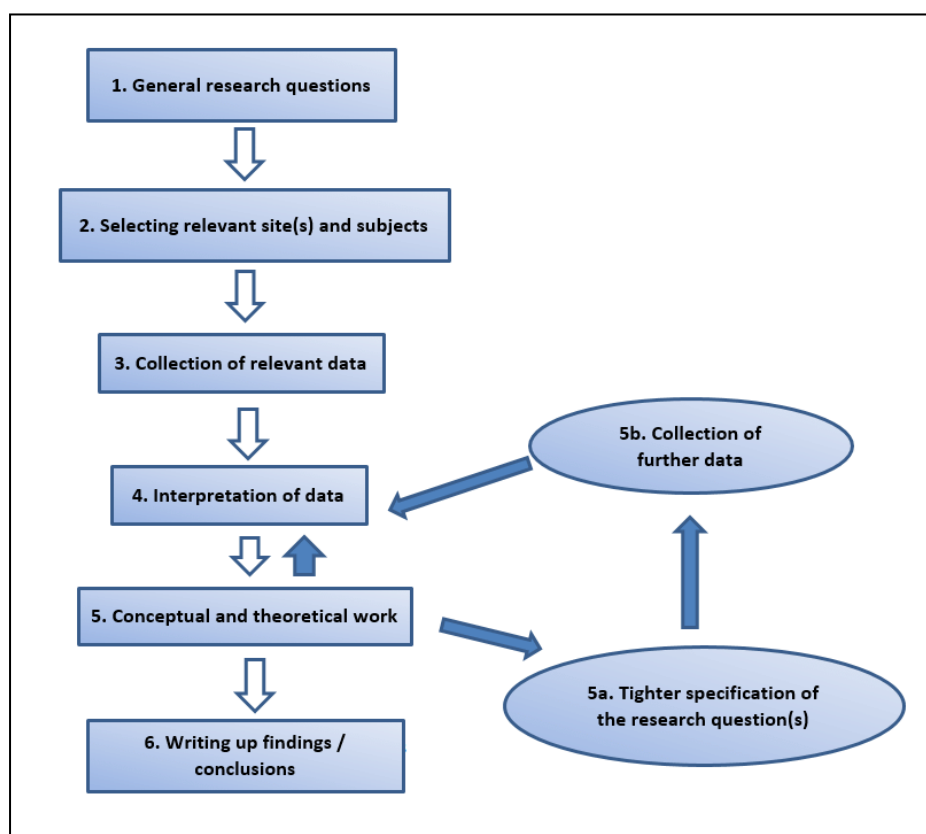


Figure 5. Main steps of qualitative research

The principles of this process were followed, whereby the preliminary study provided the first data collection point (Figure 5, box 3), it was interpreted and reviewed against the theoretical perspectives guiding this study (boxes 4 and 5). The outcomes provided the revised focus and prompt-questions for the main cohort (boxes 5a and 5b). Application in Box 5b included transcribing the data from the main cohort and uploading it to NVivo. NVivo was used to manage the data collation to inform the interpretation (box 4) and reflection on the associated theoretical research

(box 5). This then informed engagement with the focus group (boxes 5a and 5b), the data from which was added to NVivo to further build on the developing themes (boxes 4 and 5). This review helped to shape the interaction with the questionnaire cohort and was analysed manually (box 4). Finally, the overall findings were generated and assessed against the literature (box 5) and the conclusions and possible contributions proposed (box 6).

Data collected from the preliminary study was through note taking and manual analysis. For the main cohort, the transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo and the coding was set to look for common themes. As such, the following process was followed:

### **Coding the transcriptions**

Stage 0 – Review demographic identities to confirm validity of respondents

Stage 1 – Node titles created, associated with the respective capitals identified in the preliminary study and expected to be evidenced in the main cohort

Stage 2 – Highlight any text associated the capitals created in Stage 1, for example, references to how family influences (positive or negative) the academic journey (and repeat, uncoding any errors)

Stage 3 – Establish new nodes to reflect any emerging themes not set up in Stage 1

Stage 4 – When all interview transcriptions were coded, each node was reviewed and additional sub—nodes were added to identify text which reflected the capitals students arrived with (1 – On Arrival) and capital that changed during the journey (2 – Gained, 3 – Reduced)

Stage 5 – Transpose data onto graphs

This process was repeated following the addition of the data collected from the focus group.

Using the CAQDAS allowed the researcher to code and retrieve the data from main cohort and focus group with relative ease. However, the function that allows recorded interviews to be uploaded and automatically transcribed was not applied to ensure all the recordings were fully reviewed by the research when manually transcribed. Catterall and Maclaren's (1997) concerns over the unsuitability of CAQDAS for focus groups owing to the potential to lose the interpretation of the inter-communications of the respondents, were reflected on. However, owing to the relatively small number of attendees, these concerns were not supported and NVivo was used. As such, the data was added to that of the main cohort's owing to the similarity of evidence it provided, offering more examples of capital generation and conversion without any notable differences. The content of the questionnaire was developed from the outcomes of the earlier cohorts, manually analysed and presented separately.

### **Justifying claims in qualitative research**

Maylor and Blackmon (2005) state that the reliability in a qualitative approach endeavours to ensure that the research design is clear and transparent so the research can be replicated, with a reasonable expectation of comparable results. This research sets out the methods by which the respondents were selected, how the data was gathered, the analytical processes, and how the findings related to the theoretical underpinning. Furthermore, the validity of the research design is established through its alignment to similar previous studies into social capital and resilience, as well as the analytical approach. Moreover, the application of a method of triangulation adds to the potential validity in the results (Hernández, 2010). It is acknowledged that, the credibility of the findings could be challenged as the opportunity for external reliability is not possible owing to the nature of the case study and its place in time. However, this is a common challenge for this type of research (Bryman & Bell, 2015) so every attempt was been made to include respondent validation and triangulation. The purposive samples (Patton, 1990) did provide early indications of theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and data from the questionnaire cohort did indicate signs of the transferability of the findings outside this case study.

Bryman and Bell's (2015) iterative approach to qualitative analysis provides the basis for this research. The researcher's notes from the preliminary study was manually analysed to inform the discussions with the main cohort. From the main cohort, the thematic clusters were identified and investigated using CAQDAS. Data collected from the focus group was also collated, coded and analysed with CAQDAS, and added to that of the main cohort. The common characteristics of the capitals each of the case study cohorts identified informed the questions presented to the questionnaire cohort to assess the potential for the transferability of the findings.

### **Chapter summary**

Krarup and Munk's (2016) emphasise the debate on the complexities of trying measure cultural capital. This research adopts a qualitative interpretive approach in order to offer a comprehensive understanding of any phenomenon identified (Jabareen, 2009), akin to similar studies into social capital and resilience. The applied methods build on tried and tested means by which to generate, analyse and validate qualitative data collected over a period of 42-months using a representative and longitudinal case study. This chapter demonstrates how the preferred research methods were selected, governed and the data analysed. It establishes the reasons why qualitative research methodologies were considered the most effective way to approach this study. It proposed what the data was hoping to reveal and why a representative, longitudinal case study was the most appropriate method to generate primary evidence likely to answer the research question. It reflects on the ethical considerations which needed addressing and how the participants in the variety cohorts were selected and engaged, including the methodological modifications needed to adapt to

the changing research environment. It justifies the use of semi-structured interviews and a focus group to encourage respondents to reflect on their lived experiences and tell their stories and details the data recording systems. A CAQDAS system was identified to support the narrative analysis in order to help discover meaning from the interviews, wherein common themes could provide early indicators of theoretical saturation. A triangulation method was also considered as a means by which to inform the overall findings, with the potential to transfer any major observations outside the case study. Challenges to the processes and outcomes of qualitative research are acknowledged yet justifications are provided to demonstrate the potential impact of the findings this research offers to the current literature, larger studies and organisational practice. In conclusion, this chapter offers the researcher's preferred methods by which to answer the research question and how they were managed. It gives the theoretical background to the overall research paradigm and establishes the engagement rules for the collection, management and analysis of the primary data.

## 4 - FINDINGS

A total of 36 respondents informed this research, phased over 42-months: April 2017 (preliminary study), January 2018 (main research cohort), to September 2020 (focus group) and December 2020 (questionnaire cohort). This chapter provides the details of each of the respondent groups, how the data was collected, collated, analysed, and the findings. It details how each data set helped to develop the approach to the next cohort of respondents, thus demonstrating that the research method aligns to the iterative approach assigned to this qualitative research paradigm. The review of each cohort's findings has a similar structure: summary of the selected method, the key findings and conclusions. Tables and figures are included to offer pictorial representations of the findings to aid understanding and quotations taken from the data provide samples of the supporting evidence to justify the observations. It also discusses the validity of the research as a representative longitudinal case study, covering a period of important world events including a global pandemic. The key findings identified in this chapter form the basis of analysis and discussion in the following chapter.

### **Preliminary study – April 2017**

Guided by the process set out in the steps of qualitative research (Figure 5), step 3 identifies the stage at which the initial data was collected; the first of four data collection points over the 42-month study. Initially, the literature review provided many aspects of social capital which could have been included in this research, ranging from human capital (Becker, 1994) – referring to the generation to human beings in terms of numbers – to a more classical understanding of social theories which are concerned with human relationships (Field, 2005). To help focus this research on the theme of academic resilience (Morales, 2008), five preliminary study interviews were conducted to identify the most likely capitals students would refer to if asked about their academic journey in space and time. These international students were close to finishing their Master's studies at the same university as the main cohort of respondents, studying the same programme, with the same resources and teaching staff. As such, they were selected owing the similarities they shared with those identified for the main cohort (January 2018). On agreement, they were provided with the Participant Information Document which detailed the purpose of the main study, the safeguards they were afforded to maintain their personal and professional integrity, and the complaints procedure which included the direct contact details of the Dean of the Business School. All participants signed the document prior to the interviews. Each interview was conducted individually, in the relaxed setting of a local café. The discussions were very informal and started with a review of the content of the Participant Information Document to confirm their consent. After this, note taking was agreed and the respondents were invited to offer their reflections on the reasons for their studies, their motivations to study in the UK, and the things that helped them through the course. They were asked to think of moments throughout their studies which presented

significant challenges and consider how they overcame them. They were also asked to reflect on their discussions with other students on this matter and offer any common themes that may inform the primary research with a similar student body. After this invitation, the respondents were not interrupted and allowed to tell their stories, highlighting whatever they believed were the most influential factors in dealing with adversity and identifying the things that kept them going. The interviews were recorded using written notes which were reviewed with each respondent at the end of the interview to agree accuracy and completeness. The formal transcriptions were manually typed out by the researcher to aid the identification of words and phrases used to express how each respondent articulated their experience and those of others. The narrative analysis looked for commonalities and revealed several themes which aligned to the types of [social] capital strengths discussed in the literature review.

### **Preliminary study - findings**

Table 2 sets out the top themes identified by the respondents and which corresponded to the most prevalently identified in the literature review; noting that no reference was made to resistant capital or navigational capital. The row entitled 'Neo-familial' was included as an addition as it was a common theme discussed by the respondents yet an unexpected capital that did not feature in the initial review of the literature; albeit the respondents all referred to it as playing a significant role in building resilience and something which was relied on to overcome periods of adversity throughout their academic journey. The results of the preliminary study shown in Table 2 are summarised by circles to represent the capitals identified by the corresponding respondents. The number in the circles is the rating (1 high, 6 low) to reflect how influential the capital was in terms of how often it was spoke of (or related words) or if the respondent actually indicated how important each capital strength was against the others they identified; capitals with identical numbers were considered to have equal impact. The arrows indicate if the respondents spoke of the changing influence of a particular capital, either more influential or stronger over the period of studies (↑), or weaker or less influential over the period of studies (↓). Only capital strengths that were spoken of as having any influence over the respondents' resilience were recorded and entered on the table. Blanks in the table show that the respondents did not refer to the corresponding capital.

Capital	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Academic		②↑	⑤		
Aspirational	③	①	④↑	①↑	①
Cultural			②	③	
Familial	①↓		①↓	②↓	②↓
Linguistic	④↑	②	⑥↑		
Neo-familial	②↑	①↑	③↑	①↑	①↑

**Table 2. Preliminary study, summary of findings**

An initial observation from this small sample summarised above, is how each respondent immediately identified with the concept of having particular strengths that helped them through their programme of studies. Two respondents spoke of arriving with confidence in their ability to cope with the programme based on their academic background (academic capital), having previously performed well on either recent undergraduate studies or already having a Master’s degree. This confidence in their academic ability helped with how they approached their studies, being well organised and able to effectively engage with the academic content. In one case, this strength increased owing to their familiarity with many of the concepts discussed in class which improved their overall confidence and performance. Conceptually, this change in the level and influence of a capital strength identified by the respondents was considered by the researcher as an early indication of the potential for the constituent elements of social capital (if considered as a collective noun) altering over space (respondents away from their normal place of residence) and time (the duration of their studies). This concept was considered as one of the primary focuses for the main research cohort.

The findings also indicated that, the idea that students use their drive for achievement (aspirational capital) at Master’s level was common to all the respondents. The majority of these placed this capital as the most influential in terms of how it supported their learning journey. The respondents reflected on this capital by discussing how important it was for them to gain the qualification either for professional career advancement or to satisfy some other expectations; examples being, they had gained sponsorship to do the Master’s from their employer, or their family had paid for their studies overseas, or they were the first in their family to attempt this level of qualification. When they had been struggling with assignments and their thoughts drifted to failing, the desire to successfully complete the programme overwhelmed the feeling of failure and drove them on to seek support from staff or other students.

The influence of cultural capital was less impactful than the others, with only two of the five making mention of how much they reflected on their cultural roots or practices to support them through difficult times. Both these respondents reflected on events when cultural influencers had been drawn upon in terms of spiritual prayer or a need to avoid the feeling of failure as a representative of a particular community. Neither respondent mentioned any changes to this capital as a result of their studies. Neither knew each other before arriving to start the programme; however, owing to their similar cultural heritage, they had become close friends and supported each other throughout.

Familial, or family, capital was discussed by four of the five respondents. They identified their families as having a strong influence over their confidence and ability to do well on the programme (familial capital) and they remained in regular contact throughout. Respondents reflected on how proud their families were that they had gained a place to study in England and the opportunities that may arise. The respondents spoke of arriving at the university and having very regular contact with family members at home and for long periods. However, even though the strength derived from supporting families remained strong throughout their studies, its influence at times of stress or difficulty resulting from the academic challenges of the programme reduced as the course progressed; they did not believe their families could help them. As such, knowing they had the support of their families did have a strong influence over their performance generally, although other capitals were identified as being needed to help them cope with the practical challenges of progressing through the course.

Strength derived from a grasp of the English language (linguistic capital), including a good understanding of academic terminology and colloquial terms, was identified as a capital that supported the learners' journey. Three of the five respondents reflected on their ability to deal with the lectures and seminars without worrying about the vocabulary and expressions used by the teaching staff and supporting materials. They had found themselves having to help other non-first language Anglophone students who had struggled to understand classroom sessions; at times, this itself became a challenge as those with strong linguistic capital were also striving to do well whilst helping others. The majority of those who identified this as a capital strength also indicated that their linguistic skills had improved over the course of their studies which further supported their achievement and progression.

As the conversation developed between the researcher and the respondents, an unexpected capital was identified. Respondents spoke of how they had connected with at least one other student on the same or different programme of studies, albeit at the same university. This connection was spoken of in terms of a community of students that relied on each other with increasing frequency and importance as the course progressed: 'frequency' defined by most as 'daily' and 'importance'



described in terms of 'academic colleagues', 'crisis managers', and 'friends'. This was not just cited by the respondents when talking specifically about this new capital but referred to when discussing other capitals; for example, the closeness that developed by those with a similar cultural heritage who were united to undertake the same programme, a reduced reliance on family networks and replaced by fellow students support, and the help strong English language speakers gave to those less able. In this instance, this capital is termed as 'neo-familial capital' as it represents the replacing of the family networks who supported them through difficult times, with a new family network; aligned to the concept of fictive kin (Nelson, 2020).

All respondents identified the ability to build resilience from external sources to support their internal drivers and that the relative strength of some capitals had changed over the period of their studies. For example, Table 2 indicates that each respondent reflected on at least one source of strength derived from outside themselves: familial capital or neo-familial capital. Furthermore, that capital strengths had changed of space and time; for example, Respondent 1 relied increasingly less on their family and more on their linguistic skills (linguistic capital) and other students (neo-familial capital). As none of the respondents referred to the characteristics of resistant capital or navigational capital, these were no longer considered as having a major part to play in the students' journey in this case study.

### **Preliminary study - conclusion**

Although the preliminary study was limited to five respondents, the data did suggest that the main themes identified by the researcher in the literature review could form the basis of the main data collection study. Five capitals identified in the literature were confirmed in the preliminary study: academic, aspirational, cultural, familial and linguistic. An important observation revealed by the preliminary study was the emergence of an unexpected capital which all the respondents spoke of, referring to the other students and how they relied on each other at times of hardship and significant challenge. This was termed 'neo-familial capital' to represent the coming together of a new family which had previously not existed and was only possible by their participation in the academic journey overseas for a prolonged period. This observation resulted in this capital being added to the list of five other capitals for inclusion in the main research cohort. In addition to confirming the five initial capitals as worthy of inclusion, the preliminary study also helped to understand that the strength derived from each of the capitals may not have the same influence on the students. Some may have greater or lesser effect when dealing with academic adversity, as all the respondents indicated that each of the identified capitals did not share the same influence rating shown by the numbers in the circles. This sample also helped to understand that building capitals to support academic resilience may not be a static process. Rather, the strengths students arrive with to start their academic studies may change as their journey continues. They may rely less on their

families and more on other students. Their desire for achievement may increase to greater levels. They may become far more confident in their linguistic skills and become more adept at overcoming the challenges associated with using the English language and understanding the technical terms used in academia.

In summary, the preliminary study helped to inform the main research project in five key areas: confirming the relevance of five capitals identified in the literature review (academic, aspirational, cultural, familial and linguistic), plus the addition of a sixth – neo-familial capital, which had not been initially identified in the literature but was added after it was revealed in the preliminary study; two capitals discussed in the literature were discounted (resistant and navigational); socially constructed capitals may influence students in different ways when they look to overcome the challenges associated with their studies; not all students will share the same capitals; and, the strength and influence of each capital may change over space and time. The research plan and approach to the main data collection was developed accordingly.

### **Main cohort – January 2018**

Informed by the five main observations from the preliminary study, the collection of data method for the main research project was based on the same approach to the earlier study. Students on the international Master's programme at the same university with the identical demographic profile were invited to participate: non-first language English speakers, from overseas on one-year study visas. The invitation to participate was sent to each of them, 40 in total as this was the full complement of potential respondents at the university used for the case study. Twelve respondents accepted the invitation, were sent the Participant Information Document and asked to sign the research consent form, which they did. These were retained by the researcher. Individual interviews were arranged with each respondent either on the telephone or on person. They all agreed to the researcher recording the interviews so verbatim transcriptions could be produced and analysed. As before, they were asked to reflect on their academic journeys and encouraged to highlight the main points of adversity and significant challenges and how they overcame them; particularly, on specific events and the resources, relationships, or other influencers that helped them succeed. Following the interviews, the transcriptions were generated and NVivo was used to code the raw data to support the analysis.

The transcriptions from the interviews were uploaded to NVivo and stored. Two versions were produced: one for the complete transcriptions which included the interviewer and another without the interviewer. For the word analysis in NVivo, the transcriptions without the interviewer were used to ensure it was only the voice of the respondents' being analysed by the software. Each of these transcriptions was thoroughly reviewed and coded by the researcher in order to identify

words and phrases that could be linked to any of the six capitals and how impactful they may have been on the respondents' academic resilience. The researcher was mindful of the need to consider other ways – or capitals – the respondents suggested they coped with the challenges to their academic progress, but none were consistently referred to. Reference was made to 'alcohol' and 'sleep' but these were not recalled as often as any of the capitals under investigation and were also considered physiological conditions and therefore outside the scope of this research.

NVivo12 provides the function to set up nodes for each of the key themes into which the evidence revealed in the coding process can be deposited. For each of the six capitals, a node was generated. Under each, subordinate nodes were also set up to separate out words or phrases that reflected changes to capital strengths and how these may have altered during the students' academic journey. When the coding had been completed the data was analysed.

NVivo12 also offers a number of analytical tools to conduct qualitative research. For this study, word cloud and text search query were used to analyse and visualise the data. A word cloud is a word frequency query used to generate an image of the most prevalent words (or synonyms) identified in the body of evidence, differentiating between the frequency a commonly used words by the size of the lettering: the image produced shows the most common words as the largest and the least common words as the smallest. In practice, when the data has been coded and the respective nodes generated for each of the key themes, queries can be run by selecting the function 'Word Frequency'. Filtering can be applied by adding the number of words required in the image (100 initially, after which the results can be reviewed for relevance) before the query is run. The raw data can then be refined to extract axillary verbs or other connecting words which bear less weight on the findings; for example: and, to, the, on. Further refinements can be made to extract the most prevalent words by inserting qualifying rules for the words to appear; for example, a word must appear a certain number of times for it to be included in the word cloud. Also, an exact match can be applied, ensuring that any synonyms which closely match the root words are included rather than having tenuous links. For this research, all coded transcriptions were without the interviewer's questions or discussion; words had to appear at least 10 times to qualify; and exact match grouping was applied to ensure relevance.



helped, helpful, helps. Another example is the word 'good' which reflects several associated terms: depends, honest, and good.

Most frequent words	Weighted percentage of overall use (%)
helped	4.23
good	3.98
friends	3.49
really	3.45
family	3.44
like	3.41
going	3.25
talk	3.18
wanted	2.84
things	2.67
course	2.42
study	2.16
need	1.95
language	1.82
different	1.80
know	1.80
problem	1.74
English	1.72
think	1.65
time	1.65

**Table 3. Top-20 words used by respondents**

Initial observations derived from Table 3 indicate that students referred to the term 'helped' more than any other single word. Furthermore, it revealed that 80% of the respondents used this word or the associated words at least three times during their interviews. Using the NVivo12 function to click on each word showed the sources of the words and helped to identify the root sentences. This provided the researcher with the context of their use and helped to generate potential associations with the capitals under investigation, shown in Table 4. Direct quotations are included as examples of how the respondents used the terms. These quotations are also considered to reflect how the respondents dealt with the challenges they faced, the respective capitals they could align to, and if there were indications of potential changes to these capitals.

Most frequent words	Contextual phrases (quotes from primary data)	Capital Code(s)
helped	"I needed help to finish this within a year because I need to go back to work..." "...to have my friends to help me out" "...who was from India he helped me a lot"	Aspirational Neo-familial Cultural
good	"It was not that good actually [language], but improved" "I found good friends there, it was really good and they helped me a lot" "My language skills, obviously they improved"	Linguistic Neo-familial Linguistic
friends	"...support system made up of friends here, my family and others" "the friends support groups helped" "...was quite easy to make friends which helped me"	Familial/Neo-familial Neo-familial Neo-familial
really	"It has really boosted my writing skills" "The English language was really tough for me because academic writing but got better" "...relationships which makes me really like the course"	Linguistic/Academic Linguistic/Academic Neo-familial
family	"...at least I have my family with me" "my family was really really supportive" "we became each other's family"	Familial Familial Neo-familial
like	"...go to someone like the guys from Nigeria" "we were always like helping her whenever she needed" "...helped me to think more like a level 7"	Cultural Neo-familial Academic
going	"...need to go talk with someone [or] you don't get an idea..." "I started understanding them and I also started to speak like them" "I used to speak with my family on a daily basis before going to bed...I did lose the connection"	Academic Linguistic Familial
talk	"If you talk about support, my father..." "...the family, we speak in English which helped" "...improved more with my speaking and communication skills"	Familial Linguistic Linguistic
wanted	"...within a year because I need to go back to work" "I wanted to work in something more" "I knew I wanted to achieve it"	Aspirational Aspirational Aspirational
things	"I think the most important thing must be yourself to learn" "...first prepare my academic things" "All the small things build up the friendship"	Aspirational Academic Neo-familial
course	"...almost dropping off my course, help was good" "...knowledge and confidence on the course [became] stronger" "We [family] did [speak] for my entire course. I did lose the connection"	Neo-familial Academic Familial
study	"you have to learn to study in a new way" "...a girl who wanted to take the next step to achieve" "you don't always work well in a group"	Academic/Cultural Aspirational Neo-familial
need	"helping her whenever she needed something" "I was thinking I need to do this" "I need this degree for myself"	Neo-familial Aspirational Aspirational
language	"We don't use those kinds of words. I had to get better" "...certain kinds of problems, like language barrier or insecurity" "...but I was giving language tuition to people"	Academic/Linguistic Linguistic Linguistic/Neo-familial
different	"...documents and words with different meaning" "the way you live is different, the way you communicate" "...because they were stronger with different aspects of the course"	Academic/Linguistic Cultural/Linguistic Neo-familial

know	<p>“...sensitive talk about...about politics or religion caused problems”</p> <p>“...go there and get more knowledge, it was helpful”</p> <p>“...they fed me with their knowledge which boosted my knowledge”</p>	<p>Cultural</p> <p>Academic</p> <p>Academic/Neo-familial</p>
problem	<p>“Cultural ties do create some problems”</p> <p>“we have a problem in English”</p> <p>“Any problem I just shared with my friends”</p>	<p>Cultural</p> <p>Linguistic</p> <p>Neo-familial</p>
English	<p>“I improved myself and my English”</p> <p>“we learned English in secondary school which helped”</p> <p>“English was my third language”</p>	<p>Aspirational/Linguistic</p> <p>Academic/Linguistic</p> <p>Cultural/Linguistic</p>
think	<p>“...helped me to think more like a level 7”</p> <p>“I thought I was lagging behind so worked more”</p> <p>“...because I was thinking I need to do this”</p>	<p>Academic</p> <p>Academic/Aspirational</p> <p>Aspirational</p>
time	<p>“...not very analytical at that time so tried”</p> <p>“...had a good relationship with them. It takes time”</p> <p>“There were times when I had arguments as a group”</p>	<p>Academic</p> <p>Neo-familial</p> <p>Neo-familial</p>

**Table 4. Top-20 words aligned to capitals**

### **Main cohort - observations**

The capitals identified in the literature review and refined by the preliminary study were reflected in the results of the main group of respondents in several ways. The ability to review the sentences, and therefore the context, enabled each string of words to be investigated to help understand the relative impact each capital may have had on the respondents; in other words, the terms were checked to ensure they were in fact related to the capital strengths being researched. Furthermore, the quotations included in Table 4 offer some insight into the relative importance of each, where in some cases capitals were expressed with an adverb; for example, familial capital was emphasised as having significant impact, “my family was really really supportive”. There were also indications of changing levels of resilience based on the generation of increased capital strengths; for example, linguistic and academic capital appear to have increased for some, “it has boosted my writing skills”. It also showed that neo-familial capital had played a part in building resilience in students’ ability to cope with the challenges presented by their academic studies; “we became each other’s family”.

One the main aims of this research is to look for potentially changing levels of academic resilience based on the capital strengths students’ arrival with to start their studies and how these may change over space and time. During the coding, the top nodes (capitals) and subordinate nodes (indicating changes to the overall impact of the capitals) were scrutinised to investigate any indicators of changes to these and the emergence of others. Table 5 provides a summary of the data pertaining to the frequency of references to potential changes to these levels.

	On Arrival		Gained		Reduced	
	Files	References	Files	References	Files	References
<b>Academic</b>	6	7	10	23	0	0
<b>Aspirational</b>	8	14	2	2	0	0
<b>Cultural</b>	4	5	4	8	0	0
<b>Familial</b>	11	28	7	11	1	2
<b>Linguistic</b>	5	6	9	20	0	0
<b>Neo-Familial</b>	0	0	11	30	0	0

**Table 5. Indicators of changes to capital strengths**

Table 5 shows that each capital was identified, with the adjacent columns under three main headings: 'On Arrival' in the UK to begin their studies, 'Gained' strength owing to some interaction with outside influencers, and 'Reduced' strength owing to some influence of their social setting. The sub-headings refer to files (being the number respondents who referred to the respective capital under each phase) and references (the total number of times the respondents referred to them). Overall, the numerical scores indicate references to the way respondents spoke about each capital and how they may have changed over the course of their studies. For example, academic capital is named and shows six respondents who spoke of arriving with confidence in their academic strength and this was referred to a total of seven times; an additional four respondents spoke of gaining strength in this field, identified in 23 references, and there were no indications of any reductions to this capital.

This table demonstrates that five of the six capitals were referred to by at least four of the respondents, most of which arrived with strength derived from their families: 91% of respondents referring to this capital a total of 28 times in the interviews. The second most impactful capital on arrival was aspirational capital, with 67% of respondents referring to this capital a total of 14 times in the interviews. Other than neo-familial capital, all the capitals listed did provide evidence of changing over the period of their studies. However, only familial capital provided evidence that capital strengths can erode and only one respondent referred to this on two occasions during the interview.

Table 5 also provides evidence to show that students starting on a Master's programme in the UK can develop a new type of capital. None of the respondents spoke to arriving with any previously established relationships with other students on their cohorts, yet 91% of them described instances which indicated new friendships and support networks had been established within the student community and this network had grown to positively impact on their academic resilience. Figure 7 shows the total amount of capital in terms of how they were referred to by the respondents; the capitals referenced are listed on the Y-axis and the number of references on the X-axis. The yellow bars show the total number of references the respondents made to capitals they arrived in the UK



with prior to their studies (On Arrival). The green bars show the total number of references the respondents made to capital they generated while they were on their programme to studies (Gained). Figure 7 begins to identify that academic resilience – the capital strengths that students arrive in the UK with ready to start their Master’s degree – are made up of more than one particular strength. Furthermore, capitals can increase as they progress through their course. New capitals can be generated which were not available on arrival. And the aggregated total of capitals can increase over space (studying overseas) and time (on a one-year study visa).

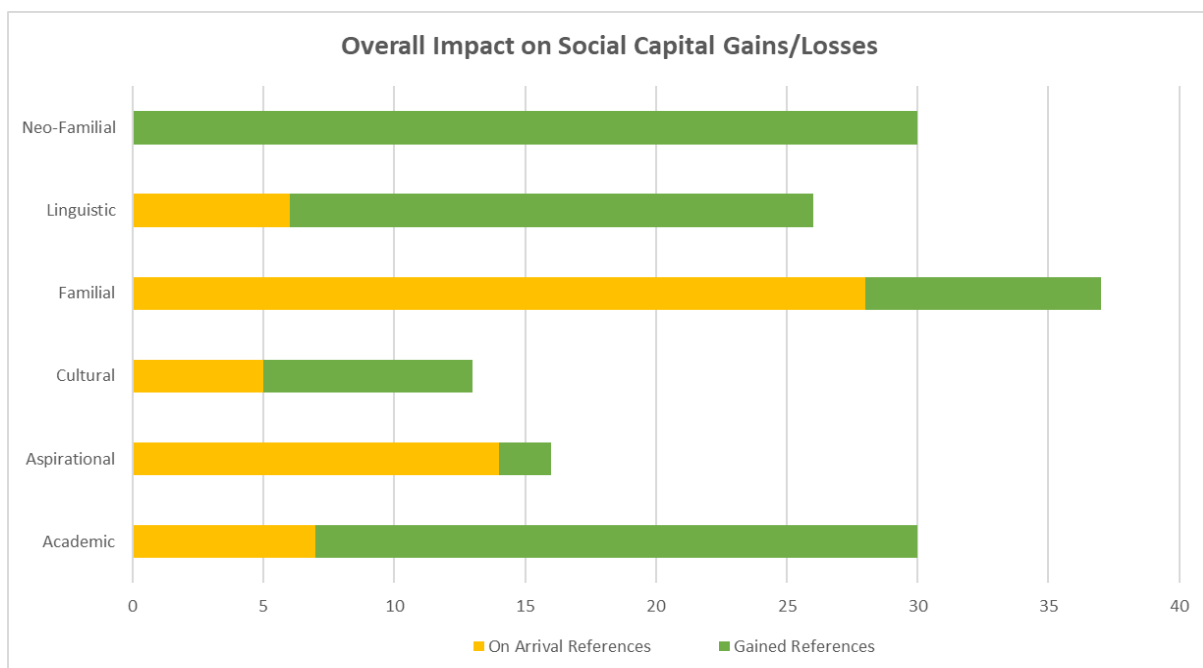


Figure 7. Overall impact on level of academic resilience

### Main cohort - contextual analysis

The terms articulated during the interviews and the context within which they were used, were further investigated using Nvivo12 Text Search queries. Text Search queries provide the researcher with the ability to find all occurrences of a word, phrase or concept which appear in the data. These queries help to identify words and phrases linked by a particular source word. This allows the researcher to investigate the contextual meaning each time the word or phrase in the nodes was used. Following the close scrutinization of the raw data, setting up nodes for each capital, creating subordinate nodes to code indicators of frequency and changes to capital strengths, the Nvivo12 data analysis function was applied. First, as described above, Word Frequency queries supported the identification of commonly used words and phrases, filtered to ensure relevance and repetition. The Text Search queries further supported the analysis by way of providing the researcher with the context in which the commonly used words and phrases were set. This analysis of the narrative helped to identify the most prevalent capitals the respondents referred to when discussing how they overcame the challenges to their academic journey. It also begins to show if the reliance on

particular capitals changed over the course of this journey and whether or not new capitals were generated and used.

The initial findings reflected in the word frequency searches helped to demonstrate that each of the capitals was identified by the respondents, with the emergence of a new capital to help build academic resilience – neo-familial capital. Further analysis offered evidence to show that the influence of capitals on academic resilience may change over space and time. In addition to this, there was little evidence to suggest that capital strengths can erode, only build.

The research also offered findings which potentially identify the most influential capitals in the generation of academic resilience, as experienced by the international non-first language Anglophone student studying a UK Master's programme. The narrative analysis provided a deeper understanding of words used, the context and their association with each of the capitals under research. This was not based on the frequency of the words used but the way the terms were used and their overall impact on the respondents' academic resilience. For example, a respondent may have mentioned the word 'family' more times than the word 'students' but the question remains over the respective influence each group may have had on the behaviours and resilience of the student.

During the interviews the respondents were asked to speak freely about their experiences of the learning journey, with a specific focus on how they coped during more demanding times. Using Nvivo12 Text Search queries, common words closely associated with each of the capitals under investigation were used to look for the context within which they were spoken, thus helping to gain a better understanding of how influential they were in building academic resilience. The Text Search queries used most common words shown in the Word Search in order to better understand any potential link they may have with the capitals identified by the respondents. The following section provides the visual representation of the Text Search and what this evidence suggests when seeking to answer the question, do the most common words used by the respondents help to identify the most impactful capitals?

Shown in Table 3, the top-5 words used by the respondents to articulate how they overcame challenges in their academic journey were: helped, good, friends, really and family. Running the Text Search query on each of these provided five reports to demonstrate the context within which they were stated, shown in appendices 1 to 5. In each, the relationship lines show how they emanate from the queried word and therefore link to the root causes and effects; the software allows the relationship of words and phrases to be selected to show the links between them. When looking for clusters of data to identify the most effectual causes, the linking words can be selected to identify the context: 'linking words' being those to the left of the centre word – also, he, it, really, they and

which. Selecting these words potentially reveals the most influential casual elements. From these images, the branches can be reviewed through the software or manually, to further analyse the origins and context of the uses of these words. Undertaking this process provided the following observations with regards the most influential impactors: university resources and fellow students; the challenges of studying at Master's level and in English; and family connections. No element could be identified to suggest one capital had a particular influence in building academic resilience and it appeared that only infrequent reference were made to any cultural influencers.

By way of example, Appendix 1 shows the queried word 'helped' in red in the centre, the most prevalent phrases used to describe how the respondents dealt with the challenges they faced. The words and phrases that either precede or follow show parts of the context where the word was used. The causes of this expression eminent from a number of sources ranging from interactions with classmates and staff to academic material and situations. The effects of these interactions led to overcoming academic challenges in writing and improvements to analytical problem solving. Appendix 1 provides the overview of the context the word was used, the detail of which is searched for in the accompanying transcriptions. What is evident are the references to being helped in multiple ways through the generation of constituents that were converted to directly support their academic journey.

Using the same method to identify other major influencers over students' resilience, the second most prevalent word was used in the Text Search, 'good', shown in Appendix 2. The theme of linguistics was evident, most notably the improvements to students' command of English and academic writing. Family, friends and university resources were also identified as contributors but no one element was shown to have any particular influence on academic resilience. Simply looking at the number of branches to the word 'good' and those that come from it, start to demonstrate the variety of topics it refers to and the origins. This is identical to the image in Appendix 1, where the root causes were many and the effects varied. This was unsurprising as 'good' was used as a noun, adjective and adverb.

In Appendix 3, the next most common term used was inserted into the Text Search query, 'friends'. Unlike the two previous queries, here peer groups, colleagues and family are prevalent root causes for respondents' use of the word. This is unsurprising as the word 'friends' pertains to a particular set of persons either as a noun or verb. However, it did feature as the third most popular word used by the respondents when talking about the sources they derived strength from and helped them overcome adversity and is, therefore, considered a key influencer over student behaviours. As the query also cites classmates and support groups, this term is also considered to refer to neo-familial capital; the strength derived from fellow students.

Appendix 4 shows the fourth word respondents used to describe the origins of their resilience, 'really'. As for the word 'good', 'really' is usually used as an adverb; the respondents did not use it as an exclamation. Similar to the Text Search using 'good', a glance at Appendix 4 shows the many root causes for the use of this word. Under review, the root causes referred to all the capitals and therefore does not offer strength of evidence to show it was of any particular influence on behaviours.

Appendix 5 uses the fifth word 'family' for the Text Search query. The root causes consistently refer to frequent support and, in some cases, regular contact with family members. It also refers to friends in connect with the term 'family' in a similar way the Text Search query using 'friends' referred to 'family'. This was expected as in several cases the two words where in the same phrase therefore picked up by the Text Search software. The family connections reflected mostly on words of encouragement and endearment rather than logistic support, although there was mention of financial support but this was not a common association.

### **Main cohort – summary**

The contextual analysis summarised in the appendices provides an interesting picture of when the top-5 words were used to help describe how the respondents overcame the challenges they faced. The findings indicate a propensity of students to deal with difficult situations by using (converting) some of the resources (capitals) they had acquired. Many of these capitals appear to refer to sources emanating from within their social setting and constructed through interactions with others. Whilst the words have been ranked in order of how frequently they were used, the contextual analysis did not offer an indication of the relative strength of each, or if they eroded over space and time.

The findings from the main cohort suggest that, it is not just one thing that students rely on when dealing with the challenges they face as part of the academic journey overseas. Academic resilience appears to be made up of a combination of capitals from which students derive strength. A review of the context within which each of the most frequent words were used, offers evidence to suggest that some may have more influence than others. However, the two most frequently used words, 'helped' and 'good', did not pertain to any specific capital as the contexts within which these words were used – or very closely associated words – varied. However, 'friends' (the third most popular) and 'family' (the fifth most popular) did make specific reference to the influence played and, in some cases, the interplay between them. For example, it was suggested that new friends can supplement the supporting role families play and the establishment of in-country support networks made up of students can replace connections with family members, to build levels of resilience when

overcoming the challenges they faced during their academic journey. Reference to the remaining capitals – academic, aspirational, cultural and linguistic – were also evident in the review of the context within which each of the top-5 words was used, but there was no clear indication that these had a particular influence over each other. As for the preliminary study, no references were identified to show an association with resistant capital or navigational capital.

### **Focus group – September 2020**

In September 2020, the impact of the Coronavirus was starting to have a significant impact on the UK's international students, reducing the number of visitors on study visas and adding complexity to the challenges students were having to deal with as part of their academic journey overseas. Even though student numbers in the UK were in the decline, the researcher contacted the case study institution to seek approval for a focus group using the same demographic as the initial preliminary study and main cohort in order to ask current students about their academic resilience and potentially identify any common observations derived from the earlier studies; focus groups being a methods by which researchers add depth and coherence to topics under discussion and help understand the respondents' collective understanding of the phenomenon being studied and construct meaning around it (Wilkinson, 1998) . Owing to the limited number of potential respondents, 10 students were invited to participate from the case study institution with only three participating. The transcriptions from this 40-minute online discussion were reviewed, looking for similar evidence to indicate how students build capital to accumulate academic resilience. Narrative analysis and template analysis techniques were used to identify common themes and relate them to the previous research findings.

### **Common themes and evidence**

Focus groups can be guided towards a fairly tightly defined topic (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As such, when the students reflected on their experiences, they openly spoke of the capitals identified by the earlier cohorts. They were asked to consider if they had any influence over their academic progress and if so, to provide examples. They were also encouraged to speak about any changes to the way they approached the challenges they faced, again with examples. Excerpts of evidence to show the respondents' references to a capital are provided in Table 6.

Capitals	References
Academic	<p>“on arrival I was over-confident”</p> <p>“most of us are confident and very intelligent”</p> <p>“at the end of the day, most of us had [academic] issues”</p> <p>“I report on my dissertation confidently [now]”</p>
Aspirational	<p>“I didn’t know anyone and had to fight for myself”</p> <p>“I have decided to do this, I need to do it and so I will”</p> <p>“you can do it, push through, the spirit of endurance”</p> <p>“I feel back on myself and my aspirations”</p>
Cultural	<p>“it’s not easy, especially for people from Asia and Africa because our background and culture is different”</p>
Familial	<p>“family back home will not be able to help you, they may give you a word of advice”</p>
Linguistic	<p>“I am used to the ascent, but it was not the same for the other students”</p>
Neo-familial	<p>“we had to call ourselves together like sheep”</p> <p>“we form into groups and say what does this assignment mean”</p> <p>“performance started to increase because we supported each other”</p> <p>“you don’t know these people [students] when you arrive ...total strangers are actually giving you the strength”</p> <p>“most of you have common ground because most of this is new”</p> <p>“your friends here will give you advice...so it’s a motivation and it is in you”</p>

**Table 6. Excerpts from focus group**

The evidence captured during the focus group begins to demonstrate that each of the capitals identified in this research did play a part in the respondents’ academic resilience with no additions. Owing to the relatively low number of participants, respondents were able to focus their attention on the capitals they considered as the most influential and speak about them more; possibly much more than if the focus groups was larger. As such, the weight of discussion was centred around how the students had “supported each other”, “giving strength” to fellow students even though they were “total strangers”. This was not something they had arrived with, nor had expected to develop. The evidence also suggested that sometimes they relied less on familial capital and more on neo-familial capital; “family at home will not be able to help you”. These observations support the earlier findings that capital strengths may change over space and time.

The evidence summarised in Table 6 reflects the propensity to talk about their relationships with other students and, therefore, the other respondents. It is worth noting that the focus group's demography was identical to those of the respondents in the preliminary study and main cohort. Shared views from each of these groups is captured in one statement provided by a respondent in the focus group, "performance started to increase because we supported each other", relating to the generation, sustainment, and deployment of neo-familial capital. For the focus group, this was the most prevalent finding. There was also evidence to show that each of the identified capitals had played a part in building academic resilience.

### **Focus group - findings**

Many of the earlier findings identified in the main cohort in 2018 were supported by the focus group; although it is acknowledged that findings were limited owing to the low take up of invitations to participate. However, from those who did join the focus group, there was consensus on a number of the key research themes, summarised in Table 6: students used external sources to build internal strength in order to deal with the academic challenges they faced; no other capital strengths were identified; capitals can increase over space and time; and the emergence of neo-familial capital was identified by all the respondents. Furthermore, for the focus group, neo-familial capital was spoken of with more frequency than any of the other capitals under review. This indicates the increased influence this capital may have had in helping them achieve their academic goals. There was also evidence that capital strengths can increase yet no evidence of its erosion.

### **Questionnaire cohort – December 2020**

Findings generated from qualitative research can be orientated to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social setting of the case study being researched. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify the challenge for empirical research as, whether or not the findings would be the same in other contexts or at different times. To test the potential transferability of the findings from the main cohort and focus group, one further group of respondents was selected to offer their views on the research question. Twenty respondents were identified as having been students who visited the UK on a short-term study visas, on a Master's level programmes. As such, they shared an identical profile to the original respondent groups yet studied at different universities in a variety of non-Business subjects. They were contacted individually and invited to participate in a short questionnaire, simply asking the following questions:

1. When you were studying overseas, please rank the following statements in order of their importance in helping you through your studies, i.e. what kept you going through the difficult times?

[Please put these in the order of how they influenced you during your studies, e.g. E (relationships and mutual support with other students/colleagues – we helped each other), A (calls home), B (aspirations to get the qualification) and so on]:

- A. My family
- B. My drive to complete the postgraduate programme (aspirations)
- C. My confidence in my academic ability
- D. My pride and links to my cultural heritage
- E. The trust and support I built up with other students/colleagues
- F. My knowledge of the English language

2. Please offer any other reflections on how you coped with the challenges you overcame to be successful (please explain your answer).

The data generated by the questionnaires was collated in an Excel spreadsheet. The results from Question 1 are presented in Table 7.

Capital Association	Average Rating	Overall Rating
A – Familial	3.0	3
B – Aspirational	1.9	1
C – Academic	3.2	4
D – Culture	5.9	6
E – Neo-familial	4.2	5
F – Linguistic	2.7	2

**Table 7. Summary of questionnaire results, question 1**

Responses to Question 2 were reviewed for common themes shared by the respondents. These are listed here in order of rating, with a selection of supporting comments:

1 – Aspirational capital: There was evidence to suggest that respondents experienced a sense of achievement based on their desire to succeed; “belief in myself and abilities [helped me] shine and achieve my goals”. Also, “my drive and aspirations [helped] to complete the postgraduate programme”. Other supporting comments included, “I knew that my personal drive would carry me to the end”.

2 – Linguistic capital: As the second most converted capital reported to have influenced the respondents, the supporting comments included: “without a good grasp of the language, everything would have taken longer”; “grasp of the subject matter terminology was important”.

3 – Familial capital: Connections with family members at home did play a part in helping students deal with challenges to their academic progress; “I was surprised of how much strength and encouragement I gained after a call with my family”.



4 – Academic capital: Only one supporting comment was assigned to academic capital; “graduating from an English private school provided me with the best skills in order to attend an English university”.

5 – Neo-familial capital: These included the surprise they experienced by the “relationships and bonds created with other students in the programme and the comfort it gave at stressful times”. In particular, some respondents were “most surprised” as “these persons were complete strangers...but connected through the programme”. Also, “I was surprised from all the different things I learned from cooperating with so many student colleagues from different cultures”. Other comments included, “I was surprised at being lucky enough to find people that helped me through the difficult times”.

6 – Cultural capital: This capital was rated as the lowest by all the respondents without exception, summarised as, “being a member of the EU helped me to settle into the UK environment easily. My culture was important but do not play any particular role in how I dealt with adversity”. This view was broadly shared by the respondents, which is an interesting contrast to the main cohort wherein none of the respondents were from Europe.

### **Questionnaire cohort – findings**

It is important to recognise that the participants of the questionnaire conducted in 2020 were not part of the case study groups for the earlier data gathering activities. They were selected based on their shared profiles with the earlier cohorts, in as much as they had all studied in a second language in the UK at Master’s level on a short-term study visa but with different institutions. These findings look to identify any potential transferable themes which could suggest the research outcomes may not be confined to this particular case study; further discussed in the Analysis chapter. The findings from the questionnaire cohort do suggest a shared view with the case study cohorts’ and that academic resilience is constituted of more than one thing. Furthermore, that these ‘things’ are recognised by the terms: academic capital, aspirational capital, cultural capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, and neo-familial capital. Furthermore, capital strengths can increase over space and time. The overall influence of one capital in generating academic resilience was not identified.

### **Chapter summary**

The main findings from the main cohort 2018 and focus group 2020 begin to show that, when non-first language English speaking students studying on the UK on one-year study visas reflect on their academic journeys and how they overcame the challenges they faced, they do refer to more than one thing they consider as having a positive influence. For the purpose of this research this is termed as a strength, the deployment of which acts as a positive influencer when striving for a successful outcome.

Initially identified in the preliminary study and corroborated by the main cohort, these strengths – or capitals – was identified as: academic, aspirational, cultural, familial, linguistic, and neo-familial. Table 2 – Preliminary study, summary of findings, provides the preliminary study's references to these capitals, how the relative strength of each may change over space and time, and that each may have a different level of influence over the students. From the main cohort 2018, Figure 6 provides evidence of the propensity of the words (or closely associated words) which the respondents used when articulating the challenges they faced and the sources of strength which helped them prevail. From this Word Cloud, the most prevalent terms the students used were identified, shown in Table 4 - Top-20 words used by respondents. These terms were shown to be associated with capitals and provide evidence to show that each of the top-20 words could be aligned to at least one capital. Table 5 provides evidence to suggest that the levels of capital are not the same and Figure 7 shows the potential scale of change to any of the capitals; including the generation of a new strength students generate and deploy – neo-familial capital. The top-5 words were filtered to further investigate the contextual use of each to see if they directly referred to any of the capitals and potentially identify if any had a stronger influence than others: appendix 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 refer. After review, two of the top-5 were considered as directly relating to familial capital and neo-familial capital. None of the other capitals could be specifically aligned to the other three words and there were no clear indications that any one capital had more influence on students. Table 6 – Excerpts from the focus group, provides evidence to show some alignment between this and the earlier findings, in particular the identification of the named capitals. It also showed the potential for the increasing influence of neo-familial capital, although this was not supported by the other evidence. When considering the findings from the questionnaire cohort, where the potential transferability of the main findings was provisionally tested, common themes were evident. These include the identification of a number of capitals which helped students overcome challenges. The characteristics of these capitals were described in identical ways as the earlier research, without assigning one particular capital as having more of an influence than others.

Overall, the findings do offer evidence to suggest that students develop academic resilience from a number of sources; these capitals strengths can increase over space and time; there was no corroborated evidence to suggest these capitals erode; and capital had differing levels of influence over students but no one capital was more influence than others. This research investigates the academic resilience of international Master's students studying as non-first language English students in the UK on short-term study visas initially centred on a specific case study institution. From the findings, a three-part theoretical perspective was developed for the generation and deployment of academic resilience:

1. The constituents of academic resilience – the strengths students use to overcome challenges – include: academic capital, aspirational capital, cultural capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, and neo-familial capital ('capital' understood in terms of Bourdieu concept of social capital).
2. The strength or level of the capitals can change over space and time.
3. The capitals do not share the same level of influence.

This perspective informs the analysis of the data and supports the body of knowledge. In so doing, gaps in the literature and opportunities for further research are identified, discussed in the following chapter.

## 5 - ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the findings of the primary data. To set it in context, it provides a short scholarly review of the nature of resilience and specifically, academic resilience. It also summarises the Bourdieusian perspective of social capital and capital conversion (1977, 1986) and recaps the capitals investigated in this research. Each of the six capitals is discussed separately, wherein a summary of the findings is provided. The following chapter reflects on the findings against other theoretical perspectives of social capital and its relationship with academic resilience.

### **Resilience – the ability to bounce back**

Linnenlueke (2015) provides detailed account of the development of the concept of resilience in the field of business and management research. Within this, Luthans (2002) offers a basis of how to understand resilience, defining it as “those with positive efficacy will bounce back and be resilient when meeting problems or even failure, while low efficacy will tend to give up when obstacles appear” (p.60). This ‘positive efficacy’ is said to have a learnable capacity (Avey *et al.*, 2006; Avey *et al.*, 2009; Luthans, 2002; Luthans *et al.*, 2007) which can be used in times of need.

### **Academic resilience – overcoming academic obstacles**

When considering resilience in academia, Morales and Trotman’s (2008) offer a definition, “[academic resilience is] the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (p.8). It is suggested that academic resilience can have positive outcomes in educational settings (Caruana, 2014; Hartley, 2011; O’Shea, 2015; Singh, 2021; Swanson *et al.*, 2011) and is a strong predictor of potential outcomes (Luthans *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, social supports can play a major role in generating resilience (Richardson *et al.*, 1990).

### **Social Capital – building academic resilience**

Bourdieu’s (1977) framework helps to establish that capital is a form of resource, socially generated through networks of relationships among people, a view supported by other scholars (Field, 2003; Manning, 2015; Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, social capital can be understood as a collective noun whereby it refers to a number of constituents; constituents of capital and linking their net effect to achievement (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000). This study also focuses on the potential generation and erosion of capital which contribute to an overall level of resilience (Wenger, 1998) and seeks to investigate how levels may change over space and time (Palmer, 2016).

In conceptualising academic resilience as capital which can be generated through the acquisition of constituents that can be converted in times of adversity, the findings established six prevalent capitals each of which is discussed herein.

### **ACADEMIC CAPITAL**

Academic capital is characterised by the skills and knowledge that support students' educational persistence towards achievement (Orta *et al.*, 2017). The research looked to identify indications that respondents referred to events, either directly or indirectly, which could show links between previous experience in academic-related environments and the skills and knowledge they acquired (academic capital) that helped to prepare them for their study experience in the UK and supported their ongoing achievements (capital conversion). The evidence collected in the main cohort suggested that academic capital was identified by the respondents as something they arrived in the UK with to commence their studies and was considered a strength that increased as they progressed through their learning journey. In the 30 references which were linked to academic capital, statements such as "helped me to think more like a level 7" and "not very analytical at that time so tried" indicate that this capital was evident in the discussions. These indications begin to show that capital could increase through the learners' journey, further supported by statements such as, "they fed me with their knowledge which boosted my knowledge". During the focus group, several references were made to arriving with greater or lesser levels of academic capital: "on arrival I was [academically] over-confident", "most of us are confident and very intelligent", "at the end of the day, most of us had [academic] issues". There was also corroborative evidence to indicate that this capital could increase, "I report on my dissertation confidently [now]". The final questionnaire cohort made only one reference to the concept of academic capital, ranked 4<sup>th</sup> of five on the most-influential scale with only one supporting comment.

### **ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL**

It is acknowledged that the literature on aspirational capital in educational settings is limited. Yosso (2005) does provide a definition, "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real or perceived barriers" (p.77). Carmo and Klein (2019) suggest that there is also a relationship between aspirational capital and young peoples' personal and professional academic advancement. This research identified aspirational capital as a potentially prevalent characteristic in building academic resilience, the findings and analysis of which led to some interesting and potentially wide-ranging implications. The narrative analysis revealed evidence to demonstrate a propensity among the students to do well in their studies and successfully complete their programmes based on a desire to succeed. It featured as the second most prominent capital students considered themselves to have arrived with when starting their programme and only two references were made to it improving as their studies progressed. The top-20 words used by the

respondents to reflect on their learning journey had frequent links to achieving their aspirations. The supporting evidence includes: “I need to finish this within a year because I need to go back to work”, “I wanted to work in something more”, “[I am a] girl who wants to take the next step to achieve”, “to improve myself and my family”. The focus group also provided evidence of strong associations with trying to achieve aspirations: “I need to do it and so I will”, “you can do it, push through, the spirit of endurance”. The questionnaire respondents - with very similar demographics to the main cohort and focus group - shared the view that achieving personal goals was very important, featuring as the highest rated capital from among the six listed. Overall, this capital is considered to play a major role in student progression and achievement. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that it is mostly generated prior to arriving in the UK to start their studies but how it is initially generated was not investigated by this study.

### **CULTURAL CAPITAL**

Identified in the preliminary study as potentially having a positive influence on international students as they embark on their Master’s studies in the UK, cultural capital was included an investigable constituent of academic resilience. The literature identified a number of ways this capital could be defined: Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of habitus as it relates to the way people deal with different situations; Yosso (2005) in that, cultural capital is developed through knowledge and skills valued in related society; and Harper (2015), where individuals derive strength from an affinity with their cultural identify, cultural knowledge, and cultural artefacts. These characteristics were considered in the analysis of the respondents’ narrative as well as their overall effect, the potential to increase or erode, and their respective influence when compared with the other capitals under investigation. Respondents did identify with the concept of deriving strength from their cultural heritage, whether that was through the customs and expectations placed on them owing to cultural influences or their affiliation with practices and people specifically linked through their cultural backgrounds. The evidence suggests that, students did arrive in the UK with capital that can be converted immediately but it featured as the least influential; other than neo-familial capital, that was not evident at all at this initial stage of the learning journey. Although its actual and relative impact were not particularly influential in the early stages of their studies, there was evidence to suggest that cultural capital did increase over space and time; noting eight references to it being developed whilst on the Master’s programme. The main cohort contextually referred to cultural capital in terms of: “go to someone like the guys from Nigeria”, “cultural ties do create some problems”, “the way you live is different”. The evidence did not provide any compelling observations to suggest cultural capital played a major role in the students’ learning journeys. Rather, it was a factor that was spoken about as important to many of the respondents, but at times of academic adversity it was not included as having played any significant part in helping the students overcome these challenges. Distance away from home and contact with family and friends

accounted for the majority of the referrals later in the studies. The questionnaire respondents collectively placed cultural capital as the least influential factor related to their academic progress and achievement, suggesting that it did have a part to play but had no particular consequence: “being a member of the EU helped me to settle into the UK environment easily. My culture was important but do not play any particular role in how I dealt with adversity”.

## **FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

Familial capital is defined as an “ensemble of means, strategies, and resources embodied in the family’s way of life that influences the future of their children...is implicitly and explicitly reflected through behavior, emotional processes, and core values” (Gofen, 2009, p72). This research looks to investigate the familial capital international students may arrive in the UK with, capital that can be converted to overcome the challenges in HE. This approach builds on Gofen’s (2009) definition and takes the view that previous and continued links with close family members can support the students, whether that be logistics (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), acting as models or offering words of encouragement in times of need (Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Richardson, 2002) or having a potentially negative effect which erodes familial capital (Gofen, 2009; Yosso, 2005) and not help with student progression or achievement. The concept of capital provided by the students’ families featured strongly in the data, considered as a strength rather than having any adverse effects on progression or achievement. The word ‘family’ featured as 5<sup>th</sup> on the most frequently used terms in the narrative analysis and was directly associated with capital conversion, for example “my family were very very supportive”. Analysis of the contextual meaning showed that it linked with words of encouragement and fulfilling family expectations and it was these that predominantly acted as the capital to support student progress and achievement rather than any negative effects. The main cohort identified familial capital as positively supporting students as they arrived to begin their studies, referred to 28 times in this context. This capital also showed signs of having increased over space and time, featuring as the most referred to capital among the six investigated. The limited effect familial capital may have had was discussed in the focus group. The point was made that “family back home will not be able to help you, they may give you a word of advice”. This statement was made in the context of reflecting on the academic demands of the study programme and may indicate that the impact of familial capital reduced over space and time, replaced by other forms of capital that had more practical applications; further discussed in the section on neo-familial capital, below. The questionnaire cohort rated the impact of family networks 3<sup>rd</sup> of the six and as having an overall positive impact; “I was surprised of how much strength and encouragement I gained after a call with my family”.

## **LINGUISTIC CAPITAL**

The relationship between spoken language and achievement is a prevalent theme in the literature (Nishioka & Durrani, 2019). Yosso (2005) describes the conversion of this capital as providing intellectual and social skills through the use of language. In the context of this research, where all the respondents in the data collection points were bilingual, none had English as their first language. This adds a further level of challenge as they had to engage with the language of academia; described by Sicurella (2016) as filled with high-status terminology which establishes the discipline within academia. Therefore, academic language can be quite different from the standard English language used in schools and general society. The inclusion of linguistic capital into this research was informed by the preliminary study, where three of the five respondents referenced it; two of which indicated that it had increased over space and time. The main cohort showed that six references were made to some level of linguistic capital on arrival on the Master's programme and a further 23 references pertained to increased levels as their studies progressed. The narrative analysis helped to identify the words and phrases within these references, including: "It was not that good actually [language], but improved, "The English language was really tough for me because of academic writing but got better". Throughout Table 4, there are many references linked to language and its expression: knowledge levels, verbal and written. For the focus group, language did not feature as a major theme other than one reference to accents. However, the questionnaire cohort provided a much stronger indication that knowledge of the English language was important in helping deal with the challenges they faced as international students studying as bilinguals. Reference to subject specific terminology was also made, indicating that a good knowledge of common English may not have been sufficient to deal with the academic rigours.

## **NEO-FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

The term 'neo-familial capital' was derived from this research when the emergence of a new unforeseen capital was identified that did not form part of the initial literature review. When revisited, the literature did provide a similar concept which was termed 'fictive kinship'. Fordham (1988) refers to this as "kinship-like connection between and among persons in a society, not related by blood or marriage, who have maintained essential reciprocal social or economic relationships" (p.56). The majority of the related literature focuses on ethnic struggles in the US (Anderson, 1988; Weinberg, 1977). More recently, Nelson (2020) describes fictive kin as the development of interpersonal relationships which bind people in similar ways to that of blood-tied relationships, but again her research focuses on white, middle-classed people in the US. When refining searches in the literature to seek research into the establishment of fictive kinship in HE amongst students studying overseas in languages other than their first, no literature was identified. This research takes the principle of fictive kinship, applies it to this field and assigns it the new term 'neo-familial capital'; referring to new 'like-family' relationships which form among previously unknown individuals yet



who share a situation in the HE setting. Initially, the concept of new like-family bonds was identified by all the preliminary study respondents and was also reflected in the data from the subsequent cohorts. Shown in Table 5, no respondents in the main cohorts identified any indication of building capital from other students on their arrival in the UK. However, Figure 7 does show a substantial increase in the number of references linked to generating capital from within the student groups to help deal with the challenges of their studies. The word 'friends' appeared 3<sup>rd</sup> on the most used term in the narrative analysis, which was more frequent than 'family'. Specific references were made to how other students helped out: "the friends support groups helped", "was easy to make friends which helped me". Also, within the top-20 most used words that featured in the narrative analysis, 14 linked to strength derived from student networks. The focus group referred to the inter-student network as providing specific support in times of need: "we form into groups and say what does this assignment mean", "performance started to increase because we supported each other", "your friends here will give you advice...so it's a motivation and it is in you". The questionnaire group did make an association between progress and the support of other students; "relationships and bonds created with other students in the programme and the comfort it gave at stressful times". Although it only featured 5<sup>th</sup> of the six capitals identified, for some of the respondents generating support from the student group was unexpected; "I was surprised from all the different things I learned from cooperating with so many student colleagues from different cultures".

### **Chapter summary**

Overall, the evidence does suggest that students do built and convert the capitals identified by this study as they strive to overcome the challenges they face as part of the Master's studies in the UK; however, the effects of each of the respective capitals may be different. For example, cultural capital was described as a strength and was converted to support students in times of need but not with the same frequency as other capitals that may offer more practical support, for instance: linguistic capital or neo-familial capital, which were referred to with more frequency and association with academic progression. Student aspirations, family networks and academic skills also play their part in supporting the learning journey. A key concept that was revealed is the role neo-familial capital plays in supporting the students' progression. This unexpected finding, both for the researcher and some respondents, is considered an under-researched area in the academic discipline of education. The following chapter discusses the findings against the theoretical background.

## **6 – DISCUSSION**

The focus of this research is on academic resilience, resilience that is achieved through the collective strength of the constituents of social capital. Having discussed the constituent capitals in the previous chapter in terms of how the primary data supported or otherwise each, attention now focuses on the relationship between the findings and the associated literature. Links between the findings and the literature are discussed, leading to the contributions to theory and practice. Discussion on the findings for each capital are provided in the same sequence as the previous chapter, followed by reflections on the seminal theoretical perspectives. Moreover, a conceptual representation of the potential relationship between academic capital conversion and student progression is provided.

### **ACADEMIC CAPITAL**

Similar studies that identify the concept of academic capital were taken from a number of sources and locations, including Australia, America and India (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2019; Morales, 2008; Orta *et al.*, 2017; O’Shea, 2015). Each identified the strengths that students generate to deal with the rigours they face in their academic journeys. The findings of this study do identify terms associated with building academic capital, mostly reflected in increases to knowledge and experience which led to improved confidence and an ability to better deal with the challenges they needed to overcome to progress. Morales (2008) focuses on the need for students of be “bicultural”; learners’ having two-selves that need to adjust to the academic setting. The findings do suggest that students adapt to a previously unknown situation using what they already have in terms of knowledge and experience to meet the challenges they face but adopt ways to overcome new difficulties. These include improvements to analytical skills, ways of writing, and increased familiarity to the institution and how it works. This increase to levels of capital was also shown by Orta, Murguia and Cruz (2019), whereby the skills and knowledge students acquire on their journeys can increase over time. As the learning experience is timebound, students return to their countries of origin with new skills and experience that may be quite different to what that previously had in their cultural settings - emphasising the potential for bicultural characteristics. A common theme shared by the constituents of social capital studied in this research was the positive impact having capitals to convert can have on academic progress and performance. This view is shared by Compton-Lilly and Delbridge (2019), as they showed that academic skills can be considered as resources and positively impact on academic achievement.

### **ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL**

Although Nunez’s (2009) called for more qualitative research in the field of capital conversion in the HE sector, this remains an under-researched area. Recent reviews of the literature in education with reference to academic capital offer only 45 scholarly articles, none of which pertain directly to the

international students' experiences in the UK's HE sector. O'Shea's (2015) study into capital generation and conversion of Australian HE students does offer some insight in this field but the international HE student experience in the UK remains relatively unknown. This research does support Yosso's (2005) definition, as it offers evidence to demonstrate that hopes and dreams for a better future do drive students on towards achievement. Carmo and Klein's (2019) research links socioeconomic policy with helping to drive these aspirations, whereby opportunity plays a significant role in helping to ignite aspirational capital, although these motivations were not explored in this study; rather it looked for evidence of its existence, if it increased or eroded over space and time, and comparisons with other capitals. From the evidence provided by the main cohort and focus group, it does feature amongst the most highly rated and prominent capitals, a finding that was supported by the questionnaire respondents. A notable observation of the evidence associated with aspirational capital is the way the respondents referred to this capital, the passion and drive being obvious in their narrative: "belief in myself and abilities [helped me] shine and achieve my goals"; "I knew that my personal drive would carry me to the end", "you can do it, push through, the spirit of endurance". Overall, the findings support the work of other researchers in this field and strengthens the call for further research in the acquisition and conversion of academic capital in the UK's HE sector as this remains an under-researched topic.

### **CULTURAL CAPITAL**

The literature refers to Furnham and Bochner's (1986) observations that, international students face several difficulties which native students do not. Furthermore, Chen (2014) highlights the need for those living in a diversified academic community to develop cross-cultural competence. Whether this research supports these views or not remains unclear. The limited references to cultural capital in comparison to others may indicate the capital conversion in times of need did not include cultural capital. There is evidence to support the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), in as much as cultural capital can be identified in terms of tangible ways linked to their cultural background that help students deal with totally new situations. However, there was no weight of evidence specifically relating to how it is developed or converted into academic resilience.

### **FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

Many comparisons can be drawn with the literature. Gofen's (2009) view is supported in that, resources provided by a family do help students, whether those resources are financial (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) or purely personal encouraging (Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Richardson, 2002). The idea that attitudes and behaviours towards education can be influenced by family members was not reflected with any notations in this research. Richardson (2002) concept of family member acting as models was not evident in the data. However, messengers that offer moral support was discussed as having a positive impact on many of the respondents; albeit it was limited in its ability to offer

practical ways to overcome academic challenges. There were no indications to support the idea that familial capital can have a negative impact on students' progress or achievement (Gofen, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Moreover, there was a suggestion that the impact of familial capital lessens but this did not indicate an erosion of capital but rather the non-conversion of familial capital.

### **LINGUISTIC CAPITAL**

The findings suggest a close association with the literature on the need for linguistic capital and its potential impact. The relationship between knowledge of the English language featured strongly in both the main cohort and questionnaire cohort, with indications that levels of capital available for conversion can change. Zamudio's (2015) notion, whereby bilinguals can benefit from their linguistic capabilities, was reflected in the findings as having a positive impact. There were no indications to show the linguistic fatigue suggested by Peralta, Caspary and Boothe (2013). Owing to the strong propensity of the majority of respondents to rate linguistic skills higher than many other capitals available, this could indicate the important role it plays in academic progression and achievement. There is evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between success and knowledge of the language, aligning to what Nishioka and Durrani (2019) claim in terms to linking language with success. The findings also refer to the specificity of the language of academia, noting the need to develop knowledge of academic terminology which is largely developed whilst on the programme of studies. This could help to explain why there was a marked increase in students' linguistic capital in space and time.

### **NEO-FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

Fordham's (1988) and Nelson's (2020) shared view that kinship-like connections can be established between non-family members that become essential interpersonal relationships for mutual gain, is strongly supported by the data collected from the main cohort and focus groups, but only partially supported by the questionnaire group. The data does support to a view that, fictive (not real) bounds can be established between individuals sharing space and time if they are linked in some common endeavour; they do establish kin- (family) like relationships. These relationships can become a capital that is convertible in times of need, possibly in place of other capitals that do not offer the same practical application. There are indications that students use neo-familial capital as an enabler towards continued progression and achievement, this being a key observation from this study.

### **Social capital – the sum of its parts**

Reflecting back on the literature offers a reminder of what social capital means. For Bourdieu, social capital is described as habitus. As a noun, habitus has two meanings: an individual's general physical constitution; and the way an individual perceives and reacts to the world around them (Oxford

Dictionary of English, 2015). These meanings align with Bourdieu's use of the word, offering a metaphor to help explain the bonds that can be formed based on collective humanistic similarities and ties (Field, 2005). Bourdieu suggests that at its core, social capital is about relationships that provide resources which can be converted to serve as a currency in times of need (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986); a view that is shared by Coleman (1994) and Putnam (2000). From the literature, research suggests that social capital, as a convertible currency, has a number of continents (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, research discusses the concept of generating capitals from many dimensions within an individual's social setting that can help develop opportunities for capital conversion (Fordham, 1988; Gofen, 2009; Morales, 2008; Nishioka & Durrani, 2019; O'Shea, 2015; Wildhagen, 2009).

The findings of this study support these views; that social capital is generated from a number of sources within social settings, which can be converted by individuals to help improve their situations when required. The preliminary study informed the approach to the main cohort by suggesting the most prevalent capitals likely to be identified by the case study respondents, including the concept of fictive kinship which had not formed part of the initial review of the literature. The evidence collected in the main cohort did suggest that students convert the capital that they either arrive with to start their academic journey overseas or build during their journey, summarised in Table 5. Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977) is supported by the way students increased their capitals in response to their social settings: collocated at a university studying the same level of academic programme, all being from different cultural backgrounds and non-first language English speakers. The findings also set out six specific capitals consistently described by the respondents as those things that helped them through the academic challenges they faced: academic, aspirational, cultural, familial, linguistic and neo-familial. Furthermore, these capitals were assessed as having unequal weight. For example, from the narrative analysis the impact of cultural capital was considered less impactful than aspirational capital, familial capital and neo-familial capital. Also, neo-familial capital was an unexpected strength that the majority of respondents reflected on as having a positive role in helping them progress through their course.

## An image of academic resilience

The identification of these six capitals could play an important role in helping to understand the way academic institutions and governmental policies consider how best to generate academic resilience in current and future students from overseas, studying in similar circumstances to those in this case study. Morales and Trotman (2008) state that academic resilience is the process and results which form part of the life story of an individual's academic progression, despite the obstacles. Based on the literature and further findings of this study, Figure 8 offers a conceptual representation of how the students may perceive their rate of progression over time.

Figure 8 has two planes:

X – Time: the duration of the short-term study visa

Y – Progression: rate the students' progress through their programme of studies

Over the course of the limited period of studies (Time), student progression should be aligned to the programme timetable (dotted line) and students only know they are progressing satisfactorily at points of assessment (where the s-curves and dotted line converge).

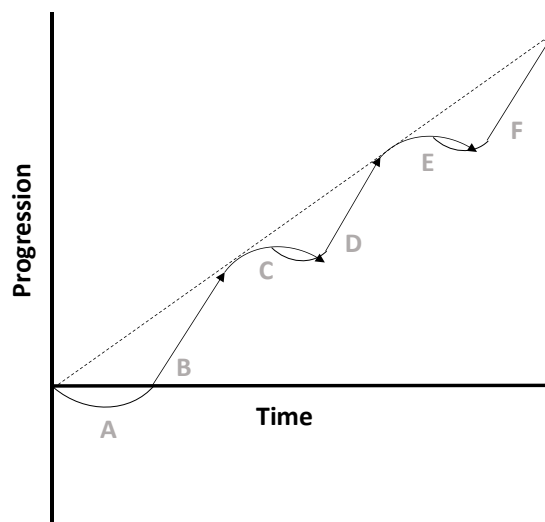


Figure 8. Perception of progression – academic resilience

On arrival, the new surroundings, new people and new study material can present significant challenges to the bilingual students studying away from home on a Master's course. Point A reflects the findings that indicate the effects of the challenges faced shortly after arriving: how students perceive their progression (potentially perceived as moving away from the progression line) and the need to "go to someone like the guys from Nigeria" for support. In several instances, these challenges referred to cultural differences, "the way you live is different [here]". Others referred to the early academic challenges, "[the studies used] documents and words with different meaning". Point B is when capital is converted to support their need to feel as though they are progressing satisfactorily, for example a call home to supporting relatives (familial capital) or establishing links with those of similar ethnicity or background (cultural capital). Over time, the feeling of progression can start to tail off as the rigours of studying at Master's level start to potentially impact on student performance – approaching Point C. To avoid coming off the progression line, students convert more capital (Point C). The respondents spoke of having to "fight for myself" and having a "spirit of

endurance” (aspirational capital) that helped with their continued progression (Point D). As the challenges increase and more critical thinking and Master’s-level synthesis are required of the students, the journey starts to get harder still (approaching Point E). To overcome the feeling of losing touch with the progression line, students spoke of getting “formed into groups” (Point E) and their “performance started to increase because [they] supported each other” (Point F).

### **Chapter Summary**

When reflecting on the proposed three-part theoretical perspective, the findings and analysis do provide evidence to support the idea whereby the constituents of academic resilience include: academic capital, aspirational capital, cultural capital, familial capital, linguistic capital and neo-familial capital (‘capital’ understood in terms of Bourdieu concept of social capital). Also, the impact and level of these capitals can change over space and time. Furthermore, that these capitals do not share the same level of influence. With regards capital conversion, Figure 8 suggests how students may perceive their rate of progress and when they feel the need to convert capital, therefore demonstrating their academic resilience – their ability to “bounce back” (Luthans, 2002). In essence, students do not know how they are really progressing until they come to an assessment point, when their actual progression is aligned to their perceived progression. This image helps to understand that the students’ journey over space and time may include converting previously accrued or newly acquired levels of capital to help overcome the rigours they will face. The conversion of capital helps to avoid them feeling as a though they are moving away from the progression line or, indeed, if they are actually moving away from the progression line and do require assistance. For example, when feeling unprepared of summative assessment points with the potential to fail, students may take preventative measures by seeking help from their self-generated student support groups (points A, C and E) which results in them overcoming the challenges and continuing to progress (points B, D and F). This conceptual approach to student progression through ‘s’ curves helps to understanding that their academic journey may present challenges they feel ill-equipped to deal with. Capital conversion in times of hardship can provide a source of specific strength by which to aid progression, whether that be through their knowledge of the UK’s academic system based on their previous studies (academic capital), desire and drive to succeed (aspirational capital), to a lesser extent their links with their cultural heritage (cultural capital), improved command of the English language (linguistic capital), calls home for some words of encouragement (familial capital), or newly established student networks which offer practical advice (neo-familial capital). Each of these capitals was evident in the findings for the main cohort, focus group and questionnaire cohort, although not with the same impact or frequency.

## **7 – CONCLUSIONS**

As stated in Chapter 1, this research seeks to address a gap in current knowledge and develop a contemporary understanding of how international students studying in the UK on Master's programmes build academic resilience to help cope with the challenges they face. In approaching the research question, this study started with the requirement to undertake a scholarly review of the key literature associated with the terms, 'resilience' and 'social capital' and understand their relationship with 'academic resilience'. Although the literature was limited, it did offer indicators for what the constituents of social capital could include: eight capitals providing the theoretical background. With reference to these and other associated literature, primary research was conducted on a case study in the UK to build greater understanding of what capitals the case study respondents identified as helping them become academically resilient. Of the initial eight, six capitals were evidenced in the findings, including how they were generated and whether or not they increased over space and time. What remained unanswered was the concept whereby capitals can erode, as suggested by Bourdieu (1986). Of particular interest was the increased influence aspirational capital had and the emergence of non-familial capital. This chapter considers the theoretical and practical implications of this study and its limitations.

### **ACADEMIC CAPITAL**

Overall, the findings share common ground with the literature on academic capital (Casey, 2020; Morales, 2008; Morales & Trotman, 2004). Its ability to be acquired prior to starting an academic journey is evidenced as is its ability to increase over time. Furthermore, it is a valuable commodity which can positively impact academic progression and performance. The potential for the erosion of academic capital was not identified in the literature or in this study, so the potential for this capital to reduce was not identified. When considering how to help international students develop bicultural characteristics whereby they prepare to effectively operate outside their normal academic settings, institutions of learning could build capabilities and confidence in advance of new arrivals starting new programmes of study. The practical implications of this could include helping students build academic capital by offering pre-course study skills in other languages and introductory academic knowledge prior to arrival. What remains unclear are any situational requirements. For example, whether the campus and its setting are linked to academic capital and if situational awareness of the campus site and its surroundings would further increase the students' ability to deal with the academic rigours they face. In summary, this study does support the literature. In the context of this case study, the findings offer support for the concept whereby international students embarking on their Master's level studies in the UK built levels of academic capital prior to arrival, but the challenges they face may require capital gains to help them cope. Whilst gains can be achieved through interaction with the programmatic material and staff, further gains can be linked



with their increased confidence as they progress and to linguistic capital, through enhanced knowledge of the language and skills needed in academia.

### **ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL**

The implications of identifying capitals that students convert to help them progress and achieve their Master's qualifications overseas, in a different language to their own, with a group of previous unknown individuals, should not be underestimated. Understanding that, one of the main motivators for students arriving in the UK to undertake their PG studies is to fulfil their desires to improve their personal and/or professional goals can impact on the way they are encouraged to participate in the UK's HE market, how to help them settle into their studies, identify periodic interventions that continue to focus on the reasons why they are there, and to establish alumni connections for mutual benefit after graduation. This study does support the current theoretical understanding of aspirational capital – how it is achieved and the need to convert it in times of adversity (O'Shea, 2015; Yosso, 2005) – and establishes links between the key drivers students' have towards academic progression and achievement, that these drivers could be generated prior to starting their studies and they can be stimulated over space (studying in a different country) and time (on a short-term study visa). With this understanding, universities could review their andragogical approach to include scheduled opportunities for students to reflect on their aspirational drivers during the programmes in group sessions, to share experience and their stories; a similar approach to that suggested by Caruana (2014) by which pedagogies should embrace cultural biography and storytelling.

### **CULTURAL CAPITAL**

The implications of the findings are limited. The concept that strength can be gained from cultural identity, customs, practice and association, is supported (Mikus *et al.*, 2020; Wildhagen, 2009; Yosso, 2005). However, the impact of these in helping students to overcome academic challenges is unclear. This may have been as a result of the respondents not fully understanding what cultural capital can mean and therefore, how to relate it to their experiences. Unlike much of the literature associated with the other capitals included in this research, which offer a more common understanding of each of the terms, cultural capital can be considered in many different ways. For further research, the ambiguity and variety of definitions for cultural capital could be fully clarified prior to engaging with respondents. The methods of this research project included an element of storytelling (Miller, 2000) and open questions which encouraged the respondents to reflect on their experiences and articulate them in whichever way they preferred. Conducting a more focused study into cultural capital may provide greater clarity and knowledge on this concept. For the purposes of this study, cultural capital is considered a strength but what that strength relates to and whether or not it is converted in times of adversity, remains unclear.

## **FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

The idea that family can and do support students on their academic journeys is well established (Shapiro, 2018). However, a great deal of the literature focuses on early years or secondary education (Gofen, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Naidoo *et al.*, 2017; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Shapiro, 2018). Furthermore, very limited research was identified on the conversion of familial capital by international bilingual students studying in the UK on Master's programmes. This research suggests that familial capital can play a significant role in helping these students in their academic journeys, not only in terms of resources but also moral support and encouragement. The potential implications of this could impact not only on university support systems – which could facilitate regular cost-effective links with family members in the students' country of origin – but also to inform governmental policies to ensure that they endorse and guide the sector towards offering support networks and systems to international students. This approach closely aligns with the UK military's support to service personnel on unaccompanied duty overseas, whereby free telephone calls and postal services are provided to affirm family networks and provide opportunities for familial capital conversion in times of need (raf.mod.uk). To offer a broader more informed view of the generation, impact and changing levels of familial capital, large studies are recommended to investigate these findings and explore the concept further.

## **LINGUISTIC CAPITAL**

English language proficiency is an important requirement for UK universities. Most HE institutions place a minimum standard of English on international students. For example, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) stipulates the need for English language tests prior to applying for courses and directs potential international applicants to their preferred university's website for specific guidance on the levels required. The competency requirements differ depending on the university and programme of studies. These prerequisite courses help to prepare students to cope with the educational settings but to a minimum standard. The findings in this research emphasise the need for linguistic skills as a key competent for academic progression and potential achievement (Chavez, 2018; Denton *et al.*, 2020; Napp-Avelli, 2014; Peralta *et al.*, 2013). It also suggests that linguistic capital does increase as the programme of studies progresses. The evidence references engagement with the academic setting and content to partially explain this, although there were also references to other students and general statements which refer to an overall emersion in the experience. As such, the implications of this support the concept that linguistic capital has an important part to play in the students' learning journey while on course. It also implies that students do increase their knowledge and expertise and the generation of this additional capital is converted to help overcome challenges they face in HE. For universities looking to offer a more attractive proposal to prospective international students, more preparatory support could be considered to address the important role linguistic capital has on the students' progression and achievement.

Early in the programmes when linguistic capital is developing, course material could be written in more simplistic terminology to help address the students' probable unfamiliarity with the language of academia. To support these implications, further research is called for to help identify the sources of linguistic capital and how best students or prospective students should engage with these resources to help with academic progression and achievement.

### **NEO-FAMILIAL CAPITAL**

The concept of international bilingual students forming neo-familial relationships with other students with identical situational characteristics has important implications. As an under-researched topic in the field of education, future studies could explore the notion of neo-familial capital: how it forms, how it grows, how and when it is converted and if it has any direct relationship with academic achievement. If these are established, the implications could be wide ranging and positively affect not only university policies in emphasising the importance of student-centred learning strategies, but also offer guidance on peer-group learning and support. This approach is suggested by Singh (2015), whereby international students build resilience strategies through group work. Embedding peer-group learning and support could focus specifically on academic resilience generation and foster neo-familial connections which could have profound positive effects not found elsewhere. Furthermore, early engagement with applicants and the setting up of student groups before they arrive in the UK could support the establishment of student relationships, in similar ways UK-based undergraduates do before they arrive for their freshers' week; linking up through social media to share ideas, concerns and aspirations for their forthcoming studies (Lavigne, 2019). Government policies could also be reviewed to encourage the sector to reflect on the importance international students may place on the establishment and conversion of neo-familial capital, albeit they may not be aware of this during the application process or arrival period.

### **Reflecting on the research question**

In answer to the research question – How do international students studying in the UK's HE system build academic resilience? – this research suggests that academic resilience has constituents that can be conceptualised in terms of Bourdieusian social capital (1977, 1986). That these constituents include six influential capitals: academic, aspirational, cultural, familial, linguistic and neo-familial. That capital gains can be achieved before arriving in-country to begin studies. Furthermore, capital can also be generated throughout the students' journey from existing and new sources. Each of the six capitals can be converted depending on the situational requirements but aspirational capital may offer additional strength in times of increased adversity. When in-country, neo-familial capital is likely to become a newly generated and prevalent capital which, when converted, can offer practical support in times of perceived need (Figure 8 refers); potentially replacing the reliance on familial capital. In summary, academic resilience is built through a combination of social constructions

(interaction with external support networks), personal attributes (internal academic skills and linguistic expertise) and personal aspirations, all of which can change over space and time and be converted to overcome academic adversity. The implications to theory and practice are important to recognise.

### **Implications for governmental policy**

This research suggests six capitals which form the basis of an international students' personal academic resilience. As the body of knowledge grows in this field, these may be confirmed or adjusted. Whichever the case, identifying the constituents that make up the convertible social capital needed to build academic resilience could have far-reaching consequences. Current governmental policies on education for international students mainly focus on the subjects for study and placement opportunities (International Education Strategy, 2019): the former, looking to support 600,000 international students by 2030; the latter, to establish the international placement plan - Turing Scheme 2021 ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). However, actions 5 and 7 in the International Education Strategy (2019) (which is reviewed annually) look to build and enhance international student numbers and experience, to which the outcomes of this research and subsequent larger studies could directly support. Application numbers could be increased owing to new policies on pre-arrival engagement and in-country support offered to international students and the resultant delivery strategies developed by UK universities.

### **Implications for university practice**

Figure 8 provides a conceptualisation of how international students perceive their progression through their academic journey. It suggests that international students' progression through space and time can be represented by the sigmoid curve or s-curve principle when dealing with adversity. Although the s-curve is usually assigned to mathematical or medical disciplines (Niam & Towill, 1993), here it represents when students may need to convert capital as they start to drift away from the progression line. The drift may be because of difficulties with assignments or as they prepare for their dissertations. Universities should engage proactively with building the academic resilience amongst its international student cohorts by embedding structured systems which include peer-group sessions into programme timetables where students are offered the chance to reflect on the how they are dealing with the academic rigors they face and how they are overcoming them. Figure 8 informs decisions on the frequency and timing of proactive supportive interventions, as well as engaging before students start their studies and in advance of them feeling as though they will not be able to cope. As a result, international students' progression and possibly achievement may increase and potentially improve the UK's reputation in providing an excellent student experience in the way that it hopes too.

## Implications for theory

Overall, this study supports the seminal writers' view that social capital is a resource which can be converted to act as a currency when needed (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000). It also agrees with Woolcock (2001), Yosso (2005) and O'Shea (2015) that multiple sources can build capital strengths. In response to Nunez's (2009) call for more qualitative analysis of how students access and convert capital within the HE environment, the contribution this study makes is to help develop a contemporary understanding of the way international bilingual Master's students studying at a university in the UK on short-term study visas become more academically resilient and overcome the challenges they face over space and time. A review of the literature found very limited scholarly papers which take the principles of the Bourdieu's approach to social capital and link them with building academic resilience in the context of this research. Furthermore, no literature was identified to help explain the most significant developments of resilience over space and time in this context. Some degree of theoretical generalisation (Lee *et al*, 2007) can be made, in that six capitals form the foundations of the academic resilience of international students studying in the UK on Master's programmes. Illustrated in Table 5, the findings show that capitals can and do change through the students' academic journey to the UK, although reductions to capital strengths remains unclear. The relative impact of each constituent capital was not explored however, it was evident that aspirational capital featured prominently as a key driver towards overcoming adversity in the academic context and neo-familial capital became an important enabler when students required more practical assistance in meeting the challenges they faced. The generation of capital was seen to be socially constructed (Casey, 1995) and the conversion of which appeared situational; different capitals were converted at different times throughout the students' journey, depending on the situational needs. The students' perceptions of their academic progress is conceptualised in Figure 8, derived from the literature and this research's findings. It offers a representation of the relationship between academic progression, students' perception of their academic progression, and the conversion of capital to ensure students keep on the progression line. This then shows that, students' progression is linked to their academic resilience as there will be occasions when capital conversion is required to overcome the challenges they face - their ability to bounce back (Luthans, 2002). The emergence of fictive kinship amongst international students studying in the UK's HE sector on Master's programmes was an unexpected yet important finding, as no literature was found to link this concept with the specifics of this case study. Termed as 'neo-familial capital' to demonstrate the difference between the application of this concept in this research and other fields, the fictive kinship relationships that were developed between the international students were shown to have very positive practical effects on their academic progression. Furthermore, the identification of this emergent capital after students arrive in-country to study, offers additional support to the concept whereby levels of capital can change over space and time. Interestingly, neo-familial capital appeared to replace familial capital at times, although this was not seen as an erosion

of familial capital but of converting less owing to the reducing effect familial capital had in the situational requirements. This study also provides evidence to suggest that these findings may be transferrable outside the case study which could stimulate theoretical and practical implications in different academic disciplines and commercial markets.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of the findings of this case study are acknowledged, as the relatively small sample of respondents in the main cohort and focus group do restrict the potential validity of the findings. This study had limited access to the required demography of respondents between 2018 and 2020; significantly affected from March 2019 by the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on international students studying overseas and the availability of the University staff. Mason (2010) does suggest that a sample size can range from 5 to 350 and Bryman and Bell (2015) emphasise the relationship between the word limit of a thesis and the respective sample size. Reflecting on these, this study takes Blumer's (1954) approach to the findings qualitative research can offer, whereby the observations provide a general sense of reference and offer guidance to larger empirical research. External reliability is unlikely to be achieved owing to the nature of a case study: the social setting and respondents' circumstances. As there was only one researcher, the issue of internal reliability is addressed, in part, by adopting a qualitative interpretive research method to generate a purposive sample and invite respondents to tell their stories. In response for the need to consider the researcher's positioning with the first two cohorts and the need for reflexivity, the research instruments were selected to allow respondents to reflect on their experiences without the researcher influencing their accounts. The findings from the first three cohorts informed the approach to the questionnaire cohort, attempting to seek respondent validation for the findings. In many areas, the questionnaire cohort did agree with the main cohort and focus group, and as such provide indicators that there are opportunities for the transferability of the findings outside the conditions of this case study. Although it is acknowledged that the findings of this study are limited, they do nonetheless offer insight into how international students become academically resilience and the importance of this in helping them progress through their studies.

## **Chapter summary**

This chapter sets out the theoretical and practical implications of this study and limitations. It emphasises the need to develop a better understanding of the relationship between academic resilience in the UK HE sector and the generation and conversion of social capital to build academic resilience. Even after earlier calls for further research into the academic resilience of the HE community (Nunez, 2009), the body of knowledge omits to fully represent the international HE students' experiences of studying UK Master's programmes in a second language. In building on this research, a greater depth of understanding could be developed of the constituents of social capital

as it relates to building academic resilience amongst the international student community. In particular, the increased influence aspirational capital has and the emergence and role neo-familial capital plays. Further research could include other academic disciplines outside education, where the principles of building capitals that can be converted and act as a currency to support resilience in overcoming personal challenges can be applied. The contribution it makes helps to establish the identification of specific capitals that build academic resilience: noting the potential strength of aspirational capital and the emergence of neo-familial capital. The outcomes help shape the Government's ongoing review of how best to enhance international students' learning experience and support the generation of more students from overseas. Guidance on how to enhance universities' practices is also provided to help increase understanding of the relationship between international students and academic resilience and the delivery strategies and practices needed to support HE students at the earliest possible opportunity.

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**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**April 2017**

**Investigating the resilience of international post-graduate students studying in the UK**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important you understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything unclear or if you would like more information before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please ask.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The overarching theme for this study is ‘resilience’, conceived as a ‘resource’ and generated by the attainment of various ‘social capitals’. The specific area of research is the impact studying in the UK’s post-graduate (PG) system can have on the resilience of international Level 7 students and how this can be developed or depleted over time (short-term academic visa) and space (studying overseas). This leads to a working research question: What type of resilience approach is most beneficial for post-graduate international students in the UK’s Higher Education (HE) system?

The aims of the study are broken down as follows:

1. To investigate and define the key terms and concepts of ‘resilience’ and ‘social capital’ and their relationship.
2. With reference to the associated literature, consider how levels of resilience in students studying overseas as non-domiciles can be developed or eroded over time and space, and how these impact on the student experience.
3. Determine the issues, challenges and impact on HE institutions hosting PG students and support HMG policies on the recruitment, sustainment and achievement levels of international students studying in the UK.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen as a Level 7 student from the case study HE institution, studying as an international student whose first language is not English.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you are requested to sign the attached consent form and returned it to Tony Ward (t.ward@chester.ac.uk). Having consented, you retain the right to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you consent to take part, you will be contacted by the researcher (Tony Ward) from the Chester Business School and invited to attend a meeting, during which the aims and objectives of the project will be further explained and any questions can be answered. The meeting will take place at the Queen’s Park Campus (unless a more convenient arrangement is agreed) and will be audio recorded.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study. The researcher’s role at the University of Chester has no influence on the research being undertaken; this study is part of their professional development and therefore they should be viewed as a researcher rather than a staff member.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will help to develop current knowledge and understanding of how international students cope with the rigors of studying in the UK, help to influence how UK HE institutions attract and support international PG students, and potentially support national policy on how the UK's government develops its policies on attracting and supporting PG students from overseas.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Professor Clare Schofield  
Chair of Faculty Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee  
Faculty of Business & Management, University of Chester, United Kingdom, Chester CH1 4BJ  
+44 (0)1244 511000 or c.schofield@chester.ac.uk

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence (but not otherwise), then you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for this.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this research may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results will be written up as part of the researcher's Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) thesis. It is hoped that the findings may be used to determine the issues, challenges and impact on HE institutions hosting PG students and support governmental policies on the recruitment, sustainment and achievement levels of international students studying in the UK.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is funded Faculty of Business & Finance, Chester Business School.

### **Who may I contact for further information?**

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Dr Connie Hancock  
Head of Department  
Faculty of Business & Management  
Queen's Park Campus  
Chester Business School  
University of Chester  
Chester  
United Kingdom  
CH1 4BJ  
+44 (0)1244 511986 or c.hancock@chester.ac.uk

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Investigating the resilience of international post-graduate students studying in the UK**

**Name of Researcher: Anthony J Ward (Tony)**

Please initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
  
- 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected.
  
- 3. I agree to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

**December 2020**

**Investigating the resilience of international post-graduate students studying in the UK**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important you understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything unclear or if you would like more information before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please ask.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The overarching theme for this study is ‘resilience’, conceived as a ‘resource’ and generated by the attainment of various ‘social capitals’. The specific area of research is the impact studying in the UK’s post-graduate (PG) system can have on the resilience of international Level 7 students and how this can be developed or depleted over time (short-term academic visa) and space (studying overseas). This leads to a working research question: What type of resilience approach is most beneficial for post-graduate international students in the UK’s Higher Education (HE) system?

The aims of the study are broken down as follows:

1. To investigate and define the key terms and concepts of ‘resilience’ and ‘social capital’ and their relationship.
2. With reference to the associated literature, consider how levels of resilience in students studying overseas as non-domiciles can be developed or eroded over time and space, and how these impact on the student experience.
3. Determine the issues, challenges and impact on HE institutions hosting PG students and support HMG policies on the recruitment, sustainment and achievement levels of international students studying in the UK.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen as a Level 7 graduate who studied at a UK HE institution as an international student whose first language is not English.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you are requested to sign the attached consent form and returned it to Tony Brogden-Ward (tony.ward535@gmail.com). Having consented, you retain the right to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you consent to take part, you will be contacted by the researcher (Tony Brogden-Ward) who is a student from the Chester Business School and invited to complete a questionnaire. Prior to completion, the aims and objectives of the study will be further explained, and any questions can be answered.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study. The researcher’s role at Unicaf University has no influence on the research being undertaken; this study is part of their professional development and therefore they should be viewed as a researcher rather than a staff member.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will help to develop current knowledge and understanding of how international students cope with the rigors of studying in the UK, help to influence how UK HE institutions attract and support international PG students, and potentially support national policy on how the UK's government develops its policies on attracting and supporting PG students from overseas.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Professor Karl Allman  
Dean of the Chester Business School  
University of Chester, United Kingdom, Chester CH1 4BJ  
+44 (0)1244 511000 or k.allman@chester.ac.uk

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence (but not otherwise), then you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for this.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this research may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results will be written up as part of the researcher's Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) thesis. It is hoped that the findings may be used to determine the issues, challenges and impact on HE institutions hosting PG students and support governmental policies on the recruitment, sustainment and achievement levels of international students studying in the UK.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is funded by the Faculty of Business & Finance, Chester Business School, and the researcher.

### **Who may I contact for further information?**

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Dr Neil Moore  
Centre of Work Related Studies  
Queen's Park Campus  
Chester Business School  
University of Chester  
Chester  
United Kingdom  
CH1 4BJ  
n.moore@chester.ac.uk



**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Investigating the resilience of international post-graduate students studying in the UK**

**Name of Researcher: Anthony J Brogden-Ward (Tony)**

Please initial box

- 3. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
  
- 4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected.
  
- 3. I agree to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

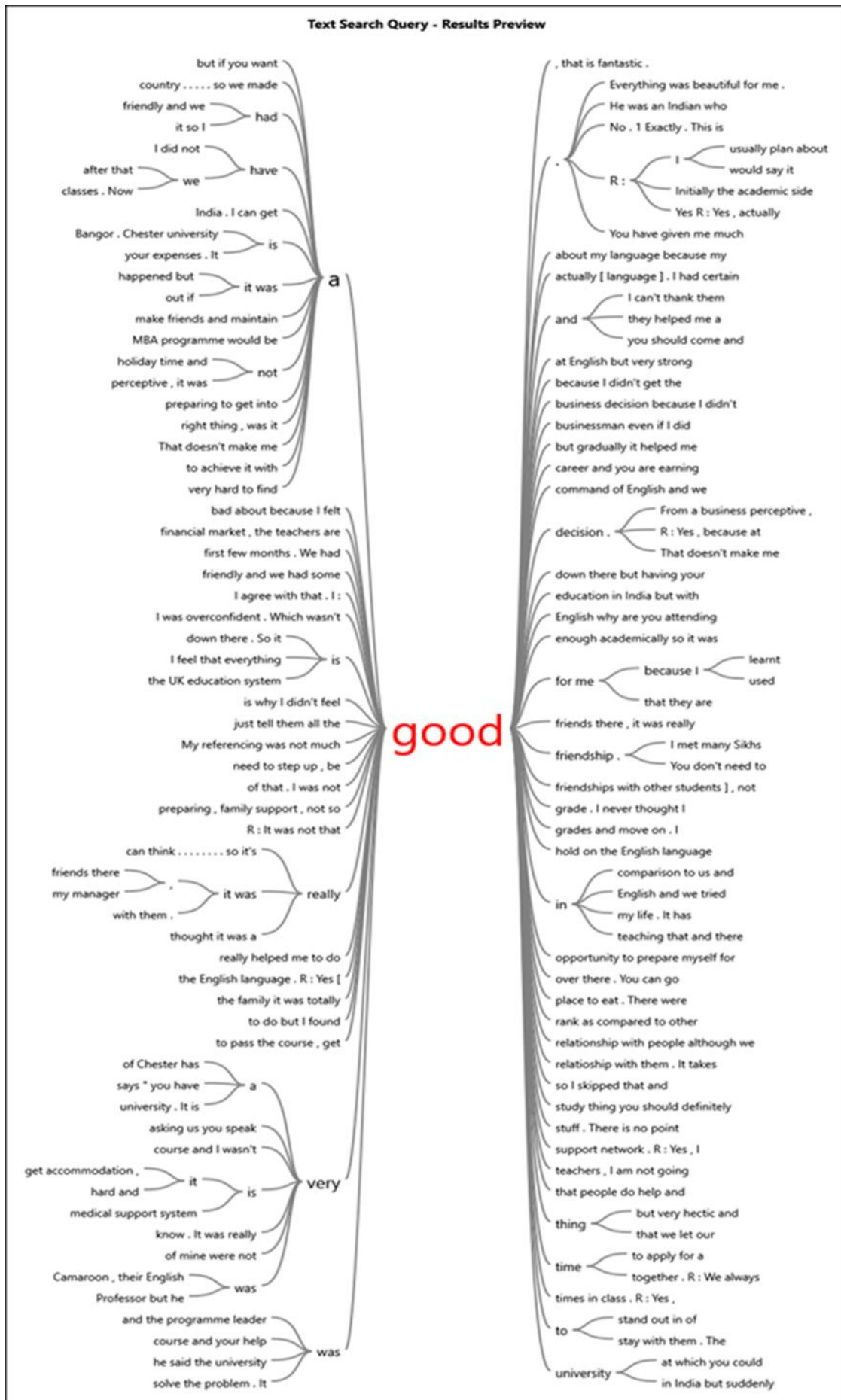
### Appendix 3 – Research Instruments

Approach	Respondents	Research Instruments	Comments
<p>Constructionist: The experience of the students is viewed as them having engaged with a series of events or stages which involved interactions which supported their overall progression. Therefore, the research instrument should offer qualitative data on the participants' lived experiences (Bosley <i>et al.</i>, 2009)</p>	5 participants from case study	Preliminary study: semi-structured interviews	<p>A degree of flexibility was required to allow the respondents to speak freely about the challenges they individually experienced and how they overcame them (Leidner, 1993). The focus group provided an opportunity to triangulate the data from the earlier cohorts.</p>
	12 participants from case study	Main cohort: semi-structured interviews	
	3 participants from case study	Focus group	
<p>Respondent validation (Marshall, 1995) and potential for the transferability of the findings outside the case study (Webb, 1966)</p>	16 participants outside the case study but with very similar demographics to the earlier non-probability samples from the panel	Questionnaire cohort	<p>Finding from the case study were presented in the questionnaire to corroborate or discount them (Omar <i>et al.</i>, 2011). Respondents were encouraged to explain their responses and add further comments if required.</p>

# Appendix 4 – Text query ‘helped’



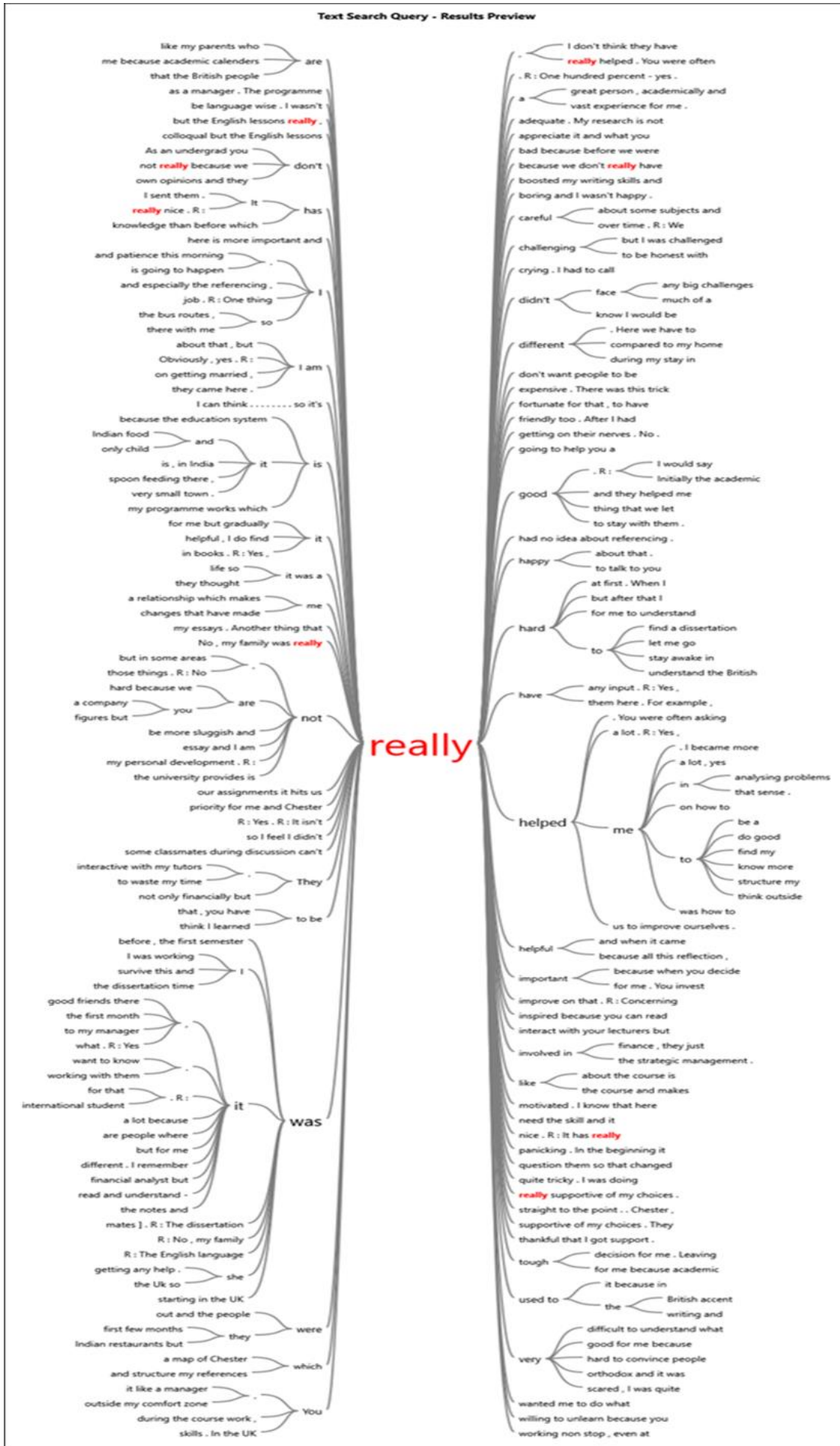
Appendix 5 – Text query ‘good’



# Appendix 6 – Text query ‘friends’



# Appendix 7 – Text query ‘really’



Appendix 8 – Text query ‘family’

