

Portuguese language learning and capital access: a study on university students in Macau

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports on an inquiry into a group of students' Portuguese language learning with a focus on their access to economic, social, and cultural capital. The inquiry problematizes the traditional uncritical assumption of a shared pursuit of linguistic competence among students. Drawing on individual in-depth interviews with 14 participants at a university in Macau, this article illustrates how local and mainland Chinese students related their Portuguese language learning to the acquisition of different forms of capital, respectively. Specifically, our analysis reveals that economic capital dominated in the local participants' pursuits, with cultural and social capital being less influential, whereas among mainland Chinese participants the influence of economic capital was weak and unsustainable, with a balanced distribution of cultural and social capital. The findings also suggest that the participants' family contexts and social networks shaped their pursuits of different forms of capital in Portuguese learning, implying that educational institutions and teachers need to reframe their learning resources and pedagogical strategies for Portuguese language learners in Macau, placing greater emphasis on reinforcing students' social connections with Portuguese or local Macanese communities.

Keywords: Portuguese language learning, learner backgrounds, language ideology, capital, Bourdieu.

Aprendizaje de la lengua portuguesa y acceso al capital: un estudio sobre estudiantes universitarios de Macao

RESUMEN: Este estudio investiga el aprendizaje de la lengua portuguesa de un grupo de estudiantes con un enfoque en su acceso al capital económico, social y cultural. La investigación cuestiona la tradicional suposición acrítica de la búsqueda compartida de la competencia lingüística entre los estudiantes. Basándose en entrevistas individuales a profundidad con 14 participantes en una universidad de Macao, este estudio ilustra cómo los estudiantes locales y los de China continental relacionaron su aprendizaje del idioma portugués con la

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adquisición de diferentes formas de capital. En concreto, nuestro análisis revela que los participantes buscaron principalmente el capital económico, siendo el capital cultural y social menos influyente, mientras que, entre los participantes de China continental, la influencia del capital económico fue débil e insostenible, con una distribución equilibrada de capital cultural y social. Los resultados también sugieren que los contextos familiares y las redes sociales de los participantes determinaron su búsqueda de diferentes formas de capital en el aprendizaje del portugués, lo que implica que las instituciones educativas y los docentes deben reestructurar sus recursos de aprendizaje y estrategias pedagógicas para los estudiantes de lengua portuguesa en Macao, poniendo mayor énfasis en el refuerzo de las conexiones sociales de los estudiantes con las comunidades portuguesas o macaenses locales.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje de la lengua portuguesa, antecedentes del alumno, ideología lingüística, capital, Bourdieu.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade Macau's government has focused on internationalizing its local universities by attracting more fee-paying non-local students from mainland China and other parts of the world, particularly Portuguese-speaking countries. In the 2020/2021 academic year mainland Chinese students accounted for nearly 50% of total enrolment in Macau's higher-education institutions (DSEDJ, 2021), making them the largest non-local student group. Overall, local students and mainland Chinese students were the two main constituents of the student population in Macau's universities.

Macau was a Portuguese colony for more than 400 years until the transfer of sovereignty from Portugal to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1999. In terms of language use, Chinese and Portuguese are specified as official languages in the region, while Cantonese is the dominant language used daily by 86.2% of the population in Macau (DSEC, 2021). Portuguese is a co-official minority language in Macau. Although it is spoken by only 2.3% of the Macau population (DSEC, 2021), it is widely used by the government, legislature, and the judiciary (Cheng, 2020; Gong *et al.*, 2021a). However, due to Macau's sustainable development as a gambling and tourism destination for mainland Chinese and international visitors, Putonghua (the national lingua franca of the PRC) and English have been increasingly used in the business and gambling sector (Botha & Moody, 2020; Yang & Gong, 2023).

In response to the increasing complexity of language learning in multilingual and multicultural contexts worldwide, recent years have witnessed a rapid rise in the demand for the teaching and learning of languages other than English (Zhu & Gao, 2021; Alhamami & Almosa, 2023). However, there has been insufficient research attention to the learning experiences of such learners and their development or enhancement of language proficiency, particularly for Portuguese language learners. At the same time, second/foreign language (SL/FL) education often fails to attend to students' different needs and motivations, which likely produce an expanded set of learning challenges for them; this is especially true for students from diverse backgrounds (Wu & Tarc, 2021). Thus, a better understanding of students' learning experiences will help to advance equity in higher education, as well as facilitating SL/FL learning quality by considering the students' surrounding linguistic, cultural, social, and educational contexts. It will also enrich our perspective and refine theorization and application in terms of SL/FL education.

Thus far, little attention has been paid to the learning experiences of Portuguese language learners in Macau (Kharlay, Bagheri, & Philips, 2019). Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1986) sociological notion of capital, this study problematizes the assumption of the learning of Portuguese as a shared group pursuit in the university, and examines the role of the participants' home contexts and social networks in shaping their different priorities around symbolic capital. To this end, we will first outline the research context for this study before investigating the participants' motivation for Portuguese learning as "a potential capacity to produce profits" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Overall, we draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) (also Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) notion of capital to examine our participants' access to economic, social, and cultural capital through their Portuguese learning in a university in Macau. Capital relates to accumulated resources and assets, and has the potential to produce profits and to reproduce itself in initial or expanded form (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241; also see Gao, 2010; Mu, 2014).

Bourdieu (1986) identified three fundamental types of capital, namely economic, social, and cultural capital. Economic capital relates to money and other forms of material/economic resources, such as wealth, income, and property. Social capital is conceptualized as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources" that are connected to "a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). A person's family background, connections with other people and institutions, and social obligations play an essential role in her/his integration into different communities. Finally, cultural capital refers to socially valued cultural objects, and may be differentiated into three states, namely embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital. Specifically, in the embodied state, cultural capital exists "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of mind and body" such as one's understanding of cultural norms and linguistic competence. Objectified cultural capital comprises various forms of "cultural goods" like books, dictionaries, machines, and so on. Finally, "a form of objectivation" such as educational credentials/qualifications from institutions represents institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243–247; see also Gao, 2012; Moskal, 2016).

Capital is convertible among its forms, and all forms of capital can function as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 98). In the context of language learning, learners' efforts to acquire any accessible capital in a target language can have the potential to develop proficiency in this language, which in turn is convertible into various forms of capital and further creates potentials and values for their identity transformation and long-term development (Gu & Huang, 2022). As an important sociological concept, the notion of capital has been widely adopted as a theoretical lens by scholars seeking to understand and explore language education scholarship (Mu, 2014).

While many studies have examined students' SL/FL learning from a Bourdieusian perspective, research on Portuguese language learning is mostly limited to cognitive and psychological orientations (e.g., Amaro, 2016). The above literature demonstrates the potential significance of Bourdieu's approach for exploring Portuguese language learners' access to

different forms of capital. Moreover, such research highlights the contextual complexities that SL/FL learners are faced with, and their role in learners' identity formation, critical understanding, and intercultural development. In the context of the present study, the Portuguese language itself represents a form of cultural capital and symbolic power, given its status as a co-official language in Macau. Thus, Portuguese language competence retains its cachet, for example by functioning as an entry criterion for the Macau Civil Service, and is increasingly emphasized in relation to its role in enhancing China's economic and political connections with Portuguese-speaking countries globally (Kharlay *et al.*, 2019).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of capital has been widely used to examine SL/FL learners' experiences in learning and social networking, in line with the sociocultural turn in language education (Block, 2017). However, existing studies on Portuguese language learners mainly document their learning motivation and related influencing factors, such as heritage connections (e.g., Kharlay *et al.*, 2019), employment opportunities (e.g., Ferreira & Gontijo, 2011), personal interest in Portuguese culture (e.g., Nikitina, Tan, & Mohamad, 2022), and so on. For instance, in a survey of 79 heritage and 57 non-heritage learners of Portuguese from a Lusophone community in the USA, de Oliveira and Gubitosi (2022) compared their motivation for learning Portuguese. The results suggested that while the participants of Lusophone origin aimed to communicate with their family members and friends, their non-heritage peers saw language learning as a way to access job opportunities through developing and improving their Portuguese language competence.

Similarly, Nikitina *et al.* (2022) investigated 91 Malaysian university students' mental images toward Portuguese-speaking countries and their motivations for learning Portuguese through a self-designed questionnaire. This study revealed that the participants had diverse images of Portugal and its representative culture (e.g., football, egg tart, food) as well as Portugal's shared history with Malaysia. This study also suggested that most of the students learned Portuguese because of personal interest and a wish to expand their knowledge, and their learning motivation was influenced by their mental images of Portuguese-speaking countries. Finally, analyzing data from questionnaires and interviews with 96 Portuguese language learners in a Macau university, Kharlay *et al.* (2019) found that the participants had limited integrative motivation (e.g., communicating with Portuguese people) but strong intrinsic motivation (e.g., interest) related to learning Portuguese. At the same time, the participants' learning motivation was connected with their heritage origin and their interest in Portuguese popular culture.

In general, these studies drawing on cognitive theories in educational psychology mostly tend to understand Portuguese language learners' motivation as an independent variable, or attribute their success or failure in learning to their "capacity of self-determination" (Darvin & Norton, 2023, p. 32). In practice, language learning is not only a psychological activity occurring within learners' brains, but also a socialization practice to access and sustain access to resources ("what we own, what we know and who we know") and turn them into symbolic capital (Darvin & Norton, 2023, p. 36). In this regard, the research suggests that a sociocultural or sociopolitical perspective on Portuguese language learning should be

adopted if we wish to understand and interpret learners' learning experiences (Block, 2003; Gao, Cheng, & Kelly, 2008). Bourdieu's (1986) sociological notion of capital constitutes an ideal such approach. In addition, few existing studies on Portuguese language learning have been conducted at educational institutions in Asian contexts, where there are an increasing number of Portuguese learners, especially in Macau (Amaro, 2016; Kharlay *et al.*, 2019).

To address the gaps described above, the present research examined a group of Macau university students' pursuit of Portuguese learning through the Bourdieusian lens of capital. Specifically, we explored local and mainland Chinese students' access to economic, social, and cultural capital in a multilingual context, aiming to provide insights into the forms of capital they prioritize and why they learn (or give up on learning) Portuguese in Macau. Specifically, this study addresses the question: What forms of capital are students attempting to access during Portuguese language learning at a university in Macau?

4. THE STUDY

4.1. Research context and participants

The current study focused on university students' attempts to access economic, social, and cultural capital through their learning of Portuguese, a co-official minority language in multilingual Macau. Specifically, it was conducted in a prestigious multi-ethnic and multilingual university in Macau. While English is the medium of instruction for most courses in this university, multiple languages are used on the campus, including Cantonese, Putonghua, Portuguese, and other ethnic languages.

A "snowball" sampling approach was employed to recruit 14 Year 3 or Year 4 undergraduate students, who participated in the study voluntarily after signing consent forms. (Handcock & Gile, 2011). Participants from these two years of study were selected since they had accumulated rich learning and socialization experiences related to learning Portuguese in Macau. Since learning experience may influence learners' language learning perception and practices (Ning, 2021), the participating students' profiles were diverse in terms of their place of origin, their major, and their family backgrounds. This sampling method allowed the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue through the participants' diverse retrospective accounts of their learning experiences. Table 1 summarizes the participants' profiles; their names are all pseudonyms.

Table 1. *Participants' profiles*

No.	Name	Place of origin	Gender	Major	University year
1	Choi	Macau	Male	Business Administration	Year 4
2	Tong	Macau	Male	Science Education	Year 3
3	Flora	Macau	Female	Primary Education	Year 4
4	Yan	Macau	Female	Communication	Year 3
5	Ella	Macau	Female	Law in Chinese Language	Year 3
6	Mona	Macau	Female	Science in Finance	Year 4

7	Susan	Macau	Female	English Education	Year 4
8	Caren	Macau	Female	English Education	Year 3
9	Fong	Macau	Male	Business Intelligence and Data Analytics	Year 3
10	Min	Mainland China	Female	English Education	Year 3
11	Hui	Mainland China	Female	Arts in Portuguese Studies	Year 4
12	Jing	Mainland China	Female	Business Administration	Year 4
13	Na	Mainland China	Female	Chinese Education	Year 4
14	Xuan	Mainland China	Female	Science in Finance	Year 4

4.2. Data collection

Concentrating on university students' Portuguese language learning, this research sought to elaborate on and interpret their experiential accounts in terms of their learning pursuits in the multilingual context offered by their institution. In line with our theoretical orientation, semi-structured interviews afford one of the most powerful and widely-used means of examining language learning and socialization (Norton & Toohey, 2011). The interviews in this research were framed around several general topics that allowed room for the participants to talk freely about their experiences and views of Portuguese language learning, and which also enabled the researchers to delve deeper into each participant's account (Mishler, 1986).

The following topics were addressed during the individual semi-structured interviews with the participants: Portuguese learning experiences in and outside the classroom; ways of using Portuguese; current contextual conditions of Portuguese learning and use; the status of Portuguese in the local community; the perceived role of learning Portuguese in their study and lives; and the perceived influence of learning Portuguese on their development. The interview questions were first reviewed and assessed by one expert and one researcher interested in multilingual learning and language socialization. Then the questions and the technique were pilot-tested with two Portuguese language learners who were not included in this study. Their interpretations of each item were checked, suggestions on wording were elicited, and the interview questions were revised accordingly. The first author conducted individual interviews with each participating student in their native/first language, either Cantonese or Putonghua, to ensure that they could express themselves freely. Each interview lasted about 50 minutes.

4.3. Data analysis

All the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim in the participants' original language (Cantonese or Putonghua), and double-checked for accuracy. Then the interview transcriptions were sent back to the participants for their consent and checking, in order to enhance the rigor of the research and the credibility of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). One participant made minor annotations, while the other 13 participants returned the transcripts without additional comment. To present the data in this article, all interview transcripts were translated into English by the first author and revised by the second author, a professional Chinese-English translator.

Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the interview data, using both deductive and inductive reasoning as well as emerging and iterative phases (Merriam, 2009). In detail, the researchers first read through the interview transcripts six times to familiarize themselves with the data, and meaningful segments that struck the researchers as interesting or important to the research were highlighted and coded using NVivo 12. In-vivo coding was adopted in the open coding phase. Next, categories were synthesized by analyzing, grouping, shuffling, and regrouping the codes, informed by the literature, the theoretical framework, and the data. The overarching categories included “economic capital”, “social capital”, and “cultural capital”. For instance, “apply for jobs” and “seek civil servant positions with the government” were clustered under the higher-order node “economic capital”, while “I hope to communicate with people speaking Portuguese” and “communicate with others” were categorized under “social capital”. The initial coding of the overarching categories was also compared across the 14 participants to find close or repeated responses and contrasting instances (Charmaz, 1990). During the interview data analysis an experienced researcher was invited to carry out peer debriefing sessions in order to minimize bias (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

5. FINDINGS

The analysis of the data identified that local and mainland Chinese students were attempting to access different forms of capital while they were learning Portuguese in Macau. Specifically, the local participants’ accounts suggested the importance of economic capital in motivating their learning, largely driven by the common goal of access to future jobs, especially government-sector positions. To a lesser extent, Portuguese was also seen as social capital for achieving interpersonal connections, and as cultural capital for gaining access to overseas higher education opportunities and Portuguese culture both in and outside Macau. Different from their local counterparts, however, mainland Chinese participants mainly had dual goals in learning Portuguese: interpersonal communication, or social capital; and access to higher education in foreign countries and Portuguese-language cultural products, or cultural capital. However, Portuguese as economic capital (e.g., to grant access to job opportunities) figured ambiguously and unsustainably in their learning experiences. It is noteworthy that the reproduction of different forms of capital did not occur in a vacuum, but rather was closely informed by the participants’ home contexts and social networks.

5.1. Economic capital dominated in local students’ pursuits

The interview data from the 9 local students indicated that all of them (9/9) tended to access economic capital through Portuguese learning, particularly referencing “job opportunities”, especially civil servant jobs with the Macau government. Some of the participants (4/9) aimed to gain social capital by highlighting the use of Portuguese to communicate with people in their local community and an imagined language community such as Portugal. At the same time, the participants’ accounts also showed that over half of them (5/9) mentioned Portuguese as a form of cultural capital, in terms of access to both Macau culture (4/9) and

higher educational opportunities (1/9). It should be noted that the participants' family resources and social networks also played an important role in shaping their Portuguese learning goals.

In detail, the data analysis revealed that all the local participants attempted to gain economic capital via Portuguese learning, primarily in terms of achieving their career goals. As an example, Yan was born and educated in Macau, and she started learning Portuguese in her freshman year. In her mind, Portuguese proficiency would make her "comparatively outstanding and competent" when applying for a job:

[1] Researcher: Why did you learn Portuguese?

Yan: Um... It is mainly because of its impact when we (graduates) apply for jobs. That is, if you know some Portuguese, you have more chance to be hired.

Researcher: Why does this happen?

Yan: Because Macau is a city with both Chinese and Portuguese cultures, Portuguese is frequently used in foreign business documents, professional training, and law affairs. Learning Portuguese can make me comparatively outstanding and competent in the job market.

As illustrated in the extract above, Yan and her classmates explicitly connected job opportunities with their Portuguese proficiency, which could be ultimately convertible into economic capital. Moreover, because Yan's mother was a civil servant in the government, Yan had learned that Portuguese proficiency seemed to be a "must" for government work. This reinforced her belief that learning Portuguese would make her into a proficient bilingual speaker of Chinese and Portuguese, affording better access to more prestigious jobs.

Macau was once colonized by the Portuguese, and its culture is highly influenced by both Chinese and Portuguese cultures. Yan also thought that learning Portuguese was an essential way to know about and live in Macau, describing her experience of reading a restaurant menu in Portuguese as "a magical feeling". Language learning, which is for learners "both a kind of action and a form of belonging" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4), helps students not only to develop and improve their linguistic competence, but also to build and strengthen their connections with a current or imagined community. In this regard, Portuguese, as a representative part of the culture of Macau, symbolized Yan's cultural identity and gave access to her language inheritance as a Macanese person. To some extent, Portuguese proficiency seemed to be a critical component of Yan's identity as someone from Macau, which in turn shaped her Portuguese learning efforts.

At the same time, when talking about learning foci and goals, words like "a combination of Chinese and Portuguese culture" often occurred in the accounts given by other participants who defined the Portuguese language as cultural capital (Flora, Mona, Susan, Fong). Yan's excerpts thus suggest that she had dual goals when learning Portuguese: Macau culture, or cultural capital; and future career opportunities, or economic capital. Likewise, Tong, whose parents worked as police officers, explicitly stated that learning Portuguese would be "an advantage" for his future career development. Since his parents' limited Portuguese proficiency had hindered their opportunities to undertake overseas official duty, Tong was to some extent motivated and had an enhanced desire to make more effort to learn Portuguese, although he did note that "Portuguese is seldom used in Macau now".

The role of Portuguese in the public sphere reinforces its symbolic capital; it has "a reputation of competence and an image of respectability and honorability" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 291). Susan was a Year 4 student majoring in English education. While her initial plan was

to become an English teacher in a secondary school, the recognition of Portuguese in Macau society led her to view the language as “an important competence” for future access to jobs:

[2] Portuguese is the second official language of Macau. If you want to work in educational institutions like different schools in the future, Portuguese will be recognized and valued there. Officials in many government sectors can speak Portuguese, and thus I think this is an important competence. I need to learn it.

In Susan’s mind her effort to learn Portuguese had the potential to give her proficiency in the language, a benefit that in turn would be convertible into career opportunities, or economic capital. Meanwhile, one of her mother’s friends who worked as a government official had told her that “many colleagues can speak Portuguese”, which further endorsed Susan’s conception of learning Portuguese as economic capital. This response underscores the role of family background and social networks in shaping Susan’s language ideology concerning Portuguese learning. In a similar vein, Flora and Ella also conceived of Portuguese learning as a crucial gateway to access “guaranteed” (literally in Chinese: 有保障) jobs, such as civil servants.

Speaking a second language is generally related to social relationships or other kinds of social capital (Darvin & Norton, 2017). As well as her focus on career success, Susan’s accounts described her perspectives on Portuguese proficiency as being tied to her ability to “communicate with others”, or social capital, and “read essays and the news in Portuguese”, or cultural capital:

[3] Communication (in Portuguese) is basically required, and I hope to communicate with people speaking Portuguese. ... I hope I can read essays assigned by my teachers and the news in Portuguese.

Similarly, responses from Choi, Flora, and Ella also drew on a communication-based view of learning Portuguese. Ella expected not only to be able to communicate with Portuguese-speaking people in her current community, but also to be able to build connections with peers in her future professional community. She said:

[4] There are many Portuguese-speaking lawyers in Macau, some with Portuguese nationality. If I go on to work in this field in the future, Portuguese will be very helpful and useful when I communicate with them. It will create more opportunities for me.

Her goal to engage with both current and future communities in Portuguese illustrated Ella’s conception of Portuguese as facilitating interpersonal and professional connections, tied to her association of Portuguese with social capital that could be explicitly convertible into career development opportunities, or economic capital. For Choi, since his Portuguese teachers were native speakers from Portugal or Brazil, he even expected to go to Portugal to engage in “chatting and living with local people there” as soon as he could financially afford it. His imagined Portuguese-language community appeared to extend beyond the classroom and into other Lusophone regions.

5.2. Mainland Chinese students focused on cultural and social capital

Although the mainland Chinese students shared their Chinese ethnicity with most of the local students from Macau, most of them spoke Putonghua as their native/first language, and had little prior knowledge of either Cantonese or Portuguese before they came to study in Macau. The data analysis revealed that in the cross-border context and compared to their local counterparts, the mainland Chinese participants had very different understandings in terms of accessing economic, social, and cultural capital via their Portuguese learning. Specifically, just over half of the participants (3/5) prioritized cultural capital in their accounts, through access to both overseas higher education opportunities and Portuguese culture in and outside Macau. A few participants (2/5) emphasized Portuguese for social capital in terms of travel and communicating with Portuguese-speaking people. Although 2 participants briefly mentioned economic capital, their assumptions related to learning Portuguese tended to be ambiguous and contradictory, particularly when they realized that Portuguese proficiency might not afford them future job opportunities due to the job prohibition for mainland Chinese students in Macau.

In practice, cultural capital is heavily subject to the context and community in which and for which it has been acquired (Moskal, 2016). In line with their local counterparts, 3 of the mainland Chinese students (Min, Jing, Xuan) saw Portuguese as facilitating access to Portuguese culture in and outside Macau. For example, Min enrolled in the Portuguese course because she was “interested in Portuguese culture and history in Europe”. Unlike Min, Xuan focused more on higher educational opportunities, seeing them as contingent on her multilingual competence in Portuguese:

[5] Because I plan to apply to overseas Master’s programs, I expect to promote my GPA through some courses (like Portuguese) which can help me achieve high grades. Meanwhile, the multilingual learning experiences will make me more competent in the application.

In other words, Xuan paid more attention to the opportunity and value that Portuguese could afford in her goal to gain an edge in future applications to educational institutions by being able to evidence both academic and linguistic excellence.

At the same time, however, learning a second language relates not only to its cultural value, but also to its social connection and symbolic value (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). For Min and Na, while they had very few opportunities to encounter native Portuguese speakers outside their classrooms, they showed strong aspirations to communicate with people who spoke Portuguese. For instance, Na stated:

[6] It (Portuguese) is not my major, so I do not expect to learn abstruse culture about it. I think it is a tool for communication. I want to place more effort on sentences for daily communication, which I can directly use. ... I always expect to communicate with foreigners.

According to Na, daily communication with Portuguese-speaking people would “test” her linguistic competence and further build her identity as “a good student” in her university that was connected to Portuguese culture.

In contrast to their local counterparts, a cross-border or international student status emerged when mainland Chinese participants positioned themselves as “outsiders” (Hui) in the host community (Kinginger, 2013). Given the limited chances and resources for international students in terms of job hunting in Macau, Hui and Xuan found that although they aimed to achieve competitive Portuguese proficiency, they still felt their access to jobs was “not realistic or practical”

(Xuan). Hence, their original high expectations for economic capital (job opportunities) gradually faded away. Xuan originally thought that Portuguese learning could afford her economic capital:

[7] My original goal of learning Portuguese was for a job. Because some financial institutions in Macau have the requirement of Portuguese language proficiency, if you can master this language, you have more opportunities to find a job. This was my original goal.

However, in her final year of study Xuan recognized that it was unlikely she would continue learning Portuguese since she “has no interest in the stuff now” (literally in Chinese: 對這東西沒有興趣了) and considered it as “only icing on the cake” (literally in Chinese: 錦上添花). These seemingly paradoxical opinions about Portuguese led to weak commitment and unsustainable involvement in learning the language. Similarly, Hui, the only student majoring in Arts in Portuguese Studies, explicitly said that it was difficult to link Portuguese proficiency with career development, or economic capital, in Macau. While Hui had experience of a learning exchange in Lisbon, Portugal and had achieved C1 level (advanced proficiency, with reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), she became demotivated after becoming aware of the realities of her career goals. She did not see Portuguese as integral to her future career, and was considering “no longer learning Portuguese” after graduation.

Both Xuan and Hui were becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that the local students with whom they studied had different job prospects (economic capital), which were partly related to their Portuguese learning. In the light of their accounts, although linguistic proficiency is an essential part of cultural capital, it seems that it does not necessarily convert into symbolic or economic capital in the local linguistic marketplace (Marshall & Bokhorst-Heng, 2020).

6. DISCUSSION

Using the framework of capital theorized by Bourdieu (1986), the present study has examined a group of university students’ perceptions of their access to economic, social, and cultural capital as a result of Portuguese language learning in Macau. Our analysis of data from local and mainland Chinese participants revealed their pursuit of different kinds of capital related to Portuguese language learning, which were shaped by their family contexts and social networks.

The findings from the inquiry problematize any uncritical assumption that students in the same educational institutions have shared goals related to the acquisition of linguistic competence. In fact, in line with Wu and Tarc (2021), we found heterogeneity in the participants’ goals related to learning Portuguese, mediated by their different family resources and social networks. Specifically, this research delves into various and even opposite profiles of value placed on different forms of capital between local and mainland Chinese participants; economical capital was most valued by the local participants, with less value placed on cultural and social capital (see Figure 1), whereas the value placed on economic capital by mainland Chinese participants was weak and unsustainable, with a balanced distribution of cultural and social capital (see Figure 2). This finding is different from Kharlay *et al.*’s (2019) study, which reported that Macau university students mostly showed an intrinsic motivation (interest) in their Portuguese language learning.

A sociocultural perspective is therefore necessary in studies on Portuguese language

education, in order to offer a realistic account of students' learning goals. According to Wacquant (1989), capital, habitus, and field are the three main “thinking tools” (p. 40) of Bourdieu's sociological approach. However, given the limited space of this article, the present analysis is not able to extend to the triad of capital, habitus, and field. Future research aiming to address relevant issues in Portuguese language learning needs to take account of these “thinking tools” in order to realize the full value of a Bourdieusian perspective in this context (Mu, 2014).

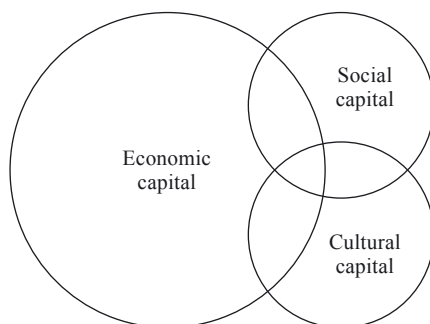


Figure 1. *Local students' access to different forms of capital*

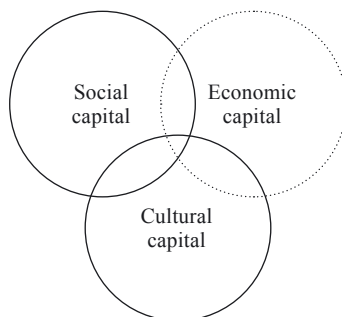


Figure 2. *Mainland Chinese students' access to different forms of capital*

Capital reproduction “is not established in a vacuum” (Mu, 2014, p. 485). As Bourdieu (1977) points out, educational institutions are structured by the economic, social, political, and cultural systems of the society where they are situated, and they reproduce the dominant structures, forms of knowledge, and practices by naturalizing them and training individuals to engage with and embody them. At the institutional level, the university's Portuguese education did not differentiate learner groups and their learning priorities, and thus was not sufficiently discriminating to provide bespoke curriculums/courses for students to learn and use Portuguese. For instance, the dominant use of Cantonese in the main social context may limit the full potential of local students' development into multilingual speakers and intercultural communicators. Conversely, given their lack of tangible social connections with and active participation in the local society, mainland Chinese students have limited previous knowledge on which to build their explicit

goal of learning Portuguese, and this contextualized or socioculturally-produced disadvantage in turn limits their potential opportunities and aspirations to develop their language proficiency and intercultural competence, related to their economic capital. It is for this reason that we urge educational institutions and teachers to reflect critically upon their own language ideologies and the extent to which they recognize the different family resources and social networks that students bring to their language learning. Specifically, in the classroom context teachers need to reframe learning resources (e.g., online spaces) and pedagogical strategies (e.g., inclusion and diversity) in order to address students' different pursuit of economic, social, and cultural capital in Portuguese language learning.

In the light of both the local and mainland Chinese participants' accounts, there were scarce opportunities for them to communicate with Portuguese-speaking people in Macau, which led to narrow, pragmatic, job-oriented access for local participants and ambiguous and unsustainable learning goals for their mainland Chinese counterparts. In practical terms, a concerted effort should be made to enable students to seamlessly access linguistic and cultural resources both in and outside the classroom. For example, Portuguese language programs should consider placing greater emphasis on intercultural activities and fieldtrips/exchanges with overseas Portuguese or local Macanese communities (Marini & Cañero, 2022). The building of tangible social networks with the target language community will facilitate the participants' Portuguese language and intercultural learning (Gao, 2010; Gong *et al.*, 2021b). Also, teachers and students should discuss students' Portuguese learning situations and the different forms of capital they require in order to achieve their current and future goals. For instance, teachers could work with mainland Chinese students to reflect on the disadvantages affecting their Portuguese learning, and expand their perspectives on language learning.

The finding regarding the participants' family contexts echoes a study by de Oliveira and Gubitosi (2022) in identifying the significance of family resources to university students in terms of learning Portuguese and acquiring symbolic capital in a multilingual context. Local students' parents should place equal emphasis on their children's economic capital and intercultural development, in order to support their preparation for participation in global talent marketplaces; meanwhile, the parents of mainland Chinese students should pay more attention to their intercultural competence in order to compensate for their limited access to economic capital. In this respect, future research on the mediating role of family contexts (e.g., family language policy) in students' Portuguese language learning would be appropriate, and may offer detailed insights into these students' language ideology development processes.

7. CONCLUSION

Different from the traditional psychological view of and approach to Portuguese language learning, the present inquiry drew upon Bourdieu's sociology to explore 14 university students' access to different forms of capital through learning Portuguese in Macau. Analysis of data from semi-structured interviews suggested that the local and mainland Chinese learner groups were heterogeneous and had different goals related to their Portuguese language learning. At the same time, all the participants' family contexts and social networks shaped their capital access.

The emerging findings from this inquiry challenge any taken-for-granted assumption

that all the language learners in a university share the same learning pursuits, and question the utility of a one-size-fits-all pedagogy for students with different family resources and social networks. The findings also suggest that sustainable language learning is closely associated with learners' access to a wider range of material and symbolic resources, which can increase their capital and social power and strengthen their connections with current or imagined communities (Darvin & Norton, 2017; Li & Gong, 2022).

It should be noted that this study only involved a few Portuguese language learners in a particular Macau university, and any generalization of the findings to students in other tertiary institutions or language settings should be undertaken with caution. This research was based on interviews with students in Years 3 and 4. It would be helpful to collect data from different sources (e.g., reflective journals, observations of students' actual learning practices) in order to triangulate the findings, and to conduct longitudinal studies to map the trajectories of students' ideologies and interactions with the learning context related to Portuguese language learning over time.

Despite these limitations, however, we believe that the findings of the present study demonstrate the significance of investigating Portuguese language learners' economic, social, and cultural capital in a multilingual and multicultural context. The research contributes to our understanding of contextual complexity in language education, including university language learning environments, family resources, and social networks, and calls for more attention to sustainability in students' Portuguese language learning. We hope that it may help relevant educational institutions and teachers to refine their language ideologies and pedagogical practices for different learners.

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