# Chapter 7
# The Development of Cultural Capital Through English Education and Its Contributions to Graduate Employability

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**Abstract**  Graduates' employability has been an important goal of education and requires further research to uncover how education can support employability. Particularly in this globalized and multicultural world, English language and cultural understanding are acknowledged as two primary factors for desirable career outcomes. This study, therefore, investigates the development of cultural capital through learning English language and how such cultural capital contributes to English language learners' employability. The study was guided by (Tomlinson, 2017) framework of graduate employability and employed semi-structured interviews with eleven participants from eight academic and professional disciplines. The findings revealed that cultural capital could be developed through the diversity of formal, non-formal, and informal forms of English language learning. The findings also indicated that cultural capital was evidently crucial in a way that it serves to develop human, social, psychological, and identity capital, all of which are components of graduate employability. Pedagogical implications and directions for future research are recommended for effective development of cultural capital in different forms of education (formal, informal, and non-formal) and for further exploration of cultural capital and employability in Vietnamese higher education.

**Keywords**  Employability · English language · Cultural capital · Forms of education · Vietnamese higher education

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## 7.1 Introduction

Graduates' employability is one of the key factors that guide the policies and teaching and learning activities at higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016; Tran, 2019; Vu & Do, 2021; Vu et al., 2022; Vu, 2021a). Employability-related research has been conducted to inform policy-making and curriculum design to achieve that primary goal. To illustrate, studies have emphasized the academic knowledge and skills as critical drivers behind graduates' successful employability (Hofer et al., 2010; Tran, 2019; Yorke & Knight, 2006). Following this, innovative curriculum design and teaching methods have been continuously proposed to provide learners with necessary content knowledge and job-related skills that prepare them for desired professions, such as the emergence of English for Specific Purposes programs and work-integrated learning and assessment (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Belcher, 2006; Bocanegra-Valle, 2016). However, other research has pointed out that the package of content knowledge and job-related skills is insufficient to ensure graduates' employability (Moore & Morton, 2017; Ramadi et al., 2016; Tran, 2018). Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving have contributed significantly to graduates' employment outcomes and career development (Chowdhury & Miah, 2016; Jackson, 2013; Tran, 2019). As a result, many policies have encouraged higher education institutions to embed such soft skills in their curricula to enhance graduates' employability (Ajjawi et al., 2020; Tran, 2017). Yet, it appears that developing soft skills for students largely relies on the organization of non-formal learning, such as extracurricular activities (Barrie et al., 2009; Tran, 2017) or informal learning, such as pastimes via reading or watching movies or shows (OECD, 2005). Thus, for comprehensive support of learners' employability, soft skills must be paid more attention to in addition to academic competence (Pegg et al., 2012; Tran, 2019; Yorke & Knight, 2006).

Recently, employability agendas in higher education have moved beyond the skills-based approach (Tran et al., 2020). Tomlinson (2017) expanded our understanding of employability by presenting a framework of graduate employability which consists of five forms of human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capital. Capital is defined as "key resources that confer benefits and advantages onto graduates" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 339). Successful employability requires:

- relevant knowledge and skills for desired professions (human capital),
- social relationships and networks that are supportive of one's career development (social capital),
- adaptability of graduates to different professional events for effective performances (psychological capital),
- graduates' credibility and the investment that they need to make for employability (identity capital), and

- graduates' cultural understanding and dispositions to integrate themselves into different working environments with distinctive work cultures (cultural capital).

Out of five forms of capital, this framework points out that cultural capital is extremely useful for graduates to navigate and adapt to different work settings, which is meaningful in an increasingly globalized and multicultural world. As a matter of fact, graduates in this globalization era are offered tremendous work opportunities in contexts involving multilingual and multicultural peers. It should be noted that the understanding of culture not only considers national or regional boundaries as Large Culture but also Small Culture that advocates one's socio-historical backgrounds and life experiences that form their cultural beliefs, ways of thinking and acting (Holliday, 2010). Therefore, multicultural workplaces involve not only people of national and geographical differences but also those of possible the same nation and region holding different beliefs and ways of behaviors.

Indeed, with the increasing globalization and internationalization, it is vital to equip students with cultural capital, helping them hit the ground running in an unfamiliar work environment. For this reason, English language education not only helps students develop the language skills but also understanding of cultures of English-speaking countries, which will make them stand out as job applicants for a position and competent employees in multilingual-multicultural organizations where English is the medium of communication. Therefore, English language skills are useful for working within a foreign-invested organization as English has been an international language of business. In many developing countries, such as Vietnam, such a task that aims to develop English language competences among current and prospective Vietnamese workers in support of their career prospects has been explicitly carried out. For example, English language education in the country has witnessed tremendous reforms in the past two decades. English language has gained its vital role in Vietnam since Doi Moi (Renovation) in 1986, attempting to escalate the socio-economic status of the country (Bui & Nguyen, 2016). This open-door policy establishes an increasing demand of English language for a variety of social aspects (e.g., economics, education, and foreign trade), which resulted in English being a compulsory subject in Vietnamese education system (Nguyen, 2005). English language teaching and learning has undergone remarkable reforms in the last decades: textbook writing, teachers' professional development, adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches, and establishing thresholds of English competence that students must achieve by graduation (Bui & Nguyen, 2016; MOET, 2008). To make Vietnamese graduates more competitive in the globalized job market, English language policies in Vietnam have shifted their emphasis on language skills to broader aspects of socio-cultural understanding (Albright, 2018; Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Le et al., 2019; Ngo, 2019). Unfortunately, until now there have been very few local and international studies investigating how learning English contributes to students' development of cultural capital (e.g., cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, and cultural dispositions) and how such cultural capital is linked to their employability in Vietnamese context. To help narrow these research gaps, this chapter will report on a qualitative study about the role of English learning, under formal, non-formal, and informal

forms, in developing cultural capital for learners, and how such capital contributes to their employability, as perceived by the learners.

## 7.2 Literature Review

### 7.2.1 What is Culture?

Technically, foreign language education is closely associated with teaching and learning the culture in which the language is used (Brown, 2014; Byram, 1997; Hjelm et al., 2019; Kim, 2020; Kramsch, 1998). However, defining what culture means is a challenging task. Although it has been researched in various disciplines, there appears not to achieve a consensus on a shared definition. Speaking about the complexity of culture, Weaver (1993) borrowed a theory of an iceberg to model a state-of-the-art perspective. If we examine culture as what can be seen, heard, and touched, as the upper part of the iceberg, culture is externally embodied. Meanwhile, the lower part of the iceberg is internally shown, which engages in human beings' motivation, beliefs, life-related values, ways of thought, and personal myth. Compared to the upper part which is thought to be objective and easy to change, the submerged part is seen as highly subjective and hard to change (Weaver, 1993).

In a similar vein, it is common to know that culture represents "membership in a discourse community that share[s] a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 10). Liddicoat (2001) provided a new view on culture, classifying into static and dynamic culture. Static culture is culture to be unchanged and transmitted among generations, also believed to be homogenous among people in any certain settings. Culture in this form involves social structures, norms, and rules and is also known as *culture as high culture, culture as area studies, and culture as societal norms* (Liddicoat et al., 2003). However, dynamic culture, also known as *culture as practice* (Liddicoat et al., 2003), is socially constructed, depending on who is involved in communities where culture exists with particular regard to people's transforming knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors. When it comes to instruction and acquisition of cultural knowledge, it is acknowledged that the former can be instructed in a form of prioritizing factual transmission (Crawford & McLaren, 2003) or proving culture to be effective in teaching students practices with no effect from contexts. This contributes to students having more tendencies to acquire unnecessary cultural stereotypes and overgeneralizations. In contrast to the static view, the other view is meaningfully considered when learners can learn about cultural knowledge, cultural differences, and intercultural communicative competence, but they are viewed to be continuously changing in a given period of time and space availability (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2005; Vu, 2021b).

### 7.2.2 How Are Culture and Language Connected?

It is widely agreed that "language does not function independently from the context in which it is used" (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 8), which is also supported by Atkinson (2002) and Crozet and Liddicoat (1999). This means that language learning can greatly benefit from, and positively be informed by, sufficient acquisition of cultural knowledge. In addition, Le and Chen (2018) advocate the relation between language and culture, stating that language education is "a political, social, and cultural activity" and learning a language needs "reference to the local socio-political and cultural environment" (p. 16). In light of the inseparability of language and culture, it is inadequate for English language learners, either as a second or foreign language, to develop the language skills with just a focus on linguistic knowledge itself. To promote effective communication among individuals from different cultural backgrounds, learners must possess cultural knowledge of the target language to address cultural misunderstanding and overcome challenges in cross-cultural communication. To facilitate this transformation, Kumaravadivelu (2008) highly recommends the inclusion of content knowledge related to culture in language classrooms to help learners "confront some of the taken-for-granted cultural beliefs about the Self and the Other" (p. 189). With that being said, cultural knowledge then can refer to the efforts to motivate students in considering and reflecting critically on multiple perspectives, which necessitates learners' deep engagement with the contexts and partaking in the process of meaning making. In support of the connection between language and culture, Brown (2014) suggested fundamentals of "teach[ing] a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 74) as part of the key principles of second language teaching and learning.

### 7.2.3 Cultural Capital and Employability

The theory of cultural capital, the most cited and originally developed by Bourdieu (1977), presents a mechanism which contributes to the transformation of social status of individuals. It is noted that cultural capital is interchangeable with social and economic capital and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1977), as the other two forms of capital that Bourdieu (1986) identified. Economic capital is contingent on a person's wealth, and social capital totals his/her network-involved possessions to engage effectively in different settings, ranging from family, friend zones, educational institutions, living communities, and broader societies (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Similarly considered in other forms of capital, cultural capital is largely reliant on societies where it can be acquired or cultures in which dominants of social groups decide the formation of structures, rules, and practices (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital primarily involves individuals' education credentials and related experience in enabling their advantages to accomplish certain social status in places where they live. Typically, cultural capital can be understood as cultural resources and assets

to be accumulated in one's life over the length of time. Bourdieu (1986) associated cultural capital with individuals' engagement in enriching knowledge, dispositions and behaviors, cultural belongings, and educationally acknowledged abilities. According to three influencing aspects as follows, cultural capital is examined based on incorporated or embodied, institutionalized, and objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1994, 1996).

Firstly, objectified cultural capital, as can be transferred with economic capital, is represented as people's property and legal ownership in different forms, to name some, such as artworks or scientific instruments. These so-called cultural goods can be transferred to monetary profits to be obtained in combination with personal powers. Secondly, incorporated cultural capital is comprehended as individual knowledge and skills which could be consumed over a long period of time and tends to be passed from past generations within similar social and cultural structures. Because incorporated cultural capital stays "in the form of schemata of perception and action, principles of vision and division, and mental structures" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 5), it involves one's verbal (linguistic expression) and non-verbal (body language) communication. Thus, cultural capital is potential to be developed by individuals' mastery of language, in other words, requiring one's continuous practice, adaptability, and cultural integration. Thirdly, institutionalized cultural capital is acquired through formal education based on either academic credentials or professional experience. With this regard, cultural capital is symbolized as worthwhile resources which can offer this capital's holders values which are legally recognized and constantly conventional.

Aligned with cultural capital which was theoretically developed by Bourdieu (1986, 1994), Tomlinson (2017) supported this form of capital as a fundamental part of graduates' employability. He argued that cultural capital involves "the formation of culturally valued knowledge, dispositions and behaviors that are aligned to the workplaces that graduates seek to enter" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 343). Consistent with Bourdieu's theory, Tomlinson (2017) added that cultural capital can be developed in two ways, of which graduates are required to acquire not only "added-value knowledge, tastes and achievements" but also "desired embodied behaviors and dispositions" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 344).

Cultural capital is crucial to developing other forms of employability capital. Being able to recognize cultural differences, graduates can develop human capital in which they acquire knowledge and reach out for the skills that they think are important (Tomlinson, 2017). Coupled with human capital which enables them to integrate into new cultural settings more conveniently, graduates can potentially facilitate psychological capital based on their increased sense of adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving. It is also suggested that cultural capital helps enhance "personal confidence and horizon scanning" in graduates (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 344), encourages them to keep reflecting on who they are (identity capital), and subsequently competently engage with diverse exposure to cultural experiences in both academic and professional settings (social capital). Through participation or engagement with diverse social exposure, individuals with cultural capital can broaden their social networks which may provide them with opportunities for desired professions.

Along with cultural capital, Bourdieu (1977) informs *linguistic capital* which facilitates language users to claim their legitimate membership of those target communities (Bourdieu, 1994). Among university/college graduates or future graduates, foreign language competence is highlighted in terms of cultural and social capital, which are most favored by employers. In this regard, however, foreign language competence does not necessarily guarantee individuals to successfully integrate into other fields. Coupled with intercultural communicative competence as a key driver in language teaching and learning (Byram, 1997; Vu, 2021a, 2021b), language users with little exposure to cultural experience through which they can gain adaptability may fail to integrate into new work conditions (Devine, 2009).

To wrap up, cultural capital is important for graduates' employability. However, how it is developed through English language learning and how it contributes to the development of graduates' employability need to be further explored to expand our understanding in these areas.

## 7.3  The Current Study

### 7.3.1  Aims of the Chapter

In Bourdieu's (1977) perspective and Tomlinson's (2017) framework of employability, cultural capital is one of the key factors supporting graduates' employability. However, the questions of how cultural capital is built during the process of English language learning and how it contributes to graduates' employability in the Vietnamese context have not yet been answered. This chapter, therefore, addresses the research gaps by seeking answers to the following questions:

1. *In what ways is cultural capital developed through the process of learning English?*
2. *In what ways does such cultural capital contribute to the development of graduates' employability?*

### 7.3.2  Research Approach and Methods

The development and contributions of cultural capital are associated with individuals' experiences in particular societies (Bourdieu, 1986; Liddicoat et al., 2003). Therefore, a qualitative research approach is relevant to explore graduates' reflection on cultural capital development through English language learning and its distinctive contributions to their employability in different professional settings under contextual and individual conditions (Creswell, 2009). This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to investigate the acquisition of cultural capital among graduates as learners of English and the effects of cultural capital on graduates'

employability. The use of semi-structured interviews is to gain insights into the pre-determined themes through the two research questions as well as be open to new ideas that are generated through the interview data (Creswell, 2009).

### 7.3.3 Participants

The researchers announced the recruitment to people on their contact list with specific information about the study. Purposive quota sampling was employed. The researchers established three categories of basic, intermediate, and advanced EFL learners and a minimum of three cases for each category (Robinson, 2014). This low number of participants could be accepted in qualitative research for an intensive idiographic analysis of each case regarding their individual experiences (Robinson, 2014). Furthermore, participants in the researchers' network were contacted to invite their participation. The researchers also devoted to searching participants of different work settings, educational programs, and years of work experience to yield diversity in the data. After one week, twelve participants responded to the recruitment; however, one participant of the Basic group later decided to withdraw from the research before interviews. A total of eleven participants had completed their undergraduate degree programs in different majors and had been employed for less than two years at the time of the research. In this study, these participants were categorized into three language proficiency levels based on their learning experience, and certified or self-reported achievements in English language learning. Table 7.1 highlights the participants' learning experience and their current employment.

### 7.3.4 Procedure

An interview was conducted with each of the participants for a duration of 30 to 45 min. Learning from Tomlinson's (2017) framework for employability, interview questions were proposed about how cultural capital was developed in the graduates' English language learning programs including learning and other extracurricular activities. Because the study aimed at cultural capital and employability, how cultural capital contributed to their job performances was also explored, for which the researchers questioned both the merits and possible demerits that this capital brought into their work and other life aspects. Notably, Tomlinson (2017) provided a network of capital for employability, and the researchers were interested in the possible relationship between cultural capital and other capital for successful employability. Therefore, as stated above, to unpack how cultural capital might be able to emerge as centrally driven by English language learning of the participants and the participants' perspectives on how cultural capital would be able to enhance employability, the interview questions were necessarily central in their experience of English

**Table 7.1** Participants' profiles

| Participants | Gender | Major | English level | Current job |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tuan | Male | English language studies | Advanced | Receptionist at a resort |
| Chi | Female | English language studies | Advanced | Instructor of English |
| Nhu | Female | English language teaching | Advanced | Instructor of English |
| Nghi | Female | English language studies | Advanced | Market Researcher |
| Duong | Male | English language studies | Advanced | MA student/Instructor of English |
| Sang | Male | External economics | Intermediate | Audit Associate |
| Nha | Female | Japanese language studies | Intermediate | Salesman |
| Chan | Male | Information system | Intermediate | Marketing Specialist |
| Hoa | Female | Hospitality | Intermediate | Hotel waitress |
| Nga | Female | Human resources | Basic | MBA Students/HR Staff |
| Huong | Female | Economic planning and investment | Basic | Data Analyst |

*Note* All names are pseudonyms

language learning with a focus on their increased cultural knowledge, informed inter-cultural communication, and fundamental work-related skills. Explicitly, the participants were asked questions related to (1) their English language learning experience, (2) how English language supported their study, work, and daily life, (3) how they learned culture in this language learning process, and (4) what changes this cultural understanding had made to their work, study, and daily life. Based on the participants' responses, follow-up questions were provided for clarification. The interviews were recorded for later analysis.

The interview data were analyzed following the steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the recordings were listened to, and the researchers took notes of the segments that were related to the themes and guided by the research questions (e.g., the development and contributions of cultural capital). To ensure the reliability of the data, the second researcher coded 25 percent of the data. As the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the segments related to the aforementioned pre-determined themes in the study were chosen to become quotes that illustrated a finding and were translated into English and cross-checked by both researchers to ensure accuracy. After initial codes were identified, the researchers grouped the codes into relevant categories as the first step of coding. The second step of coding referred to identifying sub-categories for the codes. The coded and grouped segments were read through again to identify the sub-themes. The researchers cross-checked and discussed the codes and themes that were generated from their coding. This study was guided by both pre-determined themes (i.e., development and contributions of cultural capital, cultural capital in relation to other forms of capital) which were the

focuses of this study and emerging themes (i.e., forms of learning) as methods of coding.

## 7.4 Findings

This section provides information on how the participants developed their cultural capital and the contributions of cultural capital to their employability. Following the categorization of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and the relationship between cultural capital and employability (Tomlinson, 2017), this chapter elaborates on learners' acquisition of cultural knowledge and the incorporation of cultural capital to their social, personal, and professional dimensions, which all consequently affect their employability.

### 7.4.1 The Development of Cultural Capital Through English Learning

The interview data showed that the development of cultural capital happened in language learning as the participants studied and worked in intercultural environments where English language was used. In addition, the interviews revealed different ways of learning culture. The forms of learning categorized by OECD (2005) consist of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. According to OECD (2005), formal learning takes place at educational institutions through various programs such as degree-seeking and short training courses in which certificates or qualifications are awarded. Meanwhile, non-formal learning does not result in evaluation or qualifications although they actually happen in certain courses and do not comprise credits as formal learning happens, and informal learning refers to learning from daily or leisure activities that are "often treated as a residual category to describe any kind of learning which does not take place within, or follow from, a formally organised learning programme or event" (Eraut, 2000, p. 114). As guided by Eraut (2000) and OECD (2005), the classification of learning forms contributed to a better understanding of how cultural knowledge was acquired differently among learners. While Vietnamese learners have long acknowledged the development of knowledge through formal learning, informal and non-formal learning are not adequately appreciated. The findings however advocate the contributions of other learning forms to advancing cultural capital, which encourages learners' participation in a wide range of learning forms to develop their cultural capital.

### 7.4.1.1 Formal Learning

Cultural capital can be formed in the context of formal learning, which Bourdieu (1986) labeled as *institutionalized cultural capital*. In this study, all participants had obtained at least an undergraduate degree and attended language courses in which English language was the major, the medium of instruction, or a compulsory subject. Cultural capital was then declared as being rooted in this formal education as *area studies* and as *practice.*

> I learned culture through subjects such as Intercultural Communication as part of my English Language major with international volunteer teachers from Norway and the U.S. These teachers introduced their national cultures and widened my cultural understanding. (Chi)

In addition to specific courses and lessons, cultural capital was also built through teamwork when they completed group assignments in a program using English as a medium of instruction. For example, when working on team projects as their course assignments, Sang was able to acquire cultural knowledge with a particular focus on work ethics from exchange students from many Asian and European countries.

> From my observation, unlike many of my Vietnamese friends who were not serious about the assignments, I could realize the high level of responsibility, dedication, and management skills of those foreign peers. (Sang)

Other non-English-major students who had few chances to take culture-related subjects in their undergraduate programs made good use of their language courses at English language centers or cultural exchange programs abroad. For example, Nha reported that she had attended a short course abroad from which she could witness how local residents exercised their cultural values through their daily activities.

The comments of the participants in this study revealed that formal learning was a significant source of their static cultural knowledge. Although this formal learning took place at different levels such as specific subjects, lessons, and student–student interactions, it was the most basic and common ground for the participants in this study to acquire cultural knowledge.

### 7.4.1.2 Non-Formal Learning

Defined as education-related activities that do not involve evaluation or qualifications (OECD, 2005), non-formal English learning developed cultural capital primarily through institutional extracurricular activities such as field trips or cultural exchange programs. In this form of learning, *culture as practice* seemed to be highly visible through observing how culture was reflected in daily activities for dynamic cultural knowledge.

> When my English was getting better, I joined various cultural exchange programs and activities with the university's international partners from Hong Kong, Australia, and Indonesia. They shared their cultural values and I learned those. (Tuan)

> I interacted with many foreign student interns coming to Vietnam to work. I joined as a volunteer of an international student-led organization where I also enhanced my English proficiency and engaged in Western cultures. Both benefited me in terms of my academic work at school and my teammates trusted to let me act as a leader who could manage the work well and achieve certain successes. (Chan)

Getting to know culture from these non-formal learning activities seemed to be more interesting and effective to these participants. From their claims, most cultural knowledge of societal norms gained from formal learning was heavily theoretical, which they did not know how these cultural aspects took place in real life for better comprehension. Meanwhile, taking part in non-formal learning activities, they were able to discuss, exchange, and witness how those cultural values were applied in daily life.

> I joined a homestay program with Hong Kong and Australian students when they visited my university in exchange programs. Hosting them helped me know about their cuisine, table manners, dress code, and other behaviors. They had travelled a lot and introduced cultures of other countries to me as well. (Chi)

However, it was noted that this form of learning appeared to be unlikely to happen among less proficient or non-English majoring learners who have few opportunities for these cultural activities.

> I remember that when my English was not good, I was not confident to take part in these activities. If I did, I could not understand much of what the others said to me when they introduced their culture, maybe only fifty percent. (Chi)

> My English was not good as I did not know how to speak English. Therefore, I did not join any programs or activities to learn about cultures because those activities involved using English. (Nga)

In these activities, the participants played the role of not only translators but also cultural ambassadors to introduce the lifestyle of Vietnamese people and were able to learn cultural diversity from their international peers. Despite the excitement of the activities, language proficiency was indicated as one of the barriers preventing the students from being part of the programs or acquiring cultural knowledge, as reported by Chi and Nga.

### 7.4.1.3 Informal Learning

Informal learning, defined by OECD (2005), refers to leisure and daily activities rather than academic ones. In this study, apart from the academic environment, informal learning also showed a high level of cultural learning for participants both as *area studies* and as *practice*. Informal learning of culture happened when the participants watched videos from various websites as their leisure activities and were able to learn the language and the culture. For example, the participants made use of their favorite videos from YouTube or Netflix as these videos were fun to watch and could improve their knowledge.

> I relied on YouTube and Netflix videos as free sources for my independent language learning. They offered me great materials to improve my listening skills despite lacks of space to speak with someone. However, there were lots of opportunities to explore cultural values of Western countries that I had never known. (Huong)

Other participants realized that they could learn more about cultures as practice in their leisure time through outdoor activities and interactions with foreigners in an interactive style of learning.

> I learned more cultural knowledge through making friends with foreign visitors when I was traveling. I enjoyed having conversations with foreigners not only to practice English language but also to know more cultures like their eating habits or lifestyles. (Nhu)

> I usually invite my friends from Korea to local restaurants. We liked hanging out, and from our conversations, we knew more about cuisines, festivals, and daily lifestyle. I learned how they handled their everyday problems. (Sang)

Informal learning for cultural knowledge was very diverse and dependent on personal preferences. The participants in this study had expressed different ways of combining learning and enjoying themselves as one of the effective ways to get to know more cultures. Therefore, the preference was given to informal learning, thanks to its obtaining both educational values and amusement.

## 7.4.2   The Contributions of Cultural Capital to Other Types of Employability Capital

From the interviews, the participants expressed various benefits that they gained from their vast knowledge of culture in many aspects. In this study, the learning of culture of these participants was undertaken mostly through interactions with cultural agents such as their peers, lecturers, and foreigners that they had met. The higher chance of employability and career success in this study was fostered because cultural capital enabled the development of human, social, psychological, and identity capital, all of which are key factors for successful employability (Tomlinson, 2017).

### 7.4.2.1   The Development of Human Capital

Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills that are essential to the graduates' careers (Tomlinson, 2017), which was evident as an outcome of cultural capital in this study and indicated through graduates' professional achievements and continuing development. Cultural capital was so essential for fulfillment of the work demands. To illustrate, Chi and Nhu proved their outstanding qualifications through integrating culture into the English lessons. Nhu highlighted that teaching culture made learning English more interesting. This integration was appreciated and resulted in higher payment for her exceptional performances in teaching. For Tuan, he was complimented by his customers for appropriate communicative strategies and was assigned

to serve international guests at the resort where he was working, which in his words was an honor for employees in the Hospitality industry.

> I was able to use correct slang and jokes with foreigners and select suitable topics to talk to them. When I served a British couple, I talked about British meals and British TV programs, and they really liked it. The guests at the end of their stay sent me a thank-you note and suggested a tip for my nice work. My boss really appreciated that. This is very good for me as a receptionist. (Tuan)

In addition to making use of the existing cultural knowledge to serve their duties, cultural capital that the participants gained also supported their professional development through continuing acquisition of culture and language. Some examples of this were self-study using materials written in English, which were not available in Vietnamese, and exploration of more cultures; thus, they could acquire new knowledge and skills that others might not have, making them more competitive in the labor markets.

> When I encountered Russian customers, I did not know what to say as I did not know what the customers would love to listen to. However, through interactions, I learned that they were more serious in communication and tended to be 'perfectionists' compared with other customers. Now, I know what I should do to satisfy their demands or where to get help to make them pleased. (Tuan)

> I think that culture is a big source of motivation in learning language. For example, I am very interested in American culture, so I need to learn English to explore this culture through materials or interactions. Learning English and more culture would be helpful for my future work or study. (Nga)

Cultural capital was useful for the participants' job conduct through applying cultural knowledge and skills into the current work and for their professional development through continuing acquisition of knowledge and skills.

### 7.4.2.2   The Development of Social Capital

Social capital development refers to the social networks and relationships that the learners establish and tighten, which connect them to the labor markets (Tomlinson, 2017). Cultural capital in this study enabled the development of social capital of social networks and relationships through the process of developing cultural capital and working. Particularly, the participants were well-respected at their workplaces where they were seen as sources of information and assistance to their colleagues and contributed to the development of the organizations. Their relationships with customers, colleagues, and employers as a result became better, due to their vast knowledge of culture as an important element in their professions.

> I have very good relationships with the managers at my center as they trust my ability. Therefore, I am invited to join meetings with them to give my opinions on the teaching activities at the center. (Chi)

> My manager and colleagues were very happy with my performances. I was given compliments and felt that other colleagues talked to me more comfortably. I think that they respect me. (Tuan)

An exception that this study offered was the case of Chi as her social capital to some extent was threatened by her advanced cultural capital. Being highly appreciated by the managers, Chi was able to make proposals for work policies at the center, which might not be valued by some of her colleagues and consequently became a disadvantage of advanced cultural capital.

> Many of my colleagues now used to be my classmates. When I got promoted and could contribute ideas to the teaching activities and other policies at the center such as wearing uniforms at work or having more communicative activities, I could see that my ideas were not favored by my colleagues. It may be because I am giving them more work or I am playing the role of a supervisor, so they do not like it. (Chi)

This social capital development subsequently led to the advancement in participants' careers when they were assigned important tasks at their workplaces or allowed to take part in policy-making practice at their institutions. All of these were considered remarkable achievements in their professions.

### 7.4.2.3 The Development of Identity Capital

Identity capital is defined as the learners' investment for their professional prospects and their membership in a social group (Tomlinson, 2017). In this study, cultural capital was a source that enhanced learners' identity capital as the participants' personal values were more empowered. The participants in this study claimed that they increased their motivation in learning as well as made positive changes in their beliefs and lifestyles.

> From working with Hong Kong friends, I see that they are so happy when they live for themselves. I realized that I should also love myself more and do what I feel happy with. (Chi)
>
> I realize that Japanese people are so hard-working. They try to work as much as they can to achieve their goals. Sometimes, I think they are overloaded, but they are successful. I have realized this good characteristic and learned from it to be successful like them. (Nhan)

Importantly, cultural capital could develop learners' sense of belonging, meaning that interacting with people from culturally diverse backgrounds could allow the participants to form their tolerance and respect toward diverse cultural values.

> I realize one of my foreign friends used a hand to grab the food, not a fork or a spoon. I was shocked at first but later knew that it was normal in her tradition, so it was fine for me. Later, I saw others with the same action, and I was fine with that too. (Nhu)
>
> I think that to work effectively in Hospitality with customers from various cultures. I have to be a good listener and observer, to be flexible and open to change, to be an innovative and creative thinker. (Hoa)

Cultural knowledge played a significant role in shaping the learners' professional interests which were helpful to explore other cultures and transformed them to be culturally sensitive actors in the multicultural world. Being culturally mindful, these actors became proficient in how to properly behave in a multicultural setting with people holding different ways of thinking and acting for successful communication, which was an integral part in their work performances.

#### 7.4.2.4   The Development of Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is resultant to help students overcome employment-related challenges, of which students are expected to enhance their sense of adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving (Tomlinson, 2017). With rich cultural experiences, one of the learners was able to deal with unfamiliar cultural contexts and transfer himself to be more hard-working, engaged, confident, and responsible. For Sang, being able to learn work ethics from his academic experience with exchange students was helpful to develop his enthusiasm at work.

> Through working with the exchange students, I learned some crucial skills in terms of being disciplined and responsible. Once agreeing on the assigned tasks, they tend to work responsibly and ensure the timely completion. I considered this skill important for the personal ethics in professional work environments. (Sang)

Also, they observed that being able to overcome a number of challenges in new work settings required them to adapt quickly and simultaneously be resilient at the early stage of employment.

> I think that to work effectively in the foreign-owned enterprises related to Hospitality, on-the-job learning is very crucial. I was reminded that academic knowledge cannot give me a full understanding of how to work in the service industry. As a staff member at a multinational hotel, I can learn cultural norms to enhance customer satisfaction and exceptional service because it varies from case to case, like between domestic and international services. (Hoa)

It is basic that engagement in culturally experiential learning is potential to help learners challenge their perpetuating stereotypes on what culture is uniquely existing.

### 7.5   Discussion

This study investigated the development of cultural capital through learning English language and the contributions of cultural capital to learners' employability. The findings revealed that cultural capital could be developed through different forms of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. In addition, the findings supported previous studies indicating that cultural capital resulted in better employability (Tomlinson, 2017) when the participants were able to develop other forms of capital indicated in Tomlinson's (2017) framework of employability. While the essence of cultural capital for successful employability is widely acknowledged in current literature, this study further points out possible breakdowns in one's social capital as a result of advanced cultural capital.

### 7.5.1 The Development of Cultural Capital Through English Language Learning

Among the four types of culture classified by Liddicoat et al. (2003), *culture as practice* seems to be the most attractive to the participants in this study. The participants were more interested in how culture was reflected in daily activities and interactions rather than culture as social norms taught as a subject in the curriculum or a theoretical knowledge point in lessons. Their preference for *culture as practice* then decided the favorable mode of learning for culture. This study elaborated on formal, non-formal, and informal education for cultural capital.

While formal learning is potential for learners' static cultural knowledge, non-formal and informal learning are preferable for the acquisition of dynamic cultural knowledge. Despite this difference, Hofer et al. (2010) realize that Vietnamese students focus more on formal learning to develop knowledge and tend to disregard the benefits of non-formal and informal learning. Meanwhile, this study sheds light on the preferences of learning in other less formal forms. Eraut (2000) strongly believes that the majority of human learning takes place in non-formal and probably implicit forms. This may be explained that non-formal and informal learning do not involve evaluation and take place in a more comfortable environment with interesting activities (e.g., outdoor activities), not pouring any intense pressure on students. Thus, they are more motivating and less stressful to learners (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Furthermore, with non-formal and informal learning, learners are able to intensively acquire dynamic cultural knowledge through visualizing how a piece of knowledge functions in a specific context as these two types of learning are normally contextually based, which seems invisible in formal education (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009). To illustrate, the participants could realize the differences in dress codes, table manners, and communicative strategies of their peers in different situations, leading them to a better understanding of how culture guides one's behaviors in a specific situation.

Although cultural capital is developed through language learning, the participants' exposure to cultural knowledge was imbalanced due to their different majors and English language levels. Evidently, those with advanced English language levels and of English-related majors were able to acquire and make use of more educational resources to develop their cultural capital (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009; Gerhards, 2014). The conditions for developing cultural capital could be therefore concluded as language- and discipline-based, which suggested a consideration for supporting learners' language proficiency and creating more opportunities for their acquisition of cultural knowledge across disciplines for better employability. This is consistent with the theorization of *field*, simply defined as different learning environments (Bourdieu, 2011), where there are different learning disciplines or language levels influencing the extent to which cultural capital can be developed.

An interesting point of the study is the continuing development of cultural capital during the post-graduate stage. Learning more cultural aspects occurred in the graduates' workplaces where they were able to enrich their cultural capital based on their

existing cultural knowledge. Workplaces are also considered educational environments with experiential learning where both formal learning in the form of required training and non-formal learning through interactions happen (Choi & Jacobs, 2011). Some participants after joining their professional organizations continued to develop their cultural capital through their professional activities (Park et al., 2016).

### 7.5.2 Cultural Capital and Employability

This study aligned with previous research by affirming the essence of cultural capital to graduate employability (Tomlinson, 2017). Particularly, the significance of cultural capital toward employability is demonstrated through how cultural capital supports the development of other forms of capital outlined by Tomlinson (2017) such as human, social, psychological, and identity capital. These aspects together form a strong foundation for graduates' employability, which was very little discussed in current literature and this connection was unpacked with a line of fresher insights into how cultural capital would serve as a powerful aspect to develop students' long-term career and professional prospects.

Cultural capital prepares individuals with tolerance to cultural differences, confidence in interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds, adaptability to different working environments, and flexibility in applying cultural knowledge into different contexts for harmony (Banban, 2018). In multicultural settings, cultural negotiation is essential for acceptable behaviors such as appropriate communicative strategies with different interlocutors (Giles & Ogay, 2007) and the allowance of cultural diversity within one professional organization (Banban, 2018). This interesting line of research proves Bourdieu's (1986) clarifying the inclusion of incorporated cultural capital into language use in a way that learners can seek to enhance and perform communication skills over time, coupled with improved attitudinal dimensions. These forms of development co-exist in the graduate participants, contributing to their professional development and successful work performances.

This study pointed out the contributions of cultural capital to employability in terms of continuing professional development which has been underrated in the literature. This resonates with the view of Lareau and Weininger (2003) arguing for a broader sense of cultural capital as individuals' "ability to comply with institutionalized standards of evaluation" (p. 597). The study emphasized graduates' continuing professional development during employment as a compliance with the increasing job demands in their fields (Bridgstock et al., 2019; Park et al., 2016). Specifically, cultural capital motivated graduates' further development of linguistic and cultural competencies that could be helpful for their work and their competitiveness in multicultural working environments.

Furthermore, this study emphasized another positive point resulting from cultural capital, which is the enhanced social capital. One of the key factors for successful employability is social relationships, which should be maintained for strong social capital (Bassey et al., 2019). This kind of relationship is described as a support

to one's career because team harmony and collaboration cannot be neglected in workplaces (Xia et al., 2020). While previous research does not discuss how cultural capital strengthens social capital, this study proposes that cultural capital enabled better relationships between the participants and their customers, colleagues, and managers through their successful job completion. In turn, their employability was advanced through better reputation and promotions to higher positions in line with the development of social capital.

However, social relationships as a form of social capital may also be negatively affected by cultural capital. Within one professional community, conflicts and inequality may occur when some are seen as 'core' employees and threaten others' career prospects who are categorized as 'social exclusion' (Brown, 1995). In a social space or community, there are certain symbolic powers that create social hierarchy or divisions in which those possessing the symbolic powers are labeled 'mainstream' with a higher status, and others are devalued (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 1991; Dembski & Salet, 2010; McCollum, 1999). It is evident that in multicultural environments, there are targeted 'mainstream' groups of customers and services that require English language proficiency and cultural capital. As a result, conflicts and inequality appear when those with symbolic powers of cultural capital and English language skills are successful in work fulfillment and gain higher positions.

Also being contributors to employability in terms of adaptability to various cultural environments and challenges as well as development of a sense of belonging to the multicultural world, psychological and identity capital was observed as an effective response to cultural capital. However, it appears that data was insufficient for an in-depth exploration of these two forms of capital. Hence, further studies are needed to unfold this missing evidence.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This study explored how cultural capital is developed in English language learning and its influences on the development of graduates' employability. In the former, graduates appear to develop their cultural capital in various forms of formal, non-formal, and informal learning of English language through formal courses, extracurricular and cultural exchange activities, and leisure activities. In the latter, cultural capital seems to be a driver of the development of other necessary capital for employability such as human, social, psychological, and identity capital. Therefore, English language programs should pay more attention to developing students' cultural competence, on top of the language skills. It is noted that this qualitative study involves a small number of participants. As this study focuses on English language graduates, future research with more participants of other academic programs and work settings may be necessary to generalize the relationship between cultural capital and employability. Furthermore, the participants in this study are in their early years of employment; hence, future research on participants with more work experiences and in different job areas can be useful to explore how cultural capital impacts their career development in the long run.

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