

Employability of International Doctoral Students in the UK: A Bronfenbrenner Perspective

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Good to see one of our research students presenting at @ukcge annual conference!



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STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
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Perceived employability of International doctoral students In the UK: applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

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ABSTRACT

The quality of the UK's doctorate training system plays a fundamental role in fostering vibrant research outputs and attracting global talent. However, while maintaining a consistently high standard of quality remains static and challenging, little is known about how the employability of international doctorate students is shaped and at what juncture it is opportune to support their employability during their research studies. This paper aims to understand the employability of international doctoral students within business schools at British universities, drawing on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a framework. The qualitative study involves 15 international doctoral students from 9 business schools. The findings uncover various environmental systems impacting their employability. In addition, this study theoretically extends employability research by applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to provide a multi-layered understanding of international doctorate employability, offering a novel framework for targeted career support interventions. Further, the implications highlight the urgent need for tailored support to build industrial connections, promote departmental collaboration to scaffold a dynamic research environment, proffer multiple resource channels, and create employment opportunities both inside and outside of the university.

ARTICLE HISTORY

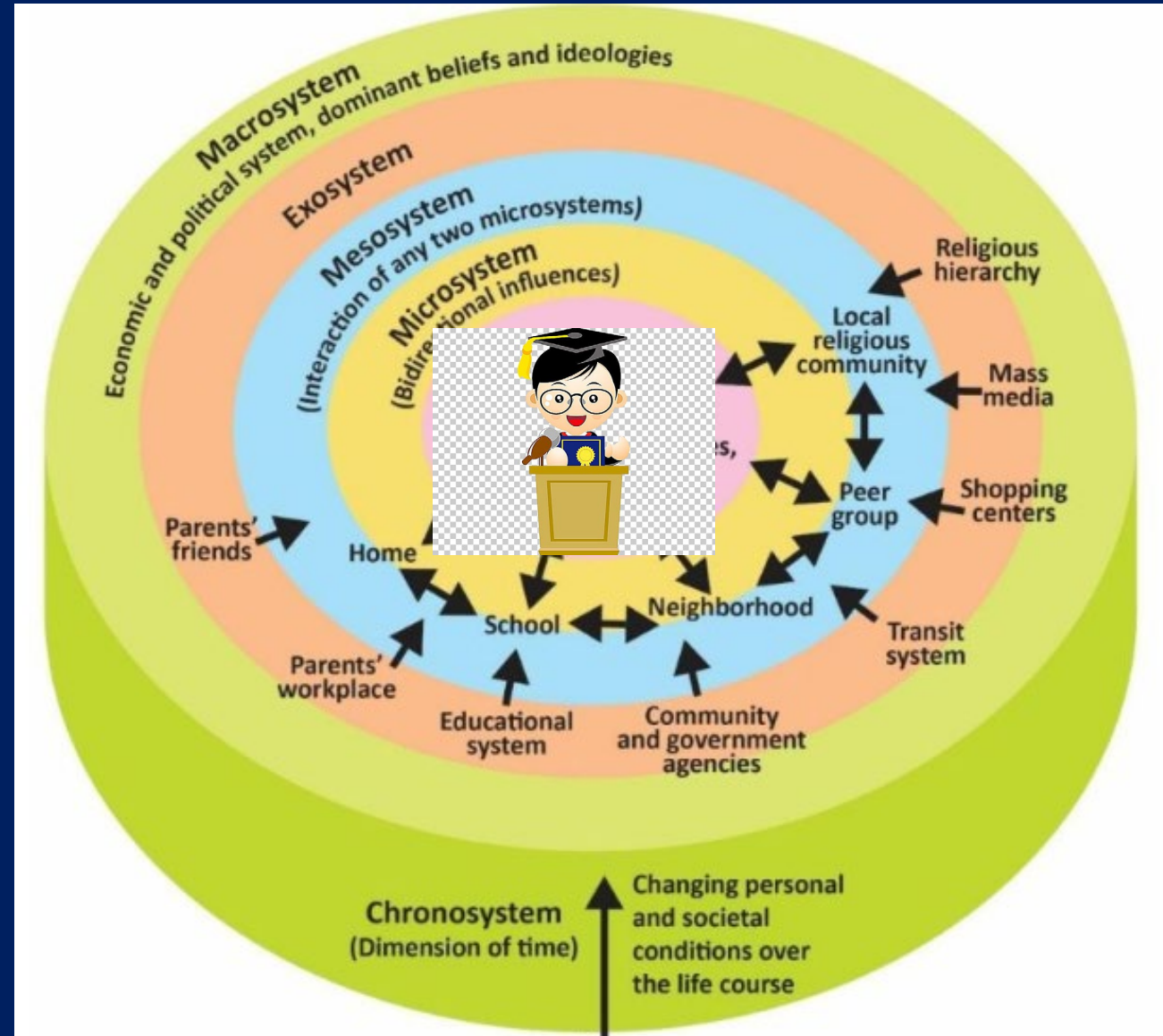
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KEYWORDS

Word: International
doctorate student;
employability;
ecological
systems theory; UK

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1984)

Theoretical Framework





This study aims to investigate the employability of IDSs through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, examining how their built environment influences their career development and prospects



To understand international doctorate student employability from students' perspectives within UK's business schools

To explore the extent to which ecological systems impact their employability and shape their career pathways

To investigate the current challenges and opportunities that IDSs encounter during their research trajectories

Aim & Objectives



Methodology

- Semi-structured Interviews
- Hybrid Thematic Analysis
- NVivo 12

Categories	Sub-groups	n
Gender	Male	4
	Female	11
Schools of Studies	Business School	15
Originality	Africa	3
	Asia	7
	Middle East	2
	Europe	2
	North America	1
Age ranges	24 – 30	5
	31 – 40	8
	40+	2
Year of enrolment in doctorate study	Frist year	2
	Second year	4
	Third year	3
	Fourth year	7
Study Status	Full-time	15
University groups	Russel groups	3
	Non-Russell groups	6



Findings

Microsystems:

- Identity of supervisor
- Employment Experiences (inside & outside of the university)
- Employability Agency

Mesosystems:

- Dynamic co-supervision
- University Support System

Exosystems:

- Labour market conditions
- Immigration policy

Macrosystems:

- Sociocultural integration to academic practices

Chronosystems:

- Accumulating different forms of employability capitals over time

Findings

Year of Study	Capital	
1 st	Human Capital	Developing academic skills; Obtaining new techniques and relevant certification; Getting accustomed to the administrative system; Trainings
	Cultural Capital	Way of communications; Accent; Cultural knowledge; Embodied behaviours; Rule and regulations (unwritten) in academia etc.
2 nd	Social Capital	Networks, Bonding activities, Professional connections, Friendships etc.
3 rd	Psychological Capital	Resilience, Self-efficacy, Consistency, Work-life balance etc
4 th	Identity Capital	Employability narratives, self-positioning in the workforce, identity formulation, Personal brand, linkages between academia and industry etc.



Implications

Theoretical Contributions: This study fills literature gaps by focusing on employability for international doctoral students (IDSs) from British business schools, especially those from specific disciplines and backgrounds, expanding the scope beyond home students.

Cross-Cultural and Social Barriers: Findings suggest universities should address IDSs' social and cultural challenges by incorporating anti-colonialist perspectives into training, promoting cultural sensitivity, and acknowledging diverse knowledge systems.

Novel Framework for Employability: Applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this research introduces a multi-layered framework for understanding IDS employability, guiding tailored support and interventions.

Practical Implications: Addressing IDS challenges in UK higher education (limited industry connections, lack of collaboration, and insufficient job opportunities) is essential. Enhancing employability training with cultural sensitivity and revisiting immigration policies could better support IDSs' transition to the workforce.

Q & A

ANY QUESTIONS?



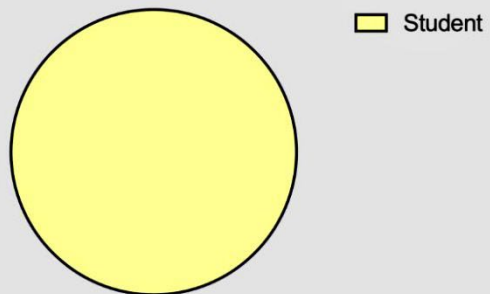
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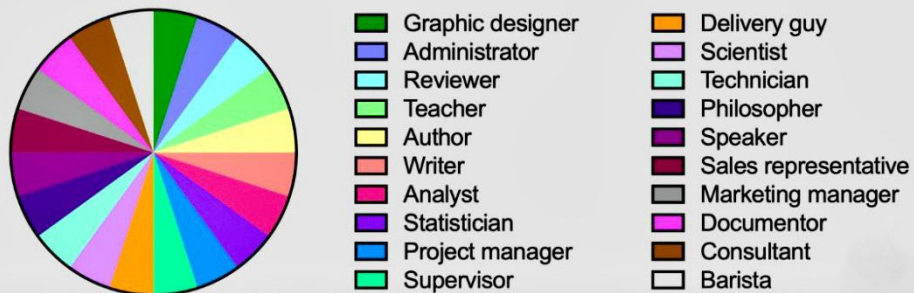
Rationale

PhD student

what the world thinks we are....



what we actually are....



Language Barrier

Scaffold new network

Cultural Differences

Isolation

Homesickness &
Emotional Challenge

Career Prospects
& Job Market

Visa Restriction ☹️