

(Non)fungibility of socio-cultural capital for rural-based students in South African universities

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The number of university students coming from rural areas has significantly increased in South Africa in the last two decades. While this is a positive sign of inclusive social growth and development, the fact that 70% of South African universities are still located in urban areas creates challenges for a number of these students. This is also compounded by the fact that most rural schools in South Africa offer sub-optimal preparation for post-school activities. As such, the first barrier for most of these students is negotiating various levels of access to higher education (HE), using forms of social and cultural capital that may be incommensurate with urban-based HE institutions. Using an in-depth review of literature on the subject of rural education, transition to higher education, student success and reflections on the professional experience of the authors in student support services in higher education. This study argues that since most South African universities are “urban enclaves”, students from rural areas take time to adapt and accumulate relevant socio-cultural capital to enable them to thrive and succeed. The transition of students from rural schools to urban-based universities is a socio-cultural as much as it is an epistemological mobility. As such, this “troubled transition” of rural students can be ameliorated through a trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional intervention to simultaneously enable epistemological access and create commensurate socio-cultural capital. However, previous interventions on student transition have been generic and lacked the nuanced intersectional analysis of rurality on student access and success.

Transdisciplinary contribution: The study proposes a trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space in which education institutions (basic and HE) collaborate with government and non-state partners to ensure sufficient and effective transition, especially for rural school learners.

Keywords: higher education; socio-cultural capital; rural students; transition; transdisciplinary.

Introduction

A priori value of higher education

The difference in educational practices and outcomes between rural and urban areas is conventionally explained in socio-economic parameters. This study focuses on the role of socio-cultural factors that may intervene between the transition, access and success of students from rural schools in semi-urban and urban universities in South Africa. The relationship between education and personal improvement is uncontroversial and has mostly been acknowledged over the years.^{1,2,3} The returns to different levels of schooling include improvement in access to various opportunities and income, as well as social recognition. While these returns are conditioned by various circumstantial or personal conversion factors,⁴ there is, generally, a positive correlation between the level of education and advantages such as employment and other income-generation endeavours.⁵ In 1971, Sewell¹ mooted the role of higher education (HE) in achieving personal satisfaction and self-realisation in what is known as the *American Dream*. He argued that equality of opportunity as far as HE is concerned was a pre-requisite to individuals’ attainment of the American Dream. Most countries accept individual differences that are consequent to individual effort. In fact, Piketty, in his book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, reflecting on Article 1 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, argued that ‘the only inequality that can be justified is one based on individual effort’.⁶ While individual effort has been linked to many activities, including private business ventures and art, education has been regarded as a key ingredient.² This assumption has influenced many public policy decisions aimed at reducing inequality and poverty, nationally and internationally. To this

effect, Grossman has opined: 'education is a fundamental right and *powerful tool for sustainable development*'.⁷ As a result, governments have advocated and invested in expanding HE with the hope of realising these socio-economic spinoffs in their citizens.⁸ However, literature has shown the need for the integration of other forms of capital, in academic attainment.⁹

According to Bourdieu⁹, there are three different 'guises' in which capital can present itself: economic, cultural and social. While these are distinct, they are convertible, albeit not reducible, to each other. Economic capital, according to Bourdieu⁹ is the most common – an assertion that is immediately and directly convertible into money is materially more visible than the latter two. This attribute of convertibility or interchange between forms of capital is called, in economic theory, fungibility.^{10,11} In this study, this means that a family with enough economic capital can afford time for its members to develop and maintain other forms of capital, compared to a family with less money.

South Africa is one of the countries with a long-running struggle with poverty and inequality, disaggregating to different groups, according to their race, ethnicity or place of residence.^{9,12,13} These economic indicators have been confirmed to have a resilient racial bias, prevalent even two and half decades after the formal end of the apartheid system. This has led to a series of cross-sectoral redistributive policies. One of the redress policies by the post-apartheid South African government has been transformational education. The current HE policy, the White Paper, has, among other things, been set out to create 'a post-school system that can assist in building a *fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist* and democratic South Africa'¹⁴ p. 4. The *White Paper* is imbued with the optimism that expanding access to and attainment of quality education by many will redress the inbuilt inequalities and, at the least, decouple these socio-economic indicators from race.¹⁴

The South African policy for HE and training, therefore, contends that the provision of accessible quality HE is a sufficient condition for the attainment of socio-economic returns, or at the least, 'a way of promoting equality of opportunities' across socio-economic divides.¹⁴ As such, public education is an important investment by the post-apartheid government in its effort to tackle the triple socio-economic challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. However, both the relationship between the three and the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing them have always been taken for granted. In 2014, Letseka argued that unless there is a significant shift (redesigning and reengineering) in the current practices, the South African education system is creating an 'illusion of education', where the lives of black people who participate in it remain unchanged. These sentiments, albeit harsh, seem to capture the reality South Africans face. For example, while there is an ever-increasing public investment in education,¹⁴ the returns on this investment are still mediocre at best.

The above sentiments may seem true considering the budget allocated to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) compared to the rates of poverty, inequality and unemployment. In the 2019/20 Budget, the DHET was allocated a total of R89.5 billion.¹⁵ Of this, 82% (R73.4 bn) has been allocated to the *University Education Programme*, leaving R16.1 bn to be shared between Administration (R460 million), Planning, Policy and Strategy (R90.8 m), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (R12.7 bn), Skills Development (R282.4 m) and Community Education and Training (R2.5 bn). This budget is biased towards university education at the expense of other sectors of HE and training. This begs the question of the strategic importance of university education in the South African socio-economic context. Even when assessing student access, university education has received the highest number of access in the post-apartheid dispensation. From 2015 to 2019, student enrolment in the 26 public universities in South Africa increased by 10.4%, from 969 154 in 2015 to 1 070 000 in 2019.¹⁶ While this is a step in the right direction, there are some contemporary challenges in the South African HE system that hinder perceptible progress. In addition, while socio-economic factors of differences in academic attainment continue to be acknowledged, the impact of the rural-urban divide on access and success to HE has not been sufficiently interrogated.

The focus of this article is the access and success of students from schools in semi-urban and urban universities in South Africa. As the 'Contemporary challenges and attempts to expand higher education access in South Africa' section and the 'Literature review' section indicate, the article notes that while transformation in South African HE has meant an increase in access by students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, black students from rural areas still faces challenges in entering, staying and succeeding in HE. The question we attempt to answer is whether the stocks of personal characteristics and experiences – socio-cultural capital – these students bring to university are sufficient to enable them to succeed in semi-urban and urban universities. If not, how can they ensure that their pre-university experiences and characteristics are exchanged for effective social models that will enable them to survive and thrive in a socio-academic context that may be alien to them? In this regard, we factor in our extensive practical experience in student transition into HE, to advocate for a transectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space for students from rural schools.

Contemporary challenges and attempts to expand higher education access in South Africa

Notwithstanding the effort and resources poured into realising the objectives of post-apartheid transformation in the HE system, it became clear soon enough that government policy alone could not effect necessary changes.¹⁷ In the *Twenty Year Review South Africa: 1994–2014*, the office of The Presidency observed that while the overall education budget has increased – constituting above 5% of the gross domestic

product (GDP) – resulting in increased access to education for many previously underrepresented groups, the South African education system still performs below its potential. This is because the education system continues to be loaded with low success rates, with low graduation rates, high drop-out rates, and hard sciences and postgraduate programmes still skewed according to gender, race and place of residence.^{17,18} As such, the quantification of physical or formal access can lead to premature celebration, as it hides many underlying challenges. For instance, only 27% (1 in every 4) of undergraduates complete their studies in regulation time; only 15% of students graduate each year and more than 50% drop out in the first 2 years of enrollment.^{19,20} The challenge still is ensuring that all enabled access stays up to the end of their qualification.²¹

Lewin and Mawoyo, in their explanation of the relationship between access and success, borrow Wally Marrow's concept of 'epistemological access', access to the academic ways of knowing that sustain the universities.²⁰ In this regard, they argue that while it may be true that many students can get physical access to many higher education institutions (HEIs) and different departments, understanding subject epistemologies remain key to ensuring student success. Otherwise, if the gap between what the students bring and what the university offers – the articulation gap – is not closed soon enough, the student may not realise the full gains of the academic programme. Hutchings and Garraway²² in *Beyond the University Gates* argue that physical access has to be complemented by something more substantial to ensure that students are prepared for academic success in their programmes. McKenna²³ notes that while enabling epistemological access may be a preserve of HEIs, many university entrants are severely compromised in quality, lacking basic language and academic literacy skills, indicative of poor schooling backgrounds. Academic access as a code language of epistemological access in many disciplines has to do with 'ways of using language but also the beliefs, attitudes and values of the group'²³ p. 10. While many students come with no knowledge of specific disciplinary literacies, some come with literacy practices that closely approximate them to cracking the code of the literacy of the discipline they want to join. Others, on the other hand, will keep using the wrong literacy practices until they are kicked out by the disciplinary tribe²³ p. 9.

Fisher and Scott, in a report presented to the National Assembly, the Portfolio Committee of Higher Education and Training also observed the need to bridge the articulation gap between students and various critical skills disciplines in HEIs if student success keeps pace with access.²⁴ It argued that access and success among black students must be improved, as they fall under the group whose previous experience excluded them from being inducted into dominant ways of constructing knowledge.²⁴ As such, the reiterated objectives from both DHET and National Development Plans (NDP) were that these underprepared students need special programmes aimed at enhancing their level of coping with the demands of university study. According to Cloete, 'it is

widely accepted that "student under-preparedness" is the dominant learning-related cause for patterns of poor performance in HE'¹⁶ p. 16–17. The Presidency in the *Twenty-Year Review* laid the blame for these success-related challenges on the HEIs, arguing that universities had not done enough in terms of student support, particularly for those students from previously underrepresented groups and areas.¹⁹ This blame has been echoed by many HE stakeholders in South Africa, including organised student representatives. Between 2015 and 2016, violent protests erupted in universities in South Africa, with student groups airing a variety of grievances ranging from high and exclusive tuition, alienating curriculum and lack of enablement for access to underprivileged aspiring students.^{25,26}

While these challenges and critiques persist, several interventions have been implemented in universities to mitigate some of these challenges. These academic programmes for underprepared students have taken several forms: tutoring, mentoring, writing centres, the Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) and First Year Student Experience (FYSE). The FYSE is a blanket intervention for all first-year students registered at the university, aiming at smoothing the transition phase and introducing first-year students to university culture. However, the ECP and other personalised interventions (mentoring, writing or language centres) tend to be long-term, in some cases spanning the rest of the student's academic journey. These are meant to individualise assistance; 'enabling students to develop sound academic and social foundations for succeeding in HE and beyond'¹⁹ p. 18. By and large, these interventions have been positively reviewed, even though some of the initial success challenges remain. With the outputs still skewed by race, gender and place of residence (rural or urban), the government's 2030 vision is to create an education system in which 'all South Africans realise their full potential, in particular those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, namely black people, women and people with disabilities (PWDs),'¹⁸ p. 296.

Literature review

The rural schooling system in South Africa: The tale of the other school

While the transformational agenda is a positive trajectory, it is challenging to imagine it yielding equitable results if these changes are not applied uniformly. The challenges of rural schools in South Africa have been over-explored, with studies commenting on long distances to school, overcrowded classes, high student-teacher ratios, lack of resources, and poor linguistic development in the language of learning and teaching, especially for English.²⁷ These sub-optimum teaching and learning conditions have been blamed for low levels of digital literacy, linguistic constraints, lack of career guidance and information asymmetry, and low career and academic aspirations.^{28,29,30} In this reasoning, the NDP: Vision 2030 alludes to the schism that exists in the basic education system, where some learners, even though they achieved university admission, emerge qualitatively unprepared. This

has also been noted by The NDP¹⁸, as a 'tale of two school systems' – 'characterized by unequal performance and resource endowment'. According to the NDP¹⁸, while this system is equally detrimental as its apartheid counterpart, the discriminating criterion is now the socio-economic status of parents rather than their race. Unfortunately, the better-performing and well-resourced urban schools can only be accessed by a few, leaving the rest trapped in a system that does not sufficiently prepare them for post-school education. It is these underprepared students that need extra support if their physical university access can be translated to socio-economic mobility.^{17,21,31,32,33}

However, to fully comprehend the need and form of such interventions and support, the dynamics of rural schools must be appreciated. The basic education system, as its HE counterpart, was subject to legislative and policy transformation after the fall of the discriminatory apartheid system. In 1995, the government introduced Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which was a transformative political initiative aimed at improving curriculum focus, and instructional and assessment practices.³⁴ The goal was to equalise educational opportunities, ensuring that all who passed through the basic education system had access to post-school socio-economic opportunities, regardless of context. Four revisions have since been enacted to the school curriculum (1997, 2002, 2004, 2011), resulting in the objective to ensure the equitable and meaningful acquisition of knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives.³⁵ In 1997 was curriculum 2005 (C2005), in 2002 was the national curriculum statement (NCS), in 2004 was the revised national curriculum statement (RNCS) and in 2011 was the curriculum assessment policy statements (CAPS). Nonetheless, the schism within the schooling system has not yet been bridged. Instead of the quality white schools versus Bantu education black schools under apartheid, now you have good-quality urban schools accessible to the privileged few versus the poorly resourced, rural schools accessible to the still underprivileged.

Despite the transformational efforts engendered by the post-apartheid government, rural schools still possess hurdles for student participants.^{27,29,36} The universalisation of policy and curriculum engendered under C2005 and CAPS have had problematic consequences for rural schools.^{37,38} The mistake of attempting to equalise educational outputs without transforming the schooling context was never going to work. According to Bozalek and Boughey³⁷, the key to creating inclusive education is the acknowledgement of diversity. An attempt at homogenisation of transformational educational interventions tends to produce the opposite results of alienation if the educational delivery system is not homogenous. According to Omidire³⁸, rural schools face distinct challenges that require distinct and appropriate support interventions from urban-based schools. According to these scholars, it is the failure to disaggregate transformational interventions that have deepened the challenges of rural education in South Africa.

The current challenges of rural schooling in South Africa are broad as they are deep. The challenges associated with rural

contexts have been extensively highlighted in literature: where rural schools are adversely affected by remoteness, isolation, low socio-economic status of communities and low education of parents.^{27,29,39} These contextual challenges negatively impact the supply chain of human and physical capital of rural schools – where rural schools have inferior infrastructure and teaching staff compared to their urban counterparts. In addition, communal engagement is weakened by the educational competencies of parents.³⁹ In this context, learners become victims of poor-quality education and lack of parental support. They find themselves having to choose between commitment to school and academic aspirations and family labour.³⁸

According to Du Plessis and Mestry³⁹, rural teachers often find these challenges intractable, which reduces their morale and increases teacher turnover. South African teachers prefer urban schools, leaving vacancies in rural schools taking a long to fill or filled with inexperienced teachers. Rural teachers find rural postings as professional dumping sites – where there are few opportunities for professional development and promotion.³⁹ While the Department of Education has in the past attempted to incentivise rural teachers, participants in rural teaching still believe that rural schools remain unattractive to teachers who neither have a rural background nor previous rural working experience. They argue that teachers simply lack the socio-cultural capital to survive and thrive in rural settings.^{38,39} In some cases, working in rural areas seems to counter the academic *cum* professional aspirations of many of *getting educated and getting urbanised*. Some argue that rural areas are politically and professionally invisible. As such, anyone with professional ambitions will do well to extricate themselves from the rural posting as soon as possible. Otherwise, the longer one remains in a rural school, the more frustrated one becomes, which further compromises rural educational activities and outcomes.

Rural learners are given fewer learning opportunities, as a result of either: (1) infrastructural constraints (electricity, technological resources and extracurricular facilities), (2) contextual challenges (multi-grade teaching and lack of experience) or (3) demand deficit (low student morale or aspirations, low premium put on education by parents and community, and lack of parental monitoring). As a result, rural learners achieve low achievements in terms of academic outputs, and technological and language acquisition. These challenges are further compounded by environmental variables such as violence in schools, distance to school and lack of effective transport, low socio-economic status of the family and low educational levels of parents.³⁴ In addition, students receive less or no post-school and career guidance,²⁷ and with learners having no siblings in HEIs, learners are demotivated to exert themselves in schooling with hopes of achieving post-school educational benefits.²⁹ Consequently, rural learners have challenges aspiring, accessing or succeeding in tertiary education compared to their urban counterparts.^{27,29,40}

Apart from these challenges of rural schools associated with resource scarcity, there is also a significant difference between rural and urban schools, mostly ignored in studies, yet equally efficacious in determining learner trajectory. This is the socio-cultural aspect. Rural areas are more than just remote locations that can be sufficiently defined through demographical and socio-economic factors: they are places imbued with specific socio-cultural characteristics.⁴¹ According to Omidire³⁸, there is therefore a difference, intersectionally and socio-culturally, in the student bodies of rural and urban schools. Rural communities are characterised by relaxed, friendly and collectivist socio-cultural environments, with close social and personal ties, distinct language patterns and mannerisms.⁴² Rural institutions, including schools, are often racially and culturally homogenous, with strict gerontocratic norms.

It is uncontroversial, therefore to assume that as rural citizens, rural school learners would have mastered specific socio-cultural capital essential for functioning in the broader rural community, including schools. As shown in Du Plessis and Mestry³⁹, even rural teachers, with urban backgrounds, have to adapt to these rural normative institutions if they have to be effective. We would argue, therefore, that some of the acute hindering factors for rural-based students in HEIs are agential, the misalignment of socio-cultural capital brought by rural-based students to universities.⁴³ As 70% of universities are 'urban enclaves', students from rural areas take time adapting, and accumulating relevant socio-cultural capital to enable them to thrive and succeed.⁴³ As such, the transition of rural students from secondary to tertiary education is simultaneously epistemological and socio-cultural mobility, with the former highly dependent on the latter.

Socio-cultural capital: An omitted variable bias

The least considered source of challenges in the student's transition from basic to HE is socio-cultural factors. According to Uleanya and Uleanya⁴⁴, socio-cultural factors can impact the learning of students in complex ways and severely impede both academic and social integration. Regardless of the ubiquity of commonsensical conceptions of culture, we define it here as 'the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas, and products characteristic of a society'.⁴⁴ As such, culture transcends a mere collection of intergenerationally transmitted traditions, and entails evolving systems of shared concepts, beliefs and patterns of behaviour. While the culture in contemporary societies is very volatile and fluid, there are still resilient worldviews inspired by certain socio-cultural exposures that can impact human development in a path-dependent fashion unless intervened. Broadly speaking, a worldview is an assertion, usually expressed in universal terms, about how the world works and man's place in it.⁴⁵ As can be seen, it can take cosmic or religious form, in which case it attempts to answer broader existential questions, such as the nature and function of the universe. According to Guba and Lincoln, this dimension can be defined as a:

[S]et of *basic beliefs* that define, for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' and the individual's place in it, and a range of possible relationships to [the] world and its parts.⁴⁶ (p. 107)

However, the concern in this article is the worldview as it pertains to human nature and behaviour, or what has been referred to as social worldviews.

Social worldviews are influenced by both environmental and genetic factors⁴⁵ and denote universal, cultural and natural values through which personal, historical and social experiences are transferred from generation to generation, with educative, formative and developmental functions.⁴⁵ Without getting into different typologies of these social worldviews (*theoretical, household and emotional-psychological*), it is vital to note the role of culture in sustaining and transmitting these worldviews from generation to generation within a localised geographical setting. The non-material cultural component of every society embodies a system of values and beliefs, norms (mores, folkways or customs), language and rituals that facilitate a process of identity formation, development and transformation. Through the process of enculturation, young people learn their societal worldviews and use them to navigate day-to-day challenges. This has been called cultural capital.⁹

Pierre Bourdieu⁹ enlisted the concept of capital accumulated labour which enables the appropriation of social energy, production of profit and reproduction of itself in explaining the general development and maintenance of social structure. Bourdieu⁹ argued that in order to understand the nature, function and evolution of social structure (what can be termed society) and the evolving positions of individuals in it, one needs to examine the nature and distribution of different forms of capital to different classes.⁹ According to Bourdieu⁹, cultural capital is conceivable in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. This means that cultural capital can either be an integral part of an individual, as 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (embodied), material objects produced by the ingenuity of an individual (objectified) or institutionalised outward approximation of individual capability and worth – such as educational credentials (institutionalised).⁹ While Bourdieu⁹ took for granted how these instantiations of cultural capital vary from one context to the other, he used this understanding of cultural capital to explain the unequal academic achievement of children from different social classes.

According to Bourdieu⁹, a child coming from a social unit (family) with more accumulated forms of cultural capital is likely to realise higher academic achievements. The accumulation of cultural capital, in its various forms, is as much a function of natural aptitude (hereditary transmission) as is a result of conscious or unconscious social immersion.⁹ As such, the context in which a child grows is important in the development of certain forms of cultural capital. However, a form of cultural capital a child brings to the educational setting can either be of negative or positive value depending on its proximity to the 'scholastic market'.⁹ On the other hand, the quality of cultural capital a child embodies depends on the time invested, the quality of social arrangements and the effort. As can be seen, the availability

and quality of social networks are important to the development of positive cultural capital. Relevant to this study, a child coming from a family where other members have attained other forms of post-secondary education and training (PSET), is likely to have a conducive environment and time to prepare for a similar journey, compared to the one who aspires to be the first to go to university.

According to Bourdieu⁹ p. 21, the 'aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of relationships, which provides an individual with the backing of collectively-owned capital' is called socio-capital.⁹ According to Woolcock and Narayan, one's socio-capital – connections with family, friends and organisations – consists of stocks of networks and contacts that can provide resources and support when needed.⁴⁷ According to Woolcock and Narayan⁴⁷ conscientious parents know that a child's intelligence and motivation are not enough to ensure a bright future and close competitions for jobs and contracts are usually won by those with 'friends' in high places.

As such, 'networking' has become a standard prescription to those who seek personal improvement (through employment and business start-ups), as a short-hand of the almost-pejorative aphorism: it is not what you know; it is whom you know. The quantity and quality of one's socio-capital depend on the size and quality of the network one can effectively mobilise. Although irreducible to economic or cultural capital possessed by each member of the network, Bourdieu⁹ contends that socio-capital exerts a 'multiplier effect' on the forms of capital the individual already possesses. While they come in different types (productive and perverse) and forms (bonding, bridging and linking), they have been acknowledged to 'help explain the dynamics of economic growth [and differential individual welfare] beyond the presence of common capitals (physical, economic, human)⁹. Bourdieu⁹ has also argued that socio-capital also can be used to explain the 'persistence of class differences and resilient social inequalities' because the elite use it to 'reproduce their prerogatives'. According to him, while the fungibility of different types of capital is the basis of social progress for an individual, as one trades one capital for another to attain or maintain certain social positioning, the 'incommensurability of the possessed and desired capital introduces a high degree of uncertainty and frustration'.⁹

While the role of economic capital in one's social progress is conventionally acknowledged, this study focuses on the latter forms of capital: cultural and social – here termed 'socio-cultural' capital. While cultural capital entails the embodiment of natural aptitudes (intelligence) and results of primary and secondary socialisations, and socio-capital is the benefits one gets from the stock of social connections, socio-cultural capital refers to personal characteristics gained and enhanced through social interactions. The nature and quality of socio-cultural capital depend on the time one spends within a significant social context and influences one's view of the social world. The study then argues that for one to

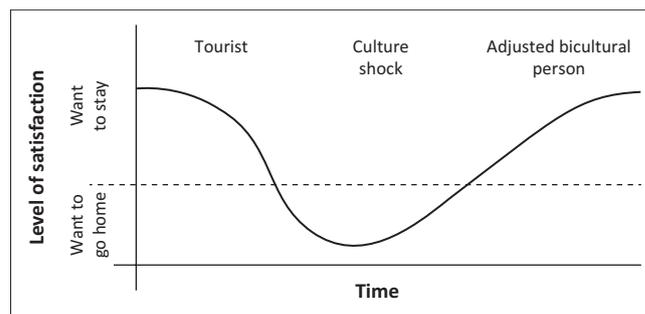
succeed in a new social context depends on the extent to which the content of his or her socio-cultural capital is adaptable to the new context and the proximity of that capital to the requirements of success in the new environment. While students' universities with socio-cultural capital enabled them to successfully complete secondary education, their epistemological access and success depend on how the proximity of this capital to university success criteria and their ability to adapt it should there be a need. This is the question of the fungibility (or non-) of students' socio-cultural capital for access and success in HE.

According to Hiebert, an individual leaving their own culture for another will be confronted with a significant amount of confusion and cultural disorientation, in which she or he finds it hard to cope with even the simplest of mundane tasks.⁴⁸ This is because the novice (or tourist) does not immediately understand the values, norms and language of the new cultural setting; social behaviour becomes inconceivable. This leads to a period of actional stagnation and social alienation, as opines:

Suddenly, they have become children who must begin again to learn a whole new way of life. To add to the confusion, cultural landmarks that appear familiar may be foreign, because the same behaviour has a radically different meaning in a different society. Many people respond with contempt for the new society and separate themselves into their cultural ghettos. (p. 36)⁴⁸

The period of cultural confusion and social disorientation, or what Alves López and Peña Portero have termed rejection and regression, is termed cultural shock which can overwhelm the newcomer with feelings of disengagement, and the need to go home.⁴⁹ On the other hand, should the newcomer resist the urge to abscond, completes the process of negotiation and adjustment,⁴⁹ she or he gets acculturated and becomes and a bicultural person – who has become well-adjusted to the new culture and functions with similar efficacy as she would under own culture.⁴⁸ This is usually achieved as a result of establishing social ties and functional familiarity with new institutions that allow one to function effectively. In explaining this concept, Hiebert employs the diagram in Figure 1.

It is these social benefits derived from the new social ties, and cultural and psychological adjustments, that make the



Source: Hiebert PG. Gospel and culture: The WCC project. *Missiology*. 1997;25(2):199–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969702500208>

FIGURE 1: The anatomy of culture shock.

cultural entrant (visitor) retain a semblance of social normalcy in an otherwise new culture which we call socio-cultural capital. These stocks of networks and/or the resultant resources come in different types and forms, and they have been acknowledged to 'help explain the dynamics of differential individual welfare beyond the presence of common capital (physical, economic, human)'.⁵⁰ While Bourdieu, focused on the convertibility of capital between its different forms (cultural, economic, social), did not explain how each form adapts itself in different contexts, in order to remain effective. In this article, we ask whether the socio-cultural capital developed by students from rural schools, in their local communities and during basic education, is sufficient enough and effective for their social and academic activities in universities.

Research methods and design

Intervening rural-university transition: A lapse in praxis

Unfortunately, the extant literature on students' success is infused with unrepentant ethnocentrism, in which paradigmatic minorities are condemned and bullied to conform to 'universal' standards without an attempt to understand their position.⁵¹ As such, this article argues that the success in student transition and success interventions, especially those targeting previously disadvantaged categories such as rural-based students, rests not only in iterative academic interventions but in charitable cultural relativism and some level of bracketing. The role of developing appropriate socio-cultural capital must be at the centre of every intervention. This entails examining the socio-cultural capital brought by the specific students, in order to determine its effectiveness.

The literature on rural students' outcomes suggests challenges in schooling that make it harder for them to access HE. On the other hand, literature on success in HE indicates challenges for first-year students to survive and thrive at university. The challenges range from purely academic ones that have been explored as part of epistemological access, and socio-cultural ones that have not been sufficiently covered. This article augments an understanding of rural student success in HE by focusing on their socio-cultural capital. The deficiency of academic skills sufficient for articulation from basic to HE has been well explored in literature. As a result, since the early 2000s, efforts have been employed to intervene in this articulation gap, as detailed in the 'Socio-cultural capital: An omitted variable bias' section. However, very little effort, in literature and practice, has been engendered on intervening discrepancies in socio-cultural capital.

The intervention for rural students to effectively transition to HE will have to, necessarily, be bilateral. Firstly, the navigation of rurality and basic education needs to be intervened. According to extant literature,^{38,42,52} rural contexts offer environments that are not supportive of children's learning aspirations. Students find themselves as some form

of social misnomer just for aspiring to continue with their education. Learners have parents with low education levels, aspirations and regard. As such, they lack a conducive environment in which they can continue their learning outside of classroom settings. It is therefore, the role of rural education stakeholders to create an environment conducive to holistic learning for students, as well as help to transform the socio-cultural worldview surrounding education in rural communities. According to Bourdieu⁹, the effective development of cultural capital requires a supportive environment and sufficient time.

Secondly, from the reviewed literature, it is clear that students from rural settings have distinct socio-cultural capital that, while enabling them social efficacy in their rural settings, makes it challenging for them to cope and thrive in contexts endemic in South African HEIs. The challenge starts with rural schooling, in which urban-based and trained teachers are frogmarched to rural schools where they reluctantly work. Teachers in rural schools complain about social and professional alienation. As such, teachers find themselves transformed by the rural socio-cultural context instead of equipping learners with a social worldview necessary for thriving in academic contexts. For example, language is a major factor in integrating into many universities. However, rural learners have fewer opportunities for developing sufficient levels of linguistic competencies, especially in English, which is the language of instruction in South African universities. While acknowledging an extensive plethora of useful socio-cultural literacies rural learners are equipped with, an intervention to be comfortable with developing linguistic competencies necessary for HE participation will be crucial.

Thirdly, in addition to academic support, career guidance and expansion of information access, rural students require experiential equipment regarding the differences between rural schools and university socio-cultural contexts. In this regard, workshops, campus visits, exchange programmes and similar activities will be necessary to enable students to glean the transformation they have to undergo to effectively participate in HE.²⁹ According to Maila and Ross²⁷, such interventions need to be implemented as early as Grade 10, to enable learners time to internalise the differences and engender necessary changes.

Lastly, according to Hiebert⁴⁸, anyone moving from one cultural context to another must be allowed time to adapt to the new environment. Unfortunately, this time includes cultural shock, in which students will be socio-culturally disoriented upon arriving at urban-based universities. One can explain the high drop-out rate in universities in the first years. However, the anticipated belated intervention must pre-emptively engage with this phenomenon and sufficiently prepare students for the stressful loop in their adaptation to university life. Such an intervention must include skills to navigate socio-cultural heterogeneity, the individualistically competitive nature of urban culture, as well as the need to

embrace a democratic and proactive outlook in dealing with colleagues and university institutions. On the other hand, Shefer et al. stress the importance of advocating for a socially just and inclusive academic environment within the supply side of university education, encouraging embracing diversity.²⁶

While research has focused on the challenges faced by rural students in accessing semi-urban and urban universities in South Africa and comparative contexts, such as Lesotho,^{41,53} this article transcends the positivist orientation of the extant literature. With a combined experience of over 20 years working in student transition to HE, as practitioners and researchers, the authors factored their personal experiences into the deductions of literature in making a recommendation for the effective transition of students from rural schools who enter semi-urban and urban universities in South Africa. As such, the 'A trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space from rural schools to university' section has a highly advocacy tone, as the researchers transition from observations and conclusions of literature to strategic steps.

Results and discussion

A trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space from rural schools to university

The appreciation of human beings as complex and multidimensional is now conventional in many disciplines.⁵⁴ As such, any analysis that focuses on human experience needs to fully cater for this complexity by shying away from mono-analytical frameworks. Hiebert⁵⁴ has recommended a multi-modal and systems approach in dealing with human phenomena, in contrast to a stratigraphic or reductionist approach.⁵⁴ He argued that 'any holistic approach to the study of human experience must integrate various models into a broader framework without the loss of understanding that each model brings'. To achieve this one has to: (1) accept different models of explanation; (2) show the interaction between the model and phenomena and (3) show the interaction between various models in the analytic framework. This integration of various perspectives in assessing human experience has been exemplified in the discipline of education, at various levels. While it has been acknowledged that education may obviously deal with the cognitive and intellectual realms of human experience, the socio-cultural and developmental (psychology, sociology) have also been variedly appreciated. Hoinle, Roose and Shekhar⁵⁵ have noted that teaching formats involving non-academic stakeholders are interestingly gaining importance to assist in delivering a socially congruent educational system and assist in the academic, civic and professional development of students.⁵⁵

Budwig and Alexander⁵⁶ in their appreciation of this transdisciplinary student learning within the context of HE, have focused on three intersecting disciplinary strands: learning sciences, developmental sciences and HE sciences. They argue that when interacting with HE practitioners, the perspectives from learning and developmental sciences bring

a unique vantage point to understanding student learning. Various pedagogical theories and experiences are instructive in how students learn, adapt to new phones and models of knowledge, and how design learning experiences that attempt to maximise the learning process. These theories are invaluable at all levels of education, but without other disciplines focusing on other aspects of human development, they remain incomplete. As such, developmental sciences (psychology, sociology and ethics) assist educational practitioners to understand that individual learners or students have unique receptivity to learning processes because of their psychosocial developmental positions. According to Budwig and Alexander⁵⁶, the learning processes of students must be superimposed with their developmental processes. Various prescribed learning models (deep learning, inquiry-based learning and self-regulated learning) consider students' metacognitive abilities. The student must be able to reflect on their learning process, and this is crucial in higher levels of education. However, this reflection is aligned with the individual's developmental processes. In HE, student self-awareness is crucial to the achievement of various learning processes (student engagement and student-centred learning) and outcomes (knowledge production and application, and community engagement). As such, an education system that meets these learning dynamics and is sufficient for holistic student development has to move away from neoliberal models of educational compartmentalisation and embrace a systems approach. This must pervade throughout the education system, and mark various important transitions, such as the one from basic to HE.

This article argues for a trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary intervention space in aiding learners from rural areas to develop sufficient socio-cultural capital that will aid their effective transition from basic education to university. According to Bourdieu⁹, the development and maintenance of cultural and socio-capital depend on the social context and the time spent in it. One needs to invest in the accumulation of effective social models and connections.⁹ In this regard, we follow and transcend the prescriptions of Budwig and Alexander⁵⁶ on the systems approach. According to them, 'a systems approach, pulling together disparate levels of analysis (learning sciences, developmental sciences, and HE) provides a powerful way of moving against the neoliberal fragmentation'.⁵⁶ We argue that, in addition, a special focus on the development of appropriate socio-cultural capital for learners moving from rural schools to urban-based universities is warranted. In this regard, we appreciate the extant effort being made towards enhancing the articulation of students from schools to universities, through interventions from universities and civil society organisations.

Various institutions have community outreach portfolios whose task is to reach out to feeder schools within their catchment areas to ensure that learners are aware of various programmes and (academic) requirements. In this regard, HEIs cannot be faulted for lack of 'career guidance' expos and 'open days' – yet as we argue in this article, these efforts, while laudable and needed, fall short of meeting the transition needs of many learners from rural schools. This is largely because

they are largely reductionist – focusing on academic qualifications within a particular HEI and/or requirements of disciplines. It is as though, contract to recurring empirical evidence when prospective students meet these institutional or disciplinary academic requirements they are meant to survive and thrive once admitted. As such, we argue that these HEI-organised transitional activities are incomplete if they do not: (1) sufficiently address the socio-cultural dimension of the transition, (2) employ a longitudinal and systemic approach to transition, engaging civil society organisations (CSOs) and basic education institutions in their activities and, (3) disaggregate support according to location and type of schools they are dealing with.

We, therefore, propose a trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space in which education institutions (basic and HE) collaborate with government and non-state partners to ensure sufficient and effective transition, especially for rural school learners (Figure 2).

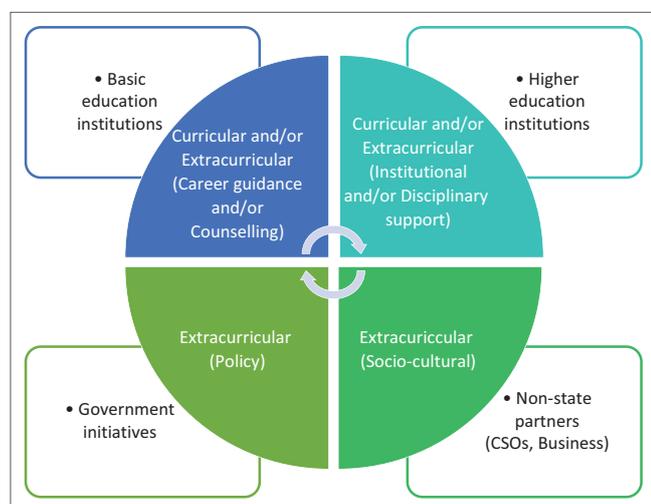
Rural schools have an integral role to place as nascent incubators of learners. They should ensure that both their curricular and extra-curricular obligations to learners are met, through the effective use of their own resources and creating networks with other sectors and stakeholders. A close collaboration with the government ensures that quality human, technological and physical resources and infrastructure are available, whereas a continuous engagement with HEIs and non-state partners will ensure that the curricular and extra-curricular engagement remains relevant and/or sufficient quality and rigour. Higher education institutions, especially within the transformative framework of post-apartheid South Africa, need to ensure that curricular and extracurricular support is available and systematic to feeder schools. Higher education institutions, through their support departments (student development, literacy and career guidance), must ensure that programmes are created on specific socio-cultural capitals prevalent in HE, and those needed for success in various competencies of HE. In these two levels, we borrow insights from Budwig and

Alexander's systems approach, in integrating learning sciences, development sciences and HE approaches. As such, a transition from pedagogy to various pedagogical activities (student-centred learning [SDL]), community engagements, knowledge production and application) must be deliberately integrated into the transitional space, informed by current sciences and empirical evidence.

The post-apartheid government has been engaged in various aspects of transforming the educational space. These efforts have taken various dimensions, from human resources, infrastructure development, access and success, to funding. While these have not been without their own challenges, it is hoped that various government levels continue their concerted effort in transforming educational spaces in order to bring them to contemporary relevancy, especially within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Investment in technological infrastructure, especially in rural schools, still lags behind many comparative middle-income countries. While South African HE is globally competitive, basic education is still faced with many challenges, and incessant inequality, especially between rural and urban contexts. Therefore, the government's role is to ensure that rural schools are brought to the level where they can sufficiently prepare learners to equitably participate in globally competitive university spaces. While the government can engage through policy-making and financing, it is the plethora of non-state actors who are best poised to implement these interventions.

Several CSOs are already involved in various aspects of transition, from student finance to tutorial services. Some of these CSOs have the best transitional frameworks that must be incorporated into conventional practice. These include interaction with both basic and HE spaces, gathering data on student progress and success, as well as employing a holistic perspective on student *cum* human development. However, because these organisations are regional and constrained with financial and human resources, their practices remain segregated to specific areas and target a portion of students in need.

This article recommends that their activities be incorporated into the mainstream transitional intervention and made accessible to every learner or student. In addition, CSO is also well-positioned to engage local communities in order to assist the development of effective socio-cultural capital for rural learners. Corporate organisations are always peripheral in the educational process, only limiting their corporate social responsibility to funding modalities (for infrastructure development, human capital and human resources). In this way, they remain inconspicuous of the everyday activities of education. The researchers suggest that CSOs can be conspicuously engaged in the transition of rural students from schools to universities. For example, receptacles of the world of work, and their involvement in career guidance forums will be very instrumental and informative, as they have relevant information on current labour practices. Their corporate social responsibility could also involve extending



CSO, civil society organisations.

FIGURE 2: Trans-sectoral or transdisciplinary transitional space from rural schools to university.

mentorship programmes to rural learners, which will be instrumental in the development of relevant socio-cultural capital needed in the contemporary world of work. In order to breach the gap created in the current transition practices, because of haphazard and discretionary programming and intervention, we suggest this multilevel (curricular or extracurricular) trans-sectoral (education, government policy and non-state) and transdisciplinary (learning sciences, development sciences and HE) space transition from school to university.

Conclusion

The rural–urban disparity in educational outputs has been analysed in socio-economic terms, and access to resources. While this tells part of the important story, starting with the conditions of many rural schools in South Africa, it is not the whole story. In this article, we have argued for, what we think is the other part of the explanatory puzzle: the role of socio-cultural capital. The concept of rurality extends beyond demographics and socio-economic boundaries: it is a place imbued with distinct socio-cultural traits, worldviews and capital. Learners from rural schools are competent in this rural socio-cultural capital and function optimally as effective members of their communities. However, these effective tools of rural existence may not be sufficient in navigating the urban enclaves of university life; students need to adapt to new socio-cultural realities endemic in urban cultures – learn a specific language, demeanour, interpersonal skills, and be able to live and work within and ethnic heterogeneous mix. Interventions for the transition from rural schools to universities must be structured to enable the development (or transformation) of effective socio-cultural capital to survive and thrive within the HE context. It is only then that rural learners will reap the benefits of a transformed HE system.

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Authors' contributions

N.P.K. and N.S. contributed equally to this work and wrote the final version of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Durban University of Technology Institutional Research Ethics Committee (reference no.: IREC 220/22).

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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