

Title: Navigational Capital: A Concept for Rethinking Graduate Employability in Uncertain Futures

Keywords: Graduate employability, Navigational capital, Higher education innovation, Future literacy

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Research Overview (43 words)

This conceptual study develops “navigational capital” as an eight-dimensional framework integrating possessional, positional , and processual perspectives to rethink graduate employability in uncertain futures. It aims to inform transformative educational projects that blend academic, general, and extracurricular learning to foster student agency, future literacy, and the ability to design a meaningful life in a rapidly changing world..

Purpose of this study

This study explores and advances a transformative approach to understanding university-to-work transitions and to rethinking graduate employability in uncertain futures. The theoretical foundation draws on Pierre Bourdieu’ s theory of practice and Holmes (2013)’ s framework of employability and engagement as dynamic processes, incorporating possessional (emphasising acquired skills and attributes), positional (considering social and contextual factors), and processual approaches (focusing on ongoing development). The theoretical framework of this paper integrates habitus as embodied navigational dispositions, alongside the convertibility of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals, allowing graduates to interpret shifting field rules, anticipate constraints, and recalibrate their trajectories between higher education, labour markets, and broader life arenas. This framework synthesises the three approaches to frame graduate employability and engagement as dynamic processes that are experienced, agentic, contextual, and temporal, rather than static possessions or positions.

Specifically, it develops the conceptualisation of “navigational capital”, which i

enhances scholarly understanding of graduate employability and engagement. Beyond its analytical applications, this framework drives innovation in effective, personalised, and sustainable higher education practices and policies that promote student self-understanding, agency, and meaningful life design. It ultimately empowering learners to become more future-literate, confident, and imaginative amidst uncertainty.

Research Method

This study adopts a conceptual and integrative research approach to develop and advance the notion of “navigational capital” as an eight-dimensional framework for rethinking graduate employability and university-to-work transitions under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than generating new primary empirical data, the methodology centres on the systematic synthesis, critical analysis, and theoretical integration of existing scholarly literature, established theoretical traditions, and educational practices across multiple domains.

The core method is an integrative review (Toronto & Remington, 2020) which is particularly well-suited to the aims of the study because it accommodates the inclusion and synthesis of diverse sources, including theoretical works, empirical studies, conceptual papers, and practice-oriented literature, into a unified, holistic understanding that generates new insights and frameworks. Unlike more restrictive systematic reviews that often prioritise homogeneity of method or evidence hierarchies, the integrative review enables the creative yet rigorous combination of disparate perspectives to address complex, multidimensional phenomena and support theory development.

In this study, the integrative review facilitates the creation of a forward-looking, actionable model by bridging and reconfiguring elements from academic programme design, university general education, student affairs, career education, and entrepreneurship education. Guided by Bourdieu’s theory of practice and Holmes’ (2013) possessional–positional–processual framework, the synthesis process involved problem identification, comprehensive literature searching across disciplinary

boundaries, critical evaluation of sources, iterative data analysis (drawing on qualitative techniques such as thematic comparison, constant comparison, and pattern identification), and the interpretive reconfiguration of concepts into the novel “navigational capital” construct. This methodical integration ensures that the resulting framework is not merely additive but emergent, offering enhanced analytical power and practical utility for personalised and sustainable higher education practices.

Results and Discussion

Navigational capital is conceptualised here as an eight-dimensional configuration of graduate resources: conviction and psychological capital, health and physical resilience, intellectual capital, educational capital, social and relational capital, cultural capital, futures literacy and decisional capability, and digital innovation capital. This conceptual framework functions as a field-specific form of capital enabling strategic movement across unequal social spaces. The findings introduce navigational capital as a key framework for empowering students to navigate uncertainties. This approach fosters enhanced graduate employability, engagement, and empowerment by blending disciplinary, general, and extracurricular education, prioritising personalised guidance and passion-driven projects. It offers practical strategies that inform various educational domains, resulting in a learner-centred model that promotes self-understanding, agency, future literacy, confidence, and imaginative thriving in an unpredictable world.

The practical implications involve redesigning higher education programmes, curricula, and student support services to integrate navigational capital cultivation, enabling institutions to provide personalised guidance, passion-driven projects, and learner-centered practices that enhance graduate employability, engagement, and empowerment. Socially, this approach fosters a more resilient, future-literate youth population capable of navigating uncertainties, contributing to societal adaptability, meaningful life design, and sustainable workforce development in an unpredictable global landscape.

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