UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

An Exploratory Investigation into the Experiences of Degree Apprenticeship Learners: through the Lens of Bourdieu

Stella McKnight

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-5226-847X

Doctor of Education

March 2023

This thesis has been completed as a requirement for the postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester

Declaration and Copyright Statement

Declaration:

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other University or other Institute of learning.

I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work.

I confirm that no work previously submitted for credit or published in the public domain has been reused verbatim. Any previously submitted work has been revised, developed and recontextualised relevant to the thesis.

I confirm that no material of this thesis has been published in advance of its submission.

I confirm that no third-party proof-reading or editing has been used in this thesis.

Copyright:

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the degree apprentices who contributed to my study. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. Your contribution to this study will pave the way for others to be bold in taking the less trodden path.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Martin Broad and Dr Craig Johnston for the time they have taken reading through my drafts and for their thoughtful and supportive feedback. Also, a thank you to former members of my supervisory team, Shaun Best, Neil Marriott, and Martina Hutton, for their constant encouragement.

To my Mum and Dad, Maureen and Robert, you instilled in me the value of working hard and gave me encouragement to be the best I can be in all that I do. I know you will be proud of what this study aims to achieve.

Thank you to my wonderful daughter and son, Victoria and Stephen, you have always been my inspiration. I never could have completed this without those extra hugs when my self-belief wavered.

Ben and Ollie, sorry but 'nanny-bag bingo' won't be quite as challenging in future 😊.

A thank you to Ra for your company through the early morning writing sessions of the past few weeks and to Kasper for your cuddles which helped me to unwind at the end of a long day.

To my Doctoral friends: Liz, Mandy, and Beth, you have been my study buddies throughout the EdD. I enjoyed our shared journey. And to my ex-colleague and friend, David Way, it was great to debate many thought-provoking themes – Thank you!

I would particularly like to thank my good friend Lisa Harding for your kindness and above all for keeping me going through the duration of the write-up, your belief and support has kept me going through some challenging times. And thank you also to Tracey for your words of encouragement 'from afar'. You are both stars!

And finally, I would like to thank Michael for releasing me from caddying duties – can't wait to get back on your A-Team.

Abstract

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT

An Exploratory Investigation into the Experiences of Degree Apprenticeship Learners: through the Lens of Bourdieu

Stella McKnight

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5226-847X

Doctor of Education

March 2023

This study explores the experiences of degree apprentices studying in higher education institutions in England. The study identifies the factors influencing their enrolment on to the degree apprenticeship and examines their experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship. The study adopts a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews with seventeen-degree apprentices one year after their graduation. Analysis of the interviews is inductive, using reflexive thematic analysis and findings are explored through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of capital.

Findings from this study highlight the complex interplay between the multi-faceted factors influencing an individual's 'choice' to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship, and how these influences are evident in the choices and sacrifices they are willing to make to complete the degree apprenticeship programme. The influence of these factors is also evident in some of the narrative surrounding affirmation of their choices post-completion of the programme. Further analysis of degree apprentice's experiences identifies a transactional and tactical approach to the degree apprenticeship and an emerging recognition of the benefits of networking within their employing organisation resulting in varied and ad-hoc strategies for the acquisition and mobilisation of social capital required for social mobility.

This study offers valuable and original insight into the complex nature of degree apprenticeship work-based learning. The study contributes to the literature and current debates relating to the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship in closing skills gaps and increasing social mobility. It also contributes to the wider context of social mobility policy. The study makes recommendations for changes to educational policy and practice in relation to the degree apprenticeship standards and curriculum design to include explicit reference to networking (currently absent from some standards) and networking skills as part of the curriculum.

Key words: Degree apprenticeships; Work-based learning; Pierre Bourdieu; Social capital; Social mobility.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1.0 Chapter One – Introduction

> '(W)hoever wants to win this game, appropriate the stakes, catch the ball … must have a feel for the game, that is, a feel for the necessity and the logic of the game'
>
> (Bourdieu, 1990:64).

This thesis explores learners' experiences of a degree apprenticeship. It captures what learners identify as the factors influencing their enrolment on to a degree apprenticeship programme, their experiences during the programme and their reflections on the programme having completed their apprenticeship. In simple terms, a degree apprenticeship enables an individual to combine studying for a degree qualification with an apprenticeship in a vocationally relevant and paid job role. A more in-depth discussion pertaining to the definition and purpose of degree apprenticeships is presented in section 1.1.

In exploring the experiences of these learners, this study adopts a pragmatist philosophy using a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with degree apprenticeship learners one year post completion of their apprenticeship. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and findings explored through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of capital.

Findings highlight the complex interplay between the multiple factors influencing a learner's choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship and how these influences are evident in affirming their choice post-completion. Findings also highlight the compromises these degree apprentices make in seeking to balance the demands of work, study, and personal lives with benefits to be gained through the apprenticeship. The findings reveal degree apprentices' positivity in relation to their: academic achievement; being able to earn while they learn; and their ability to get ahead in the game (for example, the combination of a degree qualification and work experience) in terms of career prospects. This positivity is tempered by the intensity, pressure, and tensions associated with balancing commitments. This is most notable in relation to seizing opportunities for potential social mobility, that is, the movement from 'one socio-economic position to another' (Webb *et al.*, 2017:148). Findings expose the negative impact these pressures and tensions have on their opportunity to develop strategies for longer-term acquisition and use of cultural and social capital, potentially preventing sustained upward social mobility.

This introductory chapter provides the background and context to the study, together with the rationale for this research. It begins with an overview of the higher education context in which

there is an increasing number of non-traditional degree learners. The research aim and objectives are then presented. This is followed by an overview of the researcher's background and experiences. A summary of how this study contributes to knowledge and understanding of degree apprentice learner experiences is provided. Finally, the structure of this thesis is outlined.

1.1 The degree apprenticeship: A model of work-based learning

In the United Kingdom (UK) education, including higher education (HE), continues to be viewed by many as a path to economic prosperity. University degrees are seen as the prevailing benchmark of achievement, a prerequisite for higher skilled jobs and vital to the foundation of an individual's chances of upward mobility (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018; Social Mobility Commission, 2021).

There has been a dramatic increase in student numbers from 600,000 home students in 1999 to 1.4 million in 2009 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2011). This growing engagement in higher education has led to the claim that a higher education is now 'essential to achieve success, a stable material position, in life and career' (Burlutskaia, 2014:54). By the academic year 2017/18, 50.2% of young people were participating in higher education (Department of Education, 2019) and in the academic year 2020/21, 2.75 million students were enrolled onto a university programme in the UK (Statista, 2022). However, even though some young people leave school with the requisite qualifications for entrance to higher education, they do not progress onto a traditional full-time programme of study at a university.

One UK government initiative in recent years that has seen an increase in the volume of individuals opting out of this traditional route to a degree post full-time education is the introduction of the degree apprenticeship. In policy literature, degree apprenticeships are defined as apprenticeships combined with degrees, providing individuals with vocationally relevant paid jobs that incorporate on- and off-the-job training whilst also supporting the development of economically valuable skills in the future workforce (HM Government, 2017).

A more contemporary definition of a degree apprenticeship, which is in keeping with degree apprenticeship reform today, is that it is 'a distinctive product that secures the best of an apprenticeship and the best of higher education' (IfATE, 2022:1). It is interesting to note that this definition assumes what is 'best' is known. Given that it is taken from government policy it is likely that 'best' will be determined by impact on business growth and the UK economy rather than on the views of individuals engaging in degree apprenticeship learning.

The introduction of the degree apprenticeship smoothed the way for higher education providers, including universities, to apply to join the government's Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers and offer a new form of non-traditional, ***work-based***, higher education as a route to a degree. Hence the degree apprenticeship is considered a new model of work-based learning, a form of learning which focuses on the realities of practice within a theoretical and reflective framework (Hardacre and Workman, 2010). It is this combination of theory and practice that has led to suggestions that degree apprenticeships 'represent perhaps the best effort in recent years to close the 'academic/vocational divide' in higher-level British education and training and give equal status to the academic and the practical' (Lester, 2020:2).

In England, degree apprenticeships are normally available to anyone over the age of 18. They take between three and four years to complete and a successful degree apprentice will receive both the nationally recognised degree qualification and an apprenticeship certificate. Degree apprenticeships are therefore both a vocational and academic programme which include a degree and a job (the apprenticeship). Accordingly, opportunities for progression in education and a career are now seen as integral to each other (Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019).

Degree apprenticeship is distinct from other forms of work-based learning in that it aims to respond to two flagship policy areas: to create a supply of skilled individuals to support ***national economic growth*** while simultaneously offering increased opportunity for ***social mobility*** (QAA, 2019). Social mobility being 'the movement of people over time from one socio-economic position to another' (Webb *et al*., 2017:148).

1.1.1 The degree apprenticeship: An alternative way to access higher education

Recent research (for example, Lester and Bravenboer, 2020; Social Mobility Commission, 2020) has explored the impact of introducing the degree apprenticeship as an alternative way to access higher education. Early findings suggest that, as policy intended, degree apprenticeships are creating new routes into higher-level work and another way to access higher education. Thereby acting as a vehicle for upskilling (UUK, 2019). The degree apprenticeship is therefore viewed as being significant in creating an alternative to full-time education (Lester *et al*., 2016; McKnight, *et al*., 2019).

Currently, in the UK there are 152 approved apprenticeship standards at level 6 or 7, of which 102 have a degree qualification (IfATE, 2022). Data indicates degree apprenticeships are increasing in popularity with 30,500 people commencing a degree apprenticeship (Level 6 or 7) in 2019/20, an increase on 13,587 enrolments in 2018/19 (Hubble and Bolton, 2019). Thereby lending further support to the suggestion that the degree apprenticeship has created an

alternative to full-time education. In addition, it is claimed that the increase in enrolments demonstrate the progressively important role degree apprenticeships are playing in the UK education and skills system, 'enabling employers to meet their skills needs and supporting productivity' (IfATE, 2021:6). However, it is noted that although it was claimed that progression to university or an apprenticeship would be the 'norm for young people' (HM Government, 2013:3), data indicates over half of the higher-level apprenticeships starting in August to October 2018 were recorded as being individuals over 25 years of age (Department for Education, 2018).

Whilst data highlights increasing engagement in higher education and identifies how degree apprenticeships are supporting growth in the UK economy, research shows that the academic vocational divide endures (Ball, 2010; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). In addition, there is a lack of transparency as to how these educational policies and reforms support ***social mobility***. Although Lester and Bravenboer (2020:57) suggest 'that there are encouraging examples of social mobility', they add 'there is also room for improvement'. This sentiment is reflected in a project conducted by the Edge Consortium, in which only 45% of employers felt that degree apprenticeships had contributed to social mobility (Lester, 2020).

1.1.2 The degree apprenticeship and social mobility

Despite the emphasis on employers' needs and business productivity noted above, it is important to recognise government apprenticeship reforms are ultimately intended to contribute to ***social mobility*** (BIS, 2015) by investing in the potential for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The last two decades have seen successive governments seeking to create mechanisms to facilitate higher levels of social mobility through public policy reform (Bathmaker *et al*., 2013; Mayhew and Keep, 2014). Several government policies and interventions were introduced with the aim of improving educational equity, addressing university participation, and attainment gaps that have existed historically between privileged and non-privileged social groups in the UK. These policies and interventions targeted individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds with the aim of improving their life chances (Leitch Review of Skills 2006; BIS 2011; Sainsbury Review, 2016; UK Industrial Strategy, 2017).

Despite these public policy reforms, perception that higher education did not offer a level playing field for all students persisted undermining their effectiveness as a force for social mobility (Reay, 2001; Hillen and Levy, 2015). This, combined with data showing the UK as having one of the lowest social mobility levels of all high-income countries (Ledwith, 2016),

prompted the government to launch degree apprenticeships in 2015. A key government aim being to accommodate learners such as those who are working, known as mature learners (defined as over 21 in policy context) or those who are, according to Allard (2005, in Bathmaker, 2015) regarded as economically disadvantaged or first in their family to participate in higher education (Allard, 2005 in Bathmaker, 2015; Engeli and Turner, 2019). Therefore, these apprenticeship programmes formed part of the wider change in Vocational Education and Training (VET) driven by the government for England aimed at addressing the low levels of educational and skills attainment linked to historic problems of constrained social mobility (Blanden *et al.,* 2005; Raffo *et al*., 2015).

The 2017 Apprenticeship Reform Programme set out government ambition to bring the worlds of work and higher education together under a policy initiative that was designed to increase both productivity ***and*** social mobility. Thereby placing degree apprenticeship work-based learning (WBL) centre stage of government priorities (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). Although initially funded by government, since 2017 funding for the degree apprenticeship is by way of a payroll levy on employers. According to the government, the introduction of the levy was intended to respond to a structural decline in UK investment in skills by putting investment in training, and apprenticeships, on a long-term sustainable footing (Halfon, 2017). Therefore, whilst Powell and Walsh (2017:93) argue the levy is, 'a funding mechanism and one by which the government wishes to influence buyer behaviour', the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2016) and the Department for Education (2017) claim that this change in funding is designed to encourage an increase in social mobility and inclusivity by seeking to improve equality of access from backgrounds least likely to do so.

The tensions between espoused aims of increasing productivity ***and*** social mobility, are of interest to the current study. Research suggests that the decision whether to progress to higher education may be governed by an individual's background. It may also depend on individual aspirations, and, among other things, the cost of higher education, financial pressures, as well as the pecuniary (and non-pecuniary) advantages an individual hopes to gain from higher education (OECD, 2008; OECD, 2017). Although literature (for example, Anderson, 2018; and Bravenboer, 2018) suggests that degree apprenticeships are highly valued by individuals, employers, and higher education institutions alike, whether these apprenticeships enable social mobility or how social mobility is achieved through the degree apprentice's work-based learning experience has yet to be fully addressed.

1.1.2.1 Degree apprenticeships, social mobility, and networking

The importance of nurturing relationships and networks (professional and social) for career and personal advancement and success is widely recognised within the literature (for example, Poldolny and Baron 1997; Whiting and de Janasz, 2004; Wolff and Moser, 2009; Bathmaker *et al.,* 2013; Casciaro *et al*., 2014). Consequently, professional networking for which Casciaro *et al.,* (2014:705) argue a pre-meditated professional-instrumental approach should be adopted which they define as the 'purposeful creation of social ties in support of task and professional goals', has become an increasingly important activity within organisations. It is considered that those who can successfully build and mobilise their networks, rather than taking an ad hoc approach, can enjoy a competitive advantage (Hytönen, 2014).

Raelin (2008:29) identifies opportunities for networking as 'one of the favourable benefits of work-based training'. However, he recognises that within this context networking may not be a primary goal of the learning experience. He also acknowledges that, because of being provided insufficient time for interactions, informal networking rather than planned formal networking can evolve.

Given the nature of the degree apprenticeship, it's link to professional occupation, the work-based learning context, and the government ambition to improve social mobility, awareness of the importance of developing networks amongst degree apprenticeship learners and a planned approach to networking within the degree apprenticeship is anticipated in the current study.

1.1.3 Higher education: An 'insurance against failure'

Even prior to the introduction of the degree apprenticeship, the increasing number of students in England transitioning into traditional higher education following their post-18 learning fuelled comments that having a higher education is no longer a scarce resource. For example, it was argued that:

> '… higher education is ceasing to serve as a resource that offers people an opportunity to occupy a higher position in the labour market and to achieve career enhancement and higher pay, more often, the only role it plays is as insurance against failure' Burlutskaia (2014:61).

The perceived devaluation of the role of education as an institution of mobility is echoed by Beck, (2000, in Burlutskaia, 2014:53) who states that, 'advancement on the basis of education is nothing but an illusion and education is becoming devalued and being transformed into an essential tool against a falling standard of living.' Others (for example, Brown and Tannock,

2009; Boliver, 2017; and Reay, 2021) argue it is the expansion of mass higher education that has led to a corresponding decline in the value of academic credentials for labour market returns.

The argument that higher education is now an 'insurance against failure' and 'illusion' in terms of advancement is interesting. Not only does it raise the question of how the degree apprentices view the value of higher education, particularly, the degree apprenticeship, it challenges the view of higher education as a vehicle for social mobility.

1.1.4 The degree apprenticeship: Meeting the needs of employers

There are claims that with the introduction of the degree apprenticeship 'widening participation has been outsourced to employers' with only some employers seeing widening participation as 'a duty' (Powell and Walsh, 2017:102). The degree apprenticeship, as it is employer funded, does remove a barrier to higher education for individuals unable or unwilling to take on student loans. However, it may mean higher education has less influence over the ***content*** of the degree apprenticeship and cohort composition.

In 2012, the CBI reported that 80% of employers ranked employability skills above degree subject (CBI, 2012). Consequently, educational systems which respond to this are aimed at meeting the needs of employers and therefore the wider economy (Lee, 2012; Wall and Jarvis, 2015; Rowe *et al*., 2016). The introduction of the degree apprenticeship has made it necessary for higher education institutions offering these programmes to build strong employer partnerships fuelled by a government policy associated with increasing economic competitiveness (Parry, 2005; Becker, 2006; Brown and Lauder, 2006; Bathmaker, 2015).

The government desire for employers to own and lead the degree apprenticeship has given greater power to employers to shape degree apprenticeship standards (Daley *et al.,* 2016). This has resulted in a perceived shifting of ownership and influence over curriculum design and in learner identity (Powell and Walsh, 2017). Whilst it has always been important to form and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders, within the changing context of degree apprenticeships and funding models as higher education institutions enter tripartite contracts with employers and students, these relationships are seen as increasingly more important. The advantages of collaboration and a shared vision, with more achieved together than would be possible separately, are recognised (Huxham and Vangen, 2012). Garnett *et al.,* (2009:27) argue that 'if university work-based learning is to have a major impact on the employing organisation, it needs to fully recognise and use the structural capital of the employer in fostering performance knowledge recognition, dissemination, creation and use'. Factors

identified as supporting collaboration include pre-existing relationships, shared understanding of aims, the building of trust, communication, and the reconciling autonomy of participants with collective agency (Bryson *et al.,* 2015). This highlights the importance of establishing the academic value of learning held by the employer (Garnett *et al.,* 2009). Equally important is the need to agree a framework for the operation of the partnerships to maximise the potential for their success, whilst creating programmes which are responsive to the needs of employers, and which maintain the academic quality and integrity required at degree level of study.

The difficulties in achieving collaborative advantage through partnership are acknowledged (Keep, 2012). They include: the challenges of moving from a provider-led to an employer-led system as 'the demand for skills training is a multifaceted, temporally intricate phenomenon'; and refocusing from a single-actor-led to a multiple-actor-led system where each partner leads collaboratively (Chankseliani and Relly, 2015:523), whilst having competing interests when it comes to skills training (Keep, 2012).

Moreover, government has clearly articulated apprenticeships should prioritise the demand of employers, noting it '… is important that the skills offer now, and going forward, is clear and meets the needs of employers' (BIS, 2014:23). A strategy that shifts the power and interests in delivering skills training to that of employers rather than providers. Therefore, apprenticeship reform has multiple aims requiring complex co-ordination due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Whilst the current study is not seeking to explore the complexities of this collaboration and the inherent competing interests of different stakeholders, these complexities and stakeholder interests are relevant as any recommendations made from this research need to consider the nature of this collaboration.

1.1.5 The degree apprenticeship: Parity of esteem and opportunity

Given the key government strategy of degree apprenticeships is to address economic ***and*** social problems, it is not surprising that they feature prominently in the parity of esteem discourse in government policy (Fuller *et al.,* 2013), with some reports that degree and higher-level apprenticeships are extending parity and equality of opportunity (Mulkeen *et al.,* 2019).

Early research involving interviews with schoolteachers and parents of apprentices in further education, prior to the introduction of degree apprenticeships, noted that they were perceived 'to be the route not recommended by the schoolteachers and parents' because it was not the pathway they themselves had followed and classed as 'a suitable option for someone else's child' (Saraswat, 2016:408). This legacy may contribute to current view of degree apprenticeships identified in more recent research. For example, Cunningham (2021), in

investigating the perceptions of solicitor apprentices and trainee solicitors and exploring issues of skills acquisition during both training routes, finds that apprenticeships as a model of learning are held in high regard. However, she highlights a perceived stigma and parity of esteem within the professional environment, leading to what she refers to as 'expressions of apprenticeship having a confused and confusing place and identity in the legal profession' (Cunningham, 2021:152).

Engeli and Turner (2019:v) suggest that UK culture 'promotes traditional degree attainment through university as a normal and accepted ambition and approach for young people', and, as such, society may view alternatives to the traditional university route as being of lesser value. Interestingly, Saraswat (2016) and Engeli and Turner (2019) also report that learners participating in their research reported a lack of impartial careers advice and guidance at schools and received limited information on alternative options to higher education.

A recent study exploring challenges and opportunities of designing and delivering degree and higher-level apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7 from a multi-stakeholder perspective concluded that while employers appear to be committed to the principle of increasing employee training, they do not want the apprentice to be involved in activities requiring them to be away from the business for prolonged periods of time (Mulkeen *et al*., 2019). Findings also highlighted employer concerns over the potential increased costs of offering degree apprenticeships. For example, the cost of upskilling mentors and those working with apprentices. The study also comments on graduate qualities of apprentices when compared with other graduates identifying issues of parity of esteem, seen as critical to the success of degree apprenticeships, and parity of opportunity including whilst at university and on graduation. The study recognises the need to promote a platform for parity of both esteem and opportunity for those achieving degree qualifications through the apprenticeship route, claiming that this parity is dependent on collaboration, co-operation, and co-creation between all stakeholders. Although the study did not involve capturing the views of apprentices, a key stakeholder in the degree apprenticeship, it is hoped that these claims of dependency would include apprentices as a key stakeholder.

The tripartite nature of degree apprenticeship work-based learning offers new learning opportunities for participants. However, relationships between the degree apprentice, their employer and the higher education institution remain under explored from a learner perspective (Smith, *et al.,* 2020; Fabian *et al.,* 2021; Smith *et al*., 2021). Therefore, it is anticipated that through the current study aspects of the concept of workplace affordance will be revealed to both positive and negative effect.

1.2 The degree apprentice as a research focus

In scholarly literature there have been calls for more research to give voice to the apprentices themselves (Brockmann *et al.,* 2010; Hogarth *et al*., 2012) and their desire to make sensible and feasible ***choices*** (Brooks, 2002), as they navigate perceived possibilities and tensions between apprenticeships as opportunities to learn while they earn and university degrees as the benchmark of achievement and future success.

Although recent research on degree apprenticeships has examined whether aspects of work-based pedagogy such as collaboration and partnership, programme design, and the workplace learning environment are determining factors in teaching quality and degree apprentice learner outcomes (Costley, 2021) there remains little research which focuses on the views and experiences of the apprentice. Furthermore, Smith *et al*., (2020) note that, in policy documents, apprentices' perspectives are barely addressed. In addition, Ryan and Lőrinc (2018) argue a need to explore the counter-narrative which examines the structural and contextual challenges, such as the limited number of graduate level jobs available and the rising cost of living, facing young people completing a degree apprenticeship.

Consequently, rather than seeking to examine degree level learning outcomes and teaching quality, the current study has as its' focus the degree apprenticeship learner. In recognition of the 'inequality' of the vocational learners' voice (Arnot and Reay, 2007:318), this study explores degree apprenticeships from the degree apprentice learner's viewpoint. Support for this approach can be found in findings from surveys with degree apprentices which indicate that very little is really known about how degree apprenticeships are being used and experienced in different sectors (Engeli and Turner, 2019).

1.3 Study aim and research objectives

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore learners' experiences of the degree apprenticeship programme by capturing: the factors that learners identify as influencing their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship (within a higher education institution in England); their experiences of the degree apprenticeship as a work-based model of learning; and their reflections post-completion of the programme. This study explores how learners use capital acquisitions gained and opportunities offered through the degree apprenticeship to enhance their social mobility.

The research questions for this study are:

1. What factors influence learner enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship?
2. What are these learner's experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship?

3. How do these learners use capital acquisition and exploit any opportunities, if available, to enhance their social mobility?

The research objectives for this study are therefore to:

1. Identify factors work based learners say influenced their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship within a higher education institution in England.
2. Explore their experiences of, and reflections on, being a work-based learner on a degree apprenticeship programme.
3. Examine how these work-based learners use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility.

This research highlights ways in which future work-based learner experiences on these programmes may be enhanced, particularly in relation to social mobility. Recommendations are made for changes to the design of work-based degree apprenticeship programmes based on the findings of this research.

1.4 Researcher background, values and experience

I have experience of feeling uncomfortable and inadequate in certain social and workplace situations, caused in part by behaviour of others but in equal measure by self-imposed feelings of inferiority due to a working-class background. Consequently, the work of Bourdieu was intriguing, specifically his central concept of capital and, to a lesser extent in this study, habitus, and field. This concept helped me to make sense of my own biography and give voice to many of my own feelings about my class position, lack of cultural confidence and my struggle through the education system having followed a non-traditional route through higher education.

Bourdieu's concept have also enabled me to think more clearly and deeply about some of the disquieting factors and thoughts of unrest in my role within a higher education institution where I am leading in the development of vocational, work-based training and education. Particularly where, for example, I have observed the value of academic mastery of words over practical mastery of role in assessment of student outcomes. Similarly, when supporting employers in recruiting staff I have seen A level candidates chosen in preference to the more vocationally educated BTEC candidates.

Through my research I wanted to hear of the degree apprentice learners' perceptions of the degree apprenticeship, their on- and off-the-job experiences, as well as the factors they say influenced their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship. I am interested to know whether

degree apprenticeship work-based learning provides a mechanism for long term and sustainable social mobility.

My research philosophy is one of pragmatism as I align with this values-orientated view of research. As a social constructivist I agree with the view that I have been constructed by my own history and culture along with the social groups that I inhabit (Bourdieu, 1990) with potential to influence the construction of knowledge (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

My role within higher education involves promoting degree apprenticeships to employers and their employees. As such, I am cognisant of the tensions that exist between the managerialist versus the critical view as a researcher in the examination of this government initiative from the learner perspective.

I am aware of how my own background, values and experiences influence my perception of the world and therefore my interpretation of the findings of this study. A reflexive approach, combined with reflection on each stage of the research process, challenged me to question whether higher education institutions and employers can and/or do provide sufficient support to degree apprentices in relation to enhancing social mobility. Throughout this research study I continually reflected on my own potential bias and how my position of power as a tutor of a university within the research might impact the research design and participants in this study during interview. Examples of this reflexive approach and my reflections on the research process are presented in Appendix 1.

1.5 Contribution of this study: A summary

This research contributes to the under researched area of degree apprenticeships in the UK, particularly in terms of the study's focus on the degree apprenticeship learner. In providing insights into the factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship and their experiences, this study contributes to existing literature and research by further developing understanding and adding to current debates in this area of emerging importance. It also contributes to research on young adults' access to, and decision-making, in relation to education and training pathways. The study will therefore be of interest to degree apprentices, employers, higher education staff and management and others with a vocational education policy interest. It will also be of interest to researchers: investigating degree apprenticeships within higher education; researching in the context of work-based and work-integrated learning more generally and in the areas of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and social mobility.

In addition, this study offers several practical contributions to educational practice, significant to various stakeholders including higher education institutions, employers, researchers, policy makers and degree apprentices as well as recommendations for strategic and operational changes to degree apprenticeship standards, curriculum design and delivery.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis is comprised of six chapters as illustrated in Figure 1.

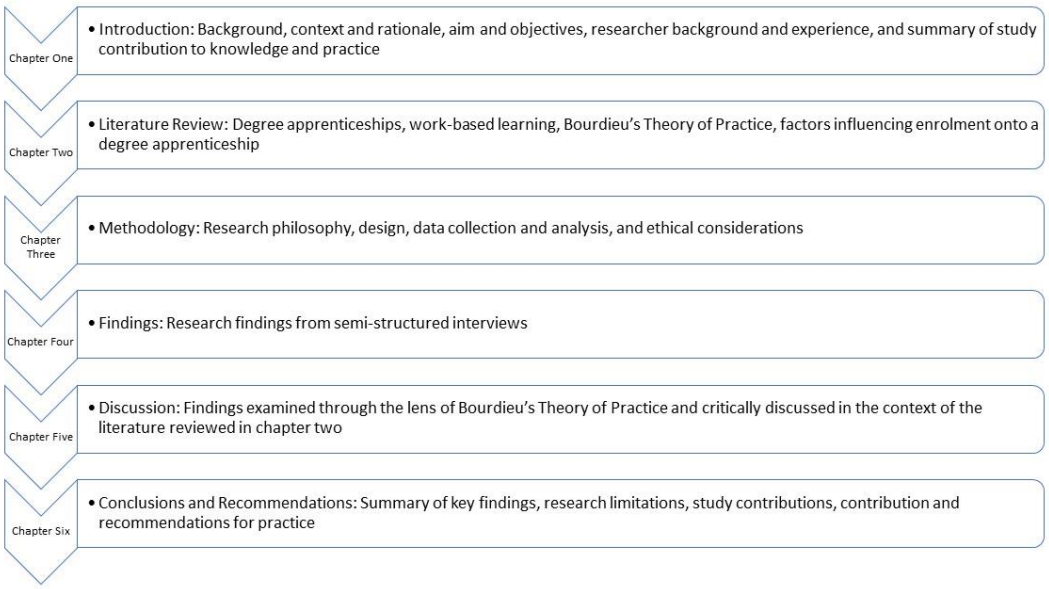

Figure 1 : Thesis structure

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided context to the study emphasising the importance of exploring the degree apprenticeship within the UK higher education context. The two-fold purpose of degree apprenticeships has significant importance as a mechanism for supporting national policy ambition of increasing productivity to achieve global economic advantage and simultaneously creating opportunities for upward mobility.

The chapter highlights the degree apprenticeship, the newest form of work-based learning, as a distinctive product with the potential to positively influence distribution of life chances. Albeit that this is acknowledged to be challenging in a complex and dynamic field rife with competing interests emanating from unequal allocation of capital resources within society.

Prior research has addressed the enduring issues and challenges that are associated with vocational education provision including the maturing field of work-based learning. However,

this is often with a focus on outcomes rather than a focus on the learner and their experiences. The current study builds on the under researched area of the degree apprenticeship through the exploration of the degree apprentice learner experience from their perspective and as a vehicle for social mobility. This study adopts a qualitative research approach that focuses on the experiences, and reflections, of those who have enrolled onto and graduated from the degree apprenticeship, thereby building understanding of this contemporary and complex phenomenon.

Chapter two presents a critical review of the literature on degree apprenticeship work-based learning. Bourdieu's concept of capital is discussed, as is research which investigates factors influencing enrolment to the degree apprenticeship.

2.0 Chapter Two – Literature Review

'An apprenticeship is no longer just the choice for individuals who could not go to university. Through the inclusion of a degree, they can be a highly aspirational choice and a change agent for social mobility'

(Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019:135).

The degree apprenticeship, the combination of studying for a degree qualification whilst working in a vocationally relevant and paid job, was launched by the UK government in 2015 to:

> '… meet economic needs and those of employers; to increase social mobility and diversity in higher education… and to imbue a vocational route to education with the prestige accorded to more conventional routes' (Engeli and Turner, 2019:1).

Degree apprenticeships in the United Kingdom (UK) therefore, have a dual purpose of both closing skills gaps while increasing upward mobility (QAA, 2019; Taylor-Smith *et. al*., 2019a).

Their introduction was, in part, a response to educational inequalities in attainment historically being linked to social exclusion and to constrained social mobility (Blanden *et al*., 2005). A view supported by a previous Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, who claimed that 'advancement in today's Britain is still too often determined by wealth or circumstance, by an accident of birth, rather than talent, and by privilege not merit' (Trustforlondon.org.uk, 2017).

Traditionally higher education and vocational education have been viewed as separate sides of the education system in the UK, with higher education seen as the more academic route and occupational qualifications as the vocational option (Vickerstaff, 2007; Wolf, 2011; Lee, 2012). Sides in which young people were stratified into different pathways (Raffe *et al,* 1998; Avis, 2004), with the apprenticeship perceived as 'a second-best option' (Vickerstaff, 2007:343).

Given that the degree apprenticeship route to gaining a degree was intended to complement the traditional full-time study route, it might be assumed to offer the potential to bridge the academic/vocational divide by unifying post-compulsory UK education and training systems. However, as highlighted in section 1.1.5, it is argued that in dividing traditional full-time learners from work-based learners, issues of parity of esteem are raised (Bathmaker, 2017; Fabian *et. al.,* 2021).

Nonetheless, David Way (2016), former Chief Executive Officer, of the National Apprenticeship Service, suggests that by placing apprenticeships at the heart of UK economic and social strategy there is potential to give young people a good start to their working lives. Equally, as

the degree apprentice qualifies with a nationally recognised qualification, the degree apprenticeship is seen to confer value to the apprentice ***and*** to the employer.

As government reform of apprenticeships continues to lead to radical transformation and organisation (Rowe *et al*., 2016; Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019), the following literature review focuses on degree apprenticeships as the newest form of work-based learning. The chapter moves on to a critical discussion of Bourdieu's concept of capital, the lens through which the experiences of the degree apprentices in this study are explored. Finally, existing research which examines reasons and influences for degree apprenticeship enrolment is considered. An awareness of these influences provides further insight to, and understanding of, the experiences of degree apprentices and how they use capital acquisition for enhancing their social mobility whilst completing the degree apprenticeship programme.

2.1 The degree apprenticeship: A model of work-based learning (WBL)

There is limited literature and research which relates directly to current ***standards-based*** degree apprenticeships as they are still relatively new. However, there is a significant body of literature concerned with apprenticeships more generally and foundation degrees. Although these programmes are not the focus of the current study, issues frequently discussed have relevance to the workplace as a site of learning. Therefore, this and literature which explores work-integrated degrees (non-apprenticeship) and work-based learning in higher education which deliberates principles, pedagogies, and practices, where relevant to the current study, have been examined.

2.1.1 Defining work-based learning

Educational theory has long taught that learning is anchored on experience (Dewey 1938). In apprenticeships practice is foregrounded but in a way that integrates theory and emphasises the interdependence of theory and practice (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1987; Lester *et al*., 2016). The fundamental theoretical premise being that 'the workplace is a crucially important site for learning and for access to learning' (Evans *et al*., 2002:1).

There are many definitions of work-based learning (Connor, 2005). For example, Gray (2001) highlights the wide range of work-based learning categories derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work. He distinguishes between learning for work (for example, work placements), learning at work (such as company in-house training), and learning through work, linked to formally accredited further or higher education programmes. Within most sectors, work-based learning is interpreted as learning which focuses on the realities of practice within a theoretical

and reflective framework (Hardacre and Workman, 2010). Importantly, it centres around what people do in their daily work and ensures that learners are central to the learning partnership as advocated by Senge (1990) in developing the notion of the learning organisation. Helyer (2011:2) describes work-based learning as 'what is learned by working – not reading about work or observing work, but actually undertaking work activities.'

Boud and Solomon (2001) capture the differences between traditional higher education learning and work-based learning within higher education, summarising key characteristics as learning opportunities not contrived for study purposes but arising from normal work and learning tasks and work tasks that are complimentary. Moreover, they highlight that work-based learning within higher education meets the needs of learners, contributes to the longer-term development of the organisation, and is formally accredited as a university qualification (ibid).

Boud and Solomon's (2001) characteristics and Helyer's (2011) definition of work-based learning are applicable to the current study. This because the degree apprentice learners are all in full-time work employed in roles that are aligned to the knowledge, skills and behaviours and relevant learning outcomes of their degree apprenticeship programme.

2.1.1.1 The degree apprenticeship: An alternative learning paradigm

Guile and Young (2002:159) argue that the general characteristics of apprenticeship and continuities between formal and informal learning settings need to be acknowledged and exploited so that the 'concept of apprenticeship might serve as a basis for an alternative learning paradigm for formal education and training'. Albeit one that needs to include more theoretical learning (Clarke and Winch, 2004).

Raelin (2008:12) warns that most young people today will have multiple careers in their lifetime, each requiring new skills and therefore 'the most valuable employee will be the updated one, the one who can shift with the organisational environment'. Today, an apprenticeship, a competence-based skill development programme designed and endorsed by employers for their employees, takes work-based learning one step further encompassing all and any learning that is situated in the workplace or arising directly out of workplace concerns (Lester and Costley, 2010). Therefore, it consists of independently accredited work-based learning, off-the-job training, and relevant experience in the job (Hoyle, 2012).

2.1.2 The degree apprenticeship and work-based learning: A tripartite arrangement

The integrated approach of the degree apprenticeship programme means that the workplace, rather than just being a site for gaining experience and applying what has been learned (Burke *et al*. 2009), becomes a source of academically valid learning. This, Lester *et al*., (2016:10) claim brings into focus the need for the workplace environment to be recognised as a site of learning with capacity to sustain learning at the level necessary to support the individual learner.

As these 'work-based learning programmes are designed to enable the participants to learn through their normal work activities' (Booth, 2018:15), it is asserted that 'for work-based learning to be beneficial to the higher education institution, learner and employer, the perspective of all parties needs to be considered at the initial stage in the formation of a tripartite arrangement' (ibid). This tripartite agreement, originally known as a Commitment Statement and now termed the Training Plan, captures the knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs) to be completed during the degree apprenticeship together with a detailed plan of the learner's journey through both on- and off-the-job learning activities.

These individual training plans are based around identified knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to the ***job role***. This has relevance to the current study, as individual behaviours related to employability are strongly associated with career self-management skills (for example, personal awareness in terms of values, attitudes, abilities, interests and work-life balance) or 'career-relevant behaviours [that] influence objective and subjective employability over and above social and educational backgrounds' (Okay-Sommerville and Scholarios, 2015:13). These career-building skills are said to help individuals 'to navigate and advance in the world of work' (Bridgstock, 2009:36). Indeed, successful completion of work-based learning programmes has been linked to increased learner confidence and feeling of empowerment leading to changed career aspirations (Costley and Abukari, 2015).

Today work-based learning is an established mode of learning and apprenticeships a recognised part of education (Lester and Costley, 2010; Billet and Choy, 2013; Smith and Worsfold, 2015; Fuller and Unwin, 2016). Consequently, work-based learning is at the centre of degree apprenticeships with the degree, a core component of the apprenticeship. For many occupations apprenticeships are today recognised as the dominant model of entry to a professional career (Lester *et al*., 2016), with clear ladders of progression which provide the foundations for potentially faster and enhanced career trajectories. However, the dual apprenticeship policy ambition of contributing to UK productivity ***and*** increasing social mobility, a relationship which continues to be debated (Clarke, 2018), implies that the purpose of the

degree apprenticeship should go beyond career management to include critical skills required to build social capital (building relationships and network connections). Such skills include effective networking, which is recognised as supporting development of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993; Skeggs, 2004). Currently tools and approaches to support networking do not appear within the degree apprentice standard for digital and technology solutions, suggesting there may be scope for further refinement to the degree apprenticeship in the achievement of government's objective for building social capital.

2.1.3 Work-based learning: Expansive and restrictive workplace practices

Lester and Costley (2010) highlight the need for the workplace to provide adequate scope for learning and critical reflective learning, as well as capacity for learning ***beyond*** the apprenticeship programme. In applying their conceptual framework to analyse working practices and their effect on apprenticeship learning, Fuller and Unwin (2003:46) identify 'expansive' and 'restrictive' practices within workplaces.

Expansive and restrictive workplaces and practices are characterised by Evans and Kersh (2004, cited in Gustavsson, 2009:248) who, drawing on Fuller and Unwin's continuum, define expansive learning environments as 'stimulating, motivating, challenging and related to rich opportunities to participate in competence development'. In contrast, they define restricted learning environments as 'dull, repetitive, non-challenging and related to minimal opportunities for personal and professional development' (ibid) as illustrated in Figure 2.

Fuller and Unwin (2003:47) argue that an apprenticeship characterised by the features listed as expansive will create a stronger and richer learning environment than those comprising features associated with the restrictive end of the continuum. Moreover, they claim an expansive approach to apprenticeship will not only deliver the broader goals being set for apprenticeship programmes around the world but will also foster workplace learning. They argue that where organisations have fashioned themselves as expansive learning environments and take an expansive approach to learning, they also provide the foundation for personal as well as organisational development (Fuller and Unwin, 2004).

In contrast, Kubiak *et al*., (2010) note that in more restricted workplaces, work-integrated learning can create tensions in role expectations often leading to high attrition rates. However, not surprisingly, the extent to which employees in different organisational and sectoral settings have the opportunity and are encouraged to learn is variable (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). Siebert and Costley (2013) provide examples of how organisational norms can restrict learning. While Heikkinen (1997), Ryan (2000) and Deissinger (2008) identify various contextual influences

including institutional, socio-cultural, and positional factors as having an impact on the concept of apprenticeship.

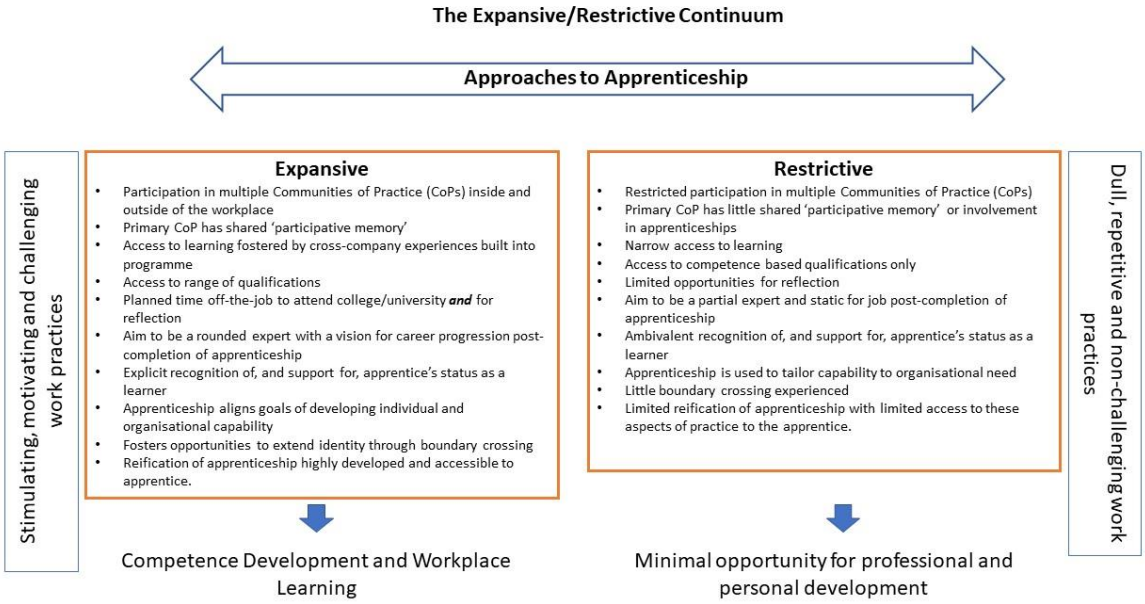

Figure 2 - The expansive/restrictive continuum (adapted from Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Evans and Kersh, 2004 in Gustavsson, 2009)

Mazenod (2016, in Cunningham 2021:45) argues that the positioning on the continuum of learning for apprenticeships is influenced by the education and training system within which it is placed. After completing a cross-national comparison, she concluded that the English apprenticeship programme tends towards the ***restrictive*** end of the continuum in the sense that it provides limited access to knowledge-based qualifications, perceived to be of low level general educational content. This is of interest to the current study as ***expansive*** workplace practices, the facilitation of rich opportunities for professional and personal development for the apprentice as well as organisational learning and development, could be a contributory factor for the success of the degree apprenticeship programme in its dual purpose of closing the skills gap and increasing social mobility.

2.1.4 Work-based learning pedagogy

There is a considerable body of literature theorising work-based learning, identifying its unique pedagogy (for example, Costley and Armsby, 2007; Lester and Costley, 2010; Bravenboer and Workman, 2016; Nottingham 2019). Dalrymple *et al.* (2014:75) describe work-based learning as a triadic learning endeavour in which the signature pedagogic principle is one of 'responsive facilitation'.

Work-based learning embodies a pragmatist position where the learner is active in creating meaning and the workplace is the site of learning and knowledge production and application (Lester and Costley, 2010; Garnett, 2016). The higher or vocational education institution's role in this context is to provide facilitation rather than teaching, and to provide assessments that are practice-based or contextually oriented (Lester *et al*., 2016). Based on Dalrymple *et al*.'s (2014) research, teaching is as much concerned with the process involved as the content. That is, teaching is not just centred on content, work-based learning facilitators are obliged to take account of learners' personal circumstance (for example, age, gender, culture) and the personal dimension this brings to the learning experience.

This is relevant to the current study as degree apprentice work-based learners are diverse in background but identified in two specific categories. One group identified as recent school or college leavers who are new to the workplace and the other group identified as mature, experienced adults who in some instances may have few formal qualifications, but who possess considerable existing knowledge pertaining to their field of professional practice.

2.1.5 Learning how to learn and reflective practice

Dalrymple *et al*., (2014:75) acknowledge 'there is a broadening recognition of the need to support facilitators and learners engaged in work-based learning for the first time.' A key challenge identified for the work-based learner is in adapting to this new model of learning. This is because work-based learners not only acquire new knowledge but also need to acquire 'meta competence that enables them to learn how to learn' (Cunningham, 2021:18).

Raelin (2008) argues work-based learning is more than acquiring a set of skills as it involves reviewing and learning from experience, centred around reflection on work practices. As such, Raelin (2008, in Dalrymple *et. al.,* 2014:75) identifies three essential and distinctive elements in the work-based learning process. These elements are that learning occurs amid action, that knowledge-creation and utilisation is a collective and social process, and that it is essential for work-based learners to have a positive disposition towards 'learning to learn' (ibid). Therefore, Raelin (2008:64) advocates development of a work-based pedagogy which is inclusive and 'acknowledges the ubiquity of learning opportunities and contexts.'

Cox (2005) argues that most people do learn from experience and that they do this reasonably well without any pedagogic intervention. However, it could also be argued that, in an age where individuals are being encouraged to upskill to close identified skills gaps, the technical and practical knowledge skills encouraged through degree apprenticeship study need to be augmented by reflective practice to encourage increased self-awareness and better-informed

responses in everyday work. Cox, (2005:471) concludes reflective practice techniques can 'make individuals conscious of the potential for learning through their work' enabling them 'to view each new challenge as a learning opportunity.' Moon (2001; 2013) also stresses the importance of reflective practice as a means of linking thought and action in a relationship between self and others. As learning can enhance self-regulating behaviour and self-efficacy, Jourdan *et. al.,* (2011) advocate providing learners with such training to prepare them for the complex interactions of work-based learning.

Reflective practice and preparing learners for work-based learning is particularly relevant to the current study as degree apprenticeship work-based learners are working full-time, balancing many demands from both inside and outside of the university, including their workplace. The ability to recognise and reflect on learning opportunities and contexts as a means of capital acquisition and enhancing upward mobility is important.

A summary of the literature explored in section 2.1 is provided in Figure 3 below.

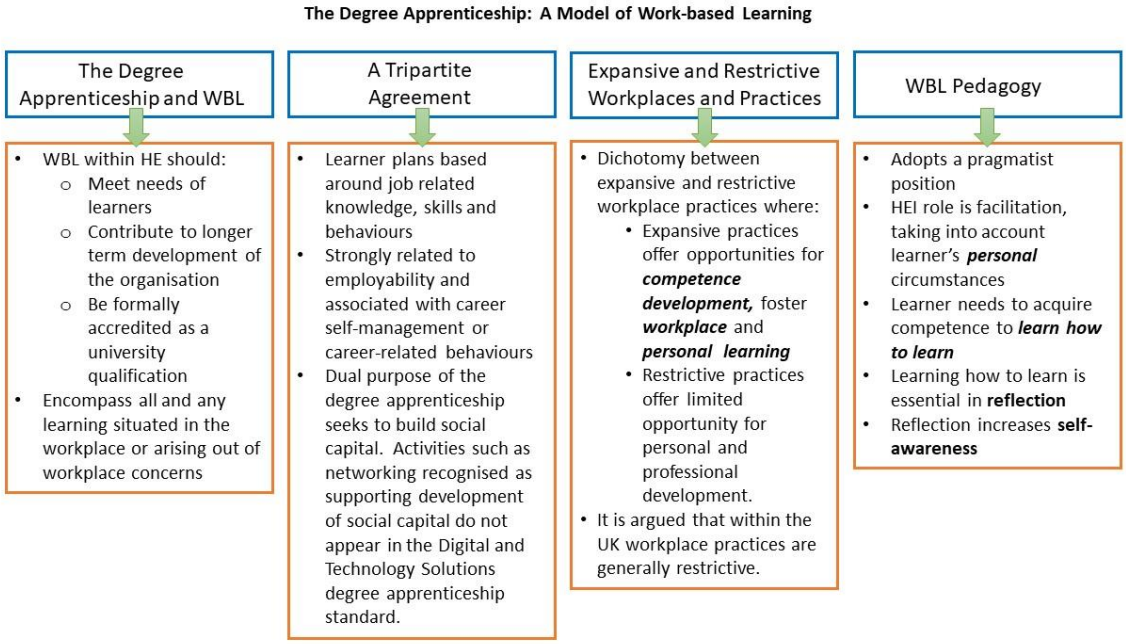

Figure 3 - The degree apprenticeship: A model of work-based learning - a summary of the literature.

2.2 Capital theory: A Bordieuan view of concept of capital

The current study applies Bourdieu's concept of capital as the lens through which to explore work-based learner experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship programme. Therefore, Bourdieu's concept of capital is examined here, with particular emphasis on the concept of social capital in the context of the degree apprenticeship. Given that literature on

social capital theory includes other influential philosophers, this review also draws upon other authors in the field (for example, Putnam).

2.2.1 Bourdieu and concept of capital

Bourdieu is perhaps best known for his work on class structure and social inequality. At the heart of his work on higher education has been a 'desire to expose higher education as a powerful contributor to the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality' (Naidoo, 2014:457). Fundamental to his studies of society was an integrated theoretical and methodological approach used in seeking to overcome dichotomies in social theory, including micro/macro, objective/subjective, structure/agency, empirical/theoretical, material/symbolic, and freedom/necessity (Power, 1999).

Key among Bourdieu's other concerns was to understand the practical logic of everyday life and social action by examining the ways that 'social capital functions in relation to social differences that exist in society, and how social capital is connected with a lack of social resources and thus a lack of power' (Johnston *et al*., 2003:76). The study of which led Bourdieu to an understanding of relations of power and domination, from which to develop a reflexive sociology (Power, 1999).

He was primarily known as a sociologist who theorised the link between education and culture. Throughout his scholarly career he provided significant contribution to understanding culture and social distinction providing both theoretical and empirical insights into consumers' cultural dispositions and tastes. Therefore, for Bourdieu, definition of capital was very wide.

Bourdieu emphasised that theory is a means of understanding and challenging practice. In the field of education Bourdieu drew on his 'theory of practice' to analyse and interrogate the role of education in the reproduction of inequality in France (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu 1996). Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' is built on the relationship between three concepts: capital, habitus, and field as illustrated in Figure 4.

Bourdieu's forms of capital are principally economic (money, income, assets, wealth financial inheritance), cultural (education, qualifications, knowledge, social taste, language), symbolic (honour, reputation, prestige, status) and social (resources based on networks and group membership, relationships, social origin). He argues that capital is unequally distributed within society, asserting that cultural capital combined with economic capital contributes to the inequality seen in the world, and that symbolic capital is always linked with typology and volume of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

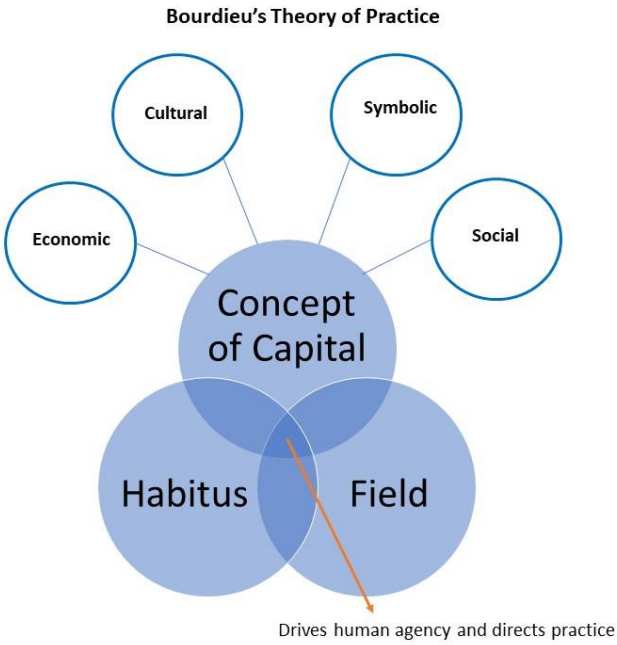

Figure 4 - Bourdieu's theory of practice

Bourdieu's concept of capital is inter-related with the concepts of habitus and field. Bourdieu considered habitus to be the learned attitudes, perceptions, tastes, habits, norms, values traditions of a particular society, and field to be a space where actors compete for power and influence using their social capital (such as networks and contacts available to them) and cultural capital (the knowledge they have). Best (2003) suggests that human agency (thinking, feeling, and perceiving) is guided by interactions between these concepts. This interaction is of interest to the current study in exploring the factors influencing enrolment onto and experiences of the degree apprenticeship.

Bourdieu's theory of practice offers researchers a comprehensive approach for exploring activities of everyday life and for examining the differential practices of educational choice and experiences, including in contemporary society. A brief overview of the concepts of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital is presented in the following sections, together with a more detailed critical discussion of social capital, which is recognised as a key contributor to social mobility (Bourdieu, 1977). This section also explores the concepts of habitus and field, given their inter-relationship with the concept of capital.

2.2.2 Economic capital

Economic capital is defined as the access to material and financial resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) such as those illustrated in Figure 5 below.

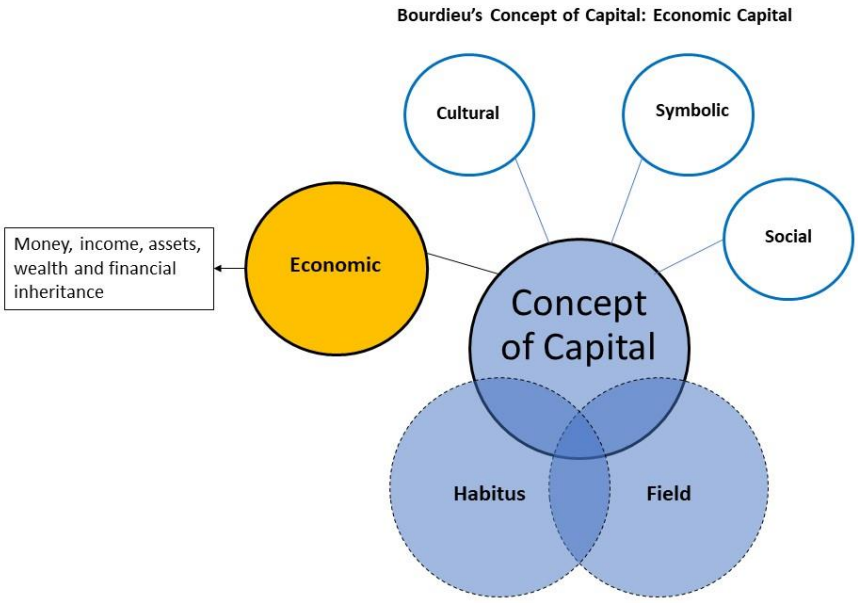

Figure 5 - Bourdieu's concept of capital: Economic capital

Harker *et al.,* (1990:1) note that, for Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of ***exchange*** in which capitals are convertible and may be exchanged for other types of capital. Similarly, Moore (2008) describes Bourdieu's approach to capital as taking the idea of capital in the economic sense and employing it in a wider system of exchanges whereby assets of different kinds are transformed and exchanged within complex networks which exist within social fields. A view supported by Pham (2019:603) who asserts 'all forms of capital have currency in terms of economic value and people seek to gain advantage in the social fields based on their ownership of capital in those fields'. This view is relevant to the current study in that economic capital encompasses the material and financial values that degree apprentices may wish to acquire through enrolling onto a degree apprenticeship. Degree apprenticeships offer learners the potential to gain a good return on their investment of time, through gaining a qualification and building relationships and networks that could enhance their future career prospects.

2.2.3 Cultural capital

According to Bourdieu (1997) cultural capital refers to the skills, knowledge and sensibilities people possess (see Figure 6) and is an attempt to expand capital beyond the economic (Moore, 2004 cited in Reay, 2004).

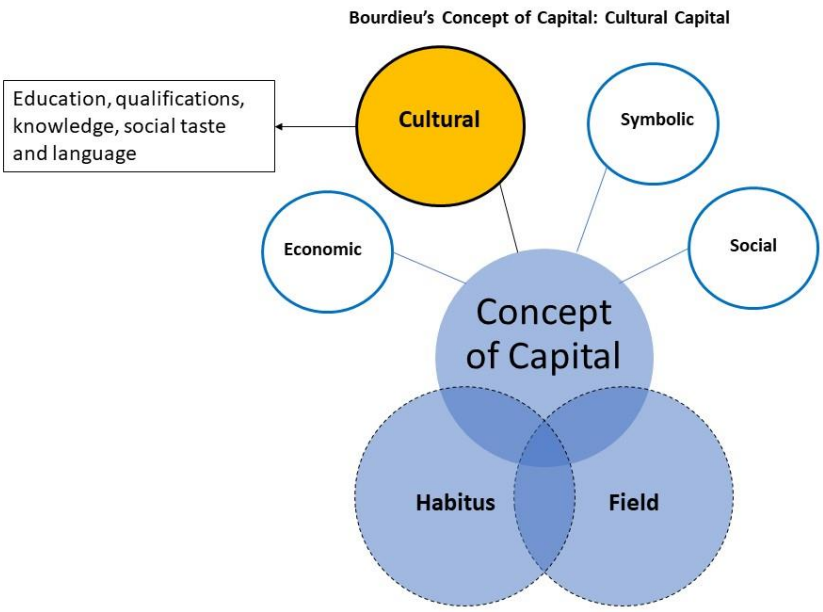

Figure 6 - Bourdieu's concept of capital - Cultural capital

For Bourdieu (2006:106), cultural capital encompasses a full range of dimensions including those 'embodied' within the corporality of a person, which begins in early childhood with investment of time by parents and family in raising awareness of cultural differences. Another dimension is said to exist in the 'objectified' state, existing as cultural goods such as books, artefacts, and paintings and a third dimension exists in 'institutionalised' forms such as educational qualifications (ibid). Individuals with these resources are identified as having the potential to produce more financial resource. Therefore, the concept of cultural capital has attracted much interest because of its influence on social inequality (Robbins, 2005; Savage and Bennett, 2005). Whilst the clear-cut aspects of cultural capital like educational qualifications and participation in profile raising activities are recognised, other aspects such as the 'affective aspects of inequality' (Skeggs, 1997:10), and the more subjective aspects of cultural capital such as levels of confidence and entitlement are also recognised in the literature (Reay,1998; 2004).

In the current study, cultural capital is of interest in terms of how degree apprentices attach meaning to the degree apprenticeship not just as a qualification but as a resource to assist with their development of skills, knowledge and professional sensibilities associated with their learning. Cultural capital also has relevance to the current study as the usefulness of the concept to describe the 'principle of the social assets' that individuals mobilise via their membership of mutually beneficial groups and associations (Bourdieu, 1997b:192) is recognised. Given the relative newness of degree apprenticeships the current study adopts a

broad understanding of cultural capital, one that focuses on the qualitative as well as the measurable.

2.2.4 Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital, according to Swartz (1997:90) is a 'form of power that is not perceived as legitimate demands for recognition'. Bourdieu (1986) describes symbolic capital as, for example, honour, reputation, prestige, and status (see Figure 7). He argues that symbolic capital is always linked with type and volume of forms of capital.

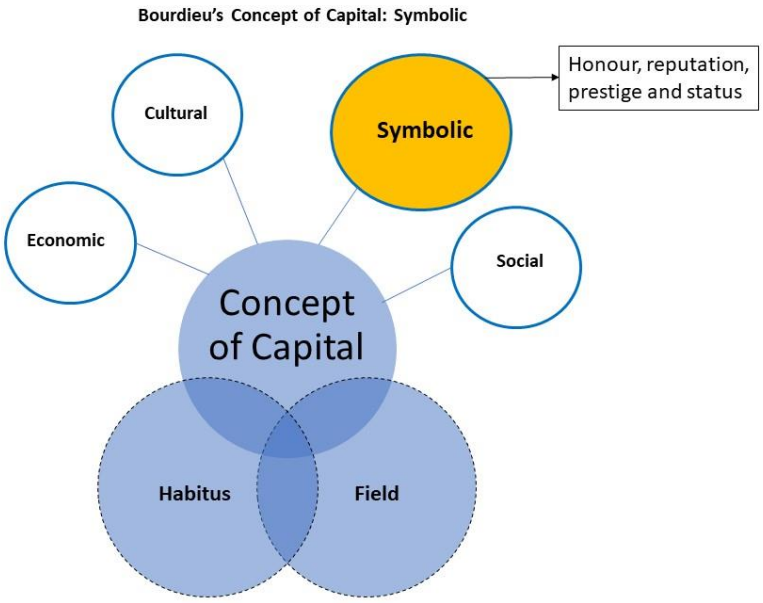

Figure 7 - Bourdieu's concept of capital: Symbolic capital

Bourdieu's idea of sociology views society as a plurality of social fields. According to Bourdieu (1986) it is the three main components of social resources (economic, cultural, and social capital) that defines the social position and possibilities of the individuals (players) in any field. These forms of capital, controlled by the various agents, influences 'winners and losers' of those that have a stake in the game (Bourdieu, 1990; Grenfell, 2007; Watson, 2013). Therefore, these three resources become socially effective (for example, increasing an individual's inclusion in society), and their ownership legitimised through the intercession of symbolic capital, for example, the degree as the accepted currency for enhanced career trajectory. To illustrate, it could be argued that individuals with greater cultural capital increase their likelihood of succeeding in education and achieving a degree. The degree provides symbolic capital which, according to Bourdieu (1986:52) is 'legitimated through a middle-class

acknowledgement' which potentially affords access to higher paid roles, enhancing economic capital.

Within the context of the current study, applying Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to explore degree apprentices' experiences of and reflections on the degree apprenticeship has potential to reveal what these learners regard as symbols of their success.

2.2.5 Social capital

Hanifan (1916) is accredited as being first in articulating the use of the term social capital, arguing that it should be used as a metaphorical tool for building communities. Hanifan (1916:78) does not refer to capital in a tangible sense but instead refers to the ways in which an individual gains access to resources through aspects of their daily lives and relationships such as 'goodwill, fellowship and families who make up a social unit'. In studying people's social ties, Durkheim (1933) draws attention to the ***complex and contextual nature of social capital,*** highlighting how these ties changed over time as people became more mobile and communities more diverse in their membership. As illustrated in Figure 8, Bourdieu defines social capital as:

> 'The sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986:243).

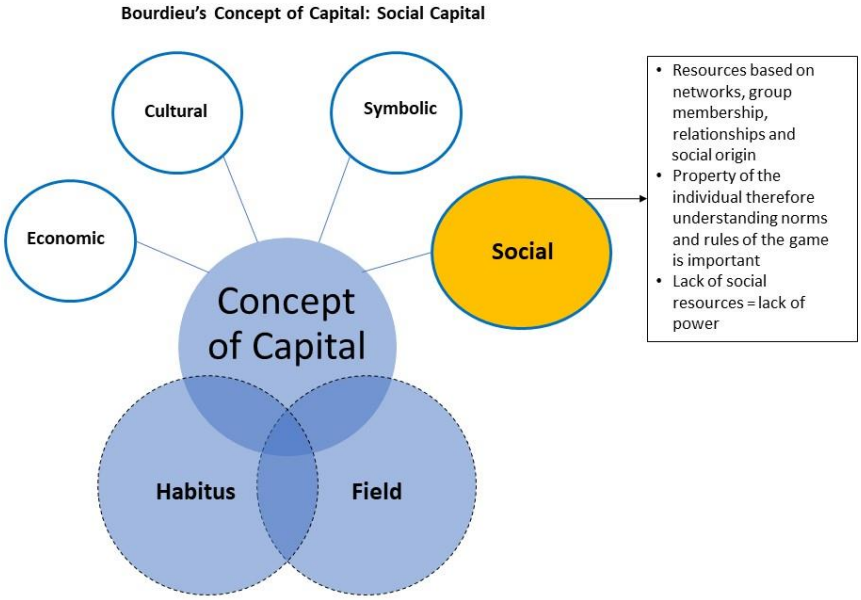

Figure 8 - Bourdieu's concept of capital: Social capital

According to Bourdieu (1997a), social capital is a resource connected with group membership and durable networks, such as family, class, club, and school, claiming that:

> '…the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term' (Bourdieu, 1997a:52).

He also claims that access to the capitals of other members of a network of social ties can be mobilised for personal ends (Bourdieu, 1986). His concept of social capital emphasises the ***resources*** that individuals use to protect their own interests (Ball, 2003; Johnston *et al*., 2003; Reay, 2004).

The idea of social networks as a resource for building social capital does not feature within the current degree apprenticeship literature. It is therefore not clear whether degree apprentices use their existing social networks to build their social capital. In addition, little attention has been paid in existing research on how degree apprentices' access existing networks or establish new ties in their workplace as sources of social capital. As it is important to understand how social capital is understood and used by degree apprentices, the current study examines whether, and how, these learners use social networks to build and enhance their social capital.

In doing so, the current study also engages with Woolcock's (1998; 2001) conceptualisation of ***bridging*** and ***bonding*** in which bonding arises from close-knit relationships and bridging arises among acquaintances who know each other but are not deeply invested in the relationship (Putnam, 2000). Granovetter (1983:207-208) contends that individuals with different kinds of ties, categorised as 'weak' or 'strong', generate different resources requiring the bridging of social distance. Moreover, Granovetter (1983:207-208) claims that for individuals within 'lower socio-economic groups', 'weak' ties may not work as social bridges if they merely 'link' the acquaintances of friends and relatives. Indeed, research by Ryan *et al*., (2008), has established that categorising all such resources as 'weak ties' is confusing as this ignores the different resources that these ties may be able to generate and transmit.

The 'bonding' social capital concept characterised by Putnam (2000) is defined as being 'ties to people who are like me in some important way'. Coleman (1988) argues that social capital is realisable through relationships of mutual trust and obligation within closed networks available through social structures. Although, the tight knit, inward looking, bonding networks are recognised as having value, Putnam (2000), has been criticised for presenting these as 'largely an unmitigated good' (Edwards, 2004).

2.2.5.1 Social capital as the property of the collective: Trust and collaboration

For Putnam, social capital is 'a resource that functions at societal level' (Field, 2017:23) and is therefore capable of shedding light on the link between successful institutional performance and mutually beneficial interrelationships. According to Putnam, social capital refers to:

> 'Features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated outcomes' (Putnam, 1993:167).

This view perceives social capital to be the property of the collective, placing value on resources to be gained from collaboration and highlighting the value of engaging in networking activities which Putnam considered as incidental enablers of social cohesion and a 'by-product of singing groups and soccer clubs' (Putnam, 1993:176).

In reporting on what he perceived to be America's declining social capital, Putnam (1995 in Field, 2017:17) termed social capital as 'bowling alone'. His argument being that Americans were:

> '… more likely to play with a group of family or friends. … [rather than] activity that brings relative strangers together on a routine and frequent basis, helping to build and sustain a wider set of networks and values that foster general reciprocity and trust, and in turn facilitate mutual collaboration' (Field, 2017:17).

This led to refinement of his definition of capital in which he referred to social capital as, 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000:19, in Field, 2017:17).

Putnam's preoccupation with ***societal change*** has similarity with that of Durkheim (1933) in that he draws on structure and function in arguing societal shift while highlighting the potential for networks to add value to both individuals and group. Although this definition has received criticism for being 'conceptually vague' and 'romantical' (Misztal 2000:121), it is acknowledged that 'Putnam has gone furthest in embracing a differentiated approach to social capital' (Field, 2017:45).

2.2.5.2 Social capital as property of the individual: Knowing and playing the game

In contrast to Putnam's perception of social capital as the property of the collective, Bourdieu (1992:64) perceives social capital as the property of the individual, believing that an understanding of norms, or '***rules of the game'***, is of benefit. For Bourdieu (1986), the game refers to the social practices that define a field, and the practices that define what is at stake in the field. For degree apprentices, this may be career enhancement for example. Individuals

who have an implicit understanding of how systems operate may use that knowledge for personal benefit, for example, in terms of their personal or career trajectory (Bathmaker *et al.*, 2013). This is achieved by using reciprocity linked to their own social, cultural, and economic class standing. Parents may also facilitate opportunities that provide competitive advantage over others, for example, in determining who and where they socialise and the school/college they attend. Bathmaker *et al*., (2013:741) conclude that generally 'knowing' and 'playing' the game further advantages those with the greatest accumulated capital.

Whilst acknowledging Bathmaker *et al.'s* (2013) conclusion, the ideas of 'bowling alone' and knowing and playing the rules of the game in the context of building social capital are of interest to the current study. In exploring whether the degree apprentices 'know the game' and if, or how, they 'play the game', will provide useful insight into how different forms of capital are used in enhancing social mobility.

It is claimed that networking is required in the acquisition of social capital and in creating bridges from one culture to the next (Phelan, 1999; Martina 2006). The positive influence of networking on academic success and mobility is espoused by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) who applied their deficiency model to explain why many disadvantaged students are unsuccessful. They argue academic success and mobility are adversely affected by structural and functional deficiencies where structural deficiencies relate to familial circumstances and functional to the insufficient interaction between generations to facilitate social and economic capital being passed onto the next generation.

Table 1 (see page 41) presents a summary comparing three key scholars' concepts of social capital.

2.2.5.3 Criticisms of social capital as a concept

Much of the literature justifies the need for social capital theory, referring to failures in the narrow economic approach of neo-classical economics and a need to return attention to the social and institutional aspects of theory (Woolcock, 2001; Huysman and Wolf, 2004; Fine, 2010). From a Bordieuan perspective, this emanates from unequal allocation of capital resources within society (Best, 2003). Bourdieu (1997; 1999) argues that life under neo-liberalism has consequences for humans in that life becomes increasingly precarious, characterised by a generalised state of material and emotional insecurity.

However, there are criticisms of social capital as a concept. For example, it has been described as a fuzzy concept by some economists and a 'chaotic concept' by sociologists, Warde and Tampubolon (2002:177 cited in Field, 2017:91). In the social sciences, the concept has been

criticised due to its conceptual vagueness, reflected in problems of operationalisation (Portes, 1998; Rostila, 2010). Other aspects of contention include whether it is a property of individuals or collectives (Portes, 2000), a process (Putnam, 1993; 2000) or a resource (Bourdieu, 1983; Loury, 1977).

Today, social capital research has become more prominent in the social sciences including in health, business, and education and incorporating a wider range of methodological approaches including, phenomenology and case study. According to Field (2017) this increasing prominence is witness to the concept's validity as an analytical tool. Therefore, whilst acknowledging criticisms of social capital as a concept, the current study applies this concept in examining how opportunities for enhancing social mobility are exploited by degree apprentices.

Table 1 – A comparison of the concepts of capital (adapted from Johnston, 2011)

	Pierre Bourdieu developed in the 1970's and 1980's	**James Coleman developed in the 1980's and 1990's**	**Robert D. Putnam developed in the 1990's and 2000's**
Components	Two components: A resource connected with group membership and social networks.	Functional view: A resource drawn upon to facilitate accomplishment of mutually beneficial ends. Involves obligation to others.	Three components: Moral obligations and norms, social values (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary associations).
Perspective	Becomes a resource in the social struggles carried out in different social arenas or fields. Volume linked to size of network connections and ability to mobilise. Relationship between social capital and power.	A public good, largely a product of social structure. The more social capital is used, the more it grows. Neglects power and conflict.	Civic community Forms of social capital are general moral resources of the community.
Trust	Universal values. Social Exchange and recognition (opposing views).	Trust arises from, and thus exists within, social relations.	Generalised trust creates the basis for reciprocity and social networks and associations. High level of co-operation, expanding trust, strong reciprocity, civic activity, and collective well-being.
Theoretical interests	Inequality. Excludes from theory even the idea of 'genuine' consensus and universal values.	Connected sociology and the social actions of individuals with the rational ideas of economists.	Societal consensus, mechanisms that strengthen the integration of the values of society and sustain the stable development of society.
Problem interest	Sociology of conflict	Sociology of education and public policy.	Sociology of integration

2.2.6 Bourdieu and habitus

Habitus is a multi-layered concept and can be interpreted as the tastes, habits, norms, values, and traditions of a particular society or community of likeminded agents (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). In practical terms, habitus can be viewed as a set of schemes, generated by certain conditions that influence the ways individuals think and act (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A view supported by Power (1999:48), who describes habitus in individuals as 'a set of dispositions internal to the individual that both reflects external social structures and shapes how the individual perceives the world and acts in it'. More recently, Dumenden and Englis (2013:1080) describe habitus as 'the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world'. According to Pham (2019:603), habitus 'is rooted in family upbringing in the social structure which shapes individual agency and perceived opportunity'. Therefore, habitus is a way of describing the embodiment of social structures and history. As such, habitus allows an individual to have an active engagement with the past that informs them on the appropriate way to behave within the present. Whilst recognising that social structures are not deterministic of behaviour or losing sight of the individual's own agency, many argue an individual's primary habitus (acquired in childhood) is more durable than habitus that may be learned later in life (Power, 1999:48). Therefore, it is posited that individuals unconsciously operate in a way that reproduces those structures (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990; Power, 1999). Consequently, Bourdieu (1990) argues individuals are predisposed to act in accordance with the social structures that shape them as these structures are embedded within them. In the words of Bourdieu:

> 'The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to act as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (Bourdieu, 1990:53).

While habitus connects an individual's past with their present helping them to shape their perceptions, thoughts, and action, Bathmaker (2015:64) contends, 'Bourdieu's concept of habitus has provided a means of counteracting the view that individuals have complete freedom to choose futures of their own making' (see Figure 9).

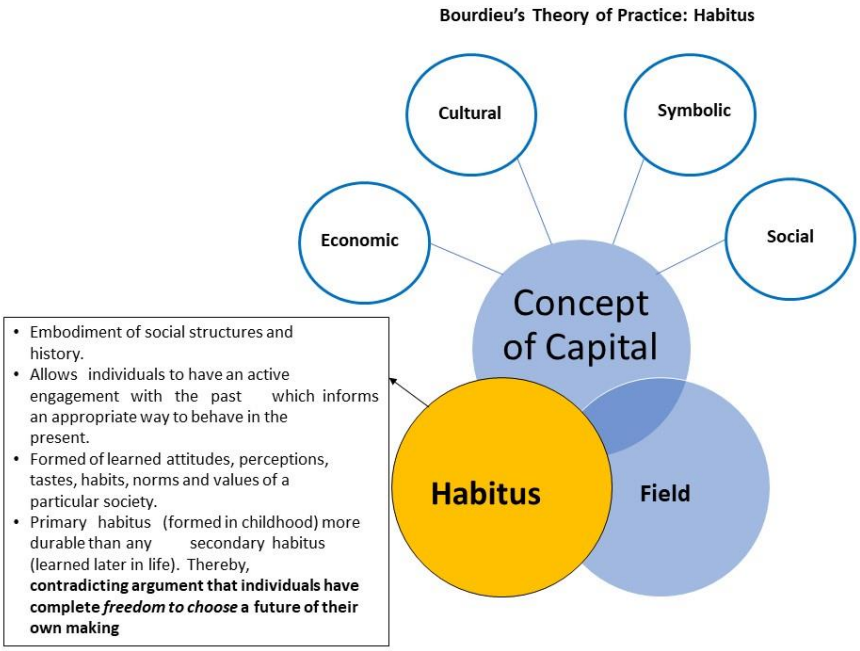

Figure 9 - Bourdieu's theory of practice: Habitus

Therefore, Bourdieu's concept of habitus recognises that individuals are born into specific contexts, 'an inherited social space from which comes access to and acquisition of differential amounts of capital assets' (Skeggs, 1997:8). Reay (2004:7) who views habitus as a complex interplay between past and present, suggests that 'while the habitus allows for individual agency it also predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving'. While accepting that numerous factors including class, gender, ethnicity, culture, education, and the historical time-period all shape an individual's habitus, Power (1999:48) argues 'practice - what one does in everyday life – is dynamic and fluid'. Therefore, although habitus shapes and produces practice, it does not determine it (Wacquant, 1992).

Acknowledging that criticisms of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, for example, the criticism that his preoccupation with social class consumes his writing to the extent that gender and racial differences are subsumed (Cicourel, 1993; Reay, 1995), habitus provides a method for simultaneously analysing the experience of 'social agents and … the objective structures which make this experience possible' (Bourdieu, 1988:782). Consequently, despite these criticisms, habitus offers a useful tool to interpret students' pasts and how this influences choices and behaviours related to perceived opportunities presented by the degree apprenticeship. Moreover, using habitus as a conceptual tool ensures that the research focus is always broader than the specific focus under study (Reay, 2004:16). Therefore, although not the main focus of this study, exploring the way that social background (habitus) interacts with the educational context in terms of its potential for enhancing individual capital and/or social mobility is useful

in gaining a better understanding of degree apprentices' experiences of the degree apprenticeship.

2.2.7 Bourdieu and field

The concept of field, although less used than habitus and cultural capital (Maton, 2005; Reay, 2004), is one of Bourdieu's central tools. According to Bourdieu, field is defined as a network of relations among positions that can be objectively defined in terms of their capacity to advance their own self-interest as well as by their relation to other positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Similarly, Maton's (2005:689) definition of field is as 'a configuration of positions comprising agents (individuals, groups of actors or institutions) struggling to maximise their position' (see Figure 10).

Bourdieu's use of field denotes it as a site of competing interests where there is struggle for recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is in evidence within the wider context in which universities in the UK are located. For example, in terms of their emergence as 'a key mechanism to increase national productivity and ameliorate inequalities by increasing the economic participation of disadvantaged equity groups (Piketty, 2014 in Webb *et al*. 2017:147) and in relation to the recent expansion of higher vocational education through providing apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships with the dual purpose of closing the skills gaps and increasing upward social mobility.

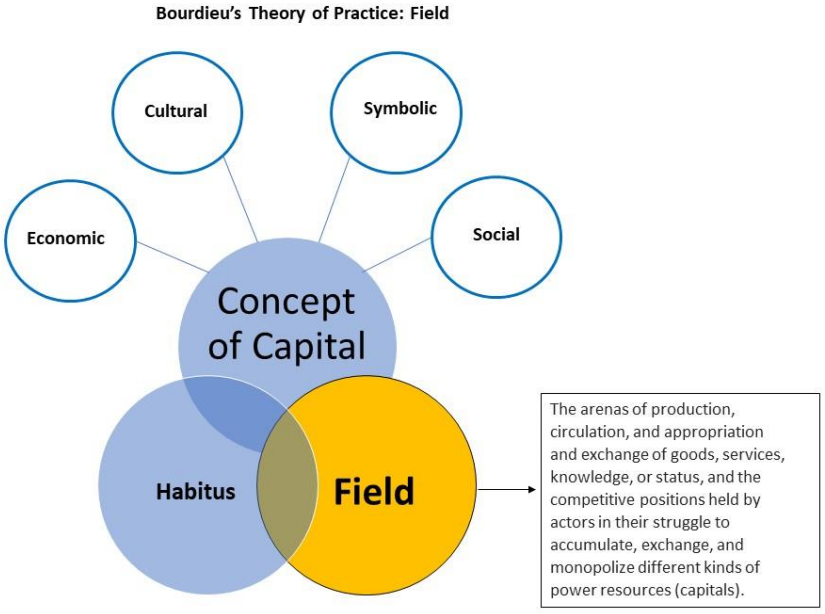

Figure 10 - Bourdieu's theory of practice: Field

There are numerous stakeholders associated with the degree apprenticeship who are considered as the field including universities, employers, government, and government bodies. Therefore, in the context of this study, the higher education institute partnering with the workplace employer in support of the degree apprentice, while operating within the quality frameworks of government, are conceptualised as key elements of the field.

2.2.8 Rationale for applying Bourdieu's concept of capital as the lens for the current study

Since 1990, researchers have used Bourdieu's conceptual tools to understand and theorise changing policies and practices in education, including higher education. Education is one of the significant ways in which social reproduction takes place (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970) and 'it is by knowing the laws of reproduction that we can have a chance, however small, of minimizing the reproductive effect of the educational institution' (Bourdieu, 2008:52-53). Given the research aim of this study is to explore the experiences of those who have enrolled onto a degree apprenticeship in a higher education institution in England it is appropriate to draw upon what Wacquant (1989:50) described as Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', namely of capital, to aid understanding. Relevant consideration of habitus and field, together with knowing the rules of the game, that is how to progress their career trajectory rapidly, is therefore deemed appropriate in the current study. Use of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital is particularly helpful to this research to gain better understanding of how learners might attempt to accumulate various forms of capital through learning (Mills, 2008; Wood, 2013).

Like Bourdieu, this research places critical reflexivity at the centre of its approach as a way of exposing and counteracting the influence of unconscious structures on practices. Bourdieu's integrated theoretical and methodological approach and concept of capital align with the research design (qualitative and explorative, using an interpretative thematic approach to data analysis as detailed in chapter three) for the current study and provide a useful 'tool kit' to assist in understanding the practical logic of everyday life and social action, and the relations of power.

Applying Bourdieu's concept of capital as a lens through which to explore degree apprentice's experiences and reflections on the degree apprenticeship will enable a greater understanding of whether the degree apprentices participating in the current study experience change in lifestyle and the ability to exhibit freedom of choice, what Weber calls a 'stylisation of life' (Bourdieu: 1986:55). Furthermore, analysis of degree apprentice reflections post-completion of

the degree apprenticeship using this lens will provide insight into whether they experience 'practical affirmation', that is legitimation of its 'value add' on their lives (Bourdieu: 1986:56) and potential for social mobility. Therefore, the concept of capital is deemed appropriate as the lens for the current study, which also draws upon the concepts of field, habitus and feel for the game.

A summary of the literature explored in this section of the chapter is presented in Figure 11 below:

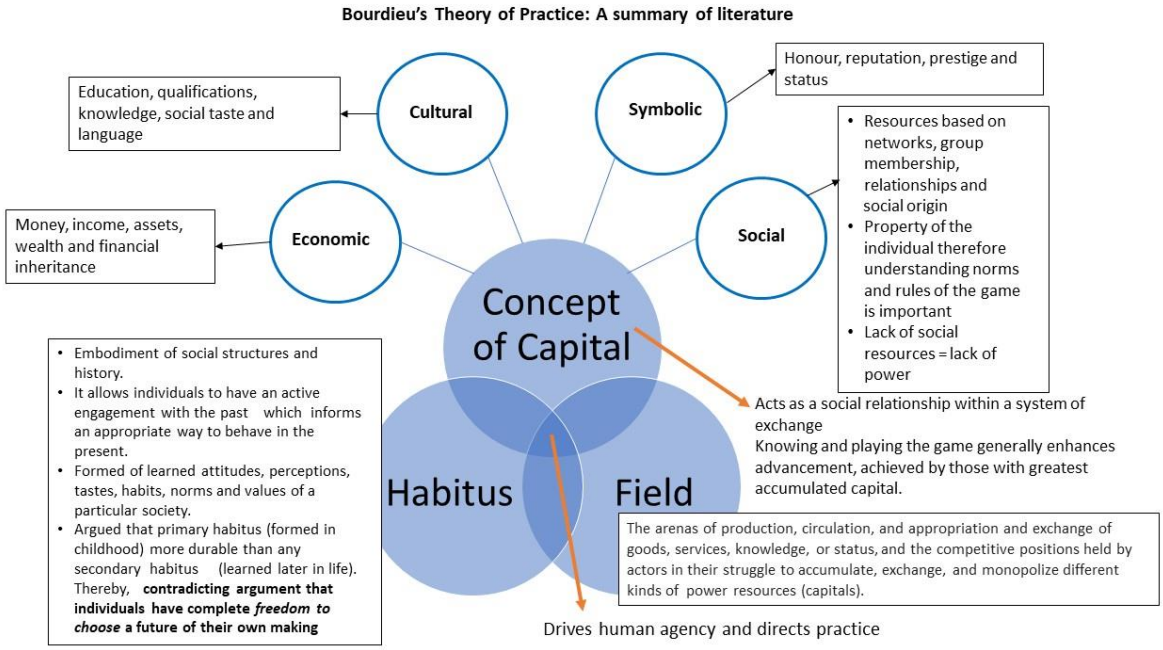

Figure 11 - Bourdieu's theory of practice: A summary of literature

2.3 Influencing factors for enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship

In this final section of the chapter, attention is turned to factors identified within existing literature that influence enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship programme. There is evidence within the literature in this area that these influences align with Bourdieu's concepts of capital (see Figure 12). Whilst the alignment is signposted here, it is examined in more depth and discussed together with findings from the current study in chapter five of this thesis.

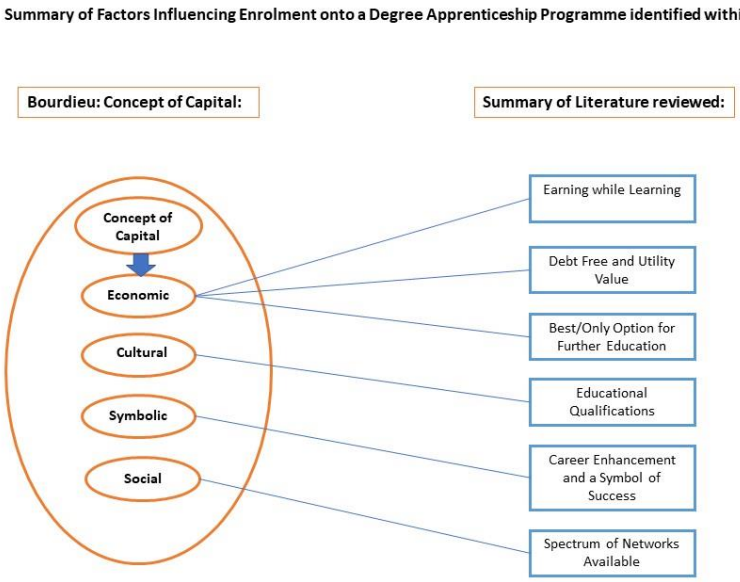

Figure 12 - An overview of factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship, aligned to Bourdieu's concept of capital

2.3.1 Diverse and complex factors influencing enrolment and the rational informed consumer

Research into enrolment to full-time education and apprenticeship education has historically been likened to an emancipatory force (Ranciere, 2003), traditionally focused on an unsophisticated separation of financial (a debt-free route to a degree) and non-financial factors both in intellectual terms and as alleged capacity to endow individuals with acquisitive value (enhanced career trajectory and portfolio of capital).

Within the educational literature, early studies and surveys investigating young people's motivations for engaging with degree level learning typically focus on 'education as a return' (Tomlinson, 2008:58). However, Tomlinson (2008) suggests this view is too simplistic and does not address the probable diversity and complexity of motives for undertaking degree-level study. This view is reflected in recent research (for example, Smith *et al*., 2021) which suggests enrolment to the degree apprenticeship is personal, influenced by a ***combination*** of, financial or non-financial, factors.

Additional support for this view is offered by Ball *et al*., (2002) who observe that young people's decisions into earlier programmes of professional work-based learning are not just informed by material conditions but by non-economic factors and their perceptions. Often learners, established in their workplace, cite these programmes as enabling them to take on increased

responsibility, to gain promotion or to gain role related benefits such as greater competence and assuredness, and workplace recognition (Lester and Costley, 2010).

There is a rich and growing body of research and literature on why young people decide on ***traditional*** higher education (Skatova and Fergusson, 2014:1). The research and literature recognise that choice is individual and complex, and that any choice is a result of a combination of motivations (Holland, 1985; Pervin, 2001; Skatova and Fergusson 2014). It has also been recognised that government policy can impact these choices (Laughland-Booy *et al*., 2015; Holmegaard, 2015; Lambert, 2016).

In neoliberal economies, policymakers tend to construct young people as 'rational informed consumers' in highly competitive markets, who when given all the necessary information, should make the 'right' choices and manage their own learning (Atkins, 2016). However, there is a counter-narrative suggesting students' choice is a dynamic and continuous process where, students' choices can change dramatically within a short time (Holmegaard, 2015; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). Thereby, indicating there are structural and contextual challenges facing young people today that are influencing their post-compulsory education choices.

More recent findings indicate that in the absence of complete and accurate information young people do not act as 'rational informed customers' (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). Therefore, their decisions are made not only on material benefits but also on perceptions and anecdotes of others (Ball *et al*., 2002; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). The recent introduction of degree apprenticeships complicates longitudinal analysis of these choices (Smith *et al.,* 2021). Consequently, it is not surprising that there are calls for qualitative studies to explore this area further, including how choices create a sense of fit for individual students (Holmegaard, 2015).

As such, it is acknowledged that theoretical development in relation to the degree apprenticeship remains limited and an understanding of reasons for enrolling to the degree apprenticeship is in its infancy. It is recognised that as the degree apprenticeship initiative matures, further work is necessary to study factors affecting enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship and to follow 'the apprentices' next steps on completing their apprenticeships' (Smith *et al.,* 2021:500).

2.3.2 Earning while learning (economic capital)

A research project undertaken by Pennell and West (2005:131) on participation in higher education in England (conducted in the London area) noted that family background linked to imputed information on parental incomes negatively impacted choice.

This economic need brought to light differentiation when it comes to educational and career decision-making, in that for those on lower incomes, decisions are related to economic factors (Connor, 2001). However, it is worth noting that Connor (2001) recognises other concerns including confidence in being able to cope with the academic pressures. This aligns to findings of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:127) who distinguish between those who were very much 'fish in water' to those 'marginalised by or excluded from the field' (cited in Watson and Grenfell, 2016:156).

Research by Reay *et al*., (2001:861) find that 'working class' students in the UK are distinguished by a 'localism' that is 'absent from the narratives of more economically privileged students.' They add that 'material constraints of travel and finance often mean they are operating within very limited spaces of choice' (ibid). In this context, it is unsurprising that financial drivers and socio-economic profile were considered primary factors influencing enrolment to employer sponsored degree programmes. However, over twenty years later, in research commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) to determine motivators for enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship, economic reasons (including cost) were cited by degree apprentices as one of the two primary factors (Engeli and Turner, 2019). The other reason being achieving a degree alongside earning a salary (ibid).

Other research has also identified the opportunity to receive an income whilst learning as reasons for choosing an apprenticeship (Ryan, 2011; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). The opportunity to have a bridge between education and employment, thereby easing the transition between full-time education and the workplace (ibid), is also perceived as a benefit. This is unsurprising given the National Apprenticeship Service's slogan 'earn while you learn' (Mazenod, 2016:107) which Ryan and Lőrinc, (2018) point out demonstrates the influence of the national context in shaping choice.

A study funded by The Edge Foundation (an independent educational charity) and undertaken by a consortium of three UK universities with the University Vocational Awards Council in 2019/20 conducted a survey of 165 respondents from each of the consortium universities, of which 46 were apprentices (The Edge Foundation, 2017). In addition, 29 semi-structured interviews and one group discussion were undertaken, eight of these being apprentices from three professional areas of nursing, digital and engineering. The apprentice sample included new and established employees.

The survey results and data from the semi-structured interviews were reported together as findings were considered sufficiently aligned. As the views of apprentices are the focus of the

current study, the findings reported as the views of employers and staff from higher education institutions have been disregarded here. The apprentices participating in the study identified the following as main factors for enrolling onto a degree apprenticeship: achieving a degree and gaining professionally qualified status, followed by ability to earn and learn at the same time, and career opportunities created directly by the apprenticeship. Findings which are consistent with those of Engeli and Turner (2019).

2.3.3 Debt-free and utility value (economic capital)

In England, university fees and associated living costs represent a significant financial outlay and potential debt to the learner. The degree apprenticeship is seen to represent a debt-free route through higher education, and a stepping-stone in a career or a means of enhancing future learning opportunity (Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019).

A study of school leavers in 2002 distinguishes between those who are ***debt averse*** and those who are ***anti-debt***, finding that those who were less debt averse were 1.25 times more likely to go to university and those who were anti-debt were the 'groups that are the focus of widening participation policies (Callender, 2003:3; Callender and Jackson, 2005). This aligns with claims that educational and career options undertaken by young people once they leave school are greatly influenced by their position on the socio-economic scale (for example, Teese, 2000, Reay, *et al.,* 2001; Goldthorpe and Jacson, 2007). Two decades later, research (for example, Smith *et al*., 2021) has found that the perceived debt-free nature of the degree remains attractive to individuals.

Prior to the introduction of the degree apprenticeship, studies examining educational expansion suggested that as access to higher education became more democratised, social differentiation became more significant. A process which affected 'the working classes' (Ball *et al*., 2002:54). A situation which Duru-Bellat (2000:39) claims leads to 'underlying macro-sociological regularities, actors, with unequal assets strive to use the system in the way they consider to be in their own interest'. According to Brooks (2002:218) young people often refer to what 'seems feasible' and 'least risky' in specific socio-structural contexts when making choices, that is they consider their 'utility value'. A more recent study by Ryan and Lőrinc (2018:762) explored how young people narrate and navigate the tensions between apprenticeships as opportunities to 'learn while they earn' and university degrees as the prevailing 'gold standard' of achievement and future success. Their findings identify that whilst these young adults were aware of the challenges associated with apprenticeships, they used

specific rhetorical devices to reclaim the normalcy of their training pathways as 'sensible' and 'mature' choices (ibid).

Today, economic necessity may still be a primary factor influencing enrolment to the degree apprenticeship. Particularly for those wishing to steal competitive advantage (Tawney, 1964 in Reay, 2013). Equally, what seems sensible, feasible and least risky may influence choices made in enrolling onto a degree apprenticeship programme.

2.3.4 The best/only option for obtaining a degree (economic capital)

Smith *et al.,* (2021) who, in a mixed-method study across six universities aimed at understanding the social mobility potential of apprenticeships, asked learners about their trajectories into the apprenticeship. They reported that many apprentices had not considered higher education [university] when leaving school, but 'took this debt-free degree when it became available, recognising that the degree apprenticeship was their best, or only option for obtaining a degree-level award' (Smith *et al.,* 2021:499).

Further support for these findings is offered by other research which has shown that some learners identify degree apprenticeships as their only realistic chance of higher education (Engeli and Turner, 2019; Lester and Bravenboer; 2020). Research undertaken by the Social Mobility Commission (2020), suggests financial constraints and entry requirements act as barriers to acquiring a degree and that the apprenticeship can represent a belated opportunity for degree-level study.

Scholars (for example, Burke, 2015; Reay, 2006; Watson and Grenfell, 2016) argue that despite expansion in student numbers, which has enabled more people from wider backgrounds to enrol in degree learning in higher education, students from less-privileged social backgrounds continue to be under-represented in UK higher education. The introduction of the degree apprenticeship intended, in part, to enable widening participation in higher education.

However, The Social Mobility Commission (2020:5) claim that in England apprentice funding 'has disproportionately funded higher-level apprenticeships for learners from more advantaged communities.' Research by Smith *et al.,* (2021) offers some support for this claim. Although their research identified that apprentices were found to be drawn from all socio-economic groups and represented those new to work and those already in work, seeking to upskill, they noted that younger adults undertaking degree apprenticeships appeared to be disproportionately privileged.

Camden (2021) in FE Week reported that the 'apprenticeships minister, Gillian Keegan expressed concern at an education select committee hearing that university goers could *squeeze out* those from disadvantaged backgrounds.' This resonates with the opinion of the then apprenticeship minister, Anne Milton, who in 2017 voiced concern that fears of a 'middle class grab' on apprenticeships was valid (ibid). These concerns raise a question as to whether the social mobility potential of apprenticeships is being achieved. For the degree apprenticeship policy initiative to be sustainable the dual purpose of increasing productivity ***and*** enhancing social mobility 'recognised as access to professional status for under-represented groups' must be achieved (Lester and Bravenboer, 2020:32).

Lillis and Bravenboer (2022) and Nawaz *et. al*., (2022) argue that claims of a 'middle class grab' (Camden, 2021) lack a reliable and substantiated evidence base. In seeking a shift in government dialogue, Lillis and Bravenboer (2022) challenge the use and reliance on proxy data, known as Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which use postcode and neighbourhood data to measure the impact of degree apprenticeships on social mobility. Findings from their detailed study examining the impact of higher and degree apprenticeship provision on social mobility and progression into graduate careers and professions for individuals studying for a degree apprenticeship at Middlesex University oppose the view (influenced by proxy data) offered by critics of degree apprenticeships and some policy makers.

They argue the study demonstrates that proxy data (POLAR and IMD) are inappropriate measures of social mobility and that individualised socio-economic measures 'provide a more reliable and valid means of determining social mobility impact regarding apprentices at Middlesex University' (Lillis and Bravenboer, 2022:52). The findings from their study are important in several ways. The use of valid and reliable government tested individual socio-economic measures instead of proxy measures provides an opposing narrative aimed at shifting government dialogue. It also has wider application enabling higher education degree apprenticeship providers to better demonstrate the impact their provision is making, thereby supporting a more informed approach to policy making.

Nawaz *et al*., (2022), in their systematic review of all available outputs on the impact of degree apprenticeships, conclude that there is robust evidence that degree apprenticeships ***are*** contributing to improving social mobility as well as productivity. Therefore, Nawaz *et. al.,* (2022) also reject the view of politicians and lobbyists that the apprenticeship programme is failing to deliver on its social mobility potential. Nevertheless, Nawaz *et. al.,* (2022) acknowledge the 'slightly contradictory narratives' of other reports and limited extant

literature, and suggest further research is required to better understand the impact of degree apprenticeships. The current study therefore contributes to this discussion.

In addition, in acknowledging the arguments that under-representation of those from less-privileged social backgrounds is contrary to an espoused intention of the degree apprenticeship, the possibility of other factors influencing enrolment onto this type of programme arises.

2.3.5 Educational Qualifications (cultural capital)

Recent research conducted by Crawford-Lee and Moorwood (2019) states that all apprentices (of any age) when asked why they decided to pursue a degree apprenticeship will confirm the ability to gain a degree as one of the reasons. This may be because of a belief that studying for a degree brings improved job and career prospects, and consequent improved earnings as identified by Connor *et al.,* (2001).

Within the field of education, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital (Webb *et al*., 2002). Early research suggests that family background and level of income may impact educational and qualification aspirations and/or the ability to achieve these aspirations. Most of this early research in the UK and Europe focusing on individual student aspirations to educational trajectories applied economic theory and analysis to survey data. For example, in the UK, a longitudinal study examining aspirations of students as they passed through education aged from 3-14 conducted between 1996 to 2003, found students generally held high educational aspirations including those from less advantaged backgrounds, with 87.2% of these students believing it very important to obtain an undergraduate degree (Baker *et al*. 2014).

Given that many degree apprentices in UK higher education are faced with a slow economic environment where there is an over-supply of graduates, for those eager to gain a foothold in their industry of choice educational and occupational aspirations remain an important reference point.

2.3.6 Career enhancement and a symbol of success (symbolic capital)

Research suggests that the age of the degree apprentice is a potential variable for different motivations for completing a degree apprenticeship. For example, in terms of preparation for a career, Engeli and Turner (2019) report that seventy-five percent of the youngest learners felt strongly that the degree apprenticeship would have an important impact on their career, compared to forty one percent of respondents over the age of thirty. Although not

differentiating by age, Lester and Bravenboer, (2020:57) report that apprentices cited 'the main value of the degree apprenticeship comes from the degree or professional qualification, the ability to work, earn and learn at the same time, and the career opportunities provided whether connected to entering the labour market or progressing to a more senior or professional level.' Together these research studies suggest that apprenticeship **combined with a degree** is perceived to not only improve job prospects but increases individual status and enhance career trajectory.

2.3.7 Spectrum of networks available (social capital)

Social contacts together with educational credentials (institutionalised cultural capital – see 2.2.3) play a central role in ensuring individuals successfully transition into the workplace (for example, Bourdieu, 1977; Granovetter, 1995; Lin 1999; Lin, 2001; Winterton and Irwin 2012). Research has also shown that individuals who forge ties across important sub-groups ***within*** the workplace are better able to capitalise on opportunities such as promotion, enjoy greater career mobility and are able to adapt to changing environments more successfully (Cross and Thomas, 2008).

Although there have been some investigations on the school-to-work transition of adolescents, this area remains under-explored (Roth, 2017). Nevertheless, existing studies on this topic point toward social ties accessed through parents being of great importance during the school-to-work transition (Granovetter, 1995; Roth, 2014). It could therefore be assumed parental social contacts may play a potential role in the school to apprenticeship transition.

Winterton and Irwin (2012:859) expand on this point by highlighting complexity for students in making career decisions not least in terms of the broad spectrum of networks available including the significance of family, educational backgrounds, parents' expectations, academic identity, school and institutional influences, and friends and peer influences in the shaping of young people's expectations. Moreover, they state that each of these networks signify forms of social capital that may be used in the career decision-making process.

Findings of the Wavehill report reveal that 62% of level 6 respondents stated that they decided for themselves that 'degree apprenticeships would be a good fit for them.' (Engeli and Turner, 2019:22) It was concluded that 'this indicated that degree apprentices are independent decision-makers' and while they said 'they may consider the views of friends, family, and employers they ultimately take responsibility for their own choices'. However, it is noted that this conclusion is based on quantitative data only, where responses could not be fully explored.

The effects of degree apprentices' social networks in influencing their choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship, whether transitioning from school or college into work at post-18 or the choice to upskill for those already in employment, has received little attention in the degree apprenticeship literature and research to date.

Roth (2018) highlights several empirical studies examining the influence of social networks on labour market entry and the effects of social networks on individual success (for example, Field, 2008; Lin, 1999; Lin and Erickson, 2008). These studies share the perspective that the resources and information an individual has access to through social networks is social capital, which they can use to achieve their goals. However, to date, there is little direct reference to professional networks, apprenticeships, and degree apprenticeships in existing research.

In summary, analysis of the literature highlights the choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship is influenced by a combination of factors. These include government policy, cost of traditional higher education and socio-economic conditions, considered in the current study to be 'push' factors. That is, factors that contribute to driving (or pushing) the learner towards the degree apprenticeship. Factors such as the ability to earn whilst learning, to be debt-free, to be able to take a less risky route to a degree than a traditional degree whilst increasing personal status and enhancing career prospects by gaining a professional qualification are considered pull factors (see Figure 13 below).

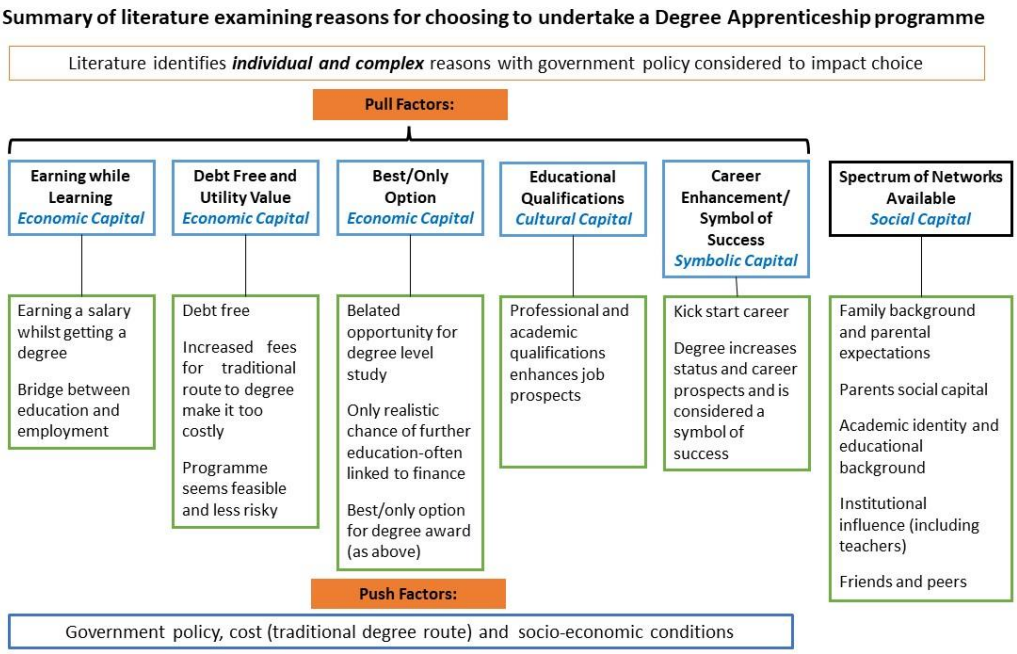

Figure 13 - Push and pull factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship programme

2.4 Chapter summary

The emergence of degree apprenticeships offers a further work-based entry route into industry generally, whilst offering an alternative route to a degree. The purpose of the degree apprenticeship being to close the skills gap (and raising productivity) and increase upward (social) mobility. In this respect, the degree apprenticeship is seen as a means of widening participation for under-represented groups in higher education (Takhar 2016). Nonetheless, some groups continue to be under-represented, especially in the most prestigious universities (Reay *et al.* 2001; Boliver 2016). Whilst there is evidence of some widening participation, of closing skills gaps and increasing productivity, the area of social mobility remains under researched.

The degree apprenticeship is a contemporary model of work-based learning. Gibson and Busby (2009:478) argue for a critical need to develop policy, practice and support for work-integrated learning that is 'fully considered, fit for purpose, contemporary and student-centred'. Simon *et al*., (2006:4) highlight the importance of learners 'making sense of their experience and building their knowledge based on these experiences'. Effective learning in vocational education and training is intimately linked to drawing on the workplace to create meaningful context for learning through application of skills and knowledge in a real-world environment (Blake and Smith, 2007). To facilitate a 'student-centred' degree apprenticeship, it is important to understand student's expectations, experiences, and reflections of degree apprentices.

Using Bourdieu's analytical tools of capitals and practice, the current study explores the experiences of degree apprentices and examines how they use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility. To achieve this objective, the social and professional networks available to the degree apprentice are considered important. Watson and Grenfell (2016:166) assert that 'the social world, as Bourdieu recognised, is multi-dimensional and one cannot capture the totality of its complexity.' Nevertheless, using Bourdieu's concept of capital, it is possible to develop a clearer picture of its component parts and the nature of its dynamic.

Literature has investigated reasons for choosing a work-based learning route to a qualification including, more latterly, the degree apprenticeship. By exploring the factors influencing learner enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship programme from the degree apprentice perspective, a greater understanding of their experiences and reflections of the degree apprenticeship will be facilitated.

3.0 Chapter Three – Methodology

'Our aim as researcher storytellers is not to seek certainty about correct perspectives on educational phenomena but to raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice that enrich ongoing conversation'

(Barone, 2007:466)

The previous chapter provided a review of the contextual literature followed by an introduction to the theoretical framework that underpins this research.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain, discuss and provide rationale in support of the chosen methodology. Firstly, an overview of research paradigms and philosophies is provided. A pragmatic stance for the research is established and justified. A critical discussion of the qualitative research design developed and applied for this study follows. The chapter moves on to describe the qualitative research approach utilised in the research. Data collection methods and sampling techniques are explained with rationale. Finally, data analysis employed in this study are examined and ethical considerations are detailed.

3.1 Introduction

This study adopts a pragmatic perspective of constructivism (Coe *et al*., 2017) and an interpretivist epistemological stance. This is underpinned by the belief that 'social reality is not objective but highly subjective because it is shaped by our perceptions', acknowledging researcher interaction 'with that being researched because it is impossible to separate what exists in the social world from what is in the researcher's mind' (Collis and Hussey, 2014:45). A pragmatist perspective holds that acceptable knowledge is that which is socially useful (Rorty, 1999) and therefore, the methodology and methods chosen are those considered most useful in addressing the research questions. The research design adopted a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews as the research tool selected primarily because of their usefulness in contributing to answering the research questions which are open ended and lend themselves to qualitative enquiry (Patton, 2014). Thereby aiding understanding of the world of the research participants (Coe *et al*., 2017). In this case deepening understanding of how apprentices experience the degree apprenticeship.

3.2 Research paradigms

In this section, the term research paradigm is defined and the ontological, epistemological, and axiological position, and methodology applied in this study are identified. A critical discussion of the adoption of a pragmatist perspective and how this influenced the research methodology and methods utilised in the study is included.

3.2.1 Research paradigms: Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology

Guba and Lincoln (1994:116) highlight that no inquirer 'ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach'. A view supported by Grix (2002) and Kuhn (1962) who argue the necessity for a frame of reference in which to operate when undertaking research claiming any researcher needs awareness of how they see the world and, importantly an awareness of how their own worldview might influence the data produced. Similarly, Coe *et al*., (2017) caution that educational research is complex and therefore researchers need to critique their own research position to promote understanding and transparency in what research is done and why. There are different opinions on the notion of the paradigm (Silverman, 2014; Coe *et al*., 2017; Bryman and Bell, 2018). In its general sense a paradigm is 'a set of inter-related assumptions about the social world, which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organised study of that world' (Kuhn, 1962 in Bryman and Bell, 2011:17). It has been classified as a set of belief systems shaping the type of knowledge being sought (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and by others as a 'worldview', concerned with how we make sense of the world as we perceive and experience it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Morgan, 2007; Patton, 2014).

For the purposes of this research, because of its concern with utility, the preferred definition is:

> 'A framework that guides how research should be conducted based on people's philosophies and their assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge' (Collis and Hussey, 2014:43).

The main paradigms (worldviews) habitually presented as being fundamentally opposed are those of positivism/post-positivism and constructivism/interpretivism (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). An overview of these worldviews is provided in Appendix 2. For many years, derived from the work of Kuhn (1970), positivism/quantitative research resided as the sole research paradigm in natural sciences (Collis and Hussey, 2014; Coe *et al*., 2017). As constructivist/qualitative research developed, it gave rise to a range of naturalistic, case study and ethnographic methodologies. However, at the end of the twentieth century the qualitative paradigm came under attack (Hillage *et al*., 1998) claiming to find its methods insufficiently rigorous, its data collection small scale and its outcomes biased. Moreover, it was argued that such research had little impact on institutional practice (Grenfall and James, 2004). Consequently, researchers were urged to return to quantitative methods capable of producing sufficiently 'hard evidence' (Fitz-Gibbon, 2000:239).

This debate in relation to the two-paradigm typology continued with researchers contesting the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative versus qualitative research, known as the paradigm wars (Onwuegbuzie, 2002). However, with the emergence of social sciences this absolute dualism was challenged, and the single paradigm restriction was lifted (Schuh and Barab, 2008).

This led to the introduction of a competing paradigm that of interpretivism/qualitative research and more recently to pragmatism, sitting between the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, it is recognised as the third research paradigm (Hall, 2013). A pragmatic stance shows appreciation of both positivist and interpretivist approaches accepting that there are both singular and multiple realities thereby allowing the researcher to be freed of the constraints of an either/or approach leading to mixed methods research (Johnson and Ongwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2008, 2016).

Saunders *et al*., (2018) maintain that each philosophy will be better at doing different things. Similarly, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:101) argue the methods that 'get the job done' should be chosen. It was therefore, acknowledged that influences could come from both hypothesis and facts of evidence. Consequently, it was proposed that researchers need not discard one paradigm (world view) over the other and pragmatism as a paradigm has emerged as a practically relevant research paradigm for all types of research (Denscombe, 2008:273-275).

Pivotal to research philosophy is a set of questions consisting of ontological issues concerned with the nature of reality, epistemological issues concerned with what valid knowledge is, and axiological issues unveiling the roles values play in research (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that ontology, the nature of knowledge, and epistemology, the nature of knowing, are not independent of each other and so are discussed together within the literature. A view supported by Coe *et al*., (2017:16) who argue 'it is on the basis of answers to the ontological question that the epistemological question can be asked, and assumptions are made'.

In summary, a paradigm is the stance taken in relation to the nature of knowledge and knowing (Morgan, 2007). Each philosophy has their own questions concerning knowledge, reality, and values, which are considered in the next section.

3.2.1.1 Ontology

Ontology scrutinises the nature of social reality or being (Grix, 2002) its nature, what form it takes, and what can be known about it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). According to Braun and Clarke (2013) ontological positions specify the relationship between the world and human interpretations and practices. Within ontology the nature of social reality has two types,

objective and subjective (Saunders *et al*., 2018). The objectivist believes in a single reality that exists independently of social actors. Conversely, constructivists believe in subjectivism, that reality is created from the minds of social actors and is, therefore, socially constructed (ibid). Influenced by van Niekerk and Savin-Baden (2010:28) who argue 'truths in qualitative research are spaces of mediation … our biographies, positions and practices affect how we see and practice truths in qualitative research', this research adopts the constructivist view that the world can be seen in a variety of different ways with 'multiple outlooks on what constitutes reality' (Maudsley, 2011:94). In treating social reality as constructed in different ways and in different contexts, the notion of an either/or approach to research methodology is rejected and multiple paradigms embraced (Punch, 2014).

This research aligns with the worldview that knowledge is created in the world surrounding the subjects including their feelings, perceptions and interpretations suggesting reality can be both constructed by social phenomena and social actors (Schuh and Barab, 2008). Therefore, this research is approached from a position of pragmatism in which both objective and subjective reality has a part to play in research and that human ideas, knowledge and actions are developed within a social context (Brinkmann, 2018) and can provide useful knowledge (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

3.2.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge and addresses the question of what it is possible to know (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This concerns what counts as valid knowledge in a particular field. It may be observable and measurable (objective data - numbers) or in contrast it may be feelings/attitudes of what is being researched (subjective knowledge).

The epistemological stance determines whether reality is thought to exist entirely separate from, and external to, social actors (objectivism). This positivist stance contrasts with the interpretivist view that the social world is subjective based on social constructions created from individual perceptions and human practices and understandings of social actors (constructivism) (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Bryman and Bell, 2018).

The aim of this research is to explore learner's experiences of the degree apprenticeship programme. Therefore, an interpretivist approach that acknowledges the subjective nature of these experiences was adopted.

3.2.1.3 Axiology

Axiology relates to values placed in research choices and processes (Saunders *et al*., 2018; Creswell, 2012). Views held are either value-laden where the researcher is immersed in the research or value-free with the researcher staying outside of the research.

Becker (1967:239) asserts that for research to be value free it must be assumed that it is possible to undertake research that is 'uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies'. Becker advocates the need to recognise the value-laden nature of enquiry and the role of power and rhetoric.

A pragmatist stance is value aware. It recognises personal values shape and influence engagement with participants, data analysis and interpretation, irrespective of explicit identification of researcher values (Collis and Hussey, 2014; Saunders *et al*., 2018). Therefore, the interpretivist stance assumes a value-laden axiology. Researcher values and potential bias, and their potential implications on this research are discussed in section 1.4 and Appendix 1.

3.2.1.4 Methodology

Methodology is concerned with how research will be conducted. It outlines 'what procedures or logic should be followed' (Coe *et al*., 2017:16) and assumptions supporting use of methods in producing knowledge (Grix, 2002).

As identified previously there is much research exploring aspects of work-based learning and early apprenticeships up to level 3, which includes all three paradigmatic approaches. However, little research in relation to degree apprenticeships has been conducted. Nevertheless, examples can be found which use an objective positivist ontology applying quantitative methodology and methods to measure, for example, variables associated with post-18 career choice (for example, Baloo, 2018; and Fabian *et al.*, 2021). There is, however, limited research that explores the degree apprentice's experiences using a qualitative approach enabling a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of their experiences to be developed. In fact, no examples of studies that explore how these degree apprentice learners experience degree apprenticeships, and how they use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility were found.

3.3. Pragmatism and this study

Pragmatism, according to Dewey (1922, 2008), characterises human experience as a continuous process of adaptation. Pragmatist theory therefore suggests that social action is a response to the social environment in which it takes place. The pragmatic world view argues that whilst

most of the responses to our environments come out of habit, when presented with new and challenging situations, where our environment warrants change, our behaviour (i.e., human action) adapts accordingly (Garrison and Neiman, 2003; Ansell, 2016).

Dewey (1992) claimed that human meaning-constructions can only be knowable through extensive and minute observation of consequences incurred in action, suggesting that we cannot claim to know anything outside of experience. Therefore, pragmatists logic and truth are established through what happens to us, and what we can verify through events. Our behavioural change is therefore, situated and context specific (VanWynsberghe and Herman, 2015). This acknowledgement has gained in momentum such that, today, pragmatism is increasingly popular in mixed-methods research (Johnson and Ongwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2008, 2016).

Pragmatism places emphasis on the view that there is no separation between humans and their natural world. Therefore, the focus is on what practical difference an observation, action, or thought makes on the world. It supports the notion that, language and knowledge do not copy reality but are means of coping with a changing world (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:60) and individuals are dependent on their adaptability and their ideas to contribute to 'changing the reality they concern' (Brinkmann, 2018:95-96). The pragmatist perspective believes that knowledge is created in the world surrounding the subjects including their feelings, perceptions, and interpretations, and that reality can be both constructed by social phenomena and social actors. As the aim of this research is to explore the experiences of degree apprentices and how they use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility, a pragmatic approach recognising the subjective nature of participant experience, was adopted for this study. Specifically, the perspective from which this research was approached reflects the belief that the context of the environment matters for the existence and creation of cultural and social capital.

In pragmatism, one methodology is not seen as being superior to another. They are complementary parts of the systematic, empirical search for knowledge (Silverman, 2013). Therefore, arbitrary, self-imposed categories and ideological commitment to one methodological paradigm are rejected (Hammersley, 2018). Instead, in the current study, the interview data ***leads*** the systematic pursuit of knowledge about the topic (Silverman, 2013), in its attempt to 'say something interesting about the nature of truth' (Howe, 1988:14) as it relates to the phenomena being investigated.

Therefore, this study was conducted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and subjective, and influenced by perception (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The methodology and

methods were adopted for their utility in addressing the research question while moving beyond observed reality toward understanding reality as 'an expression for, or a sign of, deeper-lying processes' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017:23).

Aligning with these views, methodology and methods used in the process of research were determined by the research question. The chosen research methodology for this study was qualitative utilising semi-structured interviews as it offers a suitable framework for conducting research for exploring the degree apprentice experiences of the degree apprenticeship. Silverman (2014) claims that research design should involve careful thought as, ultimately, everything will depend on the quality of the data analysis rather than upon the quality of the data. Therefore, framing the research questions was a significant aspect of this research.

3.4 Research design

In discussing the role of sociologists, Bourdieu and Waquant (1992:7) state that their task is to uncover the buried structures within society and to reveal the mechanisms that perpetually construct and reconstruct these structures. They argue that before the process of transformation can begin, an understanding of these mechanisms and of the social world in which individuals live and work must be acquired. It is argued that research decisions need to be developed not only in terms of how the researcher conceptualises the world but also in relation to theory of how research subjects think about things. This suggests the need to develop a plan that logically links the questions with the evidence to be collected and analysed, ultimately circumscribing the types of findings that can emerge (Yin, 2014).

The aim of this research is not to seek to measure the ***extent*** to which factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship ***correlates*** with their experiences of the programme as this would necessitate a quantitative approach. Instead, the aim is to explore ***how*** degree apprentices experience their degree apprenticeship, focusing on their journey into, through and beyond their degree apprenticeship. An understanding of how capital is acquired and exploited in enhancing their social mobility is of particular interest, crucial consideration at a time of increasing numbers of enrolments in alternative higher education provision.

The research design for the current study was an emergent process. The initial design and methods of data collection are presented in Appendix 3 with rationale for them being discounted in favour of a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews.

3.4.1 The qualitative research design

The research design for this study was a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews as the research method. The latter chosen primarily for their: usefulness in addressing the research questions, in aiding an understanding of the world of the participants (Cohen *et al*., 2017), and their ability to gather potentially rich data and thick descriptions of experiences and perspectives necessary to convey a full picture (Geertz, 1973; Gray, 2017). The research design for this study is illustrated in Figure 14.

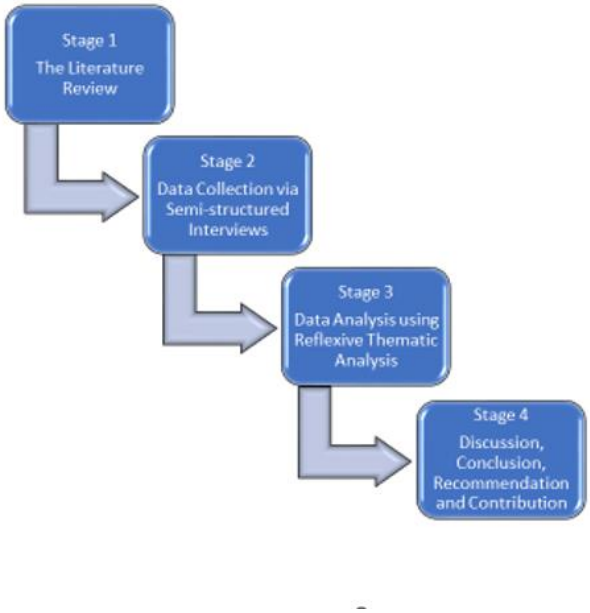

Figure 14 - The Qualitative Research Design

3.4.1.1 Researcher Reflexivity in Qualitative Research

Whilst Lincoln and Guba (2013) highlight positivist approaches have an epistemological binary of true or false, a constructivist methodology allows for continuum of views to be explored. Therefore, qualitative research acknowledges the subjective views of individuals in relation to the multiple realities of their social world (Banister *et. al.*, 1994). It encourages interpretation and construction of hidden knowledge by asking questions of, for example, appropriateness of researcher methodology, researcher impact on participants and potential for interviewer bias (Best, 2019) as the 'act of knowing becomes a dynamic act' (Freire, 1985:53). It is recognised that a researcher's own subjectivity, background, values, and biases need to also be acknowledged (Anderson and Kanuka, 2003). Therefore, reflexivity is essential in qualitative research, as part of research 'quality control' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:37).

Personal reflexivity in a research context refers to the process of critically reflecting on knowledge production and making visible the researcher's role in producing that knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992:69) discussion on the effect of the 'scholarly gaze' is implicit in their observation that the process of analysis must involve a layering of reflection and discussion with those involved. Otherwise, the object being studied (for example, capital) will be formed and analysed solely by the researcher. Therefore, data analysis requires both an objective and subjective interpretation, perpetuating the cycle of reflection through own dialogue with that of the participants. Consequently, in the current study, it was important to maintain this understanding and not look at the analysis as a pure comparative study between the experience and views of post-18 learners and the researcher as a non-traditional higher education graduate. Throughout the research process a reflexive diary was maintained, where appropriateness of research methodology and personal impact on participants including, monitoring of power relationships in the dynamic of the research process (Bannister *et al*., 1994) was questioned and challenged. Examples of this reflexivity and reflections on the research process are presented in Appendix 1.

3.5 The process of data collection

In this section a critique and rationale for using qualitative interview method and the tool of semi-structured interviews as a process of data collection is provided. This is followed by the participant recruitment strategy, together with overview of participant profiles. Ethical considerations are discussed. The ways in which issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research are addressed. The interview process is explained. The questions developed for the semi-structured interviews were informed by the research questions for this study (Appendix 4). Ethical approval for the research was obtained (Appendix 5) necessitating production and inclusion of a Research Information Sheet and Consent Form (Appendix 6).

3.5.1 Qualitative interviews as a research method

Punch (2014) asserts that interviews provide direct access to those able to provide insight into what is going on and answer how and why questions that will generate as full an understanding as possible. Interviews also place emphasis on the construction of the social situation allowing us to make sense of contemporary social situations (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). According to Seidman (2006:9) 'at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.' The decision to use interviews as a data collection method was based on a

predominant interest to collect data that facilitates insightful analysis and produce defensible findings (Mears, 2017 in Coe *et al.,* 2017).

It is important to make a distinction over the form and degree of structure to which research should adhere. Guidance in this respect states that the research interview is based on the 'conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewed' (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015:4-5). Moreover, 'an interview is a conversation that has a structure and purpose' (ibid).

3.5.1.1 The semi-structured interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews enabling collection of qualitative data are more effective in encouraging lived experiences and opinions, offering a stronger understanding of phenomena. Semi-structured interviews aid the researcher to learn what the participant has experienced and what significance it might have, as well as capturing multiple meanings of experiences as represented by what individuals say to the researcher (Gubrium, 1997 in Silverman 2013). This raises methodological issues as to whether interview responses give direct access to 'experiences' and 'feelings' or should be treated as actively constructed 'narratives' involving activities which themselves require analysis (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 in Silverman, 2013:87). In addition, individual interviews as opposed to, for example, focus group interviews, enable participants to retain anonymity (Bryman and Bell, 2018).

An acknowledged limitation of semi-structured interviews as a research tool is the potential for interviews to be lengthy, expensive, and susceptible to bias (Cohen *et. al.*, 2017; Easterby-Smith *et. al*., 2018). A pilot study was therefore conducted, and the interview process and questions subsequently refined.

3.5.1.2 Conducting and learning from the pilot study

One semi-structured interview was undertaken for the pilot. The structure of an interview must be chosen prior to the interview being undertaken and influenced by the aims of the research and by knowledge gained through literature review (Gray, 2017; Easterby-Smith *et. al.,* 2018). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stress that a significant part of an interview should take place before recording the first interview. Saunders *et.al*., (2018) and Bryman and Bell, (2018) advise use of an interview guide that helps to steer and structure the interview. Therefore, in the belief that greater preparation for interview leads to higher quality of knowledge produced in the interview interaction (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) interview questions and approach were piloted for this study.

The pilot consisted of a set of pre-prepared themed questions. These were shared with one degree apprentice participating in the study prior to the interview. This was in the expectation that the quality of response would be stronger than if unprepared. This is termed participative relevance (Bryman and Bell, 2018). This approach provided flexibility in enabling the degree apprentice to communicate their experiences from their own point of view. However, the interview lasted nearly two hours to complete and a further twelve hours to transcribe which made this a lengthy process. Consequently, it was necessary to refine the approach in a way that would focus the interview without stifling the participant.

Following the pilot study and a review of the pre-determined questions, each interview lasted approximately one hour. Prior to each interview, a short pre-interview participant information question sheet to capture basic and historical information on the participant such as their family circumstance, previous learning and outcomes was issued (see Appendix 7), in line with guidance offered by Bryman and Bell (2018) who suggest recording key details on an additional facing sheet. This meant that the interview itself was more effective in facilitating individual and subjective reflection on lived experiences and opinions (Gray, 2017). Thereby, providing the degree apprentices the opportunity to reflect on experiences, the challenges, successes, and social relationships over time.

This refinement to process also produced opportunity within the interview to make linkages between responses and the pre-determined questions, thereby enhancing participative relevance by limiting opportunity to digress (Bryman and Bell, 2018).

3.5.1.3 Interview construction

The construction of the interview guide was based on the literature review where topical themes emerged, together with the researchers 'insider knowledge' as a manager with responsibility for degree apprenticeships and the development of vocational, work-based training and education within a higher education institution.

Easterby-Smith *et. al.,* (2018) maintain that an interview guide should comprise of three sections; opening questions to break the ice, topic questions, and closing questions. In the current study, research objectives initially guided the interview structure by exploring themes encouraging systematic answering of each question. However, Braun and Clarke (2013) warn of over rushing or being over rigid in this process. Similarly, Blumberg *et. al*., (2014) caution the researcher not to obsess over the structure as tighter structure lessens flexibility. Guidance from Saunders *et. al*., (2018) encourages the use of a freer structure, allowing the flow of the conversation to dictate the order of the questions. Heeding this guidance, although pre-

determined questions were set, a preparedness to change the order of questions or not be restricted by the questions had an appropriate sub-topic emerged, was adopted. This avoided having a structured schedule which may have stifled flow of conversation (Robson; 2011; Gray, 2017; Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2018). In taking this approach, it was possible to stay focused on listening to the participant and only asking additional questions to tease out example to support a point made.

3.5.2 Interview sampling frame, target population and sample size

Awareness that each step within the research process has the potential to influence the research output ensured a strategised approach to the recruitment of participants for interview. Newby (2010:229) suggests that sampling is the most important stage in the research process. Patton (1990:230) recommends the use of purposeful sampling choosing a small number of 'information-rich' cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. However, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stress the selection of participants should observe precautions about maintaining variety of experience and avoid presuppositions about the nature of the conceptions held by different types of individuals.

At this stage, there was no indication as to whether variations and related factors of the degree apprentices' employment could impact the degree apprentice. Therefore, individuals who had completed their degree apprenticeship in the previous six to twelve months were targeted. At the time the interviews were to be conducted there were only two subject occupations with graduate degree apprenticeship programmes: the Digital & Technology Solutions Professional Degree Apprenticeship and Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship. It was decided to recruit from the Digital & Technical Solutions programme for this research. In not seeking randomness, selection was intentional and required more preparation than first envisaged (Coe *et al*., 2017).

A purposive sample method was used to recruit participants to be interviewed. Purposive and convenience sampling are ostensibly the most common participant selection strategies in thematic analysis research (Sandelowski, 1995; Patton, 2014). Silverman (2014) challenges whether there are any grounds other than convenience or accessibility that guides sample selection. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:202) claim that purposive, and not random sampling methods, requires the researcher to 'seek out groups, settings and individuals where …. the processes being studied are most likely to occur' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:202).

The aim in undertaking purposive sampling in the current study was to deliberately select 'information rich' cases (Patton, 2002:230) with potential to maximise understanding of the phenomena under investigation, that is, the experiences of degree apprentices. Due to the relatively small number of degree apprentices graduating at that time it was appropriate to employ the technique of 'snowball sampling' (Saunders *et al*., 2009:240). Therefore, academic, and professional networks were drawn upon to seek out these individuals. In turn these network contacts reached out to their networks. By taking this purposive, snowball approach it was possible to recruit a sufficient sample to provide rich data for this research study.

Determining the number of participants for the study was challenging as there is no universal standard (Madill and Gough, 2008). Concepts of data saturation, data sufficiency (Gray, 2017) and data adequacy, operationalised by Morse (1995:147) as 'collecting data until no new information is obtained', and what constitutes adequate sample size is, according to Sim *et al*., (2018:630), 'an iterative, context-dependent decision'. Given the prevailing context of a relatively small number of universities with degree apprentice graduates at the time (less than 10), the nature of the research study and the time available to balance an in-depth understanding of each participant with the breadth of understanding gained by interviewing many participants (Schofield *et al.* 2013), it was decided that fifteen to twenty interviews would offer the opportunity to collect sufficient rich data to provide an insight into the experiences being investigated.

Four universities from the higher education institutions delivering these degree apprenticeship programmes in England at the time were included. These universities constituted a wide geographic spread.

3.5.3 Recruiting the participants

To begin the process of data collection, introductions to degree apprentices that met the interview selection criteria were sought from the researcher's network of academic colleagues and invested stakeholders from the four universities. Due to General Data Collection Regulation (GDPR), the research brief and researcher contact details were shared with the network of academics. These network contacts approached potential participants, sharing the research brief enabling degree apprentices to contact the researcher if they wished to become a participant in this study. A total of eighteen people made contact, agreeing to participate. Whilst one did not respond to an invitation to interview, the remaining seventeen individuals met the criteria of having graduated as a degree apprentice within the last year.

3.5.3.1 Participant profiles

Seventeen degree apprentices were interviewed for this study. Ten of whom self-identified as male and seven as female. Their ages ranged from 21 to 28 years old. Ten of the participants were first in family to study at degree level. At the time of interview all degree apprentices were employed, representing seven employers and four universities. The degree apprentices were assured at the outset that their identity, that of their employer and that of the university they studied with would not be revealed to maintain privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. In addition, each participant was given a pseudonym. A numeric code was also given to their employer and the university at which they studied for their degree.

3.5.4 Qualitative research: Issues of trustworthiness and credibility

In qualitative research it is important to be aware of potential for the interpretation to be influenced by factors such as researcher bias, as this can impact its trustworthiness and credibility. This is in contrast to validity and reliability sought in quantitative research. Qualitative researchers suggest that the studies they produce should be judged or evaluated to different criteria to those of quantitative research (Bryman, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, propose trustworthiness in which each aspect of trustworthiness has a parallel with quantitative research criteria. They define credibility as the match between the evaluator's representation and the 'constructed realities' of respondents (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:237). The interviewer should acknowledge that the 'researcher inevitably influences the research process and 'seek to maximise the benefits of engaging actively with the participants in the study' (Yardley, 2008 in Braun and Clarke, 2013:279).

Interviews as a method of data collection can be highly subjective. To attain credibility, the research process must be both valid and reliable which is a major challenge when research is based upon a semi-structured interview (Brinkmann, 2018). This is pertinent to the current study as, for example, the degree apprentices are sponsored by their employer to undertake the degree apprenticeship. It is therefore not certain that the apprentice is answering reliably as they may say what they think is politically correct in terms of their employer. Equally, bias may also result from the time-consuming requirements of the interview process which, if not managed, could result in poorly considered responses or even unwillingness to continue to take part. The process for withdrawal from the research and what happens to any data collected to the point of withdrawal is included in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 6).

Table 2 considers each aspect of trustworthiness and its parallel with quantitative research criteria.

Table 2- Aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research (adapted from Bryman, 2016)

Trustworthiness	Definition	Alignment to quantitative approaches
Credibility	Believability of the findings is sufficiently convincing to assess that the researcher has understood participant responses.	Internal validity
Confirmability	Potential for researcher bias has been considered and reduced.	Objectivity
Dependability	The research has been sufficiently detailed to allow transparency in process and outcome, providing reassurance that it has been carried out properly.	Reliability
Transferability	Data is sufficiently rich to allow an assessment to be made as to whether it can be transferred to other contexts.	External validity

Qualitative research interviews are intended to enable an understanding of the world from the participant's point of view. As individuals are dependent on discourses, beliefs, and power relations, often imposed by others (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), the interviewer should be cognisant of this during the interview process. Interview questions should not be ambiguous and not inadvertently lead the participant to ensure knowledge claims that are convincing. Credibility as a researcher becomes critical to judgements of the trustworthiness of the research reported.

3.5.4.1 Credibility

Emphasis on multiple accounts of social reality suggests that there needs to be credibility in the researcher's account if it is to be viewed as acceptable to others. To enhance credibility in the current research, evidence of 'prolonged engagement in the field' was sought (Bryman, 2016:364). This included asking members to confirm the details provided in the summary from the interview data had been correctly understood. This is termed 'member checking', (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017:211) or 'member validation' (Bryman, 2016:364) and is commonly used as a technique to confirm accuracy of the data.

3.5.4.2 Confirmability

In quantitative research, the researcher's role is to remain distant and detached from the research process thereby maintaining objectivity. In qualitative research this is neither possible

nor desired especially for those involved in the interview process and subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data collected. This subjective approach can lead to researcher bias and can include ignoring data that does not fit with the researcher's preconceptions (Creswell, 2014; Gray, 2017). Therefore, confirmability is concerned with evidencing that the interpretation of findings of qualitative research originate from the data whilst having insight into how the researcher role in production of that data, or the researcher's own beliefs and experience, might influence their practice and introduce bias (Gray, 2017).

3.5.4.3 Dependability

Dependability of research study results is considered important and in the current study was achieved through providing clear documentation of the processes of the research, together with reflexive accounts of the research process (Creswell, 2014). For example, documentation of approaches to, and steps taken in, data collection and analysis have been detailed thereby enhancing dependability.

3.5.4.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to 'the extent to which aspects of qualitative results can be transferred to other groups of people and contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2013:82). During the interviews, questions centred on exploring participant's perceptions and experiences to allow for an in-depth exploration of the research question(s), which maximises the opportunity for transferability of results (Spencer *et al*., 2003). Analysis of data was continually undertaken following each interview transcription. This facilitated a sample size sufficient to evidence repeated patterns within the data.

3.5.5 Conducting the semi-structured interviews

Each of the interviews conducted for this research were a maximum of sixty minutes duration. Six of the seventeen interviews held face-to-face at the degree apprentice's place of work. The other eleven, due to Covid restrictions, were online, face-to-face interviews via Microsoft Teams. Each interviewee was offered a choice of location and time to encourage their participation. Having chosen their preferred setting, on the day of interview, they were also given preference regarding layout and seating arrangements to help make them feel comfortable.

The aim of the interview is to answer the research questions (Saunders *et. al*., 2018) which suggests time for this process should not be limited. However, Robson (2011) highlights that a one-hour interview could take ten hours to transcribe. In considering this and the busy

schedules of participants and tight timescales for this research, it was decided to limit each interview to a maximum of one hour. Although it is recognised that by placing restrictions on time, important questions of reliability (dependability) on the part of the interviewer could be called into question (Easterby-Smith *et. al.,* 2018; Saunders *et al.,* 2018). In the interviews rapport was established that encouraged communication (Coe *et al*., 2017) in anticipation that good craftsmanship in the research process of interviewing will make questions of validity (credibility) superfluous (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:295).

3.5.5.1 Recording of interviews

Each interview was recorded using two forms of digital recording devices, in case of technical failure of one device. Patton (1990:347) believes this to be essential stating 'no matter what style of interviewing is used, and no matter how carefully one words interview questions, it all comes to naught if the interviewer fails to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed'. This view is supported by Saunders *et. al*., (2018) who assert this not only benefits the researcher as they can focus on gaining depth of response. It is also a mechanism for controlling bias as a direct transcript can be produced.

3.6 Data analysis

Analysis of the interview data was undertaken using the method of data-driven, inductive (reflexive) thematic analysis. This section captures the importance of carefully selecting the data analysis approach to suit the methodology and purpose of the research (Punch, 2014). The process of data analysis is described, and steps taken in the process of coding are also included together with insight into how themes were developed in this study. This is supported by examples from the interview data to show how interpretation of interview data was developed from participant's words.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

Approaches to thematic analysis (TA) are varied both in their epistemological assumptions and methodological procedures which inevitably leads to there being no single definition (Silverman, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2016). Guest *et. al*., (2012) consider thematic analysis to be a methodology, while Braun and Clarke (2013:2021) view it as a family of methods that includes both data driven or theory driven approaches, arguing it is more a method than methodology. They identify thematic analysis as a 'theoretically flexible' method of qualitative data analysis independent of theoretical and epistemological stance (Clarke and Braun, 2013:120). Consequently, the thematic analysis is regarded as an umbrella term encompassing

a wide range of approaches used extensively, for data analysis, especially in areas of applied research (Braun and Clarke, 2014; Clarke and Braun, 2018).

This has resulted in some researchers challenging the methodological integrity of thematic analysis if analysis is not well planned. For example, Nowell *et al*., (2017) explain that lack of focus on rigour and relevance in this type of analysis has implications for the credibility of the research process suggesting that an analytic method is necessary. This view is supported by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who suggest the process of analysis involves three steps. Step one to establish the codes, step two to display the data and step three to carry out axial coding to allow a multi-layered examination of areas covered.

To provide clarity in the principal approaches of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2021) distinguish between three main schools which they identify as coding reliability, codebook and organic (reflexive) thematic analysis. Each differs in their conceptual foundations as captured in Table 3 (page 75).

3.6.1.1 Organic (reflexive) thematic analysis and theme identification

Identification of themes in thematic analysis is either theory driven applying a deductive approach, or data driven applying an inductive approach (Gray, 2017). Whereas a deductive approach works with pre-determined themes driven by theory, an inductive approach allows insight that potentially leads to new theory, suitable in understudied and new contexts (Bansal *et al*., 2018) such as the experiences of degree apprentices.

Braun and Clarke (2006:82) define a theme as capturing 'something important about the data in relation to the research question' that 'represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'. This differs to those using a framework or template which provides a summary of participant responses in relation to a specific topic, referred to as domain summaries or themes (Clarke and Braun, 2018). This summary captures what is regarded as obvious with only surface meaning and is described as taking a semantic approach. A latent approach to theme identification is one that seeks to capture underlying and implicit meaning together with the assumptions which lie beneath (Braun and Clarke, 2016; Clarke and Braun, 2018).

Table 3- The three schools of thematic analysis (adapted from Clarke and Braun, 2018)

School	Approach to Thematic Analysis (TA)
Coding Reliability Thematic Analysis (Small q TA) *(For example, Boyatzis, 1998 and Joffe, 2012)*	Involves qualitative data but is informed by quantitative/(post) positivist research values and practices Adopts a structured, deductive approach to coding Coding frame developed based on priori theory Accentuates the measurement of accuracy or reliability when coding data, using a structured codebook
Codebook Thematic Analysis (Medium Q TA) *(For example, Guest et al., (2012) and King and Brooks, 2017)*	Sits between coding reliability and reflexive Big Q on the spectrum Underpinned by qualitative philosophy and oriented to pragmatic considerations such as meeting predetermined information needs (known as pragmatic compromise) More structured coding procedures than small q TA Pre-determined themes. The codebook is normally constructed a priori based on research question and theory to guide the allocation of data Themes developed may be changed through the process of analysis
Organic/Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Big Q TA) *(For example, Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2018)*	Prioritises the values of Big Q Embedded in a qualitative paradigm Inductive (data driven) Involves both qualitative data, and values and practices An organic approach to development of codes and themes Requires interpretation of data Recognises the active role of the researcher in coding and theme generation Emphasises researcher subjectivity of data coding and analysis Fluid and iterative process Focuses on encouraging reflection

A domain theme in this study could include factors such as 'debt free', 'earning money', 'financial stability, to 'stand out'. Gaskell (2000) claims that whilst this would summarise quantified representation in participant responses, it has no capacity to capture the range and diversity of meaning within the participant population.

This study adopts an organic (reflexive) approach to data analysis. Therefore, themes were not predefined to find codes. Rather, themes were produced by organising codes around a 'central organising concept' (Clarke and Braun, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2019), interpreted from the data. In interpreting the data, the researcher needs to be cognisant of their active role in the data analysis process and how their values and assumptions may influence analysis, requiring application of theoretical sensitivity (Gray, 2017:185).

Throughout the coding and theme development reflective memos were written which noted emerging patterns and insights. These memos also included reflections on how the data was

addressing the research questions, possible limitations of the process and identified future potential research as suggested by Saldana (2009).

In applying an organic and inductive approach to data analysis, using reflexive (Big Q) thematic analysis, coding and theme development was guided by the content of the data. For this study rather than themes being pre-determined they were instead built from codes.

3.6.2 The six-phase process of reflexive thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis involves a six-phase process and, although the six-phases appear linear, the analysis is recursive and iterative (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2018). Figure 15 below illustrates the six phases and the processes involved at each phase.

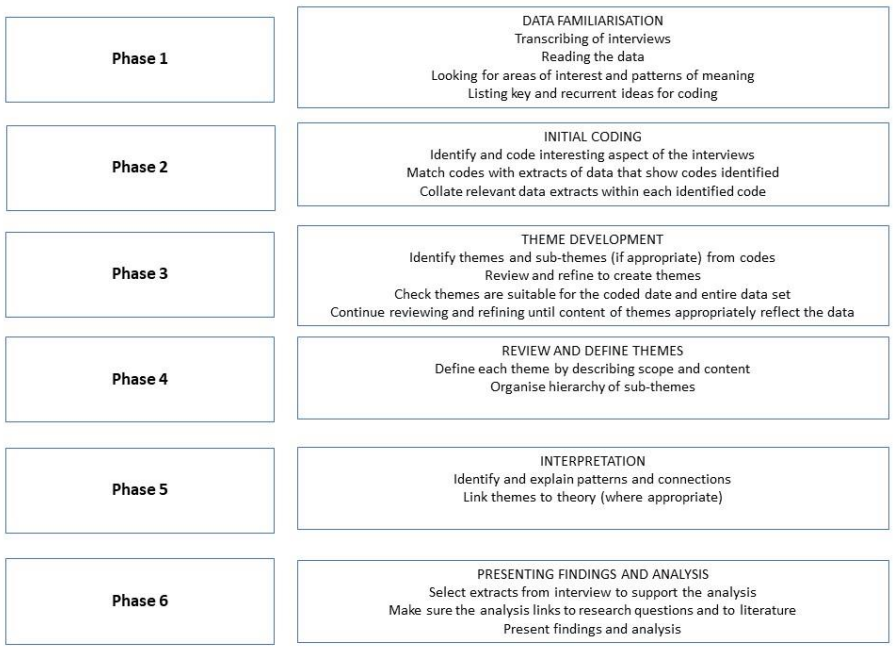

Figure 15 - Phases involved in Thematic Analysis of the Interview Data (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013; Clarke *et al*., 2019)

3.6.2.1 Data familiarisation

Following Saunders *et al.,'s* (2018) recommendations, initial familiarisation of the interview data occurred as the interviews were conducted. Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013) and by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), following each interview reflection on what had been learned took place and notes were made to capture valuable context for later analysis of transcripts. Interview summaries were drafted for which an example is provided in Appendix 8.

The formal process of familiarisation began after transcription of the interviews was complete. This began with the reading and re-reading each of the seventeen interviews to ensure a full familiarisation with the data therein. Preliminary notes were made during the early iterations

of familiarisation with the data some of which have informed the final thematic framework. An example of these notes is provided in Appendix 9.

To maintain confidentiality, and enable greater immersion in the data, manual transcription was chosen over the use of transcription services or software. Although the use of software such as NVIVO, is available for use in data analysis, this was rejected on the grounds that manual data analysis recognises the values in keeping context and offers opportunities for greater immersion in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One of the criticisms of thematic coding is that in breaking up the data into small chunks and grouping it into themes we serve to decontextualise the content. In doing so, Morgan (2010) argues the data are reduced to small manageable sound bites that, while easily reported to answer the research questions, there is a danger of losing the overall meaning of what is being said (Guest and McLellan, 2003).

3.6.2.2 Initial coding

Having gained an overview of the entire dataset and drawing on preliminary notes, the process of coding was completed. This entailed generating initial codes through a process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013). At this early stage of coding, a reductionist approach involving identification of instances of the phenomenon of interest was rejected in favour of an approach of complete coding where everything was coded within the dataset. Initially, this was achieved using a range of coloured highlighter pens to identify perceived themes, clusters, and patterns in the dataset. Post-it notes were then used to capture labels for these clusters. A single word or phrase that captured the essence of why a particular piece of data might be helpful was used. This was then applied systematically across the entire dataset.

Initial labelling was mostly descriptive. The use of single words such as 'security' and 'finance' was consciously limited to avoid domain summaries. The volume of codes generated proved to be challenging and continual cross-reference back to the transcript as a reminder of the context of the conversation was necessary, suggesting that the codes needed further refinement. As coding progressed, implicit and latent assumptions were made. The codes were then refined further to capture this development and clustered leading to the eventual development of sub-themes. For example, 'familial legacy or expectation, and other 'human influencers', and 'opportunity for second chances'. This continual refinement is according to Braun and Clarke (2013) important as good codes are the building blocks of analysis. Appendix 10 provides an extract from one participants' interview showing how links were developed between extract and notes, linked to the research questions.

3.6.2.3 Theme development and description

Once the process of coding was completed, the process of aggregating meaning into themes and sub-themes commenced. This was not contingent on frequency of codes or data items that appeared in a single transcript or across the dataset or that informed a particular theme. Instead, to answer the research questions, the 'patterning of data across the dataset' was important (Braun and Clarke, 2013:741). This necessitated identifying similarity and overlap between codes which in turn could be merged into themes and used as a central organising concept capable of communicating something meaningful (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The broad themes were then brought together to discuss with reference to research questions. Visual mapping was particularly helpful here. Table 4 (page 79) provides an illustration of the main themes developed in this study, the sub-themes, and their descriptors.

3.6.2.4 Interpretation of the data

This phase involved integrating the coded, themed data together with the contextual data provided by the narrative summaries. This required judgements about which themes were most prominent and how they connected to one another. Again, this process was iterative with theme refinement. The purpose of pattern-based qualitative analysis is to organise data into patterns. Patterns are characterised by for example, similarity or difference and how they happen in relation to other events. Providing a definition for each theme and sub-theme as illustrated in Table 4 not only provided clarity it also allowed for scoping and clearer boundaries for each theme necessary in identifying extracts to support writing up of the report.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) qualitative research is saturated with moral and ethical issues. The plethora of philosophical theories of ethics highlight the challenges researchers face in terms of moral deliberation, choice, and accountability throughout the research process (Edwards and Mauthner, 2012). However, the consideration of ethics is a critical aspect for the success of any research project (Saunders *et al*., 2018). Hence there is a requirement to adhere to ethical considerations (Gill and Johnson, 2010). Although, Coolican (2017) warns that it is not easy to conduct research without incurring ethical disagreement.

Whilst some argue that the general role of ethics committees is merely to 'prevent violations and lawsuits against universities' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014:128), this protocol provides a foundation for engaging in conventional ethics, described as a commitment to act for the good of others (Brydon-Miller, 2008).

Table 4 – An illustration of the main themes, sub-themes, and their descriptors developed in the current study

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-theme Descriptors
Wanting to exercise choice through a degree apprenticeship *This theme captures what the degree apprentices say influenced their choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship*	Debt avoidance and maximising earnings	Captures the degree apprentices' desire or need to be student loan and debt free and maximising earning potential through working whilst studying.
	Opportunity for second chances	Describes the degree apprentices' perception that the degree apprenticeship provides a chance to achieve a degree, having not previously been able to, or inclined to, engage in higher education.
	To get ahead in the game	Captures the degree apprentices' desire to enhance their career prospects, or to progress more rapidly in their career than their contemporaries by combining a degree qualification with work experience.
	Rebelling against the system	Describes the degree apprentices' desire to defy or push back against an educational system which promotes a traditional route to a degree qualification.
	Balancing risk and security	Highlights the degree apprentices' desire to balance (or avoid, reduce or spread) the perceived risks of studying for a degree on this new alternative to higher education with the security of employment.
	Familial legacy or expectation, and other human influencers	Describes how family education, career pathways and expectations influenced their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship whilst also capturing the influence of others such as teachers, career advisers, managers and colleagues, and friends.
The degree apprenticeship: A transactional and tactical approach *This theme captures the degree apprentices' experiences of the degree apprenticeship and how they navigated these experiences.*	The degree apprenticeship as a transaction	Describes the sacrifices and exchanges degree apprentices make in balancing the demands placed on them as they progress through the degree apprenticeship.
	The degree apprentice as a tactical learner	Describes the short-term and tactical approach to learning adopted by the degree apprentice to achieve the degree.
	The degree apprentice as an enabled networker	Highlights the ways in which opportunities for networking have been offered to and exploited by the degree apprentices.

Hewlett (2007) raises awareness that power inequalities may arise between the researcher and participant. In cases, as in the current study, where the researcher may be considered as an insider researcher, 'ethics of care' needs to be recognised (Costley and Gibbs, 2006, cited in McCray and Palmer, 2009). In maintaining professional standards and avoiding harm to research participants (Kent, 2015:303) a priority of focus is privacy, confidentiality, and trust. The participants in this research study have engaged with a programme of study with distinctive design. Consequently, revealing the identities of participants would undermine the espoused ethical stance of the research. Conducting research ethically requires not only following 'standard protocol' but, to avoid being blind to unexpected ethical dilemmas the researcher should 'think through the appropriateness of each ethical principle to the precise context of one's research' (Silverman, 2013:184). To evidence compliance ethical research measures were taken to ensure anonymity of participants. Permissions were obtained before conducting primary research and an ethics approval form was completed with approval gained from the University of Winchester prior to engaging in primary research. To retain confidentiality participants were assured that data would only be used for the purpose of this research and will not be shared with a third party (Saunders *et al.,* 2018).

In addition, avoidance of deceptive, inaccurate reporting of findings must be assured. In summary these issues were addressed through the following protocols.

3.7.1 Interview protocols

Issues of confidentiality were considered and addressed at all stages of the research design. Obtaining properly informed consent was seen as a further issue to be addressed. Consent was obtained in several stages. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and what would be required of them. An introductory letter and consent form was discussed with participants and the topics to be covered in the interview shared. Before the start of the face-to-face interview, the information in the letter and consent form was discussed and confirmation to continue confirmed with the participant. Table 5 outlines the ethical issues and considerations at each stage of the study.

Table 5 – Ethical issues considered at each stage of the study

Ethical Issue	Ethical consideration
Research Design in preparing for data collection	• The University's institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to conducting research • Ethical code of conduct policy was accounted for when designing the research • Sufficient information was made available to ensure all participants had awareness as to the purpose of the research and process to be undertaken • Design ensured participant's safety, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity
Data collection – Interview Protocols	Participants were: • Appraised as to the purpose of the research • Advised that their involvement is voluntary • Provided with sufficient information to enable informed consent • Asked to confirm consent prior to recording of interview • Assured that both the recording and transcripts would remain confidential • Informed as to how data obtained would be used and assured it would not be used for other purposes (unless their permission had been sought) • Informed of their right not to answer a question(s) and their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the process • Informed that 'member-checking' would be undertaken - A transcript was sent to each participant requesting confirmation of accurate data capture. (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017)
Data Storage	• Informed that transcriptions were electronically filed on a password protected device thereby avoiding unauthorised access to the data
Data Analysis	• Advised on their right to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity would be respected • Informed that data would only be used for its original purpose and context • Informed that data will be analysed in a way that avoids misrepresentation
Report Findings	• Should be reported appropriate to the area of study. • Must not be misleading, misrepresentative or falsified • Respect privacy and confidentiality and retain anonymity of participants, their employer, and their training provider (university)

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented methodology employed in the current study. The chapter began by outlining key research philosophies. This was followed by critical discussion of the pragmatic perspective of social constructivism of this study. A comprehensive overview of the research design and approach to data collection was provided, together with the rationale for use of

semi-structured interviews. Sample size, participant recruitment strategy and how interviews were conducted and consideration of trustworthiness and credibility in research was discussed. A description of inductive reflexive approach to data analysis used in this study, and an explanation of the ethical issues considered in the research process followed.

4.0 Chapter Four – Findings

'There were a lot of times when I had to work late into the evenings and weekends… that's a sacrifice… but it didn't matter because I knew what I was getting into.'

Graham (degree apprentice)

This chapter presents the research findings from analysis of interview data. In this chapter, factors influencing learner enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship within a higher education institution in England (RQ1), and learners' experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship (RQ2) are explored. In exploring their experiences, the ways in which they exploit opportunities for acquisition of social capital and enhancing social mobility are highlighted (RQ3). As identified in chapter one, this study has as its focus the experiences of degree apprentice learners who have studied within a higher education institution in England. Therefore, it is important that in this chapter the views of the degree apprentices in this study are presented. These views and the research findings are then critically examined in chapter five in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two.

In this chapter an overview of the six sub-themes relating to the factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship is provided. The findings from this study identify that, for many degree apprentices participating in the current study, a range of diverse factors influenced their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship. These factors relate to personal circumstance of background and environment (habitus) together with their aspirations, past educational experiences, pressure from, and expectations of, parents as well as other people such as teachers, managers, and colleagues. Findings suggest that these degree apprentices want to exercise choice in enrolling onto a degree apprenticeship. Experiences of, and reflections on, degree apprentice learners are then discussed. Findings identified a transactional approach to degree apprenticeship, in which sacrifices were made in exchange for benefits received, and a tactical approach to work-integrated learning which appeared to affirm their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings.

4.1 Wanting to exercise choice through enrolling onto the degree apprenticeship

The initial coding of the factors influencing degree apprentices to enrol on a degree apprenticeship programme led to the development of six sub-themes. The sub-themes were developed from pull factors of 'debt avoidance and maximising earnings', 'opportunity for second chances', and 'to get ahead in the game' in terms of career enhancement and by gaining competitive advantage over peers. Push factors associated with 'rebelling against the system',

in wanting to 'balance risk and security', and 'familial legacy or expectations and human influencers' were identified. The sub-theme descriptors are detailed in Table 4 in chapter three of this thesis. Sub-themes supported by extracts from the interview data are illustrated in Figure 16. To avoid over-complication initial codes have not been included in the illustration.

In developing the six sub-themes, the terms 'push' and 'pull' were consciously selected as they are defined as the verbs 'pressured to' and 'attracted to' respectively (Cambridge Dictionary [online], 2020). These terms were deemed appropriate in capturing the essence of what the degree apprentices were saying regarding factors influencing their choosing to undertake a degree apprenticeship as discussed in the interviews.

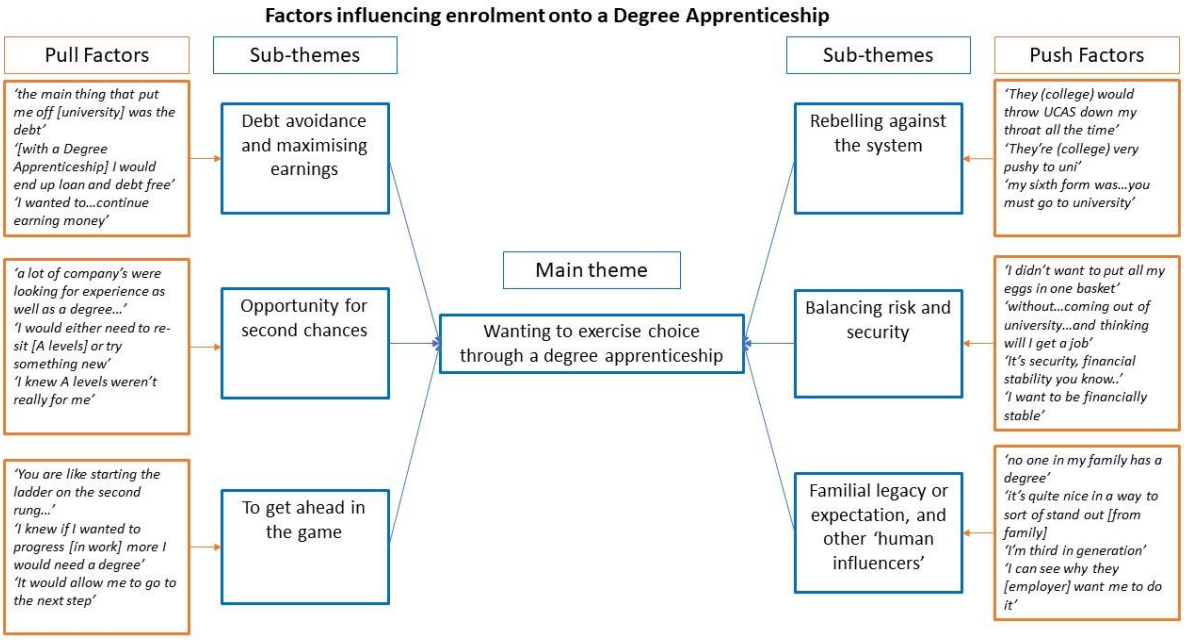

Figure 16 - Wanting to exercise choice through degree apprenticeship: An illustration of themes and factors

All degree apprentices in the current study identified several factors associated with the six sub-themes as influencing their enrolment as a degree apprentice, leading to the development of the overarching theme of wanting to exercise choice through enrolling onto a degree apprenticeship. This overarching theme (main theme) is discussed further in section 4.1.7. Not surprisingly, given the turbulence of the economic climate and the uncertainty of job and income prospects, financial factors were identified as being a key influence for degree apprentices in this study.

4.1.1 Debt avoidance and maximising earnings

In this study, the factors identified as leading to a desire for debt avoidance and to maximise earning potential included the impact of the 2008 recession on family employment and income, labour market fluctuations, and the limited availability of degree-level jobs leading to high numbers of graduating students failing to secure employment.

This is exemplified by Graham, who saw a lot of his friends '*come out of university with a ton of debt*' whereas, not only was he able to earn money throughout his degree, he also '*did not have to pay for his training*' which he believes put him '*at a huge advantage*' [when compared to his friends].

Clive who had enrolled as a full-time university student but, went back into the world of work full-time [he previously had a part-time job], says of the economy and his decision to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship:

> '*it was actually at the height of the recession, basically my family we weren't the richest; my dad lost his job he was an IT auditor he was earning quite a lot of money as a contractor but, I essentially decided I want to… get a job because I didn't want to be… a drain on their finances… I got a job with [his employer] and I did a level 3 apprenticeship scheme just to get my foot in the door because with the qualifications I had it was hard to get in the door anywhere. I mean people with degrees were struggling so I decided to do level 3 and then after I did the level 3 they offered if I wanted to continue I could do the level 4, 5 and 6 as well – the degree apprenticeship scheme.'*

For Clive, leaving university and returning to work is a strategy which enabled him to achieve greater financial security (see also section 4.1.5).

Eve hints at a change in family circumstance which has impacted her original plans to follow the traditional progression into a full-time degree. She talks about watching people suffer with debt, *'a big thing for me was that I didn't want to be paying for the degree. I had seen how normal it was for people to have massive amounts of debt in going to university and I decided I didn't want to have that.'*

Similarly, Mark identified that while the obvious next step would be university [following his A levels] he couldn't justify going saying, *'the main thing that put me off was just the debt associated with that.'*

Barbara and Beth, on the other hand, were pragmatic in identifying what incentivised them to study a degree apprenticeship. Barbara challenging: *'it's a free degree, why wouldn't I?*'. Beth also saw the benefits explaining *'the reason to do it was that I would be getting a degree and working so I would end up loan and debt free at the end of it but, I would still have a degree*

education.' Likewise, Simon who '*didn't know student finance was a thing*' was not willing to pay what he considered an *'extortionate amount of money'* to complete a degree qualification.

Whilst debt avoidance is important to many degree apprentices, earning potential is also clearly important to some, like Cliff and Sheila, who when asked about their reason for choosing a degree apprenticeship over full-time degree study were candid in their response. Sheila saying the financial earning was important, '*cos I like expensive stuff*'. While Cliff states he wants a degree, getting a job to earn was clearly a more powerful pull factor as his response to the same question was, '*I wanted to get a head start with my career and continue earning money is the truthful answer*.'

Simon says he really enjoyed computing at school and while attracted by earning potential and not finding himself in a '*lower-skilled*' role than he believed himself capable of, had not looked at longer-term potential beyond the degree, stating:

> *'… to be honest it was like I want to do something to get a bit of money. There was no real I want to be a 'thing' you know it was really just get a bit of money'.*

For the degree apprentices in this study, a degree apprenticeship represents a way of avoiding debt associated with the full-time, university experience and enables learners to maximise earning potential.

4.1.2 Opportunity for second chances

For many of the degree apprentices in this study a factor influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship is that it has provided a second chance at a degree representing too good an opportunity to miss. For Peter and Anita, for example, this is because negative prior educational experience has cast doubt in their minds of their ability to be successful in achieving the degree and so a reason not to apply to enrol as a traditional full-time higher education student.

Peter talks about failing two of his four 'AS' levels and thinking: '*I would either need to re-sit or try something new'.* While undertaking some work-experience, he found learning on-the-job more suited to him. Despite meaning he would be starting again, he chose to leave his sixth-form and to attend his local college where he selected to do a BTEC Extended Diploma. This he said: *'worked quite well for me and I got equivalent to three A's in that, so that was really good.*'

Interestingly, he compares his performance in the BTEC to A levels suggesting A levels are a measure of achievement that has familiarity, indicating them to be recognised currency. In making this comparison to A levels, his choice is affirmed. This is further endorsed when he

says, after being '*pushed heavily to sign up to UCAS and to sign up to Universities*' by his college, '*I knew I wanted to get a degree, but I didn't know if university was for me'.*

Similarly, Anita while in top-sets at school, identified herself as being '*at the bottom of the top-sets'*. She adds, *'I wasn't really good at exams* [referring to her GCSE results]*, I didn't really like them so I knew A levels weren't really for me and at the time BTECs didn't have any exams it was all course work.'* Like Peter, Anita's negative previous academic experience had contributed to her closing the door on a degree as she explains:

> *'I didn't ever apply to UCAS at all, no I just didn't think it was for me, so I said, I'll see what I can do and if I feel like I need to go to university I said I would do it the following year… [I would] see how I get on in the working world and go from there really.'*

Both Barbara and Rachel made the decision not to go to university but to go straight into work as they did not have what they considered sufficiently strong qualifications to be considered for university. Securing a skilled role was challenging as highlighted by Rachel who says, '*a lot of company's were looking for experience as well as a degree qualification which I didn't have.'*

Being respected by people was so important for Barbara that she quit her role working in retail saying:

> *'I really hated it. I hate customer service to be honest as you've always got somebody who doesn't see you as a person, they see you as a robot and just think they can treat you like rubbish just because they can essentially.'*

For those who, in the main, had the necessary qualification but for a variety of reasons (for example, financial security or a lack of academic self-confidence) did not see a degree as being for them, a degree apprenticeship is seen as offering an opportunity for a second chance. A chance to realise personal potential and to progress into roles which offer greater job satisfaction and the potential for an enhanced career trajectory.

4.1.3 To get ahead in the game (career competitiveness)

Recognition that a degree apprenticeship offers the potential 'to get ahead in the game' is also a significant theme influencing degree apprentices in this study. Factors associated with this theme, either stand alone or in conjunction with factors from another theme or themes, are highlighted by degree apprentices seeking to drive their career forward, or for those wishing to progress more rapidly in their career than their contemporaries. The degree apprenticeship is perceived to provide a competitive edge.

Harry, who left school at 18 following successful A level results, immediately joined a large company as a degree apprentice in favour of taking a full-time undergraduate programme with a high-ranking university in the UK. Harry cites '*not have any debt for starters'* as a factor

influencing this choice, adding that he believed learning on-the-job would give him advantage over those entering the job market. Harry says:

> *'I will always be plus three [referring to years working as an apprentice] on anybody who is the same age as me – if you were playing 'top-trumps' with CVs I'd win! …. You are like starting the ladder on the second rung rather than on the floor.'*

Peter, who took BTEC qualifications, says he '*wanted to get into the industry quicker because for me I wanted to progress in my career … I want to get promoted as fast as possible. I want to move up the career ladder quickly.'* Like Harry, Peter also recognises that to achieve this, he needs to beat the competition '*I want to be in a better position than my peers'.* Peter is clear that his reason for enrolling as a degree apprentice is because he has career goals and has an instrumental and planned approach to achievement of goals. He states:

> *'I think it was, this might sound bad, but I think it was a tick-box exercise for me. The reason being was that I knew I needed a degree just to drive my career forward to get me… a foot in the door, a degree or even at best a first class degree really helps on your CV.'*

Interestingly, as the interviews with Harry and Peter progressed, it became evident that they perceived longer-term personal goals could be achieved more quickly by securing a well-paid role as early in their careers as possible. Harry, when talking about the importance of progressing his career, said, '*All the things I want in my life require me to have an amount of money – if I ever want kids, I would want my own house.*' Similarly, Peter acknowledged this longer-term aim stating, '*I'm ambitious and I want to become successful for my benefit, you know, as I get older, I want to be financially stable so I can, you know, have a family'*.

They both perceive the degree apprenticeship as a mechanism to avoid debt, to get ahead in the game (in relation to the contemporaries) by making the most of the career opportunities offered by completing a degree apprenticeship.

This instrumental approach is reflected by Gary who did not want to attend university but, who perceives a degree as a necessary requirement to advancing his career. He says, *'I didn't really want to go to university I wanted to get into the world of work but I knew if I wanted to progress more I would need a degree.'*

This idea is also echoed by Keith who grew up in an *'economically depressed area'* and saw it as important '*to go out and get a career*'. Consequently, he moved away from his family to improve his career prospects. Keith says he now has a good role within the business and is discussing his future with them *'because ultimately career progression has got to be at the front of it.*'

Mark, who is looking to progress quickly in his career, says he enrolled onto the degree apprenticeship because, *'I knew it would look good just having a piece of paper that said I have a degree… it would potentially allow me to go to the next step.'* This desire for rapid career progression is a key theme identified by many of the degree apprentices.

Additionally, for some, the degree apprenticeship is perceived to offer a way of placing themselves ahead of those graduating at the same time, to secure the more prominent and consequently highly paid roles. While for some this is only perceived as achievable because they are already employed in what is an intensely competitive job market, others suggest it is the combination of the degree and the three years of work-place on-the-job training that has been a contributing factor in helping them achieve this.

4.1.4 Rebelling against the system

In most cases degree apprentices identified the role of their school or college who, in recognising that they possessed 'the capital that is associated with scholarliness and academic achievement' (Archer et al., 2007:167), were encouraging them to consider progressing to university. However, in many instances, the degree apprentices felt that the educational system, via their teachers and career advisers, was pushing them towards university and that they were not provided with the degree apprenticeship as an alternative option.

This is exemplified by Peter who says:

> *'I had a falling out with the Careers Advisor at [name of college], they would throw UCAS down my throat all the time and not give me other options. That's the primary driver to go to other options, that I didn't need UCAS to you know. I know he [careers adviser] has a job to get people to sign up to UCAS… but like I wasn't given other options so that was one of my drivers for that.'*

Another example comes from Sheila who also appeared to be rebelling against being pushed towards university:

> *'Leaving college I was like I don't want to start university or go down that path because I think like in second year of college they're very pushy to uni to make you do a personal statement saying you need to think about university and I said hold on a minute, knowing myself, if I wasn't 100% into something I didn't want to commit to one the debt which is a massive thing that students often consider and I just knew I would have to be so self-motivated so I didn't want to take on a degree for the sake of it if I couldn't see a clear path for, so obviously leaving college I thought well I need to look for jobs what am I interested in.'*

Similarly, Simon, who describes himself as a '*rebel*' says *'… my sixth form was, - really, really, you must go to university - and that's it, I thought I'm going to be a rebel, I'm not doing this, I'm*

not going to do what you tell me, so I just looked for alternatives.' After starting work his line manager engaged him in a conversation about a degree apprenticeship. He says:

> *'my initial thought was no – what's the point! I don't really know why I was just anti-university and then she [referring to his manager] said well it's a two-day a week split, you'll be in university two days a week, it's paid for, you'll still get a salary, you'll still get work-experience, and I thought, you know what – just give it a go, see what it's like.'*

The limitations placed on Simon, Sheila, and Peter in terms of their expected career trajectories were not due to scholarly deficit potentially inhibiting their access to higher education. The ability to choose their path appears important to each of them, in that they each appear to be pushing against existing perceived social structures and expectations.

Likewise, many of the other degree apprentices in this study claimed that they had sought to rebel against being pushed towards university rather than being given choice. Nevertheless, each was influenced by perceived benefits of what attending university could do for them. The key point here is that these are individuals who are being deterred from following the traditional progression in their learning, instead they want to exercise choice. In preparing to leave school or college at age 18 many are pushing against existing systems designed to support post-18 transition, whether it be to work or to go to university. They are rebelling as young adults and want, what they perceive to be, freedom to choose to follow their own path.

4.1.5 Balancing risk and security

For many degree apprentices in this study, the need for job and financial security achieved through having a career and being in receipt of a reliable income are important. This is exemplified by Keith, who grew up in an area of high unemployment with limited professional career options, and cites an uncertain economic future as an influencing factor in undertaking a degree apprenticeship:

> *'The degree apprenticeship scheme was always going to outnumber going to university I guess for the obvious reason of getting a job and the work-life balance and without the stress of coming out of university three years down the line and thinking will I get a job, where will I get a job?'*

Likewise, Mark, thought the apprenticeship was the most sensible thing to do, saying, *'I know my massive worry, even when I was finishing A levels, was can you get a job after uni?*' His apprenticeship contract provided a '*guaranteed a job'*, something he feels is not afforded to a full-time student.

Peter also wants security and to advance his career at the same time, saying, *'I think it's security, financial stability, you know thinking about later in life when I start a family that sort of stuff.'* Whilst many degree apprentices are seeking to achieve greater career and financial

security and reliability of income some, either due to challenging personal circumstances or because of past experiences, appear to be choosing a degree apprenticeship over other options to avoid, reduce or spread risk. This is illustrated by the following interview extracts:

> **Risk Avoidance** - *'Academic, full-time study doesn't fit with my strengths. I sort of wanted to take subjects that were sort of tangible to real life. I didn't have any career path in mind so I wanted to take subjects that I enjoyed so I knew I was good at them.'* (Sheila)
>
> **Reducing Risk -** [full-time study carries the risk] of not having a job at the end. *'I guess for the obvious reason of getting a job and the work-life balance and without the stress of coming out of university three years down the line and thinking will I get a job, where will I get a job'* (Keith)
>
> **Spreading the Risk** - *'I didn't want to put all my eggs in one basket, so I went through the UCAS process just in case I didn't get an opportunity to get into a business.'* (Keith) and similarly Cliff who said: '*I also did a sports and coaching course in case it all went wrong'.*
>
> **Having a back-up plan** – '*I wanted to get into work I knew that I had to further my education first, before I could do that, I didn't really want to go to university I knew I had to, so it was part of my back-up plan.'* (Gary)

In addition to other factors discussed in the preceding themes, many degree apprentices appear to need reassurance that the degree apprenticeship route was a good choice. It should be remembered that these degree apprentices were choosing a path not previously available with no evidence, in academic terms at least, that this would gain them the much sought-after degree important to each of them for various reasons discussed. Therefore, they are not only seeking job security but seeking to balance risk having assessed this, as yet unproven approach, as a good choice.

4.1.6 Familial legacy or expectation, and other human influencers

For many apprentices, it appears that one of the influences on enrolment as a degree apprentice is linked to factors associated with familial legacy such as parents educational and career histories and expectations, or the expectations of other human influencers such as teachers and managers.

4.1.6.1 First in family

Many degree apprentices in this study identify themselves as being 'first in family' to attend higher education. For example, Anita who opted for vocational level 3 study over A levels as she didn't feel she compared '*well*' with her peers despite sharing learning in '*top-sets'* with them. She says, '*Yeah, my mum and dad didn't really follow academic routes either so no one in my family has a degree.'*

Many identified their parents as being 'professionals' who have worked hard to achieve their career positions. Several degree apprentices have parents who had been apprentices. For example, Mark, who took a level 4 apprenticeship before enrolling as a degree apprentice states, '*he* (referring to his father) *started off as an accountant. He hasn't got a degree, but I guess you could say he's got a degree equivalent professional qualification.'*

In Simon's case both parents were apprentices. He says:

> *'My dad left school at 16 and did a (company name) apprenticeship thing, I'm not sure what he did, an HND or something. My mum did something in retail… some retail management apprenticeship and both have done similar careers since then and stayed in that line of work. It was just how it kind of happened.'*

Sheila highlights the lack of choice for previous generations of her family, saying, '*I think conversations with family members, the older family members who haven't had an opportunity to go to university it wasn't really a path that was available to them.'* Sheila, who rebelled against being pushed towards higher education by her school is enjoying her achievement stating, *'my uncles, my cousins on my mum's side have all done a similar thing in different trades so it's quite nice in a way to sort of standout.'*

Graham was also first in family. He and his family are clearly proud of his achievement and his comments reflect those offered by Sheila:

> *'Yeah, the first in my entire family! Yeah, the entire (surname) family I'm the first one to go through a degree – Yes, which is a new experience. It's like for example my parents didn't really know when I made my decision because they didn't have to do that – so completely new to them.'*

Sheila adds a point of interest linked to male and female familial experience in commenting that, '*it's only girls in my family that have got degrees apart from me. Whereas the boys and some of my other female cousins are doing apprenticeships.'* While aspects of gender are of interest, gender is outside of the scope of this study. That said, gender is an important area and warrants further investigation.

4.1.6.2 Familial expectation and the need for the familiar

Many of the degree apprentices talk of a strong family unit where parents are supportive, highlighting varying degrees of direct and indirect influence in their choice of a degree apprenticeship, as illustrated by Graham:

> *'I have very supportive parents, so they just wanted what I wanted. So really if I'd said I wanted to do the full-time route I'm sure they would have been supportive of that. But I did go for their advice … I remember my mum saying this is too good to be true almost you're getting a salary, you are not paying your university fees, you are getting work*

experience, you have pretty much a guaranteed job at the end of it and you're getting a degree too'.

Similarly, Melissa states it is '*my parents who have probably influenced me most to be academically successful,* but who *'always made it clear this wasn't the most important thing in life'.* However*, 'because they are both very intelligent',* Melissa *'always wanted to do well to make them proud.'*

Cliff says he does not *'want to be left behind essentially'.* However, he then proceeds to say he is also undertaking the degree apprenticeship *'for my parents as well.'* Conversely, Barbara states she was *'really interested in uni for the social life'* but her dad was overtly persuasive in influencing her by adamantly stating his view, saying *'that's not a really good reason to put yourself in debt for!'*

A couple of the degree apprentices are comfortable in living with their families and did not want to leave home to study. For example, Harry says he '*wasn't really mature enough'* and Gary also states he did not want to move away from home. He would, however, have considered following a traditional degree if he could *'stay at home'.* Although, unlike others, Gary states that his apprenticeship is in '*the area my dad works in'.* Accordingly, he '*wanted to go down that same route [as] that's what I'd grown up with'.* This would appear to indicate that he is following a familiar pattern. Sheila was fortunate that it was her mum who used her network to get her a job with her own employer saying to Sheila: *'there's an opening for a [name of role] where I work which is the bottom level, the most junior…but it is an entry way into the company.'*

It is pertinent to note that each of the degree apprentices cited thus far have a culturally British background. However, for Katerina, an apprentice from a minority ethnic background, parental direction was particularly influential. Katerina has worked for ten years going straight into the workplace from school and tells of cultural tensions in growing up in England and the challenges of familial expectation which did not include considering education beyond age 16. She states:

'In our family, because you are a girl, at the age of 16 you need to be ready for marriage. So I wasn't allowed [referring to going into traditional HE]. So at 16 my mentality was different so I went to a Church of England School all my friends were white. I'm from a completely different religion my mentality was different to what my parents thought and what my siblings thought and so I just thought right now I want to study. But, in the end it was if you study you leave home or like if you study we'll disown you. At that age you don't know that there's a world past your family'.

Some years later, having by this time been disowned by her family, and with the support of her boyfriend and workplace manager, she grasped the opportunity for second chances by applying to become a degree apprentice. This was not easy as she explains:

> *'… it was always something I wanted to do and then I heard about the degree apprenticeship scheme through (her employer) and I just thought I wouldn't get accepted because I didn't have my A levels, I didn't even have GCSE grade D in Maths so I thought, it's just not going to happen.'*

Like gender, a more detailed exploration of ethnicity in relation to the study area is not within the scope of this research. However, ethnicity in this context is recognised as an important area for further research in the future.

4.1.6.3 Family and other human influencers

For some degree apprentices, like Katerina, enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship has been influenced by advice, views, or expectations of people other than parents to include one of more of the following: siblings, partners, friends, school tutors, careers advisors and, where employed, their line manager. For example, Cliff says:

> *'It wouldn't really have been my friends because my friends went down the trade route. Many are electricians or scaffolders or something like that but I went through it with my family and obviously my tutor, and I think that had a big impact on me'.*

Barbara, who is from a family with a strong university background states:

> '*… my dad went to Cambridge, my sister went to Exeter, my brother went to Reading …. my mum never went so they kind of had an opinion on each side I guess but they never pushed us to go to uni it was always our choice. So they supported us through uni if we needed it but they never pushed us … I found my school was more pushy than my family.'*

However, she later recalled an instance where her dad had influenced her, stating: '*the only thing I was really interested in uni was the social life and my dad said well that's not a really good reason to put yourself in debt.'*

Similarly, Clive's family has a university background on the male side. Clive says, *'I'm third in generation actually, because my grandad went as well* [as his dad]'. Clive acknowledges the influence of his employer in saying:

> *'… so I thought ok I can see why they want me to do it; I'll happily do it that way so, they influenced me in that respect but it was always my own ambition that wanted me to learn and I was always going to do that and get on to it and I'll just do a degree and excel at it myself.'*

Graham, who admits to actively seeking the advice of his parent's, was also influenced by the manager in the local business where he had been undertaking work experience since the age of 16. He recalls:

> *'I remember (Manager's name) mentioning that there were degree apprenticeship options available and that was a thing that potentially working at (business) and going to university at the same time. I think for me that sounded like an incredible option.'*

In contrast, Mark's parents sought to steer him towards traditional university, saying:

> *'… the view, especially from my mum was that uni was the next natural step because apprenticeships… weren't, as generally well thought through 20, 30, 40 years ago as they are now.'*

He adds:

> 'O*nce I explained my intended path, I think it made more sense to them [parents] but I think they certainly had some questions when I said look, I'm not going to go to university I'm going to do an apprenticeship'.*

In summary, many degree apprentices were first in family to undertake degree level study and familial expectation and legacy is evident in their choice to enrol on a degree apprenticeship. Whilst many downplayed the role of human influencers it is evident that human influence exists.

4.1.7 Section summary: Wanting to exercise choice

In using their own words, this study highlights a multiplicity of factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship.

Many degree apprentices identified several factors influencing their choice. This exemplified by Peter who says:

> *'I'm ambitious and I want to become successful for my benefit, you know, as I get older, I want to be **financially stable** [**Sub-theme: Balancing risk and security**] so I can you know have a family… My mum worked very hard for me when I was growing up… I'm adopted so **I want to be successful for her** [**Sub-theme: Familial legacy or expectation**] as well because she put a lot into me when I was younger… But also I have high ambitions, you know there are **luxuries in life that I would quite like**, like a nice car a nice house those sort of things [**Sub- theme: Maximising earnings**] and those sort of things you have to work towards so the more successful I am the more chances I have of getting those things and travelling the world, things like that.'*

Equally diverse was Simon's choice:

> *'Yes, it was probably a few things. None of my family have been to university, **I'm the first person in my family** to have gone. **My parents did kind of apprenticeship type routes** and that just to me seemed like a better idea **[Sub-theme: Familial legacy or expectation]**. You know 18-year olds I'd just had enough of learning; you know school learning wasn't great it was just you know what I'm just **not paying this extortionate amount of money** [**Sub theme: Debt avoidance**] I didn't know student finance was a*

thing so I was like I'm not paying 8 grand or whatever it is, to pay for something I don't know that I want to do and ***not have a job at the end*** *of it* ***[Sub-theme: Balancing risk and security].*** *And my sixth form was really, really, you must go to university and that's it, I thought* ***I'm going to be a rebel, I'm not doing this, I'm not going to do what you tell me*** *so I just looked for alternatives* ***(Sub-theme: Rebelling against the system]****. The more I looked the more I found it quite attractive mostly because* ***you were getting a job*** *and* ***getting an income [Sub-theme: Balancing risk and security]*** *and* ***starting your career earlier [Sub-theme: Getting ahead in the game]****'.*

Harry captures the ambition of all degree apprentices most succinctly:

'… the first thing people look for is a degree, that seems to be the feeling that my generation have to have a degree to get any job that isn't basically manual labour, you feel there's an expectation that to get a skilled job you must have a degree.'

The following Figure 17 is an illustration of the complex and multiple factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship.

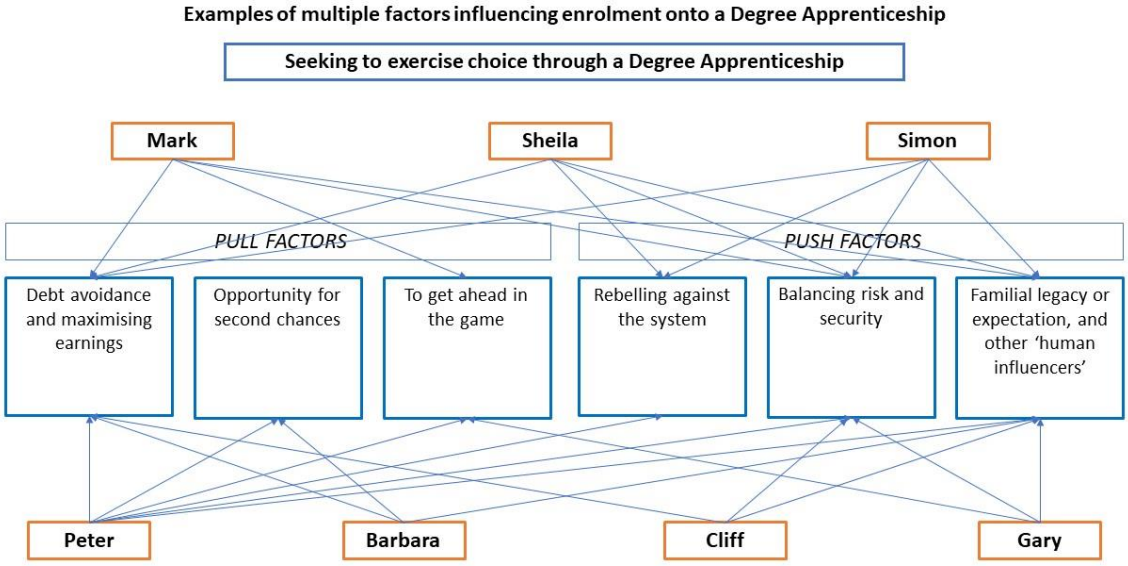

Figure 17 - An illustration of the complex and multiple factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship

It appears that degree apprenticeships are perceived to provide learners with a way of avoiding debt whilst maximising earning potential, an opportunity for a second chance and to get ahead in the game in terms of their potential for career progression. Enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship is further perceived to be a way of rebelling against the educational system that promotes the traditional full-time degree route through higher education. The degree apprenticeship provides a sense of job security with consequent reliable income linked to financial security. Enrolment is also influenced by familial legacy and expectation as well as others such as line managers. For many degree apprentices the factors influencing enrolment

are multiple and complex with the degree apprentices seemingly wanting to exercise choice through enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship.

4.2 Experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship

This section of the chapter provides an overview of the development of the themes relating to degree apprentices' experiences of, and reflections on, their degree apprenticeship. This followed by discussion of the themes, together with extracts from the interviews.

4.2.1 Experiences and reflections: An overview

The coding of degree apprentices' experiences of, and reflections on, their degree apprenticeship led to the development of two main themes as illustrated in Figure 18 below. The process by which these themes (and sub-themes) were developed from initial codes can be found in chapter three.

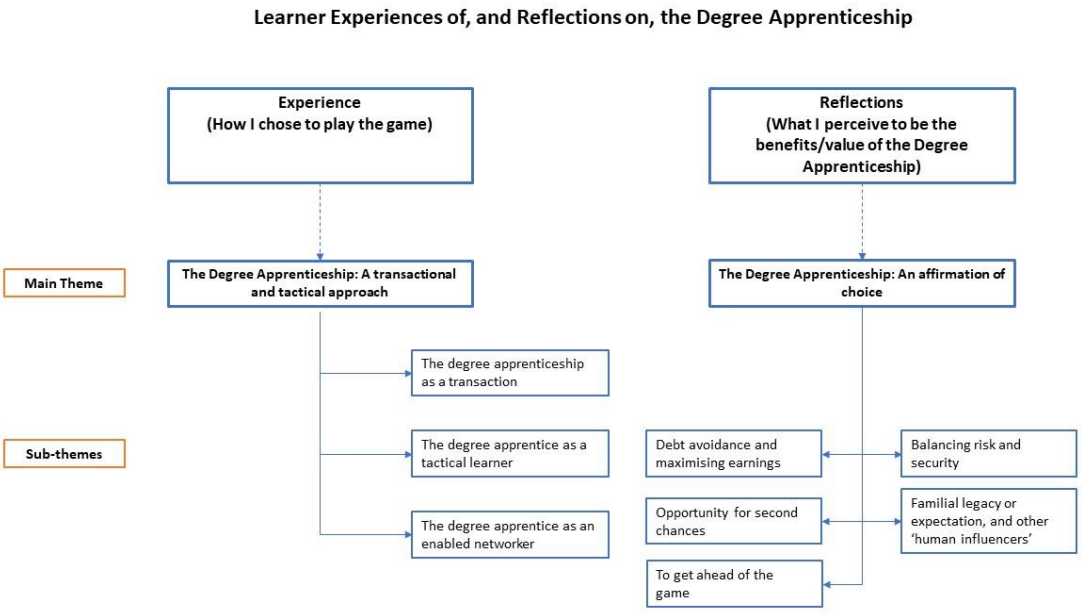

Figure 18 - Overview of the themes and sub-themes developed from degree apprentices' experiences and reflections

As highlighted in Figure 18, their reflections post completion of the degree apprenticeship reflect an affirmation (a defence of, or support for) their choice to enrol onto this type of programme. This affirmation is described in terms of the perceived personal benefits and value achieved in completing the programme. During the interviews, they talk about their experiences of the degree apprenticeship in transactional terms, suggesting a tactical approach is adopted to their learning. This transactional approach would seem to further affirm their choice (see Figure 19).

The degree apprentices talk about the networks they have developed whilst completing their apprenticeship, describing the networks developed as being enabled by others, for example, their line manager or employing organisation. These themes are discussed in more depth in the following sections of this chapter with reference to extracts from the interviews.

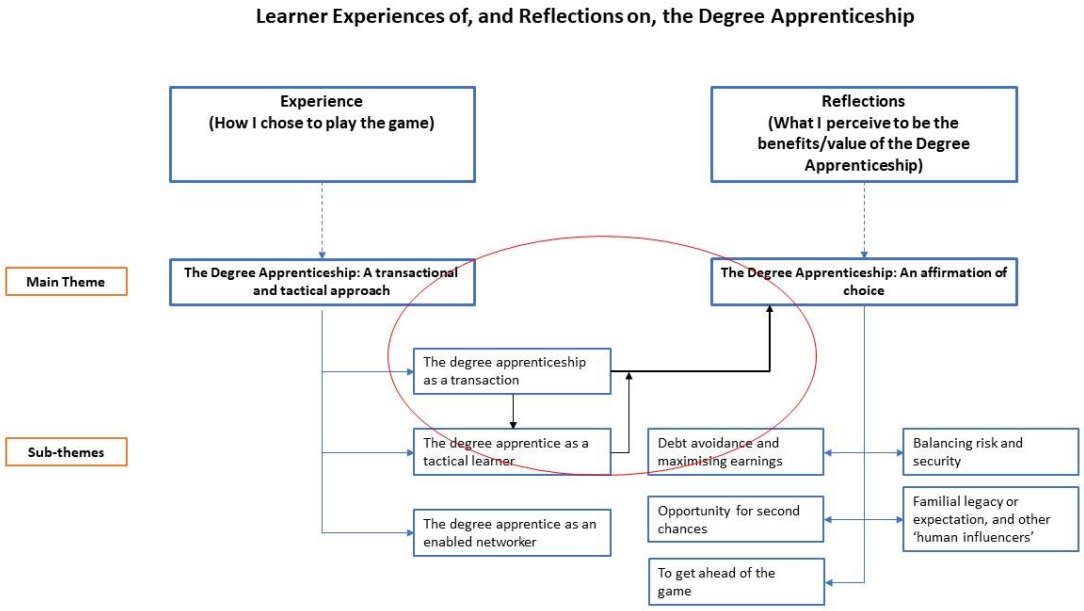

Figure 19 - An Illustration of how experience appears to affirm choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship

Analysis of the interview data would suggest that the transactional approach to the degree apprenticeship influences the adoption of tactical learning, both of which would appear to affirm choice of the degree apprenticeship. These learners chose the degree apprentice route to, for example, avoid debt, get ahead in the game, and meet 'others' expectations. They sacrifice, for example, social life and extra-curricular activities, for work and study to earn while they learn and take advantage of career progression opportunities. This approach aligns with and therefore appears to affirm their choice to enrol on the programme.

Firstly, reflections on the degree apprenticeship are discussed as these closely align with the themes developed in relation to factors (particularly pull factors) influencing enrolment.

4.2.2 The degree apprenticeship: An affirmation of choice

In this study, findings suggest that degree apprenticeship enrolment is the result of a combination of factors that provoke (push) the individual and/or attract and draw (pull) the individual toward the degree apprenticeship. Push factors include dissatisfaction with limited post-18 choices and consequent life chances. Pull factors include, for example, greater security

and career opportunities, offering what is perceived as the prospect for a more rewarding life. It is the themes associated with pull factors that appear at the forefront of the learner's reflections of the degree apprenticeship as an affirmation of choice.

4.2.2.1 Debt avoidance and maximising earnings

Many of the degree apprentices in this study do not come from a financially stable background and having witnessed the impact on their families of the 2008 economic crash, are seeking to avoid debt and maximise earnings through the degree apprenticeship. For example, in the interview with Cliff, he affirms that completing the programme has met his expectations and needs in '*getting the degree, **earning while learning**, **starting** [his] **career** and **not being in debt**.'* He adds, *'I've really enjoyed it. I've had **good pay** and **good skills** and I've had a very **good career so far** with all the **room to progress** …'* Cliff's perception would appear to resonate primarily with the pull factors of 'debt avoidance and maximising earnings' and 'getting ahead in the game'.

Debt avoidance is also an affirmation reflected by Graham who says:

> *'I wouldn't really say I really doubted or regretted my decision at all. I think, from both sides, my university side and my work side it was always the best option for me. I never thought I wish I'd never done it, I wish I'd gone full-time. All those benefits we spoke of earlier, **not paying for it**, **having a salary**, all of those things just made this even better and that continued right the way through the fourth year… there was never really a time that I doubted my decision.'*

4.2.2.2 Opportunity for second chances

The opportunity for second chances is also evident in post completion reflections as illustrated by Rachel who says:

> *'The university was able to provide me with all **the background that I had not managed to gain earlier** and to explore that work in a work environment and **explore myself** and be more comfortable in a work environment and **grow confidence in myself**, **my abilities** and my role.'*

This extract highlights the opportunity for a second chance offered by the degree apprenticeship which has increased Rachel's self-confidence within and outside of work. Similarly, Katerina affirms her choice and her resultant self-confidence in saying, *'I **had the job but not the education**, jobs can go at any time. So now I've got my partner, my own house, own car, and a degree. I have **proved myself now**.'*

4.2.2.3 Getting ahead in the game

Within the interviews there is evidence that degree apprentices perceive themselves to be ahead in the game through completion of a degree apprenticeship. This affirmation is expressed by Graham who says:

> *'I would say **definitely enhances you over a typical grad** out of university and I think that's benefitted me in terms of the opportunities I now have after graduation.'*

This he explains is because:

> *'…you have the skills not necessarily related to your job like how to talk to managers, how to work with managers you might not necessarily get from university, and you've had four years of improving while on the degree apprenticeship and even how to behave and that sort of thing and you've had that right from the get go really.'*

Eve also talks of the opportunities offered by degree apprenticeship to get ahead of the game:

> *'…I've already been afforded **opportunities that people would have to wait years for** and I've been incredibly fortunate on the degree apprenticeship… I have **three more years work experience than the rest of my peers** and that's really helpful and, people who went to work immediately rather than going to university, I know less of them, but the ones I do, **their salary still isn't as competitive as mine** is and from the people that I've spoken to **their job satisfaction is a lot lower because they've sort of started slightly lower on the chain** most of the time and been given less opportunities as just a regular salaried worker rather than being on a scheme to seek employment, **they've received less opportunities than I have**.'*

In talking about the opportunities offered by the degree apprenticeship Clive says of himself, *'more recently **I'm seen as a success story'***. This he suggests is because the degree apprenticeship '… *provided a lot of benefits. It's **provided a social network of people who know who I am***.' Networking is revisited and discussed further in section 4.2.3.3

4.2.2.4 The push factors

Interestingly, there appears to be less focus on push factors in the affirmations of choice. For example, none of the degree apprentices refer to the degree apprenticeship, post completion, in support of having rebelled against the system. Some do perceive the degree apprenticeship as having enabled them to balance risk with security as indicated by Graham who says it was a ***'sensible approach'***. Graham also vindicates his decision by comparing himself with friends and family saying:

> *'I would still make the same decision knowing what I know now, **where I'm at now compared with my friends** who are just coming out of university … I didn't at the time I knew I wanted to go this route because of all the benefits! But knowing what I know now there is no way I would do anything different… **compared to my friends** who are just coming out of uni and who still don't know if that's the area of work they want to go into which I think is slightly terrifying and to come out with all that debt sometimes **they still even can't get a job in that field** even if they come out with a 2:1… **My cousin** for*

example wanted to study psychology and get a job in the industry but can't because she hasn't got any experience.'

4.2.2.5 Summary: The degree apprenticeship, an affirmation of choice

Many of the degree apprentices in this study confirm that the degree apprenticeship has not only given them the financial stability but has also led them to benefit from the financial rewards of enhanced salary for example, having a foot on the property ladder and/or a good car when compared to their friends of a similar age. Many also say that increased opportunity within their roles has led them to benefit from career progression by enabling them to 'get ahead in the game'. For some, the degree apprenticeship offers a second chance to achieve educational qualifications. This, they report, has increased self-confidence, or elevated standing amongst their friends and family. The degree apprenticeship is perceived as a way of balancing risk with security that is not afforded on a traditional, full-time degree programme.

4.2.3. The degree apprenticeship: A transactional and tactical approach

The next section explores how degree apprentices describe their experiences of the degree apprenticeship. Graham describes his experiences as being a *'mix'* but reflects that the degree apprenticeship was ultimately a *'great choice'*. The '*mix*' being a blend of opportunities and sacrifices as illustrated by Graham who says, *'… you are sacrificing quite a lot… moving away from your parents and independence almost but that comes at a cost doesn't it.*'

Interview data suggests degree apprentices' decisions and actions during their degree apprenticeship are, in many instances, transactional and instrumental in nature. A transaction for the purpose of this study is described as a two-way exchange and instrumental as an activity used for some practical purpose. The apprentices talk of the benefits of this approach to obtaining a degree (for example, to be debt free, to get ahead in the game) but also the personal sacrifices made in achieving their degree through their choice of the apprenticeship programme (for example, intense workloads and little or no social life).

4.2.3.1 The degree apprenticeship: A transaction

According to Keith, attendance at university as part of the degree apprenticeship was, *'to get a job done.'* However, for many degree apprentices, this presents some challenges and requires some sacrifices on their part. For example, on numerous occasions Graham uses the word '*intense*' to describe his degree apprenticeship experience and, like many of his peers, spoke of sacrifices made in achieving the degree via this route. This is captured in his comments in which he makes comparisons with his friend who was undertaking a full-time degree. '*I look at the level of work I had to go into for my apprenticeship and the level of depth I had to go into*

for my degree so it's very, a lot more intense'. He adds, *'There were a lot of times when I had to work late into the evenings and weekends; and it's that sacrifice as well but, it's what I needed to do but it didn't matter because I knew what I was getting into.'*

Rachel spoke about the difficulty of '*adapting to the workload 'um because from high school to starting work is completely different*'. She mentions '*stress*' on several occasions during the interview. Jokingly asking: '*did I mention stress?*' and summing up by stating, '*I think it was a little more stressful than I anticipated'.* Like her peers, Rachel felt that the rewards outweighed the challenges saying, '*at the end I did come out with a good degree and debt-free as well'*.

Many degree apprentices highlight the need to work late into the evening to complete assessments and a number spoke of the challenges of having been '*promoted to more responsible roles while still completing their degree*'. This includes Clive who, whilst pleased at early career promotion, said that he found '*that last year* [referring to his final year as a degree apprentice] *was a challenge motivationally'.*

In relation to the balance between having a social and work (including study) life, their experiences seem to echo Simon's experience in that it was *'all work and no play',* adding that while in his final year he promised himself he would '*get a degree if it killed him*'.

The degree apprentices talk of giving up their hobbies while undertaking their degree apprenticeship with many citing hobbies, when they commenced the programme, as being sport related or going out with their friends. For them, work intensity of the degree apprenticeship has consequences in trying to manage workloads alongside these commitments. This is exemplified by Graham who, in talking about sacrifices, says:

> *'So, before this I used to play in a rugby team, I used to play drums that sort of thing because you have a bit more time… I don't play rugby every week like I used to but I would still go out and throw a ball around with my friends that sort of thing… I don't think, for example, you have time for those extra-curricular activities such as joining a netball team or joining a rugby team or football [at the university] … I would say that's more of an after-thought in a degree apprenticeship.'*

For Graham, these sacrifices are perceived as being worthwhile as he says, '*You do make sacrifices but at the time I didn't think I was missing out as much so, yeah maybe I wasn't getting to play rugby every week, but you are getting a different sort of benefit*.' However, it is interesting to note that he perceives opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities at the university as being an '*after thought*' in terms of a degree apprenticeship.

All degree apprentices advised they were aware of wider opportunities to engage in a fuller university experience, to include social and other extra-curricular social activities, but all chose

not to engage because of the demands of being a degree apprentice. For example, Cliff maintains, '*it was one thing too many to take on in addition to the role, study and maintaining existing personal social relationships.*'

Likewise, Keith says, '*I didn't have a chance to go and meet people because I was working flat out*.' Peter also highlights this issue in commenting that he '*had little time'* and so spent his spare time, '*with my girlfriend going out to dinner and all that.'*

Eve, who lived locally to the university and who also chose not to engage in university social and extra-curricular events and activities, advises, '*I wasn't missing out on the sort of super social aspect of university um for me it was never something I would say I looked to go to university to do anyway'.*

Interestingly, Eve's perception of university social life is encapsulated in the following extract:

> *'So, for me I don't feel I particularly missed out. Perhaps from an outsider point of view someone might say, oh well you know, you didn't get the time to go to [name of student social event] every week, or not to go to your lectures before mid-day and things like that. But I personally I never missed that, I feel it was something I could have made time for it if I wanted to and I didn't, so no I don't feel I missed out.'*

This view of a university social life is reflected in Graham's comment that, *'when you look at traditional full-time students who are going out every night and getting drunk you just think I haven't got time to do that.'*

As these extracts highlight, for these learners, the degree apprenticeship is transactional consisting of benefits reaped (for example, the degree) in return for sacrifices (for example, social life) made. Such that the opportunity to engage in extra-curricular activities and events offered by the higher education institution are considered as an '*after thought*'. Indeed, engaging in social events at the higher education institution is not only impossible due to demands on their time (in combining work and study) but is based on a stereotypical view of a university student as illustrated in the extracts above.

It is also interesting to note that although hobbies and social activities resumed following completion of the degree apprenticeship, none of the degree apprentices had taken up a new hobby. Instead, they had sought to reintegrate themselves into their pre-degree apprenticeship lives both in terms of their hobbies and their friendships.

4.2.3.2 The degree apprentice: A tactical learner

The findings from this study suggest degree apprentices in this study adopted a tactical approach to their apprenticeship as demonstrated by Harry who says *'in each of my three years*

of learning I was making career choices. That choice would influence how much time I had left for study, leisure, or social activities.'

This tactical approach is perhaps in response to the experience of having to balance work, life, and study. Figure 20 captures typical words and phrases used by the apprentices to describe their degree apprenticeship experience.

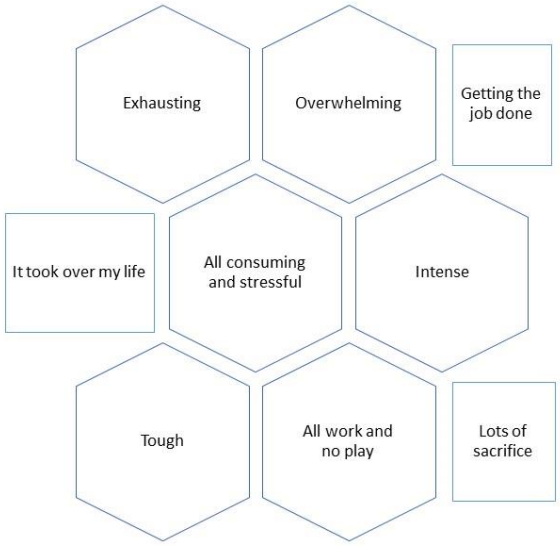

Figure 20 - Words and phrases used by degree apprentices to describe their degree apprenticeship experience

Peter describes his degree apprenticeship as a '*means to an end'* in helping him to achieve his career ambition and life goals. He describes needing the degree as *'a tick-box exercise'* for getting on in life, saying, *'This might sound bad, but I think it was a tick-box exercise for me, um, the reason being was that I knew I needed a degree just to drive my career forward to get me …, get myself a foot in the door.'* Similarly, Clive describes his approach as one in which he chose his employer and the apprenticeship scheme to enter the employment market.

Another example of a tactical approach is demonstrated by Keith who says, *'they were [employer] putting me through several courses, so the more I get under my belt the more I'm ready for the next challenge*.' He adds that, because he was working full-time and was not living on campus, he '*didn't really have any social interaction.*' As such, he says, *'I suppose you have to make the decision for your career.'*

Graham also seeks to provide a rationale for retaining a work focus, at the expense of a social life saying:

'… you've only got so many hours in a day, you have to fit things in, you have to drop certain things. But with university you're encouraged to do that aren't you, you're encouraged to do extra-curricular things because you have time to allow for that, but you don't with a degree apprenticeship I'd say. But… it's what you want to get out of it'.

This tactical approach is summarised by Harry who says that he did not enjoy the apprenticeship initially and '*couldn't see where my career was going'*. He said he '*felt like giving up'* but was pleased he didn't as he was '*promoted just before graduating'* and his *'pay increased considerably as a result.'* He says:

'My experience was like a game of monopoly. You go around the process three times [referring to the three years of the programme] and if you are lucky and make the right decisions and take a 'chance' on things you may or may not be lucky in your experience. I think as you go around for the third time you get better at it though, especially if you find someone who can help you along the way, so you choose how to avoid getting into trouble - going to jail.'

This suggests degree apprentices have had to become tactical learners to cope with the demands of balancing work and study to not only pass but exceed the expectations of key stakeholders and positively compete with those who have undertaken full-time degree study. However, in taking a tactical approach these degree apprentices are potentially missing out on opportunities to build their social and cultural capital. This indicates that they may be unaware of the social benefits that might be gained from engaging in social networking activities as facilitated by getting involved in university societies, such as debating, sports or cultural events.

4.2.3.3 The degree apprentice: An enabled networker

All degree apprentices talk about how their professional contacts have been useful in identifying interesting opportunities in support of their career progression. Although many were slow to start their networking skills, and instead relied on their workplace colleagues to champion their cause. Many discuss their growing awareness of the benefits to them of engaging in opportunity to network through their degree apprenticeship journey, identifying how this enabled their early career achievements. As a result, some became proactive in seeking to expand their networks in seeking further affirmation of their choice.

During the interviews, the degree apprentices talk about their networking experiences. For example, Gary explains that '*working full-time and studying I didn't have much free time'.* However, he did '*attend work social events such as after work drinks, quizzes, bowling to meet people*.' Whilst indicating a pro-active approach, what is not clear here is the extent to which Gary is aware of the potential benefits of developing these social networks.

Like Gary and many other degree apprentices, Keith says that during his degree apprenticeship journey, he '*didn't have a chance to go and meet people because I was working flat out*.' Again,

there is the suggestion in his narrative that he was initially oblivious to the potential benefits social networking might bring. Although he says, '*I guess I clocked it quite early on*', referring to the potential benefits networking might bring him, he says he *'fell on it by accident I think [through] introduction to a senior manager [who] then just nurtured the relationship.'*

Keith identifies the benefits of this relationship as being career progression, saying '*as soon as I had that introduction, I sort of held on to it and then I had monthly calls with him, he was throwing opportunities at me so on, so forth*.' In addition, he says that with support of his workplace mentor he was, '*adding more goals to benefit how my career will shape*'.

Similarly, Peter benefited from learning the '*social networking game'.* He says:

> *'It wasn't until I got to work in (name of previous company) that I got to realise how important the social aspect was, I think it was in my first year at (name of previous company) I realised it was the ones who are liked, who talk a lot, who do a lot of events, are the ones who get noticed and end up getting either approached to do different roles, so I noticed that quite quickly in my first year'.*

Anita identifies how she remained oblivious to networking for the first two years of the degree apprenticeship, saying:

> *'I didn't really realise how important it was until I was in my third year of uni and people start knowing your name and you get to know them as well… I think it helps you to build a network quite early on because you get to talk to lots of companies and organisations then you start building people that you know outside of your own organisation.'*

Anita recognises that networking is not one dimensional and can provide multiple benefits including help and advice, and introductions to other professionals:

> *'They introduce you to people they know, and you go to networking events. They're quite common in [the sector]. We always have beer events or wine events and that sort of stuff so it's quite nice to get to know everybody and to hear about what they've done in industry as well … so it's quite nice as well just to hear which way your career could go as well.*

Conversely, Melissa spoke of a growing awareness of the power of networking from a young age, saying she was:

> *'… always taking part in extracurricular activities, from hockey, netball, dancing, trampoline, choir to drama club [at school]. Then at sixth form I took on part time paid jobs, but also took part in different kinds of extra-curricular [activities], such as being part of organising a charity event, being 'creative director' for a commemorative community project and being a peer mentor in reading for younger students. I took part in these because I enjoy trying new activities and I liked the variety it provided in my day-to-day.'*

However, while at sixth form the nature of the extra-curricular activity changed as Melissa explains, *'these were more aimed at being fulfilling, and also to be frank, look good on applications for jobs and uni.'*

Graham also acknowledges benefits in relation to his career saying, '*It's a really good option having a social network in a career sense.'* In referring to the degree apprenticeship cohort he studied with, he adds, '*I think the degree apprenticeship is a great way to develop your network [referring to benefits the cohort brought] people would say there's a job offer here, come and do this*.'

Keith also recognises the benefits of networking, saying:

> *'I was put forward for awards, to go to big events and to talk to big managers and stuff like that. Social aspects, the thing with me is that I talk to anyone, I know, I know you're the owner of the company but I'm still going to talk to you… and I think that's one of the things that helped me across the way.'*

In speaking about the importance of networking Katerina says in her experience, *'it is really important. It's a shame that the culture within (her place of employment) is all about who you know it's not about what you know.'*

As well as professional networks, or in the absence of these networks, workplace mentors and line managers are perceived as important sources of support. For example, Mark relied on a small number of people to support him:

> *'For me, I didn't really have that many people that I communicated with it was either (name) or like my colleagues in the class but other than that if I could answer it within my project experience or get online, I could just ask (name) but I didn't really need to go outside of that. It would be useful but it's not something I did.'*

Rachel comments on the importance of workplace mentors or managers '*there is that safety bubble there is a line of support of line managers for the next promotion and things like that*'. Anita says she benefited from a colleague placed in the role of 'W*orkplace Champion*.'

A consequence of not having a 'Workplace Champion (or equivalent) was outlined by Harry who says:

> *'It wasn't until I worked on a big project with a great manager that I really felt a part of the business. He took me under his wing and helped me to understand how to be a good project manager and, more importantly he believed in me and made me feel more valued than previously. It was great to have someone who saw I was capable of more and he even helped me to prepare for my promotion – cos you have to know how the system works.'*

Interestingly, Cliff mentioned the university as having supported him, but this appeared as an afterthought as the interview was ending.

As the findings in this section suggest, many of the degree apprentices in this study appear to be unaware of how opportunities offered through the degree apprenticeship, both at university as well as in the workplace and beyond, can support the development of personal and

professional networks, skills, and strategies. Equally, there appears to be an assumption that degree apprentices can easily access a wide range, and number of networks within the workplace and while at university. This assumption simplifies and underestimates the challenges facing these work-based learners in terms of time and access to support in building networks.

4.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from analysis of the interview data addressing the research questions:

1. What factors influence learner enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship?
2. What are these learner's experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship?
3. How do these learners use capital acquisition and exploit any opportunities, if available, to enhance their social mobility?

The factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship were identified, from which six sub-themes were developed, with an over-arching theme of wanting to exercise choice through degree apprenticeship. For many degree apprentices a multiplicity of influencing factors exists.

This study also identified that, as graduates of the degree apprenticeship, these learner's reflections affirm their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship. In that they have, for example, a reliable and steady income and they are debt-free. This, they claim, is not the case for friends who have chosen to gain their degree through full-time university study. These learners have also benefited from career enhancement with most apprentices regarded as 'graduate plus one' [a career and pay level above a graduate] upon graduation. The more rapid career progression has provided them opportunities to have wide ranging work-place experiences and to develop and enhance their project management and leadership skills. This was facilitated by a work-place mentor or champion. Therefore, for these learners, the degree apprenticeship has offered them opportunity to exercise choice in transitioning into the workplace, post their compulsory full-time education. Moreover, they perceive themselves to be 'ahead in the game' when compared with those graduating alongside them from a full-time degree programme. This constant comparison with full-time graduates appears to further affirm their choice.

However, for most degree apprentices in this study, in exercising their choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship resulted in them having to make sacrifices and experience multiple

pressures. These sacrifices included a sustained period of high work intensity and a constant need to pro-actively develop networks in the pursuit of the next promotion. In addition, they sacrificed much, if not all, of their social life which included not partaking in university social activities. As the interview extracts highlight, the degree apprenticeship is transactional consisting of benefits reaped (for example, the degree) in return for sacrifices (for example, social life) made.

Consequently, these degree apprentices adopted a tactical learning approach to cope with the demands of balancing work and study together with coping with familial pressures, to not only pass but to exceed the expectations of key stakeholders. These learners demonstrate resilience and tenaciousness in seeing the degree apprenticeship as a one-time opportunity for enhancing their current situation on a debt free basis. This suggests that no matter how *'exhausting'*, *'stressful'*, and *'all-consuming'*, the experience is, it is transactional. In that they are willing to make exchanges (time, effort, and social life) to achieve the benefits of a degree qualification whilst earning a salary.

The next chapter further examines these findings in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two.

5.0 Chapter Five – Discussion

'Social mobility is a myth 'in a deeply unequal society like the United Kingdom'

Reay (2013:675).

In this chapter, findings from the current study presented in chapter four in relation to factors influencing learner enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship within a higher education institution in England (RQ1), and learner's experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship (RQ2) are synthesised with the literature reviewed in chapter two. Together with the ways in which these learners exploit opportunities for acquisition of social capital and enhancing social mobility are highlighted (RQ3). The themes developed in chapter four are illustrated in Figure 21 below:

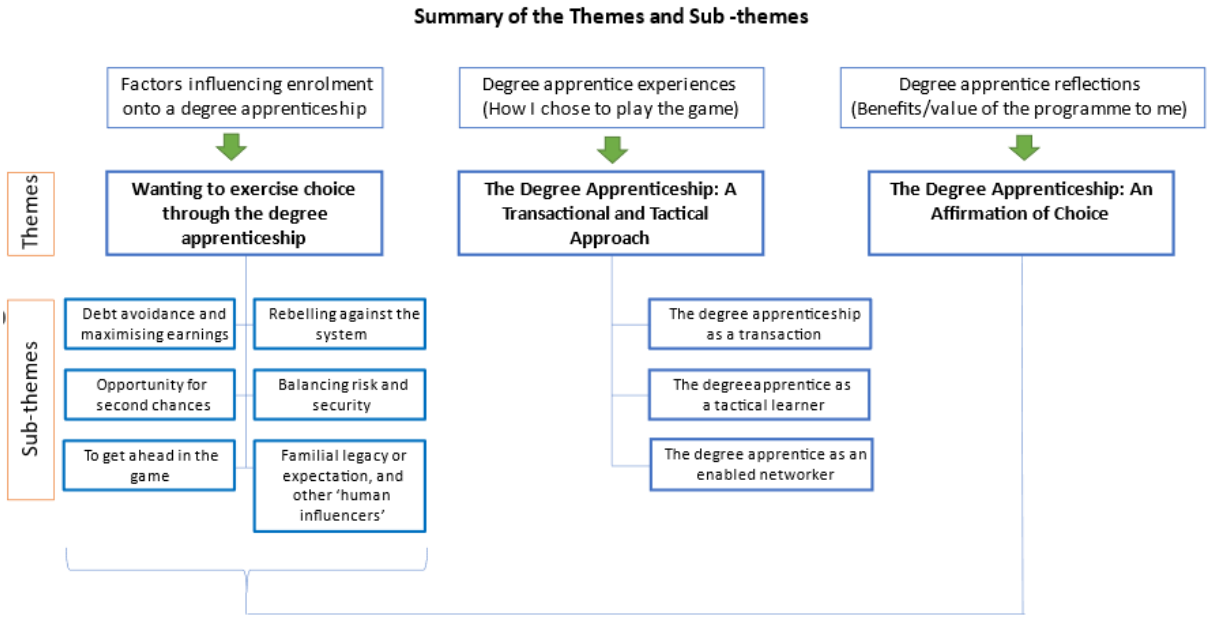

Figure 21 - Summary of themes and sub-themes developed from analysis of interview data

Similarities between, and departure from, existing literature and research and the findings from the current study are identified. Concept of capital, specifically Bourdieu's conception of social capital, is used as the lens through which to explore the experiences and reflections of the degree apprentices who participated in this study. Using Bourdieu as a lens not only offers the opportunity for critical analysis by providing a deep, lived understanding of the research context as opposed to mere description (Fitzpatrick and May, 2016) but offers a way to explore people's practice within a certain field, which Bourdieu argued is related to their accumulated capital and habitus (Khalil and Kelly, 2020).

The chapter commences with a critical discussion of the factors degree apprentices say influence their enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship (RQ1). This is followed by a critical exploration of their experiences and reflections (RQ2), and their use of capital acquired to exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility (RQ3). The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings and contributions to knowledge. The structure of this chapter is outlined in Figure 22 below:

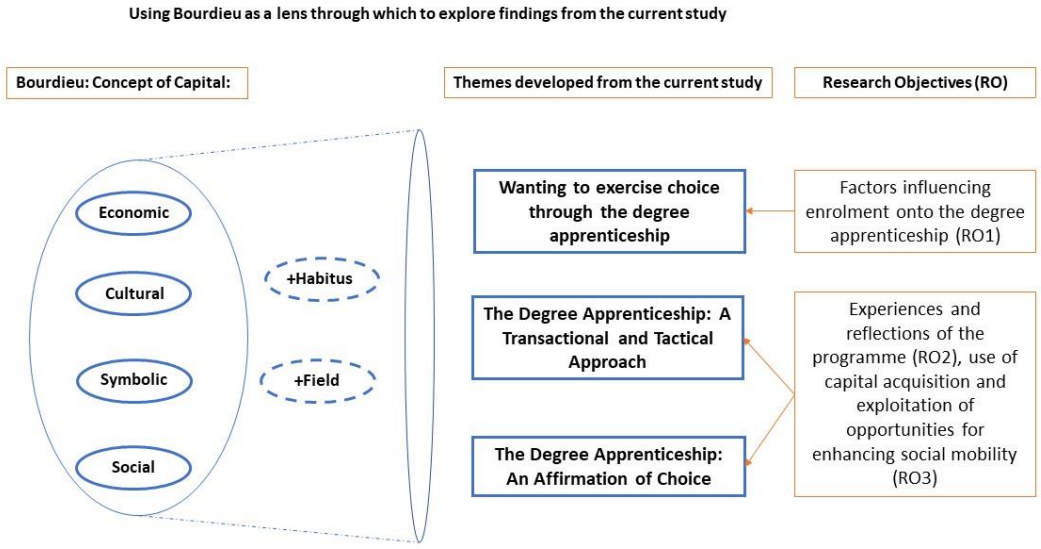

Figure 22 - Using Bourdieu as a lens through which to explore findings from the current study

5.1. Wanting to exercise choice through the degree apprenticeship

For most of the degree apprentices in this study, the factors influencing enrolment to the degree apprenticeship are complex and multi-faceted.

The factors degree apprentices in the current study say influenced their enrolment on to the degree apprenticeship broadly align with those found in the literature as illustrated in Figure 23 below. However, findings from the current study depart from the literature primarily in two ways. The first being that in the current study, the ***opportunity*** for a second chance (for example, to gain a degree) is identified as a factor influencing enrolment. This contrasts with the literature which highlights the degree apprenticeship as the ***only*** or ***best*** option for gaining a degree. The second is that, for some degree apprentices, enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship is influenced by a desire to rebel against the system. This act of rebellion being a response to being pushed towards the traditional route to university. Further discussion of these and other influencing factors commences in section 5.1.2.

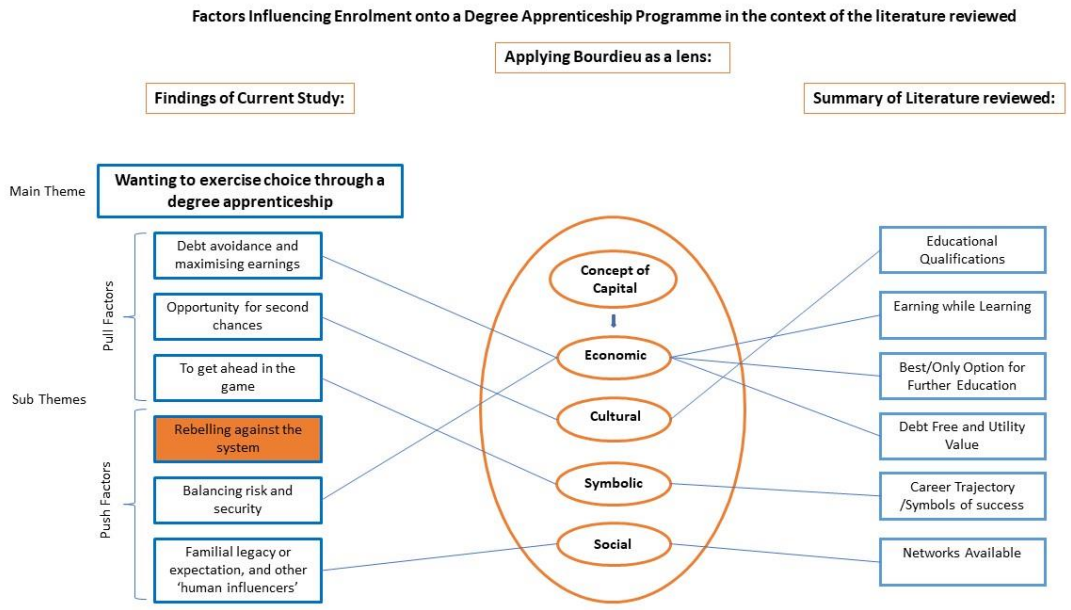

Figure 23 - Factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship programme in the context of the literature reviewed

5.1.1 The multi-faceted nature of factors influencing enrolment

As illustrated in Figure 16 of chapter four, analysis of interview data in the current study indicates a combination of factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship, a combination that varies for each degree apprentice. The multi-faceted nature of these influences aligns with the research of Engeli and Turner (2019); Lester and Bravenboer (2020); Smith *et al*., (2021) and Cunningham (2021) who highlight the numerous and complex reasons degree apprentices state for enrolling onto the degree apprenticeship. Therefore, findings of the current study support Smith *et al's*., (2021) assertion that rather than a single factor, there are multiple influencing factors for enrolling onto this non-traditional route to a degree. However, nuances in findings are evident.

For example, although findings regarding influences for enrolling onto the degree apprenticeship largely align with the 'multi-factorial' research findings of Cunningham (2021), many apprentices in the current study identified avoidance of debt as a key influencing factor. Thereby, offering a different perspective to that of Cunningham who suggests that student's attitude to debt is evolving and, therefore, was not a prominent feature of her research.

In identifying avoidance of debt as a key influencing factor, the current study also offers support to research by Engeli and Turner (2019) who identified two primary factors: economic (including cost and earning a salary alongside studying) and achieving a degree qualification. Several degree apprentices in the current study cite the ability to learn whilst earning as

important and express the belief that the degree qualification has the requisite currency, as suggested by Lester and Bravenboer (2020), to act as a vehicle to 'kick-start' their careers.

5.1.2 Balancing risk and security: Avoiding debt and earning while learning

For degree apprentices in the current study the impact of structural factors cannot be ignored. Whilst it is not the intention of the current study to showcase what Thatcher *et al*., (2018:17) characterise as the existence of a system of 'privilege and reproduction', the external context and individual circumstances are important considerations. In this study, the context of the macro-environment has undergone several significant changes including the 2008 recession, Brexit and more recently Covid and the rising cost of living. A complex employment landscape exists with an inadequate supply of graduate-level jobs, leading to previous generations of graduates finding themselves in non-graduate roles.

In England, studying for a degree represents significant debt. However, with the degree apprenticeship, apprentices receive a salary while studying. Therefore, the ability to earn while learning, rather than being exposed to the financial pressure of debt and no guarantee of enhanced career trajectory, is clearly attractive. The opportunity to acquire what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as economic and cultural capital is offered through the degree apprenticeship in terms of building financial resources whilst also gaining a degree qualification.

Findings of the current study suggest the introduction of the degree apprenticeship has provided the apprentices with a way of securing what they perceive as the benefits of the degree qualification whilst balancing financial risk and security. This balancing of such benefits and risks highlights the utility value placed on the degree apprenticeship and appears to correspond to research which concludes that apprentices 'need to present their decision as sensible as well as feasible' (Holmegaard 2015, in Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018:767). Although the perception that the degree apprenticeship represents a debt free route through higher education (Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019) is evident, what is not clear from the current study is whether these learners, in seeking to avoid debt are, according to Callendar (2003), debt averse or anti-debt.

The interview data shows that degree apprentices make sacrifices as they progress through their programme. For example, the dual demands of paid employment and study (earning while learning), lead to sacrifices in the time available for social activities and for taking advantage of opportunities for social and professional networking, which have the potential to build social capital. Given the wider economic context and the employment landscape, and the socio-

economic circumstances of some, it is understandable that debt avoidance, risk and earning while learning are dominant influential factors for enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship.

5.1.3 Getting ahead in the game: Career enhancement (a symbol of success)

For some degree apprentices, such as Peter, an influencing factor in their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship, was to '*get into the industry quicker', 'progress in my career',* and *'get promoted as fast as possible… to move up the career ladder quickly',* to be in a *'better position than my peers'.* Included in '*peers*' are those graduates just entering the job market.

Therefore, enrolling onto the degree apprenticeship, for some, extends beyond being merely a mechanism to avoid debt to a mechanism which also enables the degree apprentice to *'get ahead in the game'* by making the most of the perceived career opportunities provided by the degree apprenticeship. Therefore, for these learners, career enhancement, when compared to their school or college peers, facilitated by their degree qualification ***and*** work experience, is identified as a symbol of success. This aligns to research by Lester and Bravenboer (2020) who identified that for apprentices one of the main factors is career impact and that of Engeli and Turner (2019) who identified the degree apprenticeship as a kick start to a career.

Further, in line with the findings of Lester and Costley (2010), those already established in their workplace cite enrolling to the degree apprenticeship as enabling them to take on increased responsibility to gain workplace recognition, for example, through promotion. The achievement of a degree qualification, combined with work experience, is perceived to enhance reputation and status when compared to peers, facilitating career enhancement and progression. According to Bourdieu (1986;1989) these are prestigious and valued within English culture and are, therefore, legitimatised as forms of symbolic capital.

Consequently, the perception of the degree apprenticeship as a symbol of personal and professional success, providing value for career enhancement, resonates with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capitals as resources that can be converted into advantageous positions in social fields. In terms of degree apprenticeships, the field includes the higher education institution, the employer and government economic and social policy. However, it is important to recognise that understanding the rules of the game is a central component of successfully navigating the struggle for positions of power in the field (Bowman, 2010; Burke, in Thatcher *et al.,* 2018:17). This is discussed further in section 5.2.1.

5.1.4 Opportunity for second chance or only/best option for higher education

The exploration of factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship in the current study highlights the enduring issue of social inequality in the UK. This emerges through the narratives of degree apprentices seeking to up-skill or re-skill who identified the degree apprenticeship as providing the opportunity to return to degree study having previously foregone the opportunity for a variety of reasons, notably financial concerns. Thereby reinforcing the arguments made by Reay *et al*., (2001:861) who claimed that material constraints (for example, finance) often means that those at the lower levels of 'class' are 'operating within very limited spaces of choice'. Findings of the current study align with recent research (for example, Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019; Engeli and Turner, 2019; Lester and Bravenboer, 2020; Social Mobility Commission 2020, Smith *et al*., 2020; Smith *et al*., 2021) whose respondents identify degree apprenticeships, largely due to financial constraints, as their only realistic chance of higher education. However, rather than being considered the only option based on purely financial factors, some degree apprentices also identify the degree apprenticeship as offering a second chance to study a degree, having chosen not to progress through the traditional route because of a previous negative educational experience which cast doubt on their ability to study at degree level.

Bourdieu argues that individuals are born into specific contexts from which comes access to, and acquisition of, differential amounts of capital resource. This, he claims, predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving including 'small but not trivial differences in students' educational aspirations' (Baker *et al*., 2014:531). Whilst there is little evidence to suggest differences in educational aspirations within the current study, evidence does indicate that financial constraints and self-confidence inhibited their ability to realise these aspirations via the traditional route to a degree.

Further research is required to explore whether, for those who are economically less privileged, the degree apprenticeship removes the second, belated or only opportunity narrative for degree apprentices.

5.1.5 Rebelling against the system

The findings of the current research suggest that the active and predominant promotion of the traditional route through higher education encouraged some learners to choose to rebel against this influence, identified as a push factor in this study. They appear to be pushing against existing perceived social structures and expectations which they view as limiting their freedom of choice. This factor calls for special consideration not least because it does not

appear to feature in degree apprenticeship research but, according to Bourdieu (1986) educational qualifications are a form of institutionalised cultural capital, identified as having the potential to produce more financial resource. Therefore, not being made aware of alternative options to achieving a degree could limit the development of cultural and financial capital, further exacerbating social inequality (Bourdieu, 1977; Robbins, 2005; Bowman, 2010).

The findings of the current study align with those of Saraswat (2016) and Engeli and Turner (2019) who claim that learners participating in their research report a lack of impartial careers advice and guidance at schools and limited information on alternative options to higher education.

This may be explained by research from Engeli and Turner (2019:v) who suggest that UK culture 'promotes traditional degree attainment through university as a normal and accepted ambition and approach for young people'. As such, alternatives to the traditional university route may be viewed within society as being of lesser value. In addition, research by Saraswat (2016:408) claims that degree apprenticeships were reported as being the route not recommended by the schoolteachers and parents as the apprenticeship was not the pathway to a degree they had followed.

It could be argued that by encouraging young adults to consider progressing to university the careers advisers were fulfilling their role in recognising their ability to study at a higher level, and the value of education in building capital. The kind of capital which Archer *et al*., (2007:167) describe as being 'associated with scholarliness and academic achievement' and as evidence of an individual's symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, it should be recognised that tutors and careers advisors are acting as agents of the state. Therefore, they are employed to guide these young adults through transition from school to work by providing ***impartial*** guidance, conveying all opportunities available to post-compulsory learners. Findings from the current study strongly suggest that several degree apprentices, in choosing the degree apprenticeship, were not doing so as rational informed customers (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018) but as a form of rebellion in pushing-back against what they felt to be a system that presented them with no choice. This controlling of the field is explained by Bourdieu (1996; 2000:165) as being an 'effect of power' wherein the agents behaviour suggests management of power-driven fields to continue durable effects of the social order, which he considered rife in the context of education.

These findings of the current study resonate with and support the findings and recommendations of other scholars (for example, Lester and Bravenboer, 2020; Smith *et. al.,*

2021) who also identify the need for **complete** and **impartial** information and guidance to be provided to young adults in schools and colleges to better support those transitioning to higher education.

Therefore, higher education institutions (and other training providers) need to establish a more coherent partnership approach with employers that builds on existing relationships with schools and colleges. This will help to contribute to a more unbiased and holistic approach to discussion of post-compulsory education options with school and college students. There may be good examples of these types of partnership in the UK which involve a multi-stakeholder approach to providing information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges. However, the findings from the current study highlight inconsistencies and bias in this advice.

Interestingly, in the literature reviewed in chapter two, it is suggested that issues of parity of esteem exist between academic and the more vocational educational qualifications. This is not evident in the degree apprentices' perceptions of the degree apprenticeship in the current study. It would be interesting to explore the perceptions of tutors and career advisors in future research, particularly given the claim in existing research that apprenticeships are considered as 'a suitable option for someone else's child' (Sarawat, 2016:408).

5.1.6 Human Influencers: Utilising networks and familial pressures

Many degree apprentices in the current study say having '*supportive parents*' empowered them to make their own choices by '*having faith that they will make a smart decision'.* Most sought the views of one or more of the following: family, friends, and their employer before enrolling onto the degree apprenticeship. This aligns to research by Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) who determined that students make decisions about careers within a complex set of relationships or networks that include parents, relatives, friends, professionals such as careers advisors and teaching staff, and others.

In research by Engeli and Turner (2019:22) over half of respondents claimed they decided for themselves that a degree apprenticeship would be '*a good fit*' for them, suggesting independent agency in taking responsibility for their choice. The findings from the current study appear to align with those of Engeli and Turner in that the degree apprentices felt trusted in making their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship. However, consistent with other research findings (for example, Winterton and Irwin, 2012), rather than being a solitary decision, many provided examples of how they had looked to their peer groups for confirmation of their choice. For example, one participant felt it was *'good to try and ask as many people as possible what they [friends] thought'.* In response to their *'good advice and*

good feedback' in which friends told George, '… y*ou know you're very lucky here you aren't having to pay for a degree and you're getting a job'* and therefore they considered it a *'good opportunity',* he enrolled onto the degree apprenticeship programme. This narrative also aligns to that of Helve and Bynner (2007) who state that it is the norm, when young adults move towards autonomy and independence, to look to their friends for opinion, in preference to accepting their parent's view, particularly when '… *they never had to make that decision*.'

The influence of family and familial expectations was also evident in the analysis of interview data. Granovetter (1995) and Roth (2014, 2017) suggest this is not surprising given that opportunities of where one goes in life are still influenced by what parents did and the impact of where they grew up. For example, several degree apprentices in the current study spoke of parents and grandparents who had been university educated and therefore, it was '*expected*' they too would go to university. This has been identified by Bradley *et al*., (2013:3) as the 'taken for granted pathway'. Bourdieu (1984:23) explains that academic capital is the 'guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)'. Therefore, as it is likely that those with middle class cultural capital will know how to 'play the game' these individuals are generally regarded as having advantage over their peers who are 'first in family' (Bourdieu, 1984:23). In addition, Schuller (in Helve and Bynner, 2007:187) argues that individuals do not always intentionally strategise how to exploit social capital to their own personal ends. This is reflected in behaviours of the apprentices in the current study as evidenced in their narratives.

Given the government's spending cuts in schools many young adults find themselves unprepared for transfer to work or higher education. This may be a contributory factor in the reliance on friends, family, acquaintances, and employers in, for example, assisting in curriculum vitae writing, interview preparation, and supporting their application for a job role (Roth 2014). However, only a small number of degree apprentices in the current study identified family or friends as having assisted in securing the degree apprenticeship by way of introductions from their social and/or professional networks. Nevertheless, a few instances of parents playing a central role by using their own social networks to secure the degree apprentice a job were evident. This highlights the instrumental dimension of purposefully exploiting their own social capital.

Coleman (1988) highlights social capital, though primarily invested in the parents is also accessible to the wider family. This is demonstrated by Rachel and Sheila who each benefited from their parent's friendship networks in securing their workplace roles. However, Lin,

(1999:468) warns that this 'access to and use of these resources is temporary and borrowed' so unless developed by their offspring the social capital remains the property of parents. It is noted that Sheila capitalised on her mother's social networks in securing her job which she describes as being *'the bottom level, the most junior'* role, but one which provided '*an entry way into the company.'* This low-level entry role to the company may have been offered to Sheila for one or more reasons including her previous knowledge and work experience. A possible alternative explanation is offered by Putnam (2000) who suggests that it is the result of what is termed a 'weak' social tie. Therefore, while this familial network as a social resource enabled Sheila to negotiate the school to work transition, it has not yet resulted in a visible vertical mobility shift (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Nevertheless, Sheila's mother has provided Sheila with what Putnam (2000) conceptualises as *bonding* capital which arises from utilising close-knit relationships. However, Leonard (2004:930) warns that one may be held back by family and therefore individuals need to become successful at building their own networks by forging ***bonding*** social ties, including those external to employment, therein developing ***bridging*** social capital.

Interestingly, although many degree apprentices confirmed they belonged to one or more sports clubs and had other hobbies, none engaged in what Bourdieu (1986) terms personal mobilisation of these club memberships or social networks to leverage resources for their personal ends. The use of these network resources is discussed further in section 5.2.3.

Bourdieu (1977) contends that it is an individual's earliest experiences that forms their habitus, and influences choices made throughout life. He suggests habitus and capital are pre-disposed to reproduce themselves. Habitus, therefore, leads to 'durable and transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1977:72) which constrains agency and restricts range of choice and potentially resulting in maintaining of the existing habitus. Nevertheless, Bourdieu (1986) argues that, although a struggle, it is possible to break free from these enduring habits. The powerful influence habitus has over individual agency is exemplified in the narratives of degree apprentices in the current study. Although from varied backgrounds, all but one indicated they belonged to a tight-knit family who were consulted as an important source of advice (Banks *et al,* 1992) and supported their choice to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship because they *'trusted'* them to make the *'right decision'*.

However, Katerina's relationship with her family differs from the other apprentices. Her narrative explaining factors influencing her enrolment at the age 28 is highlighted in section 4.1.6 and exemplifies Bourdieu's (1986) argument of deep entrenchment of arbitrary social hierarchies and his idea of actors engaged in struggle in pursuit of their own interests. This

Mckenzie (2018) in Thatcher *et al.,* (2018) states does not necessarily rule out idea of agency and change. It is clear from Katerina's narrative that to break free of her background to engage in education post-compulsory schooling, required an act of defiance. When viewed through the lens of Bourdieu, it could be argued that it is necessary for Katerina to exert individual management to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the field, seen to be achievable through work-based education, to satisfy her drive and desire to choose to continue her education.

5.1.7 Section summary: Wanting to exercise choice through the degree apprenticeship

This section has identified factors influencing individuals' enrolment to the degree apprenticeship, thereby addressing the first research objective. The alignment with existing research which identifies factors influencing enrolment as being personal, complex, and multi-faceted is highlighted.

Access to the degree apprenticeship remains dependent on individual circumstance of habitus and context, and as argued by Coleman (1988), acquisition of capital depends on the wider community of which the family is a part, supplying networks of reciprocal help including links to education and work opportunities. Both Bourdieu (1977; 1997; 1986) and Coleman (1988) acknowledge the positive instrumental role of social capital in maintaining and gaining academic success. The degree apprentices in the current study, although many seemingly unaware of the capital concept, recognised the potential opportunity for career enhancement, financial gain and status offered by having a degree all of which can be achieved through the degree apprenticeship. However, as evidenced in this research navigating transition into the degree apprenticeship effectively, perhaps because of its relative 'newness', depends on access to multiple and different kinds of resources, advice, and support as further discussed in 5.2.3.

5.2 The degree apprenticeship: A transactional and tactical approach

This section explores the degree apprentices' experiences of the degree apprenticeship, examining how these work-based learners use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility, thereby addressing research objective two. The findings from the current study in relation to their learning experiences align to other extant literature in that, like the complex and multi-faceted factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship, their experiences of the degree apprenticeship are equally complex with multiple and dynamic intersections (Fabian *et. al.,* 2021).

Despite this complexity, analysis of interview data suggests the degree apprentices adopted a transactional and tactical approach to their degree apprenticeship. In that, for these learners, in exchange for benefits received such as earning whilst studying for a degree, sacrifices were made, such as a social life, because of the '*exhausting*' and '*all-consuming'* demands of work and study. Such that engaging in extra-curricular activities and events offered by the higher education institution, and sometimes the employer, were not considered or were considered as an '*after thought'.*

In reflecting on their experience of the degree apprenticeship, workplace mentors and line managers were perceived to be important sources of support, for example, in enabling them to feel '*a part of the business*' and teaching them '*how to be good in their roles*' while in the '*safety bubble*' of the degree apprenticeship. For some, this resulted in critical moments as they learnt to play the game, albeit this was in many cases by accident rather than design. The degree apprentices recognise this support as assisting them to develop behaviours and workplace networks that will enable them to achieve the next career goal, pay increase or promotion.

However, although many were aware of the many social opportunities offered through their higher education institution, they did not appear to recognise that these opportunities could also play a significant role in contributing to building their social networks and stock of capital.

Overall, the degree apprentices describe their experiences of the degree apprenticeship positively with clear articulation of appreciation of the benefits it can offer in terms of skills acquisition within the workplace. However, their experiences are ultimately shaped by their personal, albeit socially derived, history and tactical resourcefulness. The basis of this engagement is localised within the situated learning experience and located in the quality of the tripartite relationship between the learner, employer, and the higher education institution, and how that relationship supports the interests of the learner and the learner's long-term, sustainable success. These work-based learning concepts have been illustrated through the narrated experiences of the degree apprentices on their degree apprenticeship programme and are discussed here, drawing on Bourdieu's concept of capital.

5.2.1 The degree apprenticeship as a transaction in a system of exchange

Analysis of interview data suggests degree apprentices' decisions and actions during their degree apprenticeship were, in many instances, transactional in nature, or in the words of one apprentice, '*to get a job done'*. It is clear from the interviews that the benefits of the degree apprenticeship, highlighted as being, for example, the opportunity to obtain a degree, being

'*debt-free'*, and earning while learning, are known. However, there is also recognition that these benefits are achieved at a cost. Such costs include, '*intense*' and *'overwhelming'* workloads, leading to long working hours, '*stress'* and demotivation, necessitating '*sacrifice*' in the form of little or no social life. One degree apprentice described his degree apprenticeship experience as *'all work and no play'.* Due to the demands of work and study these degree apprentices would appear to be continually juggling what Fabian *et. al.,* (2021) describe as being the interplay between work and study.

In addition, although all were cognisant of the wider opportunities to engage in a fuller university experience (to include social and other extra-curricular activities), the demands of their job restricted their engagement with these wider social activities. In fact, they all chose not to engage, with one apprentice citing these activities were '*one thing too many to take on in addition to the role, study and maintaining existing personal social relationships.*' These findings align with those of Taylor-Smith *et al*. (2019b) who contend that apprentices who attend university one day a week and spend the other four in their workplace are unlikely to find time to join sports teams or societies.

For some degree apprentices long working days and '*working flat out'* meant giving up leisure pursuits altogether, these pursuits typically being sport related or socialising with friends. Analysis of interview data shows that whilst hobbies and social activities resumed following completion of the degree apprenticeship, none had taken up a new hobby. Instead, they reintegrated themselves into their pre-degree apprenticeship lives both in terms of their hobbies and their friendships.

The transactional approach to the degree apprenticeship adopted by these degree apprentices is perhaps not surprising given that capital is described as a social relation within a system of exchange (Bourdieu, 1985 in Harker *et al*., 1990:1) in which human behaviour is an exchange of rewards and costs (Homans, 1961). In this case, the perceived rewards align closely with the pull factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship (no debt and earning while learning, a chance to complete a degree, and to get ahead in terms of a career) are those which build economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. However, the costs, for example, long working hours, intense workloads, and the lost opportunity to engage in extra-curricular social and other activities offered by the higher education institute and the employer restricted opportunities for social networking, ultimately constraining development of social capital and upward mobility.

The current study recognises the degree apprentices interviewed in this research come from diverse backgrounds, to include, for example, first in family to attain a degree as well as those whose family history has an expectation that each generation completes a degree qualification. Equally, their values and the volume of existing capital (economic, cultural, and social capital) they possess differs. Consequently, this will influence how they exchange capital, and which forms of capital are exchanged (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 2004).

Similarly, it is recognised that the apprentices have differing workplace environments ranging from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to corporate organisations, each potentially offering different opportunities for learners to form capital exchanges through social and professional networking.

According to Billet (2013), how individuals elect to participate in social practice has been found to be a variable which is dependent on value alignment to goal directed activities, shaped by personal histories, and mediated by an individual's agency. Given there is some mirroring of the pull factors influencing enrolment and what are perceived to be the rewards of the degree apprenticeship, it could be argued that the transactional approach adopted by these degree apprentices is aligned to individual goals (for example, maximising earnings) based on personal histories (a need to avoid debt).

This, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus, in which it is argued that an individual's primary habitus (acquired in childhood) is more durable than habitus that may be learned later in life (Power, 1999) also helps to explain why the degree apprentices reintegrated themselves into previous hobbies and friendships on completion of their degree apprenticeship.

Interestingly, despite the challenges they experienced during their degree apprenticeship, many spoke of not wanting to '*give up'* because they felt they '*owed*' something to their family or employer, for their support through the programme. It could be argued that this is what Bourdieu (1990b:10-11) contends is the 'intensive single-minded application', a feature of the 'working-class' higher education habitus, to 'work hard as symbolic gratitude'.

It might be assumed that once these learners have graduated the degree apprenticeship, their career trajectories would continue an upward trajectory having achieved a degree qualification and gained work experience. However, findings from the current study suggest that for many career trajectories have to some extent stalled, hampered by inflexible employer career progression frameworks and traditional full-time degree graduates entering the labour market.

5.2.1.1 Time for reflective learning to develop the 'right' capital?

The intensity of workload for many degree apprentices, the significant sacrifices and the opportunities lost to build social capital, as described by these degree apprentices, are of significant concern when considering the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship is to close the skills gap ***and*** enhance social mobility.

Especially, given that it is argued that no matter what an individual's habitus their apprenticeship should feature on the 'expansive' end of their workplace experience continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Such that they can engage in 'stimulating, motivating, challenging' activities that are 'related to rich opportunities' for 'competence development' (Evans and Kersh, 2004 cited in Gustavsson, 2009:248). These activities should support the degree apprentice in the development of ***all*** types of capital not just that which benefits the organisation and its productivity.

Whilst recognising the influence of habitus, there are claims that 'widening participation has been outsourced to employers' (Powell and Walsh, 2017:102). In addition, existing research findings suggest employers do not want the apprentice to be involved in activities requiring them to be away from the business for prolonged periods of time (Mulkeen *et al*., 2019). Therefore, it is important to reflect on what types of social capital and support are needed to improve the experience of work-based learners embarking on a degree apprenticeship to ensure opportunities for development of all types of capital are not lost or sacrificed.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the degree apprenticeship standards and individual learner plans are based around identified knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to the ***job role*** (and job role competency). As discussed in section 1.1.4, employers have been given power to design the degree apprenticeship curriculum content. Consequently, degree apprenticeships are geared towards fulfilling ***organisational*** needs rather than ***individual*** needs. Equally, although in work-based learning pedagogy personal development is a vital component, development within the workplace is often focused on ***organisational*** objectives meaning that self-awareness and development of social capital is restricted to ***work related career*** goals. It is also recognised that a key challenge for employers, and higher education institutions, is in supporting work-based learners to acquire the 'meta competence that enables them to learn how to learn' (Cunningham, 2021:18).

Consequently, there is a need and an ethical duty for the employer to facilitate development of individual capital within the workplace, not just in providing expansive workplace practices but in ensuring work demands placed on degree apprentices do not inhibit these learners from

reviewing and learning from experience. This includes learning through reflection on work practices (Raelin, 2008), enabling critical reflective practice and capacity for learning beyond the apprenticeship programme (Lester and Costley, 2010).

In consideration of these findings, it is recommended that the current employer-led curriculum design emphasises the importance of reflective practice with a focus on individual development beyond the needs of the organisation. This will require employer engagement to increase commitment in terms of time available and support for reflective practice through the work-place mentor scheme. This may require further support for mentors in facilitation of this wider reflective practice. Despite the challenges of competing interests and difficulties of collaboration, as highlighted by Keep (2012), this broader approach to reflective practice is essential to facilitate learning how to learn, building expansive workplace practices and raising self-awareness.

Further support for this contribution to practice is provided in the next section which discusses the degree apprentice as a tactical learner.

5.2.2 The degree apprentice: A tactical learner playing the rules of the game?

Within the current study the degree apprenticeship has been described as a '*means to an end'* and obtaining the degree as a '*tick box exercise'* to achieving, for example, career goals of promotion and a good salary. These findings suggest that in adopting a transactional approach to the degree apprenticeship, the apprentices make tactical decisions based on what they perceived to be the best ways to manage the demands of the programme which they recognised placed *'excessive demands on their time'.*

One such choice, as discussed in the previous section was not to engage in sporting and social activities nor wider societies because this was perceived to be '*one thing too many*' and '*it would just be easier to focus on getting good grades*.' For these degree apprentices, the acquisition of cultural capital, the degree qualification, is more important than the development of social capital such as building relationship and personal social networks.

Analysis of the interview data suggests that by sacrificing their personal social life and forgoing opportunity to engage in university societies and social activities, a tactical choice which focuses on short-term goals, and which is perceived by the degree apprentices to be a '*sensible approach',* is adopted. Arguably this tactical approach has the potential to limit their access to, and possible future utilisation of, social capital (for example, network connections) later in life.

Although there is recognition amongst the degree apprentices that '*with university… you are encouraged to do extra-curricular things',* it is rationalised that as a full-time student *'you have time to allow for that, but you don't with a degree apprenticeship'.* It is therefore not clear whether these degree apprentices fully appreciate what such opportunities offer in terms of building their social capital. Equally, it cannot be assumed that these degree apprentices are aware of the potential benefits and importance of building social networks beyond the workplace. This is particularly relevant given that, as outlined in section 2.1.2, effective networking which involves critical skills for supporting the development of social capital do ***not*** appear within the degree apprentice standard for digital and technology solutions.

Instead, there is evidence to suggest that these degree apprentices pro-actively make tactical choices that they perceive align with playing the rules of the (career) game. That is, taking on additional work responsibilities and prioritising work over other activities that have the potential to build social capital. For some, this also involves engaging in workplace networking events and activities. Networking within the workplace is discussed further in section 5.2.3.

This notion of playing the rules of the game is exemplified by Harry who says that throughout the programme he was '*making career choices'*, in terms of what he thought would help to develop his career within the organisation, likening his experience to '*a game of monopoly'*. Bourdieu (1992:64) claims it is important to 'have a feel for the game' and to know how to 'play the rules of the game', so that deploying strategies that build social networks (and therefore social capital) can be realised to benefit the personal and professional life of the individual (Bathmaker *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, it is claimed that those with the greatest accumulated capital, of the right kind and mix, will be most advantaged (ibid). Consequently, when viewed from a Bordieuan perspective, this suggests that the 'rules' have been misunderstood by the degree apprentices in the current study, resulting in tactical choices being made which may not be in their best interests in the long term, both personally and professionally.

Therefore, the current research recognises the need to raise awareness of the ***dual*** purpose of the degree apprenticeship amongst stakeholders, including the degree apprentice. This research also recognises the need to raise degree apprentices' awareness of the concept and importance of social capital and how this can be acquired for short-term and long-term personal benefit. This will enable degree apprentices to have a better understanding of the rules of, and how to play the game. Thereby, enabling them to navigate the field more successfully (Burke, in Thatcher *et al.,* 2018).

The current study contributes to practice by recommending that degree apprenticeship standards which include curriculum design reflect the ***dual*** purpose of the degree apprenticeship. As it is the government body, IfATE, who approve and endorse the standards, IfATE should be checking that this dual purpose is evident prior to any endorsement of a degree apprenticeship programme. This needs to be supported by commitment from the employer and the higher education institution (or other training provider) to translate this policy and standards into practice. Billet (2013) argues that individuals elect how to engage in and learn from what workplaces afford them. Therefore, at an operational level, the employer, together with the higher education institution, are important stakeholders in facilitating this change. The visibility of this dual purpose further supports the argument for engagement in reflective practice and broader mentor support. Thereby, removing the need for the current tactical approach to learning adopted by the degree apprentice, to one which fosters a long-term and strategic approach which reflects both career goals and sustainable upward social mobility.

5.2.3. The degree apprentice as an enabled networker 'bowling alone'

All degree apprentices in this study have increased their economic and cultural capital, and by association their symbolic capital, through successfully completing their degree apprenticeship. Economic capital being their financial resources and cultural capital in the meaning they attach to the degree apprenticeship, not just as a qualification, but as a resource to assist with their development of job-related knowledge and skills. According to Bourdieu (1986), symbolic capital includes, for example, reputation, prestige, and status which is afforded to the degree apprentices through the achievement of a degree and relevant work experience.

As highlighted in chapter four and earlier sections of this chapter, it is not clear whether the degree apprentices are aware of the importance of social capital for long term and sustainable social mobility. Social capital being the '… *sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'* (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Equally, there appears to be a lack of awareness of how access to the capitals of other members of a network of social ties can be mobilised for personal ends. It is this lack of awareness that acts as a constraint in the development of social capital and therefore upward social mobility.

Social and cultural capital theories primarily explain how those with a certain amount and type of cultural and social capital are likely to be successful in achieving upward social mobility. Consequently, a lack of cultural and social capital reproduces the inequalities in society. Viewed through the lens of Bourdieu, this section critically discusses how opportunities to further

develop social capital during the degree apprenticeship were exploited and missed, thereby addressing research objective three. In addition, how missed opportunities might be mitigated in future through amendment of the curriculum are highlighted.

5.2.3.1 The workplace as a network enabler – A brief recap

Whilst many degree apprentices acknowledge the role of the workplace in facilitating achievement of the degree apprenticeship, only a few exploited opportunities provided by their higher education institution beyond tutor support of the degree study and, on occasion, their employer for further social capital acquisition. As highlighted in chapter four, many discuss their growing awareness of the need to build internal networks to support their next job role. However, despite encouragement from their line managers and mentors, the majority were not provided with insight into ***how*** networks might be maintained and extended.

Introductions to internal, workplace networks facilitated the degree apprentices to become enabled networkers. In contrast to pro-actively seeking networks of their own. As exemplified by the following interview extracts, '*as soon as I had that introduction, I sort of held on to it',* and *'[I] fell on it by accident I think [through] introduction to a senior manager [who] then just nurtured that relationship'.* Whilst some were enabled in this way from the outset of their degree apprenticeship, for others this came later. The importance of such networks to these degree apprentices was not apparent until the *'second or third year of university*'.

For one degree apprentice this was an exception with the power of networking embedded from a young age by parents through, for example, '*…taking part in extracurricular activities, from hockey, netball, dancing, trampoline, choir to drama club [at school]'* and *later engaging in 'different kinds of extra-curricular [activities]'.* This led to her prioritising '*networking despite time pressures*.' It is this awareness of the importance of networks for building social capital that needs to be raised within the degree apprenticeship programme.

Amongst the degree apprentices who have been introduced to work-related networks, there is an acknowledgement of the benefits it can offer in relation to career development. However, there is also evidence of caution, exemplified in the comment '*it is really important. It's a shame that the culture within (place of employment) is all about who you know, it's not about what you know.'*

5.2.3.2 Networking *beyond* the next job role

Raelin (2008:12) warns that whilst useful in scoping work-based learning activities, most young people today will have multiple careers in their lifetime, each requiring new skills and therefore

'the most valuable employee will be the updated one, the one who can shift with the organisational environment'. This means that employers have an ethical ***responsibility*** to develop their employees not only in terms of internal career progression but also in terms of the wider concept of employability as a minimum, thereby lending support for social mobility. This would counter the issue of 'bowling alone' which Putnam (1993:176) contends is the engagement in activities with, for example, family or friends rather than strangers. The latter offering a way of helping to build and sustain a wider set of networks and values facilitating 'mutual collaboration' (Field, 2017:17). However, this responsibility is not without its challenges.

As established in chapter two, Bourdieu considers habitus to be a multi-layered concept that can be interpreted as the habits, norms, values, and traditions of a particular society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). Therefore, in practical terms, habitus influences the ways individuals think and act (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This is evidenced in the way in which habitus has been applied in the earlier discussion of factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship. Similarly, the way in which habitus appears to have influenced degree apprentices' engagement in networking is found in the interview data.
Bourdieu (1986) contends that it is our earliest experiences that form our habitus, and that experiences hold a lot of influence over choices made. Therefore, habitus and capital are pre-disposed to reproduce themselves, often resulting in maintaining the existing habitus. Given this context and the discussion in section 5.2 so far, degree apprentice behaviours in relation to networking are not surprising when viewed through the lens of Bourdieu.

Although, Bourdieu (1992:133) argues that changing or breaking the habitus is possible through significant change in the environment he, nevertheless, moderates his argument suggesting that moving to such an environment is unlikely due to habitus itself. The argument that habitus plays a role in highlighting how individuals have developed and internalised how they interact with the social world is important as this suggests that an (individual and collective) awareness of the way in which habitus influences individual actions enables individuals to think and act in different ways to change or break the habitus. Bourdieu (1986) acknowledges that, although a struggle, it is possible to break free from these enduring habits and mindsets. An example of the power of habitus appears in the way in which the degree apprentices reintegrated themselves into their pre-degree apprenticeship lives both in terms of their hobbies and their friendships. If networking had been included in the degree apprenticeship standards this behaviour may not have been so prevalent as the degree apprentice would have had the

confidence to maintain existing social relationships whilst moving outside the comfort of existing habitus to develop new relationships and networks.

5.2.3.3 Acquisition and mobilisation of resources

As noted in 5.1.6, degree apprentices in the current study asked their friends and others in their personal networks for advice regarding enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship. A few of these degree apprentices also spoke of the familial network instrumental in securing their degree apprenticeship role. Interestingly, this mobilisation of personal and familial networks is not continued during the degree apprenticeship. This is disappointing given Lin's (1999:468) contention that *'access to and use of these resources is temporary and borrowed'* and, unless nourished, will not be maintained (Bourdieu, 1986). This means that unless such networks are maintained and utilised, their effectiveness for personal ends is lost, ultimately constraining development of social capital and potential for upward mobility.

While it could be argued that in obtaining a degree apprenticeship the degree apprentices in the current study demonstrate an awareness of the game, analysis of the interview data suggests only a few have inherited a 'feel for the game' and the importance of social networking for developing social and workplace connections. Some recognised that having a degree might not be enough to '*get ahead*' in their careers or to retain the feeling of '*security*' that the degree apprenticeship provided them. These degree apprentices spoke of ways in which they raised their profile in the ***employing organisation***. Although for most, this was dependent on another individual in the business recognising their potential value to the business, championing their cause by making important bonding (internal) introductions. Analysis of interview data further reveals that the degree apprentices' engagement with their university is solely focused on academic achievement. In so doing they choose to sacrifice wider social and cultural endeavours offered by the university. Consequently, those with less 'active self-awareness' (Bathmaker *et al.,* 2013) must be taught how to 'play the game' if they are to achieve personal and professional goals by developing what scholars (for example, Bourdieu, 1992; Archer *et al*., (2007); Bathmaker *et al*., 2013 and Pham, 2019) refer to as developing the right kind of resources for building social capital and enhancing social mobility.

5.2.3.4 Collective duty and responsibility

Although increasingly popular it is unclear whether the degree apprenticeship currently contributes to 'the game of winners or losers' and 'distribution of life chances' (Bathmaker, 2017:1-2). One issue identified is whether the degree apprenticeship addresses the 'interpenetrative relationship between structure and agency' (Thatcher, *et. al.,* 2018), an

enduring feature of the educational landscape. This is challenging for degree apprenticeships which operate in a field of competing interests.

In regulated employment markets such as the UK apprenticeship system degree apprenticeships are well positioned to contribute to educational inclusion and occupational progression. The focus on inequality, equity, and social mobility linked to individual habitus points to a significant feature of the degree apprenticeship field. Therefore, while educational choices can be understood as the processes of agency in action, it is the field that gives the habitus structure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127) as it is the field that is the means through which the various capitals are produced and socially deployed, ultimately giving form to the kind of choices that can be made.

Given the social challenges of addressing inequality, equity, and social mobility it not clear whether, when viewed through the lens of Bourdieu, the current 'structuring structures' (Bourdieu,1990:53) imposed on the field of degree apprenticeships facilitate upward social mobility or whether they 'continue to reinforce the intersection between stratified social backgrounds and stratifying structures' (Bathmaker, 2017). In making development of apprenticeships employer-led, the government is exchanging power for absolving of responsibility for meeting UK productivity targets. This is because it is challenging to determine whose interests are being served by putting employers in control of apprenticeships.

It is evident that tensions exist between the national (and employer) target of increased productivity and achieving government's social justice aim of increased upward social mobility and individual learner ambitions. However, the dominant economic model in the UK is not fit for purpose. A view supported by Reay (2013:675) who suggests social mobility is a myth 'in a deeply unequal society like the United Kingdom', calling for 'wider social and personal change' rather than 'simply reducing the social and economic distance between individuals in UK society' (ibid).

It is acknowledged that this will not be without its problems given the challenges of multi-stakeholder collaboration, differing agendas and, as highlighted by Cunningham (2021:18) supporting the learner to acquire the *'meta competence that enables them to learn how to learn'* within a work-based learning environment. However, a priority action moving forward for both employer and university must be to focus on addressing the '*intense'* and *'overwhelming' workloads,* leading to long working hours*, 'stress'* and demotivation and *'sacrifice'* as highlighted in the narratives of the degree apprentices. This is because both employer and university have a duty of care to these learners to change this narrative and

realise the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship. Whilst recognising the significant effort, commitment, and vision this transformation would require, incremental change has the potential to positively influence behaviours and attitudes.

Therefore, it is recommended that networking skills are included in the knowledge, skills, and behaviour standards for degree apprenticeships. This aligns with, and operationalises, the previous recommendation for explicit inclusion of dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship in standards and curriculum design. Currently degree apprenticeship standards and individual learner plans are based around identified knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to the ***job role.*** It is important that knowledge, skills, and behaviour standards consider networking ***beyond*** the job role. Over time, this has potential to help give the degree apprentice the confidence to break their existing habitus. The inclusion of networking skills will require considerable commitment, support and facilitation by the employer, workplace mentor, the higher education institution, and tutors.

5.3 The degree apprenticeship: An affirmation of choice

Analysis of factors influencing enrolment in the current study and the literature reviewed raises questions as to whether these factors, together with challenges experienced whilst on the programme (for example, balancing demands on time), influence the transactional and tactical approach adopted by degree apprentices in the current study. In reflecting on their programme, there appears to be some mirroring of the sub-themes established in relation to their choice to enrol on the programme and affirmation of this choice.

For example, analysis of learner's reflections on their degree apprenticeship twelve months post completion suggests their circumstances (job, salary, and status) as presented in chapter four (section 4.2.2) offer support for their choice to enrol on to the programme. Figure 24 below illustrates this further, drawing upon extracts from the interviews. As shown in Figure 24, the factors that degree apprentices say influenced their enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship programme appear to be echoed in their reflection on their choice.

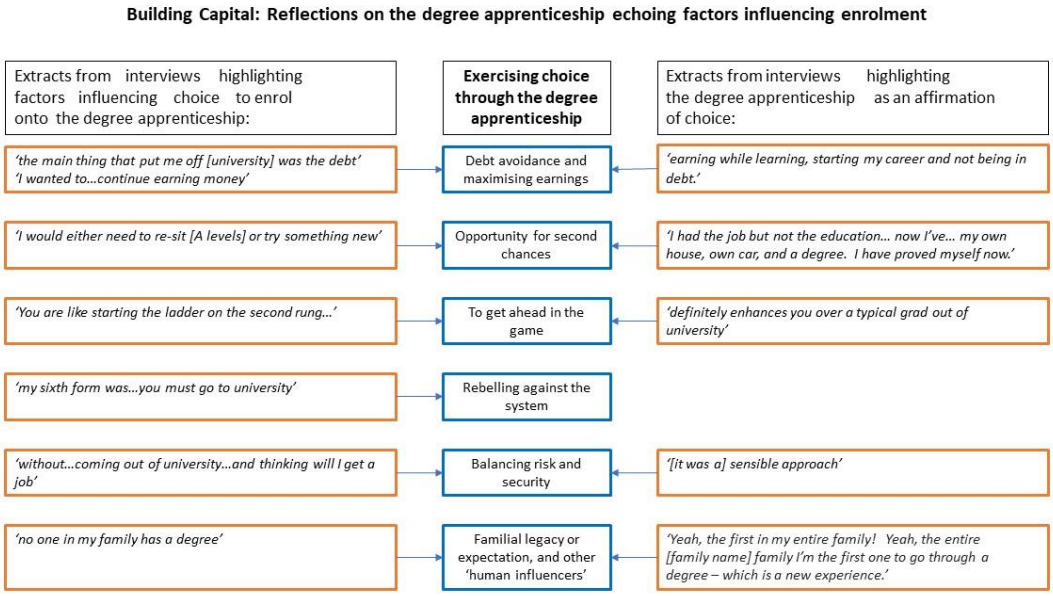

Figure 24 - Reflections on the Degree Apprenticeship: Echoing Factors Influencing Enrolment

In the interviews, none of the degree apprentices refer to the degree apprenticeship post completion in relation to rebelling against the system in explicit terms. However, in affirming their choice as illustrated above, it could be argued that, in their reflections rebelling against the system is implied as the right choice.

Several degree apprentices make comparisons between themselves as degree apprenticeship graduates and friends, particularly those who are newly qualified 'typical' graduates in terms of their salary and their status. This comparison focuses being a degree apprentice with a degree, experience, and a job, against having a degree, or having a degree and some relevant experience but no job and, in many cases, significant student debt. Thereby, reinforcing their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship.

In addition, to providing financial rewards and enabling them to kick start their career through the combination of experience and achievement of a degree, the degree apprenticeship has, according to many, increased their self-confidence and given them elevated status amongst friends and family, and some colleagues. According to Bourdieu (1984), these benefits are the outcome of building predominantly economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. Inevitably mirroring what these learners were seeking to achieve by exercising their choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship. It is therefore unsurprising that a degree apprenticeship is perceived by the degree apprentices in the current study as a transaction.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has synthesised findings from the current study with the literature reviewed in chapter two, highlighting similarities between, and departure from, existing literature and research. The current study aligns with existing research in finding multi-faceted and complex factors influencing enrolment to the degree apprenticeship but departs from the literature by identifying enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship as offering the opportunity for a second chance (for example, to gain a degree), rather than the only or best option for gaining a degree. The current study also highlights a desire to rebel against a system (schools and colleges) which the degree apprentices felt tried to push them towards the traditional route to university. A finding not noted in the existing literature.

Exploring the degree apprentices' experiences through the lens of Bourdieu identifies the influence of habitus on the acquisition of capital, including social capital and helps to explain the transactional and tactical approach adopted by the degree apprentices in the current study. Appendix 11 illustrates the complex and multifaceted factors influencing enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship for one degree apprentice, highlighting their transactional and tactical approach and their reflections which affirm their choices.

Whilst acknowledging the influence of habitus, several recommendations for strategic and operational changes to the degree apprenticeship are made.

These recommendations call for a more coherent partnership approach to be established between higher education institutions and employers. One that builds on existing relationships with schools and colleges, with a view to engendering a more impartial approach to careers advice and one which conveys all opportunities available to post-compulsory learners. It is also recommended that the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship is made explicit, and is reflected, in degree apprenticeship standards and curriculum design, and that this is operationalised by including, for example, networking skills within the knowledge, skills, and behaviour standards. Given these recommendations, the current employer-led curriculum design needs to emphasise the importance of reflective practice with a focus on individual development beyond the needs of the organisation.

6.0 Chapter Six – Conclusions

'It is important to believe that change can happen'.

(Coleridge, 1993:86)

The aim of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation into the experiences of degree apprenticeship learners through the lens of Bourdieu. This chapter presents the key conclusions and contributions of this study discussed in previous chapters. An overview of the study to include the context and the drivers for this research is provided. The study's contribution to current debates regarding degree apprenticeships from the degree apprentice perspective is identified. This chapter also highlights the contribution of this study in extending existing literature in this important area by offering further insight, using a qualitative methodology, into the complex nature of the degree apprenticeship experience.

A discussion of the strengths of the research methodology and the limitations of the study is followed by identification of areas for future research. Final reflections highlighting learning from the doctoral experience are included in Appendix 1.

6.1 Study overview and research aim

The degree apprenticeship was launched by the UK government in 2015 aimed at addressing low levels of educational and skills attainment relating to historical issues of constrained social mobility (Blanden *et al*., 2005; Raffo *et al*., 2015). Given this aim, the degree apprenticeship was declared to have a dual purpose, which was to respond to two of the government's flagship policy areas. These areas being to create a supply of skilled individuals to support ***national economic growth*** (productivity) whilst offering increased opportunity for **upward *social mobility*** (QAA, 2019), defined as being 'the movement of people over time from one socio-economic position to another' (Webb *et al*., 2017:148).

Despite this dual purpose, and the suggestion that examples of social mobility are 'encouraging', it is acknowledged that there is still 'room for improvement' (Lester and Bravenboer, 2020:57) as evidenced in a study conducted by the Edge Consortium in which less than half of employers responding to the study agreed that degree apprenticeships had contributed to social mobility (Lester, 2020).

The inherent tensions between espoused aims of increasing productivity ***and*** upward social mobility, combined with a lack of transparency as to how these educational policies and reforms support social mobility, provided a compelling rationale for undertaking this investigation into the experiences of degree apprentices.

Examination of existing literature suggests that higher education is perceived as an 'insurance against failure' and 'illusion' (Burlutskaia, 2014:53/61) in terms of advancement. Thereby, challenging the view of higher education as a vehicle for social mobility. In addition, given their relatively recent introduction, there is limited literature and research which relates directly to current ***standards-based*** degree apprenticeships and this literature has not addressed whether ***degree apprenticeships*** enable social mobility. In addition, ***how*** social mobility is achieved through the degree apprentice's work-based learning experience has not been explored.

Whilst the benefits of the tripartite nature of degree apprenticeship work-based learning have been recognised in existing literature, researchers acknowledge that the relationships between the degree apprentice, the employer and the higher education institution are under-explored from the learner perspective (for example, Smith, *et al.,* 2020; Fabian *et al.,* 2021; Smith *et al*., 2021). Indeed, it is noted that even in policy documents, apprentices' perspectives are barely addressed (Smith *et al.,* 2020). In responding to this lack of focus on the perspectives of the degree apprentice, and the calls for more research to give voice to these learners (Brockmann *et al.,* 2010; Hogarth *et al*., 2012), the current study explored the experiences of the degree apprenticeship from the degree apprentices' perspective.

Given this lack of focus on the degree apprentices themselves, it is not clear whether degree apprentices use their existing social networks to build their social capital as the concept of building capital using social networks as a resource does not appear in the current degree apprenticeship literature. Therefore, to develop understanding of how social capital is understood and used by degree apprentices, the current study examined whether, and how, these apprentices mobilised existing, and extended, their social networks to build and enhance their social capital. In particular, the study explored whether degree apprentices know and understand how to play the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1992:64) in the context of building ***long term*** and ***sustainable*** social capital required for life-long employability and social mobility. As adjustment to the demands of field requires a certain 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990:66), the 'rules of the game' concept provides the phrase used in this study to describe the specific set of norms and behaviours associated with the field of the degree apprenticeship.

Bourdieu's concept of capital was chosen as the lens through which to explore the experiences of the degree apprentices as this offers the opportunity for critical analysis (Fitzpatrick and May, 2016) and a way to explore people's practice within a certain field (Khalil and Kelly, 2020). The aim of the current study was therefore to explore learner's experiences of the degree apprenticeship programme by capturing the factors that learners identify as influencing their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship within a higher education institution in England, their

experiences of the degree apprenticeship as a work-based model of learning, and their reflections post-completion of the programme. This study explored ***how*** learners used capital acquisition gained, and opportunities offered, through the degree apprenticeship to enhance their social mobility.

By using Bourdieu's concept of capital as the lens through which to explore these experiences, greater insight was provided into their appreciation of the legitimation of the degree apprenticeship in terms of its added value to their lives and potential for social mobility (Bourdieu: 1986:56). In doing so, this study also responds to calls for further research to study factors affecting enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship (Smith *et al.,* 2021).

The study's contributions to extending existing literature and research relating to degree apprenticeships, and in particular the perspectives of the degree apprentice are noted in section 6.2, together with the contribution of the qualitative methodology adopted for this study.

6.1.1 Research objectives

The research questions explored in this study were:

1. What factors influence learner enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship?
2. What are these learner's experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship?
3. How do these learners use capital acquisition and exploit any opportunities, if available, to enhance their social mobility?

Therefore, the research objectives were to:

1. Identify factors work based learners say influenced their enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship within a higher education institution in England.
2. Explore their experiences of, and reflections on, being a work-based learner on a degree apprenticeship programme.
3. Examine how these work-based learners use capital acquisition and exploit opportunities to enhance their social mobility.

This research highlights ways in which universities may enhance future work-based learner experiences on these programmes particularly in relation to social mobility. Recommendations are made for design and delivery of work-based degree apprenticeship programmes based on the findings of this research.

6.1.2 Key findings and conclusions

The findings from this study highlight the complex interplay between the factors influencing an individual's 'choice' to enrol onto a degree apprenticeship, and how these influences are evident in the choices and compromises they are willing to make to complete the degree apprenticeship programme. The influence of these factors is also evident in some of the narrative surrounding affirmation of their choices post-completion of the programme.

6.1.2.1 Factors influencing work-based learners' enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship

An overarching theme of 'wanting to exercise choice through degree apprenticeship' was developed from the creation of six sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 29 (replicated from Figure 16) below:

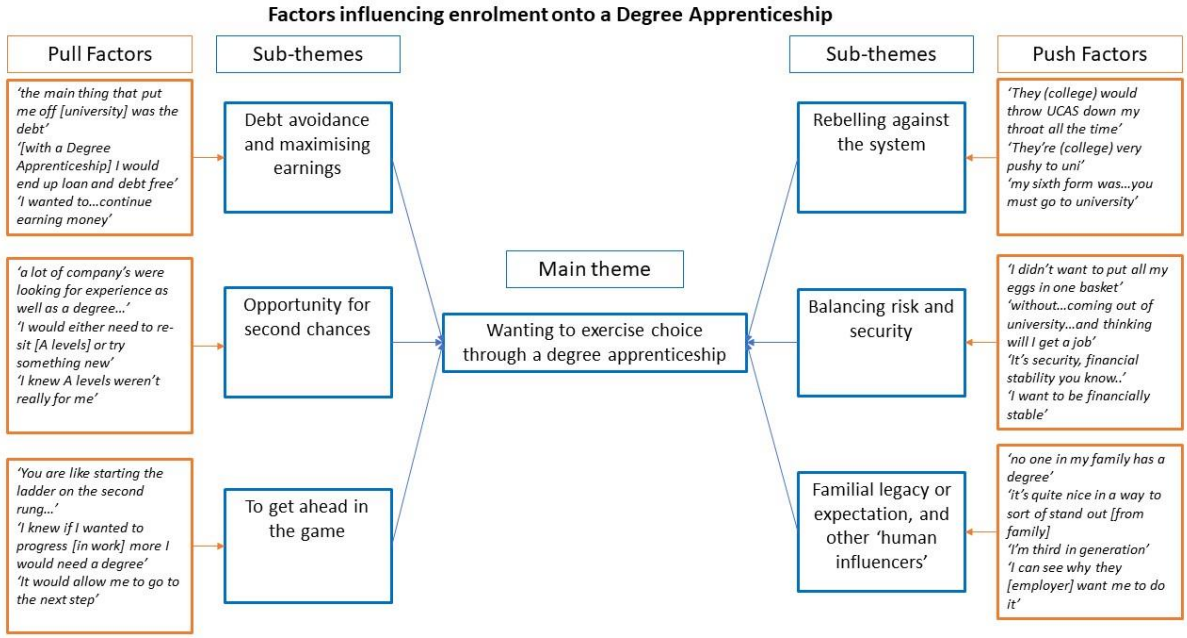

Figure 25 - Factors influencing enrolment onto a degree apprenticeship

For all degree apprentices, factors are complex and multi-faceted. These findings resonate with those of Smith *et al*., (2021) in identifying that rather than a single factor, there are diverse and multiple influencing factors for enrolling on to this non-traditional route to a degree. Key among these factors in the current study is expressing the belief that the degree qualification provides them a competitive edge by possessing the requisite currency to act as a vehicle to 'kick-start' their careers as suggested by Engeli and Turner (2019) and Lester and Bravenboer (2020).

Findings of the current research are consistent with other research findings undertaken with traditional degree learners (for example, Greenbank and Hepworth, 2008; Winterton and Irwin, 2012) in which it was determined that students make decisions about careers within a complex set of relationships or networks.

However, the current study departs from the literature in that degree apprentices identify ***opportunity*** for a second chance (for example, to gain a degree) as a factor influencing enrolment in contrast with existing literature which suggests that, for some, the degree apprenticeship is the '***only'*** or '***best'*** option (Smith *et al.,* 2021:499) for gaining a degree.

In addition, in contrast to other literature on degree apprenticeship research many of the degree apprentices in the current study expressed frustration at ***not*** having choice, of being 'pushed' towards university leading them to rebel against perceived norms of existing social structures.

6.1.2.2 Experiences and reflections on being a work-based Learner on a degree apprenticeship

Chapter five presented degree apprentices' experiences and reflections of the degree apprenticeship. The findings from the current study highlight the complex nature of their experiences which appear to be transactional and tactical, in which sacrifices are made in exchange for the perceived benefits to be gained through the degree apprenticeship. Their reflections are an affirmation of their choice.

These reflections, twelve months post completion of the degree apprenticeship, suggest that circumstances such as job, salary, and status (section 4.3.2) mirror what these learners were seeking to achieve by exercising their perceived choice to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship. Comparisons with friends or peers who took the traditional route to the degree and who are regarded as 'typical' graduates, highlight the benefits of being a degree apprentice graduate in terms of having a degree qualification, enhanced salary and career status and job security. In contrast to the graduates from a full-time degree programme who have a degree, and in many cases significant student debt, and no job.

In addition, many of the degree apprentices profess that the degree apprenticeship has increased their self-confidence and elevated their status amongst friends, family, and colleagues. Many confirming that the degree apprenticeship has not only given them financial stability but also increased opportunity within their roles enabling them to 'get ahead in the game'.

However, many of the degree apprentices in the current study did not appear to recognise that in adopting a transactional approach to the degree apprenticeship, opportunities for building their social networks and stock of capital offered by the higher education institution and the employer were also being sacrificed.

6.1.2.3 Use of capital acquisition to exploit opportunities to enhance social mobility

Many degree apprentices spoke of an emerging recognition of the benefits of networking within their employing organisation. However, this was sporadic and their engagement sometimes '*accidental*'. Those with more 'active self-awareness' (Bathmaker *et al*., 2013) recognised that the degree alone might not be enough to '*get ahead*' in their careers or to retain the feeling of '*security*' provided by the degree apprenticeship leading to their quest for a workplace champion important initially for bonding (internal) introductions and later bridging (external) relationships within and outside of the organisation.

While there is some evidence of degree apprentices drawing on familial capital via personal networks prior to joining the degree apprenticeship, this mobilisation of existing networks is not perpetuated during the degree apprenticeship.

6.2 Contribution to knowledge and practice

This research contributes to the under researched area of degree apprenticeships within UK higher education, particularly as it has the degree apprentice as the focus of the study. In exploring factors influencing their enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship, and their experiences, this study contributes to existing literature and debates by providing further insight and understanding of this work-based government initiative.

In addition to the study's contribution to knowledge, it offers contributions to educational policy and practice of significance to various stakeholders including policy makers, higher education institutions, employers, researchers, and degree apprentices.

6.2.1 Contribution to knowledge

A key contribution of this study is in adding to the debate on the effectiveness of this latest model of work-based learning as a highly aspirational choice and vehicle for social mobility. In adopting a qualitative research approach, focusing on the learners' perspectives, the study extends existing literature by offering further insight into and understanding of the complexities of the degree apprentices' experiences. The study highlights the complex and multifaceted influences on the ***choice*** to enrol onto the degree apprenticeship, and how these factors, combined with balancing the demands of work and study, lead to a transactional and

tactical approach to the degree apprenticeship. A finding which has not been identified in previous quantitative research.

The study raises questions as to whether degree apprentices are fully aware of the concept of how social mobility may be enhanced through capital acquisition. It highlights the tensions in, and the imbalance in emphasis on, the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship. In doing so, the study also contributes to research within the wider context of social mobility policy.

In chapter five and in section 6.1.2.1, the areas in which the current study departs from existing literature and research are highlighted, thereby offering a further contribution to knowledge.

As there is currently limited research that explores the degree apprentice's experiences using a qualitative approach, this study therefore adds to the empirical base on experiences of learners enrolled to the degree apprenticeship.

6.2.2 Contribution to practice

The study contributes to practice by making recommendations for changes to educational policy and practice that are aimed at enhancing future work-based learner experiences on degree apprenticeship programmes, particularly in relation to social mobility. These recommendations, accepting the powerful influence of habitus on capital acquisition, are based on the findings of this research and focus mainly on the design and delivery of work-based degree apprenticeship programmes.

6.2.2.1 A coherent partnership approach to promotion of the degree apprenticeship

The first recommendation calls for a more coherent partnership between higher education institutions (and other training providers) and employers. One that promotes a more co-ordinated approach to building on existing relationships with schools and colleges. The study has highlighted, in line with existing research (for example, Engeli and Turner, 2019; Lester and Bravenboer, 2020; Smith *et. al.,* 2021), a need for impartial and complete advice in relation to options for post-compulsory education (section 5.1.5). This will help to promote a more consistent, unbiased, and holistic discussion of options and may also eliminate some of the parity of esteem issues found in the literature (for example, Cunningham, 2021) by building trust and enhancing communication (Bryson *et al.,* 2015).

6.2.2.2 Reflecting the dual purpose in the degree apprenticeship standards

The second recommendation proposes a change to the degree apprenticeship standards in that there is specific reference made to the ***dual*** purpose of the degree apprenticeship and that this is reflected in the curriculum design. IfATE, the government body responsible for approving

and endorsing the standards, will need to check that this dual purpose is evident in the standards prior to endorsement of a degree apprenticeship programme. Commitment is required from the employer and the higher education institution (or other training provider) to ensure the policy and standards are translated into practice.

Awareness of the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship needs to be raised amongst all stakeholders, including the degree apprentice. It is particularly pertinent for the degree apprentice to have an awareness of the concept and importance of social capital and how this can be acquired for short-term and ***long-term*** personal benefit. This appreciation will enable these learners to make choices based on a deeper and a more critical understanding of how to navigate the field more successfully (Burke, in Thatcher *et al.,* 2018).

The challenges associated with this strategic change and the complex co-ordination in operationalising this change are recognised. The difficulties of a multiple-actor-led system with competing interest is noted in the literature (for example, Keep, 2012; and Chankseliani and Relly, 2015). The government's economic agenda and the shift of power and interest in terms of delivery of skills training to employers are acknowledged. However, it is the government who decreed that the degree apprenticeship should have a ***dual*** purpose (to improve UK productivity and social mobility) and as stakeholders responsibility needs to be assumed for addressing the issue of a lack of focus on upward social mobility.

6.2.2.3 Explicit reference to networking skills in the degree apprenticeship standards

The third recommendation is for networking skills to be included in the knowledge, skills, and behaviour standards for degree apprenticeships. Thereby aligning with, and operationalising, the recommendation in section 6.2.2.2. However, it is important that inclusion of networking skills goes beyond the knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to the ***job role.***

Although this may seem counter-intuitive to some employers, there is an ethical ***responsibility*** to develop employees not only to perform well in their current role and for internal career progression but also in terms of the wider concept of employability and potential for social mobility. Equally there is an ethical responsibility for higher education institutions to ensure the networking skills required to build social capital are included within the academic, taught element of the degree. The inclusion of these broader networking skills will require considerable commitment, support and facilitation by the employer, workplace mentor, the higher education institution, and tutors.

6.2.2.4 Expansive workplace practices and individual reflective practice

The final recommendation relates to the provision of ***expansive*** workplace practices which involves the facilitation of opportunities for professional and ***personal*** development (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). It is recommended that the curriculum design emphasises the importance of reflective practice with a focus on individual development beyond the needs of the organisation. It is reflective practice that will enable the learner to recognise and reflect on learning opportunities and contexts as a means of capital acquisition and enhancing upward mobility. This may help to change these learners' perceptions of the rules of the game.

The role of line managers, workplace mentors and tutors are key in reflective practice, in facilitating the time and space for reflection and supporting and guiding the learner through the process, challenging, and encouraging the learner to think about their experiences and opportunities (work and social) more critically and in broader terms than the work environment. It is acknowledged that this further support for workplace mentors in facilitation of this wider reflective practice may be required. This approach to reflective practice is essential in expansive workplace practices, facilitating 'learning how to learn' (Cunningham, 2021:18) and, building and raising individual self-awareness.

It is important to note that, together with these recommendations, and despite the challenges of competing interests and difficulties of a collaborative approach, it is incumbent upon both employer and university to change the degree apprentice narrative of 'intense' and 'overwhelming' workloads that necessitate substantial personal 'sacrifices' and to realise the dual purpose of the degree apprenticeship.

6.3 Strengths and limitations

The strengths of the current study lie in its focus on the degree apprenticeship ***and*** the perspective of the degree apprentice in exploring the factors they say influenced their enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship and their reflections on their experience of the programme. As is the emphasis on exploring opportunities exploited by degree apprentices for enhancing social mobility, given the absence of this as a feature in much of the existing literature in degree apprenticeships. This focus and emphasis respond to the calls for research to explore degree apprenticeships from the learner perspective and extends the literature in the current standards-based degree apprenticeships as outlined in section 6.1.

The qualitative research design adopted for this study is also a strength as it facilitated a more in-depth exploration of the views of the degree apprenticeship (see also section 3.4.1). To date much of the research on degree apprenticeships has been quantitative in design.

The use of reflexive thematic analysis facilitated a whole data approach to analysis rather than one which is restricted to pre-determined themes which may have resulted in some of the rich data from the interviews being missed. The latent approach associated with this type of analysis (section 3.6.2.) enabled the capture of implicit meaning which cannot be achieved through a solely quantitative research design. Reflexivity and reflection throughout the study highlighted researcher knowledge, experience, and values in the research process.

It could be argued that a limitation of the current study is the narrow focus on digital and technology solutions degree apprentices and programmes. However, on commencing this study, as these programmes were the first to launch, they were one of two programmes with post completion degree apprentice learners. Findings from the current study will be useful in informing and guiding future studies with learners on different programmes and in differing locations.

Equally, the sample size of seventeen participants and four universities may be considered a limitation. However, the sample size provided sufficient rich data for analysis for this exploratory research and further research could include bigger sample and more universities.

It is recognised that the findings of this study could have been analysed using a different theoretical lens such as Coleman or Putnam, both renowned scholars of social capital. However, Bourdieu was chosen because his concept not only provides a useful 'tool kit' to assist in understanding the practical logic of everyday life and social action, but unlike the other scholars, Bourdieu moves beyond the positives of social capital to expose the relations of power. Like Bourdieu, this study also places critical reflexivity at the centre of its approach as a way of exposing and counteracting the influence of unconscious structures on practices.

6.4 Future research

Several areas for future research are identified in this thesis which will extend the literature on degree apprenticeships, providing a more holistic view of the complexities of this work-based learning initiative from multiple stakeholder perspectives. A few of these areas are highlighted in this section. This research could offer further insight and guidance for policy makers, employers and universities in the design and delivery of degree apprenticeships.

6.4.1 Four years post-graduating: Where are they now?

A longitudinal study which builds on the current study and explores where the first graduates are now in terms of employment and career progression could offer further insight and extend the current literature on degree apprenticeships. This longitudinal study would include reflections on the degree apprenticeship in terms of how it has contributed towards career and, more broadly, life chances and successes.

6.4.2 The degree apprenticeship, parity of esteem: Tutors and career advisers

The literature reviewed in chapter two suggests that issues of parity of esteem exist between academic and the more vocational educational qualifications. Whilst this is not evident in the degree apprentices' perceptions of the degree apprenticeship in the current study, it would be interesting to explore the perceptions of tutors and career advisors in future research, particularly given the claim in existing research that apprenticeships are considered as 'a suitable option for someone else's child' (Sarawat, 2016:408).

6.4.3 Socio-economic features

There are still significant gaps in the literature on social diversity and inclusion in degree apprenticeship education. A particular issue, identified in this study, which requires a more focused investigation, is the influence of being first in family, together with socio-economic factors on academic performance and attrition rates. There is also a need for higher education institutions to build on the work of, for example, Ryan and Lőrinc (2018) to evaluate the transition into the degree apprenticeship for degree apprentices from under-represented social backgrounds. Such research would provide higher education institutions with necessary understanding from which to develop strategies that could target support to those learners from under-represented social backgrounds while in pursuit of their degree apprenticeship.

6.4.4 Gender, age, and ethnicity

While aspects of gender, age, and ethnicity in relation to the degree apprenticeship and social mobility, are of interest, as a focus they are outside of the scope of this study. That said, they are important areas which warrant further investigation.

6.4.5 Issues of Identity

Issues of identity while relevant is outside of the scope of this study as an area of investigation. However, given that those leaving post-18 compulsory education are at a time in their lives of identity creation, transformation, and change, research conducted with these young adults in

the degree apprenticeship context, using habitus and field as frames of analysis, to understand their attitudes towards their prior education and familial context would be useful in providing insight into degree apprenticeship identity construction. This would necessitate a longitudinal investigative study to do justice to the narratives of self and lives that develop over time in the construction of self and identity.

6.4.6 A wider stakeholder perspective

An exploration of the degree apprenticeship from the higher education institution and employer perspective would be an interesting focus for future study. This would build on findings from analysis of interview data for this study and would include relationships with schools and colleges, each other, and the degree apprentice.

6.4.7 Impact of Covid

Finally, an interesting and topical area for further research is the impact of Covid and increased working from home, particularly for those working in IT, in terms of opportunities and development of social networks for building social capital and enhancing social mobility. Given recent calls (for example, by Universities UK) for higher education institutions to evaluate the impact of Covid on students generally, there would be value in exploring this phenomenon in relation to the degree apprentice specifically. This would benefit each of the three main tripartite stakeholders of the degree apprenticeship learners, employers, and higher education institutions in providing both operational and strategic imperative for degree apprenticeship delivery, assessment, and support.

Reference List

Allard, A. C. (2005) Capitalizing on Bourdieu. *Theory and Research in Education*, Vol. 3, 63–79.

Almutairi, A. F., Gardner, G. E., and McCarthy, A. (2014) Practical guidance for the use of a pattern-matching technique in case-study research: A case presentation. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 239-244.

Alvesson, M. and Sköldberg, K. (2017) *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research.* London: Sage.

Anderson, A. (2018) Degree apprenticeships - Doesn't the IfA realise apprenticeship needs its flagship programme? Available at: https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/17437- degree-apprenticeships-doesn-t-ifateched-realise-apprenticeship-needs-its-flagshipprogramme. [Accessed April 2020].

Anderson, T. and Kanuka, H. (2003) *E-research: Methods, strategies and issues.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Ansell, C. (2016) Pragmatism. In *Handbook on theories of governance*, 392-401. Camberley: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Archer, L., Hollingworth, S. and Halsall, A. (2007) University is not for me – I'm a Nike person: urban working-class young people's negotiations of 'style', identity and educational engagement. *Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 2,219-237.

Arnot, M. and Reay, D. (2007) A sociology of pedagogic voice: Power, inequality and pupil consultation. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 311-325.

Atkins, L. (2016) The Odyssey: School to Work Transitions, Serendipity and Positions in the Field. *British Journal of Sociology of Educatio*n, Vol. 38, No. 5, 1-12.

Atkinson, P. (1992) *Understanding Ethnographic Texts*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D. (1997) Kundera's Immortality: the interview society and the invention of the self. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 3, (3), 304 – 325.

Avis, J. (2004) Work-based learning and social justice: Learning in Labour and the new vocationalism in England. *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 197-217.

Baker, W., Sammons, P., Sirak-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C. and Taggart, B. (2014) Aspirations, education and inequality in England: insights from the Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project. *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 525-542.

Ball, S. J. (2003) *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The middle classes and social advantage*. London: Routledge-Falmer.

Ball, S. J. (2010) New class inequalities in education: Why education policy may be looking in the wrong place! *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Volume 30, Nos. 3/4, 155-166.

Ball, S. J., Reay, D. and David, M. (2002) Classification and Judgement: social class and the cognitive structures of choice of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* Vol. 23, No. 1, 51-72.

Bandura, A. (2006) Toward a Psychology of Human Agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol.1, 164.

Bannister, P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Taylor, M. and Tindall, C. (1994) *Qualitative methods in Psychology: A research guide.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Banks, M. H., Bates, I., Breakwell, G., Bynner, J., Emler, N., Jamieson, L. and Roberts, K. (1992) *Careers and identities*, 53-54. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Bansal, P., Smith, W.K. and Vaara, E. (2018) New ways of seeing through qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol 61, No. 4, 1189-1195.

Barone, T. (2007) A return to the gold standard? Questioning the future of narrative construction as educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 13, 454-470.

Bathmaker, A-M. (2015) Thinking with Bourdieu: thinking after Bourdieu. Using 'field' to consider in/equalities in the changing field of English higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* Vol. 45, No. 1, 61-80.

Bathmaker, A-M. (2017) Post-secondary education and training, new vocational and hybrid pathways and questions of equity, inequality and social mobility: introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 1-9.

Bathmaker, A.-M., Ingram, N. and Waller, R. (2013) Higher education, social class and mobilisation of capitals. *British Journal Sociology of Education*, Vol. 34 Nos 5-6, 723-743.

Becker, H. S. (1967) Whose Side are We On? *Social Problems*. Vol. 14, 239-247.

Becker, G. (2006) The age of human capital. In Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J. A. and Halsey, A. H. *Eds*. *Education, globalisation and social change*, 292-294. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Best, S. (2003). *A beginner's guide to social theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Best, S. (2012) *Understanding & Doing Successful Research: Data Collection and Analysis for the Social Sciences.* London: Routledge.

Best, S. (2019) *The Stranger*. Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge.

Billet, S. and Choy, S. (2013) Learning through work: Emerging perspectives and new challenges. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 25 (4), 264-276.

Blake, D. and Smith, P. (2007) Examining the significance of different conceptions of learning. In Tran, L. T. and Soejatminah, S. (2016) Get Foot in the Door: International Students' Perceptions of Work Integrated Learning. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64 (3), 337-355.

Blanden, J., Gregg, P. and Machin, S. (2005) Social Mobility in Britain: Low and Falling. *Centrepiece*, Spring, 18-20.

Blumberg, B., Cooper, D. R. and Schindler, P. S. (2014) *Business Research Methods*. 4th ed. London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Boliver, V. (2016) Exploring Ethnic Inequalities in Admission to Russell Group Universities. *Sociology*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 247-266.

Boliver, V. (2017) Misplaced optimism: how higher education reproduces rather than reduces social inequality. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 423-432.

Booth, J. (2018) An exploration of factors that contribute to participants' professional identity development whilst completing a work-based learning programme. Nottingham Trent University.

Boud, D. and Solomon, N. (2001) Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education? *The Society for Research into Higher Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1980) *The logic of practice*. Reprint. California: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The Forms of Capital. In: Halsey, A. H., Lauders, H., Brown, P. and Wells, S. A. (Eds) *Education Culture, Economy and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46-58.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990b) *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1992) The purpose of reflexive sociology (The Chicago Workshop). In Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (eds) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociolo*gy. Cambridge: Polity Press, 61-217.

Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1997a) The Forms of Capital. In: Halsey, A.H., Lauders, Brown, P and Wells, S. A. (Eds) *Education: Culture, Economy and Society* (3rd Ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1997b) Selections from the Logic of Practice. *The logic of the gift: Toward an ethic of generosity.* 190-230.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2008) *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C. (1970) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P., and Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. (2nd ed) London: SAGE.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* Reprint, Cambridge: Policy Press.

Bowman, D. (2010) Sen and Bourdieu: understanding inequality. *Social policy working paper*, Vol.14, 1-16.

Boyatzis, R.E. (1998) *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Bradley, H., Abrahams, J., Bathmaker, A.-M., Beedell, P., Hoare, T., Ingram, N., Mellor, J. and Waller, R. (2013) A degree generation? *The paired Peers Project year 3 report*. *[Online]* Available from: www.bristol.ac.uk/spais/research/paired-peer//s/report/spais/research/paired-peers/documents/report.pdf. [Accessed 25 April 2017]

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3, 77-101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful, Qualitative Research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2014) What can 'thematic analysis' offer health and wellbeing researchers? *Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing,* Volume 9, 26152.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2016). (Mis)conceptualising themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts' (2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* Vol. 19, No.6, 739-743.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 589-597.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 13(2), 201–216.

Bravenboer, D. (2019) The creative disruption of degree apprenticeships in the UK, pp57-83. In Talbot, J. (ed.), *Global Perspectives on Work-based Learning Initiatives*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Bravenboer, D. and Workman, B. (2016) Developing a Transdisciplinary Work-Based Learning Curriculum: A Model for Recognising Learning from Work. In Keppell, M., Reushle, S., and Antonio, A. (2016), (Eds) *Open Learning and Formal Credentialing in Higher Education: Curriculum Models and Institutional Policies*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Bridgstock, R. (2009) "The Graduate Attributes We've Overlooked: Enhancing Graduate Employability Through Career Management Skills." *Higher Education Research and Development,* Vol. 28, No. 1, 31-44.

Brinkmann, S. (2018) *Philosophies of Qualitative Research. Understanding qualitative research.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2005) Confronting the Ethics of Qualitative Research. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 157-181.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2015*) Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* (3rd Ed). London: Sage.

Brockmann, M., Clarke, L., and Winch, C., (2010) The Apprentice Framework in England: A New Beginning or a Continuing Sham? *Journal of Education and Work*, 23 (2), 111-127.

Brooks, R. (2002) Edinburgh, Exeter, East-London – or Employment? a Review of Research on Young People's Higher Education Choices. *Educational Research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 217-227.

Brown, P. and Lauder, H. (2006) Globalisation, knowledge and the myth of the magnet economy. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 4, No.1, 25-57.

Brown, P. and Tannock, S. (2009) Education, meritocracy and the global war for talent. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 24, No. *4,* 377-392.

Brydon-Miller, M. (2008) Ethics and action research: Deepening our commitment to social justice and redefining systems of democratic practice. *The Sage Handbook of Action Research*, (2nd edition). London: Sage, 199-210.

Bryman, A. (2006) Paradigm Peace and the Implications for Quality. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9 (2), 111-126.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods* (5th ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011) *Business Research Methods.* New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2018) *Business Research Methods* (5th ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C. and Stone M. M. (2015) Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed and Challenging. *Public Administration Review,* 75 (5), 647-663.

Bullough, R. V. and Pinnegar, S. (2001) Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 13-22.

Burke, C. (2015) *Culture, Capitals and Graduate Futures: Degrees of Class*. London: Routledge.

Burke, L. D., Marks-Maran, J., Ooms, A., Webb, M. and Cooped, D. (2009) Towards a Pedagogy of Work-based Learning: Perceptions of Work-based Learning in Foundation Degrees. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training,* 61 (1), 15-33.

Burlutskaia, M. G. (2014) Higher Education as a Means of Upward Social Mobility: The Expectations of Graduates and the Realities of Present-Day Society. *Russian Education and Society*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 52-63.

Burr, V. (2015) *Social Constructionism* (3rd edn.) London: Routledge.

Callender, C. (2003) Attitudes to debt: School leavers' and further education students' attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education. London: Universities UK, 185

Callendar, C. and Jackson, J. (2005) Does fear of debt deter students from higher education? *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 509-540.

Cambridge English Dictionary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [online], https://dictionary.cambridge.or g/ [Accessed 18 September 2021]

Camden, B. (2021) "DfE still worried about 'middle-class grab' on apprenticeships", available at: https://feweek.co.uk/keegan-dfe-still-worried-about-middle-class-grab-on-apprenticeships/ [Accessed 21 August 2021].

Campbell, D. T. (1975) Degrees of freedom and the case study. *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 178-193.

Casciaro,T., Gino, F. and Kouchaki, M. (2014). The contaminating effects of building instrumental ties: How networking can make us feel dirty. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54(4), 705-735.

Chankseliani, M. and Relly, S.J. (2015) From the provider-led to an employer-led system: implications of apprenticeship reform on the private training market". *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67 (4), 515-528.

Chartered Business Institute (CBI), (2012), Learning to grow: what employers need from education and skills, *Education and Skills Survey.* 2012, CBI, London.

Cicourel, A. V. (1993) Aspects of structural and processual theories of knowledge. In: Calhoun, C. LiPuma, E. and Postone, M. (Eds). *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, 89–115. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2013). Teaching Thematic Analysis. *The Psychologist*, Volume 26, No 2, 120-123.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2018) Using Thematic Analysis in Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: A critical Reflection. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 18(2), 107-110.

Clarke, V., Braun, V., Terry, G. and Hayfield, N. (2019) Thematic analysis. In: Liamputtong, P. (ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health and Social Sciences*. Singapore: Springer, 843-860.

Clarke, L. and Winch, C. (2004) Apprenticeship and Applied Theoretical Knowledge. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 509-521.

Clough, P., and Nutbrown, C. (2012). *A Student's Guide to Methodology*. (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Coe, R., Waring, M., Hedges, L. V. and Arthur, J. (2017) *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* (2nd edition). London: Sage.

Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data (Complementary Research Strategies).* London: Sage Publications.

Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2014*) Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation.* (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2017) *Research Methods in Education* (8th ed). London: Routledge.

Coleman, J. S. (1988) Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 13-39.

Coleman, J. S. and Hoffer, T. (1987) *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities.* New York: Basic Books.

Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2014) *Business Research. A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. (4th ed). London: Palgrave.

Coleridge, P. (1993) *Disability, Liberation and Development.* UK: Oxfam.

Coolican, H., (2017) *Research methods and statistics in psychology.* Vancouver: Psychology press.

Connor, H. (2005) Workforce Development and Higher Education. *The Council for Industry and Higher Education*.

Connor, H. (2001) Deciding for or against participation in higher education: the views of young people from lower social class backgrounds. *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 204-224.

Costley, C. (2020) Definitions of different forms of work and learning in higher education. *Workplace Learning e-journal*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 53-66.

Costley, C. and Abukari, A., (2015) The impact of work-based research projects at postgraduate level. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 7 (1), 3-14.

Costley, C. and Armsby, P. (2007) Work-based learning assessed as a field or mode of learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 21-33.

Cox, E. (2005) Adult learners learning from experience: Using a reflective practice model to support work-based learning. *Reflective practice*, Vol. 6, No.4, 459-472.

Crawford-Lee, M. and Moorwood, S. (2019) Degree apprenticeships: delivering quality and social mobility. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, Vol. 2, 134-140.

Creswell, J. W. (2012) *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2014) *Research Design. Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,* (4th ed). London: Sage.

Cresswell, J. W. and Plano Clark, V. L. (2017) *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research.* (3rd ed). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Cross, R. and Thomas, R.J. (2008) How top talent uses networks and where rising stars get trapped. *Organizational Dynamics,* (37), 165-180.

Cunningham, G. E. (2021) Solicitor Apprenticeships – A new and improved education and training route to qualification as a solicitor? A study of the perceptions of solicitor apprentices and trainee solicitors. The University of Sheffield.

Daley, J., Coyle, J. and Dwyer, C. (2016) Sheffield Hallam University and Nestlé: Developing future leaders with the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship – a partnership approach. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 6, (4), 370-377.

Dalrymple, R., Kemp, C., and Smith, P. (2014) Characterising work-based learning as a triadic learning endeavour. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 75–89.

Deissinger, T., (2008) Cultural Patterns Underlying Apprenticeship: Germany and the UK. In *Divergence and Convergence in Education and Work*. Edited by Aarkrog, V and Jorgenson, C.H. 33-55. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Denscombe, M. (2008). *Ground rules for social research: guidelines for good practice*. Open University Press: GB.

Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *White paper higher education: Students at the heart of the system*. London. England: Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2015) *Apprenticeships levy: Employer owned apprenticeship training. Consultation document*. August 2015. London, England: Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

Department for Education (2017) *Further Education and Skills in England*, November 2017. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/660580/SFR62_Nov_2017.pdf. [Accessed September 19, 2018].

Dewey, J. (1922) *Human Nature and Conduct*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 56-57.

Dewey, J. (1930) *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. New York: H Holt and Company.

Dewey, J. (1938/2008) *The late works of John Dewey, Vol. 13: Experience and education, freedom and culture*, *theory of valuation and essays*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.

Dumenden, I. E. and English, R. (2013) Fish out of water: refugee and international students in mainstream Australian schools, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17 (10), 1078–1088

Durkheim, E. (1933) *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Duru-Bellat, M. (2000) Social inequalities in the French education system: the joint effect of individual and contextual factors. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 33-40.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P. R. (2015) *Management and Business Research.* (5th ed). London: Sage Publications.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Jackson, P.R. and Jasperson, L.J. (2018) *Management and Business Research* (6th ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Edwards, R. and Mauthner, M. (2002) Ethics and feminist research: Theory and practice. *Ethics in qualitative research*, Vol. *2*, 14-28.

Ellis, C. and Berger, L. (2003) The story/my story/our story: Including the researcher's experience in interview research. In Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.) *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*, 467-493. California: Sage.

Engeli, A. and Turner, D. (2019) *Degree Apprenticeships motivations research*. London: Wavehill Social and Economic Research.

Evans, K., Hodkinson, P. and Unwin, L. (2002) *Working to Learn: Transforming learning in the workplace*. London: Kogan Page.

Fabian, K., Taylor-Smith, E., Smith, S., Meharg, D. and Varey, A. (2021) An exploration of degree apprentice perspectives: a Q methodology study. *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 47, No. 7, 1397-1409.

Fawcett, B. and Hearn, J. (2004) Researching others: epistemology, experience, standpoints and participation. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 201-218.

Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006) Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5, 1-11.

Field, J (2008) *Social Capital*. London, Routledge.

Field, J. (2017) *Social Capital.* (3rd ed). Oxon: Routledge.

Fine, B. (2010) Theories of Social Capital – Researchers Behaving Badly. In *Theories of Social Capital*. London: Pluto Press.

Fitz-Gibbon, C. (2000). Education: realising the potential. *What works*, 69-92.

Fitzpatrick, K. and May, S. (2016) Doing critical educational ethnography with Bourdieu. *Theory as method in research: On Bourdieu, social theory and education*, 101-114.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans by M. Ramos. Reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. Trans by D. Macedo. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin and Garvey.

Fuller, A., Rizvi, S. and Unwin, L. (2013) Apprenticeships and Regeneration: The Civic Struggle to Achieve Social and Economic Goals. *British Journal of Educational Studies*,61:1, 63-78. DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2012.756168.

Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2003) Creating a Modern Apprenticeship: A Critique of the UK's Multi-Sector, Social Inclusion Approach. *Journal of Education and Work,* 16 (1): 5-25.

Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2004) Young people as teachers and learners in the workplace: Challenging the novice-expert dichotomy. *International Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 32-42.

Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2016) Applying an Apprenticeship Approach to HRD: Why the Concepts of Occupation, Identity and the Organisation of Workplace Learning Still Matter. In *Human Resource Management, Innovation and Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 66-79.

Garnett, J. (2016). Work-based learning: A critical challenge to the subject discipline structures and practices of higher education. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 305-314.

Garnett, J., Costley, C. and Workman, B. (2009) *Work Based Learning: Journeys to the Core of Higher Education*. London: Middlesex University Press.

Garrison, J. and Neiman, A. (2003) Pragmatism and education. *The Blackwell guide to the philosophy of education*, 21-37. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Gaskell, T. (2000) The Proces of Empirical Research: a learning experience? *Research in Post-Comulsory Education,* 5:3, 349-360.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Fontana.

Gilbert, N. (2008) *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed.). London: Sage

Gibson, P. and Busby, G. (2009) Experiencing work: supporting the undergraduate hospitality, tourism and cruise management student on an overseas work placement. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training,* 61 (4), 467–480.

Gill, J., and Johnson, P. (2010) *Research Methods for Managers*. (4th ed.) Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Glesne, C. and Peshkin, A. (1992) *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Goldthorpe, J. H. and Jackson, M. (2007) Intergenerational class mobility in contemporary Britain: political concerns and empirical findings. *British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 8, No. 4, 525-546

Granovetter, M. (1983) The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited. *Sociological theory*, Vol.1, 201-233. New Jersey, USA: Wiley.

Granovetter, M. S. (1995) *Getting a job: A study of contacts and careers.* (2nd ed). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Gray, D. (2001) A Briefing on Work-based Learning*. LTSN Generic Centre Learning and Teaching Support Network*, Assessment Series No 11.

Gray, D. E. (2017) *Doing Research in the Business World*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Greenbank, P. and Hepworth, S. (2008) *Working class students and the career decision-making process: A qualitative study*. Research Study for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), Manchester.

Grenfell, M. (2007) *Pierre Bourdieu: Education and training*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Grenfell, M. and James, D. (2004) Change *in* the field – chang*ing* the field: Bourdieu and the methodological practice of educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 507-523.

Grix, J. (2002). Introducing Students to the Generic Terminology of Social Research. *Politics*, 22 (3), 175-186.

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1989) *Fourth generation evaluation*. London: Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, Vol. 2, 163-194.

Guest, G. And McLellan, E. (2003). Distinguishing the Trees from the Forest: Applying Cluster Analysis to Thematic Qualitative Data. *Field Methods*, 15 (2), 186-201.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K.M. and Namey, E.E. (2012) Introduction to applied thematic analysis. *Applied thematic analysis*, Vol. 3, No. 20, 1-21.

Guile, D. and Young, M. (2002) Beyond the Institution of Apprenticeship. In Harrison, R., Reeve, F., Hanson, A and Clarke, J. *Eds*. Supporting Lifelong Learning, Vol.1, perspectives on learning. London: Routledge Falmer/Open University.

Gustavsson, M. (2009) Facilitating expansive learning in a public sector organization. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 31:3, 245-259, DOI: 10.1080/01580370903271453

Halfon, R. (2017) Perspective from politicians. In Clarke, P. and Beech, D. (Eds), *Reaching the Parts of Society Universities Have Missed: A Manifesto for the New Director of Fair Access and Participation*, Oxford: HEPI, 51.

Hall, J. (2013) Pragmatism, evidence, and mixed methods evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, (138), 15-26.

Hammersley, M. (2018) Commentary – On the 'Indistinguishability Thesis': A Response to Morgan. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 12 (3), 256-261.

Hanifan, L. J. (1916) The Rural School Community Centre. *American Academy of Political and Social Science* LXVII (September):130-38. Reprinted in 1920 in the Community Center. Boston, MA: Silver, Burdett.

Hardacre, K. and Workman, B. (2010) *Planning and reviewing work-based learning: a practical guide*. Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri

Harker, R., Mahar, C. and Wilkes, C. (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The Practice of Theory.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heikkinen, A. (1997) How to study apprenticeship comparatively? In Heikkinen, A. and Sultana, R. (Eds) *Vocational Education and Apprenticeships in Europe. Challenges for Practice and Research*, Finland: Tampere University Press, 267:293.

Helyer, R. (2011) Aligning higher education with the world of work. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning* 1:2, pages 95-105.

Hewlett, N. (2007) *Badiou, Balibar, Rancière: re-thinking emancipation*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2016) Higher Education Indicators for Further Education Colleges. *Overview of Trends for Widening Participation, Non-continuation and Employment Indicators,* February, 2016/01. Bristol: HEFCE.

Hillage, J., Pearson, R., Anderson, A. and Tamkin, P. (1998) *Excellence in research in schools*. London: Department for Education and Employment.

Hillen, P. and Levy, S. (2015) Framing the experiences of BME social work students within a narrative of Educating for a Culturally Diverse Workforce, Social Work Education, Volume 34, 785-798.

HM Government (2013) The future of apprenticeships in England: implementation plan. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253073/bis-13-1175-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-implementation-plan.pdf. [Accessed 19 September 2018].

HM Government (2015) English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 vision. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf. [Accessed 5 June 2017].

HM Government (2017) Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-building-a-britain-fit-for-the-future [Accessed 5 June 2017].

Hogarth,T., Gambin, L. and Hasluck, C. (2012) Apprenticeships in England: What Next? *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 64 (1), 41-55.

Holland, J. L. (1985). *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Holmegaard, H. (2015) Performing a Choice-Narrative: a qualitative study of the patterns in STEM students' higher education choices. *International Journal of Science Education*, 37:9, 1454-1477.

Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. (1995) *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. (2008) Constructionist impulses in ethnographic fieldwork. *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, 373-395.

Homans, G. C. (1961) *Social Behavior*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.

Howe, D. (1998) Relationship-based thinking and practice in social work. *Journal of Social Work Practice,* 12 (1) 45-46.

Hoyle, G. (2012) *Government-funded apprenticeships are generally of good quality. Establishing universally recognised definitions and funding procedures should be a priority. British Politics and Policy at LSE* (28 Mar 2012).

Hubble S and Bolton P (2019) Degree Apprenticeships. *House of Commons Briefing Paper No 8741 18*, Dec 2019. Available from https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8741/CBP-8741.pdf. [Accessed 31 May 2022].

Hurst, A. L. (2008) A healing echo: methodological reflections of a working class researcher on class. *Qualitative Report*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 334-52.

Huxham, C. and Vangen, S. (2005) *Managing to Collaborate: the theory and practice of collaborative advantage.* London: Routledge.

Huysman, M. and Wulf, V. (2004) *Social capital and information technology*. Massachusetts, USA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Hytönen, K., Palonen, T., Lehtien, E. and Hakkarainen, K. (2014) Does academic apprenticeship increase networking ties among participants? A case study of an energy efficiency training program. *Higher Education*, 68, 959-976.

IfATE, (2021). *A Public Consultation on Degree Apprenticeships*. Available at: https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/5244/degree-apprenticeships-consultation-acc.pdf [accessed 01/05/22]

IfATE, (2022). *Response to the Consultation on Plans for Degree Apprenticeships*. Available at:

https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/reviews-and-consultations/consultations/response-to-the-consultation-on-plans-for-degree-apprenticeships/ [accessed 01/05/2022]

Johnson, R. B. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004) Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Research*, 33 (7): 14-26.

Johnston, C. E. (2011) The Other Side of the Bridge: A study of social capital in Further Education provision for young disabled people. (Doctoral dissertation, Brunel University PhD theses).

Johnston, N., Angerilli, N. and Gajdamaschko, N. (2003) How to Measure Complex Learning Processes: The Nature of Learning in Cooperative Education. In *Handbook for Research in Cooperative Education and Internships*, edited by Linn, P., Howard, A. and Miller, E. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 157–90.

Jourdan, C. and Huchette, M. (2011) September. What do students say about what they learn from work experience? A case of French vocational education for the building industry. In *European Conference on Educational Research (ECER)*.

Khalil, L. and Kelly, A. (2020) The practice of choice-making: Applying Bourdieu to the field of international schooling. *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 137-154.

Keep, E. (2012) Education and Industry: Taking Two Steps Back and Reflecting. *Journal of Education and Work,* 25 (4): 357-379.

Kent, R. (2015) *Analysing Quantitative Data: Variable-based and Case-based Approaches to Non-experimental Datasets* (3rd ed), London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Kubiak, C., Rogers, A. and Turner, A. (2010) The Learning Experiences of Health and Social Care Paraprofessionals on a Foundation Degree. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29 (3), 373-386.

Kuhn, T. (1962/1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Lambert, S. (2016) Are Current Accountability Frameworks Appropriate for Degree Apprenticeships? *Higher Education Skills and Work-based Learning*, Vol. 6, No. 4., 345-356.

Laughland-Booy, J., Mayall,M., and Skrbis, Z. (2015) Whose Choice? Young People, Career Choices and Reflexivity Re-Examined. *Current Sociology,* 63 (4):586-603.

Ledwith, M. (2011) *Community Development: A critical approach*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Ledwith, M. (2016) *Community Development in Action: Putting Freire into Practice,* Bristol: Policy Press.

Lee, D. (2012) Apprenticeships in England: an overview of current issues. *Higher Education, Skills and Work based Learning* 2 (3), 225-239.

Leitch, S. (2006) Skills in the UK: the long-term challenge: Leitch review of skills: interim report [online]. *The Stationary Office*. Available at: https//:www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch. [Accessed 09 September, 2019].

Leonard, M. (2004) Bonding and bridging social capital: reflections from Belfast. *Sociology*, Vol. 38. No. 5, 927-944.

Lester, S. (2020) Creating conditions for sustainable degree apprenticeships in England. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning,* Vol. 10, No. 5, 701-714.

Lester, S. and Bravenboer, D. (2020) *Sustainable Degree Apprenticeships*, Middlesex University, London. Available from https://www.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/565863/sustainable-degree-apprenticeships-2020.pdf. [Accessed 11 May 2021].

Lester, S., Bravenboer, D. and Webb, N. (2016) Work-integrated degrees: Context, engagement, practice and quality. A literature review for QAA. Gloucester: QAA.

Lester, S. and Costley, C. (2010) Work-based learning at higher education level: value, practice and critique. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35 (5), 561-575.

Lillis, F. and Bravenboer, D. (2022) *Move On Up? Measuring the social impact of apprenticeships.* Middlesex University.

Lin, N. (1999) Social networks and status attainment. *Annual review of sociology*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 467-487.

Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lin, N. and Erickson, B.H. (2008) Theory, measurement and the research enterprise on social capital. In: Lin, N. and Erickson, B.H. (Eds), *Social Capital. An International Research Program*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-24.

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Enquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y and Guba, E. (2013) *The Constructivist Credo*. New York: Routledge.

Loury, G. C. (1977) A dynamic theory of racial income differences. In Wallace P. A. and LaMond, A. M. *Eds*. *Women, Minorities and Employment Discrimination.* MA: Heath Lexington, 153-186.

Madill, A. and Gough, B. (2008) Qualitative research and its place in psychological science. *Psychological methods*, Vol. 13, No. 3.

Mahoney, J. and Rueschemeyer, D. (2003) Comparative historical analysis. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Martina, C. A. (2006) *Building on Bourdieu: The Rule of School Culture and Peer Institutional Agents in Disadvantaged Students' Attainment of Academic Success*. USA: University of Rochester.

Maton, K. (2005) A question of autonomy: Bourdieu's field approach and higher education policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 6, 687-704.

Maudsley, G. (2011) Mixing it but not mixed-up: Mixed methods research in medical education (a critical narrative review). *The Medical Teacher*, 33: 92-104.

Mayhew, K. and Keep, E. (2014) *Industrial strategy and the future of skills policy: The high road to sustainable growth*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Mazenod, A. (2016) Education or training? A comparative perspective on apprenticeships in England. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol 68 (1), 102-117.

McCray, J. and Palmer, A. (2009) Developing a work-based leadership programme in the UK social care sector. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol, 21, No. 6, 465-476.

McKnight, S., Collins, S-L., Way, D. and Iannotti, P. (2019) Case study: establishing a social mobility pipeline to degree apprenticeships. *Higher Education Skills and Work-based Learning*, Volume 9, No2, 149-163.

Merrill-Glover, K. (2015) Working towards powerful knowledge: Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in work-based learning. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 22-37.

Merrill-Glover, K. and Edwards, K (2016) Making it Work: Widening Participation in Higher Education for Adults in Employment. *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 1-9.

Miles, M. and Huberman, A. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis*. (2nd ed) Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Mills, C. (2008) Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling: the transformative potential of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29 (1), 79–89.

Misztal, B. A. (2000) *Informality: Social theory and contemporary practice*. London: Routledge.

Moon, J. (2001) PDP working paper 4: Reflection in higher education learning. *Higher Education Academy*, 1-25.

Moon, J.A. (2013) *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Moore, R. (2008) Capital. In Grenfall, M. (Ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu Key Concepts.* Durham: Acumen,101-118.

Morgan, D.L. (2007) Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained. Methodological Implications of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research,* Vol. 1, No.1, 48-76.

Morgan, D. (2010) Reconsidering the Role of Interaction in Analysing and Reporting Focus Groups. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20 (5), 718-722.

Morse, J.M. (1995) The significance of saturation. *Qualitative health research*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 147-149.

Mulkeen, J., Abdou, H., Leigh, J. and Ward, P. (2017) Degree and Higher Level Apprenticeships: an empirical investigation of stakeholder perceptions of challenges and opportunities. *Studies in Higher Education,* Vol. 44 No. 22, 333-346.

Naidoo, R. (2004) Fields and institutional strategy: Bourdieu on the relationship between higher education, inequality and society. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Vol, 25, No. 4, 457-471.

Nawaz, R., Edifor, E.E., Holland, S.R., Cao, Q. and Liu, L.S. (2022) The impact of degree apprenticeships: analysis, insights and policy recommendations. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy,* Vol. (ahead of print), No. (ahead of print).

Newby, P. (2010). *Research Methods for Education.* London: Routledge.

Nind, M. and Todd, L. (2011) Prospects for educational research. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, Vol. 1, No. 34, 1-2.

Nottingham, P. (2019) Acknowledging lifelong learning principles within work-based studies: a continuing legacy for the degree apprenticeship. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 29-45.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E. and Moules, N. J. (2017) Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 16, No. 1.

OECD (2008) *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*: Volume 1 and Volume 2, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264046535-en. [accessed July 2017].

OECD (2017) *State of Higher Education 2015-16 The OECD Higher Education Programme (IMHE).* OECD Publishing, Paris, https://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/The%20State%20of%20Higher%20Education%202015-16.Pdf [accessed May 2018].

Okay-Somerville, B. and Scholarios, D. (2015) Position, Possession or Process? Understanding Objective and Subjective Employability During University-to-Work Transitions. *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 19, No. 6 1–17.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2002) Positivists, post-positivists, post-structuralists, and post-modernists: Why can't we all get along? Towards a framework for unifying research paradigms. *Education*, 122 (3), 518-530.

Parry, G. (2005) A contested landscape. International perspectives on diversity in mass higher education. In Gallacher, J. and Osborne, M. *Eds*. *A contested landscape. International perspectives on diversity in mass higher education*, 63-91. Leicester: NIACE.

Patton, M. Q. (1990) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park: CA, Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2014) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pennell, H. and West, A. (2005) The impact of increased fees on participation in higher education in England. *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 127–137.

Pervin, L. A. (2001). A dynamic systems approach to personality. *Eur. Psychol*. 6, 172–176. doi: 10.1027//1016-9040.6.3.172

Pham, L. (2019) Capital and Capabilities in Education: Re-examining Australia's 2015 PISa performance and context assessment framework. *Policy Futures in Education,* Vol. 17(5), 599-617.

Phelan, P., Davidson, A.L. and Yu, H.C. (1999) Students' Multiple Worlds: navigating the borders of family, peer, and school cultures, in Phelan, P. and Davidson, A.L. (Eds) *Renegotiating Cultural Diversity in American Schools,* New York: Teachers' College Press, 52-88.

Poldolny, J.M. and Baron, J.N. (1997) Resources and Relationships: Social networks and mobility in the workplace. *American Sociological Review, (65:5), 673-693.*

Portes, A. (1998) Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 24, 1-24.

Portes, A. (2000) The two meanings of social capital. *Sociological Forum*. Vol. 15, No. 1, 1-12.

Powell, P. and Walsh, A. (2017) "Whose curriculum is it anyway? Stakeholder salience in the context of degree apprenticeships", *Higher Education Quarterly,* 72, 90-106.

Power, E. M. (1999) An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts, *Journal for the Study of Food and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 48-52.

Punch, K. F. (2014) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (3rd ed). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Putnam, R. D. (1993) The prosperous community: social capital and public life. *American Prospect*, 4 (13), 35-42.

Putnam, R. D. (1995) Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 6, No. 1, 65-78.

Putnam, R. D. (2000*) Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuser.

QAA (2019). Characteristics Statement Higher Education in Apprenticeships. Available from https://www.qaa.ac. uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/characteristics-statement-apprenticeships.pdf. [Accessed 04 August 2020].

Raelin, J. (2008) *Work-Based Learning*, San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Raffe, D., Howieson, C., Spours, K. and Young, M. (1998) The unification of post-compulsory education: Towards a conceptual framework. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 169-187.

Raffo, C., Forbes, C. and Thomson, S. (2015) Ecologies of educational reflexivity and agency – a different way of thinking about equitable educational policies and practices for England and beyond? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19 (11), 1126-1142.

Ramlo, S. E. and Newman, I. (2011) Q methodology and its position in the mixed methods continuum. *Operant Subjectivity*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 172-191.

Rancière, J. (2003) *The Philosopher and his Poor*. London: Duke University Press.

Reay, D. (1995) 'They employ cleaners to do that': Habitus in the primary classroom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 353-371.

Reay, D. (1998) Rethinking Social Class Qualitative Perspectives on Gender and Social Class. *Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 259-275.

Reay, D. (2001) Finding or Losing Yourself? Working-class Relationships to Education. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 333-346.

Reay, D. (2004) It's all becoming a habitus: beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol 25, No. 4, 431-444.

Reay, D. (2006) The Zombie Stalking English Schools: Social Class and Educational Inequality. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 288-307.

Reay, D. (2013) Social mobility, a panacea for austere times: tales of emperors, frogs, and tadpoles. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* Vol. 34 Nos 5-6, pp. 660-677.

Reay, D. (2021) The working classes and higher education: Meritocratic fallacies of upward mobility in the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 53-64.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M. and Ball, S. (2001) Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, 'Race' and the Higher Education Choice Process. *Sociology*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 855-874.

Robbins, D. (2005) The origins, early development and status of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. *British Journal of Sociology*, 56 (1), 13-30.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research*, 3rd ed. Chichester: Wiley.

Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin Books.

Rorty, R. (2009) *Philosophy and the mirror of nature (*13th ed.) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rostila, M. (2010) The Facets of Social Capital. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour.* 41 (3), 308-326.

Roth, T. (2014). Effects of social networks on finding an apprenticeship in the German vocational training system. *Eur. Soc*. 16, 233–254.

Roth, T. (2017) Interpersonal influences on educational expectations: New evidence for Germany. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Vol. *48*, 68-84.

Roth, T. (2018) The influence of parents' social capital on their children's transition to vocational training in Germany. *Social Networks*, *55*, 74-85.

Rowe, L., Perrin, D. and Wall, T. (2016) The chartered management degree apprenticeship: Trials and tribulations. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*. 6, 357-369.

Ryan, P. (2000) The Institutional Requirements of Apprenticeship: Evidence from Smaller EU Countries. International Journal of Training and Development 4(1):42-65.

Ryan, P. (2011). Apprenticeship: Between Theory and Practice, School and Workplace. *Economics of Education Working Paper Series*, 64.

Ryan, L. and Lőrinc, M. (2018). Perceptions, prejudices and possibilities: young people narrating apprenticeship experiences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39:6, 762-777. DOI:10.1080/01425692.2017.1417821.

Sainsbury, D. (chair). (2016) *Report of the independent panel on technical education*. London: The National Archives.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London; SAGE.

Sandelowski, M. (1995) Qualitative analysis: What it is and how to begin. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 18(4), 371-375.

Saraswat, A. (2016) Higher apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship standards: perceived potential and limitations. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6 (4), 401-416.

Saunders, M. Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students*. (5th ed). Essex: Pearson.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2018) *Research Methods for Business Students*. (8th ed). Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Savage, M. & Bennett, T. (2005) Editors' introduction: Cultural capital and social inequality. *British Journal of Sociology*. 56 (1), 1-12.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2010) *New Approaches to Qualitative Research: Wisdom and Uncertainty*. London: Routledge.

Schön, D. A. (1987) *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schuh, K. L. and Barab, S. A. (2008) Philosophical Perspectives. In Spector J.M., Merrill, M.D., Van Merrienboer, J. and Driscoll, M. P. *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology.* (3rd ed). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Schofield, C., Cotton, D., Gresty, K., Kneale, P. and Winter, J. (2013) Higher Education provision in a crowded marketplace. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 193-205.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Senge, P. N. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organisation*. London: Century Business.

Siebert, S. and Costley, C. (2013) Conflicting Values in Reflection on Professional Practice. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 3 (3), 156-167.

Silverman, D. (1985) *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology*. Farnborough: Gower.

Silverman, D. (2000) Analysing talk and text. In *Handbook of Qualitative research,* ed. Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. 821-834. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2013) *Qualitative Research (*34th ed). London: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2014) *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (5th ed). London: Sage Publications.

Sim, J., Saunders, B., Waterfield, J. and Kingstone, T. (2018) Can sample size in qualitative research be determined a priori? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 619-634.

Simons, M., Harris, R. and Smith, E. (2006) *The Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Learning: Understanding Learners and Learning,* Adelaide: NCVER.

Skatova, A. and Ferguson, E. (2014) Why do different people choose different university degrees? Motivation and the choice of degree. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Vol. 5, 1244.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable.* London: Sage.

Skeggs, B. (2004) Exchange, Value and Affect: Bourdieu and 'The Self.' *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 52, No.2 (suppl), 75–95.

Smith, S., Caddell, M., Smith, C. F., Taylor-Smith, E., and Varey. A. (2020) Degree Apprenticeships - A Win-win Model? A Comparison of Policy Aims with the Expectations and Experiences of Apprentices. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training,* Vol. 1, No. 21.

Smith, S., Taylor-Smith, E., Fabian, K., Zarb, M., Paterson, J., Barr, M. and Berg, T. (2021) A multi-institutional exploration of the social mobility potential of degree apprenticeships, *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 488-503.

Smith, C. and Worlsfold, K. (2015) Unpacking the learning-work nexus: 'priming' as a lever for high-quality learning outcomes in work-integrated learning curricula, *Studies in Higher Education*, 40 (1), 22-42.

Social Mobility Commission, (2020). *Best and Worst mobility areas in England*.Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission [Accessed 01/05/2022]

Social Mobility Commission, (2021). *Apprenticeships and Social Mobility: Fulfilling Potential*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/894303/Apprenticeships_and_social_mobility_report.pdf [Accessed 01/05/2022]

Spencer, L., Lewis, J. and Dillon, J. (2003) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A Framework for Assessing Research Evidence.* London: Government Chief Social Researcher's Office.
Stake, R. E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.

Statista (2022) *Number of students enrolled in higher education in the United Kingdom from 2009/10 to 2020/21*. Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/875015/students-enrolled-in-higher-education-in-the-uk/. [Accessed on 31 May 2022]

Swartz, D. (1997) *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Takhar, O. K. (2016) *Sikh identity: An exploration of groups among Sikhs*. London: Routledge.

Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (2003) *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Taylor-Smith, E., Smith, S., Fabian, K., Berg, T., Meharg, D. and Varey, A. (2019a) Bridging the Digital Skills Gap: Are computing degree apprenticeships the answer? In *Proceedings of the 2019 ACM Conference on Innovation and Technology in Computer Science Education*, 126-132.

Taylor-Smith, E., Smith, S. and Smith. C (2019b). Identity and Belonging for Graduate Apprenticeships in Computing: The experience of first cohort degree apprentices in Scotland. In *Proceedings of the 2019 ACM Conference on Innovation and Technology in Computer Science Education,* 2-8.

Teese R (2000) Post-compulsory education and training: Some recent research findings and their policy implications. *Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 49–57.

Thatcher, J., Ingram, N., Burke, C. and Abrahams, J. (2018) *Bourdieu: The Next Generation, The development of Bourdieu's intellectual heritage in contemporary UK sociology*. London: Routledge.

The Edge Foundation (2017) *Our plan for Higher Education*, The Edge Foundation, London

Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do your research project* (2nd ed). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Tomlinson, M. (2008) 'The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29:1, 49-61, DOI: 10.1080/01425690701737457.

Trochim, W. (1985) Pattern Matching, Validity and Conceptualization in Program Evaluation. *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 9, 575-604. In Best, S. (2012) Understanding & Doing Successful Research: Data Collection and Analysis for the Social Sciences. London: Routledge.

UUK. (2019) *The future of degree apprenticeships.* London: UUK.

Van Niekerk, L. and Savin-Baden, M. (2010) In Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2010) *New Approaches to Qualitative Research: Wisdom and Uncertainty*. London: Routledge.

VanWynsberghe, R. and Herman, A. C. (2016) *Adaptive Education: An Inquiry-Based Institution*. Canada: Toronto University Press.

Vickerstaff, S. (2007) I was Just the Boy Around the Place: What Made Apprenticeships Successful? *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 331-347.

Wacquant, L. (1989) Towards a reflexive sociology. A workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, 7: 26-63.

Wacquant, L. (1992). Preface in Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. *Eds. An invitation to reflexive sociology,* ix-xv. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wall, T. and Jarvis, M. (2015) *Business Schools as Educational Provocateurs of Productivity Via Interrelated Landscapes of Practice.* London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at: https://charteredabs.org/business-schools-as-educational-provocateurs-of-productivity-via-interrelated-landscapes-of-practice/ [Accessed 04 June, 2019].

Watson, J. (2013) Profitable portfolios: capital that counts in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol.34, No. 3, 412-430.

Watson, J. and Grenfell, M. (2016) Working in the methodological 'outfield': the case of Bourdieu and occupational therapy. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 151-169.

Way, D. (2016) *A Race to the Top: Achieving Three Million More Apprenticeships by 2020*. Winchester: Winchester University Press.

Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). Understanding Bourdieu. Australia: Allen and Unwin. In Huang, X., (2019). Understanding Bourdieu - cultural capital and habitus. *Review of European Studies.* Volume 11, No.3, 45-49.

Webb, S., Bathmaker, A-M., Gale, T., Hodge, S., Parker, S. and Rawolle, S. (2017) Higher Education and Social Mobility: educational participation in Australia and England. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 147-167.

Whiting, V. and de Janasz, S. C. (2004) Mentoring in the 21st century: Using the Internet to build skills and networks. *Journal of Management Education*, 28, 275–293.

Winterton, M. T. and Irwin, S. (2012). Teenage expectations of going to university: the ebb and flow of influences from 14 to 18. *Journal of Youth Studies.* 15(7), pp.858-874.

Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publication/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report.[Accessed 12 December, 2018).

Wolff, H.G. and Moser, K. (2009) Effects of networking on career success: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* (94:1), 196-206.

Wood, M. M. (2013*) Possession, Power and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies.* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Towards a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, *27*(2), 151–208.

Woolcock, M. (2001) The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Canadian journal of policy research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 11-17.

Xu, W. and Zammit, K. (2020) Applying Thematic Analysis to Education: A Hybrid Approach to Interpreting Data in Practitioner Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. *19*.

Yin, R.K., 2014. Case study research: design and methods (5th ed). London: SAGE Publications.

Glossary

Term/Concept	Definition/Meaning
Agency	Viz, the ability of social actors to act independently of structures and roles.
Cultural capital	Viz, the mannerisms and discourse that informs a way of knowing how the system works.
Doxa	Viz, what is taken for granted in any particular society.
Economic capital	Viz, access to material and financial resources
Field	Viz, actors manifest their course of action in a 'field'. Field is a space where they compete for power and influence using their 'symbolic capital', which includes social capital (such as networks and contacts available to them) and cultural capital (knowledge they have).
Habitus	Viz, The learned attitudes, perceptions, tastes, habits, norms, values traditions of a particular society. These often learned in the familial and cultural context and that influence behaviours towards opportunities and possibilities of life trajectories.
Having a feel for the game	Viz, linked to the above this is having an implicit understanding of how the system operates and using that knowledge to benefit self, such as one's trajectories. This by using reciprocity liked to own social, cultural, and economic class standing.
Human capital	Viz, resources held by the individual
Institutional agents	Viz, individuals who can transfer, convey, and allocate institutional/workplace resources and opportunities. In the context of this study, they can therefore, help guide

	degree apprentices to translate and interpret the cultural logic of the dominant class and to understand how the system works.
Structure	Viz, the human tendency to classify experience in terms of binary (male/female, raw/cooked, pure/impure) and to act on this basis.
Social capital	Viz, the norms and social relations embedded in social structures that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals.
Symbolic capital	Viz, honour, reputation, prestige, status

Appendices

Appendix 1: Researcher reflexivity and reflections on the research process

Reflexivity within the context of research 'refers to the process of critically reflecting on the knowledge we produce, and our role in producing that knowledge.' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:37). They add that reflexivity can be viewed as part of the quality control essential in all qualitative research. Following their guidance, I kept a reflexive research journal throughout my research capturing my thoughts and feelings on the research process, some of which are presented here.

The review of literature

Reflections on the literature examined in chapter two helped me to understand the degree apprenticeship, leading me to challenge the government's ambition to increase productivity ***and*** social mobility through the degree apprenticeship. While Helve *et al.,* (2007) highlight the relevance of native social capital for the well-being and mobility of young adults, there is little research on degree apprentices, those who have enrolled to the degree apprenticeship, and simultaneously as 'new' employees, following completion of their post-compulsory schooling. Similarly, there is little evidence of those who have been in work but wish to upskill or reskill who have also enrolled to the degree apprenticeship.

The way in which their existing own social capital is acquired, built, and mobilised throughout their degree apprenticeship, pre-, during and post- the degree apprenticeship was of particular interest. Given the link to government social policy objectives; the steady growth of degree apprentices, and new contextual environment of recent years due to Brexit and Covid-19, I thought exploring why individuals enrol onto the degree apprenticeship warranted closer investigation. My reflections prompted me to query learners' awareness of opportunities to use and exploit capital acquisition to enhance their social mobility during the degree apprenticeship.

The research design

The design for this study developed as more about the social world of degree apprentices was understood. The process was influenced by emerging research as captured in chapter two, the COVID pandemic in terms of access to participants and the initial interviews. My assumptions about the design for this research were continually challenged and updated as I began to interact with participants in this research study and throughout the research process.

To develop a research approach that is highly structured and pre-specified in advance of the empirical work assumes that society is a fixed set of parameters that can fit conveniently into one research design (Punch, 2014). Consequently, this notion rejected by this study as social constructivism suggests that reality is constructed and reconstructed through our interactions with each other and with the world (Freire, 1970; Bourdieu, 1980). This suggests knowledge is always changing and 'truths' situated in time and space (Burr, 2015). Easterby-Smith *et al*., (2018) also observe the need to be flexible to emerging insight as new components emerge through data collection and analysis.

One of the reasons for changing from a mixed methods design to that of a single qualitative design emanated from the limited literature due to the 'newness' of degree apprenticeships and its links with capital acquisition and social mobility. A review of available literature highlighted early degree apprenticeship research being predominantly quantitative studies using questionnaire survey method. While helpful to this study, these did not address questions of how social mobility is enhanced, rather their focus was on issues of, for example, productivity and access to alternative forms of higher education. I felt that a quantitative approach would not adequately address questions about the social realities of degree apprentices and the processes through which their social realities are constructed and sustained (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008:374-5). In addition, the literature review highlighted the need for a more in-depth exploration of the factors of choice that influence degree apprenticeship enrolment.

Therefore, I reconsidered the initial research design with the mixed methodology being replaced in favour of a qualitative methodology in which data collection and analysis can capture the complexities of individual circumstance and their experiences. I deemed taking a single case study approach limiting, as in focusing on a single higher education institution based in the relatively 'prosperous' south of England, when compared to those elsewhere in England might create an anomaly. While I considered moving to multiple case study rather than single case study it was recognised that at this time there was only a very small number of degree apprentice learners who had completed their degree apprenticeship. Moreover, early inquiry as to whether I might interview degree apprentice learners at different higher education institutions to support my research was resisted to protect the research of those higher education institutions. Nonetheless, through employers of degree apprentices I was provided access to learners from across the country, albeit in small quantity.

Having established I was seeking a data collection method that potentially gains deeper understanding than that which would be available by means of questionnaire (Schatz, 2012 in

Silverman, 2013) my next decision was to select which approach would be best to adopt. Consequently, it became apparent that a qualitative approach with single method of semi-structured interview would be more helpful in seeking to address the aim of this research. This reconsideration of research design aligns with the belief of many researchers that the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm predominantly uses qualitative methods (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Silverman, 2000, 2014; Willis, 2007; Thomas, 2009; Nind and Todd, 2011). It also supports the pragmatic standpoint that research is not fixed but instead an emergent process (Silverman, 2014; Easterby-Smith, 2018).

3.8.2 The interviews

In the early interviews, I was careful in trying to guarantee uniformity of questions but found that, perhaps due to being over scripted, I left little room for exploration (Coe, *et al*., 2017). Consequently, the first interview felt staged in comparison to the everyday scenes of interaction (Silverman, 1985). I concluded that for in-depth interviews, a more open format is recommended including consideration to researcher approach of interviewer as pollster, primarily interested in the opinions and attitudes of the interviewees or prober who tries to get below the surface to gain deeper insight (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

I recognised my natural approach as an interviewer was passive in that I was 'unearthing the data in an uncontaminated form' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:109) as facts to be analysed from a distance. This contrasts with actively participating in creating conversation with the goal to probe and uncover knowledge. The different ways of performing the interviewer role will create different contexts for meaning making and knowledge production. Therefore, as a researcher I am aware that 'understanding ourselves is part of the process of understanding others' (Ellis and Berger, 2003:486). In future interviews I established a rapport that encouraged communication (Coe *et al.,* 2017) in anticipation that good craftsmanship in the research process of interviewing will make questions of validity superfluous (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:295).

As highlighted by Savin-Baden and Howell (2010) in exploring issues of class positionality it matters who the researcher is in relation to research participants. It is acknowledged that in being a part of this socially constructed environment there is need to be mindful of the multiple positions held and potential for accidental, self-in research bias (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004). In the current research, as educator-practitioner and strategic degree apprenticeship manager, I have an affinity with work-based learners. Therefore, there is a real danger of looking for echo (Hurst, 2008) by reinforcing others rhetoric until speaking with the same voice (Savin-Baden

and Howell, 2010). There is a risk that no one will challenge, and consequently 'new' knowledge may be perceived as objective truth (Rorty, 2009). Therefore, it was necessary to implement steps to mitigate against this as highlighted in chapter three.

Data analysis

Upon reflection, the iterative and evolving process of data collection, reduction, display, and verification allowed me to gain a clear overview of the data and begin to identify key themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Codes generated were organised in themes and as anticipated these clustered around my interview questions. While I found it challenging to manage the volume of codes and continual need to cross-reference back to the transcripts as a reminder of the context of the conversation, the themed structure of the semi-structured interview aided this activity allowing me to identify various patterns within the data. Although, I was analysing a small sample, potential limitations of this qualitative approach in managing a large amount of data that is produced (Silverman, 2014) became apparent.

In my initial draft of this study, in describing characteristics of my research participants I was concerned to provide as much detail as possible for the reader so included, age, gender, postcode and nationality. However, this caused me angst and indecision as to whether to retain this detail. This was due to my concern that, in having a small sample size, I might inadvertently be revealing some participant identities. Eventually, I realised leaving this detail could potentially reveal some participant identities and therefore age, postcode and nationality were omitted. In addition, further reflection enabled me to recognise that detailed participant characteristics were not required as I was not actively seeking gender, age, ethnicity, or socio-economic comparison from the interview data.

Final Reflections

My doctoral journey, although enjoyable, has not been without its challenges. On numerous occasions I have lain blame for these challenges on my low social-class origin. I left school aged sixteen, not because the alternative post-compulsory education route of A-level study was closed to me academically but because, in my family, getting a job was what was expected. It could be argued that my parents had dismissed a dominant discourse in education through preference to maintain custom and tradition (who we are and what we do), choosing stability and functional character of habit to make sense of their world (Dewey, 1930). For my part, I passively accepted my parent's well-intentioned but, with the benefit of hindsight, misguided and somewhat prejudiced working-class identity and values (Freire, 1972; Ledwith, 2011; 2016). In doing so, I was normalising my experience and accepting my place in society including

ignoring my right to continue my education. However, I have always taken, and continue to take, energy and inspiration from learning and my doctoral journey has enabled this.

In terms of the research process for this study, I have enjoyed all elements from review of the literature to designing the research and analysis and interpretation of the data. During this research I have gained a more in-depth knowledge of literature examined in this study, as well as learning more about myself as a researcher. This has facilitated my growth as a researcher and instilled in me belief that research provides a vehicle for change. Specifically, I have learned how my background and experiences shape my views of the world. For example, my education had not prepared me with the knowledge or skills set to take control of my future. Consequently, in my naivety, I was convinced that the only way to improve myself was through getting a job and that any education accessible to me should be aimed at progressing within that job. This illuminated a powerful insight of self. One which has been invaluable in my thinking throughout the research process. Consequently, I was alert to the potential for prejudice in constructing new knowledge based solely on my own social group and the risk of inadvertently creating a biased account (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001; Newby, 2010).

Clough and Nutbrown (2012:67) highlight 'our *identity* – as man, woman, academic, mother, father – is (to a greater or lesser extent) a driving force in our research foci.' My passion for, and commitment to, equality of educational opportunity has been heightened through the process. I am gratified to be able to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in relation to the experiences of degree apprentices. I am hopeful that in raising awareness of these experiences, changes will follow that will enhance the on- and off-the-job learning experiences for these non-traditional degree learners. Moreover, I have benefitted considerably from my research in developing an understanding of the context, the literature, and learning from the experiences of the degree apprentices in this study. From this, I have been able to reflect on, and identify my aspirations for degree apprenticeship work-based learning. My aspirations are that, in time, degree apprenticeships will be legitimised for their value as a route to a degree and potentially as a vehicle to sustainable social mobility. I look forward to continuing to develop my research in this area.

Appendix 2: A comparison of positivism and interpretivism

The following is not intended to present a historical account of the full range of theoretical frameworks available. Instead, an overview of the opposing perspectives of positivism and interpretivism are provided.

Worldview	Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Methodology
Positivism	Assumes a world that exists independent and separate from the researcher (Coe *et al*., 2017). *'*Positivism is underpinned by the belief that reality is independent of us and the goal is the discovery of theories, based on empirical research.' (Collis and Hussey, 2014: 44)	Positivist researchers as having ability to separate the practice of observation the observer and that which is observed (Coe *et al*., 2017). They investigate without influencing outcome, achieved through controlling variables and removing various forms of contamination and bias they produce valid knowledge. (Coe *et al*., 2017: Saunders *et al*., 2018)	Research is viewed from an outsider perspective. Therefore, it is argued that the approach is value-free in terms of values influencing data analysis. Counter arguments claim that as humans' we make decisions impacting research therefore research cannot be value free (Johnson and and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Collis and Hussey, 2014).	Uses formulated hypotheses and theories to present explanations through theories verified by way of measurable data. Researcher will take a deductive approach that will seek objectivity, predictability, controllability and patterns (Cohen *et al*., 2017).

Worldview	Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Methodology
Interpretivism	Seeks to understand individuals' perceptions and interpretations of the world. Reality is subjective, shaped, and influenced by perceptions where reality is observed as multiple and socially constructed (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Focus is on exploring the subjective reasons that influence individuals.	Recognises the perceptions and feelings of their research participants as valid knowledge.	The interpretivist is involved in what they research and therefore research is value laden (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This, critics argue, can lead to potential bias which can be misleading (Cohen et al., 2017).	Research approach uses inductive, qualitative methods. Aligned to the more qualitative, naturalistic paradigm which stresses the social and contextual aspects of education (Grenfell and James, 2004).

Appendix 3 – Initial research design

The initial research design for the current study involved a case study using mixed methods for data collection and data analysis. This initial research design is discussed here, together with the rationale for discarding the use of case study and mixed methods.

Initial Research Design: A single case study adopting mixed methodology

Originally the research design for this study, based on the work of Stake (1995) and Yin (2014), was a single case study approach with potential to answer 'how' and 'why' questions while taking into consideration how the phenomenon (of degree apprenticeship) is influenced by the context within which it is situated.

Case study is a popular research approach in the social sciences (Coe *et.al*., 2017) and is described as:

> '… a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Robson, 2011:136).

A key strength of the case study approach is that it would have enabled an in-depth investigation and facilitated exploration of the degree apprenticeship experience at a single higher education institute using a variety of data sources. This would support investigation through a variety of lenses with potential to reveal and understand multiple facets of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

The work of Bourdieu was identified as the lens through which to explore the phenomenon of the degree apprenticeship in the belief that the value in research relies on identifying a methodology that reveals the complex nature of the phenomenon and how this model of work-based learning influences acquisition of forms of capital in degree apprentices. According to Watson and Grenfell (2016), Bourdieu used a range of techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, in collecting and analysing data. Therefore, the initial research design for this study was to collect the data via single case study approach and adopting mixed methods research using both qualitative semi-structured interview and questionnaire survey.

This design was created in the belief that by acknowledging and combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative, as a means of gathering and analysing data, more could be learned about the research topic and consequently as many different aspects of a complex phenomenon as possible could be gained (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Bryman, 2006; Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Silverman, 2014; Yin, 2014). However, after further

consideration and reflection (See Appendix 1) the research design was changed to a single qualitative method (as detailed in section 3.4.1).

Focus group interviews as a research method

Focus group interviews were initially considered for this study as this provides opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of situations. However, some writers assert there are problems with the use of focus groups, notably, that it might lead to skewed data with stronger personalities or opinions influencing the views of others (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Easterby-Smith *et. al*., 2018). In this study, it was possible that individuals from same sector but competing organisations might not be comfortable in discussing potentially sensitive issues in this type of forum. As a willingness to actively contribute by building on and responding to the reactions of other group members to facilitate more elaborate accounts, this approach was discarded in favour of individual interviews.

Another key reason for discounting the use of focus groups for this study was that the information being discussed was personal. Individual interviews enable participants to retain anonymity (Bryman and Bell, 2018). It is also recognised that some participants will not be able to communicate their views as effectively as others (Creswell, 2014). Nonetheless, in interviews, with careful and thoughtful questioning and attentive listening, participant views can be checked more easily than in a focus group (Coe *et. al*., 2017). Hence, focus group interviews were rejected in favour of individual, semi-structured interviews as the research tool.

Data analysis: Content analysis

Originally, a quantitative approach to identify frequency of occurrence of established categories (Silverman, 2014; Collis and Hussey, 2014; Cohen *et. al*., 2017) was considered as part of the initial mixed method research design. Categories (themes) which occurred in higher frequency could have indicated issues of most prominence within the research. Content analysis seeks 'systematic inferences from qualitative data that have been structured by a set of ideas or concepts' (Easterby-Smith *et. al*., (2015:188). Whilst it is recognised that content analysis can be used in qualitative studies and offers convenience, this can be at a cost of losing sight of sequence in ***how*** and ***when*** they are used (Silverman, 2014). These aspects being of particular importance in the current study. Moreover, Braun and Clarke (2021) state that thematic analysis does not equate frequency with importance. Therefore, content analysis was discarded for the final research design.

Theme identification: Pattern matching

Initially a deductive pattern matching approach to data analysis was considered, also described as a sub-set of thematic analysis.

According to Best (2012:108), 'Pattern matching takes the form of an index or gap approach to data collection and data analysis'. It involves identifying patterns in research data, then making comparisons with patterns proposed in the literature (Best, 2012; Almutairi *et al*., 2014). This means it serves as the benchmark for comparison between the predicted pattern of outcomes of field research findings within the literature review.

With its origins in quantitative studies using small samples to test hypotheses (Campbell, 1975) pattern matching involves 'a correspondence between a theoretical or conceptual expectation pattern and an observed or measured pattern' (Trochim 1985:576 in Best, 2012). While it can be used with a wide range of qualitative research it is regarded as particularly helpful in enhancing internal validity (Gilbert, 2008; Rueschemeyer cited in Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). However, its helpfulness is challenged by Atkinson (1992) who argues that whilst such coding schemes can be conceptually powerful, it can result in overlooked categories which challenge reliability.

For a pattern matching approach to be applied in this study, a series of steps would need to be devised that firstly involved a thematic analysis of Bourdieu's descriptions of the process of capital acquisition. To achieve this, sections from Bourdieu's writing would need to be collected and sorted into dimensions such as type of capital, acquisition of social capital, and relationship with the learner's habitus. These statements would need to be amalgamated to draw out key themes for each dimension. The themes from Bourdieu's writings would then be used to code the interview data, comparing what the participants said with the descriptions of the key dimensions. As this deductive approach does not take a whole data approach, it potentially misses rich data found in more naturalistic approaches. This has led many authors to combine deductive and inductive versions to create a hybrid approach (Braun and Clarke 2006; Fereday and MuirCochrane 2006; Xu and Zammit, 2020).

Best (2012) claims that pattern matching is a creative activity in which we use the work of other authors to support own argument. Therefore, this deductive approach is often conceptualised as providing a tool for testing a hypothesis. For this reason, this approach was rejected as instead of hearing the participants' voice through the analysis it uses pre-designed categories identified prior to data analysis which inexorably ties it back to the theoretical approach of quantitative research Silverman (2014). In addition, because of the relatively recent

introduction of degree apprenticeships, an inductive approach was considered more suitable for the current study.

Appendix 4 – Research project interview Guide: Interview questions

Research Project Interview Guide

Exploring the experiences of degree apprenticeship learners: through the Lens of Bourdieu

Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to be involved in my EdD (Doctor of Education) study. My name is Stella McKnight, and the aim of this study is to explore the experiences of degree apprenticeship learners who have studied for their degree apprenticeship in UK higher education, specifically in England. The study is seeking to capture what degree apprentice graduates who studied in higher education in England identify as the factors influencing their enrolment to the degree apprenticeship and examine their experiences of, and reflections on, the degree apprenticeship post-completion of the programme. This study also seeks to understand how degree apprentices use capital acquisitions gained and opportunities offered (if available) through the degree apprenticeship to enhance their social mobility.

Note: Check participant still meets eligibility criteria: has completed and graduated their degree apprenticeship having worked as an apprentice in England and studied with an English higher education institution.

To read to participants (as a reminder):

- The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded for research purposes.
- All data will be anonymised and will not be used in any way that will enable identification of individual responses.
- All data will be filed and stored electronically and will be password protected.
- The raw data will not be shared with third parties.
- Involvement in the study is voluntary and, should you wish to, you may withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw your data will not be used and will be destroyed.

Complete and date consent forms – confirm details of what will be referenced in the research for example, use of pseudonym instead of first name, age, workplace employer and location, university in which the degree apprenticeship was studied and its location (although the number of higher education settings represented in the study will be included), prior educational settings by name and location (although these will be summarised by school/college).

As this study is seeking to explore your experiences of the degree apprenticeship the questions are broadly centred around three main areas:

- The factors influencing your enrolling to the degree apprenticeship
- Your experiences of the degree apprenticeship
- Your reflection on the degree apprenticeship and opportunities offered and taken-up by you (or not) during and post your graduating from the degree apprenticeship.

Further background questions have already been asked and captured on the pre-interview questions and I will refer to these as appropriate during the interview e.g., your qualifications and education and training journey prior to joining the degree apprenticeship; your hobbies prior to undertaking the degree apprenticeship.

Reaffirm pseudonym will be used.

If you would prefer not to answer any of the questions, please let me know.

Are there any other questions you would like to ask me or any areas on which you would like further clarification before we start the interview?

Section 1 Questions:

To confirm

Age

Self-identification in terms of gender

Current employer and employment sector, length of time employed by current employer, position held and for how long, and previous role position

Previous employer and employment sector, length of time employed, position held and for how long, and reasons for leaving this employer and/or job role

Section 2 Questions

May I please ask you to reflect on what led you to the degree apprenticeship.

What were the factors that influenced your enrolment to the degree apprenticeship?

- How did you first find out about the degree apprenticeship?
- What attracted you to the degree apprenticeship?
- Did others influence you in undertaking the degree apprenticeship? If so, who and in what way(s)?

What were your experiences of the degree apprenticeship?

Reflecting on your degree apprenticeship, how would you describe your experience of being a degree apprentice?

While a degree apprentice did you participate in social activities

- In the workplace?
- Through the university?

Prior to commencing the degree apprenticeship what were your social interests or hobbies and what are your current social interests/hobbies?

- If a change, ask: What led you to these new social interests/hobbies?

Thinking of post your graduation from the degree apprenticeship what is your current role/employment and what has brought about this change?

Reflecting on your degree apprenticeship experience as a whole is there anything that would have improved your experiences?

Section 3

Looking to the future, what are your professional and personal aspirations?

Finally, would you recommend the degree apprenticeship to others, and if so / if not, what is influencing your decision?

Thank you again for your time today.

Would you like to add anything else to our discussion today?

Do you have any questions, or would you like any further information about this research study?

Next steps:

Advise that a short summary will be emailed following the interview and for confirmation that the summary is representative of the interview discussion.

Re-confirm how I can be contacted should they require further information post interview.

Appendix 5 – Ethical Approval

From: Eira Patterson
Sent: 14 September 2022 12:29
To: Stella Mcknight <Stella.McKnight@winchester.ac.uk>; ethics <ethics@winchester.ac.uk>
Subject: FW: Ethics Approval

Dear Stella

I am emailing to confirm that ethical approval for your planned project at doctoral level was gained through Faculty Level Ethics Review on 9/06/19 (see documents attached).

Best wishes

Eira

Dr Eira Wyn Patterson

Faculty of Education and Arts Ethics Representative

Appendix 6 – Research information sheet and Consent form

Research Project Information Sheet and Consent Form

Exploring the experiences of degree apprenticeship learners: through the Lens of Bourdieu

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research study. My name is Stella McKnight and I am conducting this study as part of my postgraduate research thesis at the University of Winchester. The information below outlines the purpose of the study and what it will involve. Please take time to read through the information provided before deciding whether you wish to take part in this research. Please contact me if any of the following is unclear or you would like further information to assist you in your decision.

You have been invited to participate in this research as you have recently completed your Degree Apprenticeship. The study is seeking to understand individual motivations for enrolling to the degree apprenticeship, and the expectations, and experiences of Degree Apprenticeship learners. This study also seeks to understand whether or not you feel your individual capital has grown through being a Degree Apprentice and if so, how. It is anticipated that findings from this study will help to identify implications for Degree Apprenticeship strategy and that recommendations for management practice can be made.

The study will involve you being interviewed by me as the researcher for this study. The interview will take place either face-to-face or virtually (depending on your preference) at a mutually agreed date and time. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded for research purposes. All data will be anonymised and will not be used in any way that will enable identification of individual responses. All data will be filed and stored electronically and will be password protected. The raw data will not be shared with third parties. Involvement in the study is voluntary and, should you wish to, you may withdraw from this study at any time without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw your data will not be used and will be destroyed.

If you decide to take part in the research, two consent forms will be completed; one is to be retained by you and the other will be retained by me for my record

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at stella.mcknight@winchester.ac.uk.

Consent Form

Exploring the experience of degree apprenticeship learners: through the Lens of Bourdieu

Researcher Contact Details:

Stella McKnight, University of Winchester Business School, University of Winchester, Romsey Road, Hants SO22 5HT. Telephone no. 01962 826478. Email address: stella.mcknight@winchester.ac.uk

Request for informed consent (please tick each box to confirm informed consent):

- ☐ I have read the information sheet provided and have been given adequate time to consider the research being conducted
- ☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction
- ☐ I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that, should I wish to, I may withdraw at any time without providing reasons for withdrawal, and that my data will be destroyed
- ☐ I understand that taking part in the study will involve me being interviewed by the researcher and I agree to this interview being audio-recorded
- ☐ I understand that my personal details such as name and employment addresses will not be revealed to people outside of this project
- ☐ I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but that data collected about me during the study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication

Date Completed: xx/xx/xxxx

Appendix 7 – Pre-interview participant information question sheet

Research Aim: To explore the experiences of Degree Apprenticeship Learners before, through and following; their apprenticeship

Background

As you will know from the research aim, I am interested in your journey into, during and following your Degree Apprenticeship study. May I please ask you to complete the below questions and return to me ahead of our planned interview. Please tell me a little bit about your background, schooling, family, typical hobbies, social interests before joining, during and following the Degree Apprenticeship.

1. Please give a brief synopsis of your schooling history by indicating the schools and if appropriate college(s) by their name, type, grade level, location and your pattern/grades of attendance.
2. What is your definition of educational success? Please describe/define.
3. Did you during your education participate in extra-curricular activities? Please describe and state how and why you became involved in that activity (Sports, drama club, dance, choir, etc.)
4. While working and studying for your degree apprenticeship did you participate in any extra activities? Please describe the activity and state how and why you did so. Please also state whether the activity was work-related, university, social, peer-group activity (sports, social, peer study groups, etc.)
5. What are your academic, cultural and social interests? (such as: music, art, literature/books/magazines, dance, sports, festivals, movies, etc.)
6. When thinking about your friends, relationships and experiences with others over your life, who and what has influenced you the most to be academically successful? Please cite at least three memorable incidences/experiences or people.
7. What are your plans for next year?

Please be reassured that all responses are anonymous. The data collected will be held for the duration of the research project, it will be held securely online and will be permanently deleted once the research project has been completed.

You may withdraw from this research at any time before, during or after completion of this written questionnaire and the interview that follows. This written questionnaire and the interview will be anonymised.

Thank you for your time.

Please e-mail the completed questionnaire to: stella.mcknight@winchester.ac.uk

Appendix 8 – Example of interview summary

Interview Summary (Colin)

Parents supportive of decision making but pushing him to get a first i.e., stand out from the crowd. As the interview unfolded it was evident that his parents had been very influential in his decision- making post 16 and again at post 18. This compares with other DA learners – what was going on in the world at that time/influencing the get a job/no debt thinking?

Capital gain and awareness of standing out from the crowd at 16 when making choices. **Getting a head start!** Also gave himself two options sports coaching and business and IT – why two potential routes? Perhaps fear of failure or self-image with peers? This resonates with several DA learners who identified how parents pushed them to achieve. Parental approval is important, and it is his parent who are setting targets.

Two main factors driving Colin's post 18 decisions are earning and having a career – other factors are not really a part of the decision process. He believes his peers were driven by the same as he was – getting a head start with their career and earning money. There was no expectation for him to go to Uni from his parents. However, he believed that at that time the 'norm' was to go to uni as there were limited alternatives available to him other than getting a job – so why didn't he either plan to go to university or plan to get a job – parental influence? His parents didn't go to Uni but commented positively on the apprenticeship route over the university route although not qualified from a position of 'informed experience'. So, was this because it was funded or led to employment? His sister is first in the family to go to Uni he is second.

He states he wants a degree but getting a job to earn was a more powerful pull factor. Unlike others he is very aware that the debt factor of full-time study is not as influential due to the regulation meaning it is paid back over a very long time – he doesn't therefore, factor that into his decision as much as others interviewed have. He states that having a degree is a 'Big Thing' – he also states that he has pride in his achievements which suggests he considers he has earned a degree and the degree is recognition of hard work and/or of his capability.

Careers Advice – barely mentioned but his college had made him aware of DA as an option post-18 and invited his employer into the college even though this school in the location is recognised as one that encourages post-18 progressions through going to university.

Stigma - He was unaware of stigma related to apprenticeships until reading the extract. He was adamant that his experience of the DA has not matched this and feels it has been the opposite

on many levels. He wasn't aware of stigma, so it was not seen as a barrier or part of the decision-making process – perhaps it is historical baggage of the previous generation – although his parents don't appear to have this view, nor had they raised it with him.

Repeated adamantly that his DA experience has been a good one – implying it has met his expectations and needs i.e., getting the degree, earning while learning and starting his career. He stated that once he had mastered time management, he was able to cope with the demands of being an apprentice. Nevertheless, he still had to work late into the evening to work on his assessments which suggests that the benefits outweighed any negatives. Perhaps this is where he sees this as an opportunity that he may not have again suggesting that how 'badly' one wants the degree is a measure of what one is prepared to go through to attain it. Alongside the above he mentions competing with his peers however, it is not clear if this is due to any pressures related to the workplace i.e., others from his company being on the same programme and him wanting to stand out from the crowd or if it is down to his own 'image' and position with his peers. Interestingly he feels he is competing with his peers at uni – is this because there are some from the same company or is it about his personal 'brand' amongst his peers?

Support from the business specifically from his manager has been key not only to his success but also suggests it is key in support as he has recognised the value he placed on having a 'champion' in the business. This also suggests the on-off experience is beneficial in providing DA learners with support however, it may be that it is down to the manager's approach and/or experience of apprenticeship learning and challenges. Pro-active in support of those coming behind him on a DA – the support he offers suggests he has pinpointed the challenges of a DA but also recognised the pressure placed on these individuals to perhaps not only do well for themselves but, also when compared to their peers (especially in same company)

There is also something in what Colin suggests in terms of those on the DA not being resilient in coping with lower than expected grades or alternatively it could be in terms of 'fear' of failure or pressure to perform placed on them by the business i.e. to perform to/meet their expectations?

There is no mention of networking as such but drawing on manager, being pro-active in asking for support and having someone to '*unblock the blockers*'.

Keen to undertake a Masters level study but it suggests only if his employer is prepared to support i.e., by financing it or giving time off for study as in the DA model. This raises a question in my mind as to whether those who have studied a sponsored DA would ever

consider paying for education and/or training in the future. Colin feels confident in his ability to be successful at Masters level, however, his narrative suggests he feels secure in having a career and sustained employment and therefore there is no pressure from a career perspective to undertake additional study. This suggests he doesn't see additional qualifications as necessary for next stage career progression or holding him back in his career. He likes the thought of doing a Masters as no one in his family has achieved this - not even his older sister. He denies familial competitivity but, given that he and his sister are both sports enthusiasts it suggests there may be an element of competitiveness or perhaps as the younger child being the first in family to achieve – he states that he would be proud to achieve a Masters level qualification. Pride in achievements – against the odds perhaps?

He and his peers were aware of wider opportunities to engage in a fuller university experience i.e., social – he, and they, chose not to. He suggested it was one thing too many to take on in addition to the role, study and maintaining existing personal social relationships. He didn't mention any social activities provided by his employer.

Capital gain

At aged 21 he and his girlfriend have just secured a mortgage and bought a house. He is proud of the fact that neither he nor his girlfriend studied full-time but have achieved this. He sees himself in a better position than those who studied a degree full-time – this is clearly important – perhaps because he 'found' this option and others didn't or just the financial position. Not sure if this feeling of pride is in his achievements or the fact that he hasn't had to pay for it – the narrative suggests the latter. Also, I get a sense of him feeling 'superiority' when he makes a comparison with his sister and boyfriend who both attended university as full-time students and will struggle to get a mortgage with the volume of their combined debt. He clearly sees himself in a better position than his sister.

There is a question here regarding capital – can it be in terms of confidence gained because of the process or is this an example of **social mobility**? I gained a sense at the end of the interview that the opportunity provided by his employer has been put aside i.e., that the employer had sponsored him by paying for the degree and giving him time off-the-job to study has been forgotten and that his success is due to 'self' – perhaps this is the biggest value add/capital add. Moreover, at the end of this process having secured a first-class Hons degree, that he is proud of his achievement, he also wants others to know of his achievements, to tell his story, of how he has accrued much added capital - which he lists as **capital gain.** I found myself asking - was this achievement against the odds, did he previously lack confidence in his

ability to do a degree – was that why he chose two routes so that he had more than one option at post 16 so that at the end he could be successful in one and ignore the other? In listing **capital gain** there was no mention of the value of the apprenticeship - as a qualification this was never mentioned.

Colin recognised the benefits of networking and key people/ roles (i.e., mentor and manager) of those in the business who supported him in what appeared to be guiding him in doing the right things to progress his career. He mentioned the university as having supported him, but it appeared as an afterthought which is interesting and raises several questions in terms of how the Training Provider/University is viewed in the process – just a service that is taken for granted perhaps?

Appendix 9: An example of preliminary notes during data familiarisation.

Participants often mention competing with their peers however, it is not clear if this is due to any pressures related to the workplace i.e., others from his company being on the same programme and the participant wanting to stand out from the crowd or if it is down to his own 'image' and position with his peers?

Many of the participants state they have support from the business specifically from their manager. This is identified as key to their success. Participants appear to recognise and place value on having a 'champion' in the business.

This also suggests the on-off experience is beneficial in providing DA learners with support however, it may be that it is down to the manager's approach and/or experience of apprenticeship learning and challenges.

Some participants are being pro-active in support of those coming behind them in undertaking a degree apprenticeship – the support offers suggest they have pinpointed the challenges of a degree apprenticeship but also recognise the pressure placed on these individuals to perhaps not only do well for themselves but, also when compared to their peers (especially in same company)

There is also something suggested by a couple of participants in terms of those on the degree apprenticeship not being resilient in coping with lower than expected grades or alternatively it could be in terms of 'fear' of failure or pressure to perform placed on them by the business i.e. to perform to/meet their expectations.

There is often no direct mention of networking, but a number speak of drawing on their manager or being pro-active in asking for support and having someone to *'unblock the blockers'.*

Many participants are repeatedly adamant that their degree apprenticeship experience has been a good one – implying it has met expectations and needs i.e., getting the degree and/or financially.

Appendix 10: Interview extract illustrating initial notes and links to research objectives

Extract from Interview	Initial Notes	Questions Raised
I was like I don't want to start university or go down that path because I think like in second year of college they're very pushy to uni to make you do a personal statement saying you need to think about university and I said hold on a minute	Rebelling against conforming to educational norms	Is the college an influencing factor in choosing the degree apprenticeship?
Basically my parents just wanted the best for me um allowed me to do what I wanted to do within reason as long as it was the right decision for me um I was going to do A levels and then on the day I just said 'no I'm not doing it'	Parental influence but also making own decisions about future with parental support	What drove this change of mind?
I was open-minded; I had to be I was moving away from home at 18 so that's what you had to be open-minded about every opportunity that you were going to undertake.	Interesting use of words here – 'open-minded' Suggests happy to take risks. The nature of young people's participation in Higher Education	Is this 'choice' an example of bridging social capital?
So obviously we didn't really have that social interaction outside of university cos we were all working full-time and we weren't living on campus.	Limited opportunity to network and build capital	Is this a potential barrier to these learners acquiring social capital and potential upward social mobility?

Appendix 11 – An illustration of the multi-faceted and complex factors influencing enrolment onto, experiences and reflections on the degree apprenticeship

For one degree apprentice, Peter, there are six diverse factors influencing his enrolment onto the degree apprenticeship. These correspond to the pull of the degree apprenticeship as a second chance opportunity following his recent educational '*under-performance*', his wanting financial stability achieved through debt avoidance and maximising his earnings potential so that he can get ahead of his perceived competitors in securing a high-salary, high-status job. In choosing the degree apprenticeship Peter rebelled against the pressure exerted towards the traditional degree route by his school careers advisors. In recognising the complex employment landscape, he chose a route that provided a balance between risk and security and offered a way to '*give something back*' to his adopted mother who '*put a lot into [him] when [he] was younger'.* These factors are illustrated in the following figure, aligned to the sub-themes developed in the study.

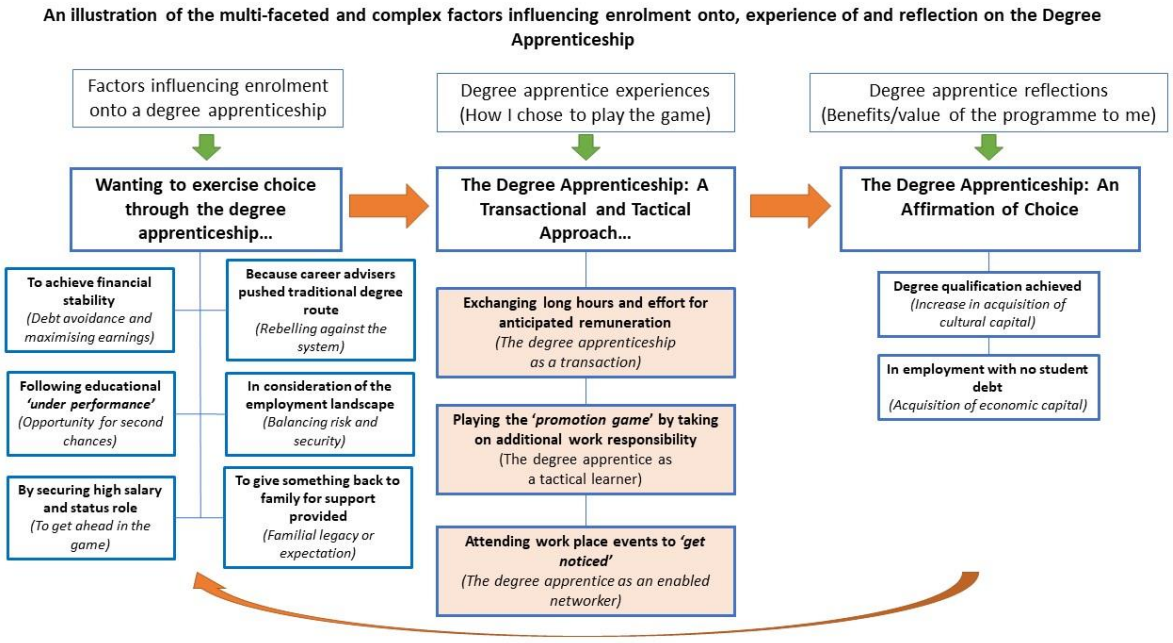

Figure 26- An Illustration of the multi-faceted and complex factors influencing enrolment onto, experience of and reflection on the degree apprenticeship

Analysis of Peter's interview data in relation to his experience of the degree apprenticeship highlights Peter's frustration in relation to imposed workplace promotional frameworks that stifled his promotion and pay despite his personal perception that he was 'playing the promotion game' (tactical learner) by regularly attending workplace events and '*getting*

noticed' (enabled networker) and by going '*above and beyond [his] workplace role responsibilities*' (transactional approach). This created a conundrum for Peter in feeling that the exchange of his effort with remunerations was not a fair transaction.

Analysis of Peter's interview data also revealed his struggle in financially supporting himself having made the choice to leave home to live locally to his workplace. Added to which he became '*exhausted*' and '*demotivated*' by the long days which due to the nature of the role, required him to travel away from his base office. Long days to get to the university exacerbated the situation. He says he had to find a way '*balancing work with study'* or he would need to consider *'giving up*'. The tensions in Peter's experience of the degree apprenticeship are illustrated in Figure 27.

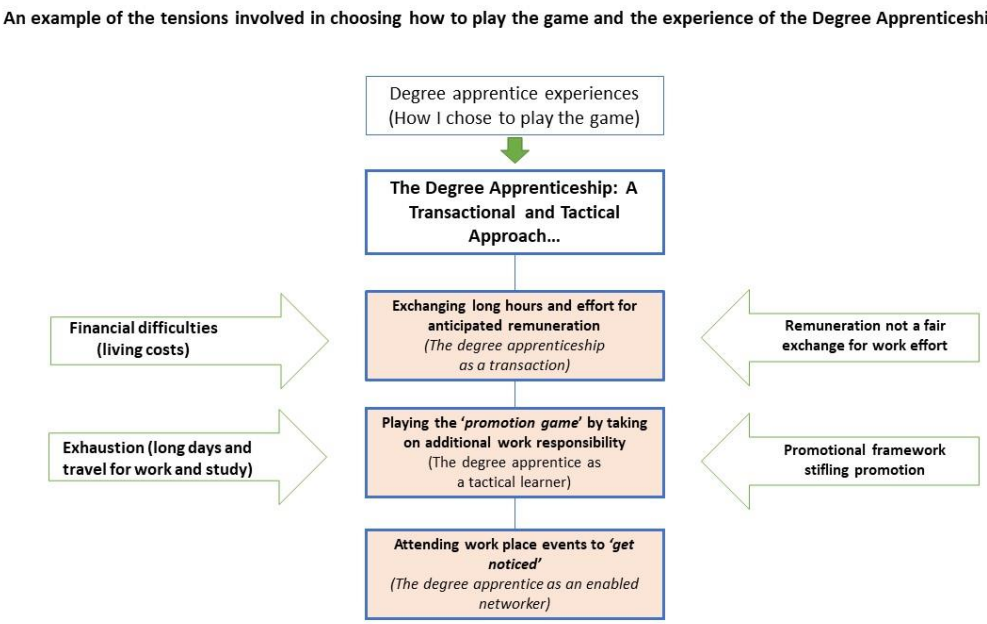

Figure 27 - An example of the tensions involved in choosing how to play the game and the experience of the degree apprenticeship.

Graham, 'first in his family' to study a degree at university attracted to the degree apprenticeship by two main factors; financial in not having to pay for the degree and the consequent concomitant savings of being employed locally, together with *'getting a degree and the benefit that goes with that'.* Whilst Graham had to travel for three hours to attend his off-the-job learning, his work was on-site, and he felt '*lucky*' in that his employer had '*always gone above and beyond in supporting both [his] academic studies and [his] work*'. Nevertheless, in comparing his experience to that of one of his friends who had studied a degree via the traditional route, he considered his learning experience to be '*a lot more intense*'. He says he made '*social sacrifice*' in missing out on social activities. However, by way of affirmation of his

choice he felt the '*sacrifice was worth it'* and concluded, having successfully achieved his degree apprenticeship that while the degree apprenticeship experience is '*a mix*' [referring to benefits and challenges] a degree apprenticeship remains '*a great choice'*.