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Impact of Change Management on Minority Foundation Students' Ethnic Identity in China

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Abstract

This study illustrated the practical pedagogy of ethnic identity for minority foundation students. In order to identify sustainable change management of ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) for minority foundation students, the study conducted a qualitative approach to explore the factors that have impacts on the ethnic identity of minority foundation students. By analyzing related literature, the study found that five categories in change management with ESD impact ethnic identity in four dimensions. Thus, a conceptual framework was generated, a strategy for sustainable change management of ESD for those students based on their ethnic identities.

Keywords: Change Management; Ethnic Identity; Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

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1.0 Introduction

Understanding 'self' and 'the others' as identity construction promotes the coherence of cultural exchange, which leads to in-depth consideration of identity change. The discussion of 'identity construction' has been a hot topic during the last decades, especially in the educational section, integrated with ideology and discourse analysis (Challinor, 2012; Sedgwick, 2015). Thus, this research concentrated on the ethnicity of foundation students, whether the management of higher education institutions changed their identity, and how it would be changed through the embodiment of those students' behaviour and performances.

The foundation year is significant to minority students to determine their view of the world, values, and life (Zhang, 2019). Zhang (2019) further discussed higher education's crucial role in forming students' views of the world, values, and life in China. During the foundation year, those Chinese minority students moved from their hometowns, mainly in the border areas, to big cities in east coast areas with highly developed economies. Those students must take a one-year pre-university study to fill the bridge between high school and college. Moreover, as they are from minority groups in China, the entry requirements for universities are lower than others if they choose to take the foundation year.

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Meanwhile, universities also have unique regulations towards minority foundation students. Thus, this research aims to analyze the aspects of change management from universities that would impact minority foundation students' ethnic identity. Furthermore, to determine which dimensions of ethnic identity would be shaped by change management in higher educational institutions in China.

1.1 Problem Statement

Recent studies contained the analysis of 'identity' mainly focused on gender, class, and connecting ethnicity with these sensitive dimensions (Culley & Demaine, 2006). Language as the invisible representation has been introduced into these debates to discuss the internal connection during the last few decades. Linguistics approaches were widely used from a pragmatic view of identity construction/reconstruction or a critical discourse analysis of identity recognition (Kayongo-Male & Lee, 2004; Cai Wang, 2018; Gu et al., 2019). On the other hand, sociologists intend to facilitate identity change by utilizing change management. Shoham and Perry (2009) explored models for educational change by transforming universities from 'knowledge institutions' to 'learning institutions' by constructing a model of organization-wide technological changes in higher education institutions. Previous studies, whether emphasizing students' identity construction, paid much more attention to the change of themselves but little to the outer circle or discussed change management from organizational aspects, institutions, or educators, may need to combine with the students. This study focused on the identity change in the organizational area by teachers and educators and was thought of as an external perspective. From an internal perspective, it considered academic achievement of minority foundation students for their ethnic identity construction.

1.2 Theoretical Model

According to Ratana et al. (2020), change management theories could be divided into three periods: before the 1990s, during the 1990s and the new ones. When analyzing the functions of the university and its implications towards ethnic foundation students, organizational change management has to be considered in depth. As discussed above, change management theories have been developed throughout comprehensive disciplines with multiple approaches. In education, especially in higher education, change management would be discussed for its subject of change and under its contexts with individuals and their interactions (Rieg et al., 2021). This could generate organizational structures by shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Rieg, Gatersleben and Christie (2021) constructed the conceptual framework of organizational change management for sustainability in higher education institutions (HEIs), as listed in Figure 1. The figure, divided into four themes, is analyzed with context, content, process, and leadership these factors.

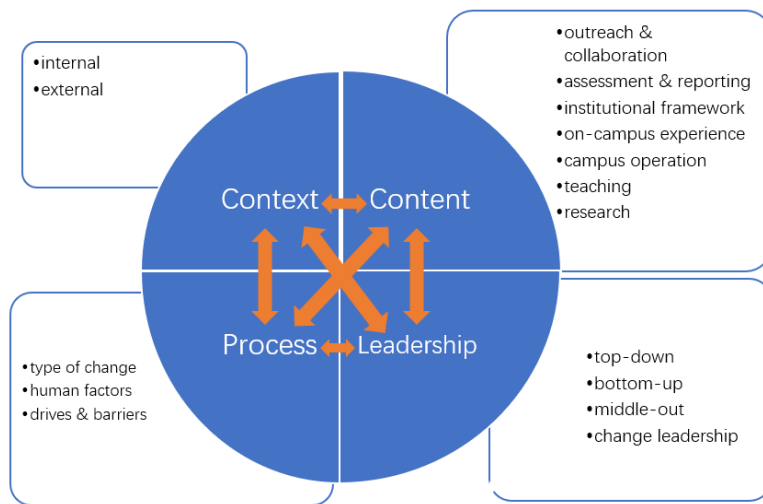


Fig. 1: Framework of organizational change management for sustainability in HEIs, adapted from Rieg et al. (2021).

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Development of Change Management Models

Contemporary change management theories do not only focus on change as a process but also emphasize change elements. The management model Mc Kinsey 7S Framework constructed in the 1980s represented structure, strategy, system, skills, style, staff, and shared values (Singh, 2013). With the development of technology, change no longer relied on planned management but became much more unforeseen and unpredictable (Ratana et al., 2020). Based on Lewin's three-step model, Judson (1991) has extended the model into five steps to analyze organizational change resistance. Kanter et al. (1992) constructed a ten-step model to challenge Lewin's three-step model. In which he included both organization and personal areas. Despite the planned type, change management became an emergent type. Simsek and Louis (1994) comprised an organizational change as a paradigm shift with five separate phases: normalcy, confronting anomalies, crisis, selection, and renewed normalcy in the higher education field.

Further research by Orlikowski and Yates (2006) pointed to 'making system workable' as a strategy which should be considered when dealing with material and with practice as an emphasis. Bridgman and Willmott (2006) agreed with this idea, who thought 'making system workable' was to deal with technologies in practice in an organization. Anderson and Anderson (2014) illustrated 'the

interrelatedness of context, people and process in the management of change'. Again, humans and technology were the key elements here. The interdependence of each element leads to an open, flexible and practical strategy towards change management (Ratana et al., 2020). Existing strategies could only solve changing issues in change situations.

In all, the change theories developed from mixed with organization management as a planned type, into a sophisticated emergent type with shifting from top-down to bottom-up approach, then became the one nowadays as a flexible process type with elements including human, technology, and strategy. The interplay of these elements makes the organization go further through the changing management, which reflects the implications of the change itself.

2.2 The Development of Ethnic Identity Models

Chasing the origin of identity theory, the psychoanalyst Erikson (1950), with his psychoanalytic theory 'ego psychology', has been adopted widely, introducing the core concept of ego identity. Identity is a guide "to indicate a more fundamental 'territory'" (Schwartz et al., 2011). Erikson (1968) constructed it into two measures. The first was the Ego Identity Incomplete Sentences Blank (EI-ISB). This measurement was to have an overview of ego identity in psychology, which contained self-reflection, a realistic sense of the future, commitment to occupation and ideology, self-initiated action, relatively safe expression of impulses, reformulation of childhood personality antecedents in adult terms, autonomy, group affiliation, social integration, and internal locus of self-evaluation (Marcia, 1964). The other measurement was a semi-structured interview named Identity Status Interview (ISI). This ISI interview question provided four groups of identity statuses: identity achievement, foreclosure, moratoriums, and identity diffusions. To expand the relationships between identity statuses and the variables that constructed identity validation, Marcia (1964) employed authoritarianism as the 'near' measurement and participants' susceptibility to positive or negative feedback from their performance of a difficult assignment. For 'far' measurement, it discussed the performance on a complex concept with stressful evaluation conditions. During these early studies, other variables were introduced, such as level of aspiration, self-esteem, anxiety, and parental antecedents.

Identity was considered a critical development (Erikson, 1968), which has been informed in various social areas. It often relates to an individual's culture of origin and is associated with their cultural values, attitudes, and behaviours (Phinney, 1996). China is considered integrated with 55 minority groups, and ethnic equality in all minority groups is the core value represented by the Chinese National Community. Ethnic identity among ethnic groups is curtailed under a multifaceted and complex construction, which could not be reduced to a self-identification icon (Pinney, 1996).

Phinney (1992) introduced the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess ethnic identity. This model combined the original three factors into one factor: intergrading exploration, resolution and affirmation of ethnic identity. While this was not clear enough to explain the individual's ethnic identity in each situation, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) examined multiple components of ethnic identity. They formed the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) model. With ESI taken into practice, many empirical studies were done, and it was discovered that there still is some space to be improved by the model. Under this circumstance, Phinney and Ong (2007) revised the version of MEIM into MEIM-R, which had two subscales: exploration and commitment. Both EIS and MEIM-R models examined individual components of ethnic identity. Besides, in EIS, familial was thought as the predictor, which had a strong implication for exploration and resolution of ethnic identity but has little to do with affirmation. Research done by Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) were the ones that proved this trend.

Moreover, these researchers also found that the growth of ethnic identity exploration predicted the growth of individuals' self-esteem. Based on these, Wu and Wang (2020) pointed out that minority foundation students' ethnic identity in China included national, ethnic, and educational domains. They further discussed 'ethnicity' as a group attribute, 'minority foundation students' as an individual attribute, and 'country' as a political attribute. The three attributes coexist and support each other. Within these discussions, ethnic identity for minority foundation students in Chinese educational institutions has been widely analyzed and gradually formed into an integrated topic.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

Through analyzing the contents of the literature articles, this study launched a qualitative approach to explore the conceptual framework generated in the literature review. The interview questions are typically open-ended, designed to get the answer with more details on the phenomenon. This study used semi-structured interviews with persuasive qualitative questions for collecting data. Interviewees were selected from ethnic minority foundation students in public universities in China. Six interviewees were chosen from different ethnic groups with different study years. The interview protocol was prepared and peer-proofed by colleagues and experts in this research area. Before tape recording all the interviews, interview regulations and consent forms were explained and signed. Researchers strictly followed the procedures of conducting semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Data Analysis Procedure

This study reported qualitative data with coding themes, which are powerful research forms for analyzing data from the positivist tradition (Cohen et al., 2002). This study generated several themes supported by the distant reading method for articles and book chapters from the literature. Three-level coding was introduced to study the data for interpreting manuscripts of the interviews—first, the initial coding, labelling each interview with detailed sentences. Then, axial coding, compare initial codes and generate themes into several concepts. Finally, generate main themes with conceptual codes according to the axial codes and make them into a theoretical level. Because all the interviews were conducted in Chinese, the manuscripts translated into English may need to be clarified, which may be a research

limitation. Due to the time and cost of expenses, the research conducted only six interviews, which may not represent the whole picture of the research objectives. This limitation could be a consideration for further study.

4.0 Findings

The research identified the university's role in preserving the cultural practice within their minority foundation students by change management and, therefore, found dimensions which shape the ethnic identity of those students. As analyzed above, this study found that the impacts of change management were categorized into five aspects, and their function on ethnic identity for those minority foundation students lay in four dimensions. Details are listed below in Figure 2.

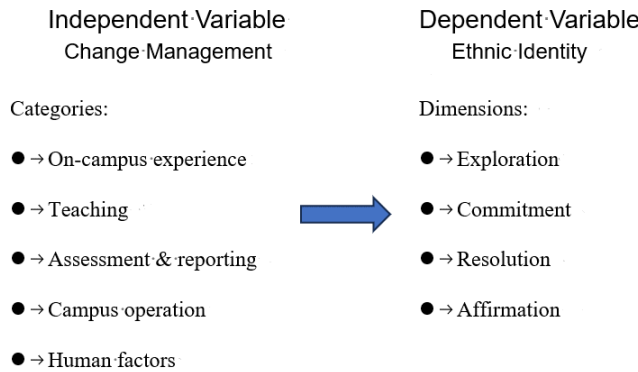


Fig. 2: Conceptual Framework

Divided into five categories, change management as the independent variable in this research, was interpreted for institution's facilities as on-campus experience for students; curriculum settings and teaching staff quality as teaching for educators; ethnic foundation students courses marks as assessment and reporting; the ethnic foundation classes set up in the university as campus operation for administrators and university organizational managers; and change of ethnic identity from internal factors, which contains same ethnic group's identity construction, and different minority ethnic groups in between identity construction, as well as external factor, that is the majority group's impact on ethnic identity construction. Along with materials gathered from the independent variable, it emphasized ethnic identity as a dependent variable lies in four dimensions, which are the exploration factor for ethnic foundation students' self-esteem, commitment factor for their self-conception, resolution factor for the change of self-esteem and self-concept; and affirmation factor for the change of stereotype threat for those students in particular universities. Thus, a conceptual framework was generated according to the interview data.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Sustainable Change Management in Chinese HEIs

With the promotion of ESD by UNESCO, the Chinese government set up an official agency for supporting the progress of ESD, that is, the Chinese National Working Committee for UNESCO on ESD (CNWCESD). Led by CNWCESD and other education experts and administrative leaders from all over the country, China accomplished ten main tasks for implementing the UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD (Wang & Shi, 2020). Among these, "promoting the research on curriculum, teaching and learning innovation" (p.106) becomes one of the critical tasks. From 2015 to 2019, CNWCESD devoted to working with its partners on ESD-oriented curriculum, teaching and learning innovation, and guidance throughout all the provinces in China. This top-level design of theoretical and practical research based on the Chinese characteristics of ESD has implemented that the educational reform in China turned its trend of development in education to the field of sustainability, which focused on sustainable curriculum, sustainable learning, teaching settings, and ESD districts.

Because of the Chinese government's discourse on promoting a sustainable development strategy, higher education institutions were in the critical stages of implementing the policy. Under the spirit of the document Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030) formulated by UNESCO 2018, the CNWCESD proposed suggestions for promoting ESD in the next ten years, one of which indicated that "colleges and universities should strengthen ESD-focused curriculum design and compile textbooks and study books" (Wang & Shi, 2020, p.108). As such, sustainable change management in Chinese higher education could only be implemented with an ESD-oriented curriculum, teaching and learning innovation, and textbook compiling.

Hence, the reform of HEIs requires sustainable change in assessment and reporting dimensions. China launched a national plan for implementing Agenda 2030 by UNESCO, which integrated ESD into educational systems (Zhang, 2019). Among these, Du and his team researchers (2020) constructed a framework of sustainable assessment tools for higher education institutions and identified education as one of the dimensions assessed by curriculum, teaching, and training for students and staff as indicators. Meanwhile, they also addressed two aspects, campus engagement and public engagement, as indicators for the engagement dimension of the

assessment. Hence, the reform of HEIs requires a sustainable change in teaching, campus operation, on-campus experience and assessment and reporting dimensions. With insights from these studies, few researchers have paid attention to ESD implementation in minority education, particularly in minority foundation education. Foundation year, a particular year for students linking high school life with college and university studies plays an essential role in higher education. No doubt, analysis of minority foundation education is necessary when considering any organizational changes from higher education institutions.

5.2 Sustainable change management in the education of Chinese foundation minority students

Within the discussion of the implementation of ESD, university teachers were considered pioneers in practice to promote ESD in higher education (Qi et al., 2020). From the acknowledgement of ESD in curriculum design to teachers' professional identification, most research emphasized examining teachers' status and the impacts of their working surroundings. Less research has been focused on the subjects of students, among which minority foundation students were the least, as Su & He (2020) suggested that minority education was the embodiment of equitable quality education to improve ESD. Ethnic minority students faced more difficulties in academics than their mainstream counterparts. The data obtained from Geng & Zhao (2020) indicated that the self-efficacy of minority foundation students was a significant predictor of academic achievement, which was influenced by those students' self-esteem, commitment to their ethnic identity and attitudes toward stereotypes from the dominant group. To make it comprehensive, Geng and his team continued to construct a 7E framework to evaluate sustainable higher education in China, a significant part of which highlighted education on minority foundation students as a reasonable explanation of equity and equality. It also reflected the instructions that UNESCO promoted in the declaration of ESD in 2018 (Geng et al., 2020).

However, neither Qi., et al. (2020) analyzed from the perspective of university teachers nor Geng and his research team, Su & He (2020) emphasized ethnic minority students to promote equality and equity for ESD; none of them took minority foundation students as their research participants for examination. From the framework addressed by Rieg et al. (2021), to have sustainable organizational change management in higher education institutions, human factors, as one dimension, played a crucial role in implementing the change. Hence, minority foundation students as participants of the research, the human factors from change management contain those students' identity from the same ethnic group, identity from different groups, and identity from significant group. As a creatively added sub-construct, all of these affect exploration, commitment, resolution, and affirmation of the ethnic identity of minority foundation students.

Meanwhile, the above research neglected education policy as a primary factor that impacted the process of sustainable organizational change management in HEIs. IPE, launched by the Chinese Ministry of Education, was such a top-down policy embedded in all aspects of the education system (Cao, 2021). Thus, the function of IPE under the ESD circumstances must be considered while analyzing the relationship between HEI management change and minority foundation students' identity construction. Cao (2021) intended to advocate a practical path for integrating IPE into minority foundation pedagogy. However, he only examined components from teachers' lack of consideration of IPE's influences on minority foundation students and in-class interactions between teachers and students under its function of IPE. Other research did not frame any comprehensive analysis on IPE functioned with the connection between sustainable change management and the identity of minority foundation students. In that case, IPE as a moderator has been considered while exploring interactions between sustainable change management and the identity of minority foundation students in HEIs.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

In sum, to obtain sustainable change management for HEIs, assessment and reporting would be the significant indicators that impacted the identity reconstruction of minority foundation students, from their commitment and resolution. Although literacy education has been carried out for a long time in Chinese public universities, students themselves still consider exam marks to be the principal factor that impacts their commitment and resolution of their ethnic identity. By considering both the criteria of assessment and equality of assessment, ethnic minority students are much more focused on their academic performance. In contrast, it may neglect the study environment, like campus operation, teaching, on-campus experience and the human factor. Assessment and reporting should take priority with the discussion of sustainable change management in ESD. For those ethnic minority students, their ethnic identity is reflected through their academic marks, which indicates it as the result of exam-oriented education. Hence, stakeholders, teachers, and staff in Chinese public universities must pay much more attention to ESD and formulate proper coping strategies for the sustainability of change management.

A revised conceptual framework was generated according to the data, which reflected the situation of sustainable change management of ESD for particular ethnic minority students in Chinese public universities. This module could be a small contribution to public universities, considering their management of minority foundation students. Due to the limited sample scale and responses, this study may not embody the whole picture of the impacts of change management on minority students' ethnic identity. Results may be varied when enlarging the sample size. Utilizing different research methods may also explore findings of other factors and variables affected by change management and ethnic identity. Moreover, whether there is any educational policy as a mediator that could be functional in line with this conceptual framework may be a new direction for further studies.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Change Management; Ethnic Identity

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