Implications of Intersectionality on First-Generation International Students' Educational Experience at Oxford University

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MSc in Education (Higher Education), 2024

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout the journey of completing this dissertation.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Prof. Simon Marginson, for his invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insightful feedback. His expertise and dedication have been instrumental in shaping this research, and I am profoundly grateful for his support.

I am also deeply thankful to my family for their unwavering love and encouragement. Their belief in me has been a constant source of motivation and strength throughout my academic journey.

To my partner, thank you for your endless patience, understanding, and emotional support. Your belief in me has been a source of comfort and inspiration during the challenging times.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my friends, whose support and camaraderie have made this journey more enjoyable. Your encouragement and understanding have been invaluable, and I am truly grateful to have you in my life.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the participants who contributed to this research. Your willingness to share your experiences and insights has been crucial to the success of this study.

Thank you all for your support and belief in me.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the educational experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University, focusing on their academic and social integration, coping mechanisms, and the effectiveness of institutional support. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 graduate students and 5 welfare officers to gather in-depth insights. Thematic analysis revealed several key themes, including the unique challenges faced by these students, their strategies for coping with academic pressures, and the disparities in support services across different colleges.

The findings highlight the compounded difficulties stemming from the intersection of being both first-generation and international students, such as cultural adaptation, financial stress, and feelings of invisibility within the university's support system. Participants emphasized the need for more proactive and inclusive support measures, suggesting that the institution should adopt a more personalized approach to address their specific needs. The study also underscores the importance of fostering a sense of belonging to enhance student engagement and success.

This research contributes to the existing literature on intersectionality in higher education and provides practical recommendations for improving support systems and policies to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for first-generation international students at prestigious institutions like Oxford University.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The internationalization of higher education has significantly diversified university populations worldwide, introducing a variety of cultural, social, and economic backgrounds among students. This increasing diversity in higher education has also highlighted the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups, such as first-generation international students. These students navigate a range of challenges related to cultural adaptation, academic expectations, financial constraints, and social integration. The intersectional lens applied in this research underscores the compounded effects of being both first-generation and international students, revealing unique disadvantages and systemic barriers.

Oxford University, known for its prestigious reputation and rigorous academic environment, attracts a considerable number of international students, including some who are the first in their families to attend university. These students bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the university community but also face unique challenges that require tailored support and interventions. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective support systems and policies that promote equity and inclusion in higher education institutions.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite the increasing diversity within university populations, there remains a limited understanding of the specific challenges faced by first-generation international students. Existing literature often treats first-generation students and international students as separate entities, failing to address the compounded challenges faced by those who belong to both categories. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the

educational experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University, focusing on their academic and social integration, coping mechanisms, and suggestions for university improvement.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the educational experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University?
2. What coping mechanisms do these students employ to navigate their challenges?
3. What are the perceptions of welfare officers regarding the support needs of first-generation international students?
4. How can Oxford University improve its support systems to better assist first-generation international students?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research holds significance for multiple reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of literature by addressing the intersectional experiences of first-generation international students, thereby filling a notable gap in academic discourse. Secondly, it provides nuanced insights into the unique challenges faced by these students at a prestigious institution like Oxford University, offering valuable information for university administrators and policymakers. Thirdly, the findings of this research have practical implications for higher education institutions, particularly in enhancing support services and fostering inclusive environments for underrepresented student populations.

1.5 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is organized into six chapters, each serving a distinct purpose:

1. Introduction: This chapter introduces the research topic, outlines the problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, and provides an overview of the dissertation structure.
2. Literature Review: This chapter reviews existing literature on first-generation students, international students, and the intersection of these identities, identifying gaps that this research aims to address.
3. Methodology: This chapter details the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.
4. Findings: This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with students and welfare officers.
5. Discussion: This chapter interprets the findings in the context of existing literature, exploring the implications and significance of the results.

By systematically exploring the experiences of first-generation international students through the lens of intersectionality, this dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by underrepresented students in higher education and to inform the development of more effective support systems and policies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by presenting intersectionality theories as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Then, it offers a survey of previous studies on intersectionality in higher education settings, first-generation college students, socioeconomic status in higher education, international students' experiences and institutional support for underrepresented students respectively. In navigating this scholarly terrain, we not only engage in a critical analysis of the current state of academic discourse, but also identify critical gaps. This section also proves the pressing need of adopting the lens of intersectionality to look at the experiences of an under-represented group of students -- first-generation college students who study abroad.

2.2.1 Intersectionality: Conceptual Framework

This section serves as the cornerstone of our inquiry, delving into the theoretical framework that underpins this dissertation—intersectionality. Initially rooted in feminist scholarship, originating from the African-American women's movements in the 1960s to 1970s and later evolving into Critical Race Theory, intersectionality theory offers a multidimensional approach to understanding how social categories such as race, class, and gender interact and influence individuals' identities and experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). This theoretical framework has been recognized as a gold standard for analyzing the experiences of identity and oppression, capturing the intricate ways in which various factors intersect to produce social inequality (Nash, 2008). It goes beyond binary categories, emphasizing a spectrum of intersecting identities and recognizing the interconnectedness of age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, and sexual orientation (P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2020). Moreover, as McCall (2005) points out, intersectionality is not

only an analytical concept but also is connected with methodological approaches that explores the relationships between power and inequality in society.

Intersectional invisibility is a vital model addressing the experiences of individuals situated at the crossroads of multiple marginalized social identities. Coined by Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), this concept underscores that systems of oppression not only elevate certain social groups but also render members of other groups invisible. The normative standards defined by androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism contribute to this invisibility, silencing the voices of those with intersecting marginalized identities (Greenway et al., 2022). This invisibility manifests across historical narratives, cultural schemas, political advocacy, and legal jurisprudence, creating disadvantages in various domains (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). As revealed by the research of Jacqueline Mattis and her colleagues (2008),the complex nature of intersectional invisibility underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals with multiple disadvantaged group memberships, amplifying the vulnerability to negative experiences, including poverty, mental health issues, violence, and systemic neglect.

While the initial focus of this theory was on intersecting social-group memberships leading to unique forms of oppression, scholars like Cole (2009) and Shields (2008) emphasize that intersecting social positions can also bring privilege and opportunity, at least relative to certain groups who are more oppressed and discriminated. Beyond that, some researchers also have proved that individuals can be marginalized in one identity aspect while enjoying privilege based on another, resulting in complex intersectional social positions (Cole, 2009; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Greenway et al., 2022; Shields, 2008). For example, White women may experience privilege due to their race while facing oppression based on gender (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). This nuanced understanding adds depth to intersectionality, acknowledging its capacity to encompass both oppression and advantage within individuals' experiences.

2.2.2 Intersectionality Study in Higher Education

This section delves into the intersectionality studies within the realm of higher education, highlighting key research themes, methodologies, and areas of contention. Intersectionality theory, as mentioned in the above section, originally rooted in feminist scholarship and Critical Race Theory, has gained prominence in higher education research for its nuanced exploration of how various social categories intersect to shape individuals' experiences within academic settings.

Since its inception in higher education research, intersectionality has been motivated by an ethical imperative to promote equity within societies through educational institutions (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Jaggar (1997) exemplified this stance by employing an intersectional perspective to critique the admissions policies of the University of California. Fernandez et al. (2022) have also demonstrated that applying intersectionality as a conceptual lens to law school admissions is crucial for understanding the unique challenges and experiences of Black women applicants. These admissions policies, lacking explicit consideration of social class, race, ethnicity, or gender, especially ignoring the compounded disadvantages experienced by students who have multiple identity categories, were criticized for perpetuating inequities.

Numerous studies within higher education have utilized intersectionality as a lens to examine the complex interplay of social identities among students, faculty, and staff (Berrington et al., 2016; P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2020; Fernandez et al., 2022; Gonzales et al., 2013; Hearn, 2012; Hunt et al., 2012; Ramirez, 2013; Sawyer III & Palmer, 2014; Seelman, 2014; Wilkins, 2014a). Among this cohort of papers, gender, race and social class have been the most researched vectors in the context of higher education (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Specifically, there is a notable focus on examining how gender intersects with ethnicity, particularly concerning the experiences of marginalized groups within Westernized higher education environments. For instance, Hernandez et

al. (2015) have investigated the impact of both individual identity as immigrant women of color and broader social and institutional factors within the realm of US higher education on their academic experiences as both graduate students and later faculty and leaders. And in the research of Gonzales et al. (2013), it centers on the representation and encounters of Latina academics in the United States, particularly those who are affiliated with Hispanic Serving Institutions. Besides, there is also an emerging consideration of sexuality in the research of higher education (Bennett et al., 2016; Chou et al., 2015; Miller, 2015; Rockenbach et al., 2016).

In mainstream higher education research, there is often an emphasis on assessing strategies solely based on their effectiveness in improving outcomes such as retention rates and grade point averages (Millea et al., 2018). However, adopting an intersectional approach challenges this narrow focus on outcomes, as it questions the instrumental view that sees the primary goal of higher education as serving the interests of the individual and the nation state within a competitive global market context (Nichols & Stahl, 2019).

In terms of aspects of higher education, intersectional studies have examined diverse settings where participants engage, such as classrooms (Vaccaro, 2017; Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020; Wånggren & Sellberg, 2012), academic departments (Pifer, 2011; Smooth, 2016), family dynamics (Jackson et al., 2022; Schmitz et al., 2020), and social gatherings (Harper et al., 2011; McCall, 2005b; Strayhorn, 2017). Analyses often explore multiple dimensions of academic, social, and personal experiences in higher education, revealing how intersecting advantages and disadvantages are shaped across academic and social spheres (Davis et al., 2023).

Most studies have underscored the importance of considering the intertwined dynamics of gender, race, and class in educational settings, emphasizing that academic achievement cannot be divorced from social and personal dimensions

(Nichols & Stahl, 2019). For instance, Wilkins (2014) compares the university experiences of first-generation male college students, highlighting how White students could adapt identity strategies more seamlessly compared to their Black counterparts, whose transition was fraught with emotional challenges despite strong academic records. Wilkins' analysis emphasizes the contextual constraints and facilitators of intersectional identity, particularly regarding ethnic and racial identity within the university context.

As for methodology, many studies in intersectionality have utilized interpretative and phenomenological methodologies, focusing on personal experiences. Case study and auto-ethnographic designs have been prevalent, emphasizing in-depth interviews and self-reflection to capture nuanced accounts. Some studies have employed statistical methods, while others analyzed institutional texts or utilized observation to investigate intersectionality within higher education contexts (Nichols & Stahl, 2019).

However, within the body of intersectionality research in higher education, there exist areas of disagreement and debate. Scholars may differ in their conceptualizations of intersectionality: some regard it as an academic tool and others see it as a means for addressing social inequalities. Additionally, scholars question whether the extension of intersectionality to many or all categories of identity renders it conceptually ambiguous. (Al-Faham et al., 2019). Some researchers critique the tendency to essentialize identities or prioritize certain axes of oppression, such as gender or race, over others, calling for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to intersectional analysis (McCall, 2005a).

Moreover, while intersectionality has provided valuable insights into the experiences of marginalized individuals within higher education, some scholars argue that its application in research and practice remains limited. Challenges such as data availability, methodological rigor, and the complexity of intersecting identities pose

ongoing obstacles to conducting comprehensive intersectionality studies (Bowleg, 2008).

Another aspect deserving attention within intersectionality research in higher education pertains to the absence of studies encompassing survey perspectives from welfare officers or pertinent faculty alongside those of college students. While existing research has delved into the experiences of students and faculty separately, there remains a notable gap in intersectional investigations that incorporate the insights of key stakeholders such as welfare officers and relevant faculty members.

In summary, intersectionality studies in higher education have contributed significantly to our understanding of how social identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences within academic settings, but more research is needed use the framework of intersectionality to look at the education experiences of underrepresented group of students such as first-generation international students.

2.3 First-Generation Students Studies

The discourse surrounding first-generation college students in scholarly literature reflects diverse perspectives, shaped in part by varying definitions used by researchers, educators, and practitioners (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). In the US, individuals labelled as 'first-in-family' or 'first generation' typically have parents without university degrees, though they may have attended college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Conversely, in the UK, Ireland, France, and Australia, research tends to merge the concept of first-generation status with broader issues like social class and access to higher education. Some researchers have adopted a narrower definition of first-generation college students, and they prefer to use “first-in-family” students to refer those individuals who are the first in their immediate family, encompassing parents, partners, children, and siblings, to pursue higher education at the university level (O’Shea et al., 2018). The ambiguity

surrounding familial structures further complicates these definitions, as scholars grapple with whether to include stepparents, foster parents, and adoptive parents (Stallworth et al., 2023). Consequently, the definition researchers employ significantly influences who receives attention in research, policy formulation, and educational practices (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). While acknowledging the heterogeneity of first-generation college students, it's noteworthy that the term is sometimes utilized as a substitute for affirmative action, masking deeper issues of educational equity, particularly concerning racial disparities (Sharpe, 2017). Failure to critically examine and refine the definition of first-generation college students risks overlooking the complexities within this population, hindering cohesive research efforts and potentially perpetuating inequitable policies and practices (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

Current first-generation students research primarily addresses inquiries related to various aspects such as pre-college attributes (Davis, 2010; Saenz, 2007), factors influencing mobility (Gofen, 2009; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019), choices regarding institution, degree programs, and subjects (Ball et al., 2002; O'Shea, 2016), experiences encountered by first-generation students at university (Paul Grayson, 2011; Thomas & Quinn, 2006), as well as their academic achievements (Petty, 2014; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).
Within this context, prevailing scholarly narratives often portray first-generation college students through a deficit lens, emphasizing their perceived shortcomings in academic preparedness and engagement compared to their peers (Davies & Rizk, 2018). This deficit-oriented perspective aligns with an assimilationist approach pervasive in higher education, where students are expected to conform to normative academic standards (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

Survey-based research methodologies, prevalent in studying first-generation students (Toutkoushian et al., 2018), often oversimplify their experiences, treating them as homogeneous entities rather than acknowledging their diverse backgrounds and

identities (Atherton, 2014). Such approaches obscure the nuanced realities of these students, perpetuate deficit-based assumptions, and underscore the need for a paradigm shift in research methodologies and theoretical frameworks, such as using intersectionality, to capture the multifaceted experiences of first-generation college students and challenge deficit-oriented narratives in academia (Godsoe, 2018).

2.4 Socioeconomic Status Studies in Higher Education

As we proceed to explore Socioeconomic Status (SES) Studies in Higher Education, it becomes evident that this research domain shares notable overlaps with the preceding examination of first-generation college students. For instance, Moschetti & Hudley (2015) demonstrate how the convergence of first-generation status and low SES compounds the challenges faced by these students within university contexts.

SES significantly influences students' experiences and outcomes in higher education. Defined by economic and social indicators, SES shapes access to resources and opportunities, contributing to persistent disparities within university settings. SES in higher education is understood through diverse lenses, with researchers employing varied definitions and measurement approaches (Hoff & Laursen, 2019). While some view SES as discrete social classes based on factors like education, income, and occupation, others conceptualize it as a continuous variable. Measures of SES range from single indicators like occupation or education to composite indices such as the Hollingshead indexes, which combine multiple variables. Researchers like Entwisle and Astone (1994) advocate for separately assessing household income, parental education, and family structure to better understand the distinct contributions of financial, human, and social capital to children's outcomes.

The concept of capital, encompassing financial, human, and social resources, has gained traction among researchers as a way to understand SES (Coleman, 1988). While

measures like household income and occupational status provide insights into financial capital, they only partially capture the broader concept. Additionally, expanding data collection to include indicators of social capital, such as family structure and social networks, can provide further insights into SES dynamics. However, the choice of SES measurement remains complex, influenced by the research question, data availability, and the characteristics of the studied population. It is also essential to recognize that SES indicators may vary in their performance across cultural groups (Ishii & Eisen, 2020).

The main two questions in the cohort of Socioeconomic Status (SES) in higher education are: academic attainment and performance and psychological experiences and barriers.

Research consistently documents the existence of attainment gaps between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies by Bellibas (2016) and Hanushek et al. (2019)

demonstrate that lower-SES students tend to have lower academic performance and higher dropout rates compared to their higher-SES counterparts. However, debates persist regarding the underlying mechanisms driving these disparities. While proponents of the "cultural deficit" perspective argue that lower-SES students lack the cultural capital necessary for academic success (Jury et al., 2017), critics contend that such explanations overlook structural barriers and systemic inequalities inherent in the education system (Destin et al., 2021; Krause et al., 2009).

There is recent scholarship shedding light on the psychological barriers confronting lower-SES students in higher education. Jury et al. (2017) illuminate the emotional toll of navigating university environments characterized by socio-economic disparities. Lower-SES students often grapple with feelings of inadequacy, imposter syndrome, and a sense of social isolation (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Moreover, intersectional analyses reveal how the convergence of race/ethnicity and SES exacerbates these challenges,

compounding the psychological burden on marginalized students (Ivcevic & Kaufman, 2013).

Though the majority of research revolves the study on lower-SES students, there is also research on the impact of higher-SES on college students' experiences and achievement in the context of higher education (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018). Besides, some SES-related research studies beyond students themselves but has expanded to look at institutional structures and cultural norms. University contexts are not culturally neutral but reflect entrenched middle and upper-class norms and values (Bunn et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2023). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that universities perpetuate social inequalities by privileging cultural capital associated with high-SES families. This cultural mismatch exacerbates the marginalization of low-SES students, hindering their academic and social integration within university settings. However, alternative perspectives challenge the deterministic view of cultural reproduction, highlighting the agency of individuals in navigating institutional structures (J. Collins, 2009).

2.5 Studies on International Students' Educational Experience

The educational experiences of international students have garnered significant attention in academic literature, and a prominent area of research focuses on the acculturation processes experienced by international students and the associated challenges and coping mechanisms. Koo et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study examining the acculturation trajectories of international students, highlighting the dynamic nature of cultural adaptation and the interplay between individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors. Similarly, some other research explored the challenges faced by international students in navigating academic, social, and cultural adjustments, identifying strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in cultural exchange programs, and developing cultural competence skills to facilitate

acculturation (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Lee & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2019; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sawir et al., 2008).

Additionally, there exists a rich body of literature that distinguishes between "assimilation" and "acculturation" (Fu, 2015; Lee & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2019). Assimilation refers to the process by which individuals adopt the cultural norms and values of the dominant group, often resulting in the loss or suppression of one's original cultural identity (Berry, 2008). In contrast, acculturation involves a more nuanced exchange of cultural traits between different cultural groups, allowing individuals to maintain aspects of their original cultural identity while also integrating elements of the new culture (Berry, 2017). Understanding the distinction between these concepts is essential for comprehensively analyzing the experiences of international students and their adaptation to new cultural environments. Moreover, Mahmood and Burke (2018) distinguish between "group level acculturation" and "individual level acculturation." Group level acculturation refers to the collective adaptation of a cultural group to a new environment, encompassing shared norms, values, and behaviors. Conversely, individual level acculturation focuses on the personal experiences and adaptations of individual members within the cultural group, recognizing variations in acculturation trajectories and outcomes based on factors such as personality, social support, and prior cultural exposure. By examining acculturation processes at both group and individual levels, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics of cultural adaptation among international students.

Furthermore, research has shown that students with similarities to the cultural background of the host nation were more likely to exhibit higher levels of sociocultural adaptation. For instance, Tomich et al. (2003) found that international students who shared linguistic or cultural similarities with the host nation's population reported greater ease in adapting to the social and cultural norms of the new environment. This suggests that factors such as language proficiency, cultural familiarity, and prior

exposure to the host nation's customs play a crucial role in facilitating acculturation processes among international students (Volet & Jones, 2012). Understanding these dynamics can inform targeted interventions and support mechanisms to enhance the sociocultural adaptation of diverse international student populations (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

As mentioned above, English language fluency also plays a role in shaping the educational and social experiences of international students (Garrison et al., 2023; Pham & Tran, 2015). Research has consistently highlighted the significance of language proficiency in academic success, social integration, and overall well-being among international student populations (Li et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2012; Rienties et al., 2012; Young et al., 2013). Students with higher levels of English language proficiency tend to experience fewer communication barriers in academic settings, enabling them to actively participate in class discussions, comprehend course materials, and perform better on assessments (Andrade, 2009). Additionally, proficient English speakers may have greater access to academic resources, such as research materials and academic support services, enhancing their learning outcomes and academic performance (Andrade, 2009). Furthermore, English language fluency facilitates social interactions and cultural adaptation, enabling international students to engage more effectively with peers, faculty, and members of the host community (Andrade, 2009). Conversely, limited English proficiency may pose challenges in both academic and social contexts, leading to feelings of isolation, frustration, and academic underachievement (Tavares, 2021). Understanding the impact of English language fluency on international students' educational and social experiences is crucial for designing targeted interventions and support services to enhance their overall academic success and well-being.

Increased social interactions and social support networks play a crucial role in shaping the educational and social experiences of international students (Sinanan & Gomes, 2020). Research suggests that active engagement with local students, other

international students, and faculty members fosters a sense of belonging and community, enhances cultural exchange, and promotes academic success (Aw et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015). Social interactions with local students facilitate cultural immersion, language acquisition, and cross-cultural friendships, providing international students with opportunities to broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of the host culture (Tran & Pham, 2016). Similarly, connections with other international students offer a sense of camaraderie and support, as peers share similar experiences and challenges related to acculturation and adjustment (Gómez et al., 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006). Moreover, building positive relationships with faculty members can contribute to academic engagement, mentorship opportunities, and access to academic resources, thereby enhancing academic performance and retention rates among international students (Atobatele et al., 2024). Additionally, the length of stay in the host country has been identified as a significant factor influencing international students' educational and social experiences (Imai, 2020; Vergara et al., 2010). Longer durations of stay provide international students with more opportunities for cultural immersion, language proficiency development, and social integration, leading to greater overall adaptation and satisfaction with the host environment. Conversely, shorter stays may limit opportunities for meaningful engagement and cultural exploration, potentially hindering the acculturation process and social integration. Understanding the impact of social interactions, social support networks, and length of stay on international students' experiences is essential for developing effective support services and interventions to enhance their academic success, well-being, and overall satisfaction with the host country experience.

Despite the wealth of literature on international students' educational experiences, there remains a notable gap in understanding the diversity within this student population from an intersectional perspective. By incorporating intersectional perspectives, researchers can advance our understanding of the complex interactions

between various social identities and their implications for international students' educational experiences and outcomes.

There is also a growing trend in research on internationalization of higher education and particularly relevant to this dissertation are the ones looking at the process of internationalization from the perspectives of international students. Guo and Guo (2017) conducted a study with a sample of twenty-six international students, highlights both positive aspects and persistent challenges of internationalization in Canadian higher education. While many students view internationalization positively for academic and personal growth, the study identifies issues such as the commodification of internationalization, the privileging of Eurocentric perspectives in the curriculum, and a gap between rhetoric and reality in institutional strategies.

There is a lack of research on the interplay of socioeconomic status and international students, possibly because international students are traditionally assumed coming from higher-SES backgrounds. However, Marginson et al. (2010) conducted a comprehensive study of international students in Australia, illuminating the significant challenges and opportunities within the global student market. One of the issues encountered by international students in Australia is financial constraints. The financial challenges faced by this group of students are complex and varied, with some experiencing severe difficulties due to factors like lack of resources, currency volatility, and insufficient knowledge of living abroad. Despite the growth in international student numbers and revenues, during the literature review process, there was a noticeable lack of research focused on the financial situations of international students. In the absence of comprehensive data on their income and expenditure, there is a critical need for research to better understand the financial realities faced by international students, including variations by demographics and institutional factors. Furthermore, there is a call for improved support systems and infrastructure to assist students in managing their finances and navigating financial crises. The study conducted by

Forbes-Mewett and Sawyer (2019) demonstrated that, contrary to the stereotype of affluent international students, some participants in the study reported experiencing significant financial strain. Instances were noted where students' families had taken out loans or pooled resources from their communities to fund their education, placing considerable pressure on the students to succeed academically.

2.6 Impact of Institutional Support for Underrepresented Students

Institutional support plays a crucial role in promoting the academic success, retention, and well-being of underrepresented students in universities (Mishra, 2020). Research has underscored the importance of targeted support services, resources, and policies in addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by underrepresented student populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with disabilities (Arif et al., 2021; Green & Wright, 2017; King, 2009; Leake & Stodden, 2014; Oesterreich & Knight, 2008). Effective institutional support initiatives encompass a range of strategies aimed at fostering a supportive and inclusive campus climate, enhancing access to educational opportunities, and promoting equitable outcomes for all students (Bauman et al., 2005).

One key aspect of institutional support is the provision of financial aid and scholarships tailored to the needs of underrepresented students, addressing barriers related to affordability and access to higher education (Brock, 2010; Eichelberger et al., 2017). Scholarships specifically targeting underrepresented student groups not only alleviate financial burdens but also signal institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, fostering a sense of belonging and support among marginalized students (Alon, 2011; Fack & Grenet, 2015; Murphy & Destin, 2016).

Moreover, institutional support extends beyond financial assistance to encompass academic and social support services designed to address the unique academic and psychosocial needs of underrepresented students. These services may include mentoring programs, academic advising, tutoring services, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, leadership development initiatives, and culturally affirming campus resources (Colbert, 2010). Research has shown that such support services contribute to higher levels of academic engagement, satisfaction, and retention among underrepresented students, as well as improved academic performance and graduation rates (Cuseo, 2003; Kinzie et al., 2008).

Furthermore, institutional policies and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion are instrumental in creating an environment conducive to the success of underrepresented students (Ajayi et al., 2021; Kinzie et al., 2008). These may include admissions policies that consider holistic measures of student potential beyond standardized test scores, outreach and recruitment efforts targeting underrepresented student populations, diversity training for faculty and staff, and the establishment of diversity and inclusion offices or committees tasked with promoting diversity initiatives and addressing campus climate issues (Davalos, 2014; Domina, 2009).

In conclusion, institutional support for underrepresented students in universities is essential for advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education. By implementing targeted support services, resources, and policies, institutions can mitigate barriers to access and success, foster a more inclusive campus environment, and empower underrepresented students to thrive academically and personally. However, ongoing efforts are needed to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and address persistent inequities in higher education.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, by reviewing existing studies on intersectionality, first-generation college students, socioeconomic status, international students, and institutional support, this chapter underscores the unique difficulties encountered by students who inhabit multiple marginalized identities. The review also reveals significant gaps in current research, particularly the need for more comprehensive studies that incorporate the perspectives of first-generation international students and welfare officers. Most studies have focused on either first-generation or international students separately, neglecting the unique intersectional challenges faced by those who belong to both categories. Furthermore, the literature highlights the critical role of institutional support in promoting the success and well-being of underrepresented students. Effective support strategies include financial aid, culturally competent support services, and policies that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Overall, this literature review establishes a strong foundation for the subsequent empirical investigation into the experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University. By addressing the identified gaps and adopting an intersectional lens, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the development of targeted support strategies that promote equity and inclusion in higher education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

This chapter serves as a comprehensive guide to the methodology employed in this dissertation, which investigates the educational experiences of first-generation international students at the University of Oxford. A qualitative research approach was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives, allowing for a rich understanding of their lived experiences within the university community (Alase, 2017; Ormston et al., 2014). By embracing qualitative methodology, this study acknowledges the complexity and subjectivity inherent in human experiences, seeking to uncover nuanced insights that quantitative methods may overlook (Jones et al., 2013). The research is based on semi-structured interviews with 15 first-generation international students, enhanced by conducting 5 interviews with welfare officers, in an additional approach known as Expert Interviews (Bogner et al., 2009; Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019).

In selecting a qualitative approach, the research is situated within a constructivist paradigm. Ontologically, constructivism acknowledges that realities are multiple (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In terms of epistemology, the constructivist paradigm holds that knowledge is constructed by individuals based on their subjective experiences and interactions with the social world, emphasizing the importance of understanding multiple realities. Likewise, interpretivism asserts that reality is socially constructed through the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, highlighting the need for researchers to interpret and make sense of these meanings within their specific contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, by adopting a qualitative paradigm, this study aims to capture the diverse perspectives of first-generation international students and explore the subjective meanings they attach to their experiences at the University of Oxford.

With this philosophical foundation established, the subsequent sections will delineate the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques employed in this study, ensuring transparency and rigor in the research process.

3.2 Sampling Strategy:

The sampling strategy for this study was designed to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of perspectives among both student and staff participants. Given the qualitative nature of the research and the aim to capture rich and varied experiences, a purposive sampling approach was adopted. This approach allowed for the selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020), such as being first-generation, international students or welfare officers or people who hold similar positions at the University of Oxford. Initially, recruitment efforts involved open calls and targeted advertisements across social media channels and university email system. These strategies aimed to attract a broad and varied audience of potential participants (Robinson, 2014). Besides, through snowball sampling, initial participants were encouraged to refer others who met the inclusion criteria, thus expanding the pool of potential participants and ensuring diverse representation (Naderifar et al., 2017).

Despite these efforts, it is notable that undergraduate students did not approach the study. However, the inclusion of both full-time and part-time graduate students from various disciplines and nationalities provided a comprehensive range of perspectives.

In addition to interviewing first-generation international students, expert interviews were conducted with welfare officers representing both university-level and college-level positions at the University of Oxford. This additional approach expands the scope of the study to include insights from institutional stakeholders responsible for

supporting student welfare. The inclusion of expert interviews serves as a form of methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by providing complementary perspectives and contextual understanding of institutional support systems (Von Soest, 2023). Triangulating data from multiple sources strengthens the rigor of the study and increases confidence in the conclusions drawn (Abdalla et al., 2018; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). These welfare officers play a crucial role in supporting students' welfare and well-being, offering valuable insights into the institutional support mechanisms available to international students.

Ultimately, a total of 15 student participants and 5 welfare officers were successfully recruited for the study. While the sample size may appear modest, qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, aiming to capture rich and detailed accounts from participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants contribute to the richness and complexity of the data, enabling a nuanced exploration of the research questions.

To protect participant identities, codes were assigned and are indicated along with demographic information – gender, district of origin, degree level, study mode, length of stay in the UK, family financial situation/SES background, source of funding and interview mode in Table 1.

No.	Student/Officer	Participant Code	Gender	District of Origin	Degree Level	Study Mode	Length of Stay in the UK	Family Financial Situation/SES Background	Source of Funding	Interview Mode
1	Student	S1	Male	East Europe	Master	Full-time	More than a year	Lower-middle Income	Family support and personal savings	in-person
2	Student	S2	Female	Latin America	Master	Part-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Family support and personal savings	online
3	Student	S3	Male	West Europe	Master	Part-time	More than a year	Financially challenged	Scholarship	in-person
4	Student	S4	Female	Southeastern Europe	Dphil	Part-time	More than a year	Lower-middle Income	Family support and personal savings	online
5	Student	S5	Female	East Asia	Master	Full-time	More than a year	Middle Income	Family support	online
6	Student	S6	Female	Southeast Asia	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Scholarship	in-person
7	Student	S7	Female	North America	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Financially challenged	Personal Savings	in-person
8	Student	S8	Female	North America	Dphil	Full-time	Less than a year	Financially challenged	Scholarship	in-person
9	Student	S9	Male	East Asia	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Family support	online
10	Student	S10	Male	North America	Dphil	Full-time	More than a year	Financially challenged	Scholarship	in-person
11	Student	S11	Female	East Africa	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Scholarship	in-person
12	Student	S12	Female	North America	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Financially challenged	Scholarship	in-person
13	Student	S13	Male	South Asia	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Scholarship	in-person
14	Student	S14	Female	Central Asia	Dphil	Full-time	Less than a year	Lower-middle Income	Scholarship	online
15	Student	S15	Female	Southeast Asia	Master	Full-time	Less than a year	Wealthy	Family support	in-person
No.	**Student/Officer**	**Participant Code**	**Gender**	**University/College**	**Position Level**	**Specialty**				in-person
16	Officer	F1	Male	University	Manager	Welfare				in-person
17	Officer	F2	Male	College	Manager	Welfare				in-person
18	Officer	F3	Male	College	Staff	Welfare				online
19	Officer	F4	Female	College	Manager	Welfare				in-person
20	Officer	F5	Female	College	Manager	Welfare				in-person

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

3.3 Data Collection:

The data collection phase of this study was guided by the overarching aim of capturing the lived experiences and perspectives of first-generation international students and insights of welfare officers at the University of Oxford. Semi-structured interviews were identified as the primary method of data collection, chosen for their flexibility in allowing participants to express their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in their own words (Ruslin et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews involve asking open-ended questions based on broad themes or topics rather than following a rigid set of predetermined questions (Kallio et al., 2016). The purpose is to encourage participants to share their perspectives and insights freely, allowing ideas to emerge naturally during the conversation (Roberts, 2020). The interviewer aims to facilitate discussions that help participants explore their thoughts and make connections without imposing

specific responses (Bolderston, 2012). Importantly, the interviewer's role is to listen attentively and facilitate the discussion rather than dominate it, fostering an environment where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

To ensure transparency and respect for participants' privacy, interviews were conducted either in study rooms within Bodleian Libraries or, weather permitting, in public parks. If the participants expressed preference of online interviews, the interviews were conducted via Teams. These settings were chosen to provide a comfortable and conducive environment for open discussion while minimizing distractions and ensuring confidentiality (Oltmann, 2016). Prior to commencing each interview, explicit consent was obtained from participants, and they were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses (Wiles et al., 2008a).

Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for thorough analysis. When collecting qualitative data, thorough records were kept serving as a reference point for later analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Verbatim transcription ensures the preservation of participants' voices and expressions, allowing for a faithful representation of their narratives during the analysis phase (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). Transcriptions were anonymized to protect the identities of participants, assigning pseudonyms to replace any identifying information (Wiles et al., 2008).

In addition to semi-structured interviews with students, expert interviews were conducted with welfare officers representing various positions at both the university and college levels. These interviews followed a similar format but focused on exploring institutional perspectives and support mechanisms available to international students. Expert interviews provided valuable insights into the broader context of student welfare and complemented the perspectives shared by student participants.

Throughout the data collection process, efforts were made to establish rapport and trust with participants, fostering an environment conducive to open and honest communication (Riley et al., 2003). The interviewer employed active listening techniques and reflexive questioning to encourage participants to delve deeper into their experiences and perspectives (Roulston, 2010). Flexibility was essential during interviews, allowing participants the freedom to share their stories in their own words and at their own pace (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

By employing semi-structured interviews and expert interviews, this study aimed to gather rich and nuanced data that would provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of first-generation international students at the University of Oxford.

3.4 Positionality Statement and Validity:

As Pillow (2010) aptly argues, qualitative research inherently involves acknowledging the subjective dimension of the research process. In the context of this study, exploring the impact of intersectionality on the educational experiences of first-generation international students at the University of Oxford, the researcher's positionality and subjectivity are vital considerations in establishing trustworthiness and validity (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). The researcher identifies as a member of the underrepresented group of first-generation international students; therefore, the researcher shares similar concerns and pressures as the participants in this study. This personal connection to the research topic fosters a genuine interest and passion in understanding the experiences and perspectives of fellow first-generation international students at the University of Oxford.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity within this group, recognizing that different members may hold varying opinions and have distinct experiences. While the researcher's background and experiences may provide insights and facilitate rapport with participants, it is essential to approach the research with openness and sensitivity to the diverse range of experiences within the first-generation international student community (Greene, 2014). By embracing subjectivity and reflexivity, the researcher endeavours to navigate the complexities of intersectionality and capture the multifaceted experiences of participants authentically. This self-awareness and reflexivity not only enhance the validity of the study but also contribute to building rapport and trust with participants, ultimately enriching the research findings (Darawsheh, 2014).

One notable challenge was the positionality of the researcher as a student interviewer. The researcher, being a student at Oxford University, conducted interviews with welfare officers, which might have influenced the dynamics of the interviews. The difference in status between the interviewer and interviewees could have affected the openness and honesty of responses. While the researcher made conscious efforts to minimize this impact by fostering rapport and ensuring a non-judgmental environment, it is possible that some responses were influenced by the perceived power dynamics (Greene, 2014; Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Reflexivity was employed throughout the research process to mitigate these biases and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Darawsheh, 2014).

In summary, the researcher's positionality as a first-generation international student with prior research experience in the field brings both strengths and challenges to the study. By acknowledging and embracing subjectivity, the researcher aims to ensure the credibility and rigor of the research process while honouring the diverse voices and experiences of participants.

3.5 Data Analysis:

The data analysis phase of this study involved a systematic and rigorous examination of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with first-generation international students and expert interviews with welfare officers. Thematic analysis, aligning well with constructivist principles (Joffe, 2011), was chosen as the primary methodological approach, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and connections within the data (Nowell et al., 2017). This research follows the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis process began with familiarization with the data, and this initial step provides a solid foundation for all subsequent stages of the research process. The researcher listened to audio recordings of all interviews and transcribed them utilising the voice-recognition function of Microsoft Word. To ensure accuracy, the researcher cross-reference the transcripts with the original audio recordings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The researchers immersed himself in the data by actively reading through transcripts multiple times to uncover meanings and patterns (Friedman, 2011). During this phase, the researcher took notes and recorded initial impressions to prepare for the following coding phase. Besides, significant statements, phrases, or excerpts that encapsulated key themes or ideas were highlighted for further exploration (Byrne, 2022).

Once this preliminary step is completed, the researcher proceeded to the more formal coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested, there are two types of codes: data-driven codes, which emerge organically from the dataset, and theory-driven codes, which are guided by specific research questions. In this phase, the researcher observed recurring themes and expressions evident across all transcripts and employed a hybrid approach of doing thematic analysis. Firstly, even though there were few existing studies directly aligned with this intersectionality

research, some theory-driven codes, such as “educational experience” and “coping mechanism”, were developed based on the research questions. Afterwards, the approach of open coding was employed, wherein individual segments of data were systematically labelled with descriptive codes that captured the essence of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the remaining codes emerged from the transcripts during the careful reading and rereading process.

Another special treatment of data in this research was that the thematic analysis process in this study involved separate coding of two distinct sets of interviews: one comprising 15 interviews with students and the other consisting of 5 interviews with welfare officers at the University of Oxford. Initial coding was conducted independently for each set of interviews. These codes serve to organize the data into manageable units, although they did not yet constitute themes, which are broader concepts that may encompass multiple codes. Data were coded with the assistance of NVivo, a computer software designed for qualitative data analysis. At this stage, the researcher attempted to code as many potential themes as possible, as the significance of certain codes may only become apparent later in the analysis process, and some sections of the data may be relevant to multiple themes (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). Subsequently, themes were developed through iterative review and comparison of coded data within each dataset. Integration of themes specific to students' experiences and welfare officers' perspectives from both datasets allowed for exploration of connections and intersections between student experiences and institutional support mechanisms.

This stage involved a both deductive and inductive process, commencing with setting up pre-determined categories and then moving on to open coding to pinpoint themes and any associated subthemes. Initially, the researcher revisited the data coded in the previous phase, seeking patterns that emerge within and across the two datasets. Further steps included pattern-coding, which entails consolidating the codes

generated during initial coding into fewer conceptual categories (Miles, 2020; Saldaña, 2021). Through this process, some codes may be modified or discarded. By identifying recurrent patterns and consolidating codes, codes were grouped into overarching themes based on their conceptual similarities and relationships. Themes were refined and defined through an iterative process of constant comparison, wherein data segments were continuously compared within and across interviews to ensure consistency and coherence.

Throughout the analysis process, attention was paid to both manifest and latent content within the data, with a focus on capturing both the explicit experiences and underlying meanings articulated by participants (Mezmir, 2020; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Reflexivity was paramount, with the researcher acknowledging his own biases and preconceptions and actively seeking to bracket these influences to maintain objectivity.

In addition to thematic analysis, the expert interviews were analysed separately to explore institutional perspectives and support mechanisms available to international students. Data from expert interviews were subjected to the same rigorous coding and thematic analysis procedures, allowing for a comparison of findings between student and staff perspectives.

By systematically analysing qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews with students and experts, this study aimed to generate rich and nuanced insights into the educational experiences of first-generation international students at the University of Oxford.

3.6 Ethical Considerations:

Ethical integrity is paramount in conducting research involving human participants, and this study adhered to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. The research protocol received approval from Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) at the University of Oxford before data collection commenced, demonstrating a commitment to upholding ethical standards throughout the research process.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, with clear information provided regarding the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the handling of data. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with measures implemented to safeguard their privacy throughout the research process. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and ensuring that identifiable information was removed from transcripts and any other research documents.

Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion, and ongoing consent was reaffirmed throughout the research process. Any concerns or questions raised by participants were addressed promptly and transparently, fostering a trusting and respectful relationship between the researcher and participants.

To mitigate potential risks associated with participation, particularly regarding the sensitive nature of topics discussed, support mechanisms were made available to participants. Contact information for relevant support services, both within and outside the university, was provided to participants in case they experienced any distress or discomfort during or after their involvement in the study.

The researcher also took measures to ensure reflexivity and minimize bias throughout the research process. Reflexivity involved critically reflecting on the researcher's own

positionality, biases, and assumptions, acknowledging their potential impact on the research process and findings. By maintaining reflexivity, the researcher sought to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the research outcomes.

Overall, this study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants involved. By upholding ethical integrity, the researcher aimed to conduct research that is morally sound, socially responsible, and academically rigorous.

3.7 Limitations and Challenges:

During the data collection stage, several limitations and challenges arose. One notable challenge was coordinating interview schedules across different time zones, as some participants were located in various countries when the researcher conducted the interviews. This logistical hurdle required careful planning and flexibility to accommodate participants' availability while ensuring the integrity of the research process.

Technical difficulties also posed challenges during online interviews conducted via platforms such as Teams. While efforts were made to ensure stable internet connections, occasional disruptions due to poor wifi signals occurred, impacting the flow and quality of the interviews. And the interviewees' environments were uncontrollable for the researcher, despite suggesting quieter locations. For instance, one interviewee chose a noisy café to have a stabler wifi connection, but it was already the best the interviewee could manage in their home country. Despite these challenges, the researcher sought to mitigate any disruptions and maintain communication with participants to the best of their ability.

Moreover, navigating sensitive topics during interviews presented emotional challenges for both the researcher and participants. Delving into participants' experiences as first-generation international students required a nuanced approach to avoid causing distress. Some participants expressed emotional responses when recounting their educational journey, highlighting the need for empathy and sensitivity throughout the interview process.

Another limitation is the variability in the quality of insights provided by participants. Some participants may not have presented equally valuable insights as others, possibly due to holding opinions that might be considered less informed or even absurd. This variability can affect the overall depth and reliability of the data. Efforts were made to include diverse perspectives to capture a comprehensive range of experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge that the quality and depth of the data are influenced by the participants' understanding and articulation of their experiences (Pillow, 2010; Roulston, 2010).

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents findings based on the thematic analysis of 15 interviews with students and 5 interviews with faculty who are either welfare officers or hold positions that offer help for first-generation college students. Student participants are coded from S1 to S15, and faculty participants are coded from F1 to F5 (See table 1 in Chapter 3).

4.2 Participants' Perspectives

In this section, the perspectives of first-generation international students at Oxford University are explored through three major themes: educational experiences, coping mechanisms, and suggestions for university improvement. The third theme combines the suggestions from both students and welfare officers.

4.2.1 Educational Experiences

Educational experiences constitute a major proportion of data in the interview conversations with students. This theme encompasses the general experiences of first-generation international students studying at Oxford University, including both academic and social aspects, both positive and negative, and both individual identity's and multiple intersecting identities' experiences. Four subthemes emerged: International Students' Aspect, First-generation College Students' Aspect, Overlapping Issues of International First-generation Students, and Financial Aspect.

4.2.1.1 International Students' Aspect

The identity of being international students has brought different experiences to the participants. Most of them (10 out of 15) have stayed in the UK/Oxford for less than a year, indicating they are still in the early stages of adjusting to the cultural differences. However, the length of stay in the UK/Oxford is not the only element that impacts their adaptation to university life. Other factors emerged during the conversations: mode of study (full-time or part-time), college affiliation, program cohort composition, cultural similarity between their home country and the UK, prior life experiences, socioeconomic status (SES), and minority status in their society.

When asked about their experiences of being international students at Oxford University, the responses were quite distinct among the 15 participants. On one end of the spectrum, some participants spoke highly of their experiences of studying and living at this elite university.

S2 described her positive impression of her classmates in her program and friends in her college due to the diverse composition of her cohort:

> I really love it. My cohort is extremely international. There are like three people from the UK and all the others are from different countries. So for me, this is a very unique experience. I met mostly other students from my college, and my college is extremely international too. So for me, it was a very good surprise because it's like a unique opportunity for me to know people from different cultures. (S2)

However, the majority of participants expressed mixed feelings towards the university. They appreciated the different educational philosophy between Oxford and the HE institution they graduated from. For instance, several participants mentioned the distance between professors and students and the discomfort towards the formal hierarchical respect they must demonstrate when communicating with their professors. One example coincidentally mentioned by participants from North America was the appointment practice with the faculty versus the office hours system in most HE institutions in North America. Another common difference mentioned by PhD students was the pedagogical philosophy at Oxford, which is more about incentivizing

students to have independent learning and research on their own rather than micromanaging their progress. This difference could necessitate some time to adjust to but was appreciated by some participants:

> But it's much more guided (in my home country). Here, it's much more like figure it out yourself a little. Yeah, yeah, yeah, which is good because I think it also teaches you to be more resourceful, I guess. (S10)

> Here in Oxford, there is a self-development, self-education matter, not like in Central Asia. In Central Asia, the teacher gives you more information. In Oxford, you have to take a lot of information, read a lot, and present it to your supervisors. (S14)

Meanwhile, some other participants found it challenging:

> I'm reading what I want to read or what I want to know, and there are people when I talk to them about my research interest, there's nothing strange about it. So that is the only thing that is kind of the only silver lining in this or at least the only thing that's keeping me going. But other than that, it's extremely rigid. It's just the student fits into a predesigned pedagogy, so we just go through it to earn the certificate. So it's not about what you get from the education or it's not about how you can also contribute to the academic experience. It's all about there's this you take it you get the paper. So it's that paper-oriented journey instead of having a very collaborative educational experience. (S11)

Participants highlighted the linguistic challenges they encountered upon transitioning to Oxford University, noting the necessity to acclimate to the subtleties of polite speech and nuanced English expressions. They expressed difficulties in discerning potentially derogatory remarks due to the intricacies of language usage, contrasting it with the more direct communication style prevalent in their home countries. This adjustment posed a hurdle in their academic and social integration, as the coded nature of language at Oxford necessitated heightened awareness and a propensity for second-guessing interpretations.

> But I think even the way of talking, the way of sarcasm, everything is very, very different. Sometimes I can't understand. I don't know what to say. So I sometimes

> felt like I'm not able to understand or mingle with them because I don't understand their pop culture. But later on, I tried to understand and mingle with those people to understand their culture. (S13)

> Cultural difference. How to speak with people, how to speak with supervisors was a little bit challenging. For instance, my supervisor said to call them by name. For me, from Central Asia, it was a little bit of a challenge. (S14)

S4 noted the challenge of politeness:

> Sometimes I don't sound perfectly polite. I will be more direct and straightforward rather than using all these polite words. I'm trying to learn this not only as a language but this is like a culture as well—not to be that straightforward and just be a little bit more flexible and use smart words. (S4)

Additionally, some participants highlighted feelings of discomfort and cultural insularity:

> No regrets coming here. I guess it's a decent enough education, and the reputation of Oxford is very good. Yeah, apart from that, I think there are a lot of things. If I could change, I would change. And if it weren't for my scholarship, I would probably not be very happy with spending my own money coming here, to be perfectly honest. I assumed Oxford would be a very sort of open, progressive institution. I don't know why I thought that, but I just kind of had the feeling. But when I came here, I found it very insular. Students here are not very culturally open. Not all of them. Some are. But I think a lot of the Western-educated ones, the Westerners, especially the whites, tend to be very culturally insular. They're not very open to other cultures. Like when you try and socialize or talk to them, it's evident you're not on the same level as somebody who is brought up in that society and speaks and acts and looks the way they do. (S6)

The above sentiment that S6 detected or observed would not be easily proved with hard evidence, but several other participants, including officer participants, expressed similar feelings on the “snobbish” culture that some faculty and students at Oxford embodied. Also, the feeling of being “invisible” was mentioned several times during interviews with some participants.

Among 15 student participants, there were 3 part-time students. Coincidentally, they expressed mostly positive experiences of studying at Oxford due to the diverse composition of their cohort and the close community they feel belonged to every time they come to Oxford for a short-period course.

For students who hold positive feedback, they all credited part of it to their colleges with which they are affiliated. Some colleges at Oxford University are more international and inclusive than others.

When asked about their preference of social group, most participants indicated they would like to socialize more with a certain group of friends: some preferred to hang out with international students irrespective of their nationalities, while others explicitly expressed their preference for friends who share more similar culture, either home country fellows or people from neighbouring regions.

> I don't have many—I couldn't use the term white—but I don't have many Western friends. Most of them came from very diverse backgrounds. They could be Americans or Europeans, but at least they came from migrant families, so maybe this is what kind of created an appreciation for our social connection. (S11)

> If I meet another American, even if we're from different states and we're nothing like each other, it's always like, oh, we're both American. It's a thing. So there's an instant kind of connection. It's more familiarity than anything. It's like, you know, we have a familiar background, which is nice when we're both in this foreign place. (S12)

When talking about the reasons why they don't like to socialize with certain groups of students, participants offered similar responses: they don't feel a sense of connection with them. This sense of disconnection could arise from various factors: different upbringing experiences, differences between working-class and middle-upper class backgrounds, cultural differences, age differences, language barriers, etc. These factors don't necessarily only come from being international students but could also

stem from being first-generation college students, which I will present in the next subtheme.

4.2.1.2 First-generation College Students' Aspect

For the set of questions related to the identity of being first-generation college students, participants were asked about their parents' backgrounds, experiences of being FGS, impressions of continuing-generation students, non-physical distance between participants and their family, and advantages of being first-generation college students.

Parents' Backgrounds:

Unsurprisingly, all parents of participants came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. While a couple of them managed to pull their families out of working-class and brought them to a middle-class or even wealthy level, most parents remained at working-class or barely reached lower-middle-class level. To sum up, 12 out of 15 participants identified themselves as coming from either lower-middle-income or financially challenged families, two from middle-income, and one from a wealthy background.

Experiences of Being FGS:

Participants discussed both their experiences at Oxford and their previous educational experiences. At Oxford, some of them felt "ignored" regarding their identity as first-generation college students due to the lack of discussions or conversations around this topic. As S10 explained, "People don't talk about first-gen students because a lot of people here come from big privilege."

Participants also highlighted the differences in socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural beliefs, hobbies, and interests, which hindered their integration at Oxford. Sometimes they felt inferior to their peers and lacked confidence in both academic and social contexts. “Imposter syndrome” was mentioned many times in conversations with participants.

They observed that their continuing-generation peers had a more balanced life between academic and social commitments without financial concerns. The cultural capital that their elite peers gained from their families further strengthened their positions at Oxford.

> I've accepted that a lot of people do come from privileged backgrounds. Some people not as much. Some people do get here because they have very good grades, but most people that get here that are young have families that made it possible regardless. It's usually so. Usually, people that don't have supportive backgrounds don't end up here when they're 18. Like me, I'm here at 38 because I had to do a lot of different things to get here, but when I was 18, I would not have. I didn't make myself into someone that Oxford would have accepted. And so usually what I find what I've noted is that if you were 18/19/20 and you're in a privileged place, it's likely because your parents and or the people that raised you made it happen. You don't raise yourself into this. (S12)

Participants also expressed the challenges of figuring everything out by themselves. Without the cultural and social capital that their peers could easily inherit from their parents, first-generation college students spent more time navigating their career paths and faced more barriers in climbing the social ladder.

> I still feel that this will linger on for my whole life because this will obviously impact the decisions I have to make. Because the foundation is very different, right? The students from educated families have one or two generations of advantages over me and my family and henceforth even for my children. They are starting from level 10 whereas I have to start from level 1. So now I have to cover the distance from level 1 to level 10. In the meantime, they will cover the level from level 10 to level 20. Now I have to keep much more pace to be at their level, and that's very difficult to achieve. (S13)

Another common experience for these student participants is their mental pressure of being relied on and expected to achieve more from their family members. One term repeatedly mentioned during the interviews is “safety net”—first-generation college students not only need to take on heavy expectations and responsibility from their family but also have no “cushion” to fall back on if they face challenges or get stuck in the middle of their struggles. This predicament also forces them to play safe to some extent, meaning they don’t have much freedom to do trial and error or they show little risk appetite, which may further disadvantage them in the competition for resources and opportunities.

Another challenge FGS commonly experienced is the non-physical distance they feel between them and their family members as they move forward with their academic and social achievements. Sometimes they even need to change their way of talking to fit back into their home environment.

> When I go home, sometimes it feels like I'm talking too smartly. So it feels really awkward, I guess, because I don't want to give off this impression of trying to be better than them. But at the same time, I feel like I'm behind all of my peers. (S8)

Although the conversations during interviews revolved around the negative impact of being FGS, participants were also asked about any positive impacts of this identity. Four out of 15 participants offered their perceptions of potential advantages of being FGS.

S10 said: “I think maybe I'd take things less for granted.” This statement was followed by his reflection on his experience of applying to Oxford and his achievements so far. All these ups and downs in his life made him become both more resilient to challenges and more empathetic to people and issues he encountered. Similar feelings were recounted by S8, S13, and S15. S8 and S15 emphasized that being resourceful and

independent were "forced" skills or characteristics they developed while overcoming barriers in life.

Class Assumption:

Some participants expressed the pressure from being perceived as coming from an upper-class background, especially this impression coming from their home country fellows who also study at Oxford. They would change the way of speaking to fit in the community, which adds another layer of discomfort.

Age Difference:

Most participants were older than their cohort, some with several years' difference and some with over a decade's difference. This age difference between them and their cohort also factored into their reflections about their educational experience during interviews. It took more years for them to build up their resume credentials and skill sets compared with their cohort. However, even if they managed to catch up to a certain level, they found they were older than their peers in the same position or degree program, which put them at a disadvantage again.

4.2.1.3 Intersectional Challenges

The intersection of being both international and first-generation students adds another layer of complexity to their experiences. Participants expressed nuanced challenges stemming from their intersecting identities. They not only dealt with general cultural shock but also faced difficulties socializing with peers and professors from privileged backgrounds. This added another layer of challenge to their academic and social lives. They worried about cultural differences, the bourgeois and materialistic topics often discussed, and the expenses of attending social events.

S13 highlighted the social pressure: “The social groups at Oxford are mostly for enjoying parties, which can be challenging for those who have invested so much to come here. The pressure to perform academically and manage expenses makes socializing difficult.”

Participants also expressed concerns about job hunting as international first-generation students. The new working-visa sponsorship policy in the UK increased the threshold of wages for a working permit, which seemed unattainable given their limited social and cultural capital. They felt the high expectations from their families added another layer of burden.

> If you consider being a woman, first-gen, low income, or international, it impacts how I see myself and what I have to do. I think I'm always more worried about not doing enough because I don't have the same background as others. I don't have the same credibility. (S8)

4.2.1.4 Financial Aspect/SES Background

SES backgrounds significantly impact the experiences of first-generation international students. To study at Oxford, one must have sufficient funding to cover the high tuition fees and living expenses. Among the 15 participants, 8 who came from working-class families were on scholarships to fund their studies, while one participant used her personal savings after over 10 years of work. The rest relied on family financial support and part-time jobs to cover living expenses. Except for S15, who came from a well-off family, all participants expressed concerns about budgeting for living expenses. Several of them had started working in their teenage years to contribute to their family's budget.

S13's words resonated with other scholarship-funded participants: “Without scholarships, I would not be here.” For those relying on family support or personal savings, the constraint on their social life varied based on their financial situation.

S8 described her mindful spending habits: “I don't eat out; I try to cook all my meals at home. If I do eat out, it's at the college dining hall. I don't really go shopping for new things unless it's something I really need. I'm very thoughtful about my spending.”

The impact on their social life also stemmed from their part-time job commitments, which reduced their time and energy for social activities. Balancing study and work forced them to give up some social interactions.

> I'm working more, so I don't have the same amount of opportunity to participate in student life as much.” S7 shared a similar dilemma: “My job is waiting for me to give them stuff, so I just can't actually go do it. That happens often because I'm overwhelmed with schoolwork and freelance work, which makes me deprioritize socializing. (S10)

Even though S10 acknowledged the upside of having better time management skills, he admitted that it took a toll on his mental well-being and university experience.

Not all international first-generation students came from lower SES backgrounds. Some of their parents, although lacking higher education degrees, had managed to improve their family's financial situation. For example, S15 recounted the well-rounded support she received from her parents, which helped smooth her transition to Oxford.

S7 made a thought-provoking point: even though she could afford social activities after working and saving money for over a decade, she still found it hard to integrate into the privileged academic and social setting. “I think both the inability to spend money and not feeling comfortable in those environments can limit what you get out of being here. A lot of being here is about making connections and becoming socially mobile. If you can't bridge that gap to do social activities, you're potentially missing out.”

The choice of pursuing a part-time degree at Oxford was another phenomenon related to students' financial situations. The three part-time student participants expressed concerns about affording full-time study and losing income and career development opportunities.

4.2.2 Coping Mechanisms

Participants employed various coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges they faced, ranging from independent strategies to seeking support from friends, family, and university services.

Five out of 15 participants preferred dealing with pressure and challenges independently through physical exercise, mental meditation, or online information searches to avoid self-embarrassment. S3 echoed a common sentiment: “I cannot have the help of my parents because my parents might not even know what Oxford is.”

Five participants sought help from friends to explore options and solutions to problems, reflecting their social group preferences.

One participant indicated family support when feeling pressure, but her case involved well-off parents who had always supported her educational journey both financially and emotionally.

When asked about institutional support from the university or college, participants largely expressed disappointment. Some participants had tried contacting the university counselling team and other welfare officers, complaining about slow and inefficient responses within the complex collegial system at Oxford. S11 mentioned that it took two semesters to sort out mental wellness support: “It doesn't feel like it's

one institution. Very disintegrated. No communication between them. Hence where does the student fall into this?"

Other participants did not seek help, assuming welfare officers would not understand their situations as international first-generation college students. This assumption highlighted the need to build trust between the university and underrepresented students.

Participants generally acknowledged support for international students, regardless of usage. However, none were aware of support for first-generation students. This disappointing situation was corroborated by all five welfare officers interviewed.

4.3 Welfare Officers' Perspectives

4.3.1 Welfare Support Structure at Oxford

Based on the interviews with welfare officers, the collegial welfare system at Oxford University integrates university-wide services with localized college support. University-level components include the University Counselling Service and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Unit. College-level provisions involve Welfare Deans, Junior Deans, Welfare Officers, and part-time college counsellors.

4.3.2 Support for International Students

Most support offered to international students revolved around building confidence. Officers acknowledged cultural differences that stressed some international students, noting that awareness of significant differences helped some students prepare better. One officer observed that European students sometimes experienced more culture shock than expected, as they assumed cultural similarities with the UK.

Emotional support from home was challenging due to time differences and cultural differences. Some international students avoided seeking help, viewing it as a sign of embarrassment or shame.

4.3.3 Support for First-generation Students

Confidence or insecurity was common among FGS, though most officers noted more undergraduate students seeking support than postgraduates. Students rarely disclosed their FGS identity unless it came up during conversations, leading officers to make assumptions based on the issues discussed. All officers acknowledged a lack of awareness and support for FGS at Oxford, despite the university having data on these students.

Officers noted that FGS often lacked role models but displayed high problem-solving skills. Financial backing was another challenge, with disparities in financial resources among colleges affecting the support available to students.

4.3.4 Financial Issues and SES

Officers observed that financial support at Oxford was often merit-based rather than need-based, reinforcing a meritocracy system with little support for those lacking resources to build their resumes. F1 emphasized the high cost of living as a significant challenge for equality and diversity in higher education. Additionally, financial support was more available for home students, and the stereotype of international students as "cash cows" overlooked the financial challenges of international FGS. The inequality of financial resources across colleges further disadvantaged students needing financial help.

4.4 Students and Officers' Concerns and Suggestions

4.4.1 Data Sharing:

All five welfare officers indicated that they lacked data on students' FGS and international status, which hindered their ability to provide tailored support. Sharing this data could improve assistance and understanding.

4.4.2 Composition and Qualifications of Welfare Officers:

Student participants suggested a more diverse composition of welfare officers who shared similar experiences and identities. Officers acknowledged the legal and practical challenges of recruiting diverse teams but recognized the importance of cultural competency.

S12 emphasized the need for officers to be educated on sociological and psychological aspects: "People in positions of dealing with problems should always be educated on sociological aspects, psychological aspects, personality disorders, and how they function with people."

Participants suggested having more welfare officers from diverse backgrounds to reduce the distance and increase comfort when seeking help.

4.4.3 The University and College Dual System:

In an ideal situation, this dual-level system should function optimally, with the university-wide and college-level services complementing each other. However, observations from both student participants and officer participants reveal divergent

perspectives on its actual performance, highlighting discrepancies between the intended and experienced efficacy of the welfare provision.

> They (the colleges) are doing their own thing and they don't feel they want to really work with the centre. So I think the devolved structure of the university applies a complexity that I didn't fully appreciate until I got here. I thought there would be greater synergy, but because they are all devolved, they have their own budgets. Some of the colleges are rich, some of the other colleges are poorer. (F1)

Both F2 and F4 have expressed the complexity of aligning policies across the university, academic departments, and colleges at Oxford.

> The problem at Oxford is very unique to other universities because of the collegiate system. So the university has its own policy. Let's say it's harassment policy, something like that. Every college is then free to set their own harassment policy, right? You know, it's difficult because each college is its own legal entity, OK? And it has its own governing body. But it does seem to me sometimes that that can cause problems. (F4)

4.4.4 Counselling Service:

Within the welfare support system, one key element is the mental counselling offered by the university and the colleges. Students could make an appointment if they feel challenges when coping with problems in their life. All officers acknowledged the importance of this service but also had concerns about the limited times that students have free access to within the university and the waiting time. These two issues could deter students from contacting for help.

4.4.5 Proactive Approach:

Both student and officer participants suggested that the welfare system at Oxford should adopt a more proactive approach. They emphasized that students in need of welfare support might struggle to initiate contact due to feelings of shame, fear of

disclosing problems, or the complexity of bureaucratic procedures. S1 suggested, "Do some kind of proactive action," highlighting the need for the institution to take the first step in offering support. S11 elaborated on the bureaucratic nature of the institution, stating, "The whole institution has been designed bureaucratically, making me feel that I am in a place where I'm not supposed to be and hence I am supposed to be thankful for the little things they're doing for me." This sentiment underscores the importance of creating a more welcoming and accessible welfare system that actively reaches out to students rather than waiting for them to seek help.

In addition to proactive engagement, participants recommended streamlining administrative procedures to prevent deterring students with overly complex processes. S13 recommended that colleges should identify first-generation students and organize exclusive events for them, facilitating socialization with other groups to foster a sense of closeness and compassion. This proactive identification and support can help mitigate feelings of isolation among first-gen students. S6 advised, "Reduce the amount of admin work," emphasizing the need to simplify bureaucratic procedures to ensure that students can easily access the support they need without feeling overwhelmed by administrative hurdles.

4.4.6 Building Awareness of First-generation College Students:

Participants noted a significant lack of discussion around first-generation college students (FGS) at Oxford, which contributes to their feelings of invisibility within the broader narratives of promoting equity and diversity. S10 observed, "I've never seen a conversation around first-gen students. It's not established in any rules or guidance, but it’s like not even conversed about, you know. So I think just starting to have any sort of conversation." This observation highlights the need for initiating and fostering conversations about first-generation students to ensure their experiences and challenges are acknowledged and addressed.

4.4.7 Cultural Inclusivity:

The cultural ambience of Oxford was commonly described as daunting by student participants. S7 expressed that "a lot of international students and first-gen students are afraid to speak to authority." This fear is compounded by the institution's rarefied and traditional nature, which includes many ancient customs and terminologies that can be overwhelming. S7 elaborated, "Because this is an institution that is so rarefied and so traditional and has all these like ancient things, like even just learning the names of the terms and stuff, like these things, when you're surrounded by people who are assuming that you know everything and you don't, and it can be really overwhelming." This statement underscores the need for Oxford to adopt more inclusive practices that demystify its traditions and make the cultural environment more accessible and welcoming for all students, especially those from international and first-generation backgrounds.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the diverse and multifaceted experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University. The findings reveal a range of challenges related to cultural adaptation, academic expectations, financial constraints, and social integration. The intersection of being both first-generation and international students adds complexity to their experiences, highlighting the need for tailored support services and greater institutional awareness. The perspectives of welfare officers further underscore the importance of proactive and culturally competent support mechanisms. These findings set the stage for a deeper discussion in the next chapter, where the implications of these experiences will be examined within the broader context of existing literature, and recommendations for policy and practice will be proposed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, we delve into the implications of the findings presented in the previous chapter by situating them within the broader context of existing literature. This discussion will illuminate how the experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University align with, contradict, or expand upon current academic discourse. The discussion is organized around the key themes identified in the findings: educational experiences, coping mechanisms, and suggestions for university improvement. Each theme will be explored through the lens of intersectionality, considering the compounded effects of being both first-generation and international students.

5.1 Educational Experiences

5.1.1 The International Student Identity Among First-Generation International Students

The international student identity of first-generation international students at Oxford University is shaped by the need to navigate a new educational system and cultural environment, which entails a complex interplay of cultural adaptation, academic expectations, and social integration. This aligns with previous research highlighting the multifaceted nature of international students' adjustment processes (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Lee & Castelo-Gutiérrez, 2019). The findings suggest that the length of stay, mode of study, and college affiliation significantly influence students' experiences, reflecting the diverse contexts within which they navigate their academic and social lives. College affiliation is a unique feature of institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, warranting further attention due to its potential to perpetuate elitist and unequal arrangements. Both students and officers in the findings highlighted disparities in resources and cultural environments across different colleges, suggesting that these variances could contribute to unequal student experiences and outcomes.

Understanding these differences is crucial for developing more equitable support systems and policies within such prestigious institutions.

Participants expressed varied responses to the academic culture at Oxford, a theme that resonates with the literature on educational acculturation among international students. For instance, some PhD participants in this research noted the emphasis on independent learning and research at Oxford, contrasting it with the more guided approach in their home countries. This divergence aligns with Berry's (2008, 2017) distinction between assimilation and acculturation, where the former involves adopting the dominant culture's norms, potentially leading to a sense of cultural loss, and the latter allows for maintaining one's cultural identity while integrating aspects of the new culture. The findings in last chapter indicate that students who adopted an assimilation approach often felt a sense of disconnection from their cultural roots, experiencing stress and identity conflict as they attempted to conform to the dominant academic culture at Oxford. Conversely, those who engaged in acculturation, integrating aspects of their own cultural identity while adapting to the new environment, reported feeling more balanced and less stressed. These students were able to leverage their cultural backgrounds as strengths, finding unique ways to contribute to their academic communities. This balance between maintaining their cultural identity and adapting to new academic norms helped them to navigate the pressures of a rigorous academic environment more effectively. Thus, the experiences of these first-generation international students underscore the importance of supporting acculturation strategies that allow for cultural integration rather than assimilation, which can mitigate feelings of cultural loss and enhance overall well-being.

Linguistic challenges and the subtleties of polite speech emerged as significant hurdles for international students, echoing findings by Andrade (2009) and Tavares (2021) who emphasize the role of English language proficiency in academic success and social integration. Participants highlighted difficulties in discerning nuanced English

expressions and navigating cultural perceptions, which is consistent with research by Garrison et al. (2023) that underscores the impact of language fluency on international students' experiences. However, interestingly, even native English speakers from North America reported challenges in understanding certain terms and expressions used at Oxford University, which deviates from the literature that typically associates linguistic challenges with non-native speakers. In this context, the cultural differences in communication styles added another layer of complexity. Many participants described the challenge of adapting to the indirect and often sarcastic nature of British communication. These difficulties in interpreting and using nuanced language contribute to a sense of isolation and misunderstanding. This aligns with findings by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007), who noted that international students frequently face misunderstandings and miscommunications due to differing cultural norms. Therefore, the experience of navigating linguistic and cultural nuances at Oxford highlights the intricate interplay between language proficiency and cultural adaptation, which is crucial for academic and social success.

The sentiment of cultural insularity and the perception of a "snobbish" culture among some faculty and students highlight the ongoing challenges of inclusivity and cultural openness at elite institutions. This finding aligns with Guo and Guo's (2017) critique of the gap between the rhetoric of internationalization and the lived realities of international students.

Furthermore, the preference for socializing within certain groups, as observed in the study, reflects existing literature on the social integration of international students. The tendency to form connections with others from similar cultural backgrounds can be a coping mechanism to mitigate feelings of isolation and cultural dissonance (Gómez et al., 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006). This preference highlights the importance of creating inclusive environments that encourage cross-cultural interactions while acknowledging and respecting the diverse backgrounds of students. Participants also discussed the hierarchical nature of interactions with faculty members, which contrasts sharply with

the more egalitarian academic cultures they were accustomed to in their home countries. This difference often made them feel uncomfortable and hesitant to engage with professors, reflecting the broader issue of adjusting to the formalities and expectations of academic interactions in Western institutions (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

The impact of cultural distance on the adaptation process cannot be understated. Students from countries with significant cultural differences from the UK reported more difficulties in adjusting, which is consistent with Berry's (2008) framework of acculturation stress. This stress affects not only their academic performance but also their mental health and overall well-being. Specifically, participants reported feelings of isolation, anxiety, and homesickness, which hindered their ability to concentrate on academic tasks and participate in social activities. These mental health challenges are supported by literature indicating that acculturation stress can lead to increased levels of depression, anxiety, and lower life satisfaction among international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). However, findings indicate that some welfare officers observed that international students who are cognizant of the large cultural distance often come better prepared to manage these differences, potentially experiencing less stress in their adaptation process. This observation aligns with comments from student participants who actively familiarized themselves with the foreign culture before arriving at Oxford University, suggesting that prior cultural awareness and preparation can mitigate the negative impacts of cultural distance.

5.1.2 The First-Generation College Student Identity Among First-Generation International Students

Participants' feelings of being "ignored" or lacking discussions about their first-generation student identity at Oxford University resonate with literature emphasizing the invisibility of this group (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020). Besides, the deficit-

oriented narrative prevalent in higher education often overlooks the diverse backgrounds and identities of first-generation students, treating them as a homogeneous group perceived to lack certain academic skills and involvement compared to their peers (Davies & Rizk, 2018). However, both student and officer participants have mentioned that being first-generation college students has compelled them to become more self-reliant and resourceful, as they have had to navigate challenges independently and develop proficiency in seeking information and resolving issues.

The mental pressure and lack of a "safety net" described by participants align with the significant emotional burden faced by first-generation students. The high expectations from families and the need to prove themselves add to this emotional strain. This finding is consistent with existing literature that highlights the psychological challenges first-generation students experience due to familial expectations and the pressure to succeed academically without the support systems often available to their peers (Atherton, 2014; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). Participants also expressed a keen awareness of their responsibility to succeed not just for themselves but for their families and communities. This sense of duty adds an additional layer of pressure, as failure is perceived not only as a personal shortcoming but as a disappointment to those who have invested in their success. This aligns with the concept of "family achievement guilt," where the success of first-generation students can lead to feelings of guilt and isolation from their families, who may not fully understand or relate to their academic experiences. Research by Covarrubias, Romero, and Trivelli (2015) discusses how first-generation students often experience this guilt, feeling torn between their academic pursuits and familial expectations, which can exacerbate their emotional and psychological stress.

The concept of cultural capital is also relevant in understanding the challenges faced by first-generation students. The cultural capital associated with their backgrounds—or

the lack thereof—plays a critical role in their university experience. Bourdieu (2011) argues that cultural capital, which includes knowledge, skills, education, and any advantages a person has that give them a higher status in society, significantly impacts their ability to succeed in academic settings. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discuss how students lacking inherited cultural and social capital must navigate higher education largely on their own. This lack of cultural capital means that first-generation students often enter academic environments without the same level of preparedness or insider knowledge as their peers, making it harder to access resources and support networks effectively. Even though the participants have expressed their "forced" independence and various skills, this finding underscores the need for institutions to recognize and address these disparities to provide more equitable support for first-generation students.

5.1.3 Intersectional Challenges

The experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University highlight the compounded challenges stemming from their intersecting identities. These students navigate a unique set of obstacles that are not fully addressed by existing support systems, which often focus on singular aspects of identity rather than their intersection. The notion of feeling "invisible" among first-generation international students speaks to the broader issue of intersectional invisibility, where individuals at the crossroads of multiple marginalized identities often feel overlooked (Greenway et al., 2022; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This invisibility is not solely attributable to their status as international students or first-generation students but is compounded by the intersection of their first-generation and international identities, highlighting the unique and complex challenges they face. First-generation international students at Oxford University experience this invisibility in several ways as evidenced in the findings chapter. The lack of tailored support services that address the intersection of their identities means that their specific needs are often unmet. This invisibility can lead to

feelings of alienation and frustration, as their experiences do not fit neatly into the existing categories of support services designed for either international or first-generation students alone (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). As Greenway et al. (2022) argue, policies and practices in higher education often fail to account for the overlapping nature of social identities, resulting in support systems that are insufficiently nuanced. This lack of recognition and support exacerbates the difficulties faced by first-generation international students, highlighting the need for more intersectional approaches in university policies and support services.

Cultural adaptation presents a significant challenge for first-generation international students, who must adjust to new educational and social environments simultaneously. This dual adjustment is more complex than for students who only need to adapt to either a new culture or a new academic system. Participants in the study described difficulties in understanding British cultural norms and academic expectations, a finding that aligns with Berry's (2008) theory of acculturation stress. The stress associated with adapting to a new culture can exacerbate the challenges of academic adaptation, making it crucial for institutions to provide comprehensive support that addresses both cultural and academic needs. Social adaptation is also complicated by the intersectional nature of these students' identities. Many participants reported feelings of isolation and insularity, often compounded by cultural differences and the perception of a "snobbish" culture among some faculty and peers. This experience resonates with the findings of Gómez et al. (2014) and Kashima and Loh (2006), who noted that social support networks are critical for international students' adjustment. However, for first-generation international students, the lack of social and cultural capital makes it harder to form these networks, further isolating them from the broader university community.

Financial pressures are another significant challenge for first-generation international students. The high cost of living and tuition fees at Oxford create substantial financial

strain, which affects their ability to participate fully in university life. This financial precarity is often exacerbated by the need to support family members back home, adding an extra layer of stress. Moreover, the intersectionality of being both first-generation and low-socioeconomic status students amplifies these challenges. The intersection of being a first-generation student and belonging to a lower socioeconomic status background also means that these students are more likely to work part-time jobs to support themselves financially. This additional workload can detract from their study time and social integration, further perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. Bellibas (2016) notes that working while studying significantly impacts the academic performance and social integration of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

The lack of financial resources not only affects their ability to participate in academic and social activities but also imposes additional stress related to academic expenses and living costs. This dual burden is consistent with the findings of Moschetti and Hudley (2015) who demonstrated how the convergence of first-generation status and low socioeconomic status compounds the challenges faced by students within university contexts. Marginson et al. (2010) further highlighted that international students face significant financial insecurity, which exacerbates their vulnerability and stress, impacting their overall academic and social experiences.

Participants' reflections on their socioeconomic status backgrounds and the financial constraints they face highlight the significant impact of socioeconomic status on their university experiences. The reliance on scholarships and mindful spending habits illustrates the financial precarity many students navigate, aligning with studies by Bellibas (2016) and Hanushek et al. (2019) that document the attainment gaps between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The notion of financial constraints limiting social interactions and networking opportunities further supports

the argument that socioeconomic status disparities persistently affect students' academic and social integration (Jury et al., 2017).

Participants also described the psychological impact of their socioeconomic status background, which often manifests as imposter syndrome—a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evident success (Gardner & Holley, 2011). This feeling of not belonging is exacerbated by the visible wealth and privilege of many of their peers, creating a stark contrast to their own financial realities. The psychological burden of navigating these environments without a safety net or familial guidance significantly affects their mental health and academic performance.

5.2 Coping Mechanisms

Participants employed various coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges they faced, ranging from independent strategies to seeking support from friends, family, and university services. The preference for handling challenges independently through physical exercise, mental meditation, or online information searches reflects a common theme in the literature on coping strategies among underrepresented students (Glass et al., 2015; Kinzie et al., 2008). This preference often stems from a sense of shame or fear of disclosing problems, as highlighted by Mishra (2020).

Seeking help from friends emerged as a significant coping mechanism, corresponding with participants' social group preferences discussed earlier. This finding aligns with research by Gómez et al. (2014) and Kashima and Loh (2006), who emphasize the importance of social support networks in facilitating acculturation and adjustment among international students. The role of social interactions in fostering a sense of belonging and community further supports the argument that social support is crucial for the well-being and success of underrepresented students (Aw et al., 2015; Tran & Pham, 2016). Participants who had strong support networks, either from friends or

family, reported better adjustment outcomes. This is supported by research from Gómez et al. (2014) and Glass and Westmont (2014) who emphasize the importance of social connections in facilitating the acculturation process.

Participants' disappointment with institutional support from the university or college reflects broader issues of trust and accessibility within the welfare system. The perceived inefficiency and slow responses within the collegial system at Oxford University highlight the need for more proactive and streamlined support services. This finding aligns with research by Green and Wright (2017) and Davalos (2014), who underscore the importance of effective institutional support initiatives for promoting the success and well-being of underrepresented students.

Moreover, the reluctance to seek institutional support due to fears of being misunderstood or not taken seriously is a significant barrier. This aligns with findings by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) and Seelman (2014), who highlight the importance of culturally competent support services that can effectively address the unique needs of diverse student populations. The cultural competency of support staff is a critical factor in the effectiveness of institutional support. Participants expressed a need for support services that understand and respect their cultural backgrounds and unique challenges. Culturally competent support staff can better empathize with students' experiences and provide more relevant and sensitive guidance. This includes understanding the cultural nuances that influence students' help-seeking behaviours and adjusting support approaches accordingly (Constantine & Sue, 2005; Sue et al., 2008). The lack of trust in institutional support mechanisms suggests a need for improved communication and relationship-building between students and support staff.

Participants' dissatisfaction with institutional support highlights several areas for improvement. The perceived inefficiency and slow response times of university

services can exacerbate feelings of frustration and helplessness. Effective support services must be timely, responsive, and proactive in addressing the needs of students. Research by Green and Wright (2017) suggests that streamlined and well-coordinated support services are crucial for promoting student well-being and success.

In addition, based on the findings from this research, the limitations of social support must also be acknowledged. While friends can provide emotional and practical support, they may not always have the resources or expertise to address more complex issues related to mental health, academic pressures, or financial stress. This further underscores the importance of accessible and effective institutional support services that can complement the informal support networks of students.

The reliance on independent coping strategies also highlights the importance of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to manage and overcome challenges. Bandura's (1999) theory of self-efficacy suggests that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to engage in proactive coping behaviours and persevere in the face of difficulties. For first-generation international students, developing self-efficacy is critical in navigating the dual challenges of adjusting to a new cultural and academic environment while also managing the expectations and pressures associated with being the first in their families to attend university.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the reliance on self-efficacy and resilience should not absolve institutions from their responsibility to provide adequate support. While individual coping mechanisms are important, they should be complemented by institutional efforts to create a supportive and inclusive environment. This includes providing accessible mental health services, academic support, and financial assistance tailored to the needs of first-generation international students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kinzie et al., 2008).

The need for improved communication and relationship-building between students and support staff also emerged as a key theme. Participants indicated that they often felt misunderstood or overlooked by institutional support services. Building trust and rapport between students and support staff is essential for effective support. This involves training staff to be more approachable, empathetic, and knowledgeable about the specific challenges faced by first-generation international students (Thomas, 2012).

Additionally, peer mentoring programs can play a significant role in supporting first-generation international students. Peer mentors who have successfully navigated similar challenges can provide valuable insights, guidance, and support. Research by Crisp and Cruz (2009) and Nora and Crisp (2007) highlights the positive impact of peer mentoring on student retention, academic success, and overall well-being. Such programs can help bridge the gap between institutional support and students' needs, providing a more holistic support system.

5.3 Suggestions for University Improvement

Both students and welfare officers offered valuable insights and suggestions for improving the welfare support system at Oxford University. The need for better data sharing and better awareness of first-generation and international students was a recurrent theme. This suggestion aligns with calls in the literature for more comprehensive data collection and sharing to inform targeted support strategies (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Nichols & Stahl, 2019).

The desire for a more diverse composition of welfare officers and specialized training in welfare and mental health reflects the importance of cultural competence in support services. Participants indicated that having welfare officers who share similar backgrounds or experiences would make them feel more comfortable and understood. This finding supports research by Arif et al. (2021) and Colbert (Colbert, 2010), which

emphasize the importance of diversity and cultural competency in promoting equity and inclusion within institutional support structures.

Additionally, there was a strong call for reducing administrative burdens and streamlining support procedures. Participants highlighted the need for more efficient and accessible services, which resonates with research by King (2009) and Kinzie et al. (2008). Simplifying administrative processes can significantly enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of support services for underrepresented students, reducing the time and effort required to seek help.

Participants also suggested that the university should adopt a more proactive approach in identifying and supporting first-generation international students. Proactive measures such as orientation programs specifically tailored for these students, regular check-ins, and dedicated support groups could help in building a supportive community. This recommendation aligns with the findings of Mishra (2020), who emphasized the need for proactive support systems to address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented students.

Moreover, fostering an inclusive and supportive campus culture was deemed crucial. Participants expressed a desire for more awareness and discussions around the experiences of first-generation international students, which would help in normalizing their struggles and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help. This aligns with the recommendations of Ives and Castillo-Montoya (2020), who advocate for creating spaces where the experiences of first-generation students are recognized and valued.

Creating more opportunities for first-generation international students to share their experiences and connect with others in similar situations can foster a sense of belonging and community. This can be facilitated through student organizations, support groups, and events that celebrate the diversity and contributions of first-

generation international students. Research by Thomas (2012) highlights the importance of a sense of belonging in promoting student retention and success.

Another critical suggestion from participants was the need for more comprehensive financial support. Many first-generation international students face significant financial challenges that impact their ability to fully engage in university life. Expanding scholarship programs, offering emergency financial aid, and providing clear information about available financial resources can help alleviate some of these burdens. Studies by Bellibas (2016) and Hanushek et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of financial support in reducing educational disparities and promoting equity.

The integration of mental health services with academic and financial support is also crucial. Providing holistic support that addresses the interconnected aspects of students' lives can lead to better outcomes. This involves training support staff to recognize and address the complex needs of first-generation international students and fostering a collaborative approach among different support services (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Sue et al., 2008). Training for faculty and staff on the complexities of intersectional identities can also help in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment. By understanding the unique challenges faced by first-generation international students, university personnel can offer more empathetic and effective support.

Finally, participants called for greater institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion. This involves not only providing support services but also addressing systemic barriers that contribute to the marginalization of first-generation international students. Implementing policies and practices that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of the institution is essential for creating a more supportive and welcoming environment (Bauman et al., 2005; Bensimon, 2005; Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

5.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted experiences of first-generation international students at Oxford University. These students navigate a range of challenges related to cultural adaptation, academic expectations, financial constraints, and social integration. The intersectional lens applied in this research underscores the compounded effects of being both first-generation and international students, revealing unique disadvantages and systemic barriers.

This discussion has situated these findings within the broader context of existing literature, drawing on relevant studies to illuminate the implications and significance of the experiences described by participants. The insights and suggestions offered by both students and welfare officers provide valuable directions for improving institutional support and fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment at Oxford University.

Ongoing efforts to address these challenges and implement targeted support strategies are crucial for promoting the success and well-being of first-generation international students. Future research should continue to explore the intersectional dynamics of underrepresented student populations, contributing to a deeper understanding of their experiences and informing more effective policies and practices in higher education.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

Despite the comprehensive approach of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, as a student researcher conducting interviews with welfare officers, the difference in our positions within the institution may have influenced the responses, potentially introducing bias despite efforts to mitigate this through reflexivity and rapport-building. Secondly, the variability in the quality of insights provided by participants is a notable limitation. Some participants may have presented

less valuable opinions, affecting the overall depth and reliability of the data. Additionally, the sample did not include undergraduate students, which limits the transferability of the findings to all first-generation international students at Oxford. Future research should consider employing mixed-method approaches to triangulate data and enhance validity. Expanding the sample size and including perspectives from other stakeholders, such as undergraduate students, teaching faculty members, and administrative staff, could provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges faced by first-generation international students. Longitudinal studies could also be beneficial in tracking the evolution of these students' experiences over time, providing insights into the long-term impact of institutional support mechanisms.

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Appendix 1 - CUREC

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC)

CUREC 1A Application form for research projects in the social sciences and humanities with less complex ethical issues

The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics review process has been established to ensure that research involving human participants is conducted in a way that respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants, and minimises risk to participants, researchers, third parties, and to the University itself. It is assumed that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously, and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to established principles and good practice in their field and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements.

Before completing this form, please refer to the guidance and flowchart on the Research Support website. Only type-written forms form will be accepted. Completed application forms should be emailed, along with relevant supporting documents, to your Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) or to ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk from your ox.ac.uk email address.

Please contact your DREC or the SSH IDREC if you have any questions about completing this form or the review process.

Advisory text is highlighted in yellow and should be deleted before finalising the document.

4.2 SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application		
This section determines whether the application for ethics review should be made using this form (CUREC 1A) or the CUREC 2 form (for research with more complex ethical issues).		
Please indicate with an 'X'.	**Yes**	**No**
1. Does the research involve the deception of participants?	☐	☒
2. Are the research participants vulnerable in the context of the research, or classed as people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question? For example, • Participants aged 16 or under (also answer question A5); • Participants aged 16 – 18 who can neither be considered competent youths nor recruited under Approved Procedure 25 • adults at risk; Note the University's Safeguarding Guidance and Code of Practice and its implications for researchers involving young people or adults at risk.	☐	☒
3. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution or significant harm?	☐	☒

4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent Duty), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Best Practice Guidance 07 on the Prevent Duty provides further guidance.	☐	☒
If you answered **'No'** to all the questions above, go to Section B. If you answered **'Yes'** to any question above, continue to question 5 below.		
5. Is your project covered by a CUREC Approved Procedure?	☐	☐
If yes, list the CUREC Approved Procedure(s) you will follow		
If you have answered '**No**' to all questions 1-4, go on to **Section B**. If you answered '**Yes**' to ANY of questions 1-4, and answered '**No**' to question 5, **stop** completing this form and do not submit it for ethical review. You will instead need to submit a CUREC 2 application form. If you answered '**Yes**' to **any** of questions 1-4, and your project is covered by an Approved Procedure, **go on to Section B**. If more than one Approved Procedure applies, contact the SSH IDREC or your DREC for advice on whether a CUREC 2 form should be submitted instead.		

4.3 SECTION B: Researchers			
1. Name of Principal Investigator or student's supervisor	Simon Marginson		
2. Department or Institute	Department of Education		
3. University of Oxford email address	simon.marginson@education.ox.ac.uk		
Copy and paste the following six rows as necessary to complete for each additional researcher who will be involved in this study, including student(s) and those external to the University.			
4. Name of researcher or student	Delei Zhou		
5. Department or Institute	Department of Education		
6. University of Oxford email address	delei.zhou@worc.ox.ac.uk		
7. Role in research	Student		
8. Degree programme, if student research	MSc		
The whole research team			
9. Have the researchers undertaken research ethics and integrity training?		**Yes** ☒	**No** ☐
10. Please provide details of any research ethics and integrity training undertaken, including the dates of the training. Alternatively state relevant research experience.	Delei Zhou completed *Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course* on 10 Dec 2023		

11. State any conflicts of interest and explain how these will be addressed.	None.

4.4 SECTION C: The research project	
1. Title of the research project	
Implications of Intersectionality on First-generation, Lower-SES International Students' Educational Experience in University of Oxford	
2. Anticipated start date of the aspect of the research project involving human participants and/ or personal data (**dd/mm/yy**).	**29/01/2024 or as soon as CUREC is approve**
3. Anticipated research end date (**dd/mm/yy**).	**31/07/2024**
4. Provide a brief lay summary of the aims and objectives of the research. This should cover the questions it will answer and any potential benefits. (max 300 words)	
This research aims to investigate the experiences of first-generation, lower socioeconomic status (SES) international students at University of Oxford, focusing on their unique intersectional identities. Lower SES international students are defined by the level of parental education – these are students whose parents did not enter higher education. The increasing presence of such students in UK universities, including Oxford, is influenced by globalization, internationalization of Higher Education, diversity initiatives, and educational access programs. Scholarships and financial aid provided by institutions further contribute to this growing demographic. Utilizing an intersectional framework, the study seeks to unravel the multifaceted experiences of individuals who belong to both international and lower-SES backgrounds. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: 1. Diverse Experiences: What are the distinct experiences encountered by first-generation, lower-SES international students at University of Oxford? How do these experiences vary based on their intersecting identities? 2. Coping Strategies: How do these students navigate the challenges they encounter at University of Oxford? What coping strategies do they employ to overcome obstacles associated with their unique backgrounds? 3. Institutional Support: What role does the institutional support system play in shaping the educational experiences of first-generation, lower-SES international students at University of Oxford? How does it either facilitate or hinder their academic journey? By exploring these questions, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the nuanced experiences of a specific demographic within the University of Oxford community. The findings are anticipated to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced	

by these students and inform potential improvements in institutional support structures, fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

5. Please indicate the methods to be used (indicate with an '**X**'):	
Analysis of existing records	☐
Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	☒
Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters (refer to guidance in BPG 01: Researcher safety)	☐
Participant observation	☐
Covert observation	☐
Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	☐
Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	☒
Using social media to recruit or interact with participants (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	☒
Participant performs paper and pencil task	☐
Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	☐
Focus group	☐
Interview (refer to guidance in BPG 10: Conducting research interviews)	☒
Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
Others (please specify below)	☐

6. Provide a brief summary of the research design and methods. What will research participants be asked to do? (max 300 words) Please also submit a copy of the questions participants will be asked, if applicable, or some information about the sorts of topics that will be covered.

This study employs a qualitative research design to comprehensively explore the experiences of first-generation, lower-SES international students at the University of Oxford. Utilizing an interpretative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews will be conducted to gather rich and nuanced data, allowing participants to share their unique perspectives. The study aims to recruit 15 students from various disciplines and degree programs, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences. Additionally, 5 welfare officers representing both university-level and college-level positions at the University of Oxford will be included. This combination of student and staff perspectives will provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and coping strategies within the university community.

Sampling Strategy:

Recruitment will involve open calls and targeted advertisements across university platforms, social media, and mailing lists to attract a broad and varied audience. Utilizing a snowball sampling technique, initial participants will be encouraged to invite others, fostering a broad representation. Purposeful selection strategies will ensure diversity in age, gender, and academic discipline, capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives and enriching the study's findings.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews will be the primary method of data collection, offering participants the flexibility to express their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Interviews will be conducted either in study rooms within Bodleian Libraries or, weather permitting, in public parks. To ensure transparency and respect for participants' privacy, interviews will be audio-recorded with explicit consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for thorough analysis.

Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis will guide the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and connections within the collected data. Transcripts will be coded, and these codes will be organized into overarching themes. The interpretative process will involve considering these findings within the context of the research questions, providing insights into the experiences of first-generation, lower-SES international students at the University of Oxford.

7. List the location(s) where the research will be conducted, including any other countries.	Bodleian Libraries Study Room (Booked); Community Spaces like community centers or cafes; Public Parks in Oxford
8. Clarify which parts of the research will be conducted in-person and which will take place remotely, e.g. online.	The primary mode of data collection for this research will be through in-person interviews. In-person interviews offer the advantage of direct interaction, allowing for a more personal and nuanced exploration of participants' experiences.

	However, recognizing the diverse needs and preferences of participants, remote interviews via online platforms will be offered as an alternative. Participants who are unable to or prefer not to participate in person will have the option to join a virtual interview. Online interviews will be conducted using secure and privacy-conscious platforms to ensure the confidentiality of participants' responses. The decision to participate in-person or online is entirely at the discretion of the participant, and their comfort and preferences will be prioritized. Participants will be informed of both options during the recruitment process, and arrangements for the interview format will be made based on their choice.

9. If your research involves fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? Please indicate with an '**X**'. (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are advised to take out University travel insurance.) Refer to guidance available from your Department, the Safety Office, the Social Sciences Division, and the Humanities Division, and on travel for University business.	Yes	☐
	No	☐
	Not required in this instance	☒

10. In the case of international or collaborative research, explain how you will address any ethical issues specific to the local context. Please provide details of the local review, approval or permission obtained or required. Refer to the BPG 16: Social science research conducted outside the UK and the Code of Conduct for Ethical Fieldwork. If there will be no local review, explain why not. Please mention any stakeholder or community engagement that has been/ will be undertaken in relation to the research. Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in Section G.
N/A

11. Name of departmental/ peer reviewer (if applicable)	
12. External organisation funding the research and grant reference (if applicable)	
13. Please refer to the CUREC Best Practice Guidance and list any that have been used to develop your research.	BPG 01 Researcher safety BPG 03 Elite and expert interviewing BPG 09 Data collection, protection and management BPG 10 Conducting research interviews

4.5 SECTION D: Recruitment of research participants	
1. Number of participants	20
2. How was the number of participants decided?	The decision to limit the number of participants in this qualitative study aligns with the principles of qualitative research, emphasizing the depth and richness of data over sheer quantity. Qualitative approaches aim to delve into nuanced details, providing an in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomena. Selecting a sample size of 20 participants, including 15 students and 5 staff members, allows for a profound engagement with each participant's narrative. This facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the challenges, coping strategies, and institutional dynamics characterizing the experiences of first-generation, lower-SES international students at the University of Oxford. The sensitivity of the research topic underscores the importance of creating a safe and trusting space for participants. A smaller sample size enables more personalized interactions, fostering an environment for open and authentic sharing of experiences. Considering the MSc level and the limited research period of approximately half a year, a sample size of 20 is strategic and

	methodologically aligned. This ensures a focused, detailed exploration of individual narratives, contributing to the overall quality and depth of the study's findings. Additionally, the unique demographic landscape of Oxford University, with a potentially smaller pool of first-generation, lower-SES international students, supports the decision to keep the number of participants modest, avoiding unnecessary recruitment efforts while still providing valuable insights.	
3. Age range of participants	18 and over	
4. Inclusion criteria	- First-Generation Status and International Student Status: Participants should be classified as first-generation college students who are not the UK citizens, indicating that neither of their parents has undertaken a tertiary level degree. - Current Enrollment at the University of Oxford: Participants must be actively enrolled at the University of Oxford during the data collection period. - Willingness to Share Experiences: Participants should express a willingness to discuss their experiences openly and candidly during in-depth interviews.	
5. Exclusion criteria	- Non-First-Generation Students: Individuals whose parents have undertaken a university degree, thus not meeting the criteria for first-generation status. - Non-Enrollment or Past Enrollment: Individuals who are not currently enrolled at the University of Oxford or have completed their studies. - Unwillingness to Participate: Individuals who are unwilling or uncomfortable discussing personal experiences related to their international status and being first-generation.	
6. Indicate with an '**X**' all intended recruitment methods **Please submit copies of the recruitment material that will be used, e.g. advertisement text, introductory email text.**	Poster advert	☒
	Flyer	☐
	Email circulation	☒
	Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)	☒
	Website	☐

	In-person approach	☒
	Snowball sampling	☒
	Recruitment sites (e.g. Mechanical Turk)	☐
	Existing contacts or volunteer database	☐
	Other (please specify):	☐
7. How will potential participants be identified and approached?	1. Open Calls and Advertisements: - Advertisements will be strategically placed on university bulletin boards across relevant departments. - Posts will be shared on official university social media platforms, targeting diverse student groups. - Advertisements will be disseminated through mailing lists associated with international student organizations, diversity and inclusion groups, and academic departments. 2. Snowball Sampling: - Initial participants, once recruited, will be encouraged to share an invitation email with their peers within their social circles. 3. Welfare Officers as Interviewees: - Welfare officers, both at the university and college levels, will be approached directly for participation as interviewees. - Direct communication with welfare officers will involve sending personalized emails explaining the study's objectives and seeking their willingness to contribute to the research. Approach: - All recruitment materials, including advertisements and introductory emails, will emphasize the importance of diverse perspectives and the value of participants' experiences. - Clear information will be provided about the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and the overall aim of the study.	

	- To ensure inclusivity, materials will be designed with sensitivity to cultural nuances and potential barriers to participation. - To increase diversity, participants will be purposefully selected across a range of age groups, various academic disciplines, and different gender identities. This will facilitate an examination of how intersectionality impacts on the experiences of participants. Continued Engagement: - Regular updates and reminders will be shared through the selected communication channels to maintain participant engagement. - Periodic check-ins with welfare officers and other initial participants will be conducted to assess progress and address any concerns or questions.
8. Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants or their parents/ guardians? If not, please explain why not.	Yes
9. For each activity or group of participants, explain how informed consent will be obtained from the participants themselves and/ or their parents/ guardians, if applicable. How will their consent be recorded? **Please submit copies of all participant-facing materials for review.** E.g.: • Recruitment material (e.g. emails, posters) • Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. written information or, if applicable, an outline oral information script). • A document to record informed consent. Further guidance and templates.	**Consent Process:** 1. **Initial Invitation:** Potential participants will receive the initial invitation email, introducing the study and its objectives. 2. **Participant Information Sheet:** Those expressing interest will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet, offering comprehensive details about the study. 3. **Follow-up Communication:** Subsequent communication will include the Informed Consent Form, giving participants the opportunity to provide written consent or opt-out. 4. **Signed Consent Forms:** Participants who choose to take part will sign and return the Informed Consent Form, which will be securely stored as a record of their agreement to participate.

	By following this process, participants will be adequately informed, and their consent will be appropriately recorded. The materials provided will be designed to be accessible, ensuring that participants have the information they need to make an informed decision about their participation.
10. Provide details of any payments and incentives and the rationale for providing these. Further guidance in Best Practice Guidance: 05 Payments and incentives in research.	None.
11. Describe how participants • may withdraw from the study • may withdraw any personal information they have provided from the study State any limits to withdrawal, for example once the data has been anonymised or at some other specified stage prior to publication. Make sure participants are aware of any withdrawal limits.	Participants can withdraw from the research, without giving a reason, by advising me of this decision. The deadline by which participants can withdraw any information they have contributed to the research is 31/07/2024. If participants decide to withdraw from the research, any data that has already been collected will be eliminated.

4.6 SECTION E: Research data

All information provided by participants is considered research data for the purpose of this form. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as personal data; any personal data which is sensitive is considered special category data. Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research.

In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the Data Protection Checklist and Data Protection Screening Assessment and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate Data Protection Impact Assessment may also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from Research Data Oxford and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from the Information Compliance team.

For guidance on conducting internet-mediated research, refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance 06: Internet-mediated research.

1. What data will be collected? (Indicate with an '**X**')			
Screening documents	☐	Task results (e.g. questionnaires, diaries)	☐
Consent records (e.g., written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms)	☒	IP addresses (refer to Best Practice Guidance 09: Data collection, protection and management for guidance)	☐
Contact details for the purpose of this research only	☒	Field notes	☒
Contact details for future use (guidance)	☐	Photographs	☐
Opt-out forms	☒	Information about the health of the participant (including mental health)	☐
Audio recordings	☒	Previously collected (secondary) data	☐
Video recordings	☐	Data already in the public domain. Specify the source of the data:	☐
Transcript of audio/ video recordings	☒	Other, please specify:	☐

2. During the course of the research, where will **each type of** research data be stored?	1. Consent Records: - Location: Digital copies of consent forms, assent forms, and any written records will be stored securely on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers. - Security Measures: All digital consent records will be encrypted to ensure data security. - Duration: Consent forms will be retained for a minimum of three years after publication or public release. Original paper consent forms will be digitized, securely stored, and then physically destroyed through shredding. 2. Contact Details: - Location: Contact details collected for research purposes only will be securely stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers. - Security Measures: Data will be encrypted to maintain confidentiality. - Duration: Contact details will be retained for the duration of the research project. 3. Field Notes: - Location: Field notes will be securely stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers after digitization. - Security Measures: Digital field notes will be encrypted to protect the information.

	- Duration: Field notes will be retained for the duration of the research project. 4. Opt-Out Forms: - Location: Digital copies of opt-out forms will be stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers. - Security Measures: Encryption will be applied to ensure data security. - Duration: Opt-out forms will be retained for a minimum of three years after publication or public release. 5. Audio Recordings: - Location: Audio recordings will be stored securely on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers. - Security Measures: Encryption will be applied to protect confidentiality. - Duration: Recordings will be deleted after transcription. 6. Transcripts of Audio Recordings: - Location: Transcripts will be securely stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers. - Security Measures: Encryption will be applied for data security. - Duration: Transcripts will be retained for a minimum of three years after publication or public release. Physical Data: - Any physical data, including original consent forms, will be scanned on a safe scanner, and (if there are personal data) the researcher will keep them password protected folder in OneDrive, then destroy the physical copies. Overall Security Measures: - All storage methods will comply with university security protocols, ensuring data integrity and confidentiality throughout the research process.
3. Who will have access to the research data during the project?	1. Primary Researcher (Me): - As the primary researcher, I will have access to all collected data for analysis and interpretation. - I will adhere to confidentiality protocols and ethical standards in handling participant data. 2. Supervisor: - My supervisor will have access to the research data for the purpose of guidance, oversight, and evaluation. - He will ensure that data management follows ethical guidelines and academic standards.

4. Please complete this section if your research involves the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data.	**Please indicated with an 'X'.**	**Yes**	**No**
	Are data access agreements in place for access to and use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)	☐	☐
	Did the individuals agree that their data could be used for this purpose?	☐	☐
	Could anyone (including members of the research team) link the data back to an individual or individuals? If this is a possibility, please explain how the associated ethical issues will be addressed:	☐	☐
5. How do you intend to share the research data at the end of the project?	Depositing in a specialist data centre or archive	☐	
	Submitting to a journal to support a publication	☐	
	Depositing in an institutional repository	☐	
	Dissemination via a project or institutional website	☐	
	No plans to share the data	☒	
	Other (please specify):	☐	
6. How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the research? (Indicate with an 'X')	Thesis publication	☒	
	Publication in a peer reviewed journal	☒	
	Publicly available report	☐	
	Conference presentation	☒	
	Publication on a website	☐	
	Pre-registration	☐	
	Report to a research funder	☐	
	Providing participants with a lay summary of the results	☐	
	Submission for academic assessment	☒	
	Other (please specify):	☐	

7. Explain what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.
This question must be answered for each type of data, including completed consent forms.

All the data will be stored on the University of Oxford Nexus365 OneDrive for Business file storage service for at least three years, which is approved by the University for all research data storage. In the event that the student researcher completes her degree and leaves the university before this length, one of the supervisors on this CUREC form will keep the research data in a folder on their Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business account.

Audio recordings will be permanently deleted after transcription.

Data will be pseudonymised by replacing personal identifiers with unique identification numbers (IDs) or codes, and the data containing the personal identifiers, and any linkage to that, will be stored separately and deleted at the end of the project.

Any physical data that cannot be digitised and then destroyed/shredded will be kept in a secure storage facility such as a locked storage room or locked filing cabinet within the Department, with access to it monitored and limited to the people that require access to the data.

Consent forms, transcripts and other pseudonymised research data will be retained safely by the PI for at least three years after the final submission of the thesis. After this period, all data will be eliminated in compliance with data protection protocols.

4.7 SECTION F: Protection of research participants and their personal data		
1. How identifiable will the participants be from the **research outputs**? (Indicate with an 'X')	Directly identifiable from the information included	☐
	Pseudonymised/ indirectly identifiable	☒
	Not identifiable – data is anonymous	☐
	Other, please specify:	☐
2. To what extent will the **data** be de-identified? How identifiable will any individuals be from the research data? Describe any measures you will take towards assuring confidentiality, potential risks to confidentiality.	1. De-Identification Process: - Participants will be assigned unique identification numbers to replace personal identifiers, ensuring de-identification. - Any personally identifiable information, such as names or specific details, will be carefully removed or altered in transcripts and records. 2. Confidentiality Measures: - Data will be stored in secure platforms, including Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers, to prevent unauthorized access. - Consent records, which include personal details, will be kept separately from other data, ensuring an additional layer of protection. 3. Potential Risks to Confidentiality: - Recognizing the challenges of full anonymization in qualitative data, every effort will be made to minimize risks.	

	- The primary researcher and supervisor will implement strict access controls and confidentiality agreements for any external parties involved.
3. How will you ensure that third parties (e.g., interpreters and transcribers) are aware of and adhere to the measures described in this form?	1. Limited Third-Party Involvement: - The research project minimizes third-party involvement, primarily utilizing Microsoft Office suite features within Nexus365 for transcription and processing confidential information. 2. Compliance with University Policies: - The University's Information Security Team has approved the use of Microsoft Office suite within Nexus365, ensuring adherence to security and confidentiality standards. - As the research doesn't extensively involve third-party services or international data transfers, it aligns with the University's policies on working with third parties. 3. Confidentiality Agreement Protocols: - Since the research doesn't extensively engage third-party services, specific confidentiality agreements may not be applicable. - However, if any minimal third-party involvement arises, confidentiality protocols, as outlined by the University's policies, will be strictly followed.

4.8 SECTION G: Risks and benefits of the research
1. Will the research involve topics that could be considered sensitive? If so: a. Please provide more detail or supporting information (such as the interview questions) to show the range of questions; b. Explain what steps will be taken to reduce risk of distress; c. Consider seeking advice from within your Department or from the ethics committee including whether the application might benefit from additional ethics review (e.g., via a CUREC 2 application).
a. Detailed Overview of Sensitive Topics: - The research may touch upon potentially sensitive topics such as participants' experiences related to their gender or ethnic status. - Interview questions will explore the intersectionality of identity, aiming to understand how gender, age, socioeconomic background, and international status shape participants' experiences at the University of Oxford. b. Steps to Mitigate Distress: - Prior to the interviews, participants will be provided with a comprehensive information sheet outlining the topics that may be discussed.

- The interviewer will approach sensitive topics with care, ensuring a supportive and non-intrusive environment during the interviews.
- Participants will be informed about the availability of university counselling services, and contact details will be provided if they wish to seek support or discuss any emotional concerns arising from their participation in the study.
- Participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw at any point during the study, without the need for justification, emphasizing their autonomy and control over the information shared.

c. Informed Decision-Making:
- Participants will be fully informed about the sensitive nature of the topics during the recruitment process and will have the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarifications.
- The information sheet and consent process will emphasize the voluntary nature of participation and the importance of informed decision-making.

2. Describe any additional burden or risks to the participants or others, including the potential for any indirect negative consequences. Explain the steps you will take to address these.

1. Interview Burden:
- Mitigation: The interviews may impose a burden on participants in terms of time and emotional engagement. To address this, the researcher will ensure flexibility in scheduling, minimize interview duration, and provide breaks during longer sessions.

2. Emotional Impact of Sensitive Topics:
- Mitigation: The discussion of sensitive topics related to identity, such as gender or ethnic status, may evoke emotional responses. The researcher will employ a supportive interview approach, emphasizing participants' autonomy to share information and providing contact information university counselling services as mentioned above.

3. Potential for Unintended Disclosures:
- Mitigation: Participants may unintentionally disclose sensitive information during interviews. The researcher will be trained in handling such disclosures and will have a plan to offer appropriate support, including information on counseling services if needed.

4. Confidentiality Concerns:
- Mitigation: There is a risk of confidentiality breaches, especially regarding sensitive information. The researcher will implement robust data protection measures, including secure storage, encryption, and pseudonymization, to minimize the risk of unauthorized access.

5. Unintended Impact on Community Perception:
- Mitigation: The research could inadvertently affect the perception of certain communities at the University. To address this, the researcher will ensure that findings are presented in a balanced and nuanced manner, avoiding generalizations and promoting diversity within the collected narratives.

3. Describe any physical or psychological risks to the researcher(s) (including local fieldworkers or research assistants) and the steps you will take to address these.
1. Physical Risks: - For in-person interviews, ensure meetings take place in safe and public locations. - Be cautious of ergonomics and workspace setup during online interviews to prevent physical strain. 2. Psychological Risks: - Researchers may encounter emotional or sensitive topics during interviews, potentially leading to psychological discomfort. - Online interactions may pose challenges in gauging non-verbal cues, affecting the overall interview experience. Steps to Address Risks: - For in-person interviews, choose public locations ensuring safety and visibility. - Establish a comfortable and private space for online interviews to enhance psychological well-being. - Researchers could access university counselling services if necessary.
4. Describe any benefits of the research, both to participants and to others. Outline the processes put in place to enable equitable research (see BPG 16 Social science research conducted outside the UK for further guidance).
Benefits to Participants: 1. Self-Reflection and Empowerment: Participants may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, fostering self-awareness and empowerment. 2. Contribution to Knowledge: By sharing their stories, participants contribute to a broader understanding of diverse experiences, potentially influencing policies and practices. 3. Community Building: The research may facilitate connections among participants, fostering a sense of community and support. Benefits to Others: 1. Academic Community: The findings contribute to academic knowledge, enriching the understanding of the challenges and coping strategies of first-generation, lower-SES international students. 2. Institutional Insights: The research may provide valuable insights to the University of Oxford, aiding in the development of more informed and inclusive support structures. 3. Wider Societal Impact: Findings may inform discussions and initiatives beyond the academic realm, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of international students. Equitable Research Processes: 1. Inclusive Recruitment: Actively seek participants from diverse backgrounds, increasing representation across disciplines, genders, ages.

2. Cultural Sensitivity: Adopt culturally sensitive approaches in interviews, respecting participants' backgrounds and adapting communication styles accordingly.
3. Informed Consent: Prioritize informed consent, clearly explaining the research purpose, potential risks, and benefits, while respecting participants' autonomy.
4. Confidentiality Measures: Implement robust measures to safeguard participant confidentiality, assuring them that their identities will be protected.

5. Comment on the societal impact.

1. Enhanced Understanding and Awareness: The research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced challenges faced by first-generation, lower-SES international students, fostering awareness among the general public, educators, and policymakers.

2. Informed Policy and Support Systems: Findings can influence institutional policies and support structures within the University of Oxford and potentially other academic institutions. This is anticipated to lead to more tailored and effective resources for international students, promoting inclusivity and success.

3. Cultural and Social Dialogue: The research can stimulate dialogue around cultural diversity, international perspectives, and the unique experiences of students studying abroad. This broader conversation can contribute to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational landscape.

4. Empowerment of Student Communities: By amplifying the voices of first-generation, lower-SES international students, the research can help to empower these communities. It will provide a platform for sharing narratives, challenges, and successes, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity.

5. Educational Equity Advocacy: The research is poised to serve as a catalyst for advocacy efforts aimed at promoting equity in education, particularly for students with diverse backgrounds. This is anticipated to inspire initiatives addressing socioeconomic disparities and supporting underrepresented student populations.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues or relevant information.

None.

4.9 SECTION H: Professional guidelines

Please indicate with an '**X**' at least one set of professional guidelines you will follow.

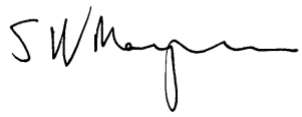
Research specialism/ methodology	**Association and guidance**

Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK	☐
Computer Science	ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	☐
Criminology	British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics	☐
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	☒
Geography	American Association of Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics	☐
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	☐
Internet-mediated research	Association of Internet Researchers Ethical Guidelines British Psychological Society: Ethics Guidelines for internet-mediated research Association for Computing Machinery Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	☐
Management	Academy of Management Code of Ethics	☐
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	☐
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	☐
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct	☐
Social research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	☐
Socio-legal studies	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice	☐
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	☐
Visual research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	☐
Other professional guidelines	List any other guidelines used here.	☐

4.10 SECTION I: Endorsements and signatures

Please ensure this form is endorsed by the Principal Investigator (or student's supervisor), the Head of Department (or nominee) and, if student research, by the student themselves. **The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a DREC, check which signature option it prefers.**

- **Option 1: direct email endorsements**
  Each of the signatories should submit an email from a University of Oxford email address, indicating their acceptance of the responsibilities listed below.
- **Option 2: signatures**
  Please scan the signed form and email it to us as a PDF. Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted.

Endorsement by the Principal Investigator/ student supervisor and student, if applicable	
I/ we the researchers understand my/ our responsibilities as Principal Investigator (and student, if applicable) as outlined in the guidance on the CUREC website. I/ we declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that the ethics committee will be informed of any changes to the project which affect the answers to this form. I/ we will inform the relevant IDREC if the Principal Investigator changes.	
Name of Principal Investigator	Simon Marginson
Principal Investigator's signature	
Date	21/12/2023
Name of student (if applicable)	Delei Zhou
Student's signature	
Date	18/12/2023

Departmental endorsement – from the Head of Department or nominee (Another senior member of the department may sign where the head of department is the Principal Investigator, or where the Head of Department has appointed a nominee. Example nominees include Deputy Head of Department, Director of Research, or Director of Graduate/ Undergraduate Studies.)	
On the basis of the information available to me, I confirm that: • I am aware of the research proposed and have read this application; • To the best of my knowledge, the proposed design and scientific methodology do not raise ethical concerns; • I support this research in principle, subject to ethical and other necessary reviews.	
Signature	Instead of a signature, endorsement may be provided by an email confirming the points above.
Name	
Role	
Date	

Appendix 2 – Recruitment Post

Ethics Approval Reference: [EDUC_C1A_23_361]

Participants Needed for A Case Study on International Students Who Are First-Generation College Students at University of Oxford

Are you **an international student** who is also **a first-generation college student** in your family? If the answers are yes and yes, then we would like to invite you to participate in a short interview, which is part of a research study being conducted by Delei Zhou, a postgraduate student at the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. The purpose of the study is to explore the rich experiences among students navigating the intersections of international status and being a first-generation college attendee. Your voice matters, and by participating, you contribute to a deeper understanding of the triumphs and challenges of students like you.

Join us for a confidential interview, where your insights will make a meaningful impact on our research. It's **45 minutes** of your time, but the impact lasts much longer!

If you are interested and would like more information or have any questions, please feel free to reach me via email at e-mail address. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and there is no obligation to take part.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

Best regards,

Delei Zhou
MSc Higher Education Student
Department of Education
University of Oxford
delei.zhou@worc.ox.ac.uk

Appendix 3 – Interview Questions

I. Questions for Students:

1. Getting to Know You:
- Could you share a bit about yourself, like where you're from, what you're studying, and how long you've been at Oxford?

2. Positive Experiences and Achievements:
- Can you share a memorable or exciting experience you've had during your time at Oxford? Something that made you happy?
- Reflecting on your time here, what achievements stand out for you? It could be anything—big or small.
- Tell me about a typical day for you at Oxford. What activities or routines bring you joy or satisfaction?

3. Multiple Aspects of Identity:
- How would you describe your socioeconomic background? Is your family wealthy, middle-income, or financially challenged?
- Did your parents go to college? If not, do you know the reasons? And if you're the first-generation college students, what kind of reasons/factors do you think make you come this far?
- As an international student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from your UK students?
- As a male/female student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from female/male international students?
- As a student from XX country, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from other international students?

- As a young/elder than average-age student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from older/younger international students?
- As a humanities & social sciences/natural sciences student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from natural sciences / humanities & social sciences international students?

- As a first-generation, Lower-SES student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from non-first-generation/continuing-generation and wealthy students?
- How do you navigate budgeting and managing expenses while studying at Oxford? Are there specific challenges or strategies you've found effective?
- Have you accessed any financial support systems or resources provided by the university/college or external organizations? How have these resources impacted your experience?
- Are you engaged in part-time employment while studying at Oxford? How does balancing work and academics impact your overall well-being?

- As a first-generation, /middle-income/wealthy student, can you share instances where you feel your experiences here might differ from non-first-generation/ first-generation LSES students?
- How do you navigate study experience at Oxford? Are there specific challenges or strategies you've found effective?
- Have you accessed any academic or social support systems or resources provided by the university/college or external organizations? How have these resources impacted your experience?
- Are you engaged in part-time employment while studying at Oxford? How does balancing work and academics impact your overall well-being?

- In your opinion, how does socioeconomic status impact access to opportunities within the university/college, and have you personally encountered any barriers?

- In your interactions with others, do you notice any ways in which people might perceive you differently due to your international status, gender, age, academic discipline, or socioeconomic background? How does this influence your day-to-day interactions?
- Managing these different aspects of your identity— international status, gender, age, academic discipline, or socioeconomic background —how do you see yourself with these intersectionality studying at Oxford?

4. Strengths and Challenges:
- In what ways do you feel your diverse identity, encompassing your international status, gender, age, academic discipline, or socioeconomic background, has empowered you during your time at Oxford? Are there specific moments that stand out?
- Can you identify any challenges that arise specifically from the combination of your international status, gender, age, academic discipline, or socioeconomic background? How do these factors work together in your Oxford journey?

5. Coping Strategies:
- When faced with tough times, what are some strategies you've found effective in staying positive and focused on your goals?

6. Supportive Networks:
- Have you found communities or groups on campus where these different aspects of your identity are acknowledged and embraced? How has being part of such communities affected your experience?
- Have you discovered supportive networks or friends who have made your experience here more enjoyable or easier to manage?

7. University/college Support:
- How do you feel about the support provided by the university and the college? Are there specific resources or services that have been particularly helpful for you? Or in your opinion, do they make things easier or more challenging for students like you?

- Reflecting on the support you receive, do you feel that the university and the college's resources take into account the diverse aspects of your identity, including your nationality, gender, age, and socioeconomic background?

8. Suggestions for Improving Support:
- If you could suggest changes to how the university/college supports students like you, what would they be? What do you think would make things better?

9. Personal and Academic Growth:
- Looking back, how do you feel your time at Oxford has influenced you, both personally and academically?
10. Looking Ahead:
- As you look ahead, are there any goals or aspirations you have for the remainder of your time at Oxford? Anything you're excited about?

II. Questions for welfare officers:

1. Role and Approach to Well-being:
- As a welfare officer, can you describe your role in supporting the well-being of students at Oxford, particularly those who are first-generation and from lower-SES backgrounds?
- What approaches or strategies do you employ to address the diverse needs of students and create a supportive environment?

2. Interaction with Diverse Student Identities:
- How do you navigate and address the intersectionality of students' identities, such as their international status, gender, age, academic discipline, or socioeconomic background?
- Can you share instances where you've encountered unique challenges related to the intersectionality of students' identities, and how you addressed them?

3. Collaboration and Community Building:
- In your role, do you actively collaborate with other support services, communities, or groups on campus to enhance the overall well-being of students?
- How do you contribute to building a sense of community and inclusivity for students with diverse backgrounds?

4. Awareness of Student Challenges:
- Are you familiar with the specific challenges faced by first-generation, lower-SES international students at Oxford? How do you stay informed about their unique needs and experiences?
- Can you provide insights into the main concerns or difficulties that students with diverse backgrounds bring to your attention?

5. Feedback and Adaptations:
- How do you gather feedback from students about the effectiveness of the support services? Have there been instances where you had to adapt your approach based on student feedback or changing needs?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that your support services are responsive to the evolving needs of a diverse student population?

6. Supportive Networks and Resources:
  - Are there specific networks, resources, or initiatives in place to support the well-being of first-generation, lower-SES international students?
  - How do you ensure that students are aware of and can access the support services available to them?

7. Challenges in Supporting Diverse Identities:
  - From your perspective, what are the main challenges in supporting students with diverse identities, and how do you work to overcome them?
  - Can you share any insights into the ways in which intersectionality influences the well-being support you provide?

8. Suggestions for Enhanced Support:
  - Based on your experience, are there areas where the university/college could enhance its support for students with diverse backgrounds? What suggestions or improvements would you propose?

Appendix 4 – Interview Consent Form

Consent to take part in [A Case Study: Implications of Intersectionality on First-Generation International Students' Educational Experience in University of Oxford**]**

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) approval reference: [EDUC_C1A_23_361]

Purpose of Study: This research seeks to comprehend the unique experiences of individuals who are both international students and the first in their families to attend college.

	Please initial each box if you agree with the statement
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version ___5.5_____, dated _July 2023_____ for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point [until **31/07/24**], without giving any reason. And I'm aware that if I do withdraw, any data about me will be eliminated from the project.	☐
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
I understand that I will not be identifiable from any publications.	☐
I consent to being audio recorded.	☐
I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.	☐
Use of quotations: Please indicate your preference (select *one* option):	☐
a) I do not wish to be quoted. **or**	☐

b) I agree to the use of quotations in research outputs if I am not identifiable. **or** ☐

c) I agree to the use of direct quotations, attributed to my name, in research outputs.

I give permission for you to contact me again to clarify information. ☐

I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint. ☐

I agree to take part.[1] ☐

YES / NO

_____	dd / mm / yyyy	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

Delei Zhou

_____	19 / 02 / 2024	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date[2]	Signature

[1] In certain projects researchers may want to add an additional statement: [I hereby assign to the researcher all copyright in my contribution for use in all work stemming from this project and future projects.]

[2] To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant. Once this has been signed by both parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form. The original signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents, which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix 5 – Interview Information Sheet

[A Case Study: Implications of Intersectionality on First-Generation International Students' Educational Experience in University of Oxford]

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: [EDUC_C1A_23_361]

4.11 Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

4.12 Why is this research being conducted and why have I been invited to take part?

This research seeks to comprehend the unique experiences of individuals who are both international students and the first in their families to attend college. We aim to delve into the achievements, challenges, coping mechanisms, and the intersectionality of your international status and socioeconomic background. Intersectionality refers to the examination of how different aspects of your identity, such as being an international student, a first-generation college attendee and coming from a specific socioeconomic background, converge to shape and influence your experiences at the University of Oxford.

The research aims to recruit a total of 15 student participants from diverse disciplines and degree programs, ensuring a rich representation of experiences. Additionally, we plan to include 5 welfare officers holding positions at both the university and college levels within the University of Oxford. Your participation is invited because you align with the specified participant characteristics outlined above.

4.13 Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, by advising me of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 31/07/2024.

4.14 What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

- The research will take place at Bodleian Libraries Study Room (Booked); Community Spaces like community centres or cafes; Public Parks; or online.
- Consent will be taken before the interview. With your consent, I would like to audio record you so I can have an accurate record of our conversation.
- The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and it will cover topics such as participants' experiences at Oxford, the intersectionality of their identity factors,

achievements and challenges, coping strategies, support networks, perceptions of university support, personal and academic growth, suggestions for improvement, as well as aspirations and goals for the future.
- You can ask to pause or stop the research activities at any time.

4.15 What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

Participating in this research may involve some discomfort, such as discussing personal experiences.

4.16 Are there any benefits in taking part?

It is hoped that this research will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of individuals who are both international students and the first in their families to attend college. Your insights will be valuable in informing policies and support mechanisms to enhance the university community.

4.17 What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

All consent records, including forms and any written documents, will be securely stored digitally on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers, with encryption measures in place. These records will be retained for a minimum of three years after publication, and original paper consent forms will be digitized, securely stored, and physically destroyed through shredding.

Contact details collected for research purposes will be securely stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers, with encryption measures in place. These details will be retained for the duration of the research project.

Field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts will all be securely stored digitally on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint, or University servers, with encryption measures applied for data security. Field notes will be retained for the duration of the research project, while transcripts will be kept for a minimum of three years after publication.

Any physical data, including original consent forms, will be stored securely in a designated facility within the department, with restricted access limited to authorized personnel. All storage methods adhere to university security protocols, ensuring data integrity and confidentiality throughout the research process. Access to the research data will be granted to the researcher and the supervisor.

The information you provide will help us understand experiences of individuals who are both international students and the first in their families to attend college and contribute to academic knowledge.

4.18 Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in a dissertation of MSc Education. All participants of the research would not be identifiable as they would all be pseudonymised by replacing personal identifiers with unique identification numbers

(IDs) or codes. The researcher would like your permission to use direct quotations in the research outputs under your pseudonym.
A copy of my dissertation will be deposited both in print and online in the Oxford University Research Archive where it will be publicly available to facilitate its use in future research.

4.19 Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research with safeguarding and protection in place as outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance web site at https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights.

4.20 Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: EDUC_C1A_23_361).

4.21 Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact Delei Zhou, the primary researcher directly by his email address (delei.zhou@worc.ox.ac.uk) or Simon Marginson, his supervisor by his email address (simon.marginson@education.ox.ac.uk). If you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:
The Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Boundary Brook House, Churchill Drive, Headington, Oxford OX3 7GB

4.22 Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:
Delei Zhou
MSc Higher Education Student
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens Oxford OX2 6PY
delei.zhou@worc.ox.ac.uk