

Education and Social Capital

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Abstract

Current challenges facing educational systems worldwide have urged scholars to study the issues involved in the educational system. Economics of education is mainly concerned with economic impacts of educational stages. However, research has highlighted the role of social capital and how it is associated to education, as not only does education contribute to social capital but the presence and maintenance of social capital, in turn, promotes education. Focusing on the relationship between social capital and education, the current research, therefore, aims to describe and evaluate social capital and its components and functions, and to introduce the leading theorists in the field. The study then suggests that through building interactions within family and the society, individuals are able to enhance social capital in children's education. As such, education and factors influencing it have a major role to play in establishing and promoting social capital in the society.

Keywords: social capital, social structure, educational system

1. Introduction

Recent civil society research suggests that social system consists of three conflicting 'spheres' where striking a balance between the spheres seems essential: government, community and market. Possessing an unrivaled power, each sphere could potentially harm the civil society. Further, given the fact that *macro-level social issues link individual*, historical, cultural and economic strains, an alternative approach to social components merits investigation.

Building a healthy relationship between these three spheres could promote social capital. Social environment shapes individuals' actions, redirects them and confines them within socially driven constraints. Norms of interpersonal trust, social networks and social organization are important in the functioning not only of the society but of the economy.

The fundamental idea behind the notion of social capital is that social networks encourage trust and collaboration in interpersonal communications and liberate individuals from their solitary lifestyle. Social capital is the core concept or the essence of what is known as civil society.

Today, the significance of social capital in social stability and cohesion has become a widely-debated topic worldwide. This discourse is deeply rooted in the concern for the change in nature of family and social networks. Scholars in different disciplines recognize social capital is a useful conceptual market for policy analysis. In effect, as globalization weakens the role of the nation state, special emphasis is being placed on community level action, particularly on the role of social capital (Warner, 1999).

The educational concerns and the problems arising from the impacts of family and society on education have urged the scholars to study the nature of family relationships, the school-family ties and the effect of family on children academic achievement. Family serves a pivotal role in a child's personality development. Equally, school serves the purposes of nurturing and modifying psychological and social characteristics children acquired from family, improving student academic performance, and ultimately facilitating social progress.

2. The Origins of Social Capital

The first occurrence of the term dates back to 1916 in an article by Hanifan, a school reformer. Later, in the early 1960s, Jane Jacobs used the concept in urban planning, arguing that in a city networks serve the role of social capital. Indeed, the concept was developed and popularized by the socialist James Coleman. Finally, in the 1990s, Putnam linked social capital to democratic engagement in Italy. The concept was introduced in the 1920s but it has gained increasing popularity since the last two decades (Sharepour, 2003).

3. General Characterization

Social capital refers to the expected collective capital or resources derived from cooperation between individuals and groups. The following are descriptions of social capital as viewed by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

A. Pierre Bourdieu

Bourdieu reached the concept of social capital at a slow-moving pace. His early writings on social capital were

part of a broader analysis of different foundations of social order. According to John Field's reading of Bourdieu, agents in the social field as determined in part by the amount and weight of their relative capitals and the strategies they adopt to achieve their goals (Field, year?).

In an argument, initially published in 1973, concerning consolidating the position of members of professional groups, Bourdieu defined social capital as a capital of social relations which, if necessary, will provide beneficial supports: a capital of dignity and respectability which is often absolutely essential in attracting clients in socially significant positions, and which may serve as currency, for instance in political career (Bourdieu, 1977). He later refined such a position in the following.

Social capital is the sum of actual or virtual resources that allow an individual or a group to possess a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. As a network of relations, social capital is not a natural or social deposit, but rather an accumulated labor that takes time to accumulate. It is the product of individual or collective investment strategies, which deliberately or unintended sustains or recreates social relations with short-or long-term benefits.

In a systematic analysis of social capital characteristics, Bourdieu characterized social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are associated to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships – or simply put, membership in a group (Bourdieu, 1986). Evidently, the very presence of network of relationships is by no means adequate in realizing social capital. In effect, network links need to be relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

B. James Coleman

The eminent American sociologist James Coleman exerted a more profound effect on social capital than Bourdieu did. Coleman associates social capital with a single resource, as it ensures networks of trust in common values. Coleman proposed his most comprehensive definition of social capital as part of a larger effort in formulating a general theory of rational-choice sociology. He defined social capital as the set of resources embedded in family relations and in community social organization and that are beneficial for the cognitive and or social development of a child or a young person. These resources are different for different people and could offer a major advantage for the development of human resources in children and youth (Coleman, 1994). Therefore, social capital is of great value not only for earning credit but for cognitive and identity development. Coleman's description of social capital lined the individual to community. For him, social capital is essentially a personal asset evolved from resources inherent in *social structures* (Coleman, 1994). Determining whether resources are applicable in practice, Coleman identified two vital elements: a) actual level of obligations and b) level of trust in the social environment.

He argued that a set of particular social structures facilitates individuals' selection of actions more than any other resources and recognized family relations as the traditional origin of social capital. This viewpoint can be considered as an ambitious effort to embed social capital in a broader theory deeply rooted in social structures. In this sense, social capital could be viewed as an asset possessed by socially disadvantaged and privileged groups alike. The merit of this standpoint is the dynamic approach to social networks.

C. Robert Putnam

Putnam's seminal book, *Bowling Alone*, earned him a reputation as a leading figure in social capital research. For him, social capital refers to connections of social structure such as trust, norms and networks that could facilitate social efficiency and improve cooperative actions (Putnam, 1993). More specifically, social capital contributes to the realization of collective action through increasing the potential costs to a defector in any individual transaction, fostering robust norms of reciprocity, improving the flow of information about the trustworthiness of individuals, and embodying past success (Putnam, 1993). Compared with Coleman, Putnam placed more emphasis on resources that are accumulated by weak connections and formed by developed organizations. Further, Putnam considered a limited role for family.

Putnam's definition of social capital experienced slight change in the 1990s. For him, social capital refers to "features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1996, p. 56). The three chief ingredients here had not changed since 1993, what was new was the recognition of 'participants' instead of 'society' as the beneficiaries of social capital (Baron et al., 2000). Subsequently, in his influential book, Putnam argued that "the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value and social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" (Putnam, 2000, p. 18-19).

This formulation is a refinement of the earlier definition, as it presented trust (together with reciprocity) as an integral element of the norms that arise from social networks. In this sense, it leaves us with two rather than three chief ingredients. According to Putnam, the difference in social capital is the primary reason behind distinctions in terms of social capital in different areas. Said differently, areas of high social capital have high levels of civic participation and, thus, a thriving economy and active political institutions. In sharp contrast, areas of high social capital face problems in social, economic and political fields.

With regard to the points discussed earlier, social capital denotes to changes that facilitate interpersonal

communications. Simply put, social capital is analogous to a reserve of empathy, trust and cooperation between individuals in a group or society, which acts as a social glue holding members of society together, yet it can function as a social liquid which facilitates social ties (Ma'dan-Aara, 2009).

4. Components of social capital

Social capital has two components: objective and subjective ties. Objective component refers to actual contacts between people. A network structure should establish communications between individuals. Based on subjective component, interpersonal ties must include mutual reciprocity, trust and positive emotions. Broadly put, social capital encompasses two components of trust and association.

5. Dimensions of Social Capital

The concept of social capital refers to dimensions of social structure through which active individuals are capable of achieving their goals and personal interests. Recognizing such a function enables one to identify its dual performance. This function contributes to individual's interest on the one hand and shapes the social structure by transforming the micro-scales to macro ones on the other hand. In fact, the function of social resources is similar to that of organizational resources: assisting individuals in achieving their goals and objectives. Therefore, it befits to pay attention to the triple dimensions that form social capital, namely: a) expectations, commitments and trust b) information networks c) social norms and penalties.

- a) **Expectations, commitments and trust building:** Indeed, this kind of social capital depends on two elements: social trust present in the environment and the extent to which individuals adhere to their commitments to others (Maedandar&Arani, 2009).
- b) **Information and communication networks:** Accessing information plays a pivotal role in social capital and innately correlates to social ties. Information is crucial given that it provides a basis for performance; yet, gaining information is costly. Using the social ties established and maintained for other purposes is a means to obtain information. This kind of social capital equips individuals with information that facilitates performance (Tajbakhsh, 2005).
- c) **Social norms and penalties:** An effective norm in the society shapes a powerful social capital, according to which individuals are required to abandon their interests and take collective interests into consideration. Such norms are reinforced through social support of status and group reverence as well as other types of rewards. In effect, these norms are a form of social capital that strengthens the groups via guiding their members. These reinforcements are achieved if individuals perform in compliance with group interest irrespective of their own interests.

6. Family and School

Family as the first foundation and school as the representative of educational system are the two institutes that can directly exert influences on children. A significant portion of social experiences are transferred to children through these two institutes. Given the importance of family in the lives of the majority of children as well as the significance of academic performance in the future lives of individuals, it is not surprising that numerous research on the relationship between family origins and academic performance is being carried out nowadays. Indeed, family not only supports children prior to reaching physical maturity but also provides the children with the first socialization and training opportunities.

7. Complementary roles of family and School

Family and school are dissimilar regarding various aspects, for instance, differences in prioritizing their expectations and demands of appropriate behavior, their relationship with children, formality and in some cases even in culture and language. Further, families are unlike considering their geographical location (urban or rural), their socio-economic status and their size. Due to dissimilarities between the environment and families, all children experience a kind of separation between home and school, even some children have difficulty adapting to school. Such a problem deteriorates and gets more stable if family and school share little in common in terms of their accepted knowledge, attitudes and values. Despite the differences between school and family, they both pursue the same objective; both have special responsibilities and duties to ensure optimal development of children. Families accept to provide for the physical needs of children with regard to their nutrition, clothing, housing and health; besides, they teach children the basic social skills to prepare them for learning at schools. In return, the schools are responsible for providing the children with the appropriate environment, human resources and curriculum pertaining to their needs, interests as well as learning styles. Yet, put down to various reasons, the majority of families and schools do not fully exercise their basic duties. Prior to going to school, children spend a great deal of time with their families learning how to behave with their families, siblings and also neighbors. When they start school, it is assumed that they are capable of applying some of the behavioral patterns learnt in family. Nonetheless, schools have also new expectations and demands that children have not

experienced in families; hence, they are required to learn new methods and principles to encounter such demands.

Further, evidently, all the families are not similar and alike; some have more children while others have fewer children; in some families there exists a major age gap between the children while in others the gap is negligible; in some families a parent is absent due to death, divorce and etc. Moreover, parents are different in terms of kindness, cordiality, coercion, punishment and forgiveness. Similarly, the schools are unlike regarding their teaching methods and maintaining discipline by teachers (Driben, 1968). The main argument is that if schools are required to form ties between children's family lives and adults' public lives, therefore, they must provide the children with the essential experiences for learning the appropriate behavioral patterns and principles for adult life.

8. Behavioral patterns in family and school: the association between norms and affection

Family members are recommended to express affection and kindness. Hence, it could be expected that all family members treat each other kindly. Affection (either verbal or behavioral) exists in various forms, for instance, support, love, common feelings and acceptance which all are indicatives of foundations based on their solidarity and unity are established and endured among family members.

Presumably, emotional bonds survive elapse of time; though, some events might occasionally occur that do not receive appropriate emotional reactions. Given the fact that families embody small groups whose members spend a lot of time together, there is an abundance of opportunities to show affection and kindness while revealing too much affection is not recommended at schools. Indeed, people are expected to express affection to more limited extents at schools so that realism would govern the relationship between students and teachers in the long run. Teachers are presumed to establish rapport yet avoid revealing too much affection. Similarly, the individuals in the class are assumed to love and assist each other not as a consequence of their love for each other but rather on account of their responsibility for performing certain individual and collective tasks (Share'pour, 2004).

9. The effect of school and family

The reports on equal educational opportunities in recent decades reveal that dissimilarities between family origins are much more significant in explaining students' progress and achievement than the differences between schools. These findings do not imply that facilities and resources available at schools do not exert any effect, but rather suggest that the better family environments are, the greater the effect of schools, however of unlike qualities, on children would be. In the process of development, resources and facilities provided by families to educate children form links with resources and facilities available at schools. Obviously, compared to schools, much more differences do exist in resources and facilities provided by families. Schools and other educational centers, as the official educational institutes, are capable of contributing certain inputs such as 'opportunities', 'demands' and 'rewards' into the socialization process. Yet, there exist another set of inputs arising from more intimate and durable environments where children are nurtured, for instance, 'attitudes', 'effort' and 'conception of self'.

The social environment of families exerts a more significant effect on the second set of inputs. Nonetheless, an implicit division of tasks exists according to which families put more stress on earning money as well as vocational life and hence entrust schools to socialize children. As a consequence, the first set of inputs i.e., opportunities, demands and rewards are emphasized while the second set i.e., attitudes, effort and conception of self are ignored.

10. The effect of social capital on educational system

As aforesaid, while the independent effort schools make does not exert a significant effect on the academic achievement of children, their families and friends are able to exert significant influences. In the realm of educational research, family background has captured considerable attention as a pivotal factor ensuring academic success of children. Such a background entails at least three different types of capitals: physical, human and social. Physical capital is almost gauged through families' wealth and income; it further provides for physical interests and could exert effect on achieving success. Human capital is measured by educational background of parents which gives rise to a cognitive environment for children. Yet, social capital is different from the two previously mentioned capitals given the fact that it refers to the quality of the relationship between parents and children as well as family members.

Although parents' human capital can be beneficial to children but this does not necessarily hold true about all parents that enjoy such a kind of capital. Due to professional occupations, many parents who possess favorable human capital are unable to use it to ensure their children's interest. As a consequence, if human capital is not supported by social capital, it cannot exert a significant effect on children's academic status and development. Within a family, a child's access to human capital depends on the physical presence of parents at

home and the extent to which they attend to their educational and academic issues. A major problem associated with such a kind of failure can be observed in single parent's families. Another kind of social capital failure exists in nuclear families where either both parents or one of them is absent due to various reasons such as employment. The influence of absence of social capital can vary from one family to another; an important criterion is school failure. The amount of time parents are at home, the numbers of siblings as well as our expectations of children's academic achievement are among other influential factors affecting social capital (Maedandar&Arani, 2009, p. 160).

Indeed, social capital can be perceived as a resource serving educational progress of children which is capable of exerting significant effects on individuals' development in the family. This kind of capital is not restricted to family bonds, but rather its influence can be observed in establishing rapport with other family members as well as social institutes. Therefore, a major function of such a capital is to facilitate academic success and reinforce individuals' education. Among contemporary researchers, James Coleman has paid the utmost attention to the relationship between social capital and education. According to him, the concept of social capital can reveal how the social structure of a group performs as a resource for its members. As Coleman puts, social capital depends on trust in the process of information communication, efficient executive guarantees, authoritative ties as well as the amount of tasks within groups. As a consequence, by social capital, he refers to social resources and facilities available to children and adolescents outside schools and within family environments. Such facilities and resources alike other types of capitals can effectively benefit children's education (Share'pour, 2004).

As stated by Coleman, social capital can be sought in three dimensions of social structure:

- a) The relationship between adults and the child.
 - b) The relationship between two adults who have relations with children.
 - c) Endurance and durability of the structure over time.
- a) The relationship between adults and children:** This relationship exists between an adult (father or mother) and a child. If it is strong, the adult's ambitions are easily transferred to the child. Indeed, the time that adults spend as well as the effort they make to educate children can exert significant positive effects on their education (Tajbakhsh, 2005, p.72). Broadly put, in this sense, it can be claimed that the quality of social capital transferred from one individual to the other depends on the strength of the relationship between the adults and children. Nevertheless, the existence of such powerful ties is a kind of social capital that can considerably benefit a child's development.
- b) Adult-adult-child relationship:** Regarding this kind of relationship, the social capital depends on the existence of a social network between a child and two or more adults. If there is a strong relationship between father and mother, the parents are able to perform as a unit and reveal similar behavior toward the child. Yet, if such a relationship is weak or does not exist at all, the child encounters an environment that is replete with contradictions and incongruities. Nowadays, other types of capital are found in the child's environment in abundance. Nevertheless, due to the fact that family and society are losing their status, social capital has become extremely vulnerable. Consequently, social capital in nurturing children refers to the norms, social networks as well as relationship between adults and children that play a vital role in children's development. Social capital exists both within families and outside family environments i.e., society. Outside family frames, social capital exists if adults show interest in the activities done by other individuals' children. This interest can occasionally manifest itself through sympathizing with the youth and listening to them. Further, this kind of social capital outside families is priceless for those children that are at a great loss in terms of social capital in their families (Share'epour, 2004, p. 153).

Recent research also confirms that there is a significant relationship between social capital and academic performance. Undeniably, much of this research admits an association between children's academic performance and social capital of parents. As Coleman puts, social capital for disadvantaged students is viewed as a vital educational resource. Further, changing geographical location can harm social capital and accordingly negatively affects children's academic performance.

Some researchers have also concluded that school students enjoy at least three types of capitals that can utilize to achieve educational objectives as well academic success:

- a) Financial capital that refers to the money students receive from their families to pay for their education such as buying books and etc;
- b) human capital that encompasses students' abilities and motivations;
- and c) finally, social capital that is achieved through interactions between teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning (Etcherey et al., 2001).

The majority of educational experts are of the opinion that challenging and yet supportive educational environments facilitate academic success of students. Therefore, schools would enjoy rich social capital if the social relationships existing within their realms challenge the students intellectually and practically on the one hand and provides abundant social support for them on the other hand. Such

relationships are able to exert significant positive effects on students' behavior as well as their performance (Etcherey et al., 2001). Some mechanisms through them social capital can exert influences on academic performance are as follows:

- a) The relationship between parents and child: Social capital within families is significant as it provides the child with the opportunity to gain access to parents' human resources from the very childhood. Yet, it depends on the physical presence of parents at home and the extent to which they love their children and are encouraging.
- b) The relationship that governs the interactions between the parents as well as their interactions with schools can significantly affect children and encourage learning.
- c) Educational and vocational ambitions are able exert considerable effects on individuals' academic performance.

A major part of ambitions are transferred to individuals through social networks. As a consequence, the quality and quantity of such networks play a vital role in individuals' educational and vocational ambitions as well as their levels (Share'epour, 2004, p.155).

11. Conclusion

Human beings are able to do activities through establishing and maintaining relationships with each other that otherwise cannot do alone. It is worth noting that establishing such relationships must be done via a set of social networks. These networks are appropriate tools that can give rise to formation of social capital.

Further, the social structure that renders itself to social capital does not necessarily benefits individuals who establish it, but rather social capital aids individuals collectively.

The function or performance of individuals can decrease, weaken or destroy the social capital of all group members. Indeed, it is the physical and human competence of individuals constituting social capital that renders significance to the social capital that nevertheless, on occasion, can be ignored. Owing to the changes in the social capital of children and adolescents inside and outside families, families' social capital has developed considerably so that their educational level is continually increasing. However, beside developments in the human capital of parents, social capital that manifests itself through the presence of adults at home as well as exchange of attitudes on various issues between parents and children has decreased. The same issue holds true regarding parents' participation in local organizations such as parent-teacher associations.

Further, increased geographical mobility arising from new developments in the labor market has hindered formation of durable social networks. Consequently, the social capital available for educating children has decreased significantly.

In general, it can be concluded that education of individuals depends on the relationship between two sets of attributes:

1. The attributes a child brings with him/herself from the family to school.
2. The attributes present in the school atmosphere

Recent research suggests that both of these two sets of attributes experience a major gap in terms of social capital. No doubt, education and its various components such as books, teaching methods, and mental-social atmosphere governing classrooms play a fundamental role in shaping and reinforcing social capital in the society. As a final point, with reference to this field, the executives of such policies and plans are required to pay more attention to the opportunities available in education.

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