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Contents

Social and Cultural Capital: Underlying Factors and Their Relationship with the School Achievement of Iranian University Students

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship between social and cultural capital and school achievement by developing, administering and validating a 35-statement questionnaire to 403 undergraduate and graduate students majoring in Teaching English as a foreign language and Persian Language and Literature and correlating their extracted factors with the grade point average of their high school diploma. The application of the Principle Axis Factoring to the participants' responses and rotating the extracted factors revealed ten latent variables, i.e., literacy, parental consultation, family-school interaction, family support, extracurricular activities, family relationship, parent-school encouragement and facility, cultural activities, peer interaction and religious activities. Between the two logically developed subscales comprising the social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ) only the social capital showed significant relationship with the GPA (.19, p <.001). Similarly, among the ten factors, parent-school encouragement and facility (.33), parental consultation (.22), family relationship (.20), and family support (.18), correlated significantly, i.e., p <.001, with the GPA. The implications of the results are discussed within a foreign/first language context and suggestions are made for future research.

Keywords: Cultural capital, Social capital, School achievement, Foreign language context

1. Introduction

Majoring not only in a foreign language such as English but also in a native language such as Persian at tertiary education institutions entails a complex interaction among many factors whose nature differ from each other. DiMaggio (1982), for example, believed that *cultural capital*, as one of these factors, is different from an ability such as grade point average (GPA) obtained upon completing high school education and vocabulary test score.

DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) defined cultural capital as *an interest in and experience with prestigious cultural resources* and measured it by focusing on statements related to participants' *attitude*, e.g., I am a cultured person, *activities*, e.g., I frequently visit museums and theaters, and *information about literature, music, and art*, e.g., I know all famous music composers. The definition offered by DiMaggio and Mohr is not, of course, the only demarcation of cultural capital. Lareau and Weininger (2003) provided at least 15 different definitions in their comprehensive review of literature.

Regardless of the diversity of definitions offered for the cultural capital, most scholars in sociology differentiate it from abilities such as GPA (e.g., Dumais 2002; Eitle and Eitle 2002, Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shaun 1990; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996; Kastillis & Rubinson 1992). Based on this differentiation, the present study has tried to find out whether there is a significant relationship between cultural capital and the university students' GPA of high school diploma.

Along with cultural capital, social capital has also been studied widely in various fields. It was first introduced into the literature by Bourdieu (1986) who defined it as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. While Bourdieu

(1986) approached social capital from a sociological perspective, Coleman (1988) took an educational approach and asserted that "all social relations and social structures facilitate some forms of social capital" (p. S105) without trying to view it as a tool in the hands of a few elite as the former did. The arguments put forward by Bourdieu and Coleman, nevertheless, have germinated many research projects to explore the possible relationship of social capital with other variables such as school achievement.

According Portes (2000), as a concept social capital has been "one of the most successful 'exports' from sociology to other social sciences and to public discourse during the last two decades" (p. 1). Based on their critical review, Dika, and Singh (2002) declared that the concept has been widely used in anthropology, business, economics, education, development/planning, political science and sociolinguistics (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). However, few studies, if any, have approached social capital from a foreign language teaching perspective. The present paper is, therefore, designed to fill the gap.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Four hundred and three, 319 female (79%) and 84 (21%) male, undergraduate and graduate university students in Mashhad, Iran took part voluntarily in this research. Their age ranged from 18 to 43 (Mean = 21.91, SD = 3.45) and spoke Persian as their mother language. One hundred seventy three (43%) were majoring in Persian language and literature at undergraduate level, and the remaining 230 (57%) were studying English language and literature at undergraduate and graduate levels at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Mashhad Azad University.

2.2 Instrument

The social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ) designed in this study consists of 35 items among which 11 deals with cultural capital and the remaining 24 concern social capital (see Appendix). The items were developed on the basis of the most frequently cited social and cultural capital indicators by Dika and Singh (2002) and Laureau and Weininger (2003).

The participants were required to read the items one by one and indicate whether they had experienced the states or undertaken the actions brought up by each item on a six-point scale ranging from never to always. The first statement, for example, read: *I enjoy listening to classical music*. After reading the statement, the participants had to specify whether they always, usually, often, sometimes, seldom or never enjoyed listening to classical music. The values 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 were then assigned to each point to quantify the items.

In addition to the 35 items, four short questions were given at the beginning of the SCCQ to collect demographic information. They included the participants' field of study, gender, age, and their grade point average at pre-university grade. All Iranian students have to complete this grade successfully in order to get their high school diploma, which is a prerequisite to take part in university entrance examination.

2.3 Procedure

According to Dika and Singh (2002, p. 35), the majority of research projects exploring the relationship between social capital and educational outcomes in America have employed the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) as their basic data sets. Since such sets do not exist in Iran, in this study the 35-item social and cultural capital questionnaire was developed to explore the relationship.

After having the social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ) printed, its copied pages were taken to Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Mashhad Azad University and distributed in the classes by the researchers. Since the SCCQ was in Persian, no questions were expected to be raised by the participants, however, the researcher were present in all administration sessions and encouraged the participants to raise whatever questions they had.

2.4 Data Analysis

The reliability of the social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ) was estimated via SPSS version 16.0. Following Khodadady and Hashemi (2010), the principle axis factoring along with Varimax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization was employed to extract the rotated factors underlying the SCCQ. The data obtained on the SCCQ were analysed to test the following hypotheses:

1. The total SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA.

2. The cultural capital subscales of the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA.

3. The social capital subscales of the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA.

4. The factors extracted from the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics related to the social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ). As can be seen, the total SCCQ enjoys a high reliability, i.e., .87, as does its social capital subscale, i.e., .86. The relatively moderate reliability of the cultural capital subscale, i.e., .76, is acceptable because it is exactly half the length of the social capital subscale and thus its length has affected its reliability coefficient.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of Sampling Adequacy was employed to find out whether employing factor analysis to extract latent variables was appropriate. The KMO statistic obtained in this study was .83. According to Kaiser (1974) as cited in DiLalla and Dollinger (2006, p. 250), KMOs in the .80s is "meritorious," so the sample selected in this study was adequate for factorial analysis.

Table 2 presents the rotated loadings of statements 2, 5, 7 and 8 on the first factor called *Literacy* in this study. Out of 47.7%, literacy explains 6.3 percent of variance in the loadings. As can be seen, statement 8, i.e., *I enjoy reading (in general)*, has the highest loading on factor one, i.e., .73, and statement five cross loads on factor eight and thus emphasizes the relationship between literacy and cultural activities such as visiting museums and taking music lessons.

Table 3 presents the rotated loadings of six statements, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30 and 31, on the second factor called *Parental Consultation* in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor two explains 6.1 percent of variance in the loadings. As can be seen, statement 33, *I usually talk about job/education with family*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .68. Statements 23 and 29 cross load on factors 3, 4 and 7 and thus call for another study with a more homogenous sample.

Table 4 shows the rotated loadings of statements 12, 18, 25 and 29 on the third factor *Family-School Interaction*. As a social capital statement, factor three explains 5.8% of 47.7% of variance in the total rotation. As can be seen, statement 18, *My mom used to attend school meetings regularly*, has the highest loading of .84 on the factor. Statements 25 and 29 show cross loadings on factors two and four.

Table 5 presents the rotated loadings of seven statements, 15, 17, 19, 23, 25, 29 and 32, on the fourth factor called *Family Support* in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor four explains 5.6 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 17, *My parents used to help me with my homework regularly*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .74. Statements 19, 23, 25 and 29 cross load on factors 2, 3, 7 and 9 and emphasize the inter connectedness of factors underlying social capital.

Table 6 presents the rotated loadings of two statements, 27 and 28, on the fifth factor called *Extracurricular Activities* in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor five explains 5.3 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 27, *I used to participate in school activities regularly*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .85. The two statements forming the factor do not crossload on any other factors and thus reiterate their uniqueness.

Table 7 presents the rotated loadings of two statements, 34 and 35, on the sixth factor called Family Relationship in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor five explains 4.4 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, both statements have a very high loading on factor six, i.e., .75 and .74 without crossloading on any other factors.

Table 8 presents the rotated loadings of five statements, 9, 10, 21, 22, and 23, on the seventh factor called Parent-School Encouragement and Facility in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor seven explains 4.2 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 9, *When a child, my parents regularly encouraged me to read*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .61. Statements 23 cross loads on factors two and four.

Table 9 presents the rotated loadings of four statements, 4, 5, 6, and 11, on the eighth factor called Cultural Activities in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor seven explains 4.1 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 1, *I know all famous music composers*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .62. Statement five cross loads on factor two and thus emphasizes the interconnectedness of literacy and cultural activities.

Table 10 presents the rotated loadings of three statements, 19, 20, and 33, on the ninth factor called *Peer Interaction* in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor seven explains 3.2 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 33, *I feel I have strong ties with my peers*, has the highest loading on the factor, i.e., .68. Statement 19 cross loads on factor four and thus emphasizes the interconnectedness of Family Support and Peer Interaction.

Table 11 presents the rotated loadings of two statements, 13, and 14, on the tenth factor called *Religious Activities* in this study. Out of 47.7%, factor seven explains 2.7 percent of total variance in the rotation. As can be seen, statement 13, *I usually get involved in religious activities in mosques*, has a loading much higher than statement 13

on factor 10, i.e., .60 and .42, respectively, implying that religious activities are more valued in Iran than other types of social activities.

Table 12 presents the correlation coefficients obtained among the 386 participants' GPA of their high school diploma with the total SCCQ and its cultural capital and social capital subscales. As can be seen, the significant correlation coefficient between the SCCQ and the GPA, i.e., (r = .194, p <.001) is almost the same as the correlation coefficient between its social capital subscale and PGA, i.e., (r = .194, p <.001). These results confirm the first and third hypotheses that *the total SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA* and *the social capital subscales of the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA*. However, they disconfirm the second hypothesis that *the cultural capital subscales of the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA*.

Table 13 presents the correlation coefficients obtained between the factors extracted from the SCCQ and the participants' high school diploma GPA. As can be seen, out of ten factors only four, i.e., 2, 4, 6, and 7, show significant correlations with the GPA and thus partially confirm *the fourth hypothesis that the factors extracted from the SCCQ will correlate significantly with the participants' high school diploma GPA*.

Factor analysis is the best statistical procedure to extract rotated latent variables whose contribution to explain significant relationships among observed variables will remain hidden otherwise. In other words, correlations between given variables with total scores and those obtained on the subscales of given measures such as the SCCQ are contaminated with the observed variables contributing little, if any, to the relationship under study. As can be seen in Tables 12 and 13, the social capital subscale of the SCCQ explains only 4% of the participants' GPA ($.19^2$ = .04). However, the seventh extracted factor, *Parent-School Encouragement and Facility*, explains about 11%, ($.33^2$ = .11) of the PGA alone.

The four factors having significant correlations with GPA are all related to families and thus emphasize how important it is for children to receive support, consultation and encouragement from their parents during their school years if they are to succeed as university students of first and/or foreign language in future. However, factors such as religious activities do not bear on students' academic success and thus necessitate the involvement of families in the process. Future research must, for example, show whether inserting statements such as *my father goes to the mosque regularly* will relate significantly to their children's GPA.   Along with Hopcroft's (2005) finding regarding the cardinal role of family in social networks, however, the results of this study confirm Crosnoe's (2003) consideration of family and school as the two main sources of social capital.

The results of this study do not, nonetheless, validate the existence of social capital and cultural capital as two distinct factorial constructs. This finding is compatible with what Khodadady (2009) found when he administered the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to 418 undergraduate and graduate students majoring in English in Iran. While Horwitz (1985, 1988, 1999) stated that the 34-item BALLI addressed five logical areas of language learning, Khodadady extracted 14 factors among which "six change as a result of formal education, i.e., nature of language learning, self-confidence and self consciousness, learning and communication strategies, compatibility of science and math with language, national aptitude and gender independency" (p. 151)

4. Conclusion

A 35-statement social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ) was developed in this study and administered to 403 undergraduate and graduate students majoring in the English and Persian languages in Mashhad, Iran. The participants' responses elicited on a six-point Likert scale revealed ten factors and thus showed the inappropriateness of establishing two logical subscales called social capital and cultural capital to capture what underlying variables the SCCQ factorially explores.

Furthermore, two logically established cultural capital statements, i.e., *I enjoy listening to classical music*, *I am a cultured person* and one social capital statement, i.e., *I see my grandparents weekly*, did not show any acceptable loading, i.e., .30 or higher, on the ten factors extracted in this study. Future research is needed to find out whether these statements did not load on any factor either because of their irrelevance to cultural and social capital or because of the heterogeneity of sample in terms of their size, age and field of study.

Among the ten latent variables only four reveal significant correlations with the participants' GPA, among which one factor alone, i.e., *Parent-School Encouragement and Facility*, accounts for almost eleven percent of students' high school achievement. Interestingly, none of the factors underlying cultural capital nor half of factors underlying social capital reveal any significant relationship with school achievement and thus call for further research to find out why peer interaction, for example, does not bear any significant relationship on achievement in Iran while it is considered as the most effective factor in communicative approaches towards foreign language learning.

And finally, since more than fifty percent of the participants in the present study were undergraduate and graduate students of English language and literature in Iran, their field of study should have affected the relationship between their GPA of high school diploma and extracted factors such as religious activities. It is therefore suggested the study be replicated with students majoring in diverse fields such as engineering and theology to find out whether the lack of significant relationship between the two is due to their very familiarity with a foreign culture through a foreign language such as English.

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Appendix

Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire

NO	Statement	Always	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	I enjoy listening to classical music.						
2	I enjoy reading literature.						
3	I am a cultured person.						
4	I know all famous music composers.						
5	I know a lot about literature.						
6	I frequently visit museums and theaters.						
7	I frequently borrow/buy books.						
8	I enjoy reading (in general).						
9	When a child, my parents regularly encouraged me to read.						
10	We have lots of books at home.						
11	I used to take or art or music classes outside school.						
12	My mother used to get involved in my primary schooling.						
13	I like to get involved in activities designed for young people.						
14	I usually get involved in religious activities in mosques.						
15	My parents usually get involved in my daily activities.						
16	I see my grandparents weekly.						
17	My parents used to help me with my homework regularly.						
18	My mom used to attend school meetings regularly.						
19	I feel I have a strong help network for my activities.						
20	I see my friends weekly.						
21	I had excellent schools with high quality.						
22	I am highly proficient in using language.						
23	At home, my parents keep track of my progress.						
24	My parents know where I am, what I do.						
25	My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.						
26	My parents know parents of my friends.						
27	I used to participate in school activities regularly.						
28	I used to participate in extracurricular activities.						
29	My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.						
30	I usually talk about job/education with family.						
31	I usually talk about job/education with other adults.						
32	My parents had a say in school policy.						
33	I feel I have strong ties with my peers.						
34	My parents have strong ties with each other.						
35	We have an intimate home environment.						

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the total SCCQ, its subscales and the GPA of high school diploma

	N	# of items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Alpha
Cultural Capital	403	11	18	60	42.24	7.458	.76
Social Capital	403	24	33	141	94.65	16.971	.86
SCCQ	403	35	66	196	136.89	20.981	.87
GPA	386	-	11	20	17.11	1.750	-

Table 2. Four statements forming the first factor of *literacy*

No	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
8C	I enjoy reading (in general).	.73	-
7C	I frequently borrow/buy books.	.69	-
5C	I know a lot about literature.	.64	8 (.37)
2C	I enjoy reading literature.	.62	-

Table 3. Six statements forming the second factor of *Parental Consultation*

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
30S	I usually talk about job/education with family.	.68	-
31S	I usually talk about job/education with other adults.	.61	-
23S	At home, my parents keep track of my progress.	.54	4 (.32) 7 (.34)
24S	My parents know where I am, what I do.	.47	-
26S	My parents know parents of my friends.	.40	-
29S	My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.	.36	3 (.38) 4 (.55)

Table 4. Four statements forming the third factor of *Family-School Interaction*

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
18S	My mom used to attend school meetings regularly.	.74	-
12S	My mother used to get involved in my primary schooling.	.65	-
25S	My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.	.62	4 (.34)
29S	My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.	.38	2 (.36) 4 (.55)

Table 5. Seven statements forming the fourth factor of Family Support

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
17S	My parents used to help me with my homework regularly.	.74	-
29S	My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.	.55	2 (.36) 3 (.38)
15S	My parents usually get involved in my daily activities.	.44	-
19S	I feel I have a strong help network for my activities.	.40	9 (.43)
25S	My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.	.34	3 (.62)
23S	At home, my parents keep track of my progress.	.32	2 (.54) 7 (.34)
32S	My parents had a say in school policy.	.31	-

Table 6. Two statements forming the fifth factor of Extracurricular Activities

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
28S	I used to participate in extracurricular activities.	.83	-
27S	I used to participate in school activities regularly.	.85	-

Table 7. Two statements forming the sixth factor of Family Relationship

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
34S	My parents have strong ties with each other.	.75	-
35S	We have an intimate home environment.	.73	-

Table 8. Five statements forming the seventh factor of Parent-School Encouragement and Facility

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
9C	When a child, my parents regularly encouraged me to read.	.61	-
10C	We have lots of books at home.	.56	-
22S	I am highly proficient in using language.	.36	-
21S	I had excellent schools with high quality.	.34	-
23S	At home, my parents keep track of my progress.	.34	2 (.54) 4 (.32)

Table 9. Four statements forming the eighth factor of *Cultural Activities*

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
4C	I know all famous music composers.	.62	-
6C	I frequently visit museums and theaters.	.51	-
11C	I used to take art or music classes outside school.	.42	-
5C	I know a lot about literature.	.37	1 (.64)

Table 10. Three statements forming the ninth factor of *Peer Interaction*

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
33S	I feel I have strong ties with my peers.	.68	-
19S	I feel I have a strong help network for my activities.	.43	4 (.40)
20S	I see my friends weekly.	.42	-

Table 11. Two statements forming the tenth factor of *Religious Activities*

#	Statements	Loading	Crossloading Factors
14S	I usually get involved in religious activities in mosques.	.60	-
13S	I like to get involved in activities designed for young people.	.42	-

Table 12. Correlations of SCCQ and its subscales with the participants' high school diploma GPA

		Cultural Capital	Social Capital	Total SCCQ
GPA	Pearson Correlation	.082	.194**	.186**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	.000	.000
	N	386	386	386

Table 13. Correlation coefficients between extracted factors and 386 participants' high school diploma GPA

No	Factors	GPA	No	Factors	GPA
1	Literacy	.034	6	Family Relationship	.199*
2	Parental Consultation	.223*	7	Parent-School Encouragement and Facility	.330*
3	Family-School Interaction	.085	8	Cultural Activities	.010
4	Family Support	.157*	9	Peer Interaction	-.008
5	Extracurricular Activities	.044	10	Religious Activities	-.025

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).