Social Capital and Academic Achievement of Nigerian Youths in Urban Communities: A Narrative Perspective

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Abstract
It is increasingly recognized that families and the society are important in helping youths develop the knowledge and skills they need to obtain technologically sophisticated jobs, which are an emerging part of the global economy. Therefore, this paper adopted social capital as a framework for promoting educational achievement of Nigerian youths in urban communities. The paper began with a critical overview of the basic tenets of social capital and education in the life of the youths in urban communities. The paper also engaged in an extensive discussion of the relevance of both society social capital and family social capital on academic achievement. The paper further discussed vividly the concerns around ethics of care in utilizing social capital. Finally, the paper was concluded with an emphasis that social capital's concrete benefits for education can be seen as higher achievement on tests, higher graduate rates, lower dropout rates, higher college enrollment, and greater participation in school and community organizations. As such, the paper recommended that policies designed to promote educational achievement should extend beyond the institutions and seek to strengthen social capital in the family and the society at large.

Keywords: Correlation, Social Capital, Academic Achievement, Youths

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature and research on social capital and its relationship to education. Increasingly, political and educational leaders propose social capital as a solution to persistent social problems (Dika and Singh, 2002). Yet there seems to be no unanimous definition of social capital. Social capital has been given a number of definitions, many of which refer to its manifestations rather than to social capital itself (Fukuyama, 1999). In other words, social capital is typically defined by its functions. These functions vary from definition to definition, but there are two elements that most definitions have in common. They are: (a) some aspects of social structures, and (b) actors whose actions are facilitated within those social structures (Coleman, 1988).

Cohen and Prusak (2001) refer to social capital as a dynamic and even organic phenomenon. Their approach also emphasizes social capital's role and function, rather than social capital itself. They underline how social capital works in organizations, how investments are made in social capital, and the return that these organizations and individuals experience from these investments. In this framework, they offer the working definition of social capital as "the stock of active connections among people, the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible".

In the same vein, the World Bank Social Capital Initiative (1998) defines social capital as "internal, social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded". Social capital is therefore seen as the glue that holds societies together, without which society at large would collapse. Consequently, the entire community must build a support system devoted to working with families in helping children realize their full potential. Therefore, this paper examined the correlation between social capital and academic achievement of the youths in education.

Social Capital in Education
Dika and Singh (2002) claimed that there are two major exportations of social capital theory into the educational field. For the first exportation, they stated that Bourdieu (1986) theories of cultural reproduction and of cultural and social capital were developed as alternative explanations for unequal academic achievement, which had already been examined using the skill deficit and human capital theories. For the second exportation, Dika and Singh (2002) pointed out Coleman (1988) approach and studies, which indicate that greater amounts of social capital- the presence of two parents at home, a lower number of siblings, higher parental educational expectations, and intergenerational closure lead to lower incidence of dropping out of school. Dika and Singh (2002) concluded that social capital and school attainment and school achievement are positively linked and most relationships were significant in the expected direction.

To Aslandogan and Cetin (2007), improvement of social capital in an educational context refers to the establishment of tripartite educator-parent-sponsorship (community) relationships and networking. In this context, parental expectations and obligations as well as social networks through family, school and community lead to social capital. Differences in student or academic achievement can be attributed to different levels of existing social capital which is produced in the networks and connections of families that the school serves. Social capital supports success and education in the form of the disciplinary and academic climate at school, and also the cultural norms and values that motivate students to achieve higher goals. Putnam (2000) stated that child and youth development is strongly shaped by social capital in school. Furthermore, networks which lead to social capital within children's families, schools, peer groups, and the community positively affect educational achievement and, consequently, students' behavior and development.

This in turn is reflected positively in low dropout rates, higher graduation rates, higher college enrollment, higher achievement on tests, and greater participation in school and community organizations (Sun, 1998, 1999; Yan, 1999; Israel et al., 2001). Family structure, family discussion, parental monitoring, parent-teen connection, family expectations and

obligations, and parents' communication with their children's school and friends (Dika and Singh, 2002) form social capital in school clearly affect students' academic achievement in different ways and manners. Similarly, Aslandogan and Cetin (2007) illustrate the benefit of social capital in students' behavioral development and success. They maintain that teachers who are fully committed to education, dedicated to academic success, self-sacrificing and altruistic in their manners towards students help attract parents and sponsors (community) towards proper schooling and education. This attraction also contributes to positive publicity and overall success in education, which in turn attracts more parents, community and support.

Aslandogan and Cetin (2007) also indicate students would not need explicit instructions in shared norms and values if they witnessed integrity, truthfulness, trustworthiness, generosity, and respect for the law and for human rights from their teachers and other networks within the family and school. Furthermore, they argue that teachers who exemplify and reflect the universal or ethical values aforementioned prove more effective than textbooks and instruction. Sil (2007) views social networks within parent groups and between parents and teachers as providing common positive outcomes for everyone in school. By focusing on social capital in the form of parental participation, she goes beyond a functionalist approach of social capital theory. Sil therefore claims that family and school partnerships are more important for students' success than family structure, such as marital status, parent's educational and income levels, race or family size. This, however, should not be interpreted as that she does not attach any significance to parents' backgrounds and aforementioned factors. These in fact should be recognized and served if parents need such.

As educational policies are formed, policy makers should take into consideration these factors, identify needs for higher social capital, and address these needs accordingly in order to maximize educational success. As demonstrated earlier, academic studies show that social capital plays a crucial role in overall success in education. In different forms, social capital produces gains and benefits for students in particular and for a society in general. Furthermore, the United States and many other developed countries, as Sil (2007) noted are becoming more multicultural, multiethnic and multi-racial. This may, to a certain extent, impede communication, interconnectedness or dialog among diverse individuals. This lack of communication and dialog manifests itself in the form of decreased participation and involvement, which in turn negatively affects educational success.

Society Social Capital and Academic Achievement in Urban Communities
The central idea of social capital is that social networks have values. It emphasizes the benefits of social networks, such as information, trust and reciprocity. The collective value of all social networks and the benefits that arise from these networks help people resolve individual and collective problems more easily (Putnam, 2000). In terms of educational issues, people use their social networks and involve different phases of education. Different stakeholders' involvement namely: community and state involvement helps to increase the relevance and quality of education. This involvement happens in various ways: by improving ownership, building consensus, reaching remote and disadvantaged groups, strengthening institutional capacity, and so on.

For instance, Francis (1998) study showed that voluntary participepation, as evinced within parent teacher associations, school committees and other grass-roots organizations, contributes significantly to local school infrastructure, maintenance, and security as well as to

the promotion of school enrollment and attendance. In this example, social capital among different groups and organizations promotes benefits for overall education including academic success. Accordingly, Heyneman (2002: 73) states:

> *School systems are expected to incorporate the interest and objectives of many different groups and at the same time attempt to provide a common underpinning for citizenship… The success of a school system is based in part on its ability to garner public support and consensus and hence its ability to adjudicate differences expressed by different portions of the public over educational objectives.*

However, these contributions differ characteristically from family involvement contributions. Since more people engage in the process, there are more complex relations and inputs. Accordingly, society's social capital, when it takes the form of educational involvement, has a smaller impact on children's academic performance (Israel et al., 2001). In contrast, in a family there are natural and higher obligations and expectations that shape the relationships, or social capital, between family members. In most cases, parents' involvement in their children's education is simple but effective, and includes methods such as helping with homework and communicating with teachers. Furthermore, written policies and rules regarding parental responsibility for their children's education lead people, perhaps unsurprisingly, to pursue more and better educational involvement.

Family Social Capital and Academic Achievement in Urban Communities

A child's development is shaped primarily by family. Within the family, elements of social capital such as trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity have powerful effects on a child's opportunities and choices, educational success, and behavioral development (Putnam, 2000). Different studies investigate social capital within families with specific focus areas such as parental aspirations, family structure, parent-school connectivity and help with homework (Dika and Singh, 2002). For instance, White and Kaufman (1997) studies showed that parents who regularly help their children with homework create an effective barrier against the negative impact of low socioeconomic status and low parental education attainment. In this example, the network between parents and children is employed to contribute to the success of the children's education.

Homework assistance was a reflection of the existing social capital within the family. Coleman (1988) defines this social capital simply as: "the relationships between children and parents" that promote success in the field of education. The World Bank (2011) also adds that acceptance and promotion of education's importance by the family positively impacts children's academic performance in schools. The World Bank gives Coleman and Hoffer (1987) studies as an example for this statement. In this example, significantly lower dropout rates in religiously- based public and private schools compared to non-religious schools are attributed to family acceptance and reinforcement of school norms and values. Israel et al. (2001) add that children born to well educated parents tend to perform well academically. These families create an environment where educational achievement is valued and expected. Furthermore, when children are provided with a nurturing environment that provides guidance on behavior, the effects on their educational success are powerful and positive. Corroborating the aforementioned, Coleman (1966) posited that parents' roles and background are more important in terms of contributing to school performance.

Concerns around Ethics of Care in Utilizing Social Capital

Ethical issues in the field of education can be discussed through multiple paradigms. The paradigms may include viewpoints of ethics of care, justice, critique and profession (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005). Among those viewpoints, Noddings (1992) discusses and theorizes about the ethics of care and places it at the top of educational hierarchy by stating: "the first job of the schools is to care". She emphasizes that the schools should prioritize process of nurturing and encouraging (caring) students rather than attempting to make achievement. Parallel to Noddings's approach, this paper will discuss social capital with respect to ethical issues in education in terms of ethics of care; indeed, like the concept of social capital, the ethics of care deal with relationships involving care, responsibility, trustworthiness and compassion among individuals and organizations. Noddings's approach to ethics of care can be described as "relational ethics" since it prioritizes concern for relationships (Noddings, 1984).

Accordingly, Starratt (1994) stated that the ethics of care focuses on the demands of relationships from a standpoint of absolute regard. Starratt asserts that the ethics of care sees individuals within the context of relationships, which are essential to one's intrinsic dignity and worth. He emphasizes fidelity to persons, willingness to acknowledge people's right to be who they are, authentic individuality, and loyalty to relationships as requirements of the ethics of care. Besides emphasizing requirements of ethics of care, Starratt views isolated individuals as half-persons. One becomes whole; he explains when he/she is in a relationship with another or with many others. Starratt (1994) also addresses characteristics of schools and school communities that are committed to the ethics of care. In his view, the integrity of human relationships should be held sacrosanct, both in school and out of school. Educators should also develop sensitivity to the dignity and uniqueness of each person in the school. To do so, educators can attend to the culture tone of schools. For instance, they can adopt a language of caring that uses humor, familiar imagery and personalized messages rather than the language of bureaucracy. School activities and procedures should also reflect caring, as should the school song and other symbols.

This ethic should concern itself with the larger purpose of productivity, such as an increase in the district's average test scores, rather than responding to more immediate concerns, such as efficiency. When successfully applied, the ethics of care as Starratt imagines them are comparable to high social capital in schools and school communities. His suggestion to promote care in and out of school may also be applicable to the promotion of high social capital in other words, when there are people committed to the ethics of care in schools and communities, there is higher social capital. On the other hand, all parties involved in the process of education, including but not limited to, administrators and teachers should not sacrifice the uniqueness and individuality of students for the sake of promoting social capital. Rather, they should try to maintain a balance between these two assets (that is social capital and individuals' unique interests, capabilities, and routes to realization of their potential). In other words, educators should still cherish diversity in the school and in the classroom, while trying to reap the benefits of social capital. This requires respect for decisions made by individuals and elimination of any overt and covert pressure on individuals to mold them into a uniform identity and/or purpose.

Conclusion

In the field of education, the concept of social capital is frequently mentioned as an important contributor to students' academic success. In different forms, people's involvement in

education has been accepted as the source for social capital, which affects educational success considerably. However, this paper, on a track running parallel to most research, separated people's involvement and the social capital generated from that involvement into two groups: (1) social capital from family, and (2) social capital from the larger society. The family structure, within which relationships and dialogs between parents and children are more frequent and less formal, provides more social capital for educational success. By contrast, society's social capital has less effect on educational success, since relationships that concern or involve educational issues are more formal and left mostly to written policies and obligations. Consequently, social capital's concrete benefits for education can be seen as higher achievement on tests, higher graduate rates, lower dropout rates, higher college enrollment, and greater participation in school and community organizations.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned, the study recommends that:

- Policies designed to promote educational achievement should extend beyond the institutions and seek to strengthen social capital in the family and the society at large.
- Educators should pay more attention to student networks and create environments in which youths and communities alike could benefit from social capital.

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