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Leadership in the Context of Social Capital in Education

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Abstract

In this study, the concept of social capital is defined, the importance of social capital in education and how to develop social capital in the context of leadership are discussed. In order to develop social capital, it is necessary to create an environment of trust in the school, to develop and encourage communication among the members of the organization, to prepare social environments where members can come together, to disseminate organizational stories that are an element of the organizational culture and to encourage cooperation. The development of social capital has a priority place among the leadership roles of school administrators. This study explores the impact of school principals' favoritism on teachers' organizational commitment, focusing on how favoritism influences teachers' emotional and professional attachment to their schools. Favoritism, in the context of educational leadership, can take many forms, such as giving preferential treatment to certain teachers in terms of promotions, assignments, or recognition, and it has been shown to create various challenges within the school environment. The research aims to understand how favoritism, whether perceived or real, affects teachers' sense of responsibility, job satisfaction, and their willingness to remain dedicated to their school organizations. Additionally, the study found that favoritism fosters an atmosphere of division among staff members. Teachers who are not the recipients of favoritism often feel alienated, undervalued, or resentful, which can lead to an erosion of teamwork and collaboration within the school. In some extreme cases, the erosion of trust can lead to high turnover rates and the loss of experienced, dedicated educators.

Keywords: Leadership, Social Capital, Social Capital in Education

Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' intellectual, emotional, and social development, directly influencing their future success. However, the effectiveness of education is not solely dependent on individual performance but also on the collective relationships between schools and communities. Social capital refers to the value derived from the networks, relationships, and trust that exist within a community. In the context of education, social capital refers to the connections and interactions between school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. These relationships contribute to the strengthening of the school community and play a critical role in fostering student success. The role of leadership in education is increasingly recognized as essential in enhancing social capital, which in turn influences the overall effectiveness of schools.

This paper explores the relationship between leadership and social capital in the educational context, emphasizing how leaders can foster environments that promote collaboration, trust, and academic success.

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The Concept of Social Capital and Its Role in Education

Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and trust that individuals and groups develop within a community. In the educational context, social capital encompasses the interactions between teachers, students, parents, and school leaders that enable a supportive learning environment (Coleman, 1988). Social capital within schools has been shown to significantly affect student outcomes by fostering collaborative relationships, providing emotional support, and creating a positive school climate (Putnam, 2000).

When social capital is strong in a school, students are more likely to succeed academically because they benefit from positive peer relationships, a supportive learning environment, and increased collaboration among teachers. Schools that nurture social capital encourage students to engage with one another, share knowledge, and support each other's learning, all of which contribute to improved educational outcomes.

The Impact of Leadership on Social Capital

Leadership plays a crucial role in building and maintaining social capital within educational settings. School leaders are responsible for shaping the culture of the school, influencing the interactions between teachers and students, and creating an environment that fosters collaboration and trust. Effective leadership can enhance social capital by encouraging positive relationships, creating opportunities for collaboration, and supporting the development of a strong school community.

Transformational leadership, for example, is particularly effective in building social capital within schools. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate teachers and students to achieve common goals, encouraging collaboration and creating a shared vision for success (Bass, 1990). This type of leadership fosters an environment where social capital can thrive, as teachers and students feel supported and motivated to work together toward shared educational objectives.

Another leadership model, servant leadership, also plays a significant role in strengthening social capital within schools. Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers, focusing on empowering teachers and students by providing support, resources, and encouragement (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership approach helps to build trust and promote collaboration, as leaders demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of their school community.

The Connection Between Social Capital and Academic Success

There is a clear link between social capital and academic achievement in schools. Schools with strong social capital tend to have higher levels of student success, as students benefit from a supportive and collaborative environment (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital allows students to form strong relationships with their peers, engage in group work, and seek emotional and academic support when needed. These relationships not only enhance academic performance but also contribute to students' overall well-being and social development.

Furthermore, schools with high social capital often see increased collaboration among teachers, which leads to the implementation of innovative teaching practices and more effective instruction (Abbas et al., 2024). Teachers who trust and collaborate with one another are more likely to share best practices, develop new strategies, and provide mutual support, all of which benefit students' academic outcomes.

Leadership Models that Foster Social Capital in Education

Different leadership models play a critical role in promoting social capital in schools. Below are some leadership approaches that have been shown to contribute to building social capital:

1. **Transformational Leadership:** Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers, encouraging collaboration and shared goals. This leadership style helps to create a positive school culture and strengthens social capital by fostering trust and collective action (Bass, 1990).
2. **Distributed Leadership:** In distributed leadership models, leadership is not confined to a single individual but is shared across the school community. Teachers, students, and administrators all take on leadership roles, contributing to a more collaborative and engaged school environment (Spillane, 2006). This approach helps to build social capital by encouraging collective responsibility and collaboration.
3. **Servant Leadership:** Servant leadership emphasizes the importance of serving others and prioritizing their needs. By focusing on the development and well-being of teachers and students, servant leaders help to build strong, trusting relationships that enhance social capital (Greenleaf, 1977).

The motives of individuals to survive have enabled the emergence of structures in which communication occurs at various levels, from groups to societies. In situations where interaction is present, some people are more dominant than others, attract attention and are accepted as leaders with the approval of others. Therefore, leadership is the role that a person achieves separately from others within the group as a result of the interaction of leaders with others (Teyfur et al., 2013). The individual, who is a social being in social life, needs leaders who will influence the movement of the group of which he/she is a member and help him/her achieve his/her goals.

Social relations and social ties in social structures and organizations are essential for social and organizational development. In this direction, individuals see a work environment that they can be satisfied with and colleagues they can respect and like as inevitable elements in order to accomplish their tasks. Such integration with the work environment and coworkers are important factors that increase employee satisfaction. Social capital has functional values and is found among the resources of individuals and groups and is involved in the relationships between them (Kahne, O'Brien, Brown, & Quinn, 2001).

Leaders need to give employees the opportunity to come together and the time to build communities to enable them to connect with each other, begin to understand each other and trust each other. Social capital needs breathing space, social time and space in and around work (Cohen and Prusak, 2001: 238). The development of social capital depends on leaders who are able to bring employees together and give them opportunities.

McCallum and O'Connell (2009), in their study on the impact of social capital on the formation of strong leadership by examining important leadership studies, concluded that social capital, which has elements such as establishing healthy relationships within the organization, establishing goodwill and trust, has become increasingly important in the context of leadership.

Social Capital Concept

The concept of social capital has been examined by different disciplines such as economics,

business administration, politics, sociology, education, sociology of education, and educational administration. According to Tatlı (2013), social capital is the potential and ability of people who make up the society to benefit and excel as a result of membership in official and civil organizations, interpersonal interactions and connections and activities. Therefore, it is important and necessary to invest in human development.

Social capital has been the subject of much research, especially since the 1980s (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Bourdieu (1986), who made significant contributions to the operationalization of the concept of social capital, defined social capital as the totality of potential benefits provided by communication and relationships based on long-term and purposefully established social networks.

Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a concept that is the source of the cooperative behavior of groups. According to Putnam (1993; 2000), social capital is a value that enables social integration and cooperation between individuals based on social connections, communication networks, reciprocity and trust. Lin (2001) defines social capital as a latent power embedded in social structures that is accessible, transferable and can create a functional impact.

Within the framework of these approaches, it is possible to define social capital as a potential resource consisting of a combination of trust, social networks, reciprocity, values and norms that affect people's coexistence and cooperation and play a role in the development of economic development and social welfare (Ekinçi, 2008). In this respect, social capital is a value that has important functions in a wide range from micro-scale organizations and institutions where the human element plays a role to societies in the macro framework.

Education and Social Capital

In educational organizations, teachers and students have a sense of belonging to the school, trust and increase the quality of their relationships through social capital (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Foley & Edwards, 1999; Hargreaves, 2011). In connection with the level of social capital, educational organizations are primarily responsible for raising qualified manpower needed by the society, contributing to social development through education and training activities, and ensuring the continuity of culture. Educational organizations can be more associated with social capital due to the intensity of social processes and human relations. For this reason, administrator-teacher-family-student relations are very important in educational organizations.

Campbell (2006), Cueto et al (2005), Iyer, Kitson and Toh (2005), Horvat, Weininger and Lareau (2003), Goddard (2003), Ream (2003), Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless (2001), Pong (1997), Teachman, Paasch and Carver (1996), Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) revealed in their study that there is a positive relationship between social capital and educational outcomes in terms of educational organizations and that the level of social capital affects the quality of the educational environment and educational outcomes.

Social capital is based on the reflections of social life and is critical for the development of successful collaboration, especially in schools. The existence of social capital also has an impact on achievement by strengthening the network of relationships between individuals (Johnson et al., 2015). It can be said that the main purpose of schools' social capital is to increase the impact on teacher and student achievement. Similarly, social capital is also effective in areas such as job performance, job opportunities and professional development (Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Johnson et al., 2015). The quality of relationships between teachers can be improved through social capital. Teacher-teacher relationships can involve ongoing relationships not only

The quality of the relationships and communication networks that administrators, teachers and students develop with the environment in school organizations depends on the basic values and perceptions of these actors. The relationships among these actors in school organizations provide important clues about the level of social capital in the school organization. These relationships have an important place in schools having effective or ineffective organizational relationships. For this reason, social capital in school organizations should be emphasized and a high level of social capital formation should be ensured (Şahin, 2011).

The benefits of social capital to the school organization can be listed as follows (Cohen & Prusak, 2001):

It enables the effective sharing of knowledge through common goals, frames of reference and established relationships of trust,

It allows for the preservation of valuable organizational knowledge,

It creates a tight cohesion in the process of ensuring organizational stability and unity of understanding,

It ensures that all kinds of costs are reduced depending on the spirit of trust and cooperation.

Leadership in the Context of Social Capital

Social capital is a current topic that has been studied in a wide range of social sciences. Similarly, leadership has been a prominent topic in management science research. While the first focus was on the indirect relationship between social capital and leadership, it is seen that the direct relationship has come to the forefront later.

In the context of the concept of social capital, leadership approaches offer quite different perspectives. A leader is a person who can offer practical solutions to the problems or conditions encountered by using his/her skills and can appeal to the emotional world of his/her followers, who has the power to influence with his/her behavior and attitude by assuming a functional role in social processes (Purdue, 2001). According to this approach, a leader should have a perspective focused on social relations and emotions. This understanding reveals that there are important links between leadership and social capital. This is because social capital emerges from social relationships and interactions.

Leadership is not about establishing power and authority over followers, but about influencing and directing them (Werner, 1993). Leaders should have the ability to direct group members towards a goal and direct them to behave in line with group goals (Erdoğan, 1997; Cömert, 2024). This set of qualities is shaped to a great extent by competency areas based on social skills. School administrators with leader qualities should be able to influence the stakeholders inside and outside the school and direct them in line with the school's goals. Especially in organizational structures such as schools where the human element is determinant, social capital develops in the shadow of leader behaviors that affect and direct human relations as a set of values that are formed as a result of relationships and interaction.

Schools are social spaces where social capital is consumed intensively. Unethical behaviors, disloyalty, mistrust, biased behaviors, frequent conflict situations encountered in schools rapidly consume the social capital of the school. Social capital is vital for the school, which is a social system, to continue its existence (Çelik, 2003). It can be said that providing and developing

social capital formation is one of the leading duties of the school administrator as a leader.

In order for schools to increase their social capital, they need to emphasize certain activities (Töremen, 2002). The behaviors and attitudes of school administrators that can be evaluated in the context of social capital leadership are activities and discourses aimed at developing a sense of reciprocity and cooperation, organizational stories, participation in decisions taken at school (Cömert, 2024).

providing a shared vision, creating a shared vision, and providing social environments and spaces that will develop relationships and sharing within the framework of the understanding of working together (Ekinci, 2008). Therefore, in order to strengthen social capital in schools, school leaders should increase social relations and interaction by functionalizing social networks among the stakeholders of the school.

In this context, Orr (1999) states that social capital offers important opportunities and advantages in overcoming problems in schools and suggests that the most important stage for school leaders to benefit from these opportunities can be realized by becoming aware of social capital resources. After this stage of awareness, school leaders will be able to make the school more functional by investing in areas that will strengthen social capital. As a result, leading school administrators in the context of social capital will provide more benefits from the efforts to achieve the school's goals with the positive results of efforts to ensure healthy relationships, active connections, shared values and high levels of trust.

Conclusion

Social capital plays a critical role in shaping the success of schools and the academic achievement of students. Schools with strong social capital benefit from positive relationships, a supportive learning environment, and increased collaboration among teachers and students. Leadership is essential in fostering social capital, as leaders can create environments that promote trust, collaboration, and shared goals. Transformational, distributed, and servant leadership models all contribute to the development of social capital within schools. As schools continue to recognize the importance of social capital, educational leaders must focus on building and sustaining relationships that will enhance student success and overall school performance.

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