In the Name of God

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

Faculty of Letters and Humanities

English Department

The Role of Bourdieu's Social and Cultural Capital in Creative Thinking Abilities and Academic Achievement: A Study in an EFL Situation

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A Thesis Submitted to the English Department, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the M.A. Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Mashhad, Iran

August, 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Successful completion of this thesis would have not been possible without the support of many wonderful people in my life including, my family members, professors, and friends. During the three years of the M.A. program at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, I have experienced life to the fullest, from learning to solve problems alone to learning to share my burden with people around me with whom I am richly blessed.

To begin with, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude and appreciation, first and foremost, to Dr. Reza Pishghadam for his patience and expertise, advice and enthusiasm, and wisdom and accommodation. He is a scholar who is full of energy and brilliant ideas. His excellent classes and his ingenious and original ideas have always been an inspiration for me and have aroused my enthusiasm and interest for ELT, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. His enthusiasm made the dissertation process an enjoyable and memorable one and it was his passion for research that helped me understand and love and enjoy the research process more. I thank him for communicating ideas and developing questions with me throughout the years. His cheerfulness and his love for people around him make him a special person. I am greatly honored and blessed to have been his student.

I owe many thanks to my dear advisor, Dr. Ebrahim Khodadady, whose comments and recommendations helped me improve the quality of this thesis and accomplish it. This thesis could not have been possible without his continuous support. I am really indebted to him.

I also owe a debt of thanks to Dr. Mohammad Reza Hashemi, Dr. Rajabali Asgarzadeh, Dr. Puriya Baghaei, Ms. Afsaneh Ghanizadeh, Ms. Vahideh Seyyedi, Ms. Sara Khazaee, Mr. Hesam Shahriari, Mr. Mohammad Reza Adel, Mr. Bouri, Ms. Ahmadi, and all of the students at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Azad University of Mashhad, and Imam Reza University of Mashhad for their assistance in the

completion of this project. Without their support and kindness, my study would have never gotten off the ground let alone have the large number of students to participate. All of their efforts are much appreciated.

I also need to acknowledge my best friends, Elyas Barabadi and Mohammad Zabetnia, whom I have known for a long time. I thank them for their understanding and encouragement.

I also owe a debt of thanks to my dearest Mahshid without whose continuous help and support I could not have finished this job. I also thank her for her continuous support of my academic endeavors. She really made the dissertation process an exciting one for me.

Last but not least, I feel really indebted to my family. I could not complete the dissertation process without the encouragement, love, and support of my family. I am especially grateful for my parents. They have been supportive of all my decisions and have encouraged me to continue this path in many ways.

Every day is a day for me to learn, and every incident is a path for me to grow. I would never regret this valuable experience that I have experienced.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACQ: Arjmand Creativity Questionnaire

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

GPA: Grade Point Average

L2: Second Language

SCCQ: Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire

ABSTRACT

Interrelationships among Iranian EFL Learners' Social and Cultural Capital, Creative Thinking Abilities and Academic Achievement

Reza Zabihi

The present study was conducted to apply a questionnaire of social and cultural capital to students' creative thinking abilities and academic achievement in the foreign language context of Iran. To these ends, the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) which comprises five factors, i.e. social competence, social solidarity, literacy, cultural competence, and extraversion, was administered to 320 undergraduate students majoring in English language. All five factors of SCCQ were found to be correlated significantly with the learners' GPA. Moreover, having conducted the regression analysis, it was found out that literacy and cultural competence were predictive of higher GPA on the part of learners. Next, parents' educational levels were entered into the regression model. The results of this analysis indicated that, together with literacy, mother's educational level predicted 23% of the variances in learners' GPA. However, father's educational level was not a good predictor of academic achievement. This study also investigated the relationship between learners' creativity and their social and cultural capital. To this end, the Arjmand Creativity Questionnaire (ACQ) was also administered to the aforementioned sample. Significant correlations were found between the factors of SCCQ and learners' creativity. Therefore, the regression analysis was run indicating that a combination of cultural competence and social solidarity was the best predictor of creativity by explaining 25% of the variances in EFL learners' creativity scores. Finally, the relationship between creativity and foreign language achievement was also examined. Three groups were formed based on creativity scores, namely, High Creative, Mid Creative, and Low Creative learners. The mean academic achievement

scores of these three groups were compared. One-way ANOVA indicated that there are significant differences in the mean academic achievement scores among the three groups. The results of the post-hoc Scheffe test revealed that there was a significant difference between the GPA scores of the high creative group and those of the two other groups. Finally, the implications of the results were discussed within a foreign language context, and suggestions for future research were provided.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

In this section, a brief background regarding the role of social factors in language learning will be discussed. Moreover, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the research questions will be mentioned. Finally, the limitations of the study and the definitions of the key terms are provided.

1.1. Background

Learning never takes place in a vacuum. It occurs within a variety of contexts, some of which are more conducive to the process of cognitive, affective, and social development than others. The impact of context on learning a language is considerable, both at the macro level of the culture in which the learning takes place, and the micro level of school and family. According to Williams and Burden (1997), learning environments will enable individuals to learn how to learn and to develop as fully integrated learners. Learner's access to different cultural goods such as, Internet, computers, pictures, paintings, books, and dictionaries (Cultural capital), and learners' relationships with teachers, parents, siblings, and peers (Social capital) may have a profound influence upon whether, what and how any individual learns a language.

According to Bourdieu (1986), capital is not only economic but is also social and cultural. That is to say, society can also be structured by the differential distribution of cultural and social capital. These two types of capital can be powers that define the chances of profit in a given field. The more one possesses cultural and social capital, the more successful one may be in a specific area. Thus, these types of capital can be considered as guarantees of success.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993) proposed the ideas of cultural and social capital to break with the presupposition inherent in the commonsense view, which considers academic success and failure as an effect of natural aptitudes. According to him, mental abilities alone are not responsible for academic achievement; the types of capital learners bring to education can contribute to their academic achievement.

Those learners who possess more cultural goods and have access to more social network of friends and institutions can guarantee more success in education. Therefore, it is fair to say that children of families with more social and cultural capital are more successful in education, which might be 'reproduced' in the successive generations of the children. Of course, this 'reproduction' can lead to the transmission of social inequality in society, hindering the educational and life chances of poor families' children.

As it was already mentioned, the idea of the relationship between "power and capital" has been highlighted in Bourdieu's works (1986; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). In the field of language learning, Bourdieu's ideas mostly have been used to manifest the nexus between power, language, identity, cultural and social capital (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2002). As Pennycook (2001, p. 120) points out, "a major task for critical applied linguistics is to find ways to meet the challenge of working across multiple levels, of looking at contextual issues of second language acquisition, while accounting for layers of institutional influence and relations of ethnicity, gender, or social class." In the same vein, Ricento (2005) has correctly pointed out that educational institutions play a critical role in production and reproduction of social identities and unequal relations of power in society. Moreover, as Pavlenko (2002, p. 281) states, "the social context is directly involved in setting positive or negative conditions for L2 learning." This is in line with Bourdieu's (1986) reproductive standpoint by which he maintains that social inequalities among social classes are reproduced in the context of education.

Bourdieu, Passeron, and Martin (1996) draw heavily on the relevance of social and cultural capital to language by claiming that the educational system tends to reinforce the social inequalities inherent in society by failing to consider the different amounts of cultural and linguistic competence possessed by different learners with different social class backgrounds. Therefore, Bourdieu (1977) adds an element of power to linguistic competence and maintains that language competence cannot be understood apart from social class. Grant and Wong (2008) make reference to Bourdieu's 'right to speak', and argue that it is important to pay attention to the

differential treatments that language learners receive with respect to race, ethnicity, and social class. For example, as Bernstein (1996) argued, so many working-class children were failing in the British educational system because they grew up learning a restricted code which was not used at school, while middle-class children acquired the elaborated code which was used mostly in education. That is to say that, access to the elaborated code can give more power to the middle-class children, making them more successful in education. This is in line with Kumaravadivelu's claim (2006) that language can be used as an instrument of communication and control, coercion as well as constraint.

Not only can the unequal distribution of social and cultural capital cause differential success rates among students of different social classes, but also it can affect students' psychological traits and mental states such as thinking styles (Zhang & Postiglione, 2001), psychological distress (Phongsavan, Chey, Bauman, Brooks & Silove, 2006; Scheffler, Brown & Rice, 2007), mental health (De Silva, Huttly, Harpham & Kenward, 2007), depression and psychosis (Lofors & Sundquist, 2007), self-esteem (Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe, 2008), burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010), and self efficacy perception (Epcacan & Epcacan, 2010).

Creativity is another variable which can be studied in relation to students' social and cultural capital. Although creativity is often regarded as an individual act performed in isolation (Sternberg, 1999), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) regards a creative activity as arising from people's interactions with their socio-cultural context, i.e. the world around them, and with other people whose knowledge and experience may contribute to the completion of that activity (as cited in Fischer, 2005).

From a psychological point of view, creativity is an important factor because it provides a framework for the description of an individual, and also specific differences between individuals. These individual differences are important because they can be used to predict future behavior such as academic success (e.g., Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir & Kumar, 2009; Otto, 1998). Therefore, creativity which involves sensitivity to problems, creative fluency of production, ability to come up with novel ideas, flexibility of mind, synthesizing ability, analyzing ability,

reorganization or redefinition of organized wholes, a high degree of complexity of the conceptual structure, and evaluation (Guilford, 1950), might be a factor affecting second or foreign language learning.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As stated above, capital is not only economic but also social and cultural (Bourdieu, 1986). That is to say, society can also be structured by the differential distribution of cultural and social capital. These two types of capital can be powers that define the chances of profit in a given field. The more one possesses cultural and social capital, the more successful one may be in a specific area. Thus, these types of capital can be considered as guarantees of success. The concepts of social and cultural capital, put forward by Bourdieu (1977; 1986; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; Bourdieu, Passeron, & Martin, 1996), have prompted many research projects concerning different aspects of individuals' lives.

Following the huge amounts of studies done on social and cultural capital, and due to its rich and expanding literature in the area of education, it seems quite necessary to examine these variables in second/foreign language learning. Granted the fact that different students from different social classes enjoy different levels of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), it has to be studied to see whether these variables have any influence on the extent to which learners learn a second or foreign language.

In the area of social psychology, creativity is also a variable which has not been studied so far in relation to social and cultural capital. To the researcher's best knowledge, no study to date has tried to empirically examine the role of social or cultural capital in students' creativity. Irrespective of its genetic roots (Sternberg, 1999), creativity is also regarded as the result of people's interactions with their socio-cultural context, i.e. the world around them, and with other people whose knowledge and experience may contribute to the completion of that activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, as cited in Fischer, 2005). Therefore, investigating the

socio-cultural dimensions of creativity can be an interesting, yet novel, topic for research.

The quest for ways of understanding why some English learners are more successful than others has lately turned towards individual differences. Psychologists of education have long been interested in predicting academic achievement, and a plethora of studies were conducted in this regard (e.g., Bratko, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Saks, 2006; Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Chamorro-Premuzik, & Furnham, 2003; Goh & Moore, 1987; Kiany, 1998; Laidra, Pullmann, & Allik, 2006; Savage, 1962; Willingham, 1974). However, due to the divergent findings of previous research, we may still cast doubt on the extent to which psychological constructs may affect learners' academic performance.

When it comes to creativity, this divergence in findings is even more tangible. The reason, as Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) state, is that creativity is a 'fuzzy' trait. Therefore, the predictive power of creativity in the prediction of academic success has yet to be replicated, across different contexts, among different participants, and via different instruments.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The value of this research thus lies in applying a social and cultural capital research instrument and in helping researchers and practitioners interested in Bourdieu's ideas to further employ the scale in the field of language learning. Put it another way, different applications of a previously-designed-and-validated instrument can deepen and enrich our understanding of social and cultural capital constructs and help researchers conduct more empirical research into the nature of social and cultural capital and different issues in language learning.

The study reported in this thesis revolves around a very timely issue, the relationship of English language learners' home background to their relative level of achievement. The social turn in applied linguistics generally has drawn attention to contextual aspects of the language learning process, and there is increasing awareness

of how the availability of useful resources for learning, inside and outside of school, can have a big impact on whether and to what extent individuals succeed. Since success in English can in many countries have a big impact on individuals' life chances, there is a serious danger that English may help perpetuate and deepen social divisions in society. So we should welcome attempts to operationalize Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital in the field of English language learning. The findings of this study may also function as a form of consciousness-raising for the ELT policy makers and practitioners who are strongly recommended to pay more and more attention to the contextual aspects of learning a language.

The value of this research also lies in filling another gap pertaining to research on creativity by trying to answer why some learners are more creative than others. The present study contributed to fill part of this gap by examining the role of EFL learners' socio-cultural backgrounds in the development of creativity.

Finally, this study is a significant one due to the shortage in the number of research studies in the area of psychology of language learning to investigate the role of learners' creativity in their learning of a second/foreign language. There is a shortage of research in the sense that there could not be found a consensus on either the helpful or the harmful effect of creativity on language learning achievement. Due to the divergent findings of previous research in this regard, the results of the present study may help us better clarify this role, and also stipulate whether and to what extent creativity has an impact on second/foreign language achievement.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

Due to the importance of social and cultural capital concepts in education, this study encompasses the examination of two issues: Firstly, by considering the huge amount of research which has focused on the relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement (e.g., De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000; DiMaggio, 1982; Merenluoto, 2009), and on the association between social capital and academic achievement (e.g., Eng, 2009; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Israel, Beaulieu

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& Hartless, 2001; Pishghadam, Noghani & Zabihi, in press), this study seeks to explore the role of students' parental education and social and cultural capital in their foreign language achievement.

Secondly, although several studies has taken into account the relation of social status to different psychological traits (e.g., De Silva, Huttly, Harpham & Kenward, 2007; Lofors & Sundquist, 2007; Phongsavan, Chey, Bauman, Brooks & Silove, 2006; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe, 2008), to the researchers' best knowledge, however, no study has been conducted to date in the field of social psychology to investigate the role of social and cultural capital in students' creativity. Thus, in this study the researchers also seek to examine the role of social and cultural capital dimensions in EFL learners' creativity.

Finally, another phase was added to the present study in order to consider the role of creativity in learners' foreign language achievement because, in the first place, there are very few studies that consider the role of creativity in language learning achievement (e.g., Albert & Kormos, 2004; Otto, 1998) and, secondly, these studies have come up with quite divergent findings. In other words, a solid understanding of the role of creativity in language learning achievement has not been obtained to date. Therefore, as a step towards filling this gap, the present study examines the relationship between EFL learners' creativity and their academic achievement.

With these purposes in mind, the researchers seek to find answers to the following research questions:

1.4.1. Research Questions

Q1. Is there a significant relationship between students' social capital and their academic achievement?

Q2. Is there a significant relationship between students' cultural capital and their academic achievement?

Q3: Do parents' educational levels predict EFL learners' university academic achievement?

Q4: Do social and cultural capital have any relationship with EFL learners' creativity?

Q5: Do social and cultural capital play any role in EFL learners' creativity?

Q6: Is there any significant relationship between creativity and learners' foreign language achievement?

Q7: Is there any significant difference between the means of high, mid and low creative groups and their foreign language achievement?

1.4.2. Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between students' social capital and their academic achievement.

H02: There is no significant relationship between students' cultural capital and their academic achievement.

H03: Parents' educational levels do not predict EFL learners' university academic achievement.

H04: Social and cultural capital do not have any relationship with EFL learners' creativity.

H05: Social and cultural capital do not play any role in EFL learners' creativity.

H06: There is no significant relationship between creativity and learners' foreign language achievement.

H07: There is no significant difference between the means of high, mid and low creative groups and their foreign language achievement.

1.5. Definitions of Key Terms

Some concepts used in this research were operationally defined to make them liable to empirical investigation.