



Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

***The Influence of Social and Cultural Capital on
EFL Students' Critical Thinking Skills***

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List of Abbreviation

SCCQ: Social and Cultural Capital questionnaire

WGCTA: Watson-Glazer Critical Thinking Appraisal

Abstract

The major aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between social and cultural capital and EFL students' critical thinking skills. This study takes this relationship into account to see if people with different sociocultural status are different regarding their critical thinking skills. To this end, 160 university students majoring in English language and Literature, English Translation and Teaching English were chosen. The students were studying in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Azad University and Tabaran University. They were asked to fill out Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) and Watson-Glazer Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) which included five subcomponents. The results of the correlational study indicated that Social and Cultural Capitals are positively correlated with measures of Critical Thinking Skills. All factors of Social Capital, namely social competence, social solidarity and extraversion, correlated with measures of inference and deduction. Measures of recognition of assumptions and evaluation of arguments only correlated with social competence and social solidarity. Among Cultural capital factors, i.e. cultural competence and literacy, both factors correlated with measures of inference, recognition of assumptions and interpretation. Measures of evaluation of arguments only correlated with literacy. The results showed no correlation between measures of deduction and Cultural Capital factors. The results of the regression equations also revealed that Social and Cultural Capital Scores can predict measures of subcomponent Critical Thinking Skills. Social competence and social solidarity can predict measures of inference. However, social solidarity was a better predictor. Recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation and evaluation of arguments can be predicted by social solidarity. Literacy can predict measures of inference, interpretation and evaluation of arguments. Measures of recognition of assumptions can be predicted by both cultural competence and literacy; however, literacy is a better predictor.

Key words: Social capital, Cultural Capital, Critical Thinking

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, introduced the concepts of social and cultural capital for the first time. Before that economic theorists believed a society was classified based on the economic distribution. Bourdieu elaborated the notion of capital and added two more capitals to the list, social and cultural capital. In his view not only economic capital but also social and cultural capital result in class division in a society. He asserted that “it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one introduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Since then a great number of studies have been done to show the influence of social and cultural capital on different aspects of individuals’ lives. Education is one of those disciplines in which these two concepts have attracted a lot of researchers to investigate how influential social and cultural capital would be on students’ educational outcome (for example, Dumais & Aary, 2009, Gopee, 2002, Tramonte & Willms, 2009).

One of the main goals of education in this modern world in which knowledge is changing very rapidly is enhancing individuals’ critical skills (Y.L.Ku, 2009). Nowadays individuals have access to different sources of data, so they need more critical thinking abilities with which they can make decision about the validity of data. In fact according to Renaud and Murray (2008) “as the amount of information and decisions increases, we may be in danger of having the answers, but not knowing what they mean” (p: 85).

Therefore this study aims at investigating whether there is any difference between students with high social and cultural capital and those with low social and cultural capital in terms of critical thinking skills.

1.2. Statement of the problem

After Bourdieu extended the concept of social and cultural capital in to the literature of education, it has received substantial attention. Many researchers have conducted extensive research on impacts of social and cultural capital on educational outcome. Many researchers have come up to the conclusion that when students are from families with high social and cultural capital, they will achieve better educational outcome (Parcel & Dufur, 2009, Dumais & Ward, 2009, Tracy well & chen, 2007 , Crosone, 2004, Tramont & Willms, 2009). While all these studies confirm the effects of social and cultural capital on educational outcome, there is no study that investigate how individuals' family background can influence their critical thinking abilities which according to Ku (2008) are considered as important goal of modern education.

Therefore based on the gaps in the previous studies, this study will be an attempt, using quantitative method, to explore the relationship between social and cultural capital and individuals' critical thinking ability.

1.3. Significance of the study

The present study will investigate the relationship between social and cultural capital on critical thinking skills. All scholars in critical thinking literature confirmed that this ability should be one of the most primary goals of education which prepares students for workforce and enhance their abilities to make wise decision in new rapidly changing world of knowledge. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate not only how critical thinking can be taught or assessed, but also how it can be influenced by various factors- in this case social and cultural capital.

In case that there exists such relationships, the result can have good implications for educational policy makers, material developers and teachers. First, policy makers should be aware of such differences and they have to include programs to raise students' level of social and cultural capital in and out of the classroom. Second, material developers are expected to include such materials which require students to use their critical thinking skills. And finally, the findings of this study can be beneficial for teachers. They can create an environment in which students are motivated to think critically, and they can also help those students who have less critical thinking ability to engage in activities enhancing critical thinking.

1.4. Purpose of the study

The major aim of this study is to examine the effects of the EFL students' social and cultural capitals on their critical thinking abilities. In order to see which type of capital has more influence, the impacts of each type of capital (social and cultural) will be examined separately.

1.4.1 Research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of social and cultural capital on individuals' critical thinking ability. Therefore this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL students' social capital and their critical thinking skills?
2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL students' cultural capital and their critical thinking skills?
3. Do measures of social capital predict critical thinking skills significantly?
4. Do measures of cultural capital predict critical thinking skills significantly?

1.4.2 Research hypotheses

To answer the research questions the following null hypotheses are formulated

HO1: there is no significant relationship between EFL students' social capital and critical thinking skills.

HO1.1. There is no significant relationship between social capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely inference.

HO1.2. There is no significant relationship between social capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely recognition of assumption.

HO1.3. There is no relationship between social capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely deduction.

HO1.4. There is no relationship between social capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely interpretation.

HO1.5. There is no relationship between social capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely evaluation of arguments.

HO2: there is no significant relationship between cultural capital and critical thinking skills.

HO 2.1. There is no significant relationship between cultural capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely inference.

HO2.2. There is no significant relationship between cultural capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely recognition of assumption.

HO2.3. There is no significant relationship between cultural capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely deduction.

HO2.4. There is no significant relationship between cultural capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely interpretation.

HO2.5. There is no significant relationship between cultural capital and subcomponent of WGCTA, namely evaluation of arguments.

HO3: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding critical thinking skills.

HO3.1: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding inference.

HO3.2: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding recognition of assumptions.

HO3.3: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding deduction.

HO3.4: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding interpretation.

HO3.5: social capital does not predict individual differences regarding evaluation of arguments.

HO4: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding critical thinking skills.

HO4.1: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding inference.

HO4.2: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding recognition of assumptions.

HO4.3: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding deduction

HO4.4: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding interpretation.

HO4.5: cultural capital does not predict individual differences regarding evaluation of arguments.

1.5. Definitions of some key terms

Social capital: According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition _or in other words, to membership of a group_ which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entails them to credit, in the various senses of the world.

Cultural capital: According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” and it exists in three forms namely, ‘embodied state’ (in the form of long lasting disposition of mind and body), ‘objectified state’ (in the form of cultural goods such as pictures, paintings, books, etc.), and ‘ institutionalized state’ (in the form of academic qualifications).

Critical thinking: according to Facione (1999) “critical thinking is purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which result in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which judgment is based” (cited in Mangena & Chabel, (2005))