Social Capital in an Elementary School: A Case Study

A

Ph.D. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Education is an essential agent for social change. It contributes through development of human capital, fosters social mobility, self-actualisation and in turn, a holistic development of an individual. Schools are primary centres for teaching social norms to individual.

The concept of capital was explored by identifying commodity as the germplasm of capital, which has use and exchange value. Lin (2008) perceived capital to be processed twice; as resource and investment, secondly as causal factor in production. Loury (1976,1981) in his exploration of social capital related it with the family background of an individual. The readiness to allocate resources within the family contributed to shape a child's development and future. Hence, social capital enhances efficiency and effectiveness of an individual at the societal level.

Bourdieu (1987,1988) defined capital as the accumulated resources in different forms that empower individual or group, when these resources are leverage either as material or live labour. He opined that capital can exist in many forms and is uneven in distribution across social structure, making it a rare resource. Bourdieu (1987,1988) identified three forms of capital that mainly exists, namely economic, cultural, and social. For Bourdieu (1987,1988) social capital is referred to as when resources are linked with a durable network, which facilitates access to various assets, including education. For Bourdieu (1987,1988), social capital was a 'socially given' resource rather than 'naturally acquired', as it involves different investment strategies towards development and maintenance of social relations. Bourdieu (1987,1988) also opined that the forms of capital have a potential to transform into different forms of capital. Hence, it is dependent upon the efforts towards developing sociability by individuals within a group.

Coleman (1988) defined social capital by its 'function' which is composed of different entities that a united by the social structure and actions of actors. Hence, it essentially inheres in the relationships between individuals, that functions to enhance the productivity and resource sharing in a group. Social capital according to Coleman (1986) exists in three forms viz. obligation and trustworthiness, information channels and norms (effective and prescriptive). These three forms influence our interactions, in turn our social relationships. Coleman (1986,1990) also put forth the idea of Intergenerational closure as an effective norm that garners collective support and enforcement of norm. Lastly, Coleman (1990) opined that social capital is a public good rather than individually ascribed good which facilitates group consensus.

Putnam (1993,2000) emphasised the role of social capital to foster relationships that serves individual interests. Elements like trust, civil societies, and norms reduce the transaction costs by instilling conviction within the members of a group. Hence, Putnam (1993) also considered social capital as a 'public good' rather than 'private good'. Putnam and Goss (2001) identified three forms of social capital based on its existence at network level: bonding (within same background), bridging (between different background), and linking (between individual and powerful institution). Hence, social capital is dependent on the quality of relationship, which could impact utilisation of resource, collective actions, and different social outcomes.

Various policies, commissions, and committees did not mention social capital explicitly but stressed on the need to increase community participation, social cohesion, and national integration through education. These policies have highlighted the importance of inclusion and social development that can only be achieved when there is a cognizance of prioritising collective goals over individual goals. Hence, it was important that through education a conducive and nurturing learning environment is created. This has been done and achieved through initiatives in Rajasthan like Shiksha Karmi, Lok Jumbish Pariyojana, and District Primary Education Programme, yet its literacy rate stands far below the national literacy rate as per Census 2011. Hence, by recognising the potentials of social capital would aid the policymakers and planners to implement much effective educational interventions.

Early education in Rajasthan was provided through Pathshalas, Maktabs, and Upasara. English education was introduced in 1819 through missionary schools and later the princely states opened different schools under their patronage. Girl education was promoted despite patriarchal norms. Post-Independence, Rajasthan focused on improving elementary education despite challenges like low enrolment and high dropout rate. As per U-DISE+ 2021-2022, there were 106240 schools in Rajasthan, where most of the schools were private schools. Despite challenges, there have been significant efforts to improve access and quality in education, with the potential role of social capital emerging as a key theme in fostering educational progress.

Early thinkers like Dewey (1900) and Tocqueville (1840) identified the importance of societal integration and relationships among the communities. Hanifan (1916) in his early conception of social capital defined it as the presence of goodwill, fellowship and cooperation that benefits the community. Papapolyrodou (2011) highlighted the role of social capital as generator and product of education in her study of students' educational outcomes. Hence, schools are critical in developing social capital among students through social connections and providing

opportunities to access different forms of capital. The elementary school years are important as a child is influenced more by peers who can mould their habitus. Hence, it is important to understand social capital in the realm of educational paradigms will be effective in its application in school.

Thus, in education, social capital is the product of socialisation that is fostered through trust, sense of belonging, open communication, reciprocity, solidarity, and engagement of school members. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), explained three dimensions in an organizational context to describe the contribution of social capital towards development of intellectual capital. The first dimension of social capital is, structural dimension, which encompasses tangible and intangible aspects. In the context of education, this can be understood through school policy, infrastructure, and leadership the school culture and school environment are affected. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) defined cognitive dimension of social capital as shared understanding, common language, and beliefs that enables effective communication and collaboration within an organization. When seen in the context of education, it focuses on alignment of expectations, perceived role of individual and ease of information-sharing. Lastly, the relational dimension of social capital as per Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) talks about quality of connections and engagement within an organization. These bring forth the importance of interactions and its role in facilitation of learning, participation, and engagement in school context.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review includes journal articles, book chapters, and electronic publications published between 2000 and 2023. The literature review was divided into three sections after reviewing 48 studies.

- The studies that were conducted between the period of 2000 to 2023 were presented chronologically in five time periods (2000- 2004, 2005-2009, 2010-2014, 2015-2019, and 2020-2023), to comprehend the existing body of knowledge and discipline related to social capital.
- The studies were reviewed to examine the impact of social capital on educational achievement, educational attainment, and psychosocial attributes.
- The studies were reviewed to understand issues and research gaps regarding the conceptualization, methodology, methods, and techniques for collecting and analysing data on social capital in education.

3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In education, social interactions play a critical role in refining our sensitivities and perceptions, leading to national cohesion, a scientific temper, and independence of mind and spirit. When a school is viewed as a social organization, our major focus remains on its internal structure. At the same time, it is important to remember that every school has its own culture and sub-cultures, filled with legends, heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies. Hence, the school is shaped through the interactions between the stakeholders and the school itself. This idea that outcomes in education are conditioned by social interactions had a titillating appeal.

The schools play a critical role in providing a space for children to interact with their friends, teachers, and the administration, forming their own social support systems. Hanifan (1916), Coleman (1988), and Morgan and Sorensen (1999) respectively opined that schools employ social capital to enhance their interconnectedness with community life, nurture high parental involvement, and expand the possibilities of students to achieve in both scholastic as well as non-scholastic activities. Furthermore, Ostrom (2000) noted that social capital aids in generating shared knowledge, understanding, norms, rules, and expectations within groups of individuals. Social capital exists through our social relationships and the benefits that these social relationships have the potential to generate. This acts as a support for stakeholders to use their membership and networks to secure benefits in the school such as aspiration (Onyx and Bullen, 2000), academic achievement (Goodard, 2003; Huang, 2009), adjustment (Lee, 2007), safety (Vieno et al., 2010) and others. The proponents of social capital advocated values such as knowledge-sharing (Ekinci, 2012), empathy (Dolan, 2022), tolerance (Onyx and Bullen, 2000; Paxton, 2002), solidarity (Hakim et al., 2012; Shoji et al., 2014; Poltacan and Balci, 2019), and trust (Onyx and Bullen, 2000; Parcel and Dufur, 2001; Paxton, 2002; Goodard, 2003) among others as valuable and critical for people to be able to collaborate and accomplish together. Hence, in a school context, Qvortrup (1994) pointed out, that social capital should be regarded as an asset that students, teachers, administration, and other stakeholders can draw on and benefit from.

The policies and committees have illuminated the importance and need to inculcate the spirit of socialism, secularism, and democracy as enshrined in our Constitution. While social capital was not mentioned in their deliberations definitively, it was talked about through the perpetual usage of cohesion and national integration. Lareau (2000) pointed out that schools are burdened with social and cultural expectations of parents of different socio-economic statuses; hence

schools could perpetuate inequality due to their bias towards the elite. Schueller et al. (2000) opined that this limits the percolation ability of policies at all levels. The state of Rajasthan has a high poverty (Unnithan-Kumar, 1997), female foeticide (Aravamudan, 2007), child marriage (Nagi, 1993), and low female literacy rate (Jindal and Pandey, 2012). Despite the continuous efforts that have been made by the State government through collaboration with the Centre and other international organisations to improve the status of education, the average literacy level of the state is far behind the national literacy rate as per the Census 2011. Ramachandran (2004) saw this as the residual effect of the social disparities that were prevalent in the socio-cultural history of Rajasthan.

Social capital, as per Jack and Jordan (1999) is a powerful social equalizer as it potentially presents equality of opportunities right from the elementary level of the school. Hence, inculcating values, and social skills in a conducive school environment can enable students to form friendships that could ultimately help them during their time of need, thus generating social capital from their social relationships.

Most of the studies have relied upon surveys as a basis for understanding the effect of social capital on various curricular aspects. These studies followed a nomothetic approach to present a macro-level picture of social capital within the schools, but have not focused on how and in what forms it comes to fruition, especially in the case of an Indian school. On the contrary, a microscopic study for an extended period would allow me to observe and understand the complexities of context, relationships, behaviour, and experience of the stakeholder within an elementary school. Hence, it was important to investigate how social capital is formed within an Indian school at the elementary level. Furthermore, it is of significance to examine the impact of social capital on circumstances associated with schools, namely parents, students, teachers, and principals. This will help in reflecting the sustenance of social capital between the principal, teachers, students, and parents within an elementary school.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

4.1 Research Questions

1. How is social capital constructed, enacted, and experienced by members of school community within an elementary school?

2. How does social capital influences engagement of members of school community within an elementary school?

3. What are the challenges to the formation and use of social capital within an elementary school?

4.2 Objectives

1. To identify the factors that contribute towards generation and maintenance of social capital within the elementary school community.
2. To analyse the influence of the identified factors on generation and maintenance of social capital within the elementary school community.
3. To study the impact of school activities on the manifestation and sustenance of social capital within the elementary school community.
4. To assess the impact of school leadership in shaping the social capital within the elementary school community.
5. To understand the role of teachers in shaping social capital within the classrooms of the elementary school community.
6. To identify the challenges to the development and sustenance of social capital within the elementary school environment.

4.3 Delimitation

The study was delimited to an Upper Primary Private Unaided School, affiliated to the Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education (RBSE) in the city of Jaipur.

4.4 Research Design

The present study followed a qualitative framework of research. This meant that the strategies employed emphasis over words rather than quantification of data. In view of Bryman (2012), qualitative research resides in the embodiment of social reality as an individual's creation.

The current study followed an Instrumental Case Study design. An instrumental case study design, according to Stake (1995) is employed to draw a deeper understanding of a particular issue, revisit generalizations, or theory-building. Here, the case itself is secondary yet plays a supportive role to facilitate an understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, the case is detailed based on its context, and the activities are scrutinized. The foundation of an instrumental case study design as per the view of Stake (1995) is a collaboration between the researcher and participant(s) to reconstruct their experiences. It offers a 'thick description' of a certain individual, institution, site, or group(s). Concurrently, Stake (1995) warned that an instrumental case study does not allow a scope of generalizing as done in quantitative research.

4.5 Defining the Field

Patton (1990) defined a field as a physical environment that sufficiently provide support to the researcher to visualize and conduct a study. Flick (2009) elaborated that in a field, the information is recognized and collected through effective communication between the researcher and the respondent. Thus, defining the field of study is imperative to establish a spatial framework. The focus of the current study was to understand how social capital presents itself in an educational context, which in this study was an elementary school.

According to U-DISE+ 2019-20 data, there were 9112 schools in Jaipur district, out of which 1990 were Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary Schools. Thus, the total share of Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary Schools was 21.8% in the Jaipur district. These upper primary schools are those schools that have classes from I to VIII only. By understanding the concept of the case study and its related assumptions, the researcher explored many schools in Jaipur.

The researcher came across SFS school through one of the contacts. The SFS school was a Private Unaided Recognised Upper Primary School located in the periphery of Jaipur city. The SFS school was established in 2000 by an Air Force couple and was affiliated with RBSE. The school did not have any permanent infrastructure and hence would shift within an area after some time. A school like this was something that the researcher had not come across. This could be due to reasons such as limited exposure to a realm of schools that has a permanent infrastructure, which remains the same for a long time, and a consistent number of students and teachers. This led to a curiosity to understand how social capital would be generated and sustained in such a school, and how the school is thought of by its community members.

During the researcher's association of more than two and a half years, the school had shifted twice. The dwindling numbers of students, and teachers in a school that shifted its location and continued to remain functioning during and after the COVID-19 lockdown, motivated the researcher to look upon this school as a case for conducting the research. In addition to this, SFS school offered a free hand to talk and interact with students and teachers. This was a relief as compared to the constraints such as no interaction with teachers and children, no photography, and the compulsion to share the findings that were put forth onto the researcher in other schools. The understanding of repercussions in the future deterred the researcher from continuing the quest and thus, SFS emerged as the case for the study.

4.6 Tools and Techniques for Data Collection

According to Bryman (2012), semi-structured interviews have a contextual tonality about the questions. It offers a scope to the researcher to vary the sequence of the questions and even pose further questions to receive significant information from the participants. An interview guide for students, teachers, and principal. However, there were many sets of questions that were developed separately for the principal, teachers, and students.

The informal conversations happened outside the school, in the staff room, during lunch breaks, and in preparation for a festival celebration or any other event. This increased the scope of acquiring data as sometimes the participant would engage in a conversation, that they might not have, had they been aware of being on record.

Participant observation was one of the best techniques to collect data from participants. The observation initially was more formal with limited opportunities for participation. This superficiality of participation transformed with the persistence to become Gold's (1958) participant-as-observer as the researcher became a part of the school activities in the form of teaching classes and organizing activities.

According to Bryman (2012), field notes are generally used as a reflective tool by ethnographers as a "detailed chronicle of events, conversations, and behaviours." Field notes were sometimes written as quick notes about an incident or behaviour on the field. The inconspicuous prompts added in it served as a trigger to write an elaboration about the day on the field.

As a researcher, Parul (2016) highlighted that it was important to listen to the participants. This listening was not merely limited to being focused on getting the answers we want. The realm of research is founded on proof. While doing research documents such as research articles, journals, theses, publications, and reports helped in the framing of the research questions. Later, it was used as a source of information to corroborate the findings of the current study.

4.7 Data Analysis

For Bogdan and Biklen (2007) qualitative data analysis encompasses organizing data, generating codes, categories, and themes, identifying patterns among themes, and finally interpreting the data in the form of a write-up. The data analysis began the moment the researcher entered the field. The qualitative data analysis for the current study is based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) framework of qualitative data analysis which is done

in three steps, namely, data condensation and data display ultimately leading to drawing conclusions.

- **Transcription of data**

The semi-structured interviews were recorded as audio. These were then transcribed verbatim in English and Hindi.

- **Organizing, Coding, and Categorizing**

While the researcher was in the field, the primary focus was to gather data. The periodically transcribed interviews were read to understand how to proceed. The data condensation allowed the researcher to select, and simplify the data obtained in the form of field notes, transcripts of interviews, informal conversations, and documents. The transformed data was then extracted to identify concepts and patterns. By doing this step, there was an ease of identifying patterns.

- **Thematic Generation and Thematic Categorization**

The data display as per Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) is the second step that entails a comprehensive assembly of information that allows one to draw conclusions. Once the researcher was able to categorize, the next step was to identify themes. By corroborating with the research questions and objectives, the researcher generated more categories that in turn led to a much clearer understanding of the pattern. This helped to gain much-needed clarity for interpreting the data and reporting the findings.

- **Interpretation and Reporting**

During the fieldwork, the researcher consciously left room for scepticism toward the obtained information. Thus, it ended up making the initial conclusions equivocal. As the study proceeded, the engagement with the participants increased. This provided a relative ease of access to the information that aided in identifying repetitive patterns and meanings. Thus, the final conclusions drawn from verification and re-verification were tested on the credibility, confirmability, and robustness of the data by triangulating it from different sources.

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a researcher, one of the challenges that were in front of me was to be able to carry out an ethical investigation. Alderson and Morrow (2004) maintain that at every stage one should take ethics as a researcher into account. As a qualitative researcher, I practiced the principles of ethics such as ensuring the least interference in their everyday routine, getting informed consent, voluntary participation, and maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- SFS school is a low-fee private recognised upper primary school that shifted its location before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The students and teachers called the school a "temple of knowledge" and a "place of learning." The principal and teacher believed that education is critical in instilling values and morals among the students.

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, activities such as morning assembly and lunch breaks had practices like young students being assisted by older students and sharing lunch boxes.

- The teachers, principal, and students had strong interpersonal relationships. However, the interpersonal connections with the parents were limited.

- Expectations, obligations, and their fulfilment were found to play an important role in developing relationships between students, teachers, parents, and principal.

- Trust was also found to play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community among the students.

- The school had multiple information channels between and among students, teachers, parents, and principal. Furthermore, these information channels were streamlined to improve communication within the school community.

- The students' aspiration was influenced by their teacher and family members as they chose to pursue high-performing careers like teachers, doctors, and defence. Teachers also aspired to be remembered for their teaching style and called teaching a "calling" rather than an "occupation."

- The relationship among the teachers had blurred professional and personal boundaries.

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the students shared being involved in sports, cultural and artistic activities.

- The principal adopted a multi-faceted role of teacher, mentor, and administrator.

- The leadership style of the principal was criticised implicitly by the teachers.

- The teachers and principal refrained from explicitly talking about conflict and resolution. Rather the conflict resolution was done discreetly.

- The teachers were involved in the decision-making processes in the school.

- After the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced a structural change by being shifted to a smaller building. There were fewer students in number, hence, varying age groups of students were made to sit together, leading to the formation of multigrade classrooms.

- Students opined that English Language Proficiency and success were positively associated with each other.

- Students made a distinction between friend and best friend based on the extent to which they would share their innermost concerns and thoughts. However, some of the associations in the form of friendships led to students concealing their knowledge and cheating in examinations.

- Longevity of association and relationships also affected the social capital within the school community.

- The school mitigated the gender biases among the female students, which they faced at home.

- The school relaxed its uniform policy considering financial constraints that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The COVID-19 pandemic affected the students' social, cognitive, and emotional engagement in the school which was seen in the form of switching off the video during the online classes, not sitting for longer time during the classes, and physical fights in the school.

- The transition to online classes reduced the access of many students, which affected their engagement and learning in the school after the schools reopened.

- Post-COVID-19 pandemic efforts were made by the school to revive the engagement and interaction with the community through initiatives like summer camp and celebration of festivals.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

From the study, it was observed that more conscious and explicit approaches and strategies need to be pondered upon to instil sense of belonging and trust at the global level among the students. Therefore, the policy-makers and strategists can delve deeper to develop social capital within the school students, that can have a lasting effect on their cognitive, social, and emotional assignation.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of parental involvement in the education of the school. In the cases, where school shows signs of increased conflict and lack of cooperation, the school can provide an avenue to the parents to engage in decision-making as well by convening a parent-teacher association. This could provide a medium for everyone to come together and discuss the issues pertaining to the school.

The shifting schools should be provided the governmental aid to stabilise themselves in a particular place. This could result in more credibility, increased access and a better quality and retention of students who often leave the school as it physically becomes inaccessible. The study offers opportunities for the school administration and teachers to reflect on the quality and extent of social interactions.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FURTHER STUDIES

- More case studies can be conducted at different levels of school to gain a better and contextual understanding of social capital within the Indian school.
- The interrelationship between individual, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions can be studied to have a more focused understanding about social capital.
- Studies can be done on relationship between social capital and school success.

9. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The present study is an attempt to explore the concept of social capital, its generation, and sustenance in an elementary school. The method of inquiry for this study was Instrumental Case Study. The deliberations of policy-makers and educational researchers have acknowledged the role of formal and informal interactions, participation, and associations. This study has specifically focused on an elementary school within the city of Jaipur, that particularly, lacked a permanent infrastructure. Consequently, the prolonged absence of a physical infrastructure has resulted in shifting from one place to another, which became a challenge in fostering trust among the community members. Additionally, incidences of rivalry among the teachers became an obstacle to harnessing the benefits of social capital among the teachers of the school. Yet, the school took measures to nurture collective participation in the form of decision-making, organization of functions, and even in the classrooms. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the issues of the school as fewer students stayed in the school and shifted to smaller building due to financial constraints. Yet the willingness to adapt among teachers and students shows that through collective actions, challenges can be addressed which will finally enhance the social capital within the school community.

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