

SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN IRAN AND THEIR ROLE IN CREATING SOCIAL CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present research was to determine the role of school libraries in creating social capital. The population of this analytical survey consisted of all the high schools of Alborz Province (N = 265), Tehran, of which 154 schools were randomly selected as the sample. Data were collected using a 44-item questionnaire and were analyzed in SPSS using t-test for independent and paired samples. The results showed that social capital and its components were higher in schools with libraries compared to those without libraries and higher in schools with active libraries compared to those with inactive libraries. After some corrective actions, social capital and its components increased in schools with active libraries.

Keywords: *Social Capital, School Libraries, High Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Social capital is a new concept in socioeconomic studies of advanced countries. Along with economic and human capital, social capital is regarded as an important variable in the development process (Alvani and Shirvani, 2005). Social capital has been widely used by scholars and researchers since the 1990s (Turkamani, 2007). It plays a more significant role in organizations and societies than physical and human capital and it strengthens the network of relationships between people and organizations. Social capital has been defined as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam *et al.*, 1993). It is imperative to identify the sociocultural factors that constitute social capital, as it is an important resource for organizational and social success. Social capital facilitates individual or collective action, generated by networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms (Coleman, 1988).

Today organizations employ managers that possess and believe in social capital. There is also a high demand for employees with high social capital who have superior problem solving skills. The education system plays a significant role in developing social capital, as it is expected to cultivate students into active citizens who help in building a strong civil society. Libraries are an important part of this process and serve both as an educational and cultural institution and as a place for social interaction among students. This is essential as it fosters students’ ability to establish relationships and allows them to practice reciprocity and community engagement. Thus, libraries with their open and unofficial environment can be a perfect place for developing social capital.

School Library

School library is a library within a school that provides access to a variety of resources for students. The goal of the school library is to ensure that all members of the school community have equitable access to books and reading, information, and information technology. The school library media center must function as a “learning laboratory”, an extension of the classroom and an extension of the teaching and learning process (Haycock, 1991).

Social Capital

Studying the success of school libraries in creating social capital is difficult, since even the most comprehensive definitions of social capital are multi-dimensional and it is difficult to measure certain elements such as society and networks (Agha, 2011). For the purpose of this research, we use the model of

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social capital proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). These researchers define social capital as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit”. They consider social capital an important asset for organizations that can help them create and share knowledge and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Their model of social capital defines it in terms of cognitive, relational, and structural dimensions.

Problem Statement

Social capital is a resource that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. It consists of elements such as norms, trust, engagement, and knowledge that govern the relations and interactions and can have different outcomes for individuals and the society. Library is a powerful social institution that can help create social capital. Libraries have a special place in the education system of advanced countries (Bahmanabadi, 1992). School libraries can support classroom instruction and function as an extension of the teaching and learning process. Advanced countries constantly invest in the dynamics of libraries, for they believe that these investments benefit the society and the economy in the long run and can facilitate sustainable development (Abasi, 2007). Despite the importance of libraries in the teaching and learning process, the role and responsibilities of libraries are not well-defined in Iran. Libraries are viewed by education officials as a place where students can spend their pastime. The resulting lack of investment in development of libraries has become the bane of Iran’s education system. Library rules are completely different from classroom rules. In libraries, students can practice voluntary cooperation, exchange of resources, mutual trust, adherence to ethical principles, honesty, and the like which can develop their social capital. Moreover, practices can be used in libraries that go beyond human capital development and foster social capital, collective learning, and value-based interactions (Ejtehadi, 2007). The purpose of the present research is to determine the role school libraries in social capital development in the schools of Alborz Province, Iran.

Review of the Literature

Huvila *et al.*, (2010) studied social capital in the virtual world (Second Life). The results showed that Second Life fosters the emergence of social capital. Also residents who considered themselves producers had higher levels of social capital than those who consider themselves non-producers. They concluded that although Second Life is a potent environment for community building and collective action, communities and collective action within Second Life cannot be based on social activity outside the virtual world.

Farr-Wharton and Brunetto (2009) examined the role of social capital in facilitating a learning culture. Although female entrepreneurs have traditionally used a relational approach to managing their businesses, they found that only about a quarter of the female entrepreneurs used a social capital approach to learn about potential venture opportunities from their staff.

McCallum and O’Connell (2009) studied the role of social capital capabilities in leadership development. They argued that social capital has a positive impact on the sustainability of organizations through (1) increased trust which leads to the reduced need for monitoring trading partners, (2) improved knowledge creation and sharing due to trust, shared goals, and common frames of reference, (3) more coherent action that flows from organizational stability and shared understanding, (4) stabilized organizational membership through reductions in turnover, severance costs, and hiring and training expenses, and (5) maximizing the values of collaboration which increases the rate of financial return.

Hooff *et al.*, (2009) studied the role of social capital and ICT in knowledge sharing. The results indicated that social capital has a significant positive impact on knowledge sharing, and that developing ICT infrastructure can increase social capital and consequently increase knowledge sharing.

Yang and Farn (2009) examined the role of social capital and behavioral control in tacit knowledge sharing. The results showed that tacit knowledge sharing intention can be induced by affect-based trust. However, shared value was negatively related to tacit knowledge sharing intention, while internal control had a positive effect on tacit knowledge sharing intention.

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Chen (2009) investigated the role of social capital in the success of knowledge management systems. The results indicated that the components of social capital, i.e. trust, shared vision, and social interaction, had a significant effect on the development of knowledge management systems.

Monavarian and Amini (2009) found a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of social capital (i.e. structural, relational, and cognitive) and the components of knowledge management. Relational and structural dimensions were the strongest predictors of social capital, and social capital had the strongest impact on the “knowledge creation” and “knowledge sharing” components of knowledge management.

Damouri *et al.*, (2009) examined the role of social capital in knowledge management using Sallis and Jones's (2002) Knowledge Management Questionnaire and Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) Social Capital Questionnaire. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between knowledge management and social capital.

Feizi (2006) studied social capital in Payame Noor University based on Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) model. The results showed that interaction and mutual trust are positively associated with social capital. Moreover, ICT had a significant positive effect on social capital through increased trust.

Khorasani and Masule (2005) examined the factors that affect social capital. They defined social capital as the quality and quantity of social relations that include three dimensions: social engagement, trust, and social cohesion. The results showed that the most important factors affecting social capital were cultural capital, safety in the neighborhood, social networks in the neighborhood, marital status, and economic status of neighbors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population and Sample

The population of this analytical survey consisted of all the high schools and students of Alborz Province in the period 2013-2014 (N = 265). The sample included 154 schools selected using cluster sampling and 384 students selected using Morgan's Table and random sampling.

Instrument

Data was collected using a 44-item questionnaire, with the first section measuring demographics (i.e. gender, age, degree, and major) and the second section measuring social capital and its eight dimensions (i.e. voluntary actions, value creation and innovation, democracy, knowledge and awareness, social engagement, social identity, social norms, and trust). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 for “Totally Disagree” to 5 for “Totally Agree”. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was verified by a group of experts in the field of information science, education, and sociology. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the instrument. An alpha of 0.917 was obtained for Social Capital, and the alpha values for the dimensions of social capital were as follows: 0.793 for Voluntary Actions, 0.713 for Value Creation and Innovation, 0.761 for Democracy, 0.928 for Knowledge and Awareness, 0.854 for Social Engagement, 0.825 for Social Identity, 0.803 for Social Norms, and 0.872 for Trust. The alpha values were all greater than 0.7, indicating the high reliability of the instrument.

Procedure

Phase 1: During the first phase of the study, the researchers visited the 154 sample high schools and found that only 96 high schools had a library, of which 52 libraries were active and 44 were inactive. The researchers also acquired information about the climate, facilities, and resources of these libraries and interviewed high school deans about their library administration policies, budget allocation, supply of resources, academic major and expertise of the librarians, promotion of library services, and research and development activities. The sample students were provided information about social capital and its dimensions, the outcomes of increased social capital in students, and the role of libraries in creating social capital. Consequently the students answered the questions with more accuracy, patience, and enthusiasm. It must be noted the social capital questionnaire was also distributed in high schools with no library. At the end of the first phase, the researchers compared social capital and its dimensions in high schools with and without a library.

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Phase 2: In the second phase, the researchers separated the data related to high schools with active libraries from those with inactive libraries based on observations and interviews with deans. The criteria for being an active library were: having a separate space for the library, having computers in the library, having librarians, and having specific library administration policies and budgets. At the end of the second phase, the researchers compared social capital and its dimensions in high schools with active and inactive libraries.

Phase 3: The third phase involved examining whether improving the performance of school libraries would lead to increased social capital in students. The researchers visited high schools with active libraries and explained to the deans and library staff the importance of social capital and the role of libraries in increasing this important construct. They were subsequently provided with the following recommendations about corrective actions that could improve library performance:

- Installing a bulletin board in the ground floor of the high school to exclusively report library activities, and informing students about this board and its goals.
- Updating the bulletin board frequently.
- Internet connectivity in the library.
- Encouraging voluntary participation by students in library administration and welcoming their ideas for improving library performance.
- Encouraging students to visit the school library for research.
- Sharing certain useful resources with other school libraries.
- Coordinating school libraries with public libraries regarding interlibrary loans.

At the end of the third phase, the researchers compared social capital before and after corrective actions. A summary of the procedure is provided in Figure 1.

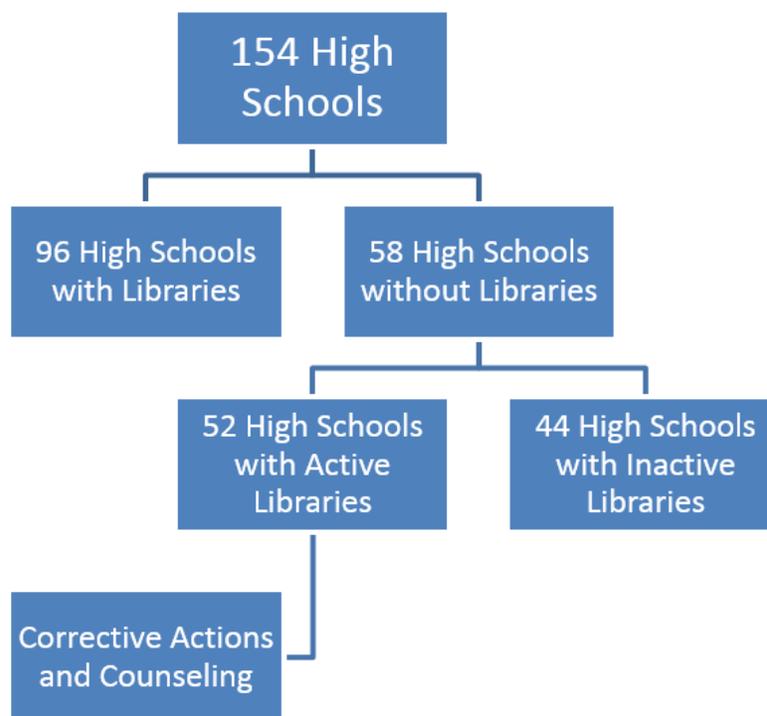


Figure 1: The research procedure

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using t-tests for independent and paired samples as well as one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in SPSS.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The demographic data of the sample are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: The demographics of the studied sample

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	215	56
	Female	169	44
Age	≤ 15 yrs.	89	23.2
	16 yrs.	132	34.4
	17 yrs.	92	23.9
	≥ 18 yrs.	71	18.5
Educational Stage	9 th Grade	96	25
	10 th Grade	103	26.8
	11 th Grade	116	30.2
	12 th Grade	69	18.0
Major	General	96	25
	Mathematics	129	33.6
	Experimental Sciences	82	21.3
	Humanities	77	20.1
Total		384	100

Table 2 provides the results of the normality test for social capital and its eight dimensions.

Table 2: Test of normality for social capital and its dimensions

Variable	Schools with Libraries		Schools without Libraries	
	Test Statistic	Sig.	Test Statistic	Sig.
Social Capital	0.535	0.937	0.467	0.981
Voluntary Actions	0.681	0.743	0.798	0.547
Value Creation and Innovation	0.831	0.495	0.365	0.999
Democracy	0.411	0.996	0.719	0.680
Knowledge and Awareness	0.698	0.714	0.902	0.390
Social Engagement	0.634	0.816	0.603	0.860
Social Identity	0.602	0.861	0.799	0.546
Social Norms	0.555	0.918	1.000	0.270
Trust	0.483	0.974	0.721	0.676

Table 3: Test of homogeneity of variance tests for two groups

Variable	Test Statistic	Sig.	Result
Social Capital	150.633	0.000	Unequal variances
Voluntary Actions	92.833	0.000	Unequal variances
Value Creation and Innovation	220.776	0.000	Unequal variances
Democracy	115.446	0.000	Unequal variances
Knowledge and Awareness	260.959	0.000	Unequal variances
Social Engagement	141.399	0.000	Unequal variances
Social Identity	45.116	0.000	Unequal variances
Social Norms	132.586	0.000	Unequal variances
Trust	12.182	0.000	Unequal variances

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T-test for independent samples was used to compare social capital and its components in schools with and without libraries (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 4: The results of independent samples t-test for social capital and its dimensions in schools with and without libraries

Variables	Test Statistic	df	Sig.	Mean Differences	95% CI	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Social Capital	-8.33	167.8	0.000	-0.725	-0.897	-0.553
Voluntary Actions	-75.25	328.2	0.000	-1.078	-1.106	-1
Value Creation and Innovation	7.44	243.1	0.000	0.235	0.173	0.298
Democracy	-4.43	320.1	0.000	-0.089	-0.128	-0.049
Knowledge and Awareness	-51.75	148.4	0.000	-0.875	-0.908	-0.842
Social Engagement	-43.17	296.0	0.000	-0.561	-0.587	-0.536
Social Identity	-9.59	367.3	0.000	-0.267	-0.321	-0.212
Social Norms	-28.02	266.4	0.000	-0.771	-0.825	-0.717
Trust	-0.81	372.4	0.414	-0.025	-0.085	0.035

The results in Table 4 indicate that the significance level for social capital and all its dimensions except Trust is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 95% CI and there is a significant difference between schools with and without a library in social capital and all its dimensions except Trust. The mean differences show that all these variables except Value Creation and Innovation are higher in schools with a library than those without a library. We can conclude that school libraries play a significant role in creating social capital.

Table 5: Test of homogeneity of variance tests for two groups

Variable	Test Statistic	Sig.	Result
Social Capital	25.417	0.000	Unequal variances
Voluntary Actions	64.345	0.000	Unequal variances
Value Creation and Innovation	35.911	0.000	Unequal variances
Democracy	57.631	0.000	Unequal variances
Knowledge and Awareness	8.819	0.004	Unequal variances
Social Engagement	26.003	0.000	Unequal variances
Social Identity	0.241	0.624	Equal variances
Social Norms	8.755	0.004	Unequal variances
Trust	9.762	0.002	Unequal variances

Table 6: The results of independent samples t-test for social capital and its dimensions in schools with active and inactive libraries

Variables	Test Statistic	df	Sig.	Mean Differences	95% CI	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Social Capital	0.529	68.2	0.599	0.076	-0.21	0.36
Voluntary Actions	0.152	56.9	0.880	0.019	-0.23	0.27
Value Creation and Innovation	0.554	59.3	0.582	0.080	-0.21	0.36
Democracy	7.038	57.5	0.000	0.738	0.52	0.94
Knowledge and Awareness	10.203	65.5	0.000	0.897	0.72	1.07
Social Engagement	5.827	68.5	0.000	0.555	0.36	0.74
Social Identity	6.953	94	0.000	0.537	0.38	0.68
Social Norms	14.099	86.7	0.000	0.610	0.52	0.69
Trust	6.271	82.8	0.000	0.734	0.50	0.96

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T-test for independent samples was also used to compare social capital and its dimensions in schools with active and inactive libraries. The results are provided in Tables 5 and 6.

The results in Table 6 show that the significance level for Democracy, Knowledge and Awareness, Social Engagement, Social Identity, Social Norms, and Trust is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at 95% CI and there is a significant difference between schools with active and inactive libraries in these variables. Mean differences s that schools with active libraries have higher means in DeKnowledge and Awareness, Social Engagement, Social Identity, Social Norms, and Trust. We can conclude that school libraries have a significant role in fostering social capital.

T-test for paired samples was used to compare social capital and its components before and after corrective actions (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7: The results of Pearson correlation

Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Social Capital	20	0.231	0.000
Voluntary Actions	20	0.194	0.000
Value Creation and Innovation	20	0.443	0.000
Democracy	20	0.726	0.000
Knowledge and Awareness	20	0.281	0.000
Social Engagement	20	0.365	0.000
Social Identity	20	0.172	0.000
Social Norms	20	0.226	0.000
Trust	20	0.335	0.000

The data in Table 7 indicate that the significance level for social capital and all its dimensions is less than 0.05. Therefore, the scores for these before and after corrective actions are significantly correlated at the 95% CI.

Table 8: The results of paired samples t-test for schools with active libraries before and after corrective actions

Variables	Mean	SD	SEM	CI		t	df	Sig.
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Social Capital	-0.261	1.102	0.152	-0.045	-0.710	1.0663	19	0.093
Voluntary Actions	-0.444	0.583	0.080	-0.282	-5.496	1.659	19	0.000
Value Creation and Innovation	-0.794	0.634	0.087	-0.617	-9.025	1.383	19	0.000
Democracy	-0.658	0.229	0.031	-0.594	-20.694	9.177	19	0.000
Knowledge and Awareness	0.458	0.237	0.032	0.524	13.917	1.0663	19	0.000
Social Engagement	-0.655	0.152	0.021	-0.613	-30.920	1.0663	19	0.000
Social Identity	-0.017	0.095	0.013	-0.008	-1.339	1.0663	19	0.178
Social Norms	0.403	0.324	0.045	0.494	8.964	1.0663	19	0.000
Trust	-0.243	0.111	0.015	-0.212	-15.699	1.0663	19	0.000

The results of paired samples t-test show that the significance level for Voluntary Actions, Value Creation and Innovation, Democracy, Knowledge and Awareness, Social Norms, and Trust is less than 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference between active libraries before and after corrective actions, with social capital and its dimensions increasing following corrective actions.

Knowledge and Awareness (0.03) and Social Norms (0.04) slightly decreased after corrective actions which is negligible. These findings further support the positive role of school libraries in creating social capital.

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Conclusion

The present findings suggested that social capital is higher in schools with libraries than those without a library. Social capital was also higher in schools with active libraries than those with inactive libraries. Corrective actions increased social capital in schools with active libraries. Overall, the results show that school libraries play a significant role in creating social capital.

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