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Social and Cultural Capital in Creativity

CAPITAL SOCIAL ET CULTUREL DANS LA CRÉATIVITÉ

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Abstract: A great part of creative activities arises from the interactions between individuals and their socio-cultural environments. The aim of this article is to explore the relationship between EFL learners' creativity and their social and cultural capital. To this end, the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) and the Arjmand Creativity Questionnaire (ACQ) were administered to a sample of 320 undergraduate students majoring in English language so that the researchers could examine the best predictors of creativity in terms of five factors of the SCCQ, namely, social competence, social solidarity, literacy, cultural competence, and extraversion. Results from Pearson product-moment correlation showed highly significant correlations between all five factors of SCCQ and learners' creativity. Moreover, results from the regression analysis revealed 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. The implications of the study are discussed.
Key words: Creativity; EFL context; Artifacts; Social interactions

Résumé: Une grande partie des activités créatives résultent de l'interaction entre les individus et leur environnement socio-culturel. Le but de cet article est d'explorer la relation entre la créativité des apprenants ALE (Anglais langue étrangère) et leur capital social et culturel. À cette fin, un Questionnaire de capital social et culturel (QCSC) et un Questionnaire de créativité d'Arjmand (QCA) ont été donnés à un échantillon de 320 étudiants de spécialité Anglais en premier cycle afin que les chercheurs puissent examiner les meilleurs prédicteurs de la créativité en termes des cinq facteurs de la QCSC, à savoir la compétence sociale, la solidarité sociale, l'éducation, la compétence culturelle et l'extraversion. Les résultats de la corrélation produit-moment de Pearson ont montré des corrélations très significatives entre les cinq facteurs de QCSC et la créativité des apprenants. En outre, les résultats de l'analyse de régression ont révélé que la combinaison de la compétence culturelle et la solidarité sociale a été le meilleur prédicteur de la créativité en expliquant 25% de la variance dans les notes de la créativité des apprenants ALE. Les implications de l'étude sont discutées.
Mots clés: Créativité; Contexte ALE; Artéfacts; Interactions sociales

1. INTRODUCTION

A major aim of education is to create men who are able to do new things, not just to repeat what others have done; such men are creative (Arcaro, 1995). A creative idea or product is usually defined as original and appropriate scientific findings and theories; even imaginative conversations are deemed as creative products. On the other hand, reproduced and stereotyped products are not considered creative, no matter how fine and elegant they are (Fisher, 2005). The term creative thinking refers to a cognitive process intending to create several novel or unusual responses to a given task. The degree to which learners can keep up with such a task is referred to as their creativity (Otto, 1998).

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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).

The two factors that were found by other researchers (e.g., Epcacan & Epcacan, 2010; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008) to affect child's mental development are social and cultural capital. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), refers to learners' having access to different cultural goods such as, Internet, computers, pictures, paintings, books, and dictionaries. Social capital, likewise, has been frequently referred to as children's relationships with teachers, parents, siblings, and peers. It is generally acknowledged that the unequal distribution of each type of capital can facilitate or hinder the process of child's mental development (e.g., Boyas & Wind, 2010; De Silva, Huttly, Harpham, & Kenward, 2007; Lofors & Sundquist, 2007; Phongsavan, Chey, Bauman, Brooks, & Silove, 2006; Steinfield et al., 2008). The psychological traits and mental states that were studied in relation to people's social status are as follows: thinking styles (Zhang & Postiglione, 2001), psychological distress (Phongsavan et al., 2006; Scheffler, Brown, & Rice, 2007), mental health (De Silva et al., 2007), depression and psychosis (Lofors & Sundquist, 2007), self-esteem (Steinfield et al., 2008), burnout (Boyas & Wind, 2010), and self efficacy perception (Epcacan & Epcacan, 2010). However, no study to date has tried to examine the role of social or cultural capital in students' creativity.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research on the relation of social status to people's mental states and psychological traits does not have a long pedigree, though in recent years a considerable amount of research has been carried out in this area. Several studies had taken into account the relation of social status to different psychological traits and mental states. McNeal (1999), for example, investigated the role of parental involvement in students' truancy and dropout. He observed that parent-child discussion and involvement in parent-teacher organizations had differential effects on students' cognitive and behavioral outcomes in such a way that parental involvement was a salient factor in explaining behavioral outcomes. In their attempts to examine the relationships between thinking styles, self-esteem, and students' socio-economic status, Zhang and Postiglione (2001) conducted a survey on university students of Hong Kong. The results of their study confirmed their initial hypotheses that socio-economic status (e.g. father's educational level and family income) are related to judicial, hierarchical, oligarchical, global, and external thinking styles, and also to self-esteem. Focusing on social class differences, Lareau and Weininger (2003) observed that a mother from a working-class family with a low level of cultural capital had great difficulty in comprehending jargons used by her child's teacher and, as a result, she did not have the self-confidence to challenge the teacher and fight for her child. In another study, Phongsavan et al. (2006) examined the effects of three dimensions of social capital, namely feelings of trust and safety, neighborhood connections and reciprocity, and community participation, on Australian adults' psychological distress. They found out that the first two dimensions of social capital were associated with lower levels of psychological distress. Using cross-sectional data from four countries, De Silva et al. (2007) sought to find out if there was any relationship between social capital and mental health. Their results showed that social capital was associated with reduced levels of mental disorders. In a similar vein, Lofors and Sundquist (2007) analyzed the association between linking social capital (i.e. the amount of trust between individuals and societal institutions) and mental disorders such as depression and psychosis, and concluded that having lower levels of linking social capital were strongly associated with hospitalization due to depression or psychosis. The role of social capital in reducing psychological distress was investigated by Scheffler et al. (2007). They found out that social capital was negatively associated with psychological distress. Steinfield et al. (2008) did a longitudinal study to examine the association of self-esteem and social capital. They analyzed data from the users of a popular online social network site, namely Facebook. Their results indicated that there was a significant relationship between social capital and users' self-esteem. Their analysis also revealed that students with lower self-esteem gained more from the social interactions through Facebook than higher self-esteem students, for the former's use of this social network might have mitigated their fears of rejection which normally would arise when they come out of the virtual world and into the real one. In an attempt to explore the relationship between social capital and employee burnout, Boyas and Wind (2010) focused on six dimensions of work-based social capital, namely trust, social relations, organizational commitment, communication, influence, and organizational fairness and their relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, two core dimensions of burnout. The results of their study revealed that both dimensions of burnout were negatively associated with some aspects of work-related social capital. In another study, Epcacan and Epcacan (2010) did a study to find if socio-economic and cultural factors have an effect on students' reading comprehension self efficacy perception. The results of their study highlighted the role of family environment and the habits of buying newspaper and reading books together with the occupation of family in students' self-efficacy perception of reading comprehension. Walsh, Harel-Fisch, and Fogel-Grinvald (2010) conducted a cross-national survey in 41 countries with the aim of examining the roles of parental involvement, monitoring and support at school, peer connectedness, and teacher support in school-aged children's (both natives and immigrants) mental well-being. The results showed that stronger relationships with parents,

teachers and peers had a significant effect on children's mental well-being, and that those children whose parents had little opportunity to monitor and support them, especially immigrants, were more likely to become psychologically distressed and engage in problematic behaviors. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain one of their research projects conducted in France in which students with different levels of social and cultural capital were given nonexistent words and were asked to define each of those words; they observed that students from higher classes were creative enough to venture a guess for each word, but working class students just admitted that they didn't know what the words meant. Although many scholars highlight the importance of the socio-cultural aspects of creativity (e.g., Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Fischer, 2005; Fischer, Giaccardi, Eden, Sugimoto, & Ye, 2005; Glaveanu, 2010; John-Steiner, 2000), no study, to our best knowledge, has been done to date to empirically investigate the role of students' social or cultural background in their creativity. Thus in this paper, the researchers have explored the effect of students' social and cultural capital on their creativity in the Iranian foreign language learning context.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As noted earlier, several studies had taken into account the relation of social status to different psychological traits. 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 paper the researchers seek to explore the role of social and cultural capital dimensions in creativity with regards to students majoring in English as a Foreign Language. This research, therefore, is conducted to find out answers to the following questions:

Q1: Do social and cultural capitals play any role in EFL learners' creativity?

Q2: What are the predictors of social and cultural capital in learners' creativity?

4. METHOD

4.1 Participants

A sample of 320 people participated in this study, comprised of 247 females (77%) and 73 males (23%) between the ages of 18 and 37 (M= 21.78, SD= 3.12) in Mashhad, a city in north-eastern Iran. All of the participants were undergraduate university students attending three universities in Iran, majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Language and Literature, and English Translation. Their parents' educational level also ranged from 'illiterate' to 'Ph.D.'

4.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect the data: the Arjmand Creativity Questionnaire and the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire.

4.2.1 The Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ)

Developed by Pishghadam, Noghani, and Zabihi (In press), the questionnaire was designed to measure students' social and cultural capital. The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) based on the performance of undergraduate university students on this questionnaire yielded a five-factor solution of social competence, social solidarity, literacy, cultural competence, and extraversion. It comprises 42 items that are scored on a Likert scale of 5-points (see Appendix). The reliability estimates for the five underlying factors of SCCQ are as follows: social competence, r = .89; social solidarity, r = .75; literacy, r = .68; cultural competence, r = .65; extraversion, r = .51. The reliability of the whole items is 0.88. In this study, the reliability estimates for the five subscales were as follows: social competence, r = .87; social solidarity, r = .77; literacy, r = .63; cultural competence, r = .65; extraversion, r = .47. Moreover, the reliability of the whole items (i.e. 42 items) estimated by Cronbach Alpha was .90.

4.2.2 Arjmand Creativity Questionnaire (ACQ)

This questionnaire had been designed and standardized by Arjmand (2003, as cited in Akbari, Sharifi, Hosseini, Sharifi, & Ahghar, 2009) in order to measure the level of creativity in Iran. It comprises 75 five-point Likert-scale items with the following options: very high, high, to some extent, low, and very low. Ebrahimi (2004, as cited in Akbari et al., 2009) administered the questionnaire to 250 high school male students in Tehran, Iran. The reliability of the test through split-half method was 0.64. In the present study, Cronbach Alpha estimated a high reliability for the ACQ, i.e., .94.

4.3 Procedures

The aforementioned instruments, i.e., SCCQ and ACQ, were administered to the participants and they were asked to fill them out. The administration phase occurred during class hours by prior arrangement with the instructors.

The data gathered from the two questionnaires was entered into and processed with SPSS 16 program. For obtaining the internal consistency of the SCCQ and the ACQ, the Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate was employed. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the body of data including a sample of 320. To investigate the role of learners' social and cultural capital in their creativity, Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to the data. Moreover, we used The Multiple Regression Analysis with a Stepwise Method to detect the best predictors of creativity in terms of social and cultural capital subscales.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Descriptive statistics

To investigate the normality of the distribution, descriptive statistics was employed. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive results of the two instruments: The SCCQ and the ACQ. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics related to the social and cultural capital questionnaire (SCCQ). As can be seen, the total SCC enjoys a high reliability, i.e., .90, as does the total creativity score, i.e., .94. The low reliability of the Extraversion subscale, i.e., .47, is acceptable because it comprises only 3 items and thus its length has affected its reliability coefficient.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of learners' scores on SCCQ and ACQ

	N	# of items	Mean	SD	Alpha
Social Competence	320	15	43.06	10.96	.87
Social Solidarity	320	11	38.36	8.21	.77
Literacy	320	6	21.32	4.84	.63
Cultural Competence	320	7	22.86	5.05	.65
Extraversion	320	3	9.40	3.01	.47
Total SCC	320	42	135.0	25.91	.90
Creativity	320	75	252.9	51.38	.94

5.2 The results of correlation between students' scores on SCCQ subscales and their creativity

To examine whether there is any significant correlation between learners' social and cultural capital and their creativity, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed. The results indicated that there is a highly significant correlation between learners' creativity and social competence ($r = 0.391$, $p < 0.01$), social solidarity ($r = 0.452$, $p < 0.01$), literacy ($r = 0.418$, $p < 0.01$), cultural competence ($r = 0.469$, $p < 0.01$), and Extraversion ($r = 0.157$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, a significant correlation was found between creativity and learners' total score on SCCQ ($r = 0.496$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Correlations between SCCQ factors and learners' scores on creativity

	Creativity
Social Competence	0.391**
Social Solidarity	0.452**
Literacy	0.418**
Cultural Competence	0.469**
Extraversion	0.157**
Total SCCQ	0.496**

** Shows the existence of significant relationship at the level of 0.01

5.3 Prediction of creativity by SCCQ factors

Table 3 presents the results for learners' creativity being regressed on the variables of interest in this study (SCCQ subscales). The results reveal which variables are important in predicting higher creativity on the part of learners. Creativity explained 25% of the total variance, (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$, $p < .05$) using a combination of cultural competence and social solidarity. High scores on cultural competence were the best predictors of high scores on the creativity test (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.21$, $p < .05$).

Table 3: The results of regression analysis for SCCQ subscales and learners' creativity

Predictors	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	P	*B*
Creativity						
Cultural Competence	0.469	0.220	0.217	89.507	0.00	0.306
Social Solidarity	0.511	0.261	0.257	56.106	0.00	0.261

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study shed light on and strongly confirm the importance of the socio-cultural dimensions of creativity (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Fischer, Scharff, & Ye, 2004; John-Steiner, 2000). As shown in Table 2, creativity is significantly and positively correlated with the total SCCQ and all its cultural and social capital subscales ($p < 0.01$). This is quite in line with Bourdieu's (1990) claim that students possessing higher levels of social and cultural capital enjoy higher levels of creativity and novelty than those of their working-class counterpart. Having conducted the regression analysis, however, the researchers found that only two subscales of the SCCQ, i.e. cultural competence and social solidarity, were best predictive of higher creativity scores. In other words, those students who more frequently visit museums, theaters, or attend concerts, and those who have stronger ties in society and with other people tend to be more creative learners.

As it was previously mentioned, cultural capital refers to a certain linguistic and verbal knowledge which derives from long-lasting dispositions of body and mind, possession of cultural goods, and academic qualifications and degrees (Bourdieu, 1986). In our study, highest scores in cultural competence, which is a subscale of cultural capital, were associated with highest scores in creativity. This finding shows that those people who enjoy higher levels of linguistic proficiency and verbal knowledge, those who possess or are able to understand and use a variety of cultural goods (e.g. books, paintings, monuments, instruments, pictures, and pieces of music), and those who are more academically oriented and intellectually gifted are more creative; that is, according to Dörnyei (2005), they are more concerned with factors such as originality, invention, and discovery. This is supportive of Glaveanu' (2010) claim that a great deal of creativity encompasses individuals' engagement with cultural artifacts and participation in cultural activities.

When it comes to educational settings, therefore, it is suggested that we foster social and cultural capital in schools and in the classroom (Hemmings, 2007; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004; Kim & Schneider, 2005; Koliba, 2003). In addition, to develop creativity, the classroom environment should contain a variety of materials and encourage lots of different experiences. Teachers are also recommended to have a better understanding of learners' social and cultural backgrounds within family and in the community whereby they can help less creative learners further engage themselves in group-work activities and encourage them to regard themselves as active contributors to classroom procedures and activities. Put another way, in an instructional setting, learners' interactions with teachers and peers (social capital) and with different cultural artifacts and tools (cultural capital) are crucial to the development of creativity.

It is not a luxury, as some people might think, to nourish children's creativity. On the other hand, as previous research has shown (e.g., Albert & Kormos, 2004; Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir, & Kumar, 2009; Otto, 1998), creativity plays a crucial role in the improvement of learners' academic achievement. Therefore, not paying enough attention to creativity, in turn, may lead to children's inability of obtaining excellence in academic achievement. Other researchers are thus recommended to find other ways of understanding why some learners are more creative than others. The present study contributed to fill this gap by examining the role of socio-cultural contexts in the development of creativity; yet it does not provide us with an exhaustive discussion of how creativity can be enhanced. Other researchers are thus encouraged to reconnoiter other factors that can help parents and teachers improve, and which may otherwise hinder, learners' creativity.

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APPENDIX

Table 4: Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ)

No.	Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	I enjoy listening to classical music.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I enjoy reading literature.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am a cultured person.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I know all famous music composers.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I know a lot about literature.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I frequently visit museums, theaters, or attend concerts.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I frequently buy/borrow books.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I like to attend symphony concerts.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I enjoy reading (in general).	1	2	3	4	5
10	As a child, my parents regularly encouraged me to read.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We have lots of books at home.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I used to take art or music classes outside school.	1	2	3	4	5
13	My mother used to get involved in my primary schooling.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I regularly talk with my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I like to get involved in activities designed for young people.	1	2	3	4	5
16	My parents usually get involved in my daily activities.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I see my siblings weekly.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I see my grandparents weekly.	1	2	3	4	5
19	My parents used to help me with my homework regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I frequently perform activities together with my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
21	My mom used to encourage me in my school activities regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
22	My mom used to attend school meetings regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I feel I have a strong help network for my activities.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I see my friends weekly.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I have friends with high educational expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I had an excellent school with high quality.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I am highly proficient in using language.	1	2	3	4	5
28	At home, my parents keep track of my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
29	My parents know where I am, what I do.	1	2	3	4	5
30	My parents used to volunteer for school projects.	1	2	3	4	5
31	My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.	1	2	3	4	5
32	My parents know parents of my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I used to participate in school activities regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I used to participate in extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
35	My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
36	I usually talk about job/education with family.	1	2	3	4	5
37	I usually talk about job/education with other adults.	1	2	3	4	5
38	My parents used to have a say in school policy.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I feel I have strong ties with the community.	1	2	3	4	5
40	I feel I have strong ties with my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
41	My parents have strong ties with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
42	We have an intimate home environment.	1	2	3	4	5

* SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree