
Mwai Kirigo Beth, Prof. John Chang’ach, Prof. Emmy Kipsoi
Moi University, Department of Educational Foundations
School of Education P.O. Box 3900, Eldoret (co.de 30100) Kenya.

ABSTRACT: The study investigated the formation of educational aspirations of day secondary school students. The Purpose of the study was to seek to interrogate the role of the family social capital in developing and shaping educational aspirations of day secondary school students considering that most day secondary schools students face challenges at home. Grounded theory research design was adopted, whereas qualitative data gathering and data analysis techniques were used. Twelve day secondary school students in one day secondary school were purposively sampled. Focus groups discussions were the tools of data collection. The study answers to the question: What is the social capital available to the learners at home to allow them set their own educational aspirations? The findings suggest that day secondary school students had low educational aspirations because the available social capital had not been able to help them form high educational aspirations. The study argues that day secondary school learners are the bulk of secondary school students and therefore their educational aspirations cannot be ignored. Listening to the FGD the researcher was able to deduce that social capital enhancement was a critical strategy that could facilitate the formation and development of high educational aspirations. The study recommends the need to put in place structured social educational programs, which could go a long way in providing interactional support for the families.

Key words- Educational Aspirations, Social Capital

1. Introduction

Educational aspirations of students research has appealed to not only educationists, but also other researchers such as sociologists and economists since it explains educational achievements, progression and inequalities (Domina et al. 2011). Educational aspirations are positively linked with educational outcomes and progression. Educational aspirations are about the learner’s, ability not only to set educational goals for the future, but also the ability to identify the goals in the present. Educational goal identification and setting is a social phenomenon that is culturally determined, and so are the educational aspirations (Quaglia & Cobb 1996; Anderson & Maassen, 2014). Educational aspirations and academic achievement have positively been co-related (Beal & Crockett; 2010). Students’ educational aspirations are significantly a product of the social endowment available in their human interactions within their environments (Dubos et.al, 2017). They are shaped and constrained by many factors both in the physical and social environment. The social environment creates capital within its relations, interactions and networks that is accessible through sharing and modelling among members. The kind of social networks and human interactions a student is immersed into right from the onset of educational experiences play a significant role in determining the level of their educational aspirations. These social networks create social capital. Available literature in research reports acknowledge that social capital plays a role in educational achievements of students. Social relationships and human interactions are at the core of social capital. A number of studies have examined the relationship between social capital and educational achievements of various youth groups such as the immigrants, youth with disabilities and youth in private and public schools (Wenk, 2011; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Muller & Ellison, 2001). Educational aspirations remain key in educational progression, achievement and outcome because they account for the academic success of students across the different levels. The educational process is an investment. It implies the use of resources to ensure not only access, but also positive learning outcomes. The resources are classified as human capital, physical capital, and the social capital. Social capital is the intangible resource embedded within interpersonal relationships or social institutions (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). It represents the social connections and the benefits these social connections generate (Siegl, 2014) for a student.

The home is a key source of social capital that allows the formation of educational aspirations. Low educational aspirations can negatively affect not just the academic success of the secondary school students, but also their ability to transit to the post-secondary institutions as well as their career choice. Evidence from educational research point to the fact that the right social interactions especially among day secondary schools students would help improve students’ educational aspirations, however, little research has explicitly examined how the educational aspirations are formed or developed. The student’s social capital at home was assessed through interpersonal relationship with the parents, sibling and other family members and how these relationships were instrumental in high educational aspirations formation.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Educational Aspirations

Educational aspirations and the capacity to aspire can explain individual learners educational undertakings and at the same time be a mirror reflecting the future educational plans of the learner. Literature has determined the home as a key site for educational aspirations development and social capital acquisition. Since educational aspirations are not individual in nature, the kind of social networks and human interactions a student is immersed into right from the onset of educational experiences play a significant role in determining the level of their educational aspirations. Research indicates that engagement in education is determined by the cultural and community norms which have an impact on not only provision, but also participation (Kilpatrick, 2003). For the students therefore, educational aspirations have to do with the desire to attain a certain level of education that is deemed desirable by the members of the immediate family and the community. Important as the home social environment is, it is determined by the background factors, and the social environmental factors. Background factors comprise of social and demographic attributes such as the socio-economic status and the family structure. The environmental factors include aspects of social support such as the parental involvement and the significant others affecting the individual. These factors are also determine the relational network members are part of.

Educational aspirations are complex social and cultural phenomena. They begin to form early in life, but are gradually modified by interactions, experience and the environment. In the family unit educational aspirations are determined not only by the student, but also by their parents/ guardians based on the social relationships available to them Leslie & Akerman, 2008). Social capital is seen in terms of relations, interactions and networks through sharing and modelling among members of the family. These interactions create capital referred to as social capital. The interactions and the experiences at home are not only sources of social capital, but social capital itself. This has proved to have educational benefits in setting and sustaining the educational aspirations of the students (Schuller et al, 2004). Educational aspirational gaps persist where individuals and groups such as the family’s actions are not congruent with the dominant social actions in the wider community.

2.2 Social capital

Very broadly, social capital refers to the social relationships between people that enable productive outcomes (Szreter 2000). Social capital can also be conceptualized as the network of connections among individuals and organizations in a community (Freiriche, 2011). Studies in education have conceptualized social capital as the family income, level of parental education and geographical location and their effects on educational achievement and outcomes among the youth, the children of the immigrants, the pushed out learners and children with disabilities (Loic & Sam, 2015). The family social capital describes relation among family members especially between parents and children. Smith et al (1995), Israel et al, (2001) conceptualize social capital as a component of structure and a process. These two attributes determine the opportunity, frequency and duration of parent child interactions. The structural characteristics are manifest in the presence of parents, other siblings and extended family members. The process attributes are manifest in the specific forms of interactions such as the parent child discussions, parental involvement in schooling and parental educational expectations. The studies epitomize the family as the bedrock of social capital through the structural and the process attributes. This study focuses on the interactions these attributes confer to the family so as to be able to build the social capital necessary for the children’s educational aspirations. The study interrogates not only the physical presence of the family members, but also the kind of interactions germane to the physical presence. Studies have shown that physical presence alone does not always guarantee social capital if there are not strong social relations between and among the children and their families (Rob, Andrew, Lisa, 2003). Msila, (2009) argues that family social capital involves family members investing time and effort in shared activities with the children. While time and effort present the opportunity, frequency and duration (Smith et al 1995), they too do not guarantee family social capital. In fact, other studies have associated low educational aspirations with multiple factors inherent in the family, such as the family’s social class; the household financial abilities, a world view that might limit sociability and strong family ties that are antithetical to the global social capital (Winter, 2000). Understanding the structural and the process attributes that create family social capital does not explain educational aspirations formation. This study on how educational aspirations formation is a factor of the quality of the social structure and the process.

3. Research Methodology

This was a qualitative study. It utilized a grounded theory design. Purposeful sampling was employed. It involved selecting participants who had key knowledge and information related to the purpose of the study (Suri, 2011)).

4. Findings

The specific question was what is the social capital available to individual learners to form their own educational aspirations? The study findings are presented.
4.1 The Family

To the learner, the family is at the core of any educational endeavour through the physical presence and the resources inherent in it. Data on the family was key in understanding the educational aspirations of the students.

Table 1: Family Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literature discussing social capital relates a large number of children in a family with low income and general lack of necessities. That is, children with fewer brothers and sisters obtain more schooling than those with more siblings (Maralani, 2008). Young people are more likely to achieve higher levels of education if their family is limited to one or two children. In this context therefore family size of between three and six children is a large family that literature attributes general lack of resources to.

The participants’ ranking in the family can determine the social capital available.

Table 2: No. of Siblings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth order</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literature about the youth points to the key role that interaction with siblings plays in the formation of social capital (Gillies & Lucey, 2006; Morrow, 1999; Seaman & Sweeting, 2004). The participants’ ranking in the family revealed that, most of them were either the first ranking in the family or among the first children in the birth order. For this study the participants, had no sibling advantage, and consequently limited social capital formation. This meant that they lacked the relational advantage of older siblings.

Siblings with post-secondary education are key in the development and use of social capital. Some of the students did not have siblings with post-secondary education. Research has shown that older siblings are influential as role models and most of their school experiences spill over to the younger siblings. This kind of resource is shared through sibling interactions and can only be enjoyed by them that have siblings endowed with the resource. In families where the participant was among the first in the birth order or older siblings had no post-secondary education, the participants lacked the conveniences that siblings with post-secondary education afford the rest of the siblings. The Parents to all the students interviewed were small scale farmers. Parents and guardians occupations determine the interactions. Occupations determine to a large extent not only the economic status, but also the social networks and the neighborhoods that this occupations afford the people. A typical Kenyan rural context for the small scale farmers connotes limitation of not only physical resources, but also limited social interactions. The social and economic circumstances determine not only the schooling decisions but also the parents and guardians financial limitations translate to aspirational limitations in terms of transmitting or transferring any social advantage to their children (Tafere, 2014). Occupations are determined by level of education and the level of education together with the occupation determine earnings. Earnings for parents determine school quality for their children. The participants were limited on the resources parental occupation afforded them.

Joining a college or university represents high educational aspirations. For the participants what was of utmost importance was not only the educational aspirations they had, but also the completion of secondary school level bearing in mind the many competing activities such as motor cycle business, logging business, availability of menial jobs, teenage pregnancies, drug and substance abuse and early marriages prevalent in the community.

*I want to go to the university to pursue my course*

The students lacked quality social endowments within their structure to influence creation of diverse interactions and activities that would make a difference. These interactions, experiences and activities form the basis of social capital.
Educational aspirations have a social characteristic, but was minimal interaction between the students, their parents, their teachers and the rest of the people in their social network concerning their educational aspirations and sharing of information regarding post-secondary school educational opportunities. Reviewed literature suggested that all educational aspiration aspects such as effort, chance, talent and even education itself are never individual, but are intricately intertwined with social networks (Fuhse, 2015, Stanton-Salazar, 2001). For the students the sharing of educational aspiration was limited to a closed social network. Some had shared their educational aspirations with their parents though some had not despite the fact that they were home every day.

“When we close school they usually ask me about my performance. Where there is a failure they normally ask what the problem is.”

Parental education is a determinant factor in the children’s schooling. The parents’ social networks are constrained in terms of the effort, chance, talent and education that they can endow their children with. Educational aspirations could be influenced by family backgrounds, socioeconomic status, living areas and neighborhoods (Stewart et al., 2007). These too did not give the students any advantage. Lack of sharing of the educational aspirations between the parents and their children was an indicator of a glaring gap that needed intervention if the students’ educational aspirations for education were to be sustained.

Research has shown that young people’s social capital is influenced by the family and the peer group (Holland, 2008). The students also shared with students from other schools. Students shared with friends and relatives who formed a close interactional network with them and therefore were an important influence. The students expressed greater reliance on friends and family. The family members and the friends in this case too had limited social capital in terms of educational experiences and interactions. Therefore the students were in a network that was constrained by the limited interactions and experiences.

Students’ educational aspirations also entail having information about post-secondary institutions. “I do not need college education to succeed in life”. This response is an indicator of low interactions. Participation of these individuals in the educational, social, political, and economic activities remain constricted.

Dissemination of information is the hallmark of social networks. Unlike in secondary school education where school choice decisions are made by the parent in a closed social network, post-secondary education decisions are about the student’s social network. The grade, aptitude, interests, career options, availability of job opportunities and availability of resources in a comparatively open society are key network markers. The parents lacked the social capital capacity to offer guidance on options available for post-secondary education due to their educational, social and economic network limitations.

The internet has become an open source of self-taught information. Hattie, (2015) asserts that students who learn need to be their own teachers. Nevertheless, the interaction with the internet as a tool to help the students get the necessary information to make choices for their post-secondary education was limited by the inaccessibility of the internet at home. The inaccessibility is further compounded by lack of the necessary infrastructure, gadgets and technological skills. From the above discussion educational aspirations of students are determined by the available interactions that help shape their perception of the educational possibilities and the openings available in the colleges and universities.

4.2 Students’ Nurturing of their educational aspirations

Educational aspirations are nurtured and sustained by self and important others such as the immediate family, extended family, neighbors and friends.

“For me to do Nursing. In fact I need to pass all the subjects. I usually revise on all the subjects but mostly I revise on Science subjects for example Chemistry, Biology and also Mathematics, I usually revise on it”

The above is efforts are individual academic efforts as opposed to aspirational efforts. Though important in academic progression these efforts reside in the human capital realm, that is, the knowledge and abilities one has and the skills one possess. Educational aspirations are about the social networks and the experiences shared from the activation of these social networks (Shahidul, Karim, Mustari, 2015).

The Parental efforts include paying school fees, giving advice, support and motivation. The parental efforts too, bordered on offering financial capital or human capital with none offering new experiences and interactions. This too could not account for nurturing of the educational aspirations. Nurturing of educational aspirations for the parents would involve access and activation of social interactions, and the ability to participate in the educational set ups. An interactional capacity the parents did not have. Sibling efforts included assistance in class work and assistance in tackling general life challenges but most of these participants ranked among the first in the birth order and therefore did not have the sibling experience advantage. Though (Tafere, 2015) argues that largely, students’ aspirations are shared with family, the extended family efforts to nurture the educational aspirations were minimal.

“My cousins help raise funds for the needy among us to continue with education and those at the university motivate us to be like them”.
I have a cousin who scored grade A.....I have an uncle who is a teacher, he encourages us by assuring us that the family will cater for financial problems”.

“I have a cousin who is a teacher. She usually advises us not to drop out of school.”

Though family and community social capital can emerge as an important resource in raising educational aspirations, thereby upholding student beliefs in their ability to realize their aspirations and, eventually, reach their goals (Tang, 2012), from the above discussion the students are limited by their own family social interactions. Khattab, (2015) asserts that families have a home based resource and much of it is gained and acquired through participation in activities outside the home that afforded the participants, with new ways of thinking and acting. The kind of interactions the students have are confined to what Putman refers to as bonding social capital that is inward looking and homogeneous enabling conformity and getting by among the members (Edwards, 2004). What day scholars need is a more robust and heterogeneous kind of social interactions to allow them learn from external interactions and experiences in order for them to achieve their educational aspirations.

4.3 The secondary school choice

A day school was not a school of choice for the students.

“This is what my parents can afford and we are satisfied”

“My father got sick ....I had no other choice”,

'My parents were not able to take me to another school’.

'I never attained the required mark for boarding school”

The school is more than the buildings and it is more than a learning institution. The school has a role in facilitating networks that enable the acquisition of more social interaction networks. The school promotes friendships between youth, school values and community values. The choice in this case was not helping in nurturing aspirations.

Students in day secondary school have enormous challenges that are different from those of students in boarding school, different from those of children of educated parents (Marjoribanks, 2005), different from those of parents with a better economic status (Erola et. al., 2016) and different from those who live in medium and high income urban areas. One of the participant wished he was in another day school.

The lack of access to new social interaction networks in the day school left the students marginalized in a system that is highly formalized, hence a perpetual struggle to develop social networks necessary for educational aspirations formation.

4.4 Career Aspirations

Careers are about jobs and the world of work. Careers are directly formed by the content of education, however, educational aspirations and career aspirations of the student are a product of socialization rather than education (Baraldi & Corsi, 2017). The table below outlines the career aspirations for the participants and the source of career information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAREER</th>
<th>MENTOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>A cousin who is a nurse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security officer</td>
<td>Uncle who is a soldier and says the work is easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>No mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td>No mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>A cousin who did engineering but is a policeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>A youth member in the church studying law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>My friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No plan</td>
<td>To be determined by the KCSE grade.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A career is a temporal imagination of a student’s future. The parents and the teachers are participants in shaping and directing the career aspirations. It is clear that the family was a key information bureau in deciding on the careers. The friendships are also valuable source of information. Nurturing the career aspirations without antecedent social support for the student was difficult. Having a sibling, a relative or a friend who had aspired or acquired the careers enhanced the students’ capacity to nurture their own
career aspirations. The career aspirations with no mentor are therefore more likely not to be pursued. Though the parents participants in shaping and directing the career aspirations, they had not shared any information about the same with their children.

4.5 Student Social Interactions

A community is a group of people with common interests and values. Community is characterized by “wholeness incorporating diversity” and may include people of different ages, ethnicities, educational backgrounds and incomes (Gardner, 2003). Local communities unite members living in one social space. The formation of social capital is dependent on who one knows within and without a particular social space. The discussion was meant to determine the level of interactions between the students and the members of their community in and outside their social space. The students’ community included the people they know directly and those they know indirectly by virtue of being known by their first network. The research results indicated that the participants’ community included their parents, siblings, relatives, immediate neighbors as well as friends, relatives and neighbors from other schools who they interacted over the school holidays. The interactions within this social space was crucial as the participants’ excerpts from the FDG discussing the role of the members of the community in their education exemplify.

A1. They are very important because if they can ensure that there is peace in the society even for your education is good....if they won’t ensure peace we won’t be able to study hard

B3 If you have challenges like school fees or you are sick and the parent is not home they can help.

A2...Not all are important....others will be happy when you fail....others motivate you.

Neighborhoods characteristics influence educational outcomes since they form an important mediating process for the students. The neighbors’ views were important in the education of the students. The neighbors were part of the social space by virtue of their advice; school fees support, and the shared learning materials. The neighborhood strength was in the ability to address the local challenges. There was agreement though that some neighbors within this community were negative. One very important way neighborhood would affect students was by influencing their educational aspirations. The community played a crucial role in the education of day secondary school students. Students understood that the community was a buffer for individual deficits such as poverty as well as the solution for meaningful peace. Educational aspirations therefore could only thrive when students would be enabled to draw on the many resources of expertise and numerous possible forms of support within and without their social space (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017).

The participants had their teachers as part of their community, though the sharing with the teachers outside class time was rare, when it happened it was only on school academic work. However, the participants expressed that teachers’ views were important in planning the students’ academic futures.

Outside school, social networks with the members of the community could be formed through voluntary community service. For the participants time spent out of school while on weekends and over the school holidays could be used to build social networks and engagements with the community and consequently develop communal aspirations, however this too revealed that, for the students activities revolved around the home. Participants indicated they did participate in communal engagements such as cleaning of public spaces such as the church and cattle dip, mending village bridges and foot paths or assisting neighbors with the farms chores. The following excerpts from the FDGs exemplify this.

A4 “The villagers engage in pool game and abuse drugs and therefore not the right ones to advice”.

A1 “I cultivate and cut some grass for the cows”;

B2 “I go to church and engage in weeding the church farm.”

“Mending broken bridges. We do it as a team.”

A3 “After church I plait other students’ hair. Students come to our home.”

Since the students had no new external interactions, these activities gave them no social advantage.

Neighborhoods characteristics and leadership can influence the students ‘educational aspirations by creating social spaces that would offer diverse perception of opportunities that are educationally beneficial, the leaders in this neighborhood offered the physical capital. Important as it was, it did little to create social interactions necessary in the formation of educational aspirations of the students. The limited and confined interactions created limited experiences and further reinforced more bonding than bridging relationships leading to social isolation.

Conclusion

Day secondary schools carry the bulk of students at this level, therefore the educational aspirations of these students cannot be ignored. From the discussion it was revealed that the day secondary school students did not have educational aspirations deficit, but they are constrained by a social space deficiency of open social networks with information and opportunities that are educationally beneficial. There was limited home social capital available to individual learners to enable them form high educational aspirations.
The students’ need a community that is socially connected to the right networks that would make a difference in their educational aspirations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

a) The government to employ educational social workers responsible for providing educational support for the marginalised families with children in the day secondary schools.

b) All secondary schools to have an interactional network that is accessible to students of different category of schools.

References