

Socio-cultural Capital as a Factor Differentiating Students' Skills in the Field of Speech Reception and Creation as well as the Analysis and Interpretation of Cultural Texts

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse the relations between students' cultural and social capital and their competence test results in the field of the Polish language. The data come from the research carried out in 2013 in 60 middle schools in 5 provinces of Poland. Students filled in survey questionnaires regarding their school and family environment and 3 competence tests. Two types of socio-cultural capital were distinguished – soft and hard capital. The hard socio-cultural capital affects approximately 10% of the students' results. If the soft and hard capital resources and the extent of identification with school were increased by one level, this would result in an average increase in the 1st form students' results of the test regarding cultural texts analysis and interpretation by 21.4%.

Keywords: cultural capital, social capital, tests of students' skills, social determinants of the effectiveness of the educational process

Introduction

Teaching effectiveness does not only depend on the student's individual predisposition or the teacher's teaching techniques. A number of external factors connected with the school and out-of-school environment influences the teaching

results achieved by teachers. The above obvious statement is supported by observations of teachers, who have to struggle with the social conditions of teaching results every day. The thesis about the influence of the factors on the effectiveness of the teaching process is not unfamiliar to sociologists, e.g., P. Bourdieu (1977) explained differentiated achievements of French students in reference to their access to resources of the cultural capital. Thanks to the empirical studies of the Institute of Education Research from 2013, teachers' and sociologists' observations can be supported by an in-depth statistical analysis.

Research Problem

Within the presented article, the following issues will be discussed:

- To what extent are the students of secondary schools differentiated in terms of access to resources of the socio-cultural capital?
- To what extent are the students' skills concerning the speech reception and creation as well as the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts differentiated by access to resources of the socio-cultural capital?
- To what extent does the socio-cultural capital explain the students' skills level from the statistical point of view?

Research Focus

P. Bourdieu pays attention to the cultural capital as one of the most important factors of differentiating students' skills acquired during the education process (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1977). The cultural capital describes individual and social resources of skills, customs, speaking styles, knowledge about the world, taste, and practised life styles. The cultural capital and its social, economic and symbolic dimensions are responsible for differentiating the position of individuals in the social structure. Borderlines between communities are specified by different configurations of particular types of the capital (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1996). P. Bourdieu differentiates three dimensions of the cultural capital, which he calls embodied, objectified and institutionalized capital. The embodied form refers to cultural competences of an individual: awareness of conventionalities, knowledge about different forms of high culture, and cultural taste. The material creations of culture such as paintings, sculptures, books, etc., constitute the objectified form of the cultural capital. Education level is the institutionalized form of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983, 1986).

P. Bourdieu defines the social capital as a set of real or potential resources which are connected with possessing a lasting net of more or less institutionalized relationships based on the mutual awareness and acknowledgement. It means the

relationships created within social groups support their members providing them with the capital possessed by the group (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 2001). The more dense the connections nets of an individual are, the bigger the social capital is. Trust is the glue of the social capital. "Trust is an essential component of social capital. (...). Trust lubricates cooperation. The greater the level of trust within a community, the greater the likelihood of cooperation. And cooperation itself breeds trust" (Putnam, 1993, 270–271). There are 3 basic dimensions of the social capital – structural, behavioural and normative ones. The condition of the growth of the social capital is not only the existence of a net of relationships but the development of the net, too, which requires social trust. According to P. Bourdieu, the resource of the social capital can grow only as a result of the material and symbolic exchange of the relationships. It means the social capital, which is possessed by an individual, depends on the extent of his/ her relationships, activity in terms of creating new relationships and on the cultural, symbolic and economic capital of those who are connected with the individual (Bourdieu, 1983, 1986).

Research Methodology

Research General Background

P. Bourdieu believes that an affiliation of a specific cultural-symbolic space including a common identity and shared life styles, access to elements of culture, effective use of symbolic resources, and contacts and social relations are decisive factors of differentiating the position of an individual within varied social worlds penetrating each other. The forms of the cultural and social capital influence the teaching effectiveness significantly. The education level aspired to by students "is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)" (Bourdieu, 1996, 23).

Research Sample

The presented results are based on the empirical study conducted in 2013 in 60 Polish schools located in five different provinces (Lubelskie, Malopolskie, Mazowieckie, Podkarpackie, and Swietokrzyskie). 5,250 students aged 13–16, representing all forms of secondary schools, took part in the study in total.

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using two paper questionnaires filled in by parents at home, by students at school and 3 competence tests written by students during their classes. The competence tests related to the main areas of the educational process with regard to the mother tongue: reception of speech (1st test), analysis and interpretation of cultural texts (2nd test) and creation of speech (3rd test). The students filled the 3 tests separately on 3 different days in the morning hours. The following table shows the basic features of the tests.

Table 1. Main features of tests

		Number of tasks	Number of open tasks	Maximum number of points to obtain
1st test	1st form	20	7	23
	2nd form	21	8	27
	3rd form	20	7	23
2nd test	1st form	17	14	27
	2nd form	18	15	35
	3rd form	17	14	30
3rd test	1st form	10	10	23
	2nd form	10	10	27
	3rd form	10	10	24

The questionnaire filled by the students included 46 questions referring to the school in general, lessons and teachers of the Polish language, reading books, periodicals and other written sources, as well as free time. The questionnaire dedicated to parents consisted of 55 questions about family, housing conditions and locality, educational plans, school attended by their children, reading books, financial situation, and professional status.

Implementation of the concept referring to cultural and social capital requires a significant modification in the case of a study dedicated to students of secondary schools. Firstly, the youth have barely built the dispositions and competences described by P. Bourdieu as indicators of the particular capital forms. Secondly, the peculiarity of the conducted studies has to be taken into consideration because verification of P. Bourdieu's theses under the conditions of Polish secondary schools was not their main aim. For this reason some assumed empirical indicators of the particular capital forms are sometimes less connected with the variables proposed by P. Bourdieu, although in accordance with the idea of the concept referring to cultural and social capital.

Seven measuring subscales of cultural capital were built:

- (1) the embodied capital: self-assessment of the communication competences (Alpha=0.612), frequency of using the offer of high culture (Alpha=0.744), and disposition towards school honesty (Alpha=0.873)
- (2) the institutionalized capital: motivation to acquire knowledge and skills (Alpha=0.822), preferences with regard to the Polish language as a school subject (Alpha=0.842), the parents' formal education (based on one item)
- (3) the objectified capital: the number of books in the parental household (based on one item)

Research Results

About 3/4 of the students assess themselves more or less positively in terms of the communication competences. A similar rate of the students assess themselves as motivated to acquire knowledge and skills to a larger or lesser degree. It does not correspond to the declarations of the students about the lessons of Polish. Only about 1/4 of them declare the Polish language as a favourite school subject. About a half of the students show a disposition towards school honesty to a larger or lesser extent. Fewer than 1/3 of the students are characterised by over-average frequency of using the offer of high culture. The results show, at the same time, that nearly a half of the parents have a relatively high degree of the formal education level. The declarations about the relatively high number of books are found out by more than 1/10 of the parental households of the students. The opposite situation is characteristic of nearly a half of the examined cases.

Table 2. Subscales of cultural capital

	1- the lowest level	2-	3-	4-	5- the highest level	Total
Embodied capital (%)						
Self-assessment of communication competences	1	3	20	43	33	100
Frequency of using the offer of high culture	10	25	34	24	6	100
Disposition towards scholar honesty	9	16	25	30	20	100
Institutionalized capital (%)						

	1- the lowest level	2-	3-	4-	5- the highest level	Total
Motivation to acquire knowledge and skills	0	3	19	54	24	100
Value of the mother tongue	13	29	33	19	5	100
Parents' education	7	23	23	34	13	100
Objectified capital (%)						
The number of books	23	25	40	13	1	100

The scale of the social capital was built in reference to the variables describing the students' relationships in the school environment. The results of the factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha allow for a construction of the scale of the social capital based on the students' declarations with regard to their relationships with teachers in total, to their relationships with the teacher of Polish, to the atmosphere among the classmates and to the way in which the teacher of Polish assesses their students (Alpha= 0.737). The scale of the economic capital of the parental household was built on the basis of the parental assessment of the housing and material situation and on the information about the monthly net income per person in the household (Alpha=0.663).

Nearly 3/4 of the students are characterised by a high or very high degree of the social capital. The results are more differentiated in the case of the economic capital. A bad material situation is found in about 1/10 of the students' parental households while satisfying material conditions are visible in over 1/3 of the parental households.

Table 3. Social and economic capital of the parental households (%)

	1- the lowest level	2-	3-	4-	5- the highest level	Total
Social capital	1	5	21	57	16	100
Economic capital	0	10	56	30	5	100

Next, the above-mentioned variables were submitted to the factor analysis to reduce the data describing similar phenomena. Two groups of scales were found out which built the common factors. The first one are the following scales: the frequency of using the offer of high culture, school honesty, motivation to acquire knowledge and skills, value of the Polish language as a school subject and the

social capital. The other one are the scales measuring the parents' education level, the number of books in the parental household and the economic situation of the household. The reliability test showed that 2 scales can be built on the basis of the 2 groups of variables further named as the soft socio-cultural capital (Alpha=0.678) and the hard socio-cultural capital (Alpha=0.688).

In total, over 2/5 of the students are characterised by a high level of the soft socio-cultural capital, whereas nearly 1/3 of the students display high resources of the hard socio-cultural capital. On the contrary, 1/10 of the students are characterised by a low level of the soft socio-cultural capital and nearly 1/4 of the students are characterised by a low level of the hard socio-cultural capital.

Table 4. Soft and hard socio-cultural capital of students (%)

	1- the lowest level	2-	3-	4-	5- the highest level	Total
Soft socio-cultural capital	0	10	47	40	3	100
Hard socio-cultural capital	1	23	44	28	4	100

Further analysis requires standardisation of the scoring obtained by the students. The school system of assessment implemented in the case of exams conducted in the Polish secondary schools was assumed as the basis for the standardisation procedure according to the following pattern: 90% of the maximum scoring - very good result, 71–89% of the maximum scoring – good result, 51–70% - satisfactory result, 30–50% - poor result, below 30% - unsatisfactory result.

The analysis conducted in the cross tabs shows correlations without any doubts. The higher the resources of both types of the socio-cultural capital, the higher the test results are obtained by the students. Depending on the kind of the test and the school form, the correlation is stronger or weaker. For example, there was no student who, having a very low or low level of the soft socio-cultural capital, achieved a very good result of the test. Nearly 16% of the students who received the negative mark were characterised by a very low or low resources of this capital at the same time. On the other hand, over 3/4 of the students having a very good test result in the area of the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts showed at least high resources of the soft capital. The ratio of the students with the worst result of the test displaying at least a high level of the soft socio-cultural capital is nearly three times higher (76% vs 27%). The correlation is confirmed by the coefficient of tau-b, which equals to 0.247, $p \leq 0.5$.

Table 5. Grade of the soft socio-cultural capital and the result of test 2 for the 1st form (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) (%)

Grade	Unsatisfactory result (0–8.0 points)	Poor result (8.1–13.5)	Satisfactory result (13.6–18.9)	Good result (19.0–24.2)	Very good result (24.3–27.0)
1+2	15.6	11.2	6.5	3.4	0.0
3	57.0	48.0	36.2	28.6	23.8
4	24.7	38.2	52.4	61.5	66.7
5	2.7	2.6	4.9	6.5	9.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note. The first and second grades of the scale were aggregated because of a low number of cases

Still stronger correlations are observed in the case of the hard socio-cultural capital. There is not any student having low or very low resources of the hard socio-cultural capital who wrote the test of the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts at very good level. The share of the youth having a low or very low level of the hard capital in the student group with unsatisfactory result of the test equals nearly 40%. On the contrary, there is no student having very high resources of the hard capital who received the unsatisfactory mark. More than a half of the students who wrote the test very well show at least a high level of the hard capital. The share of the students representing the first forms and having a high level of the hard capital in the student group with the unsatisfactory mark amounts only to 13.8%. The correlation is confirmed by the coefficient of tau-b, which equals 0.231, $p \leq 0.5$.

Table 6. Grade of the hard socio-cultural capital and the result of test 2 for the 1st forms (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) (%)

Grade	Unsatisfactory result (0–8.0 points)	Poor result (8.1–13.5)	Satisfactory result (13.6–18.9)	Good result (19.0–24.2)	Very good result (24.3–27.0)
1+2	39.6	30.6	22.2	12.7	0.0
3	46.6	46.6	44.5	40.9	46.1
4	13.8	18.1	29.4	40.3	46.2
5	0.0	4.7	3.9	6.1	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The presented correlations are repeated in the second and third forms if it is about the direction and strength of the connection. The rule is in force to a greater or lesser extent, the students achieve the higher results of the test, the higher resources of the socio-cultural capital they have.

To what extent can enlarging the resources of the socio-cultural capital influence the improvement of the students' achievements regarding the competence tests? The regression analysis was conducted to answer the question.

Table 7. Standardised regression coefficients of β and the determination coefficient of r^2 by particular forms, kinds of test and types of the socio-cultural capital

	The soft socio-cultural capital		The hard socio-cultural capital	
	β	r^2	β	r^2
Test 1, Form 1	.169	.029	.339	.115
Test 2, Form 1	.273	.075	.268	.072
Test 3, Form 1	.208	.043	.213	.045
Test 1, Form 2	.158	.025	.327	.107
Test 2, Form 2	.272	.074	.251	.063
Test 3, Form 2	.195	.038	.207	.043
Test 1, Form 3	.130	.017	.332	.110
Test 2, Form 3	.210	.044	.302	.091
Test 3, Form 3	.170	.029	.297	.088

The explanatory strength of the test results by variables describing the resources of the socio-cultural capital is very differentiated from the statistical point of view. On the one hand, the hard capital is explained by over 10% of the results variance characterising test 1 (speech reception) filled in by all the school forms. An important role of this capital is visible in the case of the third form, too. The determination coefficients show that about 9% of the results variance of test 2 (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) and test 3 (speech creation) can be explained by the variance of the hard capital. On the other hand, connections are visible whose explanatory strength is weaker. The connection between the soft socio-cultural capital and the results of test 1 of the first forms is the record holder. Only 1.7% of the result variance of test 1 written by the third forms can be explained by the variance of the soft capital.

Discussion

What do the connections between the resources of the socio-cultural capital and the results of the competence tests mean in practice? To what extent could the enlarging of the students' socio-cultural capital improve their skills in the area of the speech reception and creation as well as analysis and interpretation of cultural texts?

It turns out that the enlarging of the hard socio-cultural capital of the students' parental household by one level (20% of the maximum value of the capital) would cause an average increase in the results of test 1 (speech reception) from 11% to nearly 13%, depending on the school form. A similar effect would be achieved in the case of the enlarging the hard capital by one level for test 2 (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) and for test 3 (speech creation) for the third forms. An average increase in the results by more than 11% could be expected in the case of test 2 in the first and second forms after enlarging the resources of the soft socio-cultural capital by one level. The improvement of the test results by 8–9% could be expected in the case of test 2 for the first and second forms after enlarging the resources of the hard capital by one level and in the case of test 3 for all the forms and in the case of test 2 for the third forms after enlarging the resources of the soft capital by one level.

Table 8. Forecasted increase in the average scoring of the test in the case of enlarging the socio-cultural capital by one level by particular forms, kinds of tests and types of tests

	The soft socio-cultural capital	The hard socio-cultural capital
	Relative increase in the scoring (%)	Relative increase in the scoring (%)
Test 1, Form 1	6.6	11.2
Test 2, Form 1	11.3	9.4
Test 3, Form 1	8.0	7.0
Test 1, Form 2	7.3	12.9
Test 2, Form 2	11.5	9.0
Test 3, Form 2	7.8	7.0
Test 1, Form 3	5.4	11.1
Test 2, Form 3	8.4	9.8
Test 3, Form 3	7.5	10.7

It is worth paying attention to the fact that the hard socio-cultural capital has a slightly bigger explanatory strength to explain the variance of the test results than the soft capital, which is confirmed by the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 9. Standardised regression coefficients of β with 2 predictors and the determination coefficient of r^2 by forms, kinds of tests and types of the socio-cultural capital

	β for the soft socio-cultural capital	β for the hard socio-cultural capital	r^2
Test 1, Form 1	.177	.354	.159
Test 2, Form 1	.293	.267	.160
Test 3, Form 1	.200	.212	.087
Test 1, Form 2	.151	.327	.131
Test 2, Form 2	.270	.256	.139
Test 3, Form 2	.187	.212	.081
Test 1, Form 3	.105	.323	.117
Test 2, Form 3	.211	.294	.134
Test 3, Form 3	.179	.292	.120

The regression model, including three variables, shows the standardised coefficients of β describing connections between resources of the hard socio-cultural capital and the results of the tests are higher than the analogous coefficients for the soft capital, sometimes to a significant extent. There is one exception: test 2 (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) for the first and second forms. The resources of the soft socio-cultural capital play a greater part in the explanation of the variance observed for the results of test 2. For example, taking into consideration test 1 (speech reception) for the first forms, enlarging the resources of the hard socio-cultural capital by one level (20% of the maximum value of the capital among the examined population) would cause an average increase in the students' results by 11.7%. At the same time, enlarging the resources of the soft socio-cultural capital by one level would cause an average increase in the test results only by 6.9%. In general, both types of the capital explain 16% of the variance observed for the results of test 1 (speech reception) and test 2 (analysis and interpretation of cultural texts) for the first forms. Both types of the capital play an important part in the explanation of variance found out for the results of tests 1 and 2 for the second forms and test 2 for the third forms (over 13%).

Further variables joined in the regression model could cause additional increase in the ratio of the explained variance of the test results. For example, inclusion of the variables describing the extent of the students' identification with the school and the students' preferences regarding the subject of the Polish language causes an increase in the ratio of the explained variance observed for the results of test 2 for the first forms by more than five percentage points – from 16.0% to 21.4%. An increase in the soft and hard socio-cultural capital as well as the degree of the students' identification with school and the extent of their preferences for the mother tongue as a school subject by one level would cause an average increase in the result of test 2 for the first forms by 23.2% (by 6.3 points). The biggest influence on the improvement of the results would have an increase in the identification with the school (+2.2 points) and an increase in the hard socio-cultural capital (+1.9 points). An increase in the soft socio-cultural capital would be of less importance (+1.7 points). An increase in the preference degree of the mother tongue as a school subject would not play any significant part (+0.5 points).

Conclusions

The obtained results clearly show the role of the socio-cultural capital for students' skills in the area of speech reception and creation as well as in the area of the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts. On the one hand, the enlargement of the soft and the hard socio-cultural capitals should lead to improvement of the skills. On the other hand, the resources of the capitals should be growing along with, e.g., increasing frequency of using the offer of high culture by students, stronger motivation to acquire knowledge and skills, a more positive attitude toward the mother tongue as a school subject or stronger support of readership in general. In this context, the creation of additional programs focused on the improvement of access to high culture, development of readership, work on a more positive image of the mother tongue as the school subject or motivation training in terms of the acquisition of new knowledge and skills is worth considering. Further analyses of this type should lead to an exact picture which of the individual, social, school and out-of-school factors influence the acquisition of skills by students in the area of speech reception, analysis and interpretation of cultural texts and speech creation.

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