

Abstract

Educational Vulnerability of Students in Poverty and Policy Measures: From the Social Capital Perspective

Ryu, Bangran(Korean Educational Development Institute)

Jung, Paul(Korean Educational Development Institute)

Kim, Sung-Sik(Seoul National University of Education)

Cho, Sang-Sik(Dongguk University-Seoul)

Song, Hang-Hee(Jeonnam University)

This study is conducted with the aim of demonstrating the educational vulnerabilities of students suffering from poverty (also referred to as students in poverty) as well as identifying the appropriate responses from a social capital perspective. The following constitute the main research questions of this study: 1) What type of educational vulnerabilities are the students in poverty exposed to? 2) Are they able to overcome these disadvantages when there is an accumulation of social capital? 3) What are the policy responses that lead to such an accumulation of social capital?

Poverty has traditionally been defined in an economic manner, namely a deficiency or insufficiency of income. However, more recently, poverty has been known to exhibit more complex characteristics, such as social exclusion, family breakdown, poverty trap, and the working poor. Of these characteristics, social exclusion in particular requires educational responses. In order to prevent and alleviate the social exclusion that may potentially be experienced by the students suffering from poverty, forming social capital is deemed necessary. In this study, social capital is defined as “a social relationship based on trust, support, and cooperation, through mutual interactions and communications among families, schools, and the local community that all play a part in children’s development through learning.”

In order to empirically establish the relationship between social capital and the educational performance of students suffering from poverty, three years' worth of longitudinally collected data is analyzed. The results are as follows: 1) Students suffering from poverty tend to possess lower levels of social capital, at homes, schools, and the local communities. 2) There is a strong relationship between social capital and the students' adaptation to school environment, school attitude, and educational achievement. 3) Assuming the parents' educational levels remain the same, controlling for the prior educational achievement level renders the influence of social capital on educational achievement insignificant at middle school level. 4) Social capital at school level has a positive impact on the students' adaptation to school environment but not educational achievement. 5) Social capital at school level seems insufficient to alleviate the disadvantages of students in poverty evident in learning and adaptation to school environment. 6) Social capital level of students in poverty can, to an extent, be influenced through the efforts of the school authorities, such as the leadership of the school principal. 7) Educational Welfare Priority Project has not exerted a significant influence on improving the social capital levels of students suffering from poverty.

The study also includes qualitative analysis on data collected in three disadvantaged areas in major cities. Among students suffering from poverty, in those cases where the students lacked parental support due to family breakdowns or lack of care, students fail to establish a communicative relationship with teachers based on learning, and teachers' expectations are also low. Within an established curriculum, teachers are unable to form a supportive relationship with unresponsive students through classroom activities. In particular, middle schools lack conditions that would enable teachers to form a relationship with students based on mutual understanding on an individual level. At the school level, these relationship characteristics differ between teachers, depending on whether school culture and administration are bureaucratic or cooperative. This difference also manifests itself over whether a school forms mutual, cooperative relationship with the local community for its students or not.

In order to obtain possible policy implications, various policy cases are also analyzed, both domestic and abroad. For the case of United Kingdom, this study discusses the policy

implementation framework, timeline, and results of the Education Action Zone, which aimed to augment social capital. As for the case of the United States, the study looks at Harlem Children's Zone, initiated by the private sector in Harlem, as well as the Promise Neighborhood policy, modeled on the former initiative by the Obama administration and currently being expanded. For Germany, the study looks at its general educational welfare framework, as well as the formation of comprehensive support for Berlin area. As for South Korea, the implementation framework, specifics of policy contents, achievements and limitations of the Educational Welfare Priority Program are discussed.

Finally, through a combination of survey data analysis, interview result analysis, and previous policy evaluation, the study suggests a policy plan. The study first looks at the controversies associated with social capital accumulation policies, and policy directions are suggested accordingly. At the national level, the study suggests a formation of educational communities with a local basis, which would enable the provision of support for both parents and students suffering from poverty. Furthermore, it recommends reform plans for local community schools that would improve the accumulation of social capital.