Investigating the Effect of Cultural Capital on Students’ Academic Achievement

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1- Introduction
In recent decades, officials of various countries has been seriously considering the significance of solving educational problems as well its influences on social development. Cultural capital of every community is one of the most important cultural variables for social development. As an important issue, it has particularly attracted sociologists’ attention. This study investigates the relationship between cultural capital and educational progress. Specifically, the current research is a theoretical and empirical study of the influence of some critical social factors including certain aspects of cultural capital on the educational status of university students.

2- Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework of the present study draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) concepts of social action and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, habitus or characteristic system of individuals draws on different capitals and thereby is discussed as an attribution form. Cultural capital, which manifests itself in the form of cultural skills, goods, and documents, always reciprocates with habitus. According to Bourdieu, students with more cultural capitals can more successfully understand the rules of the game and nurture cultural skills and priorities, which are typically rewarded at schools, and therefore can better achieve educational progress. But the point which has been almost disregarded by Bourdieu, is another type of habitus, namely, acquisitive habitus, which plays an important role in the formation of cultural capital. In fact, in addition to social class and family, individual habitus or characteristic system of socio-cultural personality is affected by factors like self-concept, reference groups, mass media, and participation level in social groups and communities. Therefore, apart from cultural capital, three other influential factors, including cultural and educational participation, mass media, and reference groups have been taken into account in this study.

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3- Method
The empirical method used in this study is social survey. The population in this study includes 4000 students studying at University of Kashan, Islamic Azad University, Kashan Branch, and Aran-Bidgol Payam-e-Noor University during the 2010-2011 academic year. The sample size of 245 participants was calculated by Cochran formula. The study used non-probabilistic, quota sampling technique. In order to estimate the reliability of the 35-item questionnaire, in the pre-test phase Chronbach’s Alpha test was used. Using SPSS software the questionnaire data were analyzed. More specifically, the study used t-test and f-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, Regression Analysis (Stepwise Method), and Path Analysis, to investigate the relationships between the variables of the study.

4- Results
The results of the study indicated that there is a significant relationship between the variables of age, field of study, and academic achievement. But there was no significant relationship between the variables of gender, university, and academic achievement. The findings indicated that there are significant correlations between academic achievement and such variables as consumption of cultural products, cultural behavior and procedure, family, educational and occupational values, cultural and educational participation, and influence of mass media. In addition, after computing the variable of cultural capital by combining the variables of consumption of cultural products, cultural behavior and procedure, family, and educational and occupational values, there was a significant relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement of the participants. However, no significant relationship was found between the variables of public awareness of families, influence of reference groups and the parents’ socio-economic status, and academic achievement. The regression analysis and path analysis showed that variables of cultural capital and cultural and educational participation directly influenced academic achievement and the variable of influence of mass media indirectly influenced academic achievement. In addition, the variable of educational and cultural participation was found to affect cultural capital.

5- Conclusion
In conclusion, the empirical findings confirmed most of the hypotheses of the study. Particularly, the data analysis showed that the two variables which were less considered by Bourdieu (1977), namely, cultural and educational participation and exposure to mass media influence the academic achievement of the students. These findings support the criticisms against Bourdieu’s theories discussed in the review of the literature of the study. In other words, cultural capital is not exclusively inherited from the family background and social class, but can be affected by other variables and factors. Criticizing the notion of cultural capital and its influence on
academic achievement does not indicate the failure of the notion. However, this finding of the study indicates that Bourdieu’s theory on cultural capital should be combined with theoretical concepts and other procedures to better describe educational and cultural events and problems such as academic achievement.

**Key words:** Cultural capital, Academic achievement, Consumption of cultural products, Cultural behaviors and procedures, Cultural and educational participation.

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