Educational Aspirations Formation: A Kenyan Model

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Abstract:- Educational aspirations are linked to academic achievement at all school levels. Educational aspirations among secondary school students are formed and developed not only in the school social environment, but also in the out of school social environment. At the secondary school level, individual educational aspirations are a major determinant of progressive academic achievement and career choices. However, educational aspirations formation is a social process. This paper developed a social interaction model or framework that can enhance acquisition of social capital necessary for educational aspiration formation in Kenya. The study recommends the need to put in place formal programs at home, school and the community for day secondary schools, which could go a long way in bridging the resource disparities entrenched in the school categorization.

Keywords:- Educational Aspirations, Interaction Model, Social Networks.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of educational aspirations has been explored by educationists, sociologists, economists and educational researchers as it explains educational inequalities (Domina et al, 2011). The interest in this study is largely due to the positivity associated with high educational aspirations in determining educational outcomes and progression. Though studies document the positive influence of educational aspirations on academic achievement for learners (Tekwu et. al, 2012; Gutman et al, 2012; Beal & Crockett; 2010) little research has explicitly examined how the educational aspirations are formed or developed. The studies on educational aspirations have mainly focused on the individual learner's intellectual ability against their academic progression and/or the immediate family's financial ability in determining the learner's educational progression. This study argues for conceptualization of educational aspirations neither as a result of the individual student's intellectual endowment nor the family's financial resource, but as a communal activation shaped by the normative expectations and social capital of the adults surrounding the students. An interaction model would explain this.

II. EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations matter in every aspect of education. An aspiration is an individual strong desire, a longing, an aim or an ambition to be achieved (Gale & Parker, 2015). Educational aspirations can be measured by the desire of the student to enrol in post-secondary education and earn a certificate, a diploma or a degree. Social contexts matter in shaping educational experiences and outcome of individual children and youth (Park & Kao, 2018). Research on educational aspirations is often motivated by the thinking that educational aspirations may predict school achievement, educational attainment, school grades and school progression, however, educational aspirations relate to other aspects of social life (Hart, 2016). Educational aspirations are also about the student's social environment which includes the community and its orientation towards education. (Leslie & Akerman, 2008). Educational aspirations therefore are an interplay of social factors. The interactions inherent create capital referred to as social capital. This capital is institutionalized in the social structures such as the family, religion, education and the economy among others and its accessibility is through interactions.

III. SOCIAL CAPITAL

The concept of social capital has been used severally in history as a means to understand the relative strength of families and communities. The role social capital plays in the communities has been extensively explored by researchers in various disciplines such as health, sociology, psychology, economy and education. While there are many studies on social capital and its role especially in academic progression of students, the focus has been on the nuclear family as the carrier of social capital with emphasis drawn on social capital markers and indicators in the family institution (Hattie, 2015; Kaur, 2012; Ahmed & Najeemah, 2013). Dika and Singh (2002) affirm that social capital has a positive association not only in educational attainment, but also educational aspirations. Social capital refers to the social relationships between people that enable productive outcomes (Szreter 2000). Charles, (2000) defines social capital as a resource embedded in a social structure and can be accessed and or mobilized in purposive action. Social capital can also be conceptualized as the network of connections among individuals and organizations in a community (Freuchte, 2011). By these definitions three

pertinent dimensions of social capital emerge: It is a resource embedded in a social structure; the utility of the resource is premised on the individual's access and mobilization and lastly the presence, the access and the mobilization of this resource healthily in a community is dependent on the nature and quality of relationships that exist within and between people and their communities.

Social capital requires cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and collective well-being. (Putnam, 1993). These conditions foster individuals' development, as well as support growth and development for the society. The conditions under which people learn to cooperate matter a great deal to the outcomes. Cooperation, trust and reciprocity depend on norms built over time, and on a network of interdependent cooperative arrangements. To reap the benefits, collaboration and reciprocity are a requirement. Woodcock, (2001) associates social capital with a resource that is useful in achieving common objectives. Education is one such objective. It is through this process that an individual achieves social competence, growth and actualization. These lived experiences do not happen in isolation, but in the thick of social interactions among actors of a specific group making education and the socialization process a public good.

A. The Family Social Capital

The family is the bedrock and source of social capital as well as the main site of accumulation and transmission (Winter, 2000). The family is also the foundation of all the other forms of capital (Barker, 2012). Financial capital is the endowment of the physical resources that can aid in education. Human capital can be measured by parents' hard and soft skills, intellectual abilities and their level of education. This provides the potential for an environment for the child that aids learning. The human capital though, may yield no educational results for the children if parents are not an important part of their children's educational lives' (Rob, Andrew, Lisa, 2003). A parent being an important part of children's lives presupposes a level of interaction. The interaction between the parents and their children creates benefits for the children. The family social capital describes relation among family members especially between parents and children. 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, duration and frequency as argued by Smith et al (1995), they too do not guarantee family social capital. The study focuses on the family interactions and how they enable children to build the social capital necessary for educational aspirations. Of importance is not the physical presence of the family members, but the kind of interactions germane to the physical presence of the parents and the siblings.

B. The School Social Capital

The school plays functionally specific roles in the socialization process of the students that is educating the young members of the society with the desired skills, competences, attitudes and. It also provides an avenue of interconnectedness between members at the school level and outside the school, but embedded in this school core function are the latent aspects that are learnt and internalized by the learners such as culture, social efficiency, personal refinement and setting of educational goals and aspirations. These latent aspects are dependent not only on the learner as an individual, but also on the school environment both physical and social. This is consistent with Harding, (2011) who asserts that the social context in which schooling occurs is more important than the schooling concerns. Learners need deliberate interactions with the right actors in order to acquire these latent competences of education. This can be acquired through investment in social capital. A simple definition of social capital in schools is the relational quality between all stakeholders. It is what happens between teachers and students, between peer groups in both the classroom and staffroom, in the interactions between executive and staff and communications between the school and the family (Begley et. al. 2010).

The taskforce on the realignment of the education sector to the Constitution of Kenya 2010 made recommendations that form the basis of social capital formation.

- Proper positioning of mentoring and molding at all levels with a clear policy registration in place.
- Partnership and collaboration with the relevant stakeholders including parents and local communities be encouraged.
- National values be mainstreamed in the curriculum.
- Institutional managers and teachers be provided with necessary resources to deal with emerging health issues, substances abuse, violence and national values and cohesion (ROK, 2012).

These recommendations transcend the classroom delivery of content and brings to the fore the latent roles of actors in education. The recommendations envisage advantages that come from different experiences and stimulations that school provides (William, 2012). Schools therefore are avenues of social capital formation.

Begley et. al. (2010) outlines school social capital as a function of both internal and external social networks. The internal social networks are hierarchical in nature and present at individual level or organizational level such as teacher- student and teacher- principal. These interactions yield social capital such as positive relationships and expectations. External school social networks on the other hand may present as vertical (school and state); horizontal (school and other institutions such as family, church, other schools) and connection between school members and non-school members (teacher-parent, teacher-community, student- community, teacher-donors to the school). From the social capital thinking the connections between the school

members and non-school members are more likely to have a greater social utility. This is premised on the thinking that social capital is a vehicle for generating a sense of inclusive belonging (Roffey, 2013). However, school social capital is not synonymous to social networks and so the intangible resource may emerge or fail to emerge depending on the quality of the network. The quality of the network is determined by the structural position of members and the quantity of accumulated assets member's poses. At the educational level, the school has always been thought of as the one educating, and the rest intervening where possible, however it is the rest especially the community that educates. The school is adapts and comes to terms where it may, hence the school character is flavored by its host community. The school is an agent of social affirmation (Erick, 2017).

C. Community Social Capital

Families come together to build a strong community. Family social capital helps build community's social capital. "Social capital at the community level can be described as the social glue that holds people together in families and communities and gives them a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain world"(Catts & Ozga, 2005). Social capital at the community level is centrally concerned with the value and implications of relationships as a resource for social action. It is developed in the relationships, through doing things for one another and in the trust that is developed in one another. The social capital that has value for the development of the youth does not reside solely within the family. It can be found outside as well in the community consisting of the social relationships that exist among parents (Josiah, 2010). Whether social capital is seen from the family level, school level or community level, scholars remain committed to the view that it is the interacting members who make the maintenance and reproduction of this social asset possible (Ronald, Karen, Nan 2001). A community is said to possess social capital when the number and variety of associational groups is high with dense and overlapping social networks (Plagens, 2011).

D. An interaction Model

A model is a representation of concepts which are used to help people understand or simulate a subject the model represents. It is merely a human construct or a representation of a system to help understand the real system better. It is made of concepts which are used to help people know, understand or simulate a subject the model represents. It is an abstraction of things in the real world physical or social. A model has information input, information sharing and processes and information output.

Educational aspirations, it has been argued are communal in nature. A visual representation of how actors at different levels can interact with the learners to enable them accumulate social capital for high educational aspirations will be presented. In this study social capital has focussed on the positive attributes embedded in social relations. Previously, studies have focussed on resource seekers than resource givers as a unit of analysis (Lee,

2010). Social capital is an aggregate of actual or potential resources and the intentionality of the actors both as network orientation of resource seekers (Stanton & Spina, 2000) or resource givers (Johnstone & Knoke, 2005) remains critical in the model. The study proposed a model of interaction anchored on policy. A model that can enhance generation of social capital through interactions and social networks of both the resource seekers and the resource givers with the main focus being raising the educational aspirations of the resource seekers who are the students. A model by Lee, M. (2010) provided the basis of the proposed new model.
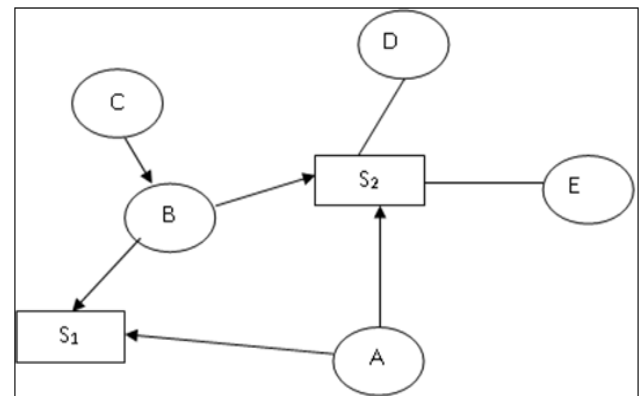

Fig 1 A Social capital Resource Model by Lee, (2010).

In figure 1 both student 1 (S1) and student 2 (S2) can get resources from A B. They also get resources from C through B, however S2 has the potential resources from D and E as opposed to S1. If we take resources A, B, C to be the home, school and the community respectively, both S1 and S2 have access to the same social network. However S2 has a potential of other social networks D and E that are not accessible to S1.

In the proposed model is A, B, and C are the basic resource givers to both S1 and S2. These resource givers are the home, the school and the community. The model proposes that the potential resource D and E be made an accessible or actual resources for both S1and S2. Most importantly though, is an overarching policy (F) that provides the guidelines for the implementation of the same. The proposed model is presented below.
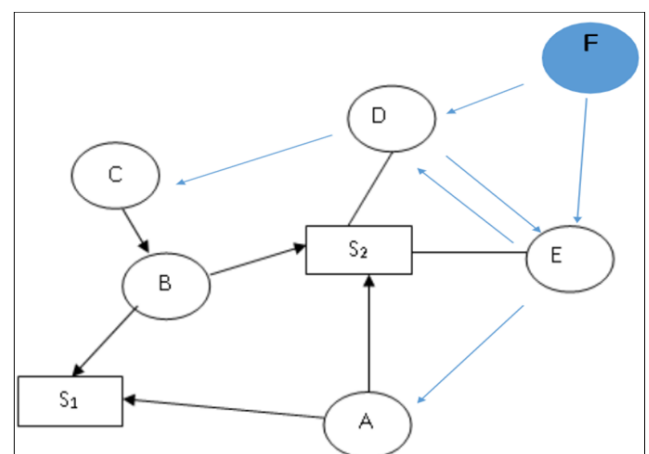

Fig 2 A Proposed Social Capital Resource Model

In the proposed model of interactions and resource channelling, the arrows represent social interactions between different actors and they also give the direction of resource channels. S1 and S2 represent students in different school categories while A, B, C, D, E and F represent the actors and the inherent resources. In the earlier model S2 had a resource not accessible to S1. In this model S1 and S2 can access resources directly from primary actors A and B, access resources from secondary actor C through actor B. Actors D and E are accessible to one another and can share the resources. This tertiary resource is potentially accessible to S1 and S2 through primary actors A or secondary actor C. This model presupposes a framework that would be anchored in policy (F) as the foundations of resource access by resource seekers.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper has revealed that educational aspirations are salient in education and they are key in determining educational achievement and progression. Career aspiration are also directly or indirectly determined by educational aspirations. This paper has revealed that the formation and development of educational aspirations is a social endeavor intertwined with the social networks that students are part of in the family, school or the community. The paper concludes that the emphasis of the model is the access to the actors in the social networks and the access to intangible resource (social capital) within the social networks that may emerge or fail to emerge depending on the quality of interaction.

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