



On the Relation of Locus of Control, Social and Cultural Capital and Oral Proficiency Achievement of EFL Students: A case of Iranians in Mashhad

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Abstract

Two areas of difficulty that almost all students might face while learning a second language are speaking and listening skills. Individuals' perceptions about the underlying main causes of their lives' events which is called Locus of Control (LOC), has a great role in their activities as well as the interactions between individuals and socio-cultural environments. This study aims at investigating the relationship between social cultural capital, LOC and oral proficiency (listening and speaking) of Iranian EFL learners. It also aims at examining the relationship between social cultural capital and LOC (internal and external). To meet this end, Social Cultural Capital Questionnaire (Pishghadam, Noghani & Zabihi, 2011) and the Persian version of LOC questionnaire (Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2010) were administered to a sample of 100 upper intermediate EFL students from some language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. Both male (N=46) and female (N=54) students filled in two questionnaires. The participants' Grand Point Averages (GPA) of their FL Listening and Speaking exams also served as an index of their oral proficiency achievement. The results of the statistical analyses revealed a positive correlation between social cultural capital, LOC, and students' oral proficiency. The findings also demonstrated a significant relationship between social cultural capital and LOC.

Keywords: Social capital, Cultural capital, Locus of control, Iranian EFL

1. Introduction

As two important language skills, speaking and listening are intertwined. As Brown (2001) mentions, listening in language learning is important since by internalizing linguistic information, we are able to produce language (p, 247). The literature showed that the need for oral proficiency has been increasing alongside the increased opportunities for communication. "Language students view the world as growing smaller and smaller, and they are aware that all people have increasing opportunities to communicate with speakers of other language" (Chastain, 1988, p, 271). Furthermore, one cannot separate speaking from listening. In fact, people speak to communicate their thoughts. Chastain (1988) claims that the term communication implies at least two purposes, one for creating a meaningful message and one for recreating that message. Consequently, a conversation class cannot be solely a speaking class and it must include listening activities as well (p, 190).

These proficiencies might be under the influence of various factors such as sociological and psychological factors. Among sociological factors, social and cultural capital has been proved to have positive impacts on students' both educational and language achievements (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Gopee, 2002; Tramonte & Willms, 2010). The reviewed literature showed that almost all studies which take this relationship into account have not considered individuals proficiencies in terms of speaking and listening. The other factor which is also proved to be influential on learning process is locus of control (Serina, Serin, Sahin, 2010; Severino, Aielloa, Cascio, Ficarra, Messina, 2011). This psychological factor is subdivided to internal and external LOC. Internal LOC (internalizers) use metacognitive strategies more frequently than those with external LOC (externalizers).

This study is conducted to extract first, the influence of sociological factors and psychological factors on individuals speaking and listening proficiencies, and second, to investigate the interrelationship of sociological and psychological factors. And finally, this study sought to find out the relationship between aforementioned. Therefore, the questions of the present study have been formed as:

1) Is there any significant relationship between social and cultural capital and oral communication skills of Iranian EFL learners?

2) Do Iranian EFL learner individuals who are internally controlled perform better at oral communication skills in comparison with those who are externally controlled?

3) Is there any significant relationship between type of personality (internal and external LOC) and social and cultural capital of Iranian EFL learners?

2. Literature Review

Pierre Bourdieu (1986), a French sociologist, introduced the concepts of social and cultural capital for the first time. Previously, economic theorists believed a society was classified based on the economic distribution. Bourdieu elaborated on the notion of capital and added two more capitals to the list, social and cultural capital. In his view not only economic capital but also social and cultural capital result in class division in a society. He asserted that "it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one introduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (Bourdieu, 1986). Rotter (1966) claimed that individuals' perceptions about the underlying main causes of their lives' events or LOC has a great role in their activities as well as the interactions between individuals and socio-cultural environments.

2.1. Social capital

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized social capital (SC) as: "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition- or in other words, the collectively-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the world" (p, 88). That is to say, people possess some networks of connections which are neither natural nor social given. These networks can be in hand to perform as helpful resources. In this regard, Scott (2006) echoed: "social capital can explain why some groups were able to hand on their privileged socio-economic position they mobilize by proxy of the capital of an entire group, such as powerful family members, old pupils of elite schools, members of a select club, or the nobility". Bourdieu (1986) asserted that these networks are "the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits" (p, 89).

2.2. Cultural capital

Bourdieu became interested in the concept of cultural capital in early 1960s. He coined the term to explain the process of class formation through the role of cultural knowledge and tastes. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as "the knowledge of familiarity with prestigious form of expression" (Bourdieu, 1993, cited in Tranter, 2006, p.2). He further added that this knowledge may exist in the embodied form from early childhood or be acquired in the form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). He claimed that with the notion of cultural capital one can explain inequalities in scholastic achievement of individuals who are from different social classes. He believed we can do so by "relating academic success, i.e. the specific profits which children from different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions" (Bourdieu, 1986, p, 84). In Bourdieu's view cultural capital can show itself in three forms:

- 1) *The embodied state* which shows itself in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body.
- 2) *The objectified state* which demonstrates itself in the form of cultural goods such as pictures, machines, dictionaries, etc.
- 3) *The institutionalized state* which shows itself as academic qualifications.

2.3. Locus of control

Posing this question might help to clarify the concept of LOC: "who determines your fate? You or some forces beyond your control?". Researchers found that individuals answer this question differently (Parse, 1965; Rother, 1966 cited in Twenge, Zhang and Im, 2004). Some individuals may find themselves to be responsible for their own fate, on the contrary, some may believe in luck and powerful others in determining their fate. The former are called internalizers and the latter externalizers. Rotter (1954) placed this individual difference within his large theory of social learning. He differentiates between these two types of individual differences by referring them as internal locus of control and external locus of control. He further explains that "internal versus external locus of control refer to the degree that to which persons expect that a reinforcement or an outcome of their behavior is contingent on their own behavior or personal characteristics" (p, 489). This is against the extent to which people "expect that the reinforcement or outcome is a function of chance, luck, or fate is under the control of powerful others, or is simply unpredictable" (Rotter, 1990, p, 489).

This concept has become one of the most researched constructs since its introduction. ELT studies are among them and many researchers in this field tried to show how internal and external locus might affect Foreign Language (FL) learning process. Ghonsooly and Elahi (2011) run a research on the relation of locus of control and FL reading and writing. The results of their study showed that locus of control had a positive correlation with student's FL reading and writing achievement. In another study by Saadat, Ghasemzade, Karami, and Soleimani (2011) the relationship between self-esteem and locus of control was investigated. The findings of their study showed that self-esteem had a positive and meaningful relationship with internal LOC and that internal LOC could predict self-esteem. Although, this relation became negative while external LOC was considered.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample chosen for this study consisted of 100 students studying English as a foreign language. They were studying in some language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. The participants were both male (N= 46) and female (N= 54) who spoke Persian as their first language. Their ages ranged from 16 to 36, with a mean of 22.77.

3.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect the data in this study: Social Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) designed by Pishghadam, Noghani and Zabihi (2011), and the Internal Control Index designed by Duttweiler (1984). For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the Persian version of LOC (Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2010) was used. The researchers used Cronbach's alpha to check the reliability of the translated version which resulted in a coefficient of 0.82. The participants' Grand Point Averages (GPA) of their FL Listening and Speaking exams served as an index of their oral proficiency achievement.

3.2.1. Social Cultural Questionnaire

This questionnaire includes 42 items. The items are scored on a Likert scale of 5-point. Participants were asked to choose among 'strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree'. The reliability of the questionnaire estimated in the previous study was $r = .88$. In this study, the reliability of the whole items (i.e. 42 items) estimated by Cronbach Alpha was .90.

3.2.2. Internal control Index

This scale includes 28 five-point Likert type items with responses of 'rarely, occasionally, sometimes, frequently, and usually' that result in a possible range of scores from 28 to 140. Higher scores indicate higher internal LOC and lower scores reflect higher external LOC. The high internally oriented respondents were expected to answer half at the "usually" end of the scale and the other half at the "rarely" end of the scale since half of the items were worded. The "rarely" response was scored as five points on items 1, 2, 4, 6, 11, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, and 27; for the rest of the items, the response "usually" was scored as five points. The reliability of the questionnaire for this sample is .78.

3.3. Procedure

First, the participants were informed orally about the objectives and procedures of the questionnaires. They were also assured that the results would be kept confidential. Then, the two questionnaires were distributed among them. The administration phase occurred during the class hour by prior arrangement with the instructor. The institutes provided the researcher with students' GPA of listening and speaking exams.

3.4. Data analysis

The Pearson product moment formula was used to calculate the correlation between social cultural capital and students' oral proficiency, and social cultural capital and LOC. Independent sample t-test was also used to investigate the relationship between internal and external LOC and oral proficiency.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was used to investigate the normality of the distribution. Table 1 reports the descriptive results of the SCCQ and LOC questionnaires, and oral proficiency scores.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of SCC Questionnaire, LOC Questionnaire, and Oral Proficiency Scores

| Variable | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Social cultural capital | 100 | 69 | 186 | 127.63 | 23.85 |
| Locus of control | 100 | 67 | 128 | 98.01 | 12.275 |
| Oral Proficiency Scores | 100 | 17 | 40 | 32.458 | 5.99959 |

It is indicated (Table1) that the participants gained the mean score of 127.63 with the Std. Deviation of 2.38 with regard to Social Cultural Capital inventory. The data in Table1 shows that the participants of the study obtained the mean score of 32.45 with the Std. Deviation of .60 considering LOC Questionnaire. Finally, it is shown that they have scored a mean of 32.458 (Std. Deviation=5.999) in the language proficiency test.

4.2. Inferential Statistics

To answer the first research question regarding the relationship between social cultural capital and EFL students' oral proficiency, the Pearson formula was used. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Correlation between Social Cultural Capital and Oral Proficiency

| variables | Pearson correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Social and cultural capital, and Oral proficiency | .739 | .000 |

As it can be seen, the correlation coefficient is .739 and $p < .05$. The correlation is moderately high and positive; therefore, we can conclude that students with higher social and cultural capital outperform students with lower social and cultural capital regarding oral proficiency.

With regard to the second question concerning any difference between internalizers and externalizers regarding their oral proficiency, Pearson correlation formula was applied (Table 3).

Table3. The Correlation between LOC and Oral Proficiency scores

| variables | Pearson correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| LOC, and Oral proficiency | .443* | .000 |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

As it is indicated in Table3, the correlation coefficient is .443 and $p < .05$. The correlation is moderately high and positive; therefore, we can conclude that students with higher LOC outperformed students with lower LOC with regard to oral proficiency.

Then, independent sample t-test was run. First, descriptive analysis of the participants' oral proficiency scores is presented in Table 4. The sample included 100 participants that were categorized as externalizers (52) and internalizers (47). The median of the LOC scores was used to categorize the students. Therefore, students with scores above 99 were considered as internalizers, and those with scores below 99 were grouped as externalizers.

Table 4. A Comparison of Externalizers' and Internalizers' Mean Scores in FL Oral Proficiency

| FL | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---------------------------|---------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Speaking/Listening Scores | Externalizers | 52 | 30.4452 | 6.51310 | .90320 |
| | Internalizers | 47 | 34.6862 | 4.47228 | .65235 |

According to Table 4, internalizers proved to have the mean score of 34.6862 and standard deviation of .65235, while the mean score of the externalizers turned out to be 30.4452 with the standard deviation of .90320. Table 4 illustrates that internalizers' oral proficiency is higher than externalizers. In order to examine that the difference between the means is statistically significant or not, a t-test was run on the data (Table5).

Table5. Determining the Significance of the Mean Scores Difference in Internalizers and Externalizers

| | Leven's Test for Equality of Variances | | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|----------------------------|--|-------|--------|------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| | Equal variance assumed | 10.78 | | | | | | .001 | -3.737 |
| Equal variance not assumed | | | -3.806 | 90.7 | .000 | 4.2410 | 1.11415 | 6.4542 | 2.0277 |

As it is shown in Table 5, $t = -3.737$ and $p < .05$. Thus, regarding oral proficiency, there is a significant difference between internalizers and externalizers.

To answer the third question of this study regarding the relationship between social cultural capital and locus of control, the Pearson formula was used. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The Correlation between Social Cultural Capital and LOC

| variables | Pearson correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|
| Social and cultural capital, Internalizer and externalizer | .367 | .000 |

As it is shown $r = .367$ and $p < .05$. Thus, the correlation is moderately high and positive; therefore, we can conclude that students with higher Social and cultural capital outperform students with lower Social and cultural capital with regard to LOC.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study regarding the relationship between social cultural capital and oral proficiency confirm the importance of the socio-cultural dimensions in oral proficiency. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficient is $.739$ and $p < .05$. Accordingly, oral proficiency is significantly and positively correlated with the total SCCQ. Therefore, students who enjoy higher levels of social and cultural capital are more successful in FL oral proficiency. This is supportive of Israel, Beaulieu, and Hartless's (2001) study. They have examined the influence of family and community social capital on educational achievement and find that community and family social capital are key factors affecting high school students' educational achievement. These results are quite in line with previous researches' findings (Pishghadam & Navari, 2009; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Pishghadam, Noghani, & Zabihi, 2011).

The results of the second question stated that learners who trace their learning in to their own efforts and ability, internalizers, are more likely to succeed in FL oral proficiency (listening and speaking skills). The findings of this study are quite in line with those of Findley and Coopers' (1983). As a result of frequent failures and lack of interest in their own majors, students of Humanities were demotivated in achieving high scores in general English achievement. The result of their study indicated a significant positive relationship between internal orientation and high academic achievement. The obtained results are in parallel with previous research on the influence of LOC and English achievement (Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011, Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2010; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Ghonsooly & Moharer, 2012; Heidari & Khorasaniha, 2013; Hosseini Fatemi & Elahi, 2011).

The results from the third question indicated a positive and significant relationship between social cultural capital and LOC. This finding is similar to that obtained by Pishghadam and Zabihi (2011). They presented the relation between social and cultural capital and creativity and they claim that creativity plays a crucial role in the improvement of learners' academic achievement.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, there is a high association between social and cultural capital and academic achievement (Goyal, 2000; Findley & Cooper, 1983). Having that in mind, we have attempted to investigate whether LOC and Social cultural capital are related to FL oral proficiency achievement. The result showed a significant positive correlation between LOC, social and cultural capital, and oral proficiency. The present study results suggest that social cultural capital and LOC are the best predictors of the oral proficiency skills.

The results of this study are most useful for EFL teachers and instructors. Language teachers can help students to have more sense of control over their learning. They can inform the students about such differences and help them to reattribute their success and failures to factors like effort which is stable and controllable.

A few limitations should be noted. One limitation of this study is that since this study does not take gender and age differences into account, it is not acceptable to generalize the findings of this study across different ages and genders. Moreover, since this study is a correlational one, claiming causal relationship between SCC, LOC and oral proficiency skills is not recommended. Also, the number of participants (100) might reduce the significance of generalization to other EFL students since correlational studies usually ask for more number of participants.

There is much room for further research on this topic and this research might have paved the way for future research. First, another research can be done with more representative sample to find more generalizable results. Second, another research can be done to consider gender and age differences. Analyzing the relationship between sub scales of social cultural capital with LOC was beyond the scope of this study, thus this can form another research to show which factors of social cultural capital are more related to LOC. Also, the predictive power of social and cultural capital in oral proficiency was ignored in this study; therefore, this factor might also be fruitful for future studies. In the end, researchers are recommended to examine the relationship between social and cultural factors and other related variables such as: attitude, and self-efficacy which seem to be highly related to social and cultural factors. We might have a better understanding of the role of these socio-cultural factors in FL learning research by finding any association between these variables and social and cultural factors.

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