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The Social Capital Theory in the Light of a Centre-Periphery Comparison

Summary: *The article examines the relationship between the social capital concept and school dropout rates from a global and multi-level perspective. Are there universal aspects of social capital that can predict dropout probability for at-risk young adults? If not, how do the correlations vary and to what extent can the differences be associated with variations in macro level state mechanisms in the context of the contemporary world's social system? These questions are discussed empirically using a data set of 138 at-risk young adults in Cameroon and Germany. The results of the study show relatively higher correlations for Germany compared to Cameroon. The article concludes that context matters and aspects of macro-level state mechanisms and political institutions have important influences on the levels and patterns of micro-level social interactions in societies. This implies that areas with standardized macro-level democratic institutions will find it easier to develop generalized trust as well as to have higher levels of social capital formation. The need for the creation of a more equitable social and economic development policy which counteracts the inequality that is inherent in centre-periphery relations is therefore highly recommended.*

Keywords: *Social capital, multi-level comparison, methodological nationalism, new inequality, centre-periphery relations, dropouts.*

Резюме (Брендан Нгелоо Абамуконг и Сольвейг Йобст: Теория социального капитала в свете сравнения центр — периферия): *Статья исследует связь между концепцией социального капитала и долей подростков, бросивших школу с позиции глобальной и многоуровневой перспектив. Есть ли универсальные аспекты социального капитала, которые могут предсказать вероятность «отсева» для подвергнувшихся опасности молодых людей? Если нет, то как варьируются корреляции и в какой степени различия могут быть соединены с вариациями и механизмами макроуровня в контексте современных социальных мировых систем? Эти вопросы рассматриваются эмпирически с использованием базы данных 138 «подростки группы риска» в Камеруне и Германии. Результаты исследования показывают относительно высокие корреляции для Германии по сравнению с Камеруном. Статья констатирует то, что контекстуальные вопросы и аспекты макроуровня, то есть государственные механизмы и политические учреждения, имеют важное влияние на социальные интеракции на уровне и образцы микроуровня в обществах. Это означает, что для сфер со стандартизированными демократическими учреждениями на макроуровне будет проще достигнуть всеобщего доверия и более высокого уровня развития социального капитала. Поэтому настоятельно рекомендуется создание более справедливой социальной и экономической политики развития, которая противодействует неравенству и является присущей отношениям «Центр-периферия».*

Ключевые слова: *социальный капитал, многоуровневое сравнение, методологический национализм, новое неравенство, «Центр-периферия», «отсев»*

Zusammenfassung (Die Sozialkapitaltheorie im Lichte eines Zentrum-Peripherie-Vergleichs): *Der Artikel untersucht die Beziehung zwischen dem Sozialkapitalkonzept und der Schulabbrecherate aus einer globalen und Multiebenen-Perspektive. Gibt es universelle Aspekte des sozialen Kapitals, welche die Dropout-Wahrscheinlichkeit für gefährdete junge Erwachsene vorhersagen können? Wenn nein, wie variieren die Korrelationen und in welchem Grad können die Unterschiede in Verbindung gebracht werden zu den Variationen und Mechanismen der Makroebene im Kontext der modernen Weltsozialsysteme? Diese Fragen werden unter Nutzung eines Datensatzes von 138 at-Risk-Jugendlichen in Kamerun und Deutschland empirisch erörtert. Die Ergebnisse der Studie zeigen relativ höhere Korrelationen für Deutschland im Vergleich*

zu Kamerun. Der Artikel stellt fest, dass Kontextfragen und Aspekte der Makroebene, also staatliche Mechanismen und politische Institutionen, einen wichtigen Einfluss auf soziale Interaktionen auf die Ebenen und Muster der Mikroebene in den Gesellschaften haben. Dies bedeutet, dass es Bereiche mit standardisierten demokratischen Institutionen auf der Makroebene einfacher haben werden, zu einem verallgemeinerten Vertrauen und einem höheren Level der Entwicklung des sozialen Kapitals zu gelangen. Die Schaffung einer gerechteren sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungspolitik, die der Ungleichheit entgegenwirkt und Zentrum-Peripherie-Beziehungen inhärent ist, ist daher sehr zu empfehlen.

Schlüsselwörter: Sozialkapital, Multi-Level-Vergleich, methodologischer Nationalismus, neue Ungleichheit, Zentrum-Peripherie, Aussteiger (Dropouts)

Problem description

For some considerable time now, international organizations and national governments regard education as a key to societal and individual development – e.g. as a way to peace (German Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013); as a medium for the formation of a supranational identity (Europa-Union Deutschland, 1995, p. 6) or as a lever of economic growth (European Parliament 2000, p. 3; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010, p. 3). In this context, calls for greater social equality in and through education are voiced not only by nation-states, which in the light of their histories would be nothing new but also by a number of international organizations with economic interests, such as the OECD (2006), the World Bank (involvement in the UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] Education for All Program) and the European Union (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2013), that integrate egalitarian aspects into their policies.

Considered critically, these egalitarian pronouncements by economic actors contrast with the educational expansion of the past, which showed clearly that despite the expanding importance of education, social inequalities are not being radically reduced (Mau & Verwiebe, 2009, p. 163; Shavit, Yaish, & Bar-Haim, 2007). Moreover, a trend can be observed universally that schools in both medium and large cities have experienced a high number of dropouts over the past decades, so that it is sometimes referred to as a crisis (Lamb et al., 2011). The growing number of school dropouts indicates a decreasing legitimation of the institution of schooling as well as processes of social, political and economic disintegration. To be more specific, school dropout can produce an increasing group of society members who are in danger of not contributing to societal development and who also risk their career opportunities and thus might have less positive professional trajectories – in the worst case they start criminal ‘careers’. Increase in unemployment rates as well as dependence on the social welfare of the state are some of the effects, among others. In the context of the current world’s social system one begins to question how such youths tend to do in peripheral zones where almost no such social-welfare services exist for every inhabitant, as is the case in Cameroon and other developing countries. While cameras of the Cable Network News (CNN) will never capture a child dying from lack of education, every day children, especially in developing countries, die from AIDS, malnutrition and other conditions that might have been prevented had their mothers had a chance to complete a basic quality education.

The factors responsible for persistent social reproduction in education systems have been extensively debated at the theoretical level since the 1960s and 1970s, and today, irrespective of the specific context, we encounter a whole bundle of explanations for why social inequalities develop in education. Theories do not only take into account the rational decision-making behavior of individual actors (e.g. Boudon, 1974), but also see a connection between processes in education systems and society (Bernstein 1973, 1990; Bourdieu, 1974; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Gramsci, 1971) and the cultural background of school students. However,

research on dropouts as well as (educational) research on inequality in general lacks multi-perspective analyses (e.g. concerning dropouts: Skrobaneck & Tillmann, 2015). The discussion is widely based on a perspective that does not consider the international dimension of inequality and thus reproduces “methodological nationalism” (e.g. Wallerstein, 1974; Kreckel 1990; Wimmer, 2003). It is this perspective of dominant theoretical thinking in the explanation of educational inequality that we would like to examine more closely in the following discussion. We will focus on the issue of school dropouts from a global and multi-level perspective by examining the social capital theory of at-risk youths. Are there universal aspects of social capital that can predict dropout probability for at-risk young adults? If no, how do the correlations vary and to what extent can the differences be associated with variations in macro-level state mechanisms in the context of the contemporary world’s social system? To begin, we will, following James Coleman, summarize the theory of social capital. This will result in the need to have a methodological approach that acknowledges the “global” structure of social inequality. In this sense, we refer to a multilevel comparative design with reference to Cameroon and Germany as two distinct examples within the modern world system (Wallerstein, 1974). The social capital theory is then empirically tested using a dataset of 138 school dropouts in two regions of the two countries. Finally, the findings are interpreted with regard to the questions and the ambiguities and opportunities to create an international understanding of social inequality within the political field of education.

Social capital theory and “methodological nationalism”

The social capital of a society is comprised of the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contributes to economic and social development (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001). In this context, the scope of the social capital ranges from micro to macro levels. The micro level includes face-to-face interactions between and among individuals as well as features of horizontal relationships such as networks of individuals or households. A macro-level scrutiny of social capital on the other hand will include the social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop. Included here are the most formalized institutional relationships and structures such as the rule of law, the political regime as well as civil and political liberty (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001). These micro- and macro-level conceptualizations are complementary and their coexistence maximizes the influence of social capital on economic and social outcomes. While macro institutions do provide and enable an environment in which local associations can develop and flourish, local associations on the other hand tend to sustain regional and national institutions, adding a measure of stability to them (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001).

But how is social capital related to education and more particularly the dropout issue? Although the term social capital originated as early as 1920, its initial theoretical development is mostly attributed to the sociologist James Coleman (Dika & Singh, 2002). He sees social capital to be inherent in the structures of relations between and among actors. He argues that social capital “is not a single action but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure” (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). The social structure that enables people to act consists of three forms of social capital: trust/expectations, information channels and social norms (Coleman, 1988). Coleman linked these sociological reflections to schooling and carried out one of the first studies that combines the fields of social capital theory and dropout (Coleman, 2000, 1988). In this study, he identifies a correlation between levels of social capital possessed by a student and the tendency to drop out of school before completion of high school. Among his findings were the following: students living with one parent are more likely to drop out of school than those living with two parents; increase in number of siblings leads to lesser amount of contact between parent and child and the

likelihood that a child will drop out of school increases for each additional sibling; students with mothers who expect them to go to college are more likely to complete high school than those whose mothers have no such expectations; and finally moving from one geographical location to another correlates with the likelihood of dropping out of school due to less inter-generational closure in the act of moving. With these results he points to the fact that parental human capital can only be transmitted to the children when the family structure includes social capital. Against this background it is widely believed that if the amount of time spent together between children and parents is relatively limited, the time for quality interaction will obviously be inadequate and the human capital of the parents cannot be transmitted to their children (Coleman, 1988). Though very valuable, parental human capital can sometimes be less relevant to the outcomes for children if employed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home. This implies that if the human capital of parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in and outside family relationships, then it turns out to be less germane to children's educational growth. In effect, the social capital that leads to human capital for children will include both the physical presence of adults as well as the attention given by adults to children (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004).

After Coleman different authors have carried out studies using the concept of social capital in diverse settings; some adopted his variables and others expanded and included other factors in their analyses (Drewry, 2007). The celebration of community in Coleman's interpretation, for example, has caught the eyes of scholars in other disciplines, such as Robert Putnam. A political scientist, he sees the concept as an attribute of community, a property of cities or nations (Dika & Singh 2002). Putnam has made use of the concept in a much more positive light, especially in his work on Italy, which tends to frame social capital as a producer of civic engagement (Putnam, 1993). He also transports social capital from a resource possessed by individuals to an attribute of collectives, focusing on norms and trust as producers of social capital to the exclusion of networks. Within the educational field the concept is used to underline the importance of intense, closed and durable networks as fostering conditions for educational success (e.g. Coleman 1984). Notwithstanding, social capital's role as a universal category in educational achievement and dropout seems to be taken for granted. This therefore needs to be seen from a more critical perspective.

Centre-Periphery Concept

The term "methodological nationalism" refers to "the naturalization of the nation-state by the social science" (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003, p. 576). In this context, the social capital theory can be seen as a nation-blind theory of modern education. Studies often take national-bounded societies for granted and neglect transnational and global processes. In the following, the centre-periphery model is described as an alternative approach that tries to cope with challenges of naturalization of nation states. The concept is seen as a spatial metaphor which illustrates and attempts to explain the structural relationships between an advanced or metropolitan centre and a less developed periphery either within a particular country or more commonly as applied to the relationships between capitalist and developing societies (Marshall, 1998). In the field of sociology, the centre-periphery concept assumes that the world system of production and distribution is the unit of analysis and also supposes that underdevelopment is not a simple descriptive term that refers to a backward, traditional economy but rather a concept rooted in the general theory of imperialism (Wallerstein, 1974; Marshall, 1998). The theory assumes that there exists a central core of capitalist countries in which the economy is determined by market forces, with a high organic composition of capital and relatively higher wages. Peripheral countries on the other hand are assumed to be having a low organic composition of capital, with wage levels not meeting the cost of production.

This perspective goes back to Wallerstein (1974). His key argument lies in the point that due to slightly different starting points, the interests of various local groups must have converged in North-west Europe, leading to its development of strong state mechanisms. On the other hand, it diverged sharply in the peripheral areas, leading to the establishment of very weak states. According to Wallerstein, therefore an alternative model with which to cope with “methodological nationalism” and to engage in comparative analysis should be to consider the historical context. This is not different from his illustration of the world capitalist economy in which he attempts to demonstrate that to be historically specific is not to fail to be analytically universal. Based on Wallerstein, it can be argued that the economic structures of contemporary undeveloped countries do not have the forms which they should have supposed to take as traditional societies, especially after being in contact with developed societies for quite a while. That is to say developing countries, which were for example previous colonies, relatively should be in an earlier stage in the industrialization process ‘*ceteris paribus*’. However, emphasis has been on the point that such states joined the world economy as peripheral raw-material producing areas and not as states in transition processes. According to Wallerstein, therefore the strengthening of state machineries in core areas has been detrimental to state machineries in peripheral zones. Continuous economic expansion of the core has therefore led to further weakening of the political and hence economic position of the periphery. In this sense, it can be argued that any fruitful comparative analysis of wholes and parts of the whole should have as the basic unit of observation a concept of world systems that have structural parts and evolving stages (Wallerstein, 1974).

In the following, the centre-periphery concept is used as a heuristic device, suggesting that capitalist society is organized globally rather than nationally (Marshall, 1998). In this respect, the term peripheralization also came into being as an attempt to advance the understanding of intra-regional differences (Bernt & Colini, 2013; Simon, 2012). The interest in any discussion on peripheralization is therefore rooted politically in the observations of rising disparities between growing and shrinking regions. Research strategies using this concept therefore need to find an appropriate balance between micro- and macro-explanations in the course of studies in spatial inequalities. People-based micro-level perspectives should therefore be helpful in better understanding agency, especially when combined with structural explanations that make similarities at the macro-level clearer.

It is in this sense that the centre-periphery concept can be used to replace the older hegemonic concept of first world/third world dichotomy. If the characteristics of the “third world” result not from the fact that it has lacked the opportunity to develop like the first world but from the fact that it was developed but only as a dependent part, a periphery of the centre (Wallerstein, 1974; Simon, 2012), it gives us a more non-hegemonic view of social reality. More important, the concept underscores the relationship between the affluence of the centre and the poverty, underemployment and increasing marginalization of the masses of the periphery. This affluence and that poverty are two sides of the same coin. The continuing underdevelopment of the periphery, resulting from the draining of raw materials, human resources and profits is therefore a prerequisite for the continuing development and increasing affluence of the centre. As we have mentioned above, this centre/periphery model applies not only between groups of nations but within nations. Thus, each developed nation consists of a centre and a periphery. Power, wealth and employment are concentrated in the centre. By contrast, the periphery is dependent and underdeveloped with a distorted economic structure, which leads to high levels of total or seasonal unemployment (Frank, 1978). A similar pattern is found in the dependent nations of the periphery, for within each of these nations, wealth, power and job opportunities are concentrated in the big cities and a great gulf separates these from the impoverished back country which constitutes their periphery. And as wealth and manpower are drained out of the countryside towards cities, the gap grows progressively wider. This article therefore springs from

the above discussion, seeing the interest in the usage of the centre-periphery concept which was provoked by rising disparities between nation states and bases its focus in attempting an appropriate balance between micro- and macro-explanations in the study of spatial inequalities.

Comparative analysis of Cameroon and Germany: A centre-periphery perspective

The results presented in this article are based on findings derived from a survey which is composed of paradigms in scientific theories that see the world as a social entity, trying to relate the logic of individual social actions to the structures in the macro-society (Jobst, 2010). The uniqueness of the paper therefore lies in its attempt to comparatively exemplify the micro-and macro-levels and relationships of the social capital theory. While Coleman's social capital theory (cf. Coleman, 1988; Israel & Beaulieu, 2001 & 2004) aided in illustrating a framework for micro-level interpretation, the macro-level interaction theory of Bjornskov & Svendsen (2003) guided the interpretation and enabled us to look at the data in a deeper and broader way. Bjornskov & Svendsen (2003), in their attempt at measuring social capital at the national (macro) level, see the term as a unitary concept, particularly involving the role of public policy in building social relations. Macro-level systemic factors were therefore defined as conditions that make social interaction possible. These included level of corruption; degree of centralization/ decentralization as well as extend of freedom of speech; equality, trust and civil liberty in societies (Bjornskov & Svendsen, 2003). This framework allows for the examination of the extant forms of relationships between young people on the one hand and their parents, schools and communities on the other at the micro level and subsequently linking the resulting differences to the influence of macro-level systemic factors in the respective countries under survey.

The empirical base of this analysis lies on the micro- (individual) level relationships of youths to their societies. According to the "most different systems design" (Przeworski & Teune, 1970), first factors that are valid are eliminated, regardless of the systems within which observations are made. Analysis was therefore shifted to the influence of macro-level systemic factors only when the formulation of valid general statements was no longer possible. Macro-level factors were therefore not given any special position among the predictors of behavior included in the study and therefore played no major role in the initial explanation of the observed behavior.

Although Cameroon and Germany differ at least with respect to geographical locations in the context of the contemporary world's social systems, all respondents for this survey were drawn from a homogeneous population made up of youths from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The assumption here was the point that social capital will correlate positively with schooling decisions irrespective of the societies or systems in which the youths live. Depending on results from micro-level evaluation, variables with differences in the forms and strengths of relationships were evaluated with respect to the influence of macro-level systemic factors in the individual societies.

The most different systems design therefore aims at seeking maximum heterogeneity in a sample of systems based on the assumption that in spite of intersystem differences, the population surveyed will differ only in a limited number of variables or relationships (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). As described by this research design, therefore as soon as additional valid statements could no longer be formulated across the two systems, the level of analysis was shifted towards the influence of macro-level systemic factors. Descriptive background data about the structures and influences of macro-level systemic factors as well as the cultural and legal conditions in Cameroon and Germany were therefore only considered at the analytical and interpretative stages of the paper in cases where differences were identified (Przeworski & Teune, 1970).

Data and methods

The following analysis is based upon a questionnaire carried out with 138 school dropouts in Cameroon (69) and Germany (69). Though no consensus exists on how to define a school dropout (Pallas, 2002), a dropout is considered to be someone who leaves school before high-school completion. For the purpose of this comparative survey, dropping out of high school was associated with a drop in status to and provided cumulative data on dropout among young adults within a specified age range. The participants therefore included young adults in the age ranges between 17 and 25, with a few above 25 years but not older than 30. In choosing the regions for this study, an effort was made to select marginalized or peripheral regions in both countries [2 English-speaking provinces (for Cameroon) and Magdeburg (for Germany)]. This is in line with the point that youths in marginalized zones have proven to be more at-risk of deviant behaviors among which is the act of educational disengagement.

“Snow-ball sampling” was used in getting contact to the participants. This technique was chosen due to its advantage as an ascending methodology for locating and bringing into focus citizens at the ground level, who are needed to fill knowledge gaps on a variety of societal contexts. Through this technique, it was possible to access populations previously hidden in society and it also helped in finding participants who initiated chain referrals with some initial respondents, engaging them as unofficial research participants (Akinson & Flint, 2001).

The questionnaires were prepared during a nine-month guest-research stay at the German National Youth Institute (DJI) in the city of Halle. The questionnaire content included questions dealing with the educational paths of the youths, their present situation as well as aspects of their social ties with parents, schools and the communities in which they live during school years. Those factors must have influenced their decisions to quit school before high-school graduation.

Due to the large number and diverse nature of the variables selected from the social-capital theoretical framework (cf. Coleman 1988; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004), a pre-evaluation analysis was carried out via factor analysis (principal-component analysis) with the main aim of data reduction as well as the construction of latent independent factors or variables which could help to reduce or eliminate the problem of multi-collinearity for further analysis to be possible. In doing so, the instruments for data measurement (such as Chronbach’s alpha, Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy as well as the Bartlett Test of Sphericity) were also validated and the level of generalizability and reliability of the findings estimated (Schöneck, 2005). The newly created latent and uncorrelated independent factors were now given values and used in the analysis for multiple linear regressions (forms of relationships) and multiple linear correlations (strengths of relationships) between the individual independent variables and the level of education attained by at-risk youths before disengaging in the schooling process, which was the dependent variable for the study (Schöneck, 2005). The findings were later on explained in relation to the main research questions and the focus research objectives of the paper.

Analyses and findings

To avoid multi-collinearity (Schöneck, 2005), all initial 27 research variables for this study were reduced to a smaller number (5) of newly derived latent and independent factors that were considered to be adequately summarizing the information in the original data set and could therefore be used for further analysis. This was followed by the usage of standardized scores of the newly created variables for multiple regression and correlation analysis. Factorial analysis therefore necessitated the revelation of patterns that could not be easily found in analyzing each original variable separately.

The 5 main factors retained for the final analysis were extracted with the help of the “Eigen values” and the “screeplot”. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was chosen as it met the following conditions (Kinner & Gray, 1995; Schöneck & Voß, 2005):

- The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy as well as the Bartlett Test of sphericity were at least .06.
- All variables retained each had an extracted communality greater than 0.50.
- The anti-image correlations of all retained variables were at least 0.50.
- Components 1-5 were selected as the main components for the study as they each had an “Eigen value” of 1 or above.

Table 1 below shows the newly created independent components that were used for the actual evaluation, their individual “Eigen values”, percentage of variance they each could explain, their newly allocated names and lastly the initial variables that summed up to form each of these components:

Table 1: Newly created independent latent components and their allocated names

Components	Individual “Eigen-Values”	Variance Explained in %	Newly allocated Names	Initial variables included in the component
1	2.899	22.300	“Economic viability”	“Level of family income”; “financial standing of extended family”, “number of children sponsored by parents”
2	1.819	13.991	“Peer-peer Interaction”	“frequency of visits paid to friends during schooling years”; “frequency at which friends paid you visits during schooling years” and lastly, “worried about being robbed or mobbed in the street in this area
3	1.460	11.234	“Parent-teacher-cooperation”	“parents felt confident and trusted teachers when communicating”; “school was solely responsible for my educational upbringing” and lastly “information given by teachers to parents was often difficult for them to understand”
4	1.165	8.961	“Parent-child-closure”	“Frequency at which school issues were discussed with parents”; “parents were informed whenever youth went out”.
5	1.011	7.777	“Mother’s Education”	“Level of education attained by mother”
		Total = 64.262%		

Source: self-designed from survey results (see also: Skinner & Gray, 1995; Schöneck & Voß, 2005)

Multiple linear regression and correlation analyses (Schöneck, 2005) carried out with these 5 newly created latent and uncorrelated factors showed some differences as seen in the following results:

- Component 1 (economic viability) showed positive and significant correlations for all German youths under core-peripheral classification. However, rural/urban classification showed positive correlations only for rural youths in Cameroon.
- For Component 2 (peer-peer-interaction), positive results were noticed under core/ peripheral groupings only for the German sample. When further grouped by gender, positive correlations were derived for both German males and females. However urban/ rural groupings showed positive and significant correlations for Cameroonian youths who were schooled in rural areas.
- For Component 3 (parent-teacher-cooperation), core/ peripheral classification showed positive and significant correlations only for the German sample.
- For Component 4 (parent-child-closure), gender classification showed positive correlations for the Cameroonian male sample.
- For Component 5 (mother's academic level), positive and significant correlations were identified under gender groupings for male youths in Germany. However, rural-urban groupings showed positive correlations for rural youths in Cameroon.

With regard to the strengths of relationships, almost no differences were noticed with respect to the percentage of variance explained by all variables for Cameroonian male (27.5%) and female (22.2%) participants in terms of gender. However, when compared with their German counterparts, great differences were witnessed with German respondents showing male (37.5%) and female (51.2%) variance. When grouped by core/ peripheral groupings, multiple correlation findings showed more percentage of variance explained by all factors for the German sample (23.6%) compared to (18.8%) for their Cameroonian counterparts. In terms of urban /rural differences in strengths of relationships, minor differences were identified in the percentage of variances explained by all variables between German urban (32.9%) and rural youths (49.7%). However, their Cameroonian counterparts on the other hand showed great differences in the percentage of total variance explained with more values for rural youths (66.0%) with very low values for their urban friends (06.9%).

The above findings therefore show relatively better correlations for youths in the centre (Germany) compared to their counterparts in the periphery (Cameroon). The results show that economic viability will affect youths similarly in the centre irrespective of gender and location but will only have significant influence on the schooling effect of rural youths in the periphery. Both parent-teacher-cooperation and peer interaction only correlate positively with school decisions for youths in the centre (German). Parent-child-closure correlated positively only for the schooling outcome for Cameroonians males while mother's education is positively attached to female educational outcome. In terms of strengths of relationships, lesser strengths were registered for the Cameroonian sample compared to their German counterparts. Higher strengths were however noticed for rural youths in Cameroon when classified under location but such differences in terms of location were not noticed in the German sample. How influential is the role of macro-level factors on these findings?

Discussion: Micro-macro relationships of the social capital theory

The discussion that follows springs from the variations in the observed behaviors at the micro level and helps to relate the role of macro-level factors to the above identified differences. Reasoning with Wallerstein (1974), Cameroon and Germany composed of two edges of the continuum of the Modern

World Social system, with the former showing characteristic features of the centre and the latter exhibiting features of the periphery. Viewing the world as a social system in a macro-sociological perspective (Adick, 2008), therefore the negative correlations recorded in the Cameroonian sample can in one way or the other be linked to macro-level systemic weaknesses in the country and vice versa to the positive correlations evidenced from the German sample.

To begin from a historical perspective, Cameroon had once been a colony under the German colonial rule (precisely between 1884-1916) before it was handed over under the United Nation's Mandate to Britain and France after Germany's defeat during the First World War (FWW). Cameroon's movement from 3 challenging phases of colonial domination, confrontation with threats against nationalism and negotiations as well as confrontation with the effects of globalization and the structural adjustment policies (SAP) of the World Bank and other donor institutions has put the macro state (just like many other peripheral zones of the world) in an in-between position with regard to education and its outcome. In acknowledging the mismatch between the African model of schooling, beginning with early group care and education of children, and Western institutional models, Nsameng & Tchombe (2011) for example bring to light the idea that education curricula in Africa seldom take to explicating their grounded subject-matter concepts and theories with which the beneficiaries of education see their cultural world and their ways of thinking, while engaging with the world (Nsameng & Tchombe, 2011; African Development Bank, 2009). This goes hand in hand with a negative country-information report from the Bertelsmann Foundation (2012), which describes Cameroon as a country with a corrupt macro-state. This is partly due to the existence of sub-standard and inadequate administrative facilities which tend to hamper transparency and easy transmission of administrative facilities in the decentralization process in the country, among other issues. The result of such macro-level state characteristics has been a growing loss of independent fate in community institutions. Inhabitants have therefore become more subordinate in institutions that they cannot control. These factors are not different from what Wallerstein (1974) describes as characteristic features of a periphery in the context of a capitalist world economy.

Moreover, the Legatum Prosperity Index (2012) classifies Cameroon to be a country where the majority of its people have little trust in others but have strong religious support networks (only 13% of Cameroonians for example thought that others could be trusted). The country is also portrayed as having a low performance of volunteer activities or giving to charity. Meanwhile the majority of its citizens have a high level of informal social engagement. Most Cameroonians therefore draw on the social networks provided by religion for support as 7/10 of them have for example recently attended a place of religious worship. Germans on the other hand are seen to be highly involved in community activities and societal trust levels are better (32% of Germans for example seem to trust others and 49 % have donated to charity). This also indicates higher levels of access to familiar networks as 90 % of Germans feel they can rely on family and friends in times of need (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012). Contrary to the situation in Cameroon, religious networks play a diminished role in Germany. In 2010, for example, only 1/3 of Germans had recently attended a place of religious worship. High community sensitization in most core countries can therefore indirectly give parents more encouragement to freely and positively discuss and work together with teachers and other educational stakeholders to the benefits of their children's schooling outcomes.

The point that children spend an increasing amount of time with their peers compared to their parents or other adults as they develop into adolescents is not debatable (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1974). However, peer influence is also likely to occur in less direct ways. Observing a friend's commitment to schoolwork or voicing a belief about the meaning of school could introduce an individual to new behaviors and viewpoints. Linking this to the negative correlation of peer interaction in the Cameroonian sample, it can be argued that lack of macro-level systematic socialization structures for

the proper welfare of the masses of the country's children (some of whom are raising themselves or are being raised by other children or minors) has put the Cameroonian youth in a relatively difficult position, especially in the global knowledge economy. In such circumstances, there seem to exist limited controlled and organized interactions facilities for peers and they tend to meet at random, mostly without parental knowledge. Since birds of the same feathers tend to always flock together, the majority of such interactive meetings between at-risk youths (due partly to the presence of poorly organized macro-level systemic socialization structures and activities) provoke them to engage more in deviant behaviors among which are educational-disengagement thoughts.

Peer interactions in most core regions on the other hand therefore tend to be officially controlled and this partly explains why such interactions can positively affect the schooling decisions of such youths. It can thus be said that the degree of interaction between teachers and parents in Cameroon is insufficient compared to that of their German counterparts, due partly to lack of trust and almost no interest in voluntary activities, caused partly by the corrupt and non-transparent nature of the macro state. Since social capital plays a major role in a society with high levels of trust, freedom of speech as well as community involvement at the macro-systemic levels, we do not expect better outcomes from the Cameroonian case, with less values of macro-level trust, freedom of speech as well as very low levels of community involvement in most decision-making processes in institutions.

The above goes hand in hand with the minimal level of state involvement in averting social risks as well as the existence of mostly family structures and other non-formal social solidarity networks that have remained the only major sources for reducing risks. Lack of democracy with a hybrid regime with almost authoritarian features as well as heavy restrictions of individual opportunities have also hampered the growth of macro-level social capital in Cameroon. For social-capital provision to be improved at the macro-level in Cameroon the Cameroonian macro-state should be willing and ready to increase the level at which it averts and alleviates social risk. The government should also willingly open up more chances for individual opportunities as this will motivate and encourage local leaders to assume not only the role of implementing what has already been decided by the centre, but also to assume decisive functions. This will in turn reduce the subordinate nature of such rural leaders. In accomplishing the above task, a state of decentralization will be empowered. By involving the local community in the organization of school life, for example, access will be facilitated to almost (if not) all children, particularly those in the most disadvantaged rural settings. By so doing, responsibilities will be given to decentralized local authorities and school councils will be better established for supervisory, monitoring and evaluative purposes. Decentralization can also be better implemented when regions and municipalities become more financially accountable with a corresponding mandate for reaching critical educational outcomes.

However the above recommendations will only be effective (being mindful of Cameroon's peripheral state in the context of the current world's social system) if grants by donor powers for educational purposes as well as the conditionality of the grants are reasonable and sustainable from the African perspective. This is because ambitious goals by global policy makers such as the goals of gender equity and poverty-reduction strategies of the United Nations are welcomed by most developing countries. Unfortunately, most developing countries have tended not to meet such targets. For such targets to be fruitful, especially in the African context, they should therefore be reasonable and sustainable in the African environment.

At times, not all that glitters is gold. Notwithstanding the positive effects of changes in the ways youths engaged in voluntary activities in most Western models, this has also come along with radical changes in the ways Western societies handle childhood and childrearing, among other issues. In

modern times, for example, Western approaches to child rearing have changed from viewing relations between adults and children primarily in terms of discipline and authority to focusing on permissiveness and individual rights (Livingstone, 2007). This has resulted in most Western children being prepared to become pleasure-seeking consumers within a prosperous new economy. Shifts in economic structures in the West have also led to profound changes in the organization of family life. The economic demands of a successful market economy have equally resulted in greater mobility, which in turn leads to less time for family life and a breakdown of the extended family. A rise in two-career families alongside mounting divorce rates have tended to increase the rate at which children get earlier exposed (at times even by parents) to adult experiences in order to survive an increasing uncontrollable world. Such "killer schedules" of parents may make them so busy that they have almost no personal time left for their children. This makes children lose a very important part of their lives - their childhood, as they tend to interact mostly with machines instead of with people. Also, with the continuous development of consumer-goods industries for children, childhood in most Western models has tended to be commercialized. Children are therefore given access to the world of adult information and entertainment. This has resulted in almost no difference between adulthood and childhood, leading to the occurrence of problematic childhood behaviors. It is therefore not a surprise that children and adolescents in the global West tend to be experiencing greater mental-health problems partly caused by such recent socio-cultural changes in the society (Livingstone, 2007).

Conclusions, implications and recommendations

From the above core/peripheral comparison, social capital is portrayed to be an abstract entity, something that is not distributed equally and diffusely over the entire social space like a sort of rainfall. In some places there is quite a great deal of it, while in other places this is a limited product. As concrete as human capital, social capital is clearly localized in social contexts. It is unevenly distributed and there are complex or complicating factors in the building of social capital. The more equitable the distribution of wealth in a country, the more trusting its people will be. Knowing how well a society's resources are distributed will therefore tell you a lot about trust in that culture. Therefore to make political institutions able to have a positive effect on social-capital levels, the character of bureaucracies and welfare-state institutions should be our primary area of interest. This implies that national differences in government and state capacity to monitor and direct a relatively impartial and fair bureaucracy can therefore help in providing a plausible explanation for national differences in social-capital levels. To be more precise, it can be said that aspects of social-capital provision that determine the quality and inclusiveness of service delivery and the fairness of political institutions can cause differences in institutional trust and attitudes toward politicians. This in turn influences generalized trust in societies. This entails that economic-cleavage structures must be taken into account in any attempt to explain the value of social capital in any given society.

The findings for this article also support the point that the relationship between the first and third world, in spite of the various cooperation and integration attempts, has been marked by great hope and even greater disappointment (Simon, 2011). The movement of peripheral states for example through three phases of colonial domination, confrontation with threats against nationalization and finally negotiation in globalization roughly parallels this distinction. Just like Wallerstein (1974), it would therefore be reasonable to argue in many important respects that the structure of underdevelopment has been created by centuries of association with the mercantile and colonialist nations. This implies that the issue of leadership crisis in the third world must be addressed squarely in order to achieve meaningful development. A focused, incorruptible and people-oriented leadership must therefore be desired and championed by the generality of the people of the third world, if the future dream of development is to be achieved. The impractical and encouraging connotations that are

linked with the role, function and effects of a large and lively civil society for democratic organization and economic development are, in a developing context, somewhat naïve if not simply wrong (Simon, 2011). Put simply, the one-size-fits-all approach that donors at times impose denies the idea that contexts matter. It seems thus quite utopian to want to create social capital as if it were a simple resource, a fixed outcome resulting from the investment in a given device.

Notwithstanding, the article has enabled the usage of a political culture as an explanatory variable in showing that countries with highly developed institutionalized welfare states are also those with the highest levels of social capital in cross-national comparisons. The article equally offers an opportunity for social capital to be looked at with both a national and a global (foreign) eye. This attention to global benchmarks can therefore aid, through its meliorist effect (Hörner, 1993), in ameliorating or promoting national policies in the social domain of education. The usage of the idiographic function of comparison equally offers an insight into reliable knowledge about the particular traits of social-capital formation in the two research settings. Readers in both contexts therefore have the opportunity to know what distinguishes the social correlates of their education systems from those of others and what can be emulated from other systems. This may also result in the demand of attention to factors that go beyond the local level.

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