Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (*IJAL*)

Vol. 20, No. 2, September 2017, 1-34

The Relationship between High School Students' Social Capital and Their Foreign Language Achievement: A Gender and Regional Variations Perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to compare the underlying measures of male and female high- school students' social capital in terms of regional variations and gender and investigate the relationship between those measures and the students' foreign language (FL) achievement. To this end, a number of 904 third-grader high school students (278 male and 626 female) from two educational districts (privileged district (PD) and less-privileged district (LD)) participated in the study. They filled out the Student Social Capital Questionnaire and took an English language achievement test. The results showed that the students in the PD outperformed their counterparts in the LD. Furthermore, group statistics and t-test results suggested variations among the groups of students in terms of such factors as mothers' involvement, institutional trust, intergenerational closure, and parents' educational aspiration. Pearson product-moment correlation indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between male and female students' participation in social networks and religious activities on the one hand, and their foreign language achievement on the other hand. However, there was a significant positive correlation between intergenerational closure and parents' educational aspiration and female students' English scores on the S-test. The findings have implications for families and school members to provide students with hopeful and positive aspirations and intimate family environments and learning environments, which can enhance their FL achievement.

Keywords: Social capital; Regional variation; Gender; Foreign language achievement

Article Information:

Received: 8 March 2017 **Revised: 20 July 2017** **Accepted: 28 July 2017**

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1. Introduction

Social capital (SC) is defined as the network of relationships among individuals (Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu (1985) defined SC as "the total extent and quality of social networks and connections that one uses to promote one's interests" (cited in Jager & Holm, 2007, p.723).The concept emerged in 1920, but its theoretical development is credited to Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1990). Educational researchers extended both Bourdieu's and Coleman's theories of social capital to explain educational achievement though these explanations were different (Dika & Singh, 2002).

To Bourdieu (1985), SC refers to resources or profits embedded within social connections in a social network, such as families, parties, or associations. In other words, SC, in Bourdieu's opinion, means the resources which individuals can access by spending time, energy, and effort during social exchanges among members of the community to reproduce social relationships (Smith, 2000). In this view, obligations and symbolic exchanges are necessary for the reproduction of SC (Smith, 2000). Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman (1988) conceptualized SC in terms of the role it plays in the creation of human capital. Coleman's SC which was related to human capital emphasized "the value of interpersonal connections to less advantaged groups…" (as cited in Scott, 2006, p.153).

Coleman (1990) believed that family and community characteristics could outweigh other factors, such as low income or belonging to a lower class of society, and he defined SC as "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or a young person" (p.154). In his view, the Bourdieu's (1986) concept of SC could not explain why students in some disadvantaged communities do much better educationally

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than their peers (Scott, 2006). Educational research frequently disputes the SC indicators proposed by Coleman, particularly parent-child-interaction and family structure variables (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Although different conceptualizations of SC have been put forward by theorists, they all include three fundamental aspects: trust, long-term or short-term obligations, and information exchanges (Smith, 2000). Generally speaking, SC accounts for the "how" and the "why" of a socio-economic position in a social network. That is, those who hand on these positions "mobilize by proxy the capital of an entire group, such as powerful family member, old pupils of elite schools, members of a select club, or the nobility" (Scott, 2006, p.153).

Indicators of SC can be classified as "proximal" and "distal". Proximal indicators reflect the outcomes of SC which are directly related to the core components like trust, reciprocity and civic engagement, while distal indicators are those outcomes of SC which are not directly related to the key components like life expectancy, health status, employment rates, crime rates, family income, and so on (Stone, 2001). Distal indicators cannot be considered as reliable indicators or measures of SC, but the combination of the two indicators is considered in the empirical analysis of the concept (Stone, 2001).

The concept of SC is matched with the social spaces and social groups (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu considered sociology as a "social typology" (p.325). Based on this definition, a person can simultaneously belong to two different groups which are sometimes opposite to each other, and, as Bourdieu maintains, the "knowledge of the position occupied in this space contains information as to the agents' intrinsic properties (their condition), and their relational properties (their position)" (p.725). According to Bourdieu, each institution or organization has a double existence: they exist, first objectively as a department or an association, and second as the hidden

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part which is their reality. They hide as much as they reveal and reveal only by hiding (Bourdieu, 1985).

Therefore, as any social organization, schools have their own multidimensional existence and two-faced reality. They are places where people are educated and prepared for their social lives, but they have a hidden reality within their existence, a hidden network of connections. Each student as a member of this small society simultaneously belongs to two different groups: his/her family and his/her school community. With a class of forty students being considered as a community, there will be forty different kinds of reality joined together in a network of connections which is called a classroom. These different social backgrounds which are the focus of this study can influence the process of learning and achievement.

1.1. Social capital and FL achievement

Coleman's theory of SC is instrumental and leads to the development of human capital (Smith, 2000). His theory states that some forms of SC, such as family norms and intergenerational closure promote educational achievement (Dika & Singh, 2002). Bourdieu's conceptualization of SC mostly deals with different experiences in schools which vary from person to person due to their race/ethnicity, class, and gender (ibid). He believes that education reproduces social stratifications and legitimizes the privileges of the dominant class, while the lower classes are faced with additional difficulties in schools (ibid).

In education, researchers attest the importance of recognizing individuals' social and cultural stratifications as highly conducive to different social and cultural experiences which, in turn, greatly influence their educational outcomes (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Prado, 2009; Schlee, Mullis, & Shriner, 2009; Tramonte &Willms, 2010). There is a growing body of literature on SC and its positive relationship with academic

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achievement and school persistence (Dyk & Wilson, 1999; Fergusson, Horwood, & Boden, 2008; Jager & Holm, 2007; Parcel & Dufur, 2009; Pishghadam, Noghani, & Zabihi, 2011; Smith, Beaulieu,& Israel, 1992; Wells, 2008), students' math scores (Bassani, 2006), and high school grades (DiMaggio,1982). Otter and Stenberg (2015) examined the availability (parents' support and guidance) and the utility (high mean grades) of SC. Analysis of the data from the Stockholm British Cohort indicated that parent-child interaction and parental support were positively related to the children's higher achievement (Otter & Stenberg, 2015).

In another study, Misra, Gimes, and Rogers (2013), using data obtained from the reports of the Mississippi Department of Education, investigated the relationship between existing SC from the perspective of regional boundary and school performance. The results indicated that the schools which were located in communities with higher stocks of SC proved significantly more effective than the schools with lower SC. For example, in a case study, Parcel and Dufur (2009) found a positive relationship among SC, reading, and female students' math achievement. Similarly, in another study, Anderson (2008) found a positive relationship among SC, reading, and math scores. Using data from tenth-grader students, Rosenbaum and Rochford (2008) found that the children from families with stronger between-members SC and high parental expectation (two important family SC indicators) achieved better scores in reading than the other skills.

In the realm of language learning, Bourdieu's ideas ignore learners' differential linguistic competencies resulting from social inequalities which are inherent in society and are reinforced by educational systems. Therefore, an external element should be added to language competence without which it cannot be understood. This element is the "power of the social class" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652). Accordingly, Bernstein (1996) argued that the restricted code in which the working-class children had grown up was the

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cause of their failure in the British educational system because they did not have access to the elaborated code, the language of the middle-class children, and the educational system. In line with Bourdieu, Smala, Paz, and Lingard (2013) argued that the native languages of immigrant families were marginalized in the English immersion program in Queensland secondary schools. This finding, again, emphasizes the power of language as a consequence of the SC of the elite community.

On a more grounded basis, the data from an ethnographic study on four Chinese families in Western Canada showed that family SC (parental investment, family income, interactions, and educational biography) and their community SC (resources and chances embedded in their social environment) had a significant impact on their children's second language acquisition (Li, 2007).The relationship of learners' social class and different capitals with their language learning is one of the most important issues which have been examined in the area of foreign language achievement. According to Pavlenko (2002), positive or negative attitudes toward language learning is directly related to the learners' social class and will affect their success in learning a new language. Song (2011) used a unique national U.S. sample to examine the direct and indirect effects of SC on psychological distress. In his study, age, gender, education, family income, race-ethnicity, occupational prestige, and voluntary participation as social factors turned out to be significantly related to distress; besides, voluntary participation was introduced by Solak and Cakir (2015) as a social-affective strategy in language learning.

Although researchers unanimously agree that the power of social class (the resources inherent in social networks) and language are inter-related, and it has become a truism to say that learners' relationships with their teachers, parents, peers, and siblings (SC) profoundly influence their

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language learning, not many studies have addressed SC in the area of second language acquisition.

1.2. SC and gender

In 2006, Oorschot, Arts, and Gelissen developed a SC scale and measured its multi-facetedness using data from the 1999/2000 wave of the European Values Study survey. The accumulated findings of human, economic, and social capital indicated that the latter was highly gender-sensitive and related to religious and political beliefs. Previous research on gender suggests that despite the quantity of social contacts (size of the personal contacts), the quality of women's connections in a social network differs from men's. To put it more precisely, women's networks are dense, include multiple types of kins and neighbors, while men's connections are composed of more friends, KKJ advisors, and co-workers (Fischer, 1982; Marsden, 1987; Moore, 1990). According to McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982), women are inclined to belong to more intimate and smaller networks, while men prefer larger and more formal communities. All in all, men tend to be attached to communities that can provide more opportunities for income, occupation, and status, while women like domestic and intimate networks (Smith, 2000). The consequences of gender differences in network structure could be seen in various fields, especially in education.

Gender socialization is partly due to the reproduction of social status in family networks (Hopcroft, 2005). Hopcroft (2005) found that there was a significant relationship between family investment (a SC factor) and the individual's status. That is, low-income families were more inclined to invest in girls, while high-status families invested in boys. Using cumulative U.S. General Social Survey (GSS), Hopcroft (2005) concluded that the girls of low-status families reach higher educational levels than boys, while in high-status families, the boys who do so. Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, and

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Wheeler (1996) stated that although girls constituted the majority of undergraduates, "they were outnumbered by the boys when it came to higher education" (cited in Hopcroft, 2005, p. 1112). Unlike Hopcroft's (2005) findings, Schoon and Polek (2011), using representative samples of the British population (n=6474 born in 1985 and n= 5081 born in 1970), found that females were more ambitious in their occupational aspirations than men and tended to have higher education. They asserted that more ambitious teens, who had received professional aspiration from their families, were more likely to pursue higher education in adulthood.

In addition, some studies indicated that parents treated their sons and daughters differently. Mothers were more sensitive than fathers about their children, especially their daughters: they attended PTAs (parent-teacher associations) more than the fathers did and, in terms of social participation, they were more authoritative toward their daughters than the fathers (Carbonaro, 1998; Dyk & Wilson, 1999; Furnstenberg & Hughes, 1995;Lopez, 1996; Mc Neal, 1999, Pong, 1998,cited in Dika& Singh, 2002; Sun, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996).

1.3.Gender and foreign language achievement

Research on the relationship between language and gender has increased significantly during the last decades. Many scholars have investigated gender differences in search for some explanation for the existing mismatch in achievement between male and female students (Wong, Lam & Ho,2002, cited in Fin & Ishak, 2012). Previous studies indicate that female students get higher scores than male students at the elementary, secondary, and upper secondary levels (Davis, 2007; Hunley, Evans, Delgado-Hachey, Krise, Rich, & Schell, 2005, as cited in Fin & Ishak, 2012). Stoet and Geary (2011), using data from four international assessments of the academic

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achievement of 1.5 million 15- year- old students (PISA), concluded that in 70% of the participating countries, girls outperformed boys in reading, mathematics, and science.

There is uncertainty about the stereotypical impression of the differences between girls and boys in language and math scores (Voyer &Voyer, 2014).To verify this impression, Hinnerich, Hoglin, and Johannesson (2011) submitted a Swedish language test to blind and non-blind grading. The results indicated zero discrimination effect. In both groups, the girls outperformed the boys in language scores. Moreover, Kaushanskaya, Marian, and Yoo (2011) found that women outperformed men in phonologically-familiar novel words. The follow-up study by Kaushanskaya, Gross, and Buac in 2013 on child word learning corroborated this finding. Moreover, the findings drawn from Voyer and Voyer's (2014) meta-analysis of 369 studies on gender differences in scholastic achievement suggested a larger female advantage for language scores though they found that the differences between male and female students in language achievement scores increased from elementary to middle school and decreased during high school and college. Taken together, these findings are interpreted as suggesting that females are more likely to outperform males in language achievement though there is no certainty to generalize the idea we are still far from being able to generalize this finding.

1.4. Social capital and regional and environmental variation

A crucial factor contributing to variations in SC measures relates to regional differences. It includes geographical mobility, length of residence, and social capital levels shaped by the regional residence (Dika & Sigh, 2002; Stone, 2001).This aspect of SC focuses on network resources as a

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characteristic of the elite group so that the unequal variations caused by region end in inequality in SC outcomes (Parcel & Dufur, 2009).

The two main environments which shape adolescent development are school and family. These two contexts interact to determine students' educational achievement (Crosnoe, 2004). In a multilevel modeling of nationally representative data (n=11,927), Crosnoe (2004) concluded that the more emotionally distant the students are to their parents, the less their academic achievement will be. In this study, he examined the effect of the social environments of schools on academic achievement and found a positive relationship between them. That is, the intimacy of the classroom and school environments and the popularity of the teachers that had created strong social connections between students and school staffs facilitated the students' FL achievement (Crosnoe, 2004). These social behaviors generally extend the home and school environments to the social community, since the relationships are reciprocal between the two contexts. As a result, any social network possesses its own underlying constructs which can influence its outcomes one of which is academic achievement.

The 1994 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data was used by Parcel and Dufur (2009) to explain the regional variation in math and reading achievement. The interpretation of the data revealed that regional differences accounted for the inequality in girls' math achievement and boys' math and reading achievements. Another study done in Poland showed that the regional variation and inequality in social borders caused variations in economic and social outcomes adverse relationships to academic achievement (Herbst & Rivkin, 2013). Seta, Pipitone, Gentile, and Allegra (2014) made use of the PISA (2009) data to propose a model for explaining Italian regional differences. Part of the results indicated that there was a meaningful relationship between the quality of the educational system and regional variability.

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Gender differences, regional variation, SC, and the effect of SC measures on attainment have been investigated separately in different studies. But, to the researchers' knowledge, the relationships among these indicators and language achievement in an EFL context have not yet been investigated. While previous research on SC and its effects on school outcomes has generally remained unspecified in orientation, the present study focuses on the SC factors and their variation in gender and educational regions in relation to foreign language achievement. It aims to investigate the effective underlying constructs of SC in relation to foreign language achievement with respect to gender and regional differences at high-school level. In other words, the study is intended to investigate whether gender and regional differences are related to SC, and whether SC is related to learning English as a foreign language. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between male and female high school students' SC measures and their English language achievement scores?
2. Is there any significant relationship between SC measures and students' English achievement scores in different regional districts (privileged and less-privileged)?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were initially 1119 students. They were third-grader high-school students studying in state schools in two different educational districts (Privileged and Less privileged) in Mashhad. But, as 215 incompletely or spuriously filled out questionnaires and answer sheets had to be put aside, an ultimate number of 904 students (278 boys and 626 girls) remained as the eventual participants of the study.

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Table 1
The participants of the study

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Privileged Districts	478	52.9
Less Privileged	426	47.1
Total	904	100.0
Boys	278	30.8
Girls	626	69.2
Total	904	100.0

According to the Ministry of Education of Iran, the Privileged District (PD) is a regional boundary in the city where students benefit from more advantages compared to the Less Privileged districts (LD). They are equipped with facilities, such as science labs, conference rooms, library, and computer labs, and their teachers are more experienced and competent in comparison to teachers in the schools of LDs. High-school level was selected in this study since the social connections will be renewed in university setting, and the role of parents which is a very important factor in indicating the SC measures will lose its color at university level (Nerri & Ville, 2008). Consequently, the relationship between SC and foreign language achievement will become less significant at upper educational stages (Wells, 2008).

2.2.Instrument

Generally, the researchers have studied SC measures in terms of different factors and collected data through questionnaires. They have gathered other background information from cohort or national data banks on the

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participants' history (e.g., Herbst & Rivkin, 2013;Nerri& Ville, 2008; Wells, 2008). However, as there was no data bank in the context of Iran and the researchers did not have access to the participants' history, they had to use an acculturated sensitive questionnaire to measure SC. Two main instruments were used for collecting the data. First, the Student SC Questionnaire (SCQ) was used to assess the students' social capital measures. It was developed and validated by Khodadady and Farrokh Alaee in 2012. It comprises 47 items measuring 10 underlying constructs of high-school students' SC (Table 2). The internal consistency of this scale was estimated through Chronbach's Alpha, which turned out to be .89, and the reliability indexes of its subcomponents ranged between 0.57 to 0.74.The validity of the scale was checked through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy and the Bartletts' test of Sphericity which yielded an acceptable validity index, KMO = 0.87. The first seven items reflect distal indicators of SC, except for items "B" and "C" which refer to the length of residence and are proximal. The rest 40 items measure both distal and proximal indicators (mostly proximal ones) and are answered on a six-point Likert scale format, ranging from 1(*never*) to 6 (*always*).

A pilot study was conducted on 706 high-school students to indicate the SC measures, where the necessary modifications were made to the questionnaire and the main indicators of SC were analyzed (Khodadady & Farrokh Alaee, 2012). The SCQ used in this study is an acculturated questionnaire designed based on other previous studies done by sociologists and researchers for indicating the most frequent measures of SC including family income, geographic mobility or length of residence, parents' education and their familiarity with a foreign language, number of siblings, elders' educational degree, type of house, parents' roles (length of existence at home and their educational aspiration, parent-child discussion, family structure, family educational aspirations, and their expectations), family

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cohesion, friends' expectations, visiting relatives, the extent of parental acquaintance, telephone conversation, religious participation, participation in extracurricular activities, students' attitude toward their schools and teachers, trust, being valued by the society, school quality, and social stratification (Anderson, 2008; Blaxter, Poland, & Curren, 2001; Camro, 2009; Crosnoe, 2004; Dika & Singh, 2002; Garmon & Lopez-Truly, 2005; Jager & Holm, 2007; Parcel & Dufur, 2009; Smith, Beaulieu, & Israel, 1992). The indicators presented in the current studies on SC correspond to those in the SCQ (Jha, Boudreaux, & Bonerjee, 2018; Maness, 2017; Yildizer, Bilgin, & Korurand Novak, 2018).

Table 2

Factors constructing the SCQ

	Areas	**items**
1.	Parents' educational aspiration	3,4,5,6,10,11,12
2.	Social interactions	16,17,18,19,20,21
3.	Mother's involvement	5,8,13,14,15
4.	Sense of social belonging	26,32,33,34,37,38,40
5.	Social trust	28,29,30,31
6.	Participation in social networks	19,23,24,25,28
7.	Intergenerational closure	4,5,6,9,35,40
8.	Institutional trust	26,27,28,36,39
9.	Religious participation	22,23,24
10.	Family household	1,2

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The second instrument utilized in this study was the S-test which is a schema-based cloze multiple-choice test (S-test). It was developed and validated by Khodadady, Pishghadam, and FarrokhAlaee (2012) based on the materials covered in *English Book* (3) for high-school students (Birjandi, Nouroozi, & Mahmoodi, 2010). It consisted of 6 reading passages followed by 43 multiple-choice items.

Schema-based cloze multiple-choice test (S-test) is a kind of multiple-choice cloze test in which the answers are syntactically and semantically related (Khodadady, 2009). The words constituting a text are part of the schemata of that given text which can be understood by analyzing their semantic features. In a study done by Khodadady (2009), the comparison of traditional content-based MCIT and schema-based MCIT showed that the former is reliable, whereas the latter enjoys both high reliability, and empirical and theoretical validity (SBMCIT: Mean=19.54, SD=4.48, Kurtosis= -.006, alpha= .61; traditional MCIT: Mean=34.00, SD= 8.73, Kurtosis= -.03, alpha= .84).

In this study, the types and tokens of domains, genera (subcategories of domains) and species (subcategories of genera)of the schemata of the readings in the English Book (3) were measured(syntactic types 70%, syntactic tokens 47.3%, semantic types 19.7%, semantic tokens 45.1%, para-syntactic types 10.1% and para-syntactic 10.5%), and regarding the use and usage in the texts, following Khodadady (2009), 81.4% semantic schemata and 18.6% syntactic schemata were chosen and deleted from the paragraphs in the S-test.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

To collect the data, the participants were required to answer the SCQ and the S-test at the end of the academic year. The data gathered from the questionnaires were fed into the SPSS software version 16.0 for analysis

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and extraction of the factors. A series of independent-samples *t*-tests were used for comparing the group means on the S-test and the SCQ. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to check the underlying factors of language achievement variation in the population.

3. Results

3.1. The results of the S-test

The *t*-test results showed that there was no significant difference between the girls and the boys in language achievement (*P*=.060>.05). However, a significant difference was observed between high-school students in the PD and those in the LD (p=.043<.05).

3.2. The t-test and correlational analyses

To explore the different underlying factors in both male and female groups, the group means obtained from the questionnaire were compared using the independent-samples *t*-test. The results revealed significant differences between girls and boys in factor 3 "Mother's involvement" (*P*= .000< .05), in factor 5 "Social trust" (*P*=.000<.05), in factor 6 "Participation in social networks" (*P*=.009<.05), and in factor 8 "Institutional trust" (*P*=.008<.05) across the two Districts, indicating that the boys' SC measures differed from those of the girls.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient showed negative significant correlations between factor 6 "Participation in social networks" and factor 9 "Religious participation" on the one hand, and the English scores in male and female groups on the other hand, indicating a reverse relationship between these two factors and boys' with foreign language achievement(Table 3).

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Table 3

Correlations between SC factors and the English scores in the male group

		Score from 43
Religious participation	Pearson correlation	-.332
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	272
Participation in social networks	Pearson correlation	-.179
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
	N	272

Similarly, in the female group, the results indicated that factor 1 "Parents' educational aspiration" and factor 7 "Intergenerational closure" were significantly positively correlated to the English scores, while this significant relationship for factor 9 "Religious participation" and factor 6 "Participation in social networks" was negative, indicating a reverse correlation of social and religious participation with foreign language achievement in this group.

Table 4

Correlations between SC factors and the English scores in the female group

		Score from 43
Parents' educational aspiration	Pearson correlation	.203
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	624
Intergenerational closure	Pearson correlation	.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	625
Religious participation	Pearson correlation	-.129
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	624
Participation in social networks	Pearson correlation	-.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	625

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Table 5

SC factors and FL achievement comparisons across PD and LD (Independent-samples t-test)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									lower	upper
F1 "parents 'educational aspiration"	Equal variances assumed	18.58	.000	4.727	894	**.000**	.299	.063	.175	.423
	Equal variances not assumed			4.656	785.3	**.000**	.299	.064	.173	.425
F6 "participation in social networks"	Equal variances assumed	7.25	.007	-6.798	895	.000	-.433	.063	-.558	-.308
	Equal variances not assumed			-6.852	894.4	**.000**	-.433	.063	-.557	-.309
F7 "Intergenerational closure"	Equal variances assumed	15.13	.000	2.835	895	.005	.200	.070	.061	.338
	Equal variances not assumed			2.809	833.9	**.005**	.200	.071	.060	.339
F9 "religious participation"	Equal variances assumed	6.21	.013	-9.374	893	.000	-.696	.074	-.842	-.550
	Equal variances not assumed			-9.436	892.9	**.000**	-.696	.073	-.841	-.551

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The *t*-test results indicated significant differences between factor 1, factor 6, factor 7, and factor 9 with respect to both groups' foreign language achievement in the two Districts (Table 5).

The results indicated that the high school students in the PD cherished higher educational aspiration (F1) and had more intergenerational closure (F7) than their counterparts in the LD, while the high-school students in the LD participated in social (F6) and religious networks (F9) more than those in the PD.

4. Discussion

The study aimed to explore the relationship between male and female high school students' social capital measures and their foreign language achievement in terms of gender and regional variations. To this end, the underlying factors of SC were measured and compared in both groups and regions. The results of the analyzed data showed that there wasn't any significant difference between the high school students' (males and females) SC in the two Districts in general, while there were differences in some underlying factors. Five items in the SCQ (5, 8, 13, 14 and 15) accounted for Factor 3 "mother's involvement" and dealt with parents' especially mothers' supervision of school affairs. The results showed that the girls' mothers were more involved in their school affairs than the boys' mothers. The findings of this study agree with other previous studies in terms of the difference between girls and boys (Carbonaro, 1998; Dyk & Wilson, 1999; Furnstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Lopez, 1996; Mc Neal, 1999; Pong, 1998, cited in Dika & Singh, 2002; Sun, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996), showing the more authoritative parenting role of mothers about their daughters. The difference between girls and boys in this factor can be due to cultural differences and beliefs about the social context of the study. In non-Western societies, more personal freedom is granted to males than females (Wainryb, 2006, cited in Assadi, Smetana, Shahmansouri, & Mohammadi,

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2011). This belief and legitimized freedom given to males may cause boys' rebellion against their mothers' restriction (Assadi et al., 2011) which reduces the controlling role of mothers.

Factor 5 "social trust" and Factor 8 "institutional trust" include the key component of SC, i.e. trust (Stone, 2001). F5 was measured by four items(28, 29, 30, and 31), i.e. the help, support, advice, and trust embedded in social networks (Anderson, 2008) and F 8 "institutional trust" by five items (26, 27, 28, 36 and 39) which represented another type of trust, the one that goes beyond the small networks of school and family. It implies the students' and their parents' trust on the schools and academic members. These factors showed significant differences between girls and boys, indicating that boys' SC measures differ from girls' since they participate in social networks, and trust institutional organizations and people more than girls. The differences in these factors are somehow due to the cultural and social differences between males and females. As Smith (2000) convincingly argued, females are inclined to belong to the smaller and more domestic networks, while males tend to win the membership of the larger communities, such as organizations. Belonging to a social network, small or large, requires one to take into account its three fundamental aspects: trust, long-term or short-term obligations, and information exchange (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988). Moreover, Norris and Inglehart (2003), scrutinizing structural and cultural dimensions of SC, asserted that men are more trusting than women in their social interactions.

Comparison of group means on the S-test showed that there wasn't any significant difference between boys and girls in the scores. This finding agrees with the general conclusion suggested by Hemmati and Sharifi (2018) in their meta-analysis of 177 gender-related studies that gender has no significant effect on language learning. But, it is at odds with those in other previous studies which have provided evidence for female students'

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superiority in language achievement in comparison to their male counterparts (e.g., Davis, 2007; Hunley et al., 2005, cited in Fin & Ishak, 2012; Stoet & Geary, 2011; Voyer &Voyer's 2014).

The comparison of the PD and LD group means on the S-test showed significant differences. That is, the high school students in PD outperformed their counterparts in LD in foreign language achievement. The results echo Contreras's (2005) view about the importance of input for achievement and the gaps in achievement.

Correlational analyses indicated a significant negative relationship between the F6 "Participation in social networks" and the F9 "Religious participation" on both girls' and boys' scores on the S-test. The findings revealed that participation in informal networks (visiting neighbors, participation in extracurricular activities, and consulting with the teacher: items 19, 24, 25 and 28) and religious communities obviously leave less time to study. In an analysis of formal and informal social participation in the Netherland, Ingen and Eijck (2009) came up with similar results and concluded that the more people spend time on social activities, the less they tend to work or watch television. According to Sol, Beers, and Wals (2013), trust can lead to social interaction and pave the way for social learning. The improvement of social behavior will enhance the emergence of an intimate and trustable environment for both family and school members, which leads to higher achievement (Anderson, 2008; Crosnoe, 2004). Contrary to expectations, the students' participation in social networks negatively correlated with their foreign language achievement.

Religious involvement in previous studies (Benson, 2004; Chamberlain & Zika, 1992; Gorsuch, 1988; Pargament & Park, 1995; Snell, 2009; Ventis, 1995; Wagener, Furrow, King, Leffert, & Benson, 2003, cited in Krauss, et al., 2012) was mostly associated with higher support, resiliency, encouragement, and thriving in youth groups. Religion was considered as a

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"control or prevention mechanism" to decrease youths' involvement in negative and high-risk communities (Benson, 2004, cited in Krausset al., 2012, p. 203). Besides, it reduced adolescents' stress and problematic behavior (Wagener et al., 2003, cited in Krausset al. 2012). All these studies on religiosity and behavioral outcomes were done in the Western settings, and a paucity of research exists to explore this contribution in Muslim, non-Western communities. French, Eisenberg, Purwono, and Suryanti (2008) found that Islamic involvement was associated with higher emotional control and academic success (cited in Krausset al., 2012). Krauss et al.(2012) echoed the same idea of the promoting role of religious involvement in youths' success in the Islamic context of Malay. Drawing on this literature, the expected findings on religious participation should indicate positive correlation to language scores. Contrary to expectations, however, the result was negative. These findings are generally consistent with those in Khodadady and Mokhtary (2013) who found a negative correlation between religious commitments and Iranian students' FL scores. The results call for a more elaborate and comprehensive study in the EFL Muslim contexts.

Furthermore, participation in religious activities, to some extent, reveals cultural values and beliefs. Learning a second language requires learning a second culture, and the more there exist social distance and cultural dissimilarities between two languages, the more difficult the learning will be (Brown, 2007). Since Persian and English have dissimilarities in cultural and religious values and beliefs, those who have internalized their own cultural beliefs and religious ideas have more difficulty in learning the second language, here English. This may be the cause for the negative correlation between English scores and participation in religious activities among the samples of the study.

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"Parents' educational aspiration" (F1) and "intergenerational closure" (F7) reflect the intimate family environment and correlated positively with the language scores in the female group. The study supports the findings in Pajoluk (2013), who asserted that family cohesion and siblings' intimacy and support are predictors of academic achievement and higher GPA in adolescent groups.

Correlational analyses revealed that there were significant differences in the constructing factors of the SC measure in the two Districts (PD and LP). F1 "Parents' educational aspiration" and F7 "Intergenerational closure" were positively correlated with their English language scores in the PD. The PD parents' concerns about and intimacy with their children led to their children's higher achievement in English. Along similar lines, Walkey, McClure, Meyer, and Weir (2013)showed that educational aspirations were significantly related to different patterns of motivation, affiliation, and attributions predictive of academic achievement. Moreover, certain authors (e.g. Carroll, Houghton, Wood, Unsworth, Hattie, Gordon, & Bowe, 2009; Sosu, 2014; Vryonides & Gouvias, 2012) support the notion that parents' educational aspirations positively influence their children's academic achievement.

As shown previously, F6 "Participation in social networks" and F9 "Religious participation" were negatively correlated with the language scores in both male and female groups. Correlational analyses indicated that high school students of the LD participated in social networks and religious activities more frequently than their counterparts in the PD. These social participations rendered them underachievers in comparison to the students of the PD.

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5. Conclusion

The present study examined the concept of SC in relation to gender, English language achievement, and regional variation in the novel and unexplored context of Iran. In this study, the differences between high school students' SC measures in terms of gender and regional variations were investigated. The findings reveal certain differences among the four groups: the girls, the boys, the students in the PD, and the students in the LD. Moreover, it sought to specify the underlying constructs of SC which are correlated with English language achievement. In summary, social and religious participation turned out to be negatively correlated with the English language scores of both male and female groups in both districts, while parents' involvement, educational aspirations, and intimate relationship were positively correlated with the English language scores. Overall, not only do the results provide evidence for to the claims made by Bourdieu who believed in the reproduction of social inequalities, but they also call for further studies to address Coleman's idea of the moderating role of education. This idea, again, supports the notion proposed by Scott (2006) who interpreted Bourdieu's (1977) and Coleman's (1988) conceptualizations of SC at individual and community levels. Bourdieu's (1977, p.563) notion of "reproduction of social inequalities" cannot explain how some individuals of disadvantaged communities perform better educationally in comparison to elite groups, while Coleman's (1988, p, 101) notion of "human capital" attributes these exceptions to family norms and individual effort.

The findings have implications first for families to provide their children with hopeful and positive aspirations and intimate family environment and second for the school members to make a close relationship with the families and the students. The suggestions here pertain to the analysis of more items on religiosity to explore respondents' perceptions of religious participation in Islamic settings. Another issue that needs further

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investigation is the exploration of the predictive underlying factors of SC with respect to foreign language achievement.

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