

# Differential parental social capital investment in children's education: Research evidence

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## ABSTRACT

When parents bring forth children, they perceive and act on their upbringing. However, some children live with and are brought up by non-biological parents. The phenomenon of children living with non-biological parents has been a long standing practice in most societies, yet little comparative research interest had been shown to examine the involvement of real and pseudo parents in children's education. The study sought to fill the lacuna by examining differential family social capital investment in children's education. Cross-sectional survey was utilised to study children from three geographical settings and data was gathered from administration of survey instrument. Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS), version 20, was used to analyse the data. Several findings emerged from the study. Firstly, the study unveiled moderate manifestation of social capital in the families of the study subjects. Secondly, there was a relatively high rate of pseudo parenting, which means that a good percent of the children were not living with their real parents. Thirdly, the results revealed that pseudo parents did not commit much time and energy into their wards' education as much as the real or biological parents did for their children. Fourthly, parents residing in urban centres tended to socially invest more in their children's education as opposed to their counterparts in the other communities. Consequently, parents, irrespective of their status and community of residence, are urged to demonstrate much interest and participate in their children's education.

**Keywords:** Social capital, real and pseudo parents, rural, peri-urban and urban communities, parental involvement in education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The essence of enrolling into formal education is to acquire certain levels of competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, otherwise considered as learning outcomes. Learning outcomes range from academic to social competence. Parents, therefore, enrol their children into schools with the aim of the children acquiring academic and social competencies that would make them productive and fit well into the social world. The academic and social competencies that students acquire in school are supposed to help them live useful and productive life and to become useful to themselves, their families and the general society. According to Farrant (1980), education is supposed to develop the three domains of learners, which are cognitive, psycho-motor and affective. Invariably, in

school, students are expected to gain two main competencies, which are academic and social. These competencies do not emanate from only the efforts of teachers and school authorities, but also from parents and significant others in the life of the children. Both anecdotal and empirical evidence demonstrated that parental involvement in education is vital in children's academic attainment (Henderson and Mapp, 2002, Burrow et al., 2004, Wright and Willis, 2004, Szente, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2007; Fasang et al., 2010). These researches unveiled that those children whose parents were involved in their education excelled in school. Parents' participation in education makes children interact with their parents, which aids to identify and remove factors that interfere with student learning and

performance (Warren and Felt, 2008). This standpoint underscores the call on parents to support the school to provide good and holistic education for children. It has been found that educators believe they cannot do it alone (Wilson et al., 2004).

### Concept of social capital

Social capital refers to the resources inherent in the relationship between actors. The resource inherent in the social relationship with people is regarded as social capital and it possesses potential to be transformative (Weller, 2006; Willer and Bruegel, 2009). The various kinds of social capital include peer social capital, teacher social capital, school social capital, family or parental social capital and community social capital. According to Coleman (1988), family social capital refers to the resources inherent in parents and children relationships that enhance success in education.

Since the conceptualization of social capital, several ideas have emerged, which have been testified to by innumerable researchers. Social capital is acclaimed to provide people with resources, information and access to various means of socio-economic advancement to children (Grodsly et al., 2008). Parental social capital includes monitoring and supervision of children's activities at home and in school. It is recognised that parents assist their children beyond the frontiers of the immediate family to include most activities in the school system (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Epstein, 2001). There are several talents within the family and opportunities outside the classroom, which are useful to student and school. This is because the family is a great resource to teachers and no matter where they teach, families guarantee resources for human experience (Rogovin, 2001).

Family social capital is said to include parents asking about their children's progress at school, monitoring and supervising children's study at home, finding out children's problems and assisting them at home, explaining the contribution of education to socio-economic success to children and stimulating children to devote time to their studies (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). They continue that parental involvement could be in the form of provision of secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship, participation in school events, participation in the work of the school and participation in school organisation. The relevance of social capital ranges from academic competence through social competence to healthy development. Spence et al. (2003) testify to the fact that social capital is essential for healthy development. We think that social capital enhances mental scaffolds to children's total development. The

influence of social capital on various aspects of student development makes it expedient for more rigorous and scientific investigation into whether all kinds of parents provide opportunities for their children to access social capital for the latter's holistic development.

### Categories of children

As has been noted, in practical life, children may or may not live with their real parents during their formative years. In reality, apart from children who live with their real parents, adopted parents and in institutional care homes, there are those who live with relatives and non-relatives, who do not fit for the description of adoptees. In this paper, such children are termed as wards who stayed with pseudo or non-biological parents. Wards are a category of children who via informal arrangements find themselves with non-biological parents. They stay with the pseudo parents either temporary or for good. However, wards tend to maintain relationship with their relatives in the course of their stay with the pseudo parents. There are reciprocal visits by wards and relatives. It was curious to realise in the literature that there are no measures that safeguard and protect children who by informal means end up staying with pseudo parents. Nonetheless, there are ample measures in favour of adopted children. One of such protective measures for adopted children is the stringent process of adoption instituted by countries and international bodies. Farr et al. (2010) affirm that adopted parents usually undergo a demanding screening before finalizing an adoption process. Undoubtedly, same cannot be said about the process of wards getting into the hands of pseudo parents. Again, there are some safeguarding principles that have been purposefully entrenched as permanent considerations in all issues concerning child adoption (United Nations, 2009). This means that children who have been adopted enjoy some protection even at the international level. Regrettably, same can hardly be argued to exist for wards who live with pseudo parents.

Again, a lot of research interest has been shown in adopted children's welfare in general and their education in particular. Some of such studies are Lansford et al. (2001), Whitten (2002), Burrow et al. (2004) and Toussaint (2008). Van Ijzendoorn et al. (2005), for instance, sought to compare the academic achievement of adoptees and those who remained in institutional care homes. The study revealed that the adoptees had a better performance than those who remained in institutional care homes. There was, however, paucity of research efforts expended to study issues that concern children who do not live with their real parents, adopted parents nor live in institutional care homes. The desire to unravel the parental involvement in children's education by real and pseudo parents is a reason that precipitated

this scientific inquiry.

Another issue that triggered this research was differential parental involvement in children's education by parents in varied geographical settings. Much had not been done to examine social capital investment in children's education by parents residing in urban, peri-urban and rural communities. Parents living in diverse geographical settings are confronted with different demands, which could impinge on their relationships with their children.

## Research questions

The study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of children and wards' parents?
2. To what extent do parents manifest social capital at home?
3. To what extent do real and pseudo parents socially invest in their children's education?
4. To what extent do parents in rural, peri-urban and urban communities socially invest in children's education?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study design

The study was designed on quantitative dimension and utilised descriptive cross-sectional survey. The survey design aided to unravel manifestation of social capital across the students' homes. It also aided in examining manifestation of social capital across geographical settings.

### Population and sample

The study utilised students who were in their formative years of development and in the junior high school. They were in their developmental stage where supervision, guidance and assistance for their academic work were still needed. The adolescents were living with real and pseudo parents in urban, peri-urban and rural communities in Ghana.

Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to successively select the study subjects while observing the necessary research protocols. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were adopted to select male and female students from rural, peri-urban and urban communities in the jurisdiction. The schools and students from the various communities in the southern, middle and northern belts of Ghana were used. In all, 54 basic schools, 18 from each of the regions which were involved in the study. Clearance was sought from heads of the selected schools prior to administration of the research tools while oral permission was sought from the students.

### Instrumentation

The study utilised questionnaire titled *Social Capital and Parenting*

*Style Questionnaire (SCPSQ)*, which was made up of mainly close-ended items to elicit factual data about parental involvement in children's education. The instrument was pre-tested in three towns, which were urban, peri-urban and rural in nature from a different region, which did not form part of the main study. The pre-testing was conducted to check for the validity and reliability of the research tool. Cronbach alpha reliability was used to ascertain the reliability co-efficient, which was found to be 0.87. There was a high return rate as 1,755 of the 2,265 questionnaires were returned.

Again, factor analysis was carried out to derive the major components of the social capital concept to enable further analysis. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was estimated prior to performing Principal Component Analysis (PAC). The correlation matrix disclosed that most of the co-efficients were above .3, which is a rule of thumb. The statistical analyses aided to derive items that were very much essential for further analysis to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. These processes contributed in ensuring high validity of the instrument.

### Data analysis

The data gathered was taken through sound data processing and management. The primary data gathered was screened and edited before analysis. Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS), version 20 was adopted for the analysis of the data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were run to describe the respondents and check the differential parental social capital investment in children's education. The descriptive statistics used were frequency counts, means and standard deviation and the inferential statistics employed were independent samples t-test and One way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to ascertain differences in the social capital investment in children and wards' education by real and pseudo parents. With regard to the testing of differences in social capital provision by parents domiciled in the urban, peri-urban and rural communities, ANOVA was used and Tukey's Post-hoc test was run to locate where the differences lied.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic characteristics of the children and wards' parents

The study sought to identify the socio-economic status of families of the study respondents by considering rate of pseudo parenting, community of residence, parental educational attainment and parents' occupation. Table 1 displays results on pseudo parenting in the study communities.

Table 1 demonstrates that majority of the children lived with their real parents while minority of them were in the hands of non-biological parents. The pseudo parents constituted one-fifth of the total parents that the students lived with.

The research sought to unearth the types of communities the respondents resided. Table 2 presents the community of residence of the study subjects.

The data in Table 2 shows a fair distribution of children from the various geographical contexts. Although the urban community tops, the differences in the other

**Table 1.** Respondents' relation with parents.

Type of parents	Frequency	Percent
Real parents	1,397	79.6
Pseudo parents	358	20.4
Total	1,755	100

**Table 2.** Location of respondents.

Type of community	Frequency	Percent
Rural	576	32.8
Peri-urban	588	33.5
Urban	591	33.7
Total	1,755	100.0

**Table 3.** Parents' education level.

Educational level	Father		Mother		Male guardian		Female guardian	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
No formal education	234	20.6	342	25.4	54	21.1	72	21.4
Basic education	459	40.6	485	36.8	25	9.9	85	25.4
Secondary education	254	22.5	332	25.6	74	29.0	103	30.6
Tertiary education	184	16.3	160	12.2	102	40.0	76	22.6
Total	1,131	100.0	1,319	100.0	255	100.0	336	100.0

communities are not vast.

The study was also interested in examining the educational attainment of real and pseudo parents. The outcomes of data analysis on parental education are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 portrays that while 20.6% of real fathers had no formal education, 40.6% had up to basic education, 22.5% had education up to secondary school, and 16.3% had education up to the tertiary level. The results indicate that a vast majority of the real male parents had attained low levels of formal education. The case of real female students is not quite different. The real mothers who had attained up to senior high education were less than forty percent.

On the contrary, the results demonstrate that almost 70% of the male guardians had attained secondary education and beyond. Again, the results demonstrate that more than half of the female guardians had attained education up to secondary level and beyond. The educational attainment of the pseudo parents is comparably higher than that of the real parents.

The study also ascertained the occupation of the students' parents and the results are displayed in Table 4.

As can be seen in Table 4, while more real fathers are engaged in farming, more female parents are into trading. Again, more real male fathers worked in the civil service than their female counterparts. Conversely, more female guardians worked in the civil service than their male counterparts. Overall, more pseudo parents were found to be in formal sector employment than did the real parents.

### Manifestation of social capital

The study purported to unravel the extent to which

parents provided opportunity for children to access social capital at home via the interactions they had with them regarding educational matters. This intention was to give us a nuanced picture of parent-children interactions at home.

The results as shown in Table 5 indicate that most of the variables are relatively higher than the mid-point of the scales. Most of the at-home and in-school activities are above the mid-point of the scales. None of them is below the mid-point of the scale, indicating relatively high manifestation of social capital. The results generally indicate that the parents showed relatively high participation in the children's education hence they were deemed to be providing social capital to the children.

### Social capital of children of real and pseudo parents

We sought to determine whether both real and pseudo parents equally socially invested in their children and wards' education. Independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to achieve this end. The outcomes of the analysis are presented in Table 6.

The outcome of the analysis illuminates significant difference in the means of the scores on real and pseudo parents' involvement in children's education. It is observed that while the scores of real parents' social capital provision are ( $M = 62.71$ ,  $SD = 20.86$ ), that of the pseudo parents are ( $M = 57.30$ ,  $SD = 23.37$ ). The results show that there is no equal variance as  $p < .05$ . The results mean that real parents had higher levels of involvement in their children's education than the pseudo parents had in their wards' education. It is, therefore, averred that there is significant difference in the social capital investment by real and pseudo parents in children's education.

**Table 4.** Parents' occupation.

Type of occupation	Father		Mother		Male guardian		Female guardian	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Farming	252	22.4	491	37.4	72	28.4	85	25.4
Trading	117	10.4	323	24.5	17	6.8	74	22.4
Civil service	418	36.4	188	14.3	59	23.2	88	26.2
Private firms	132	11.7	33	2.5	22	8.6	40	11.3
Self-employment	140	12.4	187	14.2	20	7.5	35	10.4
Unemployed	72	6.7	97	7.3	65	25.5	14	4.3
Total	1,131	100.0	1,319	100.0	255	100.0	336	100.0

**Table 5.** Means and deviations for social capital provision by parents.

Variables	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Parent			
Provides my basic educational needs	1,755	2.7045	.85040
Discusses my education and progress with me	1,755	2.4393	.91733
Discusses my academic performance with my teachers	1,755	2.1978	.93878
Discusses my behaviour at school with my teachers	1,755	2.0243	.93733
Attends PTA meetings and other school events	1,755	2.3987	.97294
Monitors my behaviour at school	1,755	2.1982	.88423
Monitors how I spend my time outside of school	1,755	2.3865	.92354
Makes sure I go to bed at reasonable times	1,755	2.4848	.91258
Reprimands me when I shout on others	1,755	2.5286	.88766
Makes me feel welcome at home	1,755	2.5983	.87121
Makes me know the essence of hard work	1,755	2.5243	.80565
Explains to me the consequences of my behaviour	1,755	2.5006	.85996
Uses role models as a means to get me behave well	1,755	2.4096	.88725
Discusses my future plans with me	1,755	2.2949	.88456
Scrutinizes my report cards and comments on it	1,755	2.3192	.85433

**Table 6.** Independent samples t-test of social capital provision by real and pseudo parents.

Groups	N	Means	SD	df	T	p
Real parents	1397	62.7151	20.86806	1753	4.270	.000
Pseudo parents	358	57.3017	23.37524	512.254		

### Provision of social capital by parents in rural, peri-urban and urban communities

The mean scores of social capital investment in education by parents living in different geographical settings were compared. One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to check the differences in the groups. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

The outcome of the analysis portrays significant difference in the social capital provision by parents residing in the urban, peri-urban and rural communities, which is  $F(2, 1752) = 98.45$ ,  $p = .000$ . It is inferred from

the table that there is marked difference in the social capital provision by parents living in the different communities.

Since there were disparities in the mean scores of parental social capital investment in children's education, Tukey's post-hoc analysis was conducted to locate where the differences were. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 8.

The outcome of the analysis as shown in Table 8 demonstrates that the difference in social capital provision lied in all the communities. Parents in the urban communities socially invested more in their children's education, followed by those in the peri-urban

**Table 7.** ANOVA of social capital provision by parents in rural, peri-urban and urban communities.

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	14174.460	2	7087.230	204.771	.000
Within groups	60637.616	1755	38.611		
Total	74812.076	1754			

**Table 8.** Post-hoc analysis of social capital provision by parents.

Which type of community do you reside?	Which type of community you reside?	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard. error	Sig	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Rural	Semi-urban	-4.27179*	.34533	.000	-5.0818	-3.4618
	Urban	-6.90572*	.34403	.000	-7.7127	-6.0987
Semi-urban	Rural	4.27179*	.34533	.000	3.4618	5.0818
	Urban	-2.63393*	.34268	.000	-3.4378	-1.8301
Urban	Rural	6.90572*	.34403	.000	6.0987	7.7127
	Semi-urban	2.63393*	.34268	.000	1.8301	3.4378

communities and then those in the rural communities.

## DISCUSSION

### Socio-economic status of children and wards' parents

Parental involvement in children's education is hyped to be essential in the progress of children's education. The paper intended to unveil the extent to which different categories of parents partook in their children's education to provide the social resources that enhance education. The study disclosed that although majority of the students were staying with their real parents, a handsome percentage of over 20% were in the care of non-biological parents. One out of every five students used in the study was living with and being brought up by non-biological parents. The result is consistent with the findings of a study by Better Care Network (2015), which indicated that in the West African Region about a quarter of children were been brought up by non-biological parents. Benson (2002) avers that many children are not in the care of their real parents but being raised by grandparents, step parents, guardians and some other people. Reasons such as poverty, lack of access to social services, discrimination, social exclusion, personal or social crisis and emergencies may trigger the phenomenon of children moving to stay with pseudo parents (Williamson and Greenberg, 2010). On their part, Owusu and Adjei (2009) discovered three main issues that caused children to stay with non-biological parents, which were poverty, family disruption and death of a

parent.

It also became evident in this study that the pseudo parents had attained higher levels of education as compared to the real parents. Majority of the pseudo parents had obtained education up to secondary and beyond than the real parents. The study also established that more pseudo parents, especially females, were in formal sector employment as opposed to the real parents. The results imply that more pseudo parents had higher socio-economic status than the real parents. The finding is consistent with Bausch (2006) study results, which portrayed that the adopted families possessed relatively high socio-economic status. The findings of the current study further support Owusu and Adjei (2009) study outcome that foster parents in the urban centres were civil servants as compared to those in rural communities. The high level of education of pseudo parents and their engagement in formal employment may have underscored their staying with wards. The demand of formal employment responsibilities might have necessitated the need for helping hands at home. It is also plausible that due to their employment in the formal sector pseudo parents were more financially viable and well positioned to adequately cater for both their biological and non-biological children.

### Manifestation of social capital across students' homes

Results of the study revealed that majority of the students were provided with the opportunity to access social capital through interactions with their parents. The

students interacted with their children on educational issues and the actors received resources from the interactions. The parents tended to follow progress of their children's education in and out of school to engender increased learning outcomes.

### **Social capital investment by real and pseudo parents**

The results of the study depicted major differences in the real and pseudo parents' social capital investment in children's education. It was discovered that pseudo parents did not spend much time with their wards concerning their education as much as the real parents did. The interactions that pseudo parents had with their wards were not as much as the real parents had with their children. This finding corroborates Burrow et al. (2004) study, which revealed that non-adopted adolescents were significantly closer to their mothers and fathers than adoptees were to theirs. Their study revealed that real parents were more involved in their children's education than adopted parents were in their wards' education. However, the finding of the present study contradicts that of Hamilton et al. (2007) study, which disclosed that adopted families were similar to biological families in providing social capital to their children.

### **Social capital investment by parents in rural, peri-urban and urban communities**

Results showed significant difference in the social capital provision by parents in the rural, peri-urban and urban communities. The amount of time, effort and energy expended on children's education by parents in the three geographical settings differed markedly. It was observed that parents in the urban communities spent more time with their children on their education than those in the peri-urban and rural communities respectively. The finding is consistent with Prater et al. (1997) results which showed that parents in urban centres tended to be more involved in their children's education. Parents domiciled in rural, peri-urban and urban communities did not equally socially invest in their children's education. The parents in the urban communities were more alive with their responsibilities to providing academic monitoring, supervision and guidance to aid the educational progression of their children than their counterparts in the peri-urban and rural communities respectively.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The issue of parental involvement in education and its consequential effects on the adolescent child is dear to the heart of many educationists and researchers.

Plethora of scientific investigation had sought to unfurl the extent of parental involvement in children's education, which emits social capital to them. Extant literature depicted knowledge gap in differential parental provision of social capital with respect to real and pseudo parents, and parents residing in different geographical settings.

Results of the study revealed disparity in the social capital investment in children's education by real and pseudo parents. The study also found a relatively high rate of pseudo parenting in the Ghanaian society. On the basis of that it is expedient for authorities such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in the country to facilitate enactment of laws to protect children especially those who do not live with their biological parent(s), adopted parents and in care homes. Evidently, in most societies such as Ghana, there are unequivocal and clear rules and regulations guiding and protecting adopted children as well as those in care giving homes. Nonetheless, same cannot be said to be existing for children who by some informal arrangements end up staying with some adults in the society. The lack of regulations and policies on pseudo parenting may have accounted for the pseudo parents renegeing on their responsibilities of monitoring, supervising and guiding their wards' education. The children living with pseudo parents also need protection like their counterparts in care institutions or adopted homes.

Appropriate policies, laws and regulations need to be made to protect children in such a situation to enable them pursue education to the levels that their academic ability and prowess can carry them. Measures that intend to make parents efficient and effective in executing their responsibilities to aid their children succeed in all aspects of their educational life are essential and urgent. As they could help them pursue education to the levels that their academic competence can take them. It is envisaged that if appropriate policies and laws on pseudo parenting are enunciated and enforced, they would help shape the society and behaviour of parents towards wards and their education. As there are local and international laws, regulations and policies for adopted children that protect and safeguard them including their education, so should there be protection for children living with pseudo parents.

As per the results of the study, parents in the urban communities tended to provide more opportunities for their children to access social capital followed by those in the peri-urban communities and then those in the rural communities. The kinds and quality of parent-children relationships differed across the geographical settings. The finding calls for formulation of policies that would make all parents, irrespective of community of residence, to fully engage in children's education to enable the latter to reap the benefits that emanate from the interactions. Education programmes that intend to inform and educate parents on the benefits of social investment in children's education need to be instituted to target particularly

parents in the countryside. There could also be initiatives and strategies to improve parents' child rearing skills. Such education programmes could encompass activities that would equip, strengthen and position parents to provide academic monitoring, supervision and guidance for their children. Via such programmes, parents could be trained to improve on their relationships with children.

This research contributes to canon of knowledge by providing guidance to the state in terms of policies on pseudo parenting. The study has also enhanced understanding on the differential parental involvement in children's education by real and pseudo parents, and by parents residing in different communities. The knowledge and understanding on differential parental investment in education has also augmented literature on families' contribution to children's education. The empirical evidence provided by the study adds to the stock of knowledge on social capital.

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