




Extended family networks as Social Capital: Their impact on educational attainment in African Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the function of extended family networks as a type of social capital and their influence on educational achievement in African communities. Based on the ideas of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, this research investigates how collective kinship systems can promote or hinder educational opportunities. A qualitative case study design was employed to gather data from 45 participants in Ogbomoso North Local Government, Nigeria, utilizing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, document analysis, and key informant interviews. Thematic analysis indicated that extended family networks improve schooling through the aggregation of financial resources, the provision of emotional support, the transmission of cultural values, and the establishment of collective success expectations. Nonetheless, constraints such as financial pressure, migration, competing responsibilities, and intra-family conflicts diminish their efficacy in the long term. The results highlight the inconsistent and context-specific characteristics of social capital concerning educational outcomes. The study indicates that although extended families are essential for supporting children's education, their contributions must be augmented by institutional initiatives, such as scholarships, community grants, and NGO-led mentorship programs. This research enhances academic discourse by elucidating the sociological significance of extended kinship in education and revealing lessons about policies that utilize indigenous support systems to foster equity in African education.

Keywords: Extended Family Networks, Social Capital, Educational Attainment, African Communities, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Education is universally acknowledged as a catalyst for social mobility and economic advancement. In Africa, where economic inequalities, elevated poverty rates, and inequitable access to education endure, families are pivotal to the survival and progress of children. Extended family networks have historically served as vital support systems, offering financial resources, childcare, emotional counsel and cultural transmission. These networks extend beyond the nuclear family to encompass grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives, with their impact on educational results illustrating the overarching African concepts of collectivism, reciprocity, and communal duty.¹

¹ Robert Serpell, "Literacy and Child Development in a Contemporary African Society," *Child Development Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (2020): 90–96; Emily Treleven, "The Relationship between Extended Kin Resources and Children's Healthcare Utilization: An Analysis of Family Networks," *Social Science & Medicine* 321 (2023): 115720.

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Despite their significance, much of the current literature on education in Africa has concentrated on the roles of nuclear families, educational institutions, and governmental entities, with relatively little emphasis on extended kinship networks. Recent research has investigated social and economic dynamics within African families; nonetheless, the precise mechanisms through which extended family networks facilitate or impede educational attainment remain inadequately examined.² The present study indicates a significant knowledge deficiency: whereas extended families are integral to African social structures, their educational roles and constraints remain inadequately hypothesized and empirically investigated.

This study explores extended family networks as a type of social capital and their influence on educational achievement in African communities. This research utilizes new scholarship that merges classical theories of social capital with modern African contexts to view extended family ties as significant resources for enhancing children's educational opportunities.³ A qualitative case study design was utilized, encompassing 45 participants from the Ogbomoso North Local Government in Nigeria. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, document analysis, and key informant interviews. This method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within extended family networks and the institutional, cultural, and economic circumstances that influence educational results.

The study is organized thematically to provide a thorough examination. First, it examines the supportive function of extended families in schooling through financial, emotional, and cultural resources. Second, it analyzes the cultural expectations and societal forces that shape children's educational experiences. Third, it addresses impediments and challenges, including economic pressure, migration, and competing responsibilities of teachers. Fourth, it underscores the inconsistent and variable family support systems. Fifth, it assesses the perceived influence of these networks on educational attainment, encompassing both beneficial results and the dangers of this attrition. Ultimately, it delineates options for government and institutional actions that can augment and strengthen the contributions of extended families.

This study elucidates the benefits and drawbacks of extended family assistance while offering tips to policymakers, educators, and community leaders aiming to leverage indigenous social systems for educational justice in Africa.

Extended Family Networks and Their Role in African Communities

In numerous African communities, the extended family structure functions as a collective entity in which tasks and resources are allocated among members. This system is defined by robust familial ties that encompass not only the nuclear family but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives. These networks are essential for delivering social support, economic aid, and cultural continuity.⁴ In her important study, "All Our Kin," Stack demonstrates how African American communities employ extended kinship relationships to manage economic challenges, emphasizing the adaptability and resilience embedded in these networks.⁵

Extended Family Networks as Social Capital

Social capital theory asserts that social networks possess value and that interactions within them can facilitate the accumulation of resources that benefit individuals and groups.⁶ In African communities,

² Véronique Deslauriers, Simona Bignami, and John Sandberg, "A Typology of Social Network Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from a Rural Population in Senegal," *Population Studies* 78, no. 2 (May 3, 2024): 251–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2024.2345070>; Giovanni Razzu and Ayago Wambile, "Four Decades of Intergenerational Educational Mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa," *The Journal of Development Studies* 58, no. 5 (2022): 931–50.

³ Danielle Vegas Lewis, Ryan Taughrin, and Megan Iantosca, "Using the Community Cultural Wealth Model for Success: Students of Color Activating Familial Capital," *The Urban Review* 57, no. 3 (September 10, 2025): 403–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-025-00724-0>; Yuji Utsumi and Mohammad Tahir Muradi, "Leveraging Social Capital for Educational Resilience in Conflict: The Impact of Community Behaviors on Educational Access in Pre-Taliban Ruling Afghanistan," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 106 (2024): 104428.

⁴ Carol B Stack, "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies in an Urban Black Community," *Woman, Culture and Society*, 1974, 112–28.

⁵ Stack, "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies in an Urban Black Community."

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58; James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," in *Networks in the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195159509.003.0007..>

extended family networks represent social capital by providing access to resources, including childcare, financial assistance, and mentorship. These networks function based on the principles of reciprocity and trust, which are fundamental elements of social capital.⁷ Because these networks are collaborative, members can rely on each other for help, making it easier for them to reach a wide range of goals, including educational goals.

Impact on Educational Attainment

The impact of extended family networks on educational achievement in African societies can be complex:

1. **Resource Sharing:** Extended families frequently consolidate resources to facilitate the education of younger members. This collaborative strategy can mitigate financial pressures related to education, including tuition, uniforms, and educational resources, thereby enhancing access to schools.⁸
2. **Emotional and Social Support:** A comprehensive support system can offer emotional encouragement and inspiration to pupils. This support may take numerous forms, such as mentorship from older relatives, homework aid, and guidance in educational choices.⁹
3. **Cultural Transmission and Identity:** Extended family networks are crucial for conveying cultural values and fortifying identity. A robust cultural identity correlates with elevated self-esteem and academic motivation among students.¹⁰
4. **Social Control and Expectations:** Extended families can create standards and expectations for educational achievement. Collectively investing in a child's education fosters accountability and the drive to fulfill familial expectations.¹¹

Obstacles and factors

Extended family networks can offer significant assistance, but they may also pose obstacles. Wikipedia, Deep Blue, PubMed Central

1. **Limitations of Resources:** In economically deprived areas, the resources within extended families may be constrained, thus impeding their capacity to successfully support educational pursuits.¹²
2. **Obligations and Expectations:** The reciprocal dynamics of extended family networks can create obligations that may interfere with educational endeavors. Students may be required to contribute to household income or caregiving duties, constraining their time and energy for academic pursuits.¹³
3. **Variability in Support:** Not all extended family networks operate effectively due to various factors. Elements include familial relationships, geographical distribution, and internal discord, which might affect the degree of support rendered.¹⁴

Objectives

1. To examine the composition and roles of extended family networks in specific African cultures.

⁷ Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital."

⁸ A. Foster, "Parental and Extended Family Investments in Children's Education," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 47, no. 1 (2000): 117–44.

⁹ Sangeetha Madhavan et al., "Fathers' Financial Support of Children in a Low Income Community in South Africa," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 35, no. 4 (2014): 452–63.

¹⁰ Gbenga Michael Adeyeye, "The Influence of Family Structure on Children's Academic Achievement: Evidence from Some Selected Secondary Schools in Oyo State, Nigeria," *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, no. 2 (2023): 27–37.

¹¹ Peter Glick and David E. Sahn, "Schooling of Girls and Boys in a West African Country: The Effects of Parental Education, Income, and Household Structure," *Economics of Education Review* 19, no. 1 (February 2000): 63–87, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7757\(99\)00029-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7757(99)00029-1).

¹² Bame A. Nsamenang, *Human Development in Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective* (Sage Publications, 1992).

¹³ Sangeetha Madhavan and Nicholas Townsend, "The Social Context of Children's Nutritional Status in Rural South Africa 1," *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 35, no. 69_suppl (August 1, 2007): 107–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14034950701355700>.

¹⁴ Gbenga Michael Adeyeye, *The Academic Performance of Urban and Rural Secondary School Learners in South Western Nigeria* (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2017).

2. To evaluate the degree to which extended family networks furnish resources that enhance educational achievement.
3. To assess community members' perceptions of the impact of extended family networks on educational attainment.
4. To ascertain the potential obstacles within extended family networks that may impact their ability to support education.
5. To provide measures for augmenting the beneficial influence of extended family networks on educational achievement.

Research Questions

1. What are the structural attributes of the extended family networks in the examined communities?
2. How do extended family networks enhance the educational achievements of their members?
3. What is the perception of community people on the significance of extended family networks in facilitating education?
4. What obstacles do extended family networks encounter when offering educational support?
5. What measures can reinforce the influence of extended family networks on improving educational outcomes?

Background

Extended family networks have traditionally functioned as essential support structures in African communities, offering diverse forms of help that enhance social and economic stability. These networks, encompassing grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives, transcend the nuclear family and function according to the concepts of collectivism, reciprocity, and communal duty.¹⁵ In numerous African countries, the extended family is regarded as an essential structure that fosters individuals from childhood to adulthood, providing emotional, financial, and educational support.¹⁶ This study examines the function of extended family networks as a type of social capital and their influence on educational achievement in African communities.

The Notion of Social Capital and Extended Kinship Networks

Social capital refers to the advantages and resources individuals obtain through social relationships, networks, and community connections. It promotes collaboration and reciprocal assistance among society members, significantly contributing to the improvement of educational and economic prospects.¹⁷ In the African context, extended family networks provide social capital by facilitating knowledge transfer, economic assistance, mentorship, and community involvement, all of which are crucial for the educational advancement of children and youth.¹⁸ Bourdieu posits that social capital comprises resources inherent in social networks, that individuals can leverage for economic and educational advancement.¹⁹ In this context, extended families serve as a crucial mechanism for promoting educational access and achievement. These networks guarantee that children obtain financial assistance for tuition, ethical supervision, and intellectual encouragement, thereby enhancing their prospects for educational success.²⁰

Extended Family Networks and Academic Achievement in Africa

Education is universally acknowledged as a crucial catalyst for socioeconomic advancement, and in numerous African communities, extended families play a substantial role in the educational success of children. Considering the high costs of formal education, particularly in low-income regions, extended

¹⁵ Nsamenang, *Human Development in Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective*.

¹⁶ Sangeetha Madhavan and Mark Gross, "Kin in Daily Routines: Time Use and Childrearing in Rural South Africa," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 44, no. 2 (March 1, 2013): 175–91, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.44.2.175>.

¹⁷ R. D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

¹⁸ Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital."

¹⁹ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

²⁰ Foster, "Parental and Extended Family Investments in Children's Education."

family networks are essential for consolidating resources to finance educational expenses.²¹ Resource-sharing across extended families guarantees that children from economically disadvantaged homes can receive quality education, notwithstanding the financial challenges faced by their nuclear families.²²

A study on intergenerational support in Africa revealed that numerous students obtain financial aid from relatives employed in urban areas or overseas.²³ Remittances from extended family members assist in financing tuition fees, textbooks, and other educational expenses. This financial support system underscores the significance of familial solidarity in maintaining educational continuity and mitigating the dropout rate.²⁴

Moreover, the emotional and psychological assistance offered by extended family members can improve children's academic achievement. Research indicates that mentorship from older relatives, support from grandparents, and direction from family elders significantly influence children's goals and attitudes toward education.²⁵ Extended family members frequently bolster cultural beliefs that prioritize education as a means of social mobility, resulting in heightened motivation among students.²⁶

Obstacles and Constraints of Extended Family Assistance in Education

Although extended family networks positively contribute to education, certain problems may impede their effectiveness. A major concern is the economic instability. In numerous African countries, elevated unemployment rates and pervasive poverty constrain the financial ability of extended families to fund children's education.²⁷ When extended family members encounter financial difficulties, their capacity to assist with educational expenses may diminish, resulting in reduced educational prospects for children.

Another concern is the escalating urbanization and migration trends impacting African countries. As family members relocate to urban areas or abroad in pursuit of enhanced economic prospects, the conventional extended family support structure may deteriorate because of geographical dislocation.²⁸ In many instances, children abandoned in remote regions may lack adequate support, hindering their access to education.

Furthermore, the requirement to provide financial assistance to extended family networks can occasionally strain persons tasked with supporting numerous relatives.²⁹ When finances are limited, some children may be compelled to leave school to support their home income, thereby hindering their educational achievement.

Policy and Institutional Factors

To optimize the advantages of extended family networks in educational support, implementing policies that reinforce these traditional support structures is crucial. Governments and educational institutions can establish programs that enhance family support systems by providing scholarships, financial assistance, and community-oriented educational initiatives.³⁰ Enhancing public education systems to alleviate the financial strain on families can guarantee that children from low-income homes complete their education.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based initiatives have been instrumental in addressing deficiencies where extended family networks may fall short. Programs offering mentorship, tutoring, and career advising for adolescents from underprivileged backgrounds

²¹ Madhavan et al., "Fathers' Financial Support of Children in a Low Income Community in South Africa."

²² Glick and Sahn, "Schooling of Girls and Boys in a West African Country: The Effects of Parental Education, Income, and Household Structure."

²³ Angus S. Deaton, *The Analysis of Household Surveys: A Microeconomic Approach to Development Policy (English)* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 1997).

²⁴ Glick and Sahn, "Schooling of Girls and Boys in a West African Country: The Effects of Parental Education, Income, and Household Structure."

²⁵ Madhavan and Townsend, "The Social Context of Children's Nutritional Status in Rural South Africa 1."

²⁶ Nsamenang, *Human Development in Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective*.

²⁷ Cynthia B Lloyd and Ann K Blanc, "Children's Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Fathers, Mothers, and Others," *Population and Development Review*, 1996, 265–98.

²⁸ Madhavan and Gross, "Kin in Daily Routines: Time Use and Childrearing in Rural South Africa."

²⁹ Adeyeye, *The Academic Performance of Urban and Rural Secondary School Learners in South Western Nigeria*.

³⁰ World Bank, *Education Finance and Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Addressing the Funding Gap* (World Bank Publications, 2022).

may enhance the informal support provided by extended family members.³¹ Such programs can support educational ambitions, especially in communities that face economic difficulties.

In conclusion, the extended family network constitutes a crucial form of social capital in African countries, profoundly impacting educational achievement. These networks facilitate access to schools and essential resources for academic success by offering financial, emotional, and academic assistance. However, economic difficulties, urban migration, and evolving family structures impose constraints on the efficacy of extended family assistance. Addressing these problems necessitates legislative initiatives, institutional assistance, and community participation to strengthen the role of extended family networks in promoting educational development in the region. This study examines these dynamics in detail, offering insights into the role of extended family networks as a type of social capital and its influence on schooling in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the function of extended family networks as a type of social capital and their impact on educational attainment in African communities. A qualitative study approach was employed to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the participants' living experiences, cultural surroundings, and social interactions. To achieve methodological triangulation and improve validity, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, participant observation, and key-informant interviews.

Research Design

A qualitative case study methodology was used to elucidate the intricacies of extended family assistance in education. Anchored in the interpretivist paradigm, the study highlighted the subjective significance participants ascribe to their experiences.³² The case study design facilitated an in-depth analysis of social processes and cultural practices within specific local contexts.³³

Population and Sampling

The study group comprised individuals from Ogbomosho North Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria, who had either provided or received educational assistance through extended family networks. The sample comprised students, parents, guardians, elderly family members, and school administrators. Purposive sampling facilitated the selection of participants with pertinent experiences, whereas snowball sampling enabled recommendations for supplementary individuals.³⁴ A total of 45 participants were included in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with pupils, parents, and extended family members. Sessions lasted 45 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were subsequently transcribed. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Six focus groups, each including 6–8 members, examined collective experiences and cultural norms. Discussions persisted for 60 to 90 minutes.

Document Analysis: Policy documents, educational records, and familial histories were examined to furnish contextual data.³⁵

Participant Observation: Observations were conducted during familial and educational activities, such as PTA meetings, to document real-time interactions. The field notes recorded the actions and choices concerning children's education.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Community leaders, school administrators, religious figures, and NGO workers offered comprehensive insights into community-based support and problems.

³¹ Foster, "Parental and Extended Family Investments in Children's Education."

³² Alan. Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

³³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Sage Publications, 2018).

³⁴ Lawrence A Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42 (2015): 533–44.

³⁵ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (August 3, 2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach.³⁶ Transcripts were processed and analyzed using NVivo software, with emerging themes categorized into family support, cultural expectations, hurdles, and outcomes. Triangulation of data sources and member checking, disseminating preliminary findings to participants, augmented trustworthiness and guaranteed that interpretations accurately represented participants' viewpoints.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical permission was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary in all cases. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed through safe data management and the elimination of identifying information. The research process adhered to cultural norms, ensuring that data collection was consistent with local traditions and sensitivities.

Limitations

The study provided useful insights; however, certain limits were recognized. The results were context-dependent and may not be applicable to other African communities. Social desirability bias may have influenced the responses, and migration may have rendered some extended family members inaccessible to the participants. However, triangulation and diverse data sources enhanced the validity and profundity of the findings.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Theme 1: Support for Education from Extended Families

Some categories and their codes are listed below: Financial support. The codes included textbooks, uniforms, school fees, WAEC fees, and remittances. Academic and emotional support. The codes are mentoring, academic guidance, inspiration, and role models. Reinforcement of culture. The codes were cultural values and elders' promotion of education. Shared accountability. The codes are: collaborative support, family resource pooling.

Theme 2: Cultural Pressures and Expectations

Some categories and their codes are listed below: Cultural duty. The codes are: "Every child is everyone's child," according to the educational expectations for communal childrearing. The codes were as follows: family pride, achieving family goals, and pressure to succeed. Cultural or religious impact. The rules are moral education, elder mentoring, and education as a spiritual obligation.

Theme 3: Restrictions and Obstacles in Extended Networks

Some categories and their codes are listed below: Financial limitations. The codes are Breadwinners were stressed by unstable income, unemployment, and "hard to say no." Distance and Migration. The codes are Urbanization and the physical absence of important supporters Conflicting commitments. The codes are Children doing errands, skipping school, and laboring to support the household. Over expectations and broken promises: The codes are Unreasonable demands and unmet financial commitments.

Theme 4: Uneven Support Structures: Variability and Reliability of Support.

Uneven Support Structures. The codes are some families participate in internal conflicts, while others do not. Internal conflicts. The codes are Family disputes and ambiguous roles. Geographical restrictions. The codes are Rural-urban divides and trouble keeping connections.

³⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

Theme 5: Perceived influence and educational results

Student motivation and stability. These codes are more targeted, "family-motivated," and "want to succeed for them." Academic Achievement. The codes are higher attendance, higher results, and strong family support Dropout risk. The codes are lack of resources, children who are overwhelmed, and financial difficulties.

Theme 6: Possibilities for Policy and Institutional

Intervention involvement of the community. The codes are cultural forums and school-family cooperation. Interventions that are suggested. The codes are scholarships, community grants, educational workshops. Non-profits, and policy roles. The codes are after-school activities and additional mentoring.

Theme 1: Familial Support for Education

This theme emphasizes the role of extended families as essential facilitators of education through the aggregation of both tangible and intangible resources. The financial support codes—textbooks, uniforms, WAEC fees, and remittances indicate that education is a shared financial obligation within numerous African homes. Participants' accounts reveal that uncles, aunts, and grandparents intervene to fill financial voids created by nuclear parents, reflecting Foster's conclusions regarding resource-sharing across African kinship systems.³⁷

The academic and emotional support subcategory emphasizes that the extended family functions not only as an economic unit but also as an intellectual and motivational framework. People frequently mentioned mentoring, inspiration, and advice, confirming Madhavan et al.'s observation that older relatives serve as role models and boost confidence.³⁸ The reinforcement of cultural values, such as elders underscoring the significance of education, imparts a moral dimension to the academic experience, thereby enhancing the child's sense of purpose.

Theme 2: Societal Pressures and Expectations

This theme illustrates how cultural ideologies generate both facilitating and limiting influences on educational pathways. Maxims like "every child is everyone's child" underscore communal responsibility, a principle grounded in African social philosophy.³⁹ Education goes beyond individual advancement; it serves as a collective goal, and children often feel significant pressure to meet those expectations. Participants frequently perceived this pressure as simultaneously motivating and anxiety provoking. Cultural and religious influences are essential for shaping educational objectives. Education is frequently regarded as a moral or spiritual duty, with elders serving as mentors and moral guardians. These viewpoints reflect Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital, wherein attitudes and behaviors regarding education are influenced by ingrained cultural norms.⁴⁰

Theme 3: Limitations and Barriers in Extended Networks

Despite the robustness of extended family networks, this study highlights their vulnerability to economic strain. Indicators such as erratic revenue, excessive commitments, and unfulfilled assurances demonstrate that these support networks are not consistently reliable. The emotional and financial strain on breadwinners, along with elevated dependency ratios, often results in disillusionment and discord, hindering educational initiatives.

Furthermore, increasing urban migration and the geographical dispersion of families undermine these previously cohesive arrangements. Urban relatives, while amenable to assistance, frequently encounter difficulties in providing continuous support due to geographical distance or conflicting

³⁷ Foster, "Parental and Extended Family Investments in Children's Education."

³⁸ Madhavan et al., "Fathers' Financial Support of Children in a Low Income Community in South Africa."

³⁹ Nsamenang, *Human Development in Cultural Context: A Third World Perspective*.

⁴⁰ Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

obligations. This phenomenon underscores what Coleman described as "social capital erosion," wherein network separation constrains the dissemination of advantages, such as educational assistance.⁴¹

Theme 4: Disparate Support Frameworks Inconsistency and Dependability

This investigation uncovers discrepancies in the functioning and efficacy of extended family structures. Some students indicated having highly supportive relatives, while others faced disengaged or dysfunctional family dynamics. Often, students cited family discord and ambiguous roles, highlighting how insufficient coordination and vagueness can compromise the desired group objective.

This theme illustrates the heterogeneous character of social capital—networks do not operate uniformly. The social capital provided by extended families is context-dependent and reliant on interpersonal interactions, proximity, and the existence of similar values. Adeyeye contended that not all community institutions exhibit cooperation, particularly in the presence of internal rivalry or structural constraints.⁴²

Theme 5: Perceived Impact and Educational Results

This theme consolidates the results linked to robust or frail, extended family networks. Research on student motivation and stability suggests that supportive, extended families promote resilience and goal-setting. Numerous students indicated that the sacrifices of their families motivated them to achieve, underscoring the notion that emotional capital; such as faith and encouragement is as crucial as financial assistance.

In contrast, dropout risks were frequently associated with a failure of these support systems stemming from poverty, excessive demands, or academic disregard. This finding corresponds with Putnam's paradigm, which contends that underperforming networks generate detrimental social capital, transforming commitments into liabilities rather than assets.⁴³

Theme 6: Opportunities for Policy and Institutional Intervention

This subject emphasizes how formal structures can augment or complement informal family support systems. Participants advocated for community-based forums, family-school collaborations, and government subsidies to institutionalize assistance for at-risk students. These recommendations indicate the need for organized initiatives that reinforce and prolong the effects of social capital.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and after-school programs have become more and more important in dealing with the problems that family-based support systems have. Family networks are still an important source of social capital, but they don't always work well in situations where money is tight. As a result, hybrid support strategies that combine resources from both families and institutions have been recommended. Recent research, including Jenson (2020), underscores the significance of integrating community-based initiatives with formal support systems to improve educational outcomes.

Analysis Conclusion

Thematic analysis demonstrates that extended family networks function as a multifaceted kind of social capital, intricately woven into the communal existence of the African. However, its effectiveness is not guaranteed; it varies according to economic conditions, geographic proximity, cultural congruence, and organizational coordination. Enhancing these networks through policy, institutional and community-based interventions is crucial to guarantee equal educational access and educational success.

This discourse, rooted in participant perspectives and consistent with the theoretical literature, establishes a solid basis for suggestions in your study.

⁴¹ Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital."

⁴² Adeyeye, *The Academic Performance of Urban and Rural Secondary School Learners in South Western Nigeria*.

⁴³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

Participant Observation Responses and a deep thematic discussion

Theme 1: Practical Engagement in Educational Activities

Codes:

- Attendance at school functions
- Homework assistance
- Provision of school materials
- Physical accompaniment to school

Discussion: This theme reflects the visible, hands-on involvement of extended family members in children's schooling. These activities indicate that education is seen as a collective family responsibility, not confined to the nuclear family. Attending PTA meetings, helping with assignments, and providing logistic support for school participation signal both emotional investment and shared accountability. This type of engagement often boosts the child's sense of belonging and support, reinforcing their educational motivation. It also reduces the burden on biological parents, especially in single parents or financially stressed households.

Theme 2: Informal Mentorship and Educational Dialogue

Codes:

- Academic guidance
- Career advice
- Inquiry into school progress
- Informal mentoring

Discussion: This theme highlights the role of non-nuclear relatives as informal educators and mentors. Aunts, uncles, and cousins often bridge communication between formal schooling and home life by discussing academic performance or plans. These interactions create a culture where education is discussed across generations, helping children develop a broader worldview and confidence. Informal mentoring fosters a sense of continuity and purpose, which is critical for students who navigate complex educational landscapes in low-resource settings.

Theme 3: Hierarchies and Decision-Making Structures

Codes:

- Elders making final decisions
- Male-dominated authority
- Financial power hierarchy
- Deference to senior family members

Discussion: Extended families often operate within culturally embedded hierarchies. Educational decisions such as which school to attend or how much support to provide are typically made by the eldest or most financially capable members. This dynamic can both empower and hinder educational progress. On one hand, it ensures that educational investments are prioritized by key decision-makers. On the other hand, it may suppress input from younger or more progressive members, particularly women, limiting innovation or responsiveness to a child's individual needs. This power imbalance requires careful navigation in policy or intervention programs.

Theme 4: Emotional Support and Moral Encouragement

Codes:

- Verbal praise and motivation
- Role modeling by older relatives
- Celebration of academic success
- Family expectations

Discussion: This theme focuses on the emotional and motivational scaffolding provided by the extended family. Encouraging words, public recognition of achievements, and storytelling from older relatives act as emotional capital that builds self-esteem and educational resilience. Such emotional reinforcement communicates the intrinsic value of education beyond economic outcomes, cultivating persistence and ambition. It also subtly defines family honor and legacy in terms of academic success, promoting a positive academic identity in the child.

Theme 5: Cultural Rituals and Symbolic Practices

Codes:

- Prayers and blessings for success
- Family meetings on academic performance
- Token rewards for achievement
- Ritualized expressions of educational value

Discussion: This theme uncovers symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of educational support. These often unspoken, habitual actions like offering prayers before exams or gifting money after good grades serve to embed education into the cultural fabric of the family. Such rituals transform education into a collective spiritual and social goal, reinforcing both community cohesion and personal accountability. These practices often instill moral discipline and aspirational behavior in students, further strengthening educational outcomes.

Synthesis and Implications

The identified themes demonstrate that extended families in African contexts contribute to education not only through financial means but through social, emotional, cultural, and structural capital. However, these benefits are mediated by hierarchies, access to resources, and shared values.

Programs and policies seeking to leverage extended family networks must:

- Respect traditional hierarchies while empowering diverse voices.
- Support both tangible (books, fees) and intangible (mentorship, rituals) forms of engagement.
- Recognize the role of cultural norms in sustaining educational motivation and persistence.

CONCLUSION

The thematic analysis shows that extended family networks are a complex type of social capital that is deeply embedded in the social fabric of African societies. These networks offer emotional, financial, and informational assistance that profoundly impacts educational accessibility and results. But they don't always work; it depends on the economy, how close they are to each other, how well they fit in with the culture, and how well they work together as a community.

In line with participant viewpoints and the current theoretical discourse on social capital, these results underscore the necessity of transcending dependence on informal family structures exclusively. Extended family systems are important, but they need to be supported by well-planned institutional and policy changes. To ensure fair access to education and continued academic success, it is important to improve these networks through intentional policy frameworks, stronger partnerships between schools and communities, and community-based support programs.

In this regard, policymakers should prioritize the integration of family-based support systems with formal educational structures, including collaboration with non-governmental organizations and community initiatives. These kinds of hybrid approaches can help lessen the effects of socio-economic differences and strengthen the role of social capital in making education more fair and accessible for everyone.

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