

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: Impact of social capital on TVET completion rates

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Background:

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an effective means to promote economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries. A number of non-profit organizations in Sri Lanka conduct vocational training programmes for secondary school dropouts to help them acquire vocational skills and to make them employable. This study was conducted in Diyagala Boys' Town, which is a residential vocational training institute for young boys who come from mainly poor and troubled families. Data from the institute show that the completion rate is around 60% of entrants. Could social capital have an impact on completion rates? The study was carried out to ascertain the influence of social capital on the vocational trainees who are already school dropouts. Their family background and the circumstances that lead them to follow a vocational training course were examined to assess their social capital. The contrast between the social capital elements of their families and those of the training institute were also examined.

Data source and method:

This is a case study based on a particular vocational training institute called Diyagala Boys' Town. Using a qualitative approach, a purposive sample of 5 successful trainees were interviewed as primary means of data collection. The essence of each student's experience was described and themes across all of the stories were presented and discussed. A link between their social capital and successful attainment of vocational skills training was established by analyzing these descriptions.

Theoretical Foundations and literature review:

The most basic components of social capital are the numerous relationships and interactions among various people who are associated with one another. "Trainee attainment" is defined as reaching a desired level of learning or a benchmark. Lehr et al (2004) observed that fewer studies have been conducted on students' reasons for staying in school. Synthesising information from a variety of studies they developed a list of reasons. They are; 1) a supportive nurturing family and home environment, 2) interaction with and the involvement of committed, concerned educators and other adults, 3) Development of perseverance and optimism. 4) Improved attitude toward school and increased motivation to obtain a diploma. 5) Positive, respectful relationships between staff and

students. 6) Satisfaction with the learning experience. In the above list, the support of the family and the adults stand out distinctly as factors positively influencing the students' school completion.

In this study, completing the vocational training programme or attainment of the expected skills standard is taken as the dependent variable while indicators of social capital related to family, community and the school (institute) are treated as independent variables. It is assumed that these variables have a positive impact on trainees attainment. In other words, the higher the value of social capital there is a greater possibility of completing the training programme.

Key Findings:

A lack of family cohesion, poor parental education, low expectations for the child's education, lack of mother's support for education and poor income level of the families indicated poor social capital for the trainees before entering Boys' Town. The positive element is that all had some extended family members who could compensate for the lack of parental care.

It was found that the negative effects of the lack of social capital in one's family was compensated by socially supportive connections outside the family. At the institute, the support of the teachers, trainers and the peers improved the social capital of the trainees. The value placed in the skills achievement, the reputation of the institution and the orderliness of the programme enhanced the social capital of trainees that promoted their success. The sense of obligation to family and assurance of a job at the end of the training period too were positively correlated with successful attainment of skills training.

Conclusion:

The support of the extended family members stand out as an important and positive component of social capital that contributed to compensate for the negative effects of deficiencies in the immediate family social capital. Social capital by way of connectedness with concerned teachers and peers have a positive effect in the success of the trainees. A conducive learning environment, a culture of quality skills training, a disciplined and orderly programme and assurance of employment worked as positive social capital for the success of the trainees.

Vocational training providers can play an important role in giving students confidence, self-esteem and hope in addition to the specific course competencies. These findings suggest that practices to strengthen social capital of the trainees while they are in the programme need to be promoted for better results.

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