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Conceptualizing Social Capital as Access to Social Network and Mobilization of Network
Resources: A Study of Workplace Literacy Programs and Low-income Somali Refugee Workers

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy

by

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Abstract

There is a substantial body of literature on the economic benefits of workplace literacy programs, and much less empirical studies on the social or non-economic outcomes of workplace literacy programs, particularly in the context of low-income refugee workers. Adopting a social network approach, this study examines the impact of workplace literacy programs on the social capital development of Somali refugee workers. Social capital can be defined as the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social group that facilitates their access to emotional, instrumental, or informational resources, essential for their daily survival, stability, or upward mobility. This study takes the position that literacy development is a socially situated and contextualized set of practices which impact the structure of an individual's social network. Thereby, creating access to certain types of social resources –emotional, instrumental and informational – that can be used for the good of the individual. Data were drawn using interviews with eighteen participants enrolled in a workplace literacy program and had attended classes for at least three months. The classes offered included ESL, GED and Citizenship. The interview protocol was designed using a hybrid (name and resource) generator instrument. First, we examined how participating in classes impacted the structure of participant's social networks by measuring (i) the size of the social network, and (ii) strength of the ties in social network. Next, we examined the types of social capital resources that accrue to low income Somali refugee workers through their networks acquired as a result of participating in classes. The findings revealed that participation in classes had a positive impact on their network structure, through the acquisition of strong ties with co-workers, and weak ties with teachers and supervisors. This created access to emotional, instrumental and informational resources that participants previously did not have access to and consequently enhanced their social capital

development. Moreover, mobilizing social capital resources through strong ties with co-workers would have been difficult or impossible in the absence of specific mechanisms, which we identified as motivation, trust and reciprocity.

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List of Published Paper

Chapter 2: Nwude, Angela; Zajicek, Anna. “The Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs on the Structure of Social Networks of Low-Income Somali Refugee Workers.” (Submitted for publication to the Adult Literacy Education Research Journal).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Each year, many people migrate voluntarily or involuntarily to the United States for different reasons and under various circumstances. Although there has been a tendency to characterize these groups as migrants, crucial distinctions exist between immigrants and refugees. Immigrants are individuals who voluntarily leave their country of origin and legally enter another country where they are granted permission to permanently resettle. Their reasons for wanting to resettle may range from a longing for economic prosperity or a better education, to the fulfillment of a dream or reunion with family (Castelli, 2018). Refugees, on the other hand, are forced to leave their country of origin because they are at risk of, or have experienced persecution, conflict, violence, or other dangerous circumstances for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Zimmermann, Dörschner, & Machts, 2011). In most cases refugees are forced to flee with no warning, and, in the process, they leave behind their homes, most or all of their resources, family members and friends (American Immigration Council, 2020).

Hence, immigrants differ primarily from refugees based on the reason for migration, length of time and variety of resources they have at their home country to prepare for their immigration and resettlement in the U.S. Once displaced from home, refugees are less likely to access basic services such as health care, housing, transportation, and educational services such as schools (Almohamed, 2019). They generally have less time and fewer resources to develop their literacy and language skills for employment prior to immigration, and therefore are more vulnerable and disadvantaged in the U.S. labor market (Chang, 2017).

Regardless of these distinctions, interest has grown in the study of the role of social capital in compensating for economic and social disadvantages among broadly defined migrants,

with emphasis on immigrants as opposed to refugees not studied (Chow, 2000; Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Aguilera and Massey 2003; Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne & Solomos, 2007; Campbell, Cornish, & Mclean, 2007; Bankston 2014; Portes 1998).

Social capital can be defined as the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social group that facilitates their access to emotional, instrumental, or informational resources, essential for their daily survival, stability, or upward mobility (Lin 1991; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). Such networks may consist of strong ties with family members, co-ethnics, and friends or colleagues/co-workers serving as key sources of support in times of need and are vital for getting by (Coleman, 1988; Briggs, 1998). The networks may also consist of weak ties/relationships that cut across race, ethnicities, age, class, gender, or other sociodemographic characteristics and serve to access a wider variety of resources/opportunities essential for getting ahead (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Briggs, 1998).

Empirical studies support the idea that social capital has positive effects on the economic adaptation and social integration of immigrants. For instance, in their study of on South Asian immigrant women in Toronto, George and Chaze (2009) reported that immigrants' social capital, which included relationships with friends, families, and acquaintances, assisted with their settlement process by providing them with potentially wealth-generating information, resources, and employment. In a similar study of Asian immigrants in the U.S., Sanders, Nee, and Sernau (2002) established that immigrants' reliance on cross-cultural ties could lead to increased job information and employment opportunities. They argued that immigrants who relied on their interpersonal ties to find jobs were more likely to find employment compared to those who relied exclusively on their own efforts. In examining the implications of social capital for immigrants, Li (2004) found that social capital enabled immigrants and ethnic minorities who were isolated

in low-resource communities to connect to opportunities outside their social enclaves, thereby increasing their chances for stability and upward mobility. In their study on Mexican immigrants in the US, Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra (2007) found that social networks for both unauthorized and legal Mexican immigrants positively impacted their employment and earnings.

Hence, as immigrants arrive in their host communities, their social networks/social capital appear to be key sources of support essential for adaptation, survival, and socioeconomic mobility (Aguilera and Massey 2003; Dong & Chang, 2017; Quetulio-Navarra, Niehof, & Vaart, 2013). When compared to their native-born counterparts, both immigrants and refugees are more susceptible to social capital deficits (Evans & Fitzgerald, 2017). Their social capital deficits have been attributed to a range of structural disadvantages they encounter, including illegal status (Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013), premigration and resettlement issues (McMichael & Manderson, 2004), racial and ethnic discrimination (Szaflarski & Bauldry, 2019), family separation (Dong & Chang, 2017), and literacy and language deficits (Thuesen, 2016; Pih & Lee, 2007).

Over time, increasing attention has been paid to the literacy and language proficiency levels of immigrants in the U.S. Studies have shown that immigrants arrive in the United States with varying levels of literacy and language proficiency (Boyer, 2009; Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; McCabe, 2011). At one end of the spectrum are highly literate/educated immigrant workers who are of medical professionals, social scientists, engineers, etc. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; American Psychological Association, 2012; New American Economy, 2017). However, the other end of the spectrum consists of immigrant workers with low literacy and language proficiency levels that are far below their native-born counterparts (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015). These immigrants predominantly

occupy unskilled, low-skilled, and low-income jobs in the agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and service sectors in the U.S. labor market (American Psychological Association, 2012).

The literacy and language proficiency levels of low-income, low skilled immigrants, therefore, raises serious questions about their potential for social capital development. From this standpoint, some scholars have argued that the low educational backgrounds and limited English proficiency among immigrants serve as barriers to form relations with others outside of their ethnic communities (Pih and Lee, 2007; Lee, 2015). As a result they are constrained in their access to a wide range of resources not available within their immediate social circles, and thus limited in their potential for social capital development (Ryan, 2011; Lin, 2002; Bankston, 2014). For instance, in their study of Chinese immigrants in Southern California, Pih and Lee (2007) found significant social capital deficits among low-wage Chinese immigrants. They argued that despite their access to co-ethnic ties, the flow of information on available health care resources was constrained due to language barriers, which impacted their ability to establish relationships with the native population.

When compared to their native born counterparts, immigrants with low literacy and language proficiency skills experience significant barriers to their social capital development (Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Lin, 2002; Roggeveen and Van Meeteren, 2013; Kindler & Piechowska 2015; Lee, 2015). Additionally, their potential for social capital development may be further constrained, as they often live in ethnically segregated and economically disadvantaged communities/neighborhoods (Wilson, 2012; Lin, 2000; Elliot, Haney, & Sams-Abiodun, 2010; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). For instance, in a study on Mexican immigrants, Lee (2015) found that immigrants with low educational backgrounds and limited

English proficiency have a strong tendency to form social ties with the same ethnic people (co-ethnics), facilitated by shared languages and culture. This limits them from accessing sufficient social capital, and thus hinders their potential for upward mobility. The reason is that resources accessed through co-ethnic ties are more homogenous, redundant and less valuable for mobility than those accessed through more heterogeneous ties to individuals/groups from different social and economic backgrounds.

The implications of these studies are that among low-income immigrants, literacy and language proficiency are integral to their social capital development. At the same time, creating opportunities for their literacy and language development may positively enhance their social capital development, which in turn improve access to diverse information, resources and opportunities that they otherwise would not have been able to access (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Toso, Prins, & Mooney, 2013; Thuesen, 2016)

While most studies examining the implication of literacy and language proficiency on social capital development have done so in relation to voluntary or economic migrants such as many Hispanic and Asian immigrants (Lee, 1994; Aguirre & Martinez, 2000; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012; Li 2008), less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as refugees (Evans & Fitzgerald, 2017). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs among low-income Somali refugee workers in the U.S.

Background

Low-income Somali Refugee Workers in the U.S.

Following the establishment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. has been a symbol of hope and home to a substantial number of refugees seeking freedom from war, poverty,

environmental disaster, or political and religious persecution (Catholic Charities Diocese of Lexington, 2016). Since 1980, more than three million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1980, making the U.S. the largest resettlement country in the world after Canada (Evans & Fitzgerald, 2017; Blizzard & Batalova, 2019; Radford & Connor, 2019).

Refugees, notably, constitute a significant and growing portion of the U.S. population, accounting for a substantial proportion of the labor force. Although refugees are diverse in educational attainment and work experience, a large number of them arrive in the U.S. with very low levels of literacy, English proficiency, and other skills that are important determinants of effective participation and mobility in the U.S. labor market (Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; Choitz & Montes, 2016; Chang, 2017; Hanley, et al, 2018).

To date, Somali refugees have relocated to the United States in large numbers, making them one of the largest African refugee groups in the U.S. labor force (Goza, 2011; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012). Based on existing data, Somali refugees appear to be one of the most educationally disadvantaged refugee groups in the U.S. (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2011). The backdrop of this disadvantage is a long history of civil war, insecurity, poverty, and natural disasters forcing civilians to migrate to the US under precarious circumstances (U.N. Development Programme (2011).

In spite of their traumatic experience in fleeing persecution conflict, violence, or other dangerous circumstances in their home country, Somali refugees in the U.S. possess a strong sense of communal identity, solidarity, cultural confidence and pride that enable them to adapt and strengthen their resilience in adverse situations (Seppänen, 2016). As reflected in the Center for Immigration Studies report, Somali refugees have a greater tolerance for risk and hard work than natives (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). In communities across the U.S., particularly rural ones,

Somali refugees have become an integral part of the communities, and have helped fill workforce gaps in a variety of sectors including manufacturing; healthcare, transportation, hospitality, to name a few (New American Economy, 2017). They are also often described as entrepreneurial, pooling financial, labor and other economic resources and thereby contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy as taxpayers and consumers (New American Economy, 2017; United Nations, 2018).

Despite their meaningful contribution to the U.S. workforce and the pivotal role they play in the labor market, Somali refugees differ in important ways from economic migrants and their native-born counterparts (Kallick&Mathema, 2016). As a small ethnic minority group in the U.S., Somali refugees are uniquely confronted with cultural, religious, literacy and linguistic differences that impede their access to opportunity and economic self-sufficiency, and mobility (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Gichiru, 2012; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012). Several factors have been identified as responsible for these impediments.

First, unlike economic migrants who voluntarily leave their home country in search of economic advancement, Somali refugees are forced to flee their homes and seek safety in another country, oftentimes without warning and under traumatic and tragic circumstances (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2011; Catholic Charities Diocese of Lexington, 2016). Upon their involuntary migration, they find themselves in communities that are extremely different in almost every regard from their home communities(Bialecki, Gotta, & Pilegi, 2018). This, in turn, affects their ability to integrate socially and thrive successfully in their host communities.

Second, when compared to native-born counterparts or other economic migrants, Somali refugees lag behind in educational attainment, with as many as half without a high school diploma (McMichael & Manderson, 2004; McCabe, 2011). It is estimated that, in Somalia, about

42% of the population is illiterate due to the educational disruption caused by the war. In addition, the education of Somalis in refugee camps is almost non-existent (Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit, 2013). On arrival to the U.S., they are predominantly functionally illiterate, as many of them are unable to read or write in their own language, much less in the English language. Consequently, Somali refugees experience significant challenges finding employment, staying employed, and moving up the employment ladder (Kaptejns & Arman, 2008).

Third, although some of them may be proficient in multiple languages such as Somali, Arabic, Swahili, etc., or educated to a certain degree, their prior educational achievement and credentials are often unrecognized/undervalued in the labor market (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012; Kaptejns & Arman, 2008; Sullivan, Weeks, & Simonson, 2017). Moreover, in spite of their desire to be gainfully employed, they lack familiarity with workforce training or development opportunities needed to get on career paths that offer upward mobility (Kaptejns & Arman, 2008; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012).

In this context, creating opportunities for literacy and skill development among Somali refugees is central to enhancing their adaptation and social integration (Szaflarski&Bauldry,2019; Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008), as well as their employability and upward mobility (Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004). These realities underpin the rationale for both public and private investments in workplace literacy programs.

Workplace Literacy Programs

Driven by the demographic changes in the U.S. labor force and the need to enhance the literacy and skills of America's working poor (Shilcock, 2017; Bernstein, 2017; U.S. Department of Labor, 2017), the U.S. government established the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

of 2014 (WIOA). Pursuant to the WIOA, workplace literacy programs have been recognized as useful strategies for improving the literacy of educationally disadvantaged workers (Bird, Foster & Ganzglass, 2014). The term “workplace literacy program,” is also referred to in the literature as adult basic education program (Milkulecky & Lloyd, 1997), employee basic skills program or workplace education program (National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2004). Regardless of the name, the term simply refers to a literacy or education program typically carried out at the workplace or in a setting provided by the employer (Milkulecky & Lloyd, 1997; Jurmo, 2004; Gyarmati, Leckie, Dowie, Palameta, Shek-wai Hui, Dunn & Hébert, 2014). Rather than teaching abstract skills, workplace literacy programs are needs-oriented and aim at strengthening the speaking, reading, writing, and numeracy/computation skills at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in the society at large (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012; Isphording, 2015; Enchautegui, 2011; Shilcock, 2017). They are also designed to help educational disadvantaged workers in precarious circumstances to reduce impediments to employment and employability (McCaffery, Merrifield, & Millican, 2007; Brown, McKenzie & Taylor, 2014).

For instance, Pritchard (2013) demonstrated the importance of basic literacy skills such as communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills, in securing entry level employment and in being successful in the workplace. In the same vein, Horn, Edwards, & Greene (2015) argue that workplace literacy programs can be highly efficient in providing the right training, stable employment and increased earnings for workers with literacy deficits and barriers to employment. According to Haan & Caputo (2012), improved literacy enhances employees’ level of competencies which makes them less vulnerable to layoff and displacement and improves their access to evolving job opportunities.

Increasingly, employers prioritize workplace literacy programs as a key strategy for improving the productive capabilities of their educationally disadvantaged workforce (Moore, Myers, & Silva, 1998; Salomon, 2010; Parker, 2007), as well as enhancing the organization's productivity (Hollenbeck, 1993; Levenson, 2004; Bloom, Burrows, Lafleur, & Squires, 2007; Isphording, 2015). In accordance with WIOA, workplace literacy programs are, therefore, conceptualized and evaluated as economic tools essential for human capital development (Hollenbeck, 1993; Haan & Caputo, 2012; Coulombe, Tremblay & Marchand, 2004; Singer, 2012). However, emerging studies suggest that the outcomes of workplace literacy programs go beyond economic benefits to include the relationships or connections that are fostered through learning or participating in literacy programs (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011; Salmon, 2010; Desjardins & Schuller, 2006; De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016; St. Clair, 2008). These social relationships or connections have been associated with different outcomes – positive and negative – conceptualized and documented in the literature as social capital (Balatti, Black, Falk, 2006; Field & Spence, 2000; Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016).

For instance, in a study on Scottish adult literacy learners, Tett and Maclachlan (2007) opined that participation in learning fostered positive changes in learners' attitude, such as the development of self-confidence, which facilitated social interactions. In a similar study, Macdonald and Scollay (2009) investigated the social capital development of adult learners in California. They argued that participation in learning resulted in greater connectivity between individuals, which manifested in social trust and civic responsibility. According to Desjardin and Schuller (2007), participation in learning facilitates the creation of social capital in the form of trust, social and community engagements. These are necessary for individual and community well-being.

Although these studies point to some correlation between participation in learning and social outcomes, the specific connections to the structure of relationships and nature/types of social resources – social capital – that are acquired through learning remain largely unexplored (Sabatini, 2008). Discussions on the social capital outcomes of learning that do exist have generally focused on economic immigrants such as Hispanic and Asian immigrants as these two immigrant groups make up the vast majority of immigrants in post-1965 United States (Lee, 1994; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2010; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012; Teegene, 2016). Importantly, less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as Somali refugees (Benseman, 2012).

Recognizing this dearth in research, this study adopts a social network conceptual approach for measuring outcomes of learning in the context of low-income refugee groups. It suggests that any attempt to examine social capital should be grounded on a specific conceptual or theoretical framework that is capable of examining how individuals with significant literacy and language barriers access and mobilize social capital as a result of learning. A specific conceptual or theoretical basis for examining social capital makes explicit the characteristics (e.g. structure) and potential (e.g. functions) of social capital development (Stone, 2001; Claridge, 2004; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007) acquired as a result of learning in the context of low-income refugee groups.

Social Network Approach to Workplace Literacy Programs Outcomes

While determining what specifically should be considered when measuring social capital outcomes, most scholars emphasize two basic underlying concepts. First, social capital is composed of networks of social relations that generate beneficial outcomes for an individual or groups of individuals. Second, social capital represents resources embedded in social

relationships that individuals can access/mobilize by virtue of their membership in a network (Bourdieu, 1996; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Guided by these key concepts, social capital can be defined as the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social group that facilitates their access to emotional, instrumental or informational resources, that are essential for their daily survival, stability or upward mobility (Smith, 2000, Lin, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002). Consistent with this definition, this study adopts a social network conceptual framework that is centered on two key dimensions namely: (1) access to social networks and (2) mobilization of social network resources (Flap & Volker, 2004; Lin & Erickson, 2008; Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018).

Access to social networks results from the structure (size and strength of ties) of an individual's social network (Granovetter, 1973; Rostila, 2013; Manalel, 2018), as well as the individual's position in the social network (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Adler & Kwon, 2002). Mobilization refers to the ability of an individual to extract resources by virtue of membership in a social network (Portes, 1998; Burt, 2000; Lin, 2002). Notwithstanding this distinction, most empirical studies have examined social capital based on an individual's access to a social network (Flap & Volker, 2004; Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018) whereas mobilization of social network resources remain under-researched (Smith, 2008). This study takes the position that the mere existence of a social network does not always equate to or guarantee social capital (Smith, 2008; Ryan, 2011). Rather, the resources embedded in social networks, and how they are utilized for productive purposes, are the hallmarks of social capital. The rationale is that an individual may have access to a social network, but may not have the ability to mobilize the resources that are embedded in their social network – which ultimately impacts their social capital endowment (Portes, 1998; Cross & Lin, 2008; Lancee, 2010).

Three simple points may help drive this point home. First, in order to possess social capital, an individual must establish and maintain social relationships or ties with others (Williams & Durrance, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986; Flap & Volker, 2004; Lancee, 2010). Second, it is the resources - emotional, instrumental or informational - possessed by those others within the social network that are the actual or potential source of advantage (Lin, 2002, Shoji, Haskins, Rangel & Sorensen, 2015). Third, in order to deploy social capital, individuals must have the ability to leverage the resources entrenched in their networks, and do so to their advantage (Cross & Lin, 2008; Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos, 2017). These points outline the structural and functional perspectives of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Lin, 2002; Policy Research Initiative, 2003).

Viewed from the foregoing, this study suggests that any attempt to conceptualize and measure social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs must examine (i) the structure of social network accessible to an individual as a result of participation in learning (Bourdieu, 1986; Granovetter, 1973); (ii) the nature or types of resources that can be mobilized through the network acquired as a result of participation in learning (Lin, 2000); and (iii) the mechanisms that enable or facilitate the process of mobilizing resources in the social network (Kwon & Adler, 2014). It is against this backdrop that this study adopts a social network conceptual approach to measure social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs in the context of low-income refugee workers.

Overview of this Dissertation

The overarching objective of this dissertation is to examine the social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs among low-income Somali refugee workers. The entire dissertation presents three articles. The first article examined how participation in a workplace literacy

program influenced the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers. To this end, the primary research question is: how (and to what extent) does participation in a workplace literacy program influence (i) the size and (ii) strength of ties of the social network accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers? A focus on the structure of social networks allows for a more thorough understanding of the extent to which participation in classes may impact the size, as well as the quality of ties/relationships in an individual's social network, thereby enhancing their social capital acquisition.

The second article examines the extent to which low-income Somali refugee workers are able to mobilize the resources in their networks acquired as result of participating in classes. Flowing from this, the research questions that shall guide this study are: (i) what are the types of resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers through the networks acquired as a result of participating in a workplace literacy program? (ii) what are the mechanisms that enable the flow or exchange of resources within their acquired social networks? A focus on the types of resources accruable to individuals from participation in learning provides insight into how their acquired social networks function to facilitate access to specific resources that they otherwise would not have been able to access or mobilize.

Drawing on the findings of the first and the second article, the third article uses the results of the empirical articles to discuss their implications for the social capital framework and future directions in examining and measuring social capital outcomes in the context of low-income immigrant and refugee groups.

Research Methodology

The concept of social capital is both structural and functional (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2002; Bizzi, 2015). As such a research methodology is required that is apt to

thoroughly explore and examine the contextualized set of practices that influences how individuals expand their social networks and mobilize resources therein to an advantage. For this reason, data was collected (qualitatively) via individual interviews, designed or developed using a name and resource generator/instrument (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2004; Lin & Erickson, 2008; Lin, Fu, & Hsung, 2001).

The name generator instrument was deployed to investigate the structure of an individual/participants social network, while the resource generator instrument examined the range of resources that individuals could mobilize from their networks. Participants for this study were recruited through a purposeful sampling from a group of Somali refugees working at a meat processing plant of a company located in the U.S. South. The plant was purposefully selected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) on the basis that it had provided an opportunity for the literacy development of its employees with low literacy and language proficiency.

Significance of the Dissertation

Although workplace literacy programs are typically conceptualized as economic tools, essential for the development of human capital, necessary for employment and productivity (Moore, Myers, & Silva, 1998, Jurmo, 2004; Toso, Prins, & Mooney, 2013). However, emerging studies suggest that the outcomes of workplace literacy programs go beyond economic benefits to include the potential for social capital acquisition. Most studies to date have examined social capital outcomes of learning, have done so in relation to economic migrants such as Hispanic and Asian immigrants (Lee, 1994; Bankston, 2014; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012). Whereas, less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as Somali refugees.

The significance of this study is twofold. First, it examines social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs, providing insight into the specific key elements that should be considered when assessing social capital outcomes in the context of low-income, ethnic refugee groups. Hence, this research contributes to our understanding of the types of resources or support – emotional, instrumental, or informational – that are accessed and mobilized through relationships acquired as a result of participating in workplace literacy programs. Second, this study is particularly significant in the light of Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014). It suggests that in the absence of a uniform national integration policy the WIOA presents potential opportunities to better address the economic and social integration needs of immigrants and refugees in the workforce. Therefore, in addition to the economic argument for investments in workplace literacy programs, workplace literacy programs can open up arrays of opportunities for reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and improving the quality of lives of low-income refugees at the risk of isolation and discrimination. It is against this backdrop that the non-economic argument, i.e., social capital development deserves recognition and consideration in public policy debates.

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Chapter 2: The Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs on the Structure of Social
Networks of Low-Income Somali Refugee Workers

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Abstract

A substantial body of literature exists on the economic benefits of workplace literacy programs, and much less available empirical studies on the social or non-economic outcomes of workplace literacy programs, particularly in the context of low-income, refugee workers in the U.S. Adopting a social network approach, this study examines the impact of workplace literacy programs on the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers. We conceptualized structure as (i) network size, and (ii) tie strength. Data were drawn using interviews with eighteen participants enrolled in a workplace literacy program. The classes offered included ESL, GED and Citizenship, and participants had attended classes for at least three months. The interview protocol was designed using a name generator instrument. The findings revealed that participation in classes had a positive impact on their network structure, through the acquisition of strong ties with co-workers.

Introduction

Following the establishment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. has been a symbol of hope and home to a substantial number of refugees seeking freedom from war, poverty, environmental disaster, or political and religious persecution (American Immigration Council, 2020; Blizzard & Batalova, 2019). Currently, more than three million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1980, making the U.S. the largest resettlement country in the world, after Canada (Blizzard & Batalova, 2019; Radford & Connor, 2019).

Refugees, notably, constitute a significant and growing portion of the U.S. population, and, as such, account for a substantial proportion of the labor force. Although refugees are diverse in educational attainment, and work experience, a large number of them arrive in the U.S. with very low levels of literacy, English proficiency, and other skills that are important determinants of effective participation and mobility in the U.S. labor market (Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; Choitz & Montes, 2016; Chang, 2017).

Based on existing data, Somali refugees appear to be one of the most educationally disadvantaged refugee groups in the U.S. (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2011). The backdrop of this disadvantage is a long history of civil war, insecurity, poverty, and natural disasters forcing civilians to migrate to the U.S. under precarious circumstances (U.N. Development Programme (2011). To date, Somali refugees have relocated to the United States in large numbers, making them one of the largest African refugee groups in the U.S. labor force (Goza, 2011; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012).

In spite of their traumatic experience fleeing persecution conflict, violence, or other dangerous circumstances in their home country, Somali refugees in the U.S. possess a strong sense of communal identity, solidarity, cultural confidence and pride that enable them to adapt

and strengthen their resilience in adverse situations (Seppänen, 2016). As reflected in the Center for Immigration Studies report, Somali refugees have a greater tolerance for risk and hard work when compared to their native-born counterparts (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). In communities across the U.S., particularly rural ones, Somali refugees have become an integral part of the communities and have helped fill workforce gaps in a variety of sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, transportation, hospitality, to name a few (New American Economy, 2017). They are also often described as entrepreneurial, pooling financial, labor and other economic resources, thereby, contributing billions of dollars to the U.S. economy as taxpayers and consumers (New American Economy, 2017; United Nations, 1951).

Despite their meaningful contribution to the U.S. workforce and the pivotal role they play, Somali refugees differ in important ways from economic migrants and their native-born counterparts (Kallick&Mathema, 2016). As a small ethnic minority group in the U.S., Somali refugees are uniquely confronted with cultural, religious, literacy and linguistic differences that impede their access to opportunity and economic self-sufficiency and mobility (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Gichiru, 2012; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012). Several factors have been identified as responsible for these impediments.

First, unlike economic migrants who voluntarily leave their home country in search of economic advancement, Somali refugees are forced to flee their homes and seek safety in another country, oftentimes without warning and under traumatic and tragic circumstances (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2011; Catholic Charities Diocese of Lexington, 2016). Upon their involuntary migration, they find themselves in communities that are extremely different in almost every regard from their home communities (Bialecki, Gotta, & Pilegi, 2018). This, in turn, affects their ability to integrate socially and thrive successfully in their host communities.

Second, when compared to native-born counterparts or other economic migrants, Somali refugees lag behind in educational attainment, with as many as half without a high school diploma (McMichael & Manderson, 2004; McCabe, 2011). It is estimated that, in Somalia, about 42% of the population is illiterate due to the educational disruption caused by the war. In addition, the education of Somalis in refugee camps is almost non-existent (Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit, 2013). On arrival to the U.S., they are predominantly functionally illiterate, as many of them are unable to read or write in their own language, much less literate in the English language. Consequently, Somali refugees experience significant challenges finding employment, staying employed, and moving up the employment ladder (Kaptejns & Arman, 2008).

Third, although some of them may be proficient in multiple languages such as Somali, Arabic, Swahili, etc., or educated to a certain degree, their prior educational achievement and credentials are often unrecognized or undervalued in the labor market (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012; Kaptejns & Arman, 2008; Sullivan, Weeks, & Simonson, 2017). Moreover, in spite of their desire to be gainfully employed, they lack familiarity with workforce training or development opportunities needed to get on career paths that offer upward mobility (Kaptejns & Arman, 2008; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012).

In this context, creating opportunities for literacy and skill development through workplace literacy programs, among Somali refugees is central to enhancing their adaptation and social integration (Hanley, et al., 2018; Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008), as well as their employability and upward mobility (Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004).

Recognizing the low levels of literacy among large segments of the US labor force and the need to enhance the economic mobility of America's working poor, the US government

established the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). Pursuant to the WIOA, workplace literacy programs have been recognized as useful strategies for improving the literacy of educationally disadvantaged workers (Jurmo, 2004; Bird et al, 2014).

The term "workplace literacy program" simply refers to a literacy or education program typically carried out at the workplace or in a setting provided by the employer (Moore, Myers & Silva, 1998; Milkulecky & Lloyd, 1997; Jurmo, 2004). Rather than teaching abstract skills, workplace literacy programs are needs-oriented and aim at strengthening literacy skills such as reading, writing, listening, computation, speaking/language, and critical reasoning skills (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012; Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017). Over the years, these programs have benefitted immigrant, including refugee and non-immigrant workers equipping them with the skill set necessary to succeed in the workforce, improve their organization's performance, as well as advance their personal and professional development (Pritchard, 2013; Haan & Caputo, 2012; Parker, 2007; Hollenbeck, & Timmeney, 2009).

In accordance with the provisions of the WIOA, workplace literacy programs are typically evaluated in the context of their economic benefits, and conceptualized as human capital, essential for employment and productivity (Descy & Tessaring, 2005; Clymer, 2011; Singh & Mohanty, 2012). However, emerging research suggests that the outcomes of these programs exceed economic benefits to include the promotion of social relationships – networks – that are fostered through learning (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk 2003; Schuller 2017). These social relationships have been associated with different outcomes – positive and negative – and have been conceptualized and documented in the literature as social capital (Balatti, Black, Falk, 2006; Field & Spence, 2000).

For instance, Feinstein and Sabates (2007) established that participation in adult education programs stimulates positive changes in participants' attitudes which are revealed in a wide spectrum of social outcomes, such as demonstrating a greater sense of connectedness, confidence, trust, as well as racial tolerance amongst individuals. Similarly, Salomon (2010) asserts that participation in workplace literacy programs can help learners develop not only skills needed for work, but also build social relationships and networks based on trust and shared values. By virtue of an analysis of a number of Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy programs, Tett & Maclachlan (2007) revealed a positive relationship between learning, self-confidence and social capital.

Although these studies point to some correlation between participation in learning and social capital, their specific connections to the structure of relationships/networks that are acquired through learning remain largely unclear. Recognizing this dearth in research, this study suggests that any attempt to examine social capital should be grounded on a specific conceptual or theoretical framework. Without a conceptual/theoretical basis for examining social capital, its characteristics and potential remain unknown (Stone, 2001). Inspired by the scholarships of Bourdieu (1986) Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), this study adopts a social network approach to examine the social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs.

The central idea of social capital is that through our social networks of relationships we have access to a range of resources – emotional, instrumental and informational – we can utilize or mobilize to an advantage (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 1993). To this end, social capital inheres in the structure of the social network accessible to an individual and that can be leveraged for support (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2002). Hence, the primary research question is - how (and to what extent) does participation in workplace literacy program

influence the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers? A focus on the structure of social network allows for a better understanding of the extent to which participation in classes/learning may impact the quantity and/or quality of relationships, thereby creating access to social capital.

A Social Network Approach to Conceptualizing Social Capital

The idea that social networks play a significant role in creating access to social capital has been well established through the works of several scholars, including Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Although their theories are broad and diverse, they overlap in one central view, that social capital lies within one's networks and more specifically in the relationships and resources therein (Bourdieu, 1996; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). For instance, Bourdieu (1996) asserts that the individual's social network and the resources they convey in itself is the social capital. Coleman (1988) locates the sources of social capital in the structure of social networks, and at the same time refers to three features of social capital namely: obligations and expectations, information channels and norms. In Putnam's (2000) view, social network together with the trust, norms and reciprocity necessary to mobilize such a network is regarded as the source of social capital.

Guided by these key concepts, social capital can be defined as the structure of social network accessible to an individual and that can be leveraged for support or used for productive purposes (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2002). This study, therefore, suggests any attempt to examine or measure social capital outcomes should focus on the structure of network that provides access to beneficial resources or that can serve as a source of support to an individual in times of need.

The Structure of Social Network

The structure of a social network has been well discussed in the empirical literature and examined using various measures or metrics. The most common include network size (Bourdieu, 1986), tie strength (Granovetter, 1973), network density (Coleman, 1988), and network homogeneity/diversity (Son & Lin, 2012). However, for the purpose of this study, we shall conceptualize structure as the size, and the strength of the ties in the social network accessible to an individual as a result of participation in classes (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986).

Network Size

Proponents of the structural network perspective have argued that the size of a person's network determines the quantity and quality of social resources accessible to an individual. For instance, Bourdieu (1986) argued that the volume of social capital processed by an individual depends on size of networks or connections that can be mobilized. Hence, individuals with large networks may have a larger pool of persons to call upon when in need, and as such have access to diverse social resources (Smith, 2008; Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004). On the contrary, those with fewer ties or small networks may have restricted access to a variety of resources. For instance, in examining the structure of social networks of women, Cofie, Barrington & Singh (2017) found that women who had access to large networks were more likely to access more diverse social resources/support compared with those who did not.

Although it could be argued that having access to a large social network could be more beneficial, the diversity or heterogeneity of the network members may be crucial for access to social capital. Several studies have shown that without diversity of contacts, the size of a social network may be ineffective in creating access to useful resources (Burt, 1992; Letki & Mierina, 2015). For instance, Son and Lin (2012) claim that diversity of social networks confers a relative

advantage to the individual, because it reflects the extent to which additional resources are captured through relationships that are heterogeneous. Similarly, Gyarmati, Leckie & Palameta (2014) argue that individuals typically benefit from having larger, less dense, and more diverse networks, as these kinds of networks can provide access to a wider range of resources not available in the individual's close/immediate network.

Tie Strength

A classic and persistent argument in the social capital research is that access to social capital depends on the strength of ties between individuals in a given network (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2002; Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006; Ryan, 2011; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). According to Granovetter (1973), tie strength can be conceptualized as a combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services between two individuals. Tie strength, however, ranges from strong ties characterized by frequency of interaction, emotional intimacy, and feelings of reciprocity, to weak ties characterized by infrequent interactions, lower levels of emotional intimacy and reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973; Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

Strong ties, therefore, exist among individuals connected within densely knit, homogenous networks such as those involving family/kin, close friends, or ethnic clan/group. Weak ties, on the other hand, exist among individuals connected within sparse, heterogeneous networks such as those involving acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). The effectiveness of strong and weak ties in influencing access to social capital has been widely debated in extant literature (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

For instance, Coleman (1988) analyzed data on dropouts among children at parochial schools. He found that children in smaller, close knit families, evidenced a lower dropout rate. He attributed the lower dropout rates to increased social capital represented in their strong ties to parents, classmates, and teachers. He concludes that strong ties within and between families generates transferable value that support the educational attainment of children in the community. According to Rademacher & Wang (2014), strong ties reinforce trust in interpersonal relationships and also foster mutual exchange of resources especially among people of similar backgrounds.

Due to their distinctive characteristics, some studies claim that networks of strong ties are unlikely to provide resources beyond survival or coping needs, thus highlighting the importance of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Briggs, 1998; Son & Lin, 2012). Recognizing the limitations of strong ties, Granovetter (1973) and Burt (2001) emphasize the importance of weak ties. They argue that a sparse network characterized by weak ties often provides access to a wider variety of resources and novel information not likely to be available in closed networks characterized by strong ties. The distinction between strong and weak ties has been particularly important in the study of disadvantaged social groups such as low-income immigrants and refugees. For instance, Lin (2000) argues that although strong ties are valuable, but weak ties are much more useful for socioeconomic advancement than strong ties because they cross boundaries of race, class, gender or other important sociodemographic characteristics. He asserts that disadvantaged social groups are further marginalized in the absence of networks rich in weak ties. His findings are consistent with Wilson (2001), who opined that the further decline and impoverishment of black inner-cities resulting in social alienation, unemployment and welfare dependency, was due to the quality of their social networks characterized by a lack of

weak ties. In support of Wilson's argument, Campbell, Cornish, & Mclean, (2007) identified the lack of weak ties as one of the obstacles that stood in the way of immigrants' or ethnic groups' social inclusion and upward mobility.

The highlight of these studies is that for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds e.g. low-income immigrants and refugees, both strong ties and weak ties are essential for social capital development because they allow individuals and groups to acquire not only resources embedded in their immediate or closed networks, but also resources that transcend their closed networks (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Flora, Flora & Gasteyer, 2016).

The Role of Social Capital amongst Immigrant groups

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the study of social capital in the context of low-income and ethnic minority social groups. A number of scholars have sought to establish the role of social capital in compensating for economic and social disadvantages amongst immigrant/refugee communities (Quetulio-Navarra, Niehof, & Vaart, 2013; Lowe, 2012). For instance, in their research on South Asian immigrant women in Toronto, George and Chaze (2009) report that the participants' social capital, which included relationships with friends, families, and acquaintances, assisted with their settlement process by providing them with potentially wealth-generating information, resources, and employment. In their study on Mexican immigrants, Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra (2007), found that social networks particularly strong ties contributed to increased earnings among undocumented and legal Mexican immigrants. Sanders, Nee & Sernau (2002) established that immigrants' reliance on cross-cultural ties could lead to increased job information and employment opportunities. Li (2004) found that social capital enabled immigrants who were isolated in low-resource communities to connect to

opportunities outside their social enclaves, thereby increasing their chances for stability and upward mobility.

While there has been much discussion and research on the value of social capital for immigrants, some studies have shown that a lack of fluency in the English language and lower levels of literacy may stall the process of social capital development among educational disadvantaged immigrants (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013; Thuesen, 2016; Pih & Lee, 2007). For instance, in their study of Chinese immigrants in Southern California, Pih and Lee (2007) found significant social capital deficits among low-wage Chinese immigrants. They argued that despite their access to co-ethnic ties, the flow of information on available health care resources was constrained due to linguistic barriers.

Similarly, in a study of immigrants in Sweden, Behtoui (2008) found that, compared to native born population, immigrants experienced significant social capital deficit. However, improved education, work experience and being a member of a voluntary association were positively related to immigrants' ability to access social capital. Thuesen (2016) examined the influence of language on social capital development in low-skill and ethnically diverse workplaces. He found that due to their linguistic barriers, ethnic immigrant and minority workers were embedded in networks that lacked weak, wide ranging ties to individuals from different social and economic backgrounds.

Therefore, creating opportunities for literacy and language development of educationally disadvantaged immigrants may positively enhance their social networks and, consequently, improve access to information, resources and opportunities that they otherwise would not have been able to access (Toso, Prins, & Mooney, 2013; Thuesen, 2016). To date, discussions on the social capital outcomes of learning have generally focused on economic immigrants such as

Hispanic and Asian immigrants, as these two immigrant groups make up the vast majority of immigrants in post-1965 United States (Lee, 1994; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012; Tegegne, 2016). Less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as Somali refugees. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the impact of workplace literacy programs on the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers in the U.S.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited through a purposeful sampling from a group of Somali refugees working at a meat processing plant of a company located in the U.S. South. The plant was purposefully selected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) on the basis that it provided opportunity for the literacy development of its employees with low literacy and language proficiency. Eighteen respondents were selected for this study, including eleven men and seven women, between eighteen to sixty-four years of age. At the time of the study, all the participants had lived in the country for at least one year, had received no form of education in the US, and were enrolled in a workplace literacy program. Led by adult education instructors, the program offered free English, GED and U.S. Citizenship classes on-site at the plant, before and after work shifts. Participants were selected on the criteria that they had attended any of the classes for at least three months and were willing to participate in the study.

Research Design, Data and Methods

The primary research question guiding this study is – how (and to what extent) does participation in workplace literacy program influence the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers? To adequately answer this research question, individual interviews were conducted, and respondents were given the option of interview in

English or Somali language. About half of the interviews were conducted in Somali language with the aid of an interpreter. The interviews took between sixty to ninety minutes. The interview schedule was organized into three sections. The first section contained questions regarding each participant's personal background, including their socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religion, level of education, family size etc.).

Second, we examined impact of workplace literacy program on social network size by counting and comparing the total number of contacts with whom a participant established social relationships with (i) before attending classes, and (ii) after or as a result of attending classes. To accomplish this, we utilized the name generator instrument. This instrument contained a series of name generating and interpreting questions to elicit information regarding the profiles of contacts in each participant's social network (Marin & Hampton, 2007).

Using the name generator instrument, each participant was asked to (a) mention at least five names of key contacts, with whom they share particular social relationships, in each of the following categories: family/relative, close friend, co-worker, neighbor, and acquaintance; (b) describe the occupation, gender, age, religion, and ethnicity of each contact mentioned; (c) recall and list, from the aforementioned contacts, the names in each category of social relationships with those individuals whom they knew and interacted with (i) before attending classes, and (ii) after or as a result of attending classes.

The third section of the interview protocol focused on the strength of ties associated with participants' social networks (i) existing before attending classes and (ii) acquired as a result of attending classes. In this section participants were given the opportunity to describe their social networks in terms of their own subjective evaluations of closeness to specific network members.

For the most part, using this measure, a number of different characteristics can be derived, including the levels of emotional closeness, frequency of interaction and reciprocity (Marin & Hampton, 2007; Marsden & Campbell, 2012).

Measures of Tie Strength

The indicators for tie strength were (i) frequency of interaction; and (ii) reciprocity or exchange of resources (Granovetter, 1973; Retzer Yoong & Hooper, 2012).

Frequency of interaction describes how often individuals are in touch with people in their social network (Manalel, 2018). In order to measure frequency of interaction, we referred to three of the key contacts generated in the preceding section, for each category of social relationships - family/relative, close friend, co-worker, neighbor, and acquaintance. We asked participants to describe how many times (daily, weekly or monthly) they were in contact or how often they interacted with each contact listed. We grouped each participant's responses into two distinct categories (i) often and (ii) not often. For instance, for interactions that occurred daily, weekly, or multiple times daily or weekly we coded "often," and for interactions that occurred monthly or a couple of times a year, we coded "not often." (Haythornthwaite, 2002)

Reciprocity is the extent to which social support/resource is both given and received in a relationship (Retzer et al, 2012). Hence, to measure reciprocity, we asked participants to describe the nature of activities they engage in with each contact or support they have received and/or given or exchanged as a result of their relationship. We coded participants' responses as (i) two way i.e. when activities were reciprocal or there was a mutual action of giving and taking, and (ii) one way i.e. when activities were not reciprocal or mutual action was absent (Petroczi, Nepusz & Bazsó, 2007).

Data Analysis Strategy

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. After reviewing the transcripts, the analysis proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, data were organized then analyzed using descriptive statistics, and non-parametric statistical tests in SAS software. This allowed us to (i) examine and describe the demographic characteristics of the population (Table 1); (ii) measure and compare differences in size of participants' existing and acquired networks across social relationship types (Table 2); (iii) measure, classify and compare the strength of ties in participants' existing and acquired networks (Table 3).

Inspired by the preceding phase, the second phase of the analysis involved thematic coding of participants' responses into broad themes. The aim was to (i) enhance the interpretation of the descriptive and non-parametric statistics obtained from phase one of the analysis; and (ii) gain participants' perspectives on how participation in classes may have impacted the structure of their social networks. The results from the descriptive statistics, non-parametric statistical test and thematic analysis are integrated, systematically presented and discussed in the sections below.

Results

Overview of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 summarizes the demographics of eighteen study participants. Their ages ranged between eighteen and sixty-four. The average age was 32.8 years. Eleven (61.1%) of the participants were men, and seven (38.9%) were women. Six (33.3%) participants reported that they had received no education prior to their enrollment in the workplace literacy program. Five (27.7%) had less than an elementary education, and seven (38.8%) had less than a high school education. Out of the eighteen participants enrolled in classes, ten (55.5%) attended ESL class,

seven (44.4%) attended GED class, and one (5.5%) attended Citizenship class. Eleven (61.1%) of the participants were married, while seven (38.8%) were single. Eleven (61.1%) participants described their households as large, while seven (38.8%) described their households as small. Eleven (61.1%) of the participants (all men) described their roles in the family as providers, while seven (38.8%) of them (all women) described their roles as supporters. All eighteen (100%) participants were of the Muslim faith and practiced Islam.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Total No of Participants	Percentage No of Participants (%)
Gender		
Male	11	61.0
Female	7	38.8
Age Group		
18-26 years	6	33.3
27-36 years	6	33.3
37-64 years	6	33.3
Marital Status		
Married	11	61.1
Single	7	38.8
Education		
None	6	33.3
< elementary	5	16.6
< high school	7	50.0
Class enrolled		
ESL	10	55.5
GED	7	33.8
Citizenship	1	5.5
Family Role		
Provider	11	61.1
Supporter	7	38.8
Religion		
Islam	18	100
Other	0	0

Impact on Network Size

We examined impact of participating in workplace literacy program on the size of participants' social network by counting and comparing the total number of contacts with whom a participant established social relationships with (i) before attending classes, and (ii) after or as a result of attending classes. The total size of the existing social networks for the whole sample was 254. Per an individual, the maximum existing social network size was 21, while the minimum was 8. The mean and median values of participants' existing social network size were 14, respectively. The total size of the networks for the whole sample increased by 118 contacts, a 47% increase. For an individual, the maximum number of newly acquired contacts was 9 and the minimum was 2. The mean and median values for the acquired contacts were 6.5 and 6.0 respectively. A participant acquired a large network if their network size increased by at least 6 contacts. More than half of the participants (61%) was considered to have acquired a large social network, 45% of them were men, and 55% of them were women. As a result of classes, women acquired more contacts when compared to men as a result of classes. Out of all the women, 86% had a large social network size compared to 45% of the men.

Before attending classes, relationships with family/relatives accounted for the bulk of all participants' social network contacts (36%). Relationships with co-workers and acquaintances accounted for a smaller proportion of their existing network contacts (14% and 11% respectively). However, as a result of attending classes, participants reported more contacts in their non-familial/kinship relationship types. Relationships with co-workers and acquaintances constituted the majority of their acquired network contacts (37% and 22% respectively). Relationships with neighbors and close friends were also positively impacted as a result of

attending classes (21% and 18% respectively). Family relationship was the least impacted with the smallest proportion of contacts listed (2%).

We conducted a Wilcoxon Signed Rank (non-parametric) test to examine whether the differences between existing and acquired network size across relationship types were statistically significant. The differences in the number of contacts across all other relationship types are significant (close friends - $Z = 39$; p value < 0.0005 ; co-workers - $Z = 76.5$; p value < 0.0001 ; neighbors - $Z = 60$; p value < 0.0001 ; and acquaintances - $Z = 45.5$; p value < 0.0002). While the difference in the size of family relationships is not significant ($Z = 0.5$; p value = 1.00),

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Network Size across Social Relationship Types

Network Size – Mean		
Relationship Type	Existing	Acquired
Family	5.05	0.11
Close Friend	3.16	1.16**
Co-worker	2.00	2.44**
Neighbor	2.38	1.39**
Acquaintance	1.50	1.44**
Men	13.80	5.54*
Women	14.50	8.14*

*** $p < 0.001$ statistically significant level

** $p < 0.05$ statistically significant level

Impact on Tie Strength

We measured tie strength by combining participants' (coded) responses to questions regarding their frequency of interaction and reciprocity with their contacts (i) existing before they participated in classes and (ii) acquired as a result of participating in classes. We assume that ties are stronger where there is frequency of interaction and reciprocity between the participants and their contacts (Granovetter, 1973). Conversely, ties are weaker when there is

less interaction and not as much reciprocity or exchange of resources between the participants and their contacts (Marsden & Campbell, 2012).

For the reasons above, we assigned numerical values (from a scale of 1 to 4) to each combination of coded responses according to their reported frequency. We transformed the scale items into categories of tie strength (Retzer, Yoong & Hooper, 2012). For instance, we assigned the highest value of “4” when the frequency of interaction is coded “often”, and exchange of resources is coded “two way”; and we assigned the lowest value of “1” when the frequency of interaction is coded “not often”, and exchange of resources is coded “one way”.

Categories of Tie Strength in Participants' Social Networks

We identified four categories or dimensions of tie strength which we characterized as:

1. **Strong ties - “often and two way”** - i.e. when the frequency of interaction between the participant and the contact is “**often**”, and exchange of resources is “**two way**” (Granovetter, 1973).
2. **Intermediate strong ties – “not often and two way”** – i.e. when the frequency of interaction between the participant and the contact is “**not often**” and exchange of resources is “**two way**” (Retzer et al, 2012).
3. **Weak ties – “often and one way”** – i.e. when the frequency of interaction between the participant and the contact is “**often**” and the exchange of resources is “**one way**” (Marsden and Campbell, 2012).
4. **Latent ties – “not often and one way”** – i.e. when the frequency of interaction between the participant and the contact is “**not often**”, and the exchange of resources is “**one way**” (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Table 3. Cross Tabulation and Chi-square Analysis of Tie Strength

Categories of Strength	Existing/Pre Class	Acquired/Post Class	Row Total
Strong	170	91	261
	0.256	0.43	
	0.651	0.349	80.6%
	0.837	0.752	
	0.525	0.281	
Intermediate Strong	7	9	16
	0.913	1.531	
	0.438	0.562	4.9%
	0.034	0.074	
	0.022	0.028	
Weak	8	11	19
	1.281	2.148	
	0.421	0.579	5.9%
	0.039	0.091	
	0.025	0.034	
Latent	18	10	28
	0.012	0.02	
	0.643	0.357	8.6%
	0.089	0.083	
	0.056	0.031	
Column Total	203	121	324
	62.70%	37.30%	

Pearson's Chi-squared test ($Chi^2 = 6.59$; $D.F. = 3$; $p\ value = 0.086$)

Cell Contents

N
Chi square contribution
N/Row Total
N/Column Total
N/Table Total

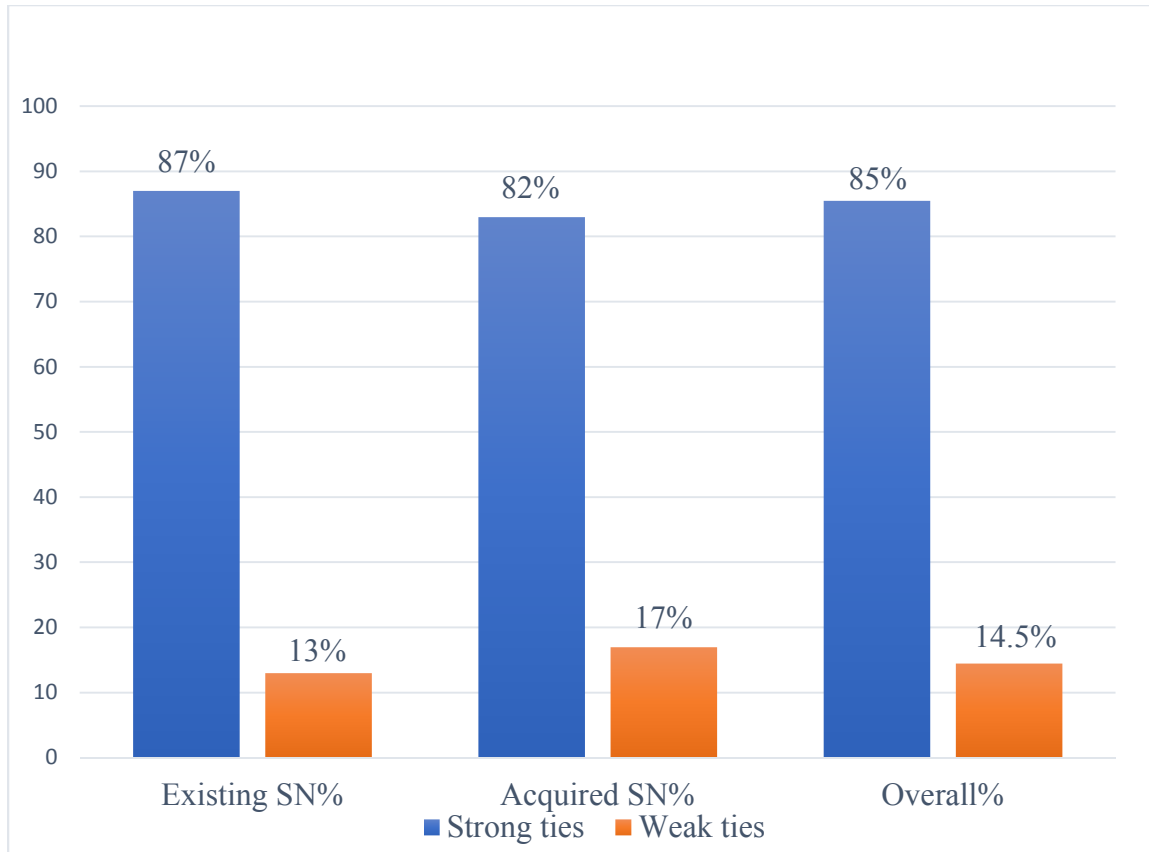


Figure 1. Comparing Strong and Weak ties in Existing and Acquired Social Network

By means of cross tabulation and chi-square analysis, we calculated, and compared the different categories of tie strength across participants' existing and acquired social networks. At a 0.1 or 90% significant level, we found evidence of a relationship between the tie strength in the existing and acquired social networks ($\chi^2 = 6.59$; degrees of freedom (DF) = 3; p value = 0.086). All four categories of tie strength – strong (80.6%), intermediate strong (4.9%), weak (5.9%) and latent (8.6%) - were represented in both existing and acquired social networks, although in various proportions. Overall, strong ties constituted the largest category of tie strength in participants' existing and acquired social network (87% and 82% respectively) and shall be the center of discussion.

Discussion

This study examines the impact of participating in a workplace literacy program on the structure of social networks of low-income Somali refugee workers. Overall, our findings support the hypothesis that participation in learning positively impacts social capital development amongst economically/educationally disadvantaged social groups, such as low-income Somali refugee workers.

Participation in classes increased the size of participants' social network through their acquisition of non-kinship relationships such as co-workers, close friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Participants' relationships with co-workers (who were in most cases classmates) accounted for most of their newly acquired contacts. In addition, women acquired more contacts when compared to men. A possible explanation for this difference is that women may be more likely than men to engage in frequent social interactions and activities (McDonald & Mair, 2010).

From the thematic analysis, it was evident that participation in classes improved participants' communicating skills and those skills played a significant role in the formation, expansion and strengthening of new relationships. Most (94%) of the participants attributed their ability to form new friendships to the improved communication skills they acquired from taking classes, regardless of the type of class enrolled in. For instance, a GED student recalled:

My ability to speak English has really helped me to interact with people that are not only from Somalia, but other places and we can all speak English. I communicate now with a lot of people because of English ... This would not have been possible without attending class. After class I became more friendly and outgoing. I am able to talk to a lot of people at work and I speak more in general. I now know more coworkers that are not from Somalia, than I used to (Saber, woman, aged 28, GED).

Even though attending classes had no impact in the size of family relationship, four out of eighteen participants reported that taking classes enhanced the quality of their relationships with family members. For instance, one of the participants claimed:

Taking classes has helped me to find a different way to interact with my family/relatives and close friends. For instance, I baby sit my sister's kids sometimes and I have to speak English to them because they understand that perfectly, even more than me (Habiba, woman aged 21, GED).

Another participant recalled:

The fact that I can communicate in English has not only helped me connect with my friends, it has also made me closer to my family, because my parents insist that we speak English. It has helped me spend time with my family because we all challenge each other to speak English language in addition to our own native language (Sadarac woman aged 23, ESL).

While participants' existing social networks consisted mainly of strong ties centered around kin and close friends, the results indicate that participation in classes also fostered the emergence of strong ties predominantly with co-workers (seventeen out of eighteen participants). The nature of their strong ties was homogeneous and dense, as network members shared similar social position (low-income ethnic and minority workers) and almost all members knew each other. Classes provided a meeting place for individuals who shared some characteristics such as minority status, occupational backgrounds, education level etc. Accordingly, participants were more likely to socially interact and establish strong ties with their classmates based on those shared similarities, interests or experiences. Several participants claimed that their relationships with peers were, for the most part, built and strengthened as a result of the commonalities they shared, and feelings of solidarity and cooperation amongst them were triggered. For instance:

Attending classes has helped me to be closer to some of my friends. For instance, Halimo, Zainab, and Abdi are my close friends who I met in school because we take classes together, we also speak the same language - Somali, and we face the same struggles of trying to make it each day ... We pray together, and we have mutual understanding. This makes us closer, and because we are there for each other For instance

Abdi cannot really help me with my study because he is a student like me, but he helps me with a ride... Zainab assists me with reading We go to school together. Halimo, we talk together about school, family etc.... (Saheed, man, aged 41, ESL).

This study also found evidence that taking classes facilitated frequent social interactions which strengthened their interpersonal relationships and consequently resulted in reciprocal relations between participants and their contacts. For instance, several participants admitted that on account of attending classes together, they became more socially engaged with their peers. As a result, they were more willing to render and request specific support from one another, and that strengthened their relationships. One participant recalled:

Class has made me more social; it helps me to understand people outside the job, and who are not Somali. Also, I am like a teacher's assistant in class. I help to break down some of the learnings for the other students who are a bit slower than myself. This brings us closer and helps to maintain the relationship and this would not have been possible without the classes (Usaru, man, aged 36, Citizenship Class).

Regardless of cultural and sociodemographic characteristics such as ethnicity, age, religion or gender, participation in classes fostered feelings of social solidarity and mutual support among individuals. Some of the participants claimed that without attending classes, it would have been difficult to maintain the closeness that exists between them and their network members. Consequently, participants demonstrated a sense of togetherness and greater motivation to request assistance from their strong ties during times of need. Also, their strong ties were instrumental in assisting participants carry out their daily activities such as getting a ride to work or providing other practical support that otherwise might have been difficult to previously. For example, a participant noted:

Keta, the Burmese guy who is my friend and Co-worker, whom I didn't know so well before classes ..., he and his brother promised to always give me a ride to class. They have also helped me a lot in my studies because we learn from each other. I would not have got all the help that I get from them because before classes we were not close enough for me to ask for certain favors or assistance such as a ride, but as a result of

attending classes together, we have each other's phone number ... (Saber, woman, aged 28, GED).

What follows from these findings is that creating opportunities for the literacy and language development of low-income Somali refugee workers positively impacts the structure of their social networks. Although participants' existing social networks constituted mainly of strong ties, participants were more disposed to establish and maintain strong ties with co-workers based on their shared interests. For the most part, the nature of the strong ties in their newly acquired network was homogeneous and dense. Network members were familiar with each other and also shared similar demographic characteristics along unique dimensions such as minority status, occupational backgrounds, and education level.

Improved Social skills

To the extent that participants were able to meaningfully communicate in English with their peers, minimized communication barriers, alleviated vulnerabilities and thus reinforced solidarity. For instance, a female participant enrolled in the GED class described how her ability to communicate reasonably in English strengthened her relationship with a co-worker from a different ethnicity, and thus enhanced her access to useful support:

Lynda my co-worker, a Hispanic lady, said she didn't approach me initially because she didn't think she could communicate with me. When I approached her and spoke English to her, she was surprised, and then we became friends...For example, there was a day I fell down, she took me to the nurse and stood as a witness, without her help I would have been badly injured. And as a result, we became close friends. She was able to help me because I could understand her question and speak to her. I was able to interact with her (Hamsaphat, woman, aged 21, GED).

Although participation in classes did not significantly impact the formation of weak ties, the improved linguistic capacity of participants eliminated some of the communication barriers and improved access to more diverse groups of people (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013; Thuesen, 2016; Pih & Lee, 2007). This improved access to new or

more people and further enhanced potential for the formation of weak ties, as revealed in this testimony:

Now I have more confidence than before because I am taking English classes and because I can speak some English even though not so much, I like to talk to white people, and I like to talk to people that are good... Yes, I like to meet new people because I am working in a big company that hires new people all the time and I can talk to many of them now because I can speak some English. Before I couldn't respond if they talked to me. I will just be looking at them. But now I can understand them either say yes or no. I can write some words and read as well... I can speak and can read now and can understand anything it is only a few words that I cannot read now (Nurtu, man, aged 26, ESL)

Consistent with studies that have established a link between literacy development and self-confidence (Strawn 2003; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007), participants demonstrated increased ability and confidence in meaningfully interacting and connecting with people outside their immediate social circle. Thus, the more proficient participants were in communicating in English, the more confident they were, and the less barriers they encountered in expanding their networks. Conversely, language deficiency may create formidable challenges to the expansion of an individual's positive sense of self and potential, as well as hinder expansion or strengthening of social network. As a participant described

The people in my class mostly Mexicans and so there are language barriers ... I only speak to the ones who understand me. For instance, I tried to talk to my supervisor, but he couldn't understand me ... I am handicapped, and I can't make much friends and participate in activities because I cannot really interact and communicate because of the language barriers (Jada, man, aged 37, ESL)

Although the learning environment creates opportunities for participants to frequently interact and connect with one another, language barriers restrict an individual's ability to engage in meaningful interactions (Phillimore, 2011; Toso, Prins, & Mooney, 2013; Thuesen, 2016). This consequently limits the size of their social networks and potential to access useful resources that will enable them to get by or get ahead.

Shared Interests

Literacy development and language proficiency were not the only elements influencing the structure of participants' social network. The establishment of shared interests was also found to be one of the key elements influencing the formation of strong ties. Classes provided a meeting place for individuals who shared some characteristics such as minority status, occupational backgrounds, education level etc. Thus, consistent with the homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001), our analysis revealed that participants were more likely to socially interact and establish strong ties with their classmates based on shared similarities, interests or experiences. Several participants claimed that their relationships with peers were, for the most part, built and strengthened as a result of having shared interests and that triggered feelings of solidarity and cooperation amongst them. For instance:

Because we have a mutual understanding of wanting to learn and we all know the importance of learning, and that helps us to be closer to each other. Sometimes we help each other. And now we can understand each other because we have learned together, we speak the same language, we pray together, we eat together, we work together and more... This would not have been possible without the classes (Ibarra, man, aged 29, GED)

Overall, participation in classes set the background for the creation and maintenance of strong ties based on the establishment of shared interests with co-workers and classmates. Participants were able to maintain their strong tie networks through engaging in social events, religious gatherings and celebrations together. These activities cultivated a sense of belonging, and fostered feelings of closeness, trust and unity among them.

Mutuality

Mutuality was also key to establishing and maintaining strong ties. Mutuality suggests an ongoing interdependence which refers to the state of being reliant and dependent upon one another for assistance or support (Fehr, 2008). Hence, the concept of mutuality is built upon

meaningful social interactions and reciprocal relations. In view of this, the social settings in which learning occurred enabled participants to become more familiar with each other. The more familiar they were, the more likely they were to engage in supportive relationships. For instance, participants revealed that participation in classes provided the context for the credible flow and exchange of resources or support, essential for their stability and daily survival.

Taking classes has helped my relationships ... We talk to each other a lot, my friends call me and I call them back ... we use social media like WhatsApp, we play together sometimes and we also eat together ... because we are available for each other...so our relationship gets stronger...For example, I help Nuru to interpret or translate in English, when he wants to pay a bill or rent. I also help Ahmed especially when he is doing groceries and cannot communicate with the sales associate, and this makes us closer (Hazzah, man, aged 21, GED)

Another participant noted:

I would not have known my friends very well and be able to approach them if not that we take classes together and so we spend a lot of time together. My relationship with my friends has become closer and better ... We can now support each other, we talk to each other a lot, help each other, and give assistance to each other when needed. The relationship is mutual (Abdul, man, aged 38, ESL)

Trust

Trust can be defined as the positive expectation of goodwill (Glanville, 2007), and is created through reliable processes of exchange and expectation (Adler & Kwon, 2002). When trust is low, social isolation is high, and the potential for reciprocal relations is weakened. In other words, one of the reasons why individuals socialize and engage in collaborative activities is because there is a certain degree of trust established and sustained. Our analysis revealed that participation in classes engendered trusting relationships. Moreover, trust was key to fostering collaborations, and strengthening relationships. For instance, one participant explained:

The class is pretty diverse, but we all have the same goal which is learning. The class allows me to interact with all people from Somalia, Mexico, and Burma. We understand each other at work so it is pretty nice to understand each other in class as well. The class

provides a place for us to interact with people and this helps us build trust, this helps us to be closer and help each other when in need (Usaru, man, aged 36, Citizenship)

In all, participants' interactive experiences and mutual understanding achieved in the classroom environment fostered the development of trust. This did not only create a strong basis for establishing friendships and collaborations, but it also enhanced feelings of security and reliability, that enabled network members to act together more effectively in pursuit of their shared objectives. Trust, therefore, appears to be instrumental to the formation of strong ties and is established and sustained as a result of participants' ability to engage in meaningful interactions and supportive relationships.

Conclusion

Workers from disadvantaged groups, especially low-income refugee workers, are not only disadvantaged by their relatively low human capital, but also by their limited access to social capital. Traditionally, employers had an incentive to invest in workplace literacy programs to optimize the human capital resources of their workforce to maximize organizational productivity, competitiveness and profitability (Descy & Tessaring, 2005; Hollenbeck, 2009; Singh & Mohanty, 2012). Research evaluating outcomes of workplace literacy programs have largely taken either an economic approach, conceptualized as human capital (Hollenbeck, 1993; Levenson, 2004; Bloom, Burrows, Lafleur, & Squires, 2007), and a non-economic approach, conceptualized as social capital (Salmon, 2010; Desjardins & Schuller, 2006). Whilst the former has been widely studied in the literature, there is little evidence for the non-economic outcomes, specifically social capital, especially in the context of low-income refugee workers in the U.S.

The central idea of social capital is that through our social networks of relationships we have access to a range of resources— emotional, instrumental and informational – we can utilize or mobilize to an advantage (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 1993). For this reason,

Bourdieu (1986) argues that the amount of social capital possessed by an individual depends on the size of the social network, as well as the quantity and quality of social resources accessible to that individual by virtue of membership in a given network. Consequently, it is the structure comprised of the size, and the strength of ties, associated with a given network that determines access to social capital (Bourdieu, 1996; Granovetter, 1973).

The few studies that have examined social capital outcomes of learning have done so without any consideration of the structure of network accessible to an individual by virtue of learning (Salmon, 2010; Desjardins & Schuller, 2006; De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016; St. Clair, 2008). This study represents a starting point for filling in that research gap. It suggests that any attempt to examine or measure social capital outcomes of learning should focus on the structure that is the size and strength of ties, conceptualized as strong or weak ties acquired through learning. A focus on the structure of social network allows for a better understanding of the extent to which participation in learning may impact the quantity and quality of relationships, thereby expanding and creating access to social capital.

This study found evidence that among low-income Somali refugee workers participation in workplace literacy programs (ESL, Citizenship and GED classes) positively impacts the structure of their social networks. Through the acquisition and maintenance of strong ties with co-workers. Classes provided the social context for the establishment, strengthening and maintenance of non-kinship strong ties, predominantly with co-workers. Their newly acquired relationships proved effective for accessing useful resources that assisted participants in times of need. In addition, the potential for expansion and strengthening of relationships was influenced by certain key factors such as literacy and language proficiency, shared interests, mutuality, and

trust. Alternatively, changes in any of these factors may likely affect the structure (size and strength of ties) of their network and therefore social capital development.

Taking classes (ESL, Citizenship and GED) facilitated frequent social interactions which strengthened their interpersonal relationships, and consequently triggered reciprocal relations between participants and their contacts. Classes provided a meeting place for individuals who shared some characteristics such as minority status, occupational backgrounds, education level etc. Class interactions opened up a lot of opportunities for more frequent meaningful interactions, intimacy, and reciprocal relations among individuals, which contributed to the formation of strong ties with their co-workers and peers (Granovetter, 1973; Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

Participation in classes also enabled more cross-cultural social interactions and integration with peers or classmates such as Burmese, Hispanics, and African Americans etc. Classes, therefore, served a bridging function, by connecting participants to co-workers or peers from different backgrounds in terms of age, ethnicity, religion, culture, and language. Nevertheless, the nature and quality of their relationship with individuals from diverse backgrounds were no different from their strong ties with co-workers with similar characteristics such as minority status, occupational backgrounds, education level etc. The reason was that the social context in which learning occurred created a sense of belonging, which enabled participants to be more familiar with other individuals regardless of their backgrounds. Hence, the more familiar they were with one another through the class interactions, the more likely they were to frequently interact and engage in collaborative and cooperative activities, which increased the size of their network and strengthened the quality of their relationships.

Although participation in classes did not significantly impact the formation of weak ties, improved language and literacy proficiency levels appear to eliminate some of the barriers participants encounter in expanding their social networks beyond their immediate social circle. This suggests the potential to increase access to more diverse resources and information (Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013; Thuesen, 2016; Pih & Lee, 2007).

The key insight of this study is that creating opportunities for the literacy development of low-income Somali refugee workers through workplace literacy programs positively impacts the structure of their social network. This happens through the acquisition of strong ties, implying an increased access to needed social capital resources – emotional, instrumental and informational (Lin, 2002; Sabatini, 2009; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). The more language proficient and literate low-income Somali refugees are, the more likely they are to engage in meaningful interactions that expand and strengthen their social networks beyond their immediate kinship or familial social network. This process creates access to resources that they otherwise would not have been able to obtain in the absence of such networks.

This study, therefore, lends support to the notion that social capital inheres in the structure of social network accessible to an individual (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Rademacher & Wang, 2014; Kwon & Adler, 2014). Consequently, any attempt to measure or examine social capital outcomes of learning should focus on the structure (size and the strength of ties) of social network accessible to an individual.

The findings of this study are consistent with prior studies (Feinstein & Sabates, 2007; Tett & Macalachan, 2007; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007; Salomon, 2010) that have been able to establish a link between learning and social capital development in the context of disadvantaged groups. This study is significant in that it contributes to the emerging literature suggesting that

workplace literacy programs extend beyond the economic effects to include other non-economic outcomes, such as the relationships that are fostered through learning(Hartley & Horne, 2006; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007; Taylor, Trumpower, & Pavic, 2012).

This study is of particular importance in the light of Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) which supports evaluating literacy programs from the economic perspective of the employer – employment and productivity. In view of the findings from this study, I suggest that the WIOA standards for evaluating workplace literacy programs should be revised and broadened to include the potential for social capital development. By doing so, the workforce literacy programs may be able achieve the following: (1) strengthen its programming and curriculum, based on research, to promote non-economic outcomes, such as the potential for social capital development of vulnerable social groups; (2) develop and incorporate research strategies that are capable of assessing and demonstrating the holistic performance and progress of individuals/participants in the program; and, (3) explore and exploit pathways, and partnerships that are geared towards scaling up existing workplace literacy programs, especially with the goal to bridge existing gaps in social inequality.

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Chapter 3: Mobilizing Social Capital Resources through Workplace Literacy Programs: A Study of Low-Income Somali Refugee Workers

Abstract

This study is part of a larger project that examined the impact of workplace literacy programs on the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers. Drawing on qualitative interviews with eighteen participants, we examined the types of social capital resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers through their networks acquired as a result of participating in a workplace literacy program. Our findings indicate that participation in workplace literacy program afforded participants the opportunity to mobilize social capital resources through the social interactions that it facilitated. Overall, strong ties with co-workers had greater emotional and instrumental benefits to participants when compared to other social relationship types. The emotional and instrumental support that participants acquired were unique and centered on their literacy development and general wellbeing. The benefits included assistance with learning or studying, transportation, companionship support, offering advice, and other practical support services essential for carrying out their daily activities. Moreover, mobilizing instrumental resources through strong ties with co-workers would have been difficult or impossible in the absence of specific mechanisms, which we identified as motivation, trust and reciprocity.

Introduction

As a minority ethnic group in the US, low-income Somali refugee workers are uniquely confronted with significant cultural and language differences (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). These differences not only undermine their work-related aptitude but also deprives them of the opportunity to expand their social networks beyond their immediate kinship and/or co-ethnic networks (Almohamed, 2019), thereby, restricting their access to diverse and beneficial resources i.e social capital. However, as demonstrated in the preceding study, creating opportunities for literacy development through workplace literacy programs positively impacts the structure of their social network through the acquisition of strong ties.

Having established that participation in workplace literacy programs is instrumental in creating access to social networks among low-income Somali refugee workers, the next step is to understand precisely the nature and types of social capital resources that flow through their acquired network. The argument advanced here is that an individual(s) may have access to a social network (Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018), but may lack the ability to mobilize the available resources to their advantage (Portes, 1998; Smith, 2000), which ultimately impacts their social capital development (Flap & Volker, 2004; Lin & Erickson, 2008).

This study argues that access to social network or membership in a social network does not always equate to social capital (Smith, 2008; Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos, 2017). Rather, it is the resources that flow through the network and how they are utilized/mobilized that are the hallmarks of social capital (Lin, 2000; Letki & Mierina, 2015). This study, therefore, suggests that in examining social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs, it is not just the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers that is noteworthy.

We must ask questions about the nature and types of resources available to low-income Somali refugee workers through their social network acquired as a result of participation in a workplace literacy program (Ryan, 2011), as well as the mechanisms that aid mobilization of social capital resources (Lin, 2000; Kwon & Adler 2014). Without examining the specific types of resources that flow through newly acquired social networks, as well as the ability to leverage available resources, we are unable to adequately examine the social capital outcomes of learning in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers.

In spite of the role that social networks play in creating access to social capital among marginalized social groups such as immigrants and refugees, insufficient attention has been paid to the nature and types of resources that flow through the network acquired as a result of learning. Most studies that have sought to evaluate social capital outcomes of participation in literacy programs lack a theoretical basis for empirically measuring outcomes. In addition, their specific connection with the different capital types – emotional, instrumental or informational – that can be mobilized as a result of participation remain largely unexplored.

For instance, in their in-depth study of over six-hundred literacy and numeracy learners in Scotland, Tett & Macalachan (2007) established a link between participation in adult literacy programs, increased levels of confidence and social capital. They argue that learning is essentially a social activity, and participation in learning impacts learners' identity and enables them to develop a stronger sense of personal and social efficacy. Similarly, Macdonald & Scollay (2009) conducted a longitudinal study that focused on the social capital development of adult literacy learners in California. They established that participation in learning resulted in increased social activity and social networking which manifested in social trust and civic

responsibility. Desjardins & Schuller (2007) argue that learning facilitates the creation of social capital in the form of social trust, enhanced social skills and civic engagements.

The measures adopted in these studies such as, social trust, civic responsibility/engagement, social efficacy etc., point to a correlation between participation in learning and social capital. However, they reveal little or nothing about the structure of social networks and specific types of resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – that are mobilized by the individual(s) through social networks acquired as a result of learning. This limitation hinders our understanding of the specific ways in which participation in learning or literacy and language development may impact an individual's ability to create/expand their social support networks and leverage relevant support or resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – that are beyond their usual capacity.

This study addresses this research gap, and extends previous research that examines the impact of workplace literacy programs on the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers. The goal is to examine the specific types of resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – that accrue among low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a workplace literacy program, as well as some of the mechanisms that impact the mobilization of social capital resources.

A focus on the types of resources accruable to individuals from participation in learning provides insight into how their acquired social networks function to create access to specific resources that they otherwise would not have been able to access or mobilize, hence increasing the productive potential of their stock of social capital.

Mobilizing Social Network Resources – Social Capital

Research on social capital emphasizes the value of networks as conduits to access tangible and intangible resources or support (Bourdieu, 1896; Lin, 1999; Ferlander, 2007; Policy Research Initiative, 2003; Manalel, 2018). These tangible and intangible resources are distinct from the personal resources possessed by the individual, and have been classified under three broad categories: emotional, instrumental, and informational (Lin, 2002; Smith, 2000; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Magasi & Hammel, 2004; Ferlander, 2007; Parks-Yancy et al, 2009; Rostila, 2010).

Emotional resources, also referred to as expressive or affective resources (Lin, 2000; Pena-Lopez & Sanchez-Santos, 2016), include the less tangible resources or forms of assistance that make people feel respected, cared for, and loved (such as providing companionship, attachment, and comfort) (Helgeson, 2003). This type of resource improves an individual's psychological being by functioning as a buffer against adverse effects of stress (Bartley 2004; Claridge, 2004; Rostila, 2010; Pena-Lopez & Sanchez-Santos, 2016).

Instrumental resources refer to the tangible or material resources that people receive from their social networks. They include practical or substantive support that helps solve practical problems such as providing labor in kind (e.g. cleaning, carrying groceries, assistance with moving etc.), childcare, transportation, or financial assistance to someone (Smith, 2000; Helgeson, 2003). These resources assist people in getting by in their everyday lives or minimize socioeconomic instability (Briggs, 1998; Li, 2004; Cohen, 2004). Informational resources include different kinds of valuable information, such as advice, guidance, or relevant knowledge that can open up prospects for the flow

of opportunities, for example, employment, referrals, promotion or access to health care etc. (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman, 1992). This type of resource is presumed to assist people in getting ahead or to attain socioeconomic mobility (Briggs, 1998; Lin, 2000; Smith, 2000; Zhang, Anderson & Zhan, 2011).

Guided by this three-fold conceptualization, social capital can therefore be conceptualized as the resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – that flow through an individual's network of social relationships that can be leveraged to attain beneficial outcomes or returns that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2000; Smith, 2000; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Magasi & Hammel, 2004). The basic idea is that an individual's social network constitute an important asset that could be leveraged or mobilized to attain social capital. Nevertheless, not all individuals or groups may uniformly acquire social capital or receive beneficial resources or returns from their social networks (Edwards & Foley, 1998). To this end, it is widely assumed that mobilization of social capital is contingent on how social networks are structured and serve to distribute resources to individuals in a given network (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Lin, 2000, Bankston, 2014). In support of this assumption, is the strength of ties hypothesis, which highlights the role of strong and weak ties in the mobilization of social capital resources (Granovetter, 1973; Glover & Parry, 2005).

According to Granovetter, the strength of a social tie is a function of the frequency and duration of interaction, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services that characterize that tie or relationship. Hence, in most cases, strong ties are largely considered to be ties with people to whom an individual is closest, with whom he or she has more regular and continued interactions, and to whom he or she is likely to count on for certain support. For the most part, strong ties represent an individual's immediate social network consisting of family or kin, close

friends, and co-ethnics (Lin & Dumin, 1986; Borgatti & Jones, 1998; Ryan, 2016). In some cases, they may include immediate colleagues or co-workers or neighbors (Parks-Yancy, DiTomaso, & Post, 2008; Claridge, 2018), depending on the extent of closeness or familiarity between the individuals or groups of individuals (Granovetter, 1973; Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

Weak ties, on the other hand, refer to relationships with people who are not within an individual's immediate social circle (Granovetter, 1973; Lin 2000). They are presumed to be outward looking and tend to link individuals to people of different social groups or from heterogeneous or dissimilar backgrounds (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). In general, weak ties refer to relationships with acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973), or people who are not very well acquainted but interact infrequently for various purposes (Enns, Malinick, Matthews 2008; Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

A number of scholars contend that the distinct characteristics of strong ties – frequency of interaction, emotional intimacy, and reciprocity – make them ideal for mobilizing social capital resources (Lin, 2000; Burt, 2001; Claridge, 2004; Billet, 2011; Hawkins & Maurer, 2011; Zhang, Anderson & Zhan, 2011; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). For instance, Coleman (1998), sees strong ties as a distinctive advantage of social networks. In his opinion, the closeness or intimacy associated with strong ties underpins the establishment of trust that is critical for cooperation and mutuality. Accordingly, strong ties are presumed to be to be an essential source of emotional, instrumental and informational resources (Lin, 2000; Burt, 2001; Claridge, 2004; Billet, 2011; Hawkins & Maurer, 2011; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). Strong ties have proven to be beneficial or useful in times of economic hardships (Briggs, 1998; George and Chaze, 2009), and

psychological or mental stress (Malecki & Demaray, 2003; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Ferlander, 2007).

Notwithstanding the importance of strong ties in mobilizing social capital resources, they do have limits. To this end, some studies claim that the quality of resources leveraged through strong ties is often redundant and restrictive when compared to weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Portes, 1998; Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006). The reason is that strong ties are often formed between or among individuals within the same social circle, who are more similar or share comparable demographic or socioeconomic characteristics, and that typically affects the diversity and quality of resources that flow through such networks (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Portes, 1998; Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006).

On the contrary, weak ties bridge diverse social circles and allows individual or group members to access a differentiated pool of resources, novel information and diverse opportunities that are not likely to be available within their immediate social circle (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2002). For instance, Granovetter (1973) opined that individuals in densely knit strong-tie network are insulated from widely dispersed and instrumental networks that are conduits for accessing diverse opportunities and novel information. He suggests that if a person depended only on a densely knit strong-tie network that person could be deprived of useful or novel information leading to a job acquisition, hence limiting upward mobility. Ryan (2008) argued that over-reliance on dense, strong ties largely made up of family members and co-ethnics may limit network reach and resources. Similarly, Dong & Chang (2017) claimed that dependence on overlapping circles of strong ties with family and friends may increase the risks of overburdening these relationships, which negatively impacts flow/exchange of resources within the network.

Drawing on the strength of ties hypothesis (Granovetter, 1973; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Rademacher & Wang, 2014), some scholars argue that a network characterized by strong ties may be a more valuable source of social capital for individuals from privileged groups, when compared to individuals from economically disadvantaged or marginalized social groups. The reason is that the extent of homogeneity, familiarity and density that are distinctive of strong ties make them ideal for preserving or maintaining existing resources (Briggs, 1998, Portes, 1998; Lin, 2002).

For instance, individuals at the top of the social hierarchy, with higher socioeconomic status might have better connections in the society. Hence, when they rely on their strong ties, they are likely to acquire productive returns capable of preserving their advantaged positions (Granovetter, 1973, Lin, 2002). Similarly, individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy with lower socioeconomic status, with fewer resources, may rely on their strong ties for basic resources to get by their daily struggles (Briggs, 1998; Loury, Modood and Teles, 2005; Billet, 2011). That notwithstanding, they are more likely to experience substantial social capital deficits when compared to individuals of a higher socioeconomic status; because their strong ties are less effective at mobilizing new resources and information from distant parts of the social system (Lin, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002; Edwards & Foley, 1998; Smith, 2000; Loury, Modood and Teles, 2005; Pih & Lee, 2007).

Hence, for economically disadvantaged individuals with limited resources, accessing more diverse social capital resources may require extending their reaching beyond strong ties, thus bridging through weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Without bridging through weak ties, they lack the connection that help open up prospects for the

flow of new opportunities and information across social distance, necessary to gain higher social status (Hernandez & Blazer, 2006; Lin, 2002; Rademacher & Wang, 2014; Claridge, 2018). A number of scholars make this argument. For instance, Lin (2002) contends that disadvantaged social groups are further marginalized in the absence of networks rich in weak ties. He claims that weak tie relationships due to their strategic locations and positions provide a range of resources, new ideas and prospects, otherwise unavailable in strong tie relationships.

In support of Lin's argument, Wilson (2001) opined that the further decline and impoverishment of black inner-city resulting to social alienation, unemployment and welfare dependency, was as a result of the quality of their social networks evident in their lack of weak ties. Similarly, Briggs (1998) found that black adolescents with higher levels of weak ties, had more perceived job information. He asserts that members in more heterogeneous networks are more likely to access new information that may be valuable for their economic advancement. Li (2004) argued that weak ties enabled immigrants who were isolated in low-resource communities to connect to a wider range of opportunities outside their social enclaves, thereby increasing their chances for upward mobility.

Therefore, in the context of marginalized social groups, such as low-income immigrants and refugees, weak ties are presumed to be a more useful source of social capital essential for economic advancement or upward mobility. Nevertheless, the lack of education and language proficiency may impact their ability to form weak ties with individuals beyond their immediate social circle, which consequently limits their potential for social capital development (Pih & Lee, 2007; Roggeveen and Van Meeteren, 2013; Behtoui 2008). At the same time, creating opportunities for their literacy and language development may impact their ability to mobilize diverse resources, information and opportunities that they otherwise would not have been able to

access, and therefore, enhance their social capital development (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Toso, Prins, & Mooney, 2013; Thuesen, 2016).

While most studies examining the implication of literacy and language proficiency on social capital development have done so in relation to voluntary or economic migrants such as Hispanic and Asian immigrants (Lee, 1994; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Aguirre & Martinez, 2000; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012), less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as refugees. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the nature and types of resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a workplace literacy program, as well as the mechanisms that enable the flow or exchange of resources.

Research Objective

This study is part of a larger project that examined the impact of workplace literacy programs on the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers. In the preceding study, it was established that participation in classes had a major impact on the structure of participants' social networks, through the acquisition of strong ties with co-workers. This study, however, goes further to examine the types of social capital resources that are mobilized through social networks acquired as a result of learning and some of the mechanisms that impact mobilization of social capital resources.

For the purpose of this study, social capital can be defined as the network of relationships possessed by an individual that facilitates their access to emotional, instrumental or informational resources and that are essential for their daily survival, stability or upward mobility (Smith, 2000, Lin, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002). The research questions that guide this study are:

(i) what types of social capital resources are usually accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers, and through what social relationships?(ii) What types of social capital resources accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers as a result of their participation in classes? (iii) What are some of the mechanisms that enable or enhance the mobilization of social capital resources?

Data and Methods

Data were collected through qualitative interviews with eighteen respondents, comprised of eleven men and seven women. Respondents were selected through a purposeful sampling from a group of Somalis working at a manufacturing plant of a company located in the U.S. South (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The plant was purposefully selected because it provided opportunity for literacy development for employees with low literacy levels. Participants were between eighteen to sixty-four years of age and were all enrolled in classes such as ESL, GED, and Citizenship. Participants were selected based on whether they attended any of these classes for at least three months.

The quality and credibility of the data collection process were ensured by taking all necessary precautions (Seale, 1999; Omona, 2013). The interviews ranged from about sixty minutes to one hour thirty minutes and were audiotaped with participants' written and verbal consents in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. The interviews were transcribed for analytical purposes. In addition, field notes were written to support the analysis of the interview transcripts, as well as to help clarify other important observations unclear in the transcripts (Schwandt, 2015; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

The interview protocol was designed using a resource generator instrument (Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2005). The resource generator instrument was deployed to identify the specific types of resources- emotional, instrumental or informational that each respondent could leverage

from their social network (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2000; Smith, 2000; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Magasi & Hammel, 2004), as well as some of the mechanisms through which these resources are accessed and mobilized (Flap, Snijders, Volker, Gaag, 2000).

We selected three items from the resource generator instrument to represent each type of social capital resources – emotional, instrumental and informational. We asked participants to (i) mention and list at least three names of key contacts they frequently interacted with because they attended the literacy program; (ii) identify the specific resources or support they have received from each contact listed; (iii) describe the nature of relationship with each contact listed in the following categories – family, close friends, co-workers, neighbors, and acquaintances; and (iv) describe the occupation, religion, ethnicity and gender of each contact.

Data Analysis

Data from the resource generator instrument were organized according to participants' responses indicating the specific types of resources – emotional, instrumental or informational, and the particular social relationships – family, close friends, co-workers, neighbors or acquaintances – through which the resources are accessed and mobilized. By means of a relative frequency table, we calculated the average frequency of participants (in percentage) that indicated access to emotional, instrumental or informational resources through family, close friend, co-workers, neighbors, and acquaintances.

In order to identify some of the mechanisms that enabled or enhanced participants' ability to mobilize social capital, we utilized NVIVO software. First, we compared, contrasted and coded participants' responses to shed light on the circumstances that enabled participants to activate their ties with co-workers. Next, we searched for common patterns in the coded transcripts that captured specific factors enabling participants to mobilize or obtain resources

from their acquired social networks. Quotes from the data are used to provide valuable supplements, to add voice to the text, and help categorize the data (Wolcott, 1990; Jack, 2005).

Results

Participants' ages ranged between eighteen and sixty-four. The average age was 32.8 years. Eleven (61.1%) participants were men, and seven (38.9%) were women. Six (33.3%) participants (all men) reported that they had received no education prior to their enrollment in the workplace literacy program. Five (27.7%) participants had less than an elementary education (four men and one woman). Seven (38.8%) had less than a high school education (six women and one man). Out of the eighteen participants enrolled in classes, ten (55.5%) attended ESL class, seven (44.4%) attended GED class, and one (5.5%) attended Citizenship class. Eleven (61.1%) participants were married (ten men and one woman); seven participants (38.8%) were single (five women and two men). All participants described their households as large. Their households, as defined by participants, included members living in the US as well as family members residing abroad. Eleven (61.1%) participants described their roles in the family as providers (ten men and one woman), while seven (38.8%) described their roles as supporters (six women and one man). All participants were of the Muslim faith.

Mobilizing Social Capital Resources

Types of social capital resources accessible through social relationships

Figure 1 illustrates the types of social resources accessible through specific social ties/relationships. We found that participants both men and women relied on all types of social relationships – family, close-friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances for all three resource types – emotional, instrumental and informational – although to various degrees. For instance, as shown in Figure 1, 63% and 50% of all the participants relied on their ties with

family, close friends and co-workers respectively, for emotional resources. In order to access instrumental resources, 61% and 64% of the participants relied on their ties with family and close friends. Participant’s ties with co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances seemed to be weak sources for accessing emotional and instrumental resources. The majority (93%) of the participants relied on their ties with acquaintances for informational resources, however, participants’ ties with co-workers and neighbors were not conduits for accessing informational resources.

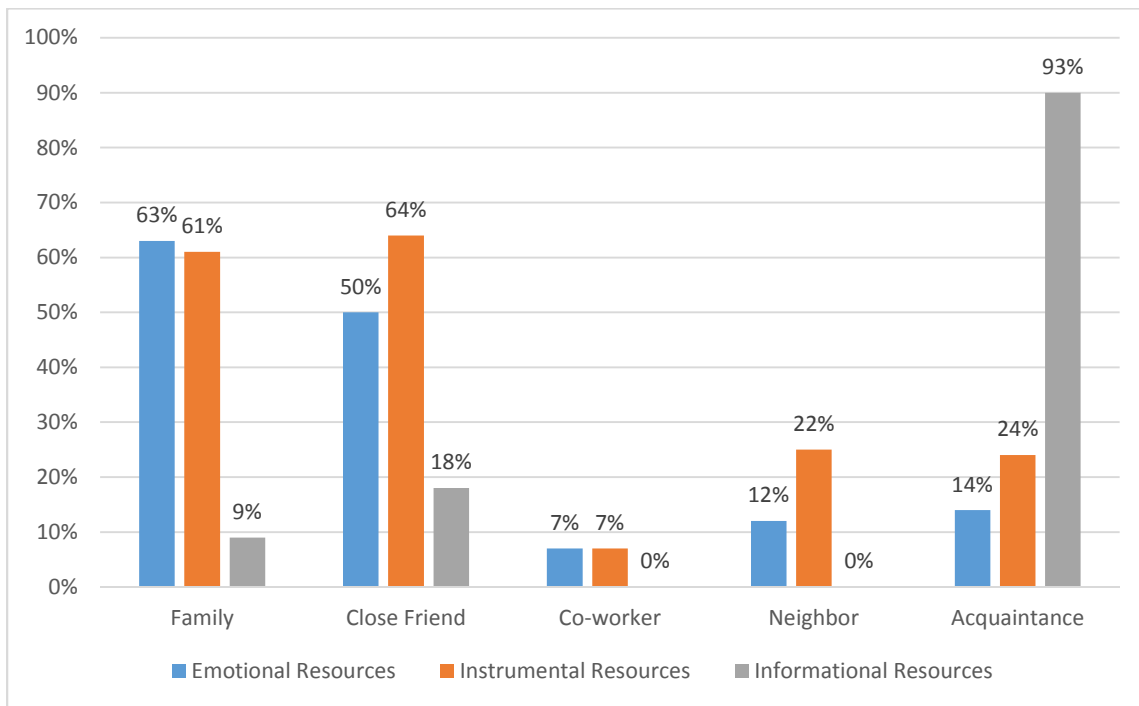


Figure 1. Types of social resources accessible through specific social ties/relationships.

Access to Social capital Resources through Strong Ties

Even though most participants relied on their strong ties with family and close friends (most of whom were co-ethnics) for emotional and instrumental resources, the likelihood of accessing emotional and instrumental resources through either family or close friends varied with the nature or particular type of assistance sought by the participants. With regard to

emotional resources, 72% of the participants were likely to turn to family members when in need of advice concerning personal or family issues, compared to 44% who indicated that they would likely turn to close friends. However, when in need of a companionship, 61% of the participants were likely to turn to close friends, compared to 50% who indicated family members. Similarly, in accessing instrumental support, such as when participants were ill and needed practical help with chores, 68% of the participants were more likely to activate their ties with close friends compared to 40% who indicated that they would turn to their family members for such support. The most common support participants derived from their strong ties with family and close friends included assistance with advice on a personal issue or when depressed and assistance with chores when ill. This was revealed in some of their testimonies as follows:

When I need advice to deal with any personal issue, I call my sister Safio she is unemployed, and my mum, her name is Fatimah. ... I do not have stress, I am happy all the time. But if I am thinking about something, I will talk to my husband, Mohamed or my close friend Zainab (Hamzat, aged 28, woman, GED)

When I am ill, I will call on Fatima, she is like a family to me. I will also call on Abdurashed he lives in Nacogdoches, he is a laborer, or I will call my sister Hauwa, but she is at the refugee camp in Kenya. You know I don't interact with my family members much because of the distance and I live in an isolated place as well (Jada, man, aged 37, ESL)

Although strong ties with family or relatives seemed to be a significant source for accessing some emotional and instrumental resources, in some cases those ties were not very useful sources of social capital. This was particularly due to geographic distance, or location of their network members. Some of the participants referred to their family relationships including spouses, parents, and siblings overseas. Many of them were still in their home country – Somalia or in refugee camps at different locations e.g. Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. As one of the participants recalled:

I have a big family in Somalia. My mum, daddy and my siblings. We are all nine in number. I have some relatives in Kenya as well. Makur, a sister, she works in Saudi Arabia as a house-maid. Mohamed is a brother; he is unemployed and stays at home with my mother in Somalia. Salat is a brother, he is unemployed and lives in the refugee camp in Kenya (Saheed, aged 41, man, ESL)

The geographic location of network members had the potential to limit access to specific intangible support such as comfort, companionship or leisure, and tangible support such as when ill and in need of some practical help with doing chores or getting groceries. For instance, a participant demonstrated that he experienced some emotional stress due to the fact that he could not really spend time with his wife, as she was living in a refugee camp overseas.

Zainab is my wife, she is a student in secondary/high school at the refugee camp in Kenya. I love my wife so much, but she is in the refugee camp and I miss her so much, so it is hard for me sometimes especially when I am stressed. I like to spend time with my wife, but she is not here (Nuru, aged 32, man, ESL)

In other cases, their strong ties with families and relatives overseas were constraining.

Participants had a culture of remitting money back home to support their families without much returns on such investment e.g. For instance, a participant noted:

I come from a big family, although I lost my dad at a very young age, my dad had three wives and fifteen kids. All of them are back home in Somalia. My family cannot really help me. I am the provider for my family. Every month, I send money home to my mother in Somali, my brother and his family are in Kenya refugee camp, I send money monthly to him every month. Also, I send money every month to my wife in Somalia. They are hungry and there is no job, so I have to help them (Saheed, aged 41, man, ESL)

Access to Social Capital Resources through Weak Ties

Weak ties with acquaintances represented the most frequently mentioned source for accessing informational resources. Nevertheless, most participants specified the same contact(s) when in need of information. Ninety three percent of participants who indicated acquaintances as their source of informational resources mentioned the names of two community leaders as their most reliable sources when in need of important information or assistance relevant to a job search. For instance, Sedaku noted:

If I need help filling a form for a job, I will call on Mamud or Jubril. They are our community leaders and supervisor, although Mamud is from Egypt and Jubril from Kenya, but we speak the same language. I can approach them whenever I have any problems maybe like looking for a job for my relatives or friends who are refugees like me (Sedaku, aged 41, man, ESL)

Accessing informational support was not only limited to participant's weak ties with acquaintances, we found that a small number of participants (18%) also relied on their close friends for informational support, and this was mostly in relation to job search:

We Somalis look out for each other all the time. I was introduced to this job by my close friend in North Missouri, who introduced me to the liaison officer and community leader who then got a job for me here. I have been working in this plant for 6 months (Usak, aged 36, man, Citizenship)

Another respondent noted:

I have a close friend; her name is Sarah. She told me about this new community because there are quite a number of us Somalis here, and advised me about the job opportunity there. So, Sarah put me in touch with someone who picked me up from Dallas because I did not know how to get to the new community. Now, I have been working here for 2 years now (Sabrin, aged 28, woman, GED)

Hence, among low-income Somali refugee workers, their strong ties consisting of close friends or co-ethnics are presumed to be potential sources of information (Sanders, 2002; George & Chaze, 2009; Pih & Lee, 2007). However, the potential for the dissemination of novel and diverse information may be constrained, as close friends or co-ethnic are more likely to belong to the same social circle, and that typically affects the nature of information that flows through such networks (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). In this study the quality of information leveraged through their strong ties with close friends or co-ethnic were redundant, and better leads for job opportunities came from their weak ties with their acquaintances - liaison officers.

Although participants demonstrated better access to informational resources through their weak ties with liaison officers, whom they regarded as their community leaders, the quality of informational resources accessible through their weak ties may not have been much different

from that accessed through their strong ties. The reason is that majority of the participants alluded to the same weak ties – liaison officers – as their most reliable source when in need of important information relevant for employment. Consequently, the lack of diversity or heterogeneity of their weak ties could potentially undermine the novelty and quality of information that were accessible to participants. This lends support to the argument that members of marginalized groups such as immigrants and refugees are embedded in networks that lack weak, wide-ranging ties, thereby reducing the likelihood of discovering new opportunities for labor market advancement (Smith, 2000; Pih & Lee, 2007; Loury, Modood, & Teles, 2005).

Therefore, gaining access to novel information, influence and diverse opportunity, may require establishing weak ties with other individuals or groups, beyond the liaison officers, and who travel in different social circles (Wellman, 1992; Billet, 2011; Ryan, 2016). For this reason, Granovetter (1985) argues that not all weak ties are bridges. He contends that weak ties are most useful or valuable when they bridge substantial social distance i.e. when they have the capacity to connect individuals to people that are located higher up the social hierarchy in advantageous or influential positions who possess valuable resources.

These observations illustrate that in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers, access to social capital resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – was made possible through their strong ties with family, close friends, and co-ethnics. However, in some cases, due to the geographical location of their strong ties, access to emotional and instrumental resources was constrained. Although both strong and weak ties had the capacity to provide information, however, the quality of information may have been undermined due to the lack of heterogeneity of network members (Briggs, 1998; Zhang, Anderson & Zhan, 2011).

Having identified the types of social capital resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their existing networks, the next step is to examine types of social capital resources that accrue to them as a result of their participation in classes; as well as some of the mechanisms that enable mobilization of social capital resources.

Types of social capital resources through Workplace Literacy Programs

Participation in classes increased the size of participants' social network through their acquisition of non-kinship relationships such as close friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances. Participants' relationships with co-workers (who were in most cases classmates) accounted for most of their newly acquired contacts. Figure 2 illustrates the specific types of social resource mobilized, and through what particular social ties or relationships. We found that mobilization of emotional, instrumental, and informational resources varied with the type of social relationship. For instance, 22% and 27% of the participants specified that they received emotional support from their close friends and co-workers respectively. None of the participants indicated that they received emotional support from their neighbors or acquaintances. Only 28% of the participants specified that they received informational support from their acquaintances; close friends, co-workers or neighbors were not recognized as channels for mobilizing informational support.

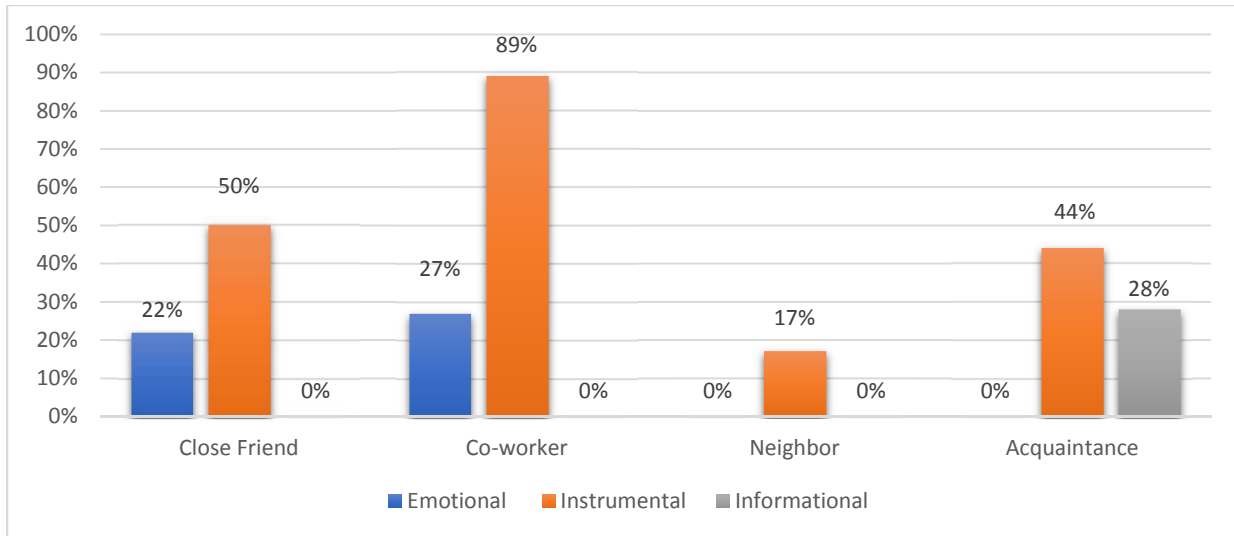


Figure 2 Types of social resources acquired through participation in classes

Mobilization of instrumental resources was quite different when compared to emotional and informational resources. Actually, all social relationship types served as vehicles for mobilizing instrumental resources, although to various degrees. For instance, 89% of participants received instrumental resources from their co-workers, while 50%, 44% and 17% of the participants received instrumental resources from their close-friends, acquaintances and neighbors respectively.

Overall, co-workers were more likely to provide access to instrumental and emotional resources. Moreover, the type of instrumental and emotional resources mobilized through co-workers was unique and centered on literacy development and overall wellbeing. These resources include assistance with learning or studying, companionship support, and other practical support services such as assisting with transportation. Participation in classes also served to reduce the risk of alienation and isolation among participants who were fairly newcomers in the community. Participants had access to their network member's contacts and as such could reach

out to them for assistance in times of necessity. The comments below illustrate some of the instrumental nature of participants' relationships with co-workers:

Yes Keta, the Burmese guy who is my friend and Co-worker, I didn't know so well before classes, but at my first day of class, he and his brother promised to always give me a ride to class. They have also helped me a lot in my studies because we learn from each other. ... I would not have got all the help that I get from him because before classes we were not close enough for me to ask for certain favors or assistance such as a ride, but as a result of attending classes together, I am able to interact with them when I like, and we both have each other's phone number (Sabrin, aged 28, woman, GED)

Another respondent stated:

Habiba, Zara, and Amdi, I know them because we took classes together. For instance, Zara assists me with reading. Habiba and Amdi cannot really help me because they are student like me. We can only communicate together in Somali language. We go to school together; we speak the same language and we have mutual understanding. Amdi helps me with a ride as well as Zara. Habiba, we talk together about school. Halimo keeps me company, we walk together to work and school (Saheed, aged 41, man, ESL)

It appears that participation in classes fostered the emergence of strong ties with individuals who shared the same or similar characteristics with respect to characteristics such as ethnicity, educational level, occupational status, and religion. All the same classes also provided the context for the establishment of cross-cultural ties with their peers or classmates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Burmese, Hispanic and African Americans). As one participant noted:

I know a lot of people, both Somalis and non-Somalis. Most team members are my friends and they are not Somalis and they are not Muslims too. For example, Mario, he is male, and he is in his sixties, and he is from Somalia. I have known him for 3 years. Jiao is from Burma, he is Buddhist. Bali-Bali from Thailand and he is my coworker in his thirties, I have known him for a while. Jeanne is also a friend from Congo, and he is in his sixties, he is a Christian. Pela is Mexican and I have known him for about six months now (Ahmed, aged 38, man, ESL)

To the extent that participants were able to meaningfully communicate with their cross cultural ties in English language, minimized communication barriers, fostered solidarity and

enhanced access to social capital resources which they ordinarily would not have been able to access. This was evident in Ahmed's response:

Jaju is from Burma, I met him in class, and we also work together. He is my best friend and he doesn't practice any religion. We help each other all the time, we eat together, and we celebrate festivals together, and that is how we sustain the relationships we are there for each other. The ESL classes really helped, because I was able to meet more people, a lot of friends. We learn English together, we speak in English, and this would not have been possible without ESL. (Ahmed, aged 38, man, ESL)

Another participant recalled:

I have more friends now because I speak English, we talk to each other a lot, help each other, and we are there for each other. For example, I help to cook, clean and help my classmates sometimes when they are sick, and I help them with advice, ideas or any form of need. They also help me. For instance Nassir, is my good friend, we met in class, we talk often and help each other with schoolwork and he also gives me a ride to school, to the clinic or to the store. I also know Santiago, a Mexican man. We met at the GED class and we study together most times (Hamzat, aged 28, woman, GED)

As participants improved their literacy and language skills, they also developed a set of skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to navigate their social environment with increased confidence. This was evident in their ability to understand, evaluate, and use a wide range of support services that were initially difficult to access before attending classes. These support services were essential to developing their knowledge and potential and also improving the quality of their lives. As one participant noted:

Before I could not read and write in English, but now I can read and write in English, although I will still need to do better. I can attend my doctor's appointment by myself and be able to explain myself to the doctor. I can go to the bank and talk to them and ask them any question, I can go the store and ask for what I may need. For example, I can communicate with the Walmart workers and ask them any question, maybe to help me find a specific product on the shelf (Alimor, aged 34, woman, GED)

As a result of their literacy and language developments, most participants also demonstrated satisfaction, self-sufficiency and a sense of security within their new environments, and that positively impacted their goals and aspirations. For instance, one participant recalled:

I express myself in school and in the community without any help. In the past I would need a translator, but now I can meet the officers in charge of the citizenship interviews. I could not stand before them or understand anything they used to say in the past. So, this class has made a huge difference for me. I can now fill out application forms on my own without the help of the teacher. I always get new information every week and that helps my practice test a lot. (Usaru, man, aged 36, Citizenship)

Underpinning all their replies was a strong desire to achieve personal independence so that they did not have to rely on their children, an interpreter, or a third party in order to do things such as talk to their doctor or a cashier at a grocery store etc. Participants expressed that they were more confident and composed carrying out their daily tasks, whether it be shopping, speaking to individuals in the community, asking for information or making enough progress to enroll in a higher-level course, or participate in an interview.

At this juncture, it is important to note that from the analysis, participant's ties with co-workers seemed to be weak sources for accessing emotional and instrumental resources, before participation in the literacy program. However, participation in classes opened up more channels for accessing emotional and instrumental resources, through their strong ties with co-workers, regardless of their cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. However, their strong ties with co-workers were not potent or reliable sources for informational resources. In this regard their weak ties with acquaintances were the most preferred channels for accessing information in relation to a job, education or aspiration.

Few (28%) of the participants demonstrated that they were able to request for and receive specific information related to school, and work from their teachers – acquaintances. Most of them attributed their ability to request for help from their acquaintances to their literacy and language development. For instance, a participant recalled:

The class has helped improve my speaking and I can now talk to people that I could not talk to before like my teacher. I have my teacher's number for instance, and I can

communicate with my class teacher directly through text but before I will always ask my friend in the past to help me send the text message, but these days I send them out myself. I sometimes contact my class teacher when I need some help with my study, or when I am sick or when I am going somewhere and I cannot attend the class, and when I need help or information about school (Noah, aged 26, man, ESL)

Another participant recalled:

I am currently enrolled in the GED classes. My goal is to have a certificate and go to college. I would like to become a pharmacist, but I am having some challenges with mathematics, but my teacher always helps me with Math he is such a great teacher, and I am able to ask him questions because he is my teacher (Saber, aged 28, woman, GED)

Taken together, the findings from this study reveal that there are tremendous benefits in having a network (strong or weak ties) of supportive relationships, because they are actual and potential conduits for accessing emotional, instrumental or informational resources. Although participants' demonstrated access to social capital resources through their existing network of strong ties with family, however, the nature of those resources was limited to certain types of psychological or moral support such as when in need of personal advice or encouragement. Their ability to access other types of practical support, e.g. childcare support, assistance with chores when ill, or transportation assistance, was impaired due to the geographic location of some of their network members such as spouses, parents or siblings etc. Participants acknowledged that most of their relatives whom they actively supported financially (through remittances) were either back home in Somali or in refugee camps overseas, and consequently mobilizing basic practical support from that network, in times of necessity, was difficult or impossible.

However, participation in classes afforded participants the opportunity to mobilize additional social capital resources through the social interactions and reciprocal relations that it facilitated at the workplace. Overall, participants' strong ties with co-workers had greater emotional and instrumental benefits to participants when compared to other social relationship

types. The instrumental support that participants acquired was unique and essential for their daily survival and general wellbeing. Such supports were both tangible and intangible, and included companionship support, assistance with transportation to the store, clinic etc., assistance with learning, homework or assignments, helping with chores when ill, or providing other practical support beneficial during times of necessity. Most of these social resources or support were not obtainable through their prior social networks.

Participation in classes also opened up more channels for accessing informational resources. Hence, in addition to their existing weak ties with liaison officers, whom they all alluded to as their source of information, participation in classes and their ability to communicate more effectively in English enabled participants to establish weak ties with their teachers and supervisors. Although informational resources were not a much needed support, but a few (28%) participants identified their teachers and supervisors as the most preferred channels for accessing information in relation to a job, career advancement or aspiration.

In the light of the foregoing, this study suggests that participation in classes or learning positively impacts the social capital development of low-income Somali refugee workers, by enhancing access to emotional, instrumental and informational resources that they otherwise would not have been able to access or mobilize. These findings are consistent with studies that have established a correlation between literacy development, social capital, and improved overall wellbeing (Ballati, Black & Falk, 2009; Tett & Macalachan, 2007; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007).

Having established that participation in classes positively impacts participants' ability to access/mobilize social capital resources. The next step is to examine some of the mechanisms that influence mobilization of social capital resources.

Mechanisms for Mobilization of Social Capital Resources

The central idea of social capital is that, through our relationships – network – with others, we have potential access to resources we can utilize when necessary. However, from an empirical standpoint, the mere existence of a social network or membership in a social network does not always equate to or guarantee social capital (Foley & Edwards, 1999; Smith, 2008; Ryan, 2008). The possibility of extracting the resources in social networks is contingent on the mobilization capability of the individual, which ultimately impacts their social capital development (Portes, 1998; Cross & Lin, 2008; Lancee, 2010).

Given that most participants (89%) were able to mobilize instrumental resources through their ties with co-workers, this study went further to identify some of the mechanisms that enabled or enhanced participants' ability to mobilize some of the instrumental resources from their networks. From the analysis three themes emerged namely: motivation, trust and reciprocity.

Motivation

Social capital, conceptualized as a network of social relations, is not a natural endowment, but rather something that must be intentionally created, reproduced, and maintained on an ongoing basis (Bourdieu, 1996). Thus, like other forms of capital, social capital is premised upon the notion that an investment in social relations will result in a return – some benefit or profit to the individual (Lin, 2002; Tett and Maclachlan 2007; Salomon, 2010). The underlying idea is that no individual is an island (Flap, 2002), hence the motivation to establish social relationships (investments in sociability) can be linked to the individual's need to acquire specific resources that are outside their reach and necessary to attain certain goals.

In this regard, several participants declared that they purposefully and actively established social relationships with their co-workers who also attended classes, in order to gain support or utilize certain resources that were beneficial and instrumental to their literacy development. For example, one of the participants claimed that without establishing relationships with her co-workers/classmates, it would have been difficult for her to keep up with classes, since she was a much slower learner than her peers:

Yes, without attending classes I would not have relationship with some of my friends. For example, Zara and Ahmed, are people I met in the class and they help me with learning in class. They are more advanced than me and so with their help I am able to cope in class since I am a bit slower in learning than the rest of the class (Abdul, aged 38, man, ESL)

Although participants were more likely to establish strong ties with co-workers from the same ethnicities and who spoke the same native language, participants were also motivated to establish relationships with their co-workers and teachers regardless of their cultural, linguistic or ethnic backgrounds. However, without the ability to socially interact and communicate in English, participants would not have been able to establish relationships beyond co-ethnic ties, and that may have limited their opportunity to access and mobilize other instrumental resources outside their co-ethnic ties. As one participant stated:

Taking classes have helped improve my speaking, I can interact and communicate with anyone in English, and I know that the classes have helped me a lot personally. I have more friends now that are not from Somalia for example African Americans, Whites etc... Class helps break the language barrier for us ... I can talk to my teacher, my classmates that are not from Somalia, for example Burma and Mexico and now we can understand each other, and I can ask for help from my teacher and other classmates that are not from Somalia, and when they ask I can help them too because I understand them, and now we can understand each other and have more fun even using a different language, and that brings us together and make us even closer...the situation would have been different if I did not attend classes, because I would have been scared of talking to people that are not from Somalia (Hamzat, aged 28 , woman, GED)

Motivation or willingness on the part of network members to share resources and provide certain services or assistance to participants was also necessary for mobilization of social capital

resources (Portes, 1998; Smith, 2008). Many participants expressed enthusiasm to render assistance to network members, or their fellow co-workers/classmates, in need of assistance with learning or other forms of assistance:

I communicate a lot with my friends at school, and I am there to help them. For example, I help Ayaan sometimes with reading and studying because we study together, sometimes I help my friends out with class lessons and other things like reading, and that helps us maintain our relationship. We are here for each other (Ibramo, aged 29, man, GED)

The social or communication skills gained as a result of learning, as well as the social settings in which learning occurred, enabled participants to strengthen their relationship and become more accustomed with each other; and the more accustomed they were, the more willing or motivated they were to render or ask for specific support from their peers.

Trust

Fundamental to the concept of social capital is the ability of an individual to extract or deploy resources from people he/she has established social relationships with. However, the potential value of relationships cannot be fully realized without trust engendered through social interactions (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Trust can be viewed as an element that drives motivation, and that encourages cooperative activities in social networks. Trust therefore motivates individuals to share resources with other members of a social network. That is, people make resources available to others in a social network when it is the expectation that others hold for them and which they have internalized (Wilkins, 2018).

The literacy classes created a conducive learning environment that enabled the development and maintenance of trust-based relationships. This influenced participant's willingness to ask for certain assistance or exchange resources at their disposal. One participant described how taking classes enhanced trusting and mutual relations:

Taking class together helps build trust because we see each other more often than not and we share a lot in common. I would not have known my friends very well and be able to approach them if not that we take classes together and so we spend a lot of time together. My relationship with my friends has become closer and better because of the trust I have for them ... We can now support each other, we talk to each other a lot, help each other, and give assistance to each other when needed. The relationship is mutual (Abdul, aged 38, man ESL)

Abdul's experience illustrates that trust operated as a result of meaningful and frequent social interactions, familiarity, mutuality and expectations, which were developed and fostered in the classrooms and at the workplace. Classes provided a sense of belonging, security, and community. Hence, to the extent that participants' felt a sense of connectedness, shared identity and established common objectives of learning with their colleagues, trust was also engendered.

Another participant noted:

Yes, I trust some of my friends that I interact with. We have a mutual understanding of wanting to learn and we all know the importance of English, and that helps us to trust each other. My trusts for them increases because we have learned together, we speak the same language, we pray together, we eat together, we work together and more (Ibramo, aged 29, man, GED)

Trust allowed participants to reliably expect to obtain, and use the resources made available through their network members regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The development of trust not only enabled the exchange of resources between participants and their contacts, but it also minimized uncertainty and increased the credibility of the relationships established:

Yes, taking class has helped with the trust, if not for class I wouldn't trust them nearly as much. The class helps us come together, we ask each other questions, and get to know each other more, their cultures and we are able to understand them. We have a common goal of wanting to learn and we all know the importance of learning, and that helps us to trust each other ...I have a lot of trust because when I leave things in class, they bring them to me. Once I forgot my phone in class and someone brought it to me and that shows trustworthiness (Sadiak, aged 23, woman, GED)

These comments illustrate that trust is an essential prerequisite for the establishment and maintenance of supportive relationships. The importance of trust lies in its capacity to enhance greater cooperation in the exchange and provisions of support/resources in a network. Trust increased the ability of group members to work together and promoted positive expectations among network members even in the face of uncertainty (Lin, 2000; Glover & Parry, 2005). Trust is therefore an essential mechanism that influences network members' ability to mobilize social capital resources (Stone, 2001; Claridge, 2004; Hawkins & Maurer, 2011; Zhang, Anderson, Zhan, 2011).

Reciprocity

Closely related to motivation and trust is the principle of reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity holds that individuals are more likely to engage in social exchange or share resources with the confident expectation of being rewarded in the future (Putnam, 2000). For participants in this study, partaking in classes allowed for the proliferation of obligations and expectations, which induced the flow or exchange of resources. Most participants demonstrated willingness to render assistance or support to their colleagues with the expectation that the recipient would also reciprocate the support they received:

We help each other all the time, we eat together, and we celebrate festivals together, and that is how we sustain the relationships we are there for each other. Abdullahi Alli is my classmate, he is from Kenya and he is my friend. I help Abdullahi a lot especially with his homework. I always help him with classes ... He also helps me with a ride. He always gives me a ride to the store or to work and school (Usaru, aged 36, man, Citizenship)

In most cases, proximity eased communications and interaction between participant and their co-workers and classmates who also participated in the literacy program, and that opened up opportunities for the exchange of resources and collaborations. Participants were more willing

to reciprocate certain activities or services with individuals in their direct physical environment and with whom they were in constant communications. As one participant described:

We always meet in class, and we also live close to each other, we talk together all the time. We read together and help each other with the assignments, and other things we can help each other with ... For example, Jubril helps me in class with assignments and homework. Anything that is difficult in class Jama helps me with those. Ismail is also my friend. He is my good friend and can give me a ride when I need help, he takes me to the store, and we also ride to school together (Nuram, aged 26 years, man, ESL)

Another noted:

I talk to my friends all the time and we go to school together, whenever I can I help them, I help them, and they also help me as well whenever I need anything ... I am always with my friends, when I am not at work or in school. On Saturdays we cook together and have fun with my friends, sometimes we meet together, and we try to study and answer questions, we watch movies together as well ... We celebrate together, we eat and dance together ... these activities make us feel good after a long week's job (Habiba, aged 21, woman, GED)

In summary, mobilization of social capital arises as a by-product of continuous social activities and tangible or intangible exchange relations. Participation in classes was instrumental to enabling and sustaining a series of social interactions and reciprocal relations that stimulated the exchange of social capital resources between participants and their peers. Participants' ability to reciprocate and return favors or assistance helped to maintain a more balanced mutual relationship, and that fostered trust and created a sense of belonging. By working together or exchanging resources, individuals were able to get by their daily activities, thus, accomplishing more tasks or goals that they otherwise would not have been able to accomplish on their own.

Conclusion

Social capital is an essential resource among marginalized social groups, such as low-income Somali refugee workers in the U.S., however, their potential for social capital development is significantly constrained by their low levels of literacy and language proficiency (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Pih & Lee, 2007; Tubergen & Volker, 2014).

Therefore, creating opportunities for the literacy and language development of low-income Somali refugee workers appears to enhance their social capital development.

In the previous study it was established that participating in a workplace literacy program positively impacts the structure of their social networks, through the acquisition of strong ties with co-workers. The acquisition of strong ties implies access to social capital. This study, however, argues that the mere existence of a social network (or acquisition of strong ties) does not guarantee social capital and should not be construed as such (Smith, 2008; Ryan, 2008). Rather, it is the resources – emotional, instrumental or informational – that are accessible through a social network, and how they are utilized or mobilized for productive purposes, that is the hallmark of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Lin, 2002). The rationale is that an individual may have access to a social network, but may not have the ability to mobilize the resources entrenched in their social network – which ultimately impacts their social capital development (Portes, 1998; Cross & Lin, 2008; Lancee, 2010).

This study went further to examine the nature and types of resources that are accessible through the social networks acquired as a result of participation in a workplace literacy program, as well as some of the mechanisms that enhance mobilization of social capital resources. Substantial evidence was demonstrated in this study, that among low-income Somali refugee workers, participation in classes opened up more channels for accessing emotional, instrumental and informational resources. Overall, strong ties with co-workers (regardless of their cultural, linguistic or religious backgrounds) had greater emotional and instrumental benefits to participants when compared to other social relationship types. In addition, a few participants were also able to access informational resources through their weak ties with acquaintances.

Weak ties are presumed to be an important source of social capital (Granovetter, 1973). In the context of low-income Somali refugee workers, however, their strong ties were more useful for mobilizing social capital resources when compared to their weak ties. Through their strong ties with co-workers, they were able to access certain types of emotional and instrumental resources that they could not access through their existing kinship ties or their newly acquired weak ties. Such assistance or support included companionship support, assistance with transportation, assistance with learning, providing translation or interpreting services, helping with chores when ill, or providing other practical support in times of uncertainty.

Hence, it cannot simply be assumed that weak ties provide better access to social capital compared to strong ties, since individuals may have very different needs for which different types of resources and social ties are useful. This underscores the need to empirically examine or measure the nature and types of resources that flow through the social network acquired as a result of learning or participating in a workplace literacy program. In this study participants' strong ties with co-workers seemed to be a more reliable and potent source of social capital, compared to their weak ties, for a number of reasons. These reasons include the current needs and goals or objectives of participants, geographical location or proximity of social ties, the social context in which social interactions and learning occurred, and the extent of familiarity between network members.

For instance, their goals, needs and basic daily requirements determined whom they frequently interacted with and turned to for support. The nature of their needs were such that only their strong ties with co-workers could provide, and included regular assistance with studying or working together on their homework, regular assistance with transportation, and companionship support. These types of support or resources were required to help them

accomplish their daily tasks more easily and were easily accessible through their co-workers at all times, and even in the event of an emergency. Moreover, these types of resources or support were less likely to have been obtained through their weak ties with whom they were less familiar and had fewer interactions and social relations. They were also less likely to have obtained such resources from their networks located in Somalia or at different refugee camps in Africa.

In addition to the weak ties with liaison officers prior to attending classes, and whom they all alluded to as their source of information, participants were likely to access information in relation to a job or career advancement, through their newly acquired weak ties with teachers and supervisors. Although, access to informational resource was useful, however, it wasn't very beneficial for their daily survival, adaptation or stability. Altogether, their strong ties were more beneficial for mobilizing needed social capital resources compared to their weak ties.

It is also noteworthy that mobilization of social capital resources through strong ties did not occur in a vacuum. It was the result of their willingness or motivation to establish and maintain supportive relationships in order to achieve goals and satisfy needs. This was made possible through frequent and meaningful social interactions, trust and reciprocity – which are some of the characteristics of strong ties as espoused in the social capital literature

In the light of the foregoing, this study demonstrates that creating opportunities for the literacy and language development of low-income Somali refugee workers through workplace literacy program positively impacts their social capital development. This is accomplished by enhancing access to emotional, instrumental and informational resources that they otherwise would not have been able to access/mobilize in the absence of their acquired networks. These findings are consistent with other studies that have established a correlation between literacy

development, and social capital development (Ballati, Black & Falk, 2009; Tett & Macalachan, 2007; Salomon, 2010; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007; Macdonald & Scollay, 2009)

This study is significant in that it extends prior studies in the context of disadvantaged groups, such as low-income refugee workers in the U.S. It contributes to our understanding of the types of social capital resources— emotional, instrumental or informational - that are accessed and mobilized through social networks (strong or weak ties) acquired as a result of participation in learning. Thus, it helps to elucidate the specific mechanisms that enable the mobilization of social capital resources.

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Chapter 4: Examining Social Capital in the Context of Low-income Refugee and Immigrant Groups

Abstract

The basic idea of social capital is that an individual or group's social network (strong or weak ties) constitute an important asset that could be leveraged for productive purposes. However, from an empirical standpoint, not all individuals or groups uniformly acquire social capital or receive beneficial returns from their social networks. This suggests that the mere existence of a social network does not always equate to or guarantee social capital for all individuals. Rather, it is the resources mobilized through the network that are the actual or potential source of advantage – social capital – to an individual or group. Drawing on the preceding empirical studies that examined the social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers in the U.S. and extant literature on social capital. This study suggests more attention should be paid to the nature and types of resources that can be mobilized by virtue of membership in a social network, particularly in the case of marginalized social groups such as low income immigrant and refugee workers.

Introduction

There has been a growing interest in the study of the role of social capital in compensating for economic and social disadvantages among marginalized social groups. In spite of this scholarship, there is a lack of clarity about examining social capital in the context of low-income immigrants and refugees (Ryan, 2011; Child, 2016; Tegegne, 2016; Sabatini, 2008). Different scholars have examined the concept of social capital from different perspectives, leading to a proliferation of competing conceptual frameworks. That notwithstanding, most studies are driven by a theoretical framework that emphasizes two basic underlying concepts. First, social capital is composed of networks of social relations that generate beneficial outcomes for an individual or groups of individuals (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Lin, 2002). Second, social capital represents resources embedded in social relationships that individuals can access or mobilize as a result of being attached to a group (Bourdieu, 1996; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Guided by these key concepts, social capital can be defined as the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social group that facilitates access to emotional, instrumental or informational resources that are essential for their daily survival, stability or upward mobility (Smith, 2000, Lin, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002). This definition highlights two important dimensions of social capital namely: (1) access to social network and (2) mobilization of social network resources (Flap & Volker, 2004; Lin & Erickson, 2008; Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018). While access to social networks inheres in the structure (size and strength of ties) of an individual's network of relationships (Granovetter, 1973; Rostila, 2013; Manalel, 2018) and refers to an individual's position in the social network (Bourdieu, 1986; Policy Research Initiative, 2003), mobilization inheres in network resources and simply refers to the ability of an

individual to extract or deploy emotional, instrumental or informational resources by virtue of membership in a social network (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Lin, 2002).

In spite of this distinction, there is a tendency to examine social capital based on an individual's access to a social network (Flap & Volker, 2004; Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018). The nature and types of resources mobilized through the network remain under-researched (Smith, 2008; Ryan, 2011). The central idea is that through membership in a network (strong ties or weak ties) one has access to resources – emotional, instrumental and informational – that can be utilized or mobilized for productive purposes, hence social capital. However, the context in which networks are established, as well as the social location of network members, may affect the quality of resources – social capital – accessible to them (Glover & Parry, 2005; Kwon & Adler, 2014). From this standpoint, examining social capital outcomes in the context of marginalized social groups such as low-income immigrants and refugees may be better understood by focusing on nature and types of resources that flow or are mobilized through the network(s) accessible to them (Foley & Edwards, 1999; Lin, 1999, Smith, 2000; Ryan, 2011). Findings from the preceding empirical studies that examined the social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers in the U.S., as well as extant literature on social capital, is used to illustrate this.

Mobilizing Social Network Resources – Social Capital

Research on social capital emphasizes the value of relationships as conduits to access tangible and intangible resources or support. These tangible and intangible resources or support have been classified under three broad categories: emotional, instrumental, and informational (Lin, 2002; Smith, 2000; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Magasi & Hammel, 2004; Ferlander, 2007; Parks-Yancy et al, 2009; Rostila, 2010). Emotional resources, also referred to as expressive or

affective resources (Lin, 2002; Pena-Lopez & Sanchez-Santos, 2016), include the less tangible resources or forms of assistance that make people feel respected, cared for, and loved (such as providing companionship, attachment, and comfort) (Helgeson, 2003). This type of resource improves an individual's psychological being, by functioning as a buffer against adverse effects of stress (Claridge, 2004; Rostila, 2010; Pena-Lopez & Sanchez-Santos, 2016).

Instrumental resources refer to the tangible or material resources that people receive from their social networks. They include practical or substantive support that help solve practical problems such as providing labor in kind, childcare, transportation, or financial assistance to someone (Smith, 2000; Helgeson, 2003). These resources assist people in getting by in their everyday lives or minimize socioeconomic instability (Li, 2004; Cohen, 2004). Informational resources include different kinds of valuable information such as advice, guidance, or knowledge relevant to a situation or necessary for improvement, for example employment, referrals, promotion, etc. (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman, 1991). This type of resources is presumed to assist people in getting ahead or to attaining socioeconomic stability or mobility (Lin, 2002; Smith, 2000; Ryan, 2011).

A classic argument in the social capital literature is that mobilization of social network resources – social capital – is contingent on how social relationships are structured and serve to distribute emotional, instrumental or informational resources among those in a network (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Lin, 2002, Erickson, 2003; Bankston, 2014). Consistent with this argument is the strength of ties hypothesis which highlights the role of strong and weak ties in generating social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2008; Burt, 2001; Glover & Parry, 2005). To this end, some scholars argue that the distinct characteristics of strong ties –frequency of interaction, emotional intimacy, and reciprocity – makes it a reliable source of emotional,

instrumental or informational resources, hence social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Sabatini, 2008; Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

This argument was supported in a preceding study that examined the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a literacy program. The findings revealed that participation in ESL, GED and Citizenship classes opened up opportunities for the formation of strong ties with co-workers, characterized by frequent meaningful interactions, intimacy, reciprocal relations among individuals. Their network of strong ties with co-workers proved to be a more reliable and potent source of social capital, when compared to their weak ties with acquaintances, whom they were less familiar with, and had fewer interactions and social relations with (Nwude & Zajicek, forthcoming).

However, other studies also claim that the usefulness of strong ties in creating access to social capital applies best to individuals from a higher socioeconomic background. Conversely, for individuals or groups from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the quality of resources emanating from their strong tie networks are for the most part restrictive or limited and therefore of lesser value when compared to individuals or groups from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Elliot, Haney, & Sams-Abiodun, 2010). For instance, Nwude & Moon, forthcoming, examined the nature and types of social capital resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a literacy program. They found that the social capital resources emanating from participants' strong ties was homogeneous, and limited to specific emotional and instrumental support such as transportation, companionship support and assistance with learning or studying translation services etc. Their findings demonstrated that although such resources were essential for meeting some of the workers' basic needs, these resources were not effective or instrumental for improving their disadvantaged economic situations. In support of

this finding, Loury, Modood, & Teles, (2005) argued that although poor or vulnerable social groups need strong supportive ties to get by in their daily struggles, the value of social capital emerging from their strong ties is more often redundant as the strong ties contain very few resources. Furthermore, they claimed that when too many strong ties are present, they become less effective at mobilizing additional resources outside of the closed network.

Recognizing the limitations of strong ties in the context of disadvantaged social groups, Granovetter (1983, 213) argues that the perpetual reliance of poor individuals on strong ties and relationships with similar others “has the impact of fragmenting communities of the poor into encapsulated networks”. He highlights the importance of weak ties in generating social capital among lower social groups. He argues that a social network characterized by weak ties often provides access to a wider variety of resources and information not likely to be available in closed networks characterized by strong ties (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Burt, 2004; Claridge, 2018). Mobilizing better social capital may require extending one’s reach beyond closed networks that is bridging through weak ties.

Although weak ties are presumed to provide access to diverse resources and novel information, nevertheless, not all individuals or social groups will receive beneficial or substantial returns from their weak ties (Smith, 2000; Lin 2002). The extent to which weak ties constitute a beneficial source of social capital among individuals from lower socioeconomic groups was called to question in the study conducted by Nwude & Moon, forthcoming. Although participants demonstrated access to informational resources through their weak ties with liaison officers, the quality of informational resources accessible through their weak ties was questionable. The reason was that majority of the participants alluded to the same weak ties – liaison officers – as their most reliable source of information relevant for employment.

Consequently, the lack of diversity or heterogeneity of their weak ties potentially undermined the novelty and quality of information that were accessible to participants (Nwude & Moon, forthcoming). These findings support the notion that the benefits associated with weak ties depend on diversity or heterogeneity of network members and associated resources (Granovetter, 1973; Briggs, 1998; Son and Lin, 2012). For example, in his study of residents of a New York public housing program, Briggs (1998) found that black adolescents with more heterogeneous weak ties or bridging networks, had more perceived job information. He asserts that members in more heterogeneous networks are more likely to access new information that may be valuable for their economic advancement. The reason is that weak ties encompass networks that are outward looking, and cross boundaries of race, class, gender or other important sociodemographic characteristics (Briggs, 2003; Claridge, 2004; Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006; Billet, 2011).

Accordingly, the strength or value of a weak tie as an effective source of social capital is contingent on its ability to bridge social distance and may differ substantially relative to the individual. In other words, weak ties are less valuable if they do not link the individual to different networks or social circles with more diverse information and resources than those that are unavailable in their immediate social circle (Granovetter, 1973; Ryan, 2011). For instance, in examining the structure of social networks accessible to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a literacy program, Nwude & Zajicek, forthcoming, found that participation in learning resulted in the creation of more cross-cultural ties with their peers/classmates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Burmese, Hispanic African Americans etc.). However, these cross cultural ties did not serve as bridges to additional resources, information and opportunities beyond those generated through their strong ties.

Referring to all such cross-cultural ties as weak ties confuses the different resources that they may be able to generate and transmit, and therefore creates a vague notion of the productive potential of social capital in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers. This therefore underscores the importance of examining the nature and types of resources that are obtainable or accessible within a particular network (Granovetter, 1983; Nwude & Moon, forthcoming, Ryan, 2011).

An examination of the nature and types of resources obtainable through an individual's network of strong ties or weak ties also raises important questions about the relative social location of network members (Ryan, 2011). To this end, some scholars argue that the higher an individual's socioeconomic status, the greater the likelihood that the individual has a competitive advantage to social capital development relative to others with low socioeconomic status (Lin & Erickson, 2008; Ryan, 2011; Child, 2016). In the same way, others claim that individuals will be deficient in their stock of social capital if they experience deficiencies in other essential capitals or resources such as human and cultural capital (Granovetter, 1983; Bourdieu, 1986; Briggs, 1998; Lin, 2000).

For instance, Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital as a tool of reproduction for the dominant class and claimed that economic and cultural capital deficits create barriers for individuals to acquire and use social capital. He argues that the nature and quality of resources accessible to an individual(s) through their network is structurally determined by the classic forms of social stratification (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika & Singh, 2002). According to Lin (2000), different social groups experience variations in social capital because access and mobilization of social capital resources are in part determined by an individual's position in the hierarchical structure, which in his opinion is preconditioned by certain structural factors such as race,

gender, or class. Drawing on Lin's concept, Elliot, Haney, and Sams-Abiodun (2010) assert that although social networks offer social resources in times of need, however, the efficiency of resources vary by the social class position of those involved. They however conclude that the social capital of people of a lower social status or class are of lesser quality than those of a higher social status.

The foregoing argument was brought to light in the recent study that examined the types of social capital resources that accrue to low-income Somali refugee workers by virtue of their participation in a literacy program (Nwude & Moon, forthcoming). Even though participation in classes increased the size of their social networks, the nature of resources emanating from their social networks was redundant and ineffective for upward mobility. Three major factors were responsible for that. First, in support of the homophily principle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001), there was a general tendency for low-income Somali refugee workers to associate and establish relationships with similar others (low-income, low skilled, minority workers). Second, their workplace and neighborhoods were characterized by economically disadvantaged and ethnically segregated low-income minority populations (Burmese, Hispanic and Somali migrants). Third, their classrooms were also a reflection of their educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and segregated neighborhoods, as classes were created for workers or individuals with low literacy and language deficits, mostly immigrants and refugees.

Consequently, their networks consisted predominantly of individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds (low-income, low skilled, minority workers), and lacked wide ranging ties to individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Nwude & Moon, forthcoming). Thus, for the most part, the social location of low-income Somali refugee workers, which results from the interactive effects of their racial/ethnic minority status, low occupational

status, and low educational level, shape their opportunities to establish meaningful links or ties with individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds or more privileged groups. This consequently impacts the productive potential of their social capital and also reinforces existing marginalization/disadvantages (Granovetter, 1983; Portes, 1998; Ryan, 2011; Child, 2016; Tegegne 2016; Bolibar, 2020).

Therefore, by virtue of their social locations in the social structure, individuals from low-income socioeconomic backgrounds such as refugees and immigrants are more likely to experience deficits in their stock of social capital since they experience deficits or disadvantages in other essential capitals or resources, e.g. human, financial or cultural capital (Li, 2004; Sanders, Nee, & Sernau, 2002; Pih & Lee, 2007; George & Chaze, 2009; Roggeveen & Meeteren, 2013). By the same token, low-income refugees and immigrants may be further marginalized and unable to break free from their disadvantaged economic circumstances due to the quality of social capital they accrue from their networks (Lin, 2002; Loury, Modood, & Teles, 2005; Parks-Yancy, 2006; Campbell, Cornish, & Mclean, 2007; Child, 2016).

Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing, it is noteworthy to highlight that access to resources beyond an individual's capacity occurs through social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2002). As shown, however, simply having access to a social network does not necessarily mean having access to valuable resources capable of productive returns – social capital. Rather the productive potential of social capital emanating from a social network may differ substantially relative to the individual or group of individuals; and is contingent on the nature and types of resources that flow through the network, and conditioned by the social location in which social network members are positioned (Bourdieu, 1986; Foley & Edwards,

1999; Lin, 2000; Grossman, 2013). Therefore, we cannot theoretically assume that social capital inheres in social networks, conceptualized as strong or weak ties, without empirically examining the nature and types of resources that flow through the social network. As Granovetter (1983, 229) argued, “one needs to show not only that ties bridging network segments are disproportionately weak but also that something flows through these bridges, and that whatever it is that flows actually plays an important role in the social life of individuals groups and societies”.

In conclusion, this study suggests that future studies examining social capital outcomes in the context of marginalized social groups, such as low-income immigrants and refugees groups, should pay sufficient attention to the nature and types of resources that are mobilized by virtue of membership in a social network. This approach is important for the following reasons. First, it allows for the development of more reliable method for empirically measuring social capital outcomes in the context of marginalized social groups, thereby addressing some of the conceptual ambiguities and measurement challenges in the scholarship on social capital. Second, it clarifies or sheds light on the nature, quality and efficacy of social capital accessible to low-income immigrants and refugees groups through their networks. Finally, it offers new insights about the structural processes or mechanisms by which social capital deficit is generated in the context of marginalized social groups and helps direct public policy initiatives towards creating opportunities that would enhance their social capital development.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although refugees are diverse in educational attainment and work experience, a large number of them arrive in the U.S. with very low levels of literacy, English proficiency, and other skills that are important determinants of effective participation in the U.S. labor market (Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; Enchautegui, 2015; Isphording, 2015, Kallick & Mathema, 2016). In fact, when compared to their native born counterparts or economic migrants, refugees with low literacy and language proficiency skills experience significant barriers to employment (Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Roggeveen and Van Meeteren, 2013; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012; Hanley, et al, 2018). Additionally, their potential for social capital development is constrained as they often live in ethnically segregated and economically disadvantaged communities or neighborhoods (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Gichiru, 2012; Wilson, 2012; Elliot, Haney, & Sams-Abiodun, 2010; McMichael & Manderson, 2004).

Therefore, creating opportunities for literacy and skill development through workplace literacy programs is central to enhancing the adaptation, employability and social capital development of refugees. While most studies examining the implication of literacy and language proficiency on social capital development have done so in relation to voluntary or economic migrants such as Hispanic and Asian immigrants (Lee, 1994; Aguirre & Martinez, 2000; Bankston, 2014; Pew Social and Demographic Trends, 2012; Chang, 2017; Chow, 2000), less attention has been paid to involuntary or conflict-induced migrants groups, such as refugees.

Recognizing this dearth in research, this study adopts a social network conceptual framework for measuring outcomes of workplace literacy programs in the context of low-income Somali refugee workers. In doing so, this study draws upon the social network approach centered

on two key dimensions namely: (1) access to social networks (2) mobilization of social network resources. Consistent with the network approach, I defined social capital as the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social group that facilitates access to useful resources or support – emotional, instrumental or informational– that can be mobilized or used for productive purposes.

The essential idea is that social capital resides in the individual’s personal network of social relationships and the resources that they provide – with productive benefits. Consequently, the structure of an individual’s social network, conceptualized as size and strength of ties, determines access to social capital. However, merely having access to a social network or membership in a social network does not guarantee social capital. In reality, the potential for social capital development is contingent on an individual’s ability to mobilize the resources available in their network, for productive purposes. Therefore, the types of social capital resources that are accessible and mobilized through an individual’s social networks becomes an important factor in examining social capital outcomes.

For the purpose of this study, I conceptualized and measured social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs by examining (i) the structure of social network accessible to an individual as a result of participation in a literacy program (Bourdieu, 1986; Granovetter, 1973; Child, 2016; Manalel, 2018); (ii) the nature or types of resources that can be mobilized through the network acquired as a result of participation in learning (Lin, 2002; Smith, 2000); and (iii) the mechanisms that enable or facilitate the process of mobilizing resources in the social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002). This study produced four key observations which could be explored in relation to other educationally disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups, beyond low-income, low-literacy Somali refugee groups.

Workplace Literacy Program and Social Capital Development

First, the findings from this study support the hypothesis that participation in workplace literacy program positively impacts social capital development among low-income Somali refugee workers through the acquisition of non-kinship ties (Tett and Maclachlan, 2007; Desjardin and Schuller, 2007). In this context, participation in classes increased the size of participants' social network and the strength of ties (predominantly strong ties). This created access to social capital resources that participants previously did not have access to and consequently enhanced their social capital development.

For instance, although participants' demonstrated access to emotional resources through their existing network of strong ties with family, however, the nature of resources emanating from their kinship ties was limited to specific types of psychological or moral support e.g. calling on a relative when in need of personal advice or encouragement. Their ability to access a variety of practical support such as childcare support, assistance with chores when ill, or transportation assistance, was impaired due to the geographic location of some of their network members. Participants acknowledged that most of their relatives e.g. spouses, parents, siblings etc. whom they actively supported financially (through remittances) were either back home in Somali or in refugee camps overseas and consequently mobilizing basic practical support from such network in times of necessity was difficult or impossible.

However, participation in classes afforded participants the opportunity to mobilize additional social capital resources through the social interactions and reciprocal relations that it facilitated in the classrooms and at the workplace. Overall, participants' strong ties with co-workers had greater emotional and instrumental benefits to participants when compared to other social relationship types. The emotional and instrumental support participants acquired

were unique and very essential for their daily survival, and general wellbeing. Such support included, companionship support, assistance with transportation, assistance with learning, homework/assignments, translation or interpreting support, assistance with chores when ill, or providing other practical support that were beneficial during times of necessity. Most of these social resources or support were not obtainable through their existing kinship network.

Participation in classes also opened up more channels for accessing informational resources. Hence, in addition to their existing weak ties with liaison officers, whom they all alluded to as their main conduit for accessing informational resources, participation in classes enabled participants to establish weak ties with their teachers and supervisors. Although informational resource were not a much needed support, however, some participants identified their teachers and supervisors as the most preferred channels for accessing information in relation to a job, career advancement or educational aspiration.

Mobilizing Social Capital through Strong Ties

Secondly, an inherent component of a viable social network is its ability to offer social resources or support in times of need to individuals or group of individuals (Williams & Durrance, 2007; Ryan, 2011; Child, 2016). Therefore, one of the main considerations in determining the usefulness of a social network is understanding what ties – strong or weak – generate the most beneficial social capital resources for an individual. As demonstrated in this study, participants' newly acquired network of strong ties with co-workers seemed to be more reliable and potent sources of social capital, when compared to their existing network of strong ties or weak ties. This was attributed to a number of reasons. The current needs and objectives of participants, the geographical location or proximity of social ties, the social context in which social interactions and learning occurred, the extent of familiarity between network members all

contribute to understanding the efficacy of their newly acquired social ties. For instance, in this study, participants' needs, and basic daily requirements determined whom they frequently interacted with or turned to for support. The nature of their needs were such that their existing social networks could not provide, and included regular assistance with studying or homework, regular assistance with transportation and companionship support e.g. spending leisure time on the weekends. These types of support or resources were required to help reduce the risk of alienation or isolation and also assist them with accomplishing their daily tasks more easily. These supports were easily accessible through their co-workers/peers at all times, even in the event of an emergency. Moreover, these types of supports were less likely to have been obtained through their kinship ties located in Somalia or at different refugee camps in Africa. Participants were also less likely to have obtained such resources through their weak ties with whom they were less familiar, and had fewer interactions and social relations.

Social networks (strong or weak ties) are, therefore, valuable or useful to the extent that they provide access to beneficial resources. Hence, given that individuals may have very different needs, for which different resources and social ties may be useful, one cannot simply assume that strong or weak ties provide better access to social capital. In context of low-income Somali refugee workers, access to information e.g. in relation to a job was not a necessity among participants who were all employed at the time of the study. Therefore, although weak ties have the capacity to provide novel information, their strong ties were, for the most part, more beneficial and useful for mobilizing social capital resources essential for their daily survival, adaptation and stability. This underscores the need to empirically examine or measure the nature and types of resources that are accessible to an individual by virtue of membership in a network. For it is the resources embedded in a social network (strong or weak ties), and how they are

utilized for productive purposes that are the hallmarks of social capital (Portes, 1998; Cross & Lin, 2008; Lancee, 2010).

Mechanisms for Mobilizing Social Capital

Thirdly, merely having access to a social network or membership in a social network does not automatically equate to social capital, rather, the ability to leverage network resources is also fundamental to social capital development (Foley & Edwards, 1999; Lin, 2002; Kwon&Adler, 2014). It was evident from the findings that emotional and instrumental resources – social capital – could not have been accessible in the absence of specific mechanisms, which were identified as motivation, trust and reciprocity. For instance, it was established that participants’ ability to secure and exchange social resources or support was contingent on their ability to socially interact more frequently, as well as their willingness or motivation to establish and maintain useful relationships with their co-workers or classmates.

Although improvements in their language and literacy proficiency influenced their ability to socially interact in more meaningful ways, the identification of shared interests was also a powerful motivational force for establishing and mobilizing useful relationships. Participation in classes created a sense of belonging among individuals with similar demographic characteristics including minority status, educational background, and occupational status. As a result, participants were motivated and able to draw on the knowledge, experiences, and resources of their peers and co-workers in times of need and to pursue their respective goals.

Participation in classes, also, enabled more cross-cultural social interactions and integration with peers or classmates. Classes served a bridging function, connecting participants to co-workers or peers from different backgrounds in terms of age, ethnicity, religion, culture, and language. However, the potential for extending relationships to other social groups would

have been difficult without a certain degree of trust established within their network. Many participants described how their relationship with co-workers had transitioned from strangers to close friends. Trust, therefore, motivated participants to maintain and strengthen their relations with co-workers or classmates, regardless of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Trust enhanced the ease and frequency of resource exchanges – reciprocity – between and among network members even during times of uncertainty. The development of trust and reciprocity resulted from frequent meaningful interactions, the feelings of commitment to one another, and a sense of responsibility and support for each other's well-being (Lin, 2000; Glover & Parry, 2005). Classes, therefore, provided both a conducive environment for learning and the proliferation of expectations and obligations. Participants demonstrated their willingness to render assistance to their colleagues with the expectation that the recipient/colleagues would reciprocate the support they received (Putnam, 2000). On many occasions, participants, became reliant and dependent on one another for assistance and support with learning, and other practical support essential for their daily survival. Participants' ability to reciprocate and return favors or assistance helped to maintain a more balanced mutual relationship and that fostered a sense of belonging. By working together or exchanging resources, individuals were able to satisfy their immediate needs and accomplish certain desired goals that would have been difficult to accomplish on their own.

Limitations to Social Capital Development

Fourthly, although participation in classes improved access to social capital resources among low-income Somali refugee workers, there were still some limitations to their social capital development. For instance, a large portion of their social network was homogeneous consisting of individuals who shared the same or similar characteristics with respect to minority

status, educational level, occupational status, and aspirations. Consequently, resources accessed through such network were more homogenous and limiting compared to resources accessed through more heterogeneous relationships. Although, such resources were essential for meeting most of their basic needs, they were not very effective or instrumental for improving their disadvantaged economic situations. Even though participation in classes enabled the creation of more cross-cultural ties with their peers/classmates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Burmese, Hispanic African Americans etc.), their cross cultural ties did not really serve as bridges to additional resources, outside those generated through their strong ties. Consequently, the quality of social capital emanating from their acquired network was impaired and less effective for socioeconomic mobility (Briggs, 1998; Lin, 2000; Smith, 2000).

A number of factors were responsible for this, the most salient include: first, their newly acquired network members were limited to individuals or co-workers who were of the same social class in terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds (educational disadvantaged) and occupational status (low-income, low skilled, minority workers). Second, their neighborhoods were characterized by economically disadvantaged and ethnically segregated low-income minority populations (Burmese, Hispanic and Somali migrants). Third, their classrooms were also a reflection of their educational disadvantaged backgrounds and segregated neighborhoods, as classes were created for workers/individuals with low literacy and language deficits, mostly immigrants and refugees.

Therefore, for participants to be able to access novel information or diverse resources that can enhance upward mobility, they would have to extend their reach beyond their closed networks or bridge through weak ties (Granovetter, 1983; Burt, 1992; Lin 2002). Nevertheless, not all weak ties are capable of upward mobility opportunities (Smith, 2005; Carolan & Natriello,

2006). The benefits associated with weak ties depends on diversity or heterogeneity of network members and associated resources (Granovetter, 1973; Briggs, 1998; Son and Lin, 2012). For instance, in this case, even though participants established weak ties with liaison officers, teachers and supervisors, the heterogeneity of their weak ties was questionable, as they all alluded to the same contacts when in need of information, e.g. in relation to a job search. This lends support to the argument that members of marginalized groups such as immigrants and refugees are embedded in networks that lack weak, heterogeneous ties, thus reducing the likelihood of discovering new opportunities for economic advancement (Smith, 2000; Pih & Lee, 2007; Loury, Modood, & Teles, 2005), and establishing a link between social location and social capital inequality (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998; Lin, 2000; Tegegne 2016).

Hence, without bridging ties to other social circles consisting of individuals or groups of higher socioeconomic status, low-income Somali refugee workers may lack the connections that may enhance their social capital development and promote upward mobility (Granovetter, 1973; Li, 2004; Agnitch, Flora & Ryan, 2006; Parks-Yancy et al, 2009). The key highlight is that both strong and weak ties have unique benefits, and the most effective networks are presumed to be those enriched with a combination of strong and weak ties (Lin, 2002; Burt, 2001; Agnitch, Flora and Ryan, 2006); because it allows individuals and groups to acquire not only skills, resources and opportunities embedded in their immediate network or social circle, but also skills, resources and opportunities that transcend their immediate network or social circle (Granovetter, 1983; Putnam, 1993; Carolan & Natriello, 2006).

Contributions, Significance and Implications for Policy

Fundamental to the formation of social capital is the ability of individuals to socially interact in meaningful ways that facilitate the creation of social networks and enhance the flow

or exchange of social resources. However, given their low levels of literacy and language proficiency, low-income Somali refugee workers are restricted in their ability to socially interact in ways that may enhance their social capital development. Thus, given the array of evidence in this study, it is apparent that creating opportunities for the literacy development of low-income Somali refugees positively impacts the structure of participants' social networks through the acquisition of strong ties with co-workers/classmates. That notwithstanding, their newly acquired social networks enhanced their social capital development by creating access to emotional and instrumental resources that were unavailable in their immediate familial or kinship network and that were essential for their daily survival and stability.

The findings of this study are consistent with prior studies (Balatti, Black, Falk, 2006; Tett & Macalachan, 2007; Field & Spence, 2000; Desjardin & Schuller, 2007) that have been able to establish a link between learning and social capital development in the context of disadvantaged groups. This study contributes to our understanding of the types of resources or support that are accessed and mobilized through social relationships (Lin, 2002; Pena-Lopez & Sanchez-Santos, 2016; Glover & Parry, 2005) acquired as a result of learning. Thus, it helps to elucidate specific mechanisms that explain the different contexts in which resources or support are both secured and exchanged by virtue of membership in a social network (Granovetter, 1973; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Claridge, 2018; Child, 2016).

In the light of the foregoing discussions, this study suggests that in examining social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs, it is not just the structure of social networks that is noteworthy (Granovetter, 1973; Policy Research Initiative; 2003). The nature and types of resources that might be obtained through the network are critical, as well as the mechanisms that enable or enhance, the flow or exchange of resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin 2000; Kwon &

Adler,2014). To this end, research examining social capital outcomes of workplace literacy programs should be guided by a conceptual framework that is capable of investigating both access and mobilization of social network resources (Flap & Volker, 2004; Lin & Erickson, 2008; Yang, Jackson, & Zajicek, 2018).

A focus on access and mobilization of social network resources is significant for the following reasons. First, it allows for the development of a more reliable method for measuring social capital outcomes in the context of marginalized social groups such as low-income refugees and immigrants, thereby addressing some of the conceptual ambiguities and measurement challenges in the scholarship on social capital. Second, it clarifies or sheds light on the efficacy of social capital accessible to low-income refugees and immigrant groups through their social networks of strong or weak ties. Third, it provides insight on ways to increase levels and quality of social capital among low-income refugee and immigrant groups with the goal of improving their economically disadvantaged situations and promote socioeconomic mobility.

This study is significant in that it contributes to emerging literature suggesting that outcomes of workplace literacy programs extend beyond economic benefits and includes other non-economic or social benefits (Salmon, 2010; Desjardins & Schuller, 2007; De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016; St. Clair, 2008). It highlights the role of workplace literacy programs in eliminating some of the barriers to successful economic adaptation and social integration of low-income refugees and immigrants posed by literacy and language deficiencies, cultural and religious differences, social isolation and stigmatization (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Sum, Kirsch, & Yamamoto, 2004; Bialecki, Gotta, & Pilegi, 2018; Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2011; Toso et al, 2013). Specifically, it highlights the importance of providing opportunities for the literacy development of low-income refugee and immigrant groups, identified as follows.

First, workplace literacy programs provide a sustainable path towards increased stability and mobility of low-income refugee and immigrant workers by empowering them with the adequate skill set required not only to secure meaningful employment, but also to increase their access to the resources, social support and opportunities otherwise not available. Second, workplace literacy programs can serve as avenues to improve diversity, minimize social exclusion, and promote successful social and economic integration of refugees and immigrants into the civic life of the communities where they have settled. Third, workplace literacy programs can open up arrays of opportunities for reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and improving the quality of lives of refugees and immigrants who are at risk of poverty, oppression, and discrimination.

This study is of particular importance in the light of Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) which aims to create access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services, particularly for individuals with the greatest barriers to employment including low-income immigrants and refugee groups (Wu, 2019). In the absence of a uniform national integration policy (De Graauw & Bloemraad, 2017), the WIOA presents potential opportunities to better address the economic and social integration needs of immigrants and refugees in the workforce, especially at this time of restrictive immigration policies and toxic national rhetoric. From this standpoint, workforce development systems should adopt and implement effective strategies and measures targeted at improving the structure, management and delivery of programs and services under the WIOA. The rationale behind this is to increase access to education, training, support services and development opportunities for the marginalized and underserved, such as low-income refugees and immigrant groups. This study, therefore, makes the following recommendations.

1. The WIOA provisions should be revised and strengthened by adopting a more flexible approach to evaluating workforce development or literacy programs. Hence, in addition to the traditional performance measures centered on employment and credential attainment (Fleming & Ysasi, 2017), nontraditional indicators and performance measures centered on non-economic or social outcomes e.g. social capital development should be adopted.
2. Workforce development systems should develop and incorporate effective mechanisms that are capable of tracking and demonstrating the holistic performance of participants including low-income refugees and immigrants in workforce development programs, at the same time addressing gaps in the provision and efficacy of programs.
3. Workforce development programs under the WIOA should promote and adopt research strategies and methods best suited to examine and analyze the size, sociodemographic characteristics and diverse needs of immigrants and refugee groups, in order to obtain a better grasp on how well to serve this underserved population (Bernstein & Vilter, 2018). Without the requisite data on the size, sociodemographic characteristics and diverse needs of immigrants and refugee groups, services provided to help them overcome barriers to employment and upward mobility risk falling short of their actual needs. For instance, research indicates that particular groups of refugees have greater or distinctive needs relative to others. These groups include older people, asylum seekers, those with physical disabilities, women, and youths – who are having a hard time adapting to their new communities (Benseman, 2014).
4. Workforce development programs under the WIOA should take concrete and meaningful steps to expand access and eliminate barriers to successful participation in

workplace literacy, language and education programs for low-income immigrant and refugee groups. Such barriers include lack of access to the necessary social support services, e.g. transportation, housing, childcare, healthcare etc. (Bird, Foster & Ganzglass, 2014). For instance, even when opportunities are created for literacy development, transportation challenges and long commute times can keep workers from pursuing education and training. Also, accessing affordable childcare is a major hurdle for many low-income immigrant and refugee workers, and this limits participation.

5. Workforce development systems should explore pathways and leverage partnerships with employers, local education providers, non-profit organizations and immigrant or refugee community-serving organizations (Ott, 2015; Montes & Choitz, 2016). These partnerships or collaborations should be geared towards instituting new programs or scaling up existing programs, while also addressing specific barriers that impede access to participation. For instance, literacy programs can be provided at the workplace through engagement with employers and coordination with education providers. Or programs could be offered in trusted spaces e.g. religious places of worship, libraries or other areas that are frequently visited by low-income immigrants and refugee groups.

These recommendations create an opportunity for community leaders, local education providers, employers and advocates in states and local communities to rethink, reshape, and expand workforce systems, programs, and practices that are grounded in research and experience to improve the educational attainment, employability and social capital development of low-income and marginalized individuals in the workforce.

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Appendix



To: Zola Knowles Moon
HMGH 0203

From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee

Date: 06/12/2018

Action: **Exemption Granted**

Action Date: 06/12/2018

Protocol #: 1709073949

Study Title: A Case Study of the Impact and Effectiveness of Upward Academy Program on Human and Social Capital Development of Low Skilled Workers at Tyson Foods in Center, Texas.

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Angela Uchechukwu Nwude, Investigator