

# The Effect of Family Capital on the Social Adjustment of Young Children Aged 3-6 Years Old

Chuyu Huang \*

Department of Teaching Education, Ningbo University, Ningbo, 315211, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: 226002584@nbu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** With the rapid development and change of the social environment, the importance of social adaptability in modern society has been emphasized. 3-6 years old is a critical period for the social development of young children. Cultivating children's good social adaptability at this stage not only affects their early interpersonal relationships and psychological health but also has far-reaching significance on their future academic achievement, social integration and lifelong development. As the earliest micro-system that young children encounter, different family backgrounds have a profound impact on young children. Therefore, exploring the influence of family capital on the social adaptive ability of 3–6-year-olds has become one of the most important topics in the field of preschool education. Taking 3-6-year-old children as the research object, this study adopts the methods of literature search and comprehensive analysis, aiming at exploring how the differences in family economic, social and cultural capitals affect and shape the social adaptive ability of young children. In addition, the study focuses on specific ways to compensate for family capital and promote educational equity. Corresponding conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Family capital, social adaptation, early childhood education.

## 1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has pointed out on the issue of health that human health is not limited to physical functions, and that good social adaptability is also an important manifestation of health [1]. Social adaptability is the ability of an individual to adapt his or her behavior to the degree expected by society. In recent years, society has been evolving more rapidly, which means people need to constantly adapt their cognitive and behavioral patterns to changes in the environment. This also puts higher demands on people's social adaptability. Take China as an example, the promotion of the “double-reduction” policy (Reducing the excessive burden of homework and out-of-school training on students) and the implementation of legislation on family education have brought widespread attention to the issue of socialization of young children. 3-6 years of age is a critical time for the social development of young children, and social adaptability should be given attention as an important goal in the social sphere [2]. Well-developed social adaptability can lead to healthy emotional management, peer communication and pro-social behaviors. These not only affect the early interpersonal relationships and psychological health of young children, but also have far-reaching significance on future academic achievement, social integration and lifelong development. Using family capital as the independent variable of the study, including three sub-dimensions: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. This study aims to explore the influence of different young children's family background on their social adaptability. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory, it is known that children's development is the result of the interaction of multiple factors, among which the role of the environment cannot be ignored [3]. The family environment is the earliest microsystem that young children are exposed to as individuals, and the social status of family members, their occupation, education level and the family atmosphere they create constitute the unique growth environment of young children. Differences in family capital may profoundly affect young children's social adjustment through resource allocation, parenting behaviors, and interaction patterns [4]. Therefore, the study has important theoretical and practical implications. This study aims to organize and supplement current research on the impact of family capital on young children's social adaptability and reveal its mechanism of action. It will provide a more effective

scientific basis for the inclination of educational resources and the guidance of family education, which will contribute to educational equity. To address this issue, this study will use a variety of research methods, such as literature review and case analysis, to understand the specific impact of young children's family capital on their current social adaptive capacity. In addition, relevant theoretical studies and practical experiences will be comprehensively examined to reveal the influence mechanisms of different family capital dimensions. Finally, relevant conclusions will be drawn based on the findings of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

As early as the 1980s, Pierre Bourdieu, an important founder of capital theory, began to emphasize the role played by family capital in child development, arguing that the family is the basic unit of social structure and the most hidden site of social reproduction. Children inherit the capital of their parents invisibly or explicitly through the education of the family under the inculcation of their parents' occupation, skill and cultivation [5]. This has made a significant theoretical contribution to the study of the impact of the family environment on children's development and to the analysis of the intergenerational transmission mechanism of inequality. Jonathan H. Turner gives the following definitions for the three types of capital based on Bourdieu's explanations: economic capital refers to the material wealth (e.g., property, assets) possessed by the family, which can be directly transformed into economic benefits or market advantages; and social capital refers to the resources accumulated by family members through social networks, relational ties, and group affiliations. Cultural capital is the core of Bourdieu's theory and includes informal interpersonal skills, habits, language styles, educational qualities, tastes and lifestyles [6]. The strengths and weaknesses of family capital greatly affect the physical and mental development of young children.

Social adaptation is an important task in the growth and development of young children and is also a concern of developmental psychologists. However, there is no uniform definition of it in the academic world, and there are differences in the perspective of researchers in defining social adaptation. Cavell unfolds from the dimension of developmental goals, emphasizing the degree to which individuals reach the standard of social expectations through the dynamic adaptation of physical and mental states [7]. Lukash focuses on the interactive mechanism, proposing that the process is essentially a dynamic relationship between the subject and the social environment with continuous inner construction and that it is the process of the individual constantly adjusting his behaviour according to his own needs [8]. Lin Chongde emphasizes the dimension of environmental adaptation, pointing out that it is the subject's adaptation to the social environment through cognitive reconstruction and behavioral adaptation [9].

In general, social adaptation can be categorized into positive and negative adaptation. Excellent social adaptation is typified by self-regulation ability and pro-social behavior, while a low level of social adaptation will show both exoteric and implicit behaviors such as paranoid behaviors and withdrawn emotions when dealing with others [10].

## 3. Mechanisms of the Influence of Different Dimensions of Family Capital on Children's Social Adjustment

### 3.1. Economic Capital

The economic capital of a family has a significant impact on children's social adaptability. The economic capital of a family directly determines a family's material standard of living. At the same time, the foundational nature of economic capital enables it to serve as a prerequisite for the accumulation of other capital. Economic capital determines whether families can purchase quality educational services (e.g., private kindergartens), participate in paid social activities (e.g., art classes and clubs), and provide more books and toys for their children, which directly construct the boundaries of their children's social circles. This is a form of transforming economic capital into

cultural capital, as families with high economic capital filter out “homogenized” social partners through paid activities. In addition, economic capital allows families to choose the neighborhoods in which they live, hire nannies or tutors, and thus indirectly control the spatial segregation of the social environments to which young children are exposed. This is a form of economic capital transformed into social capital. [4, 5]. In addition to direct resource support, economic capital also feeds back to children indirectly by influencing parents. Research has pointed out that the family's worrying economic situation, such as the problems of unemployment, material deprivation and food insecurity, will lead to parents' anxiety, depression and other emotional instability, which will be reflected in the young children through the parenting style and will have a negative impact on the social adaptive capacity of the young children [11]. Conger's “Family Stress Model” also points out that economic stress indirectly contributes to children's behavioral problems (e.g., aggressive or withdrawn behaviors) by affecting parental emotions and family interactions (e.g., spousal conflicts, parenting styles) [12].

### **3.2. Social Capital**

Family social capital can be explored in two aspects: internal and external. First of all, activities within the family have an impact on the early social adaptability of young children. Bowlby mentioned in his attachment theory that a good parent-child relationship helps individuals grow and develop social adaptability [13]. Research has shown that families with good parent-child relationships and frequent positive interactions have children who have better social skill acquisition and greater social adjustment [14]. Because the parent-child relationship is good, young children are more likely to open up in the process of getting along. They know how to express themselves, develop a sense of security and dependence, and form good social adaptability. Children of this type, influenced by their family's social environment, will also be able to develop stronger social competencies in peer relationships in the future. Social capital outside the family is mainly the ability of family members to obtain resources in social activities through the relationship network they have in social interactions, which mainly includes parents' interpersonal relationships in the workplace, community or social institutions. Research on kindergarten home-school cooperation shows that frequent contact between parents and kindergartens and active participation in home-school communication is conducive to the development of young children's social adaptability and behavioural adjustment [16]. In addition, the social network of the family, such as parents' good interpersonal relationships with neighbors and friends, parents' participation in parent support groups, and the relationships constructed by parents' participation in community activities can indirectly contribute to the development of young children's social adaptive capacity by influencing parents' resources and experiences [5].

### **3.3. Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital mainly points to the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition and skills that have been passed down from generation to generation, with a wide range and deep coverage, and is also considered to be the most important factor in family capital [5]. Studies by several scholars have shown that the level of parental literacy has a certain impact on children's social adaptability. Usually, families with low parental educational attainment have children with poorer social adjustment [17]. This is perhaps because most families with low cultural capital also have relatively low economic capital, and it is difficult for parents to convert excess economic capital into resources for early childhood education and access thresholds for social circles, which indirectly affects, to a certain extent, young children's ability to adapt to different social environments. Family cultural capital also manifests itself in the form of internalized language styles, thinking patterns and other embodied forms, such as family lifestyle (e.g., meal etiquette, time planning), and parental corrections of children's daily language, which are all subconsciously internalized into children's “cultural instincts”, enabling them to adapt naturally to a particular social arena[5]. The cultural activities undertaken by parents and their cultural tastes are also specific forms of family cultural capital, and

studies have shown that parents who frequent art museums and libraries are more concerned with cultivating their children's cultural habits and tastes [5]. Wide exposure to a variety of cultural forms can also help young children improve their social adaptability.

## **4. Challenges Faced by Struggling Families with Scarce Family Capital**

### **4.1. Problems Encountered in the Social Adaptation of Young Children**

Taken together, the impact of family capital on young children is not exclusively unidimensional. Low SES Families often have limited educational resources and can provide less cultural enrichment for young children, which may lead to a lack of family cultural capital to some extent. This can also have an overall negative impact on young children's social adjustment skills.

From a behavioral and emotional perspective, families with low SES are pressured to live with higher levels of emotional distress and are prone to conflict. Such negative emotions will affect young children, and when they encounter similar stimuli, their negative emotions will be stronger and more persistent than those of other children, leading to some poor social adjustment problems [18]. Meanwhile, low-income and low-educated parents often suffer from a lack of scientific parenting knowledge in their educational practices. These families are more likely to have high-pressure parenting patterns, such as over-controlling children's behavior through coercive directives (e.g., "stop it now," "don't ask questions," "do it now"). In many cases, parental directives are given without explanation or question, ignoring children's need for emotional expression and independent decision-making. In contrast to the democratic consultation and positive incentives used by highly educated families, these parents often focus on result-oriented external constraints and do not understand the rules of children's cognitive development. They are less likely to use open dialogue to understand children's wishes, less likely to give concrete verbal encouragement, and more likely to use the one-way communication mechanism of "command-and-obey". Research has shown that this model of parenting, which ignores psychological needs and inhibits the development of autonomy, may exacerbate children's social avoidance, emotional regulation disorders and other adaptive problems [19].

In terms of cognition and learning, parents with high SES have a higher willingness to invest in early childhood education, and the family's economic capital will help young children to choose schools in a hidden way to provide them with high-quality, well-endowed education. At the same time, they will actively intervene in education, not obeying the teacher in everything, but caring more about their children's individual development. In contrast, low-income and low-education parents are powerless to choose schools and their children have a higher failure rate in education. Due to the lack of economic and cultural capital, they hold high respect for schools and teachers, showing negative obedience, which also has a certain negative impact on the learning and development of young children [20].

In terms of social exclusion, children from low-income, low-education families are more likely to experience unfair treatment or self-identity problems in peer interactions and school adjustment. When migrant children in rural China try to integrate into urban life, "parental perceived social distance" has a significant negative impact on their social integration. This special status of migrant workers from the father's generation also implies a lack of citizenship. The stereotypical image of migrant children held by some of the local population will be reflected in the imbalance of interactions between the offspring, making it difficult for migrant children to integrate into the school and society because of the discrimination, exclusion and disharmony they feel, either explicitly or implicitly, in their social interactions with their peers [21].

### **4.2. Multiple Disadvantageous Effects**

Nowadays, the State's gradual emphasis on early education has led to the vigorous development of universal kindergartens. Although there are still differences between urban and rural kindergartens in terms of teachers' qualifications and environment creation, the situation has improved considerably

compared with the past. However, for young children, the transmission of family capital is still characterized by an intergenerational transmission mechanism, and the lack of economic, cultural, and social capital has a cumulative negative impact on the growth of young children. At the same time, insufficient internal coping mechanisms and a lack of external support in the family can also lead to a vicious cycle of family capital transmission. Such an analysis of family heterogeneity indicates that there is still a certain degree of inequality in educational opportunities in China. The advantaged classes have consolidated their social status by virtue of their advantages in family capital stock and family capital transformation efficiency, while disadvantaged classes such as those in rural areas, low-education families and low-income families find it difficult to escape from the constraints of their family origins, and are hard pressed to achieve intergenerational upward mobility through education, which has brought about class solidification to a certain extent. The serious lack of family capital investment in early childhood education resources by disadvantaged families is mainly manifested in two aspects: on the one hand, children from disadvantaged families receive less financial support than children from ordinary families; on the other hand, the difficult life situation of the family forces the parents of disadvantaged families to have a serious absence of family education capital building. Many disadvantaged families have realized the importance of education, but in the absence of appropriate methodological guidance, most families are unable to provide strong educational capital support in practice.

## **5. How to Mitigate Equity Issues Arising From Family Capital in Practice**

### **literature References**

Although family capital is an innate and non-optional factor, through education and social support, individual efforts can still play a great role as an acquired compensatory factor. Therefore, it is worthwhile for researchers to think about how to mitigate the equity problems caused by the innate factors of family capital in practice and provide more young children with excellent educational conditions suitable for social development.

#### **5.1. Government Interventions**

Government institutional safeguards. With regard to early education, in recent years China has increased the number of rural kindergartens nationwide by 68 per cent from 2011 to 2020 through the construction of inclusive kindergartens in rural areas, but there are still significant quality differences. In order to further improve the quality of kindergartens, in addition to hardware facilities, it is necessary to appropriately skew resources, bring in high-quality teachers (e.g., mobility of high-quality teachers to narrow the gap in the quality of kindergarten socialization programs), establish a system for evaluating kindergartens' social adaptive capacity, and develop online high-quality social field programs such as the “kindergarten cloud classroom” for the whole community to learn from.

Optimizing family subsidy and support programs. Many preschool education programs at home and abroad, such as the Head Start Program in the United States, the High/Scope preschool program, and the SureStart program in the United Kingdom, all show the importance of preschool education to the future of human beings, and the investment in the preschool stage will have a huge return for the country and society. The Government should improve its social welfare policy, gradually promote free pre-school education, and provide disadvantaged families with a certain amount of financial security for school enrolment. To ensure that every young child can have basic educational conditions and equal access to kindergarten enrollment.

#### **5.2. Support System for Kindergartens and the Community**

Innovative models of home-home cooperation. Kindergarten is the closest place for young children other than their families, and kindergarten education can provide the greatest support for young children's capital compensation. Kindergarten teachers should ignore differences in family backgrounds, provide differentiated support for different children, and meet children's individual

needs as much as possible. For those children who have difficulty integrating into kindergarten life because they come from disadvantaged families, teachers can provide personalized accompaniment and guidance and provide them with opportunities to interact with others through cooperative games, role-playing and other forms so as to promote the development of their social adaptive ability. Parents are guided to change from “passive observers” to “active contributors” and are provided with opportunities to participate in kindergarten activities in various ways under the premise of a lighter burden. The cooperation between teachers and parents can be carried out through the establishment of dynamic files of children, enhancing communication between home and abroad, and jointly agreeing on the development plan of children. In order to strengthen parent-child communication and intimacy, home visits and questionnaires can be used to screen families with low literacy capital and design “family task cards” (e.g., 10-minute daily conversation practice).

Psychological counseling and social skills training. Teachers can incorporate social picture book learning and games into group teaching activities to train children's emotional recognition skills. Mixed-age educational activities can also be implemented in kindergartens, where children from different family backgrounds are organized into mixed teams. In this way, children with high social capital can lead children with low capital to learn the rules of cooperation.

Build a socialized support network. Nowadays, more and more emphasis is being placed on collaborative parenting among families, kindergartens and the community. China has put forward the idea of building “child-friendly communities”, which shows that the role of the community in the development of young children's social adaptive capacity should not be underestimated. The community can serve as a gathering point for residents, organizing parent-child activities and educational seminars and providing toys and activity space for families. In the process of neighborhood exchange, it helps disadvantaged families to build family social capital, while young children can form stable interactive relationships with peers in the community, which is conducive to the development of their social adaptive capacity. The community can also make full use of existing resources, such as relying on the Internet to establish a network community and inviting retired teachers to tutor low-income families in pairs, so as to pass on cultural capital (e.g., storytelling and handicraft activities) through intergenerational interaction.

### **5.3. Family Capacity Enhancement**

As parents, we must first establish a correct view of education and children, and understand the importance of the early childhood stage of development. It may not be possible to provide diversified and sufficient educational resources for young children at the material level, but it is necessary to fully respect their willingness to read and explore. Many studies have indicated that the number of magazines and newspapers in the home can promote children's language development [22]. By means of borrowing and recycling second-hand books, educational resources can be exchanged for less economic costs, and young children are also infected by the values embedded in them in the process of independently reading picture books, which is conducive to the cultivation of their social adaptability. The arrival of the AI era signals that it is no longer difficult to obtain professional guidance, and forms such as parent classrooms and live Q&A broadcasts can provide families with more effective guidance on family education. In addition, to pay attention to the convertibility of family capital, and to give full play to the power of advantageous capital to supplement unfavorable resources, it is first necessary for parents to have a sense of learning and upgrading. Parents can optimize their family's cultural capital by improving their knowledge and culture, increasing the frequency of their participation in cultural activities, and creating a cultural atmosphere in the family, so as to transform themselves from “passive receivers” of capital into “active constructors”.

## **6. Controversies and Shortcomings**

### **6.1. Theoretical Aspects**

Many studies tend to overemphasize the “absoluteness” of family capital. For example, they believe that there is a direct causal relationship between family economic capital and young children's social status and social opportunities while ignoring the impact of young children's own temperament type, personality traits and psychological qualities, such as resilience, on young children's social adaptability. Such studies are prone to bias and affect the value of the research. In addition, most empirical studies are quantitative in nature, drawing conclusions from data and models. However, there are few qualitative studies on case studies and follow-ups, and there may still be “counter-examples” of families at the bottom with excellent social adjustment ability, while capital is not the only explanatory variable. A study of these cases would be beneficial to society in exploring ways to culturally compensate disadvantaged families and promote educational equity.

### **6.2. Methodological Aspects**

Most studies focus on the middle class and above or extreme poverty groups, and there is a lack of research on emerging classes (e.g., urban migrant workers, demolition households) and diverse family structures (e.g., restructured families, single-parent families). In addition, research on migrant children and children with special needs has also been one-sided. With the acceleration of new urbanization, population mobility has become more active. The families of migrant children are heterogeneous, and migrant children are not necessarily disadvantaged children. In addition, existing studies focus more on the current situation and analyze cross-sectional data, lacking longitudinal studies. It may be more conducive to showing the cumulative effect of the impact of family capital or the bias of the impact on young children of different ages after tracking the families with different capital contents. Meanwhile, there are limitations in the measurement tools of the study, with most studies using questionnaires to record explicit indicators (e.g., family book collection, arts program participation). However, methods such as ethnography, observation records, and physical analysis may be more effective in digging deeper into the invisible influences of family capital.

### **6.3. Dimensions of Cultural Universality**

At present, most of the important studies with typical reference values originate from the West. However, there are cultural differences between China and the West, and the national conditions are very different, so the cultural universality of the studies remains to be explored. There may be differences in the role of family capital in the context of collectivist culture in Eastern countries, for example, China's strong clan network may compensate for the lack of family economic capital.

### **6.4. Practical Aspects**

Existing research tends to analyze the phenomenon in terms of correlation and lacks experimental design to verify whether compensatory interventions are effective. For example, whether parenting classes and family education guidance can help families improve the compensation of cultural capital and promote the in-depth practice of educational equity.

## **7. Conclusion**

Through literature indexing and comprehensive analysis, this study examines the impact of family capital (economic, social, and cultural) on the social adjustment of children aged 3-6 years, and proposes a multifaceted approach to help children from disadvantaged families develop their social adjustment. The study found that differences in family capital significantly affect children's social adjustment through resource allocation, parenting styles and environmental interactions. Economic capital affects children's access to quality educational resources and social circles; social capital enhances young children's sense of security and social skill development through relational networks;

and cultural capital shapes invisible social norms in a subtle way. The cumulative nature and intergenerational transmission of family capital exacerbates social inequality to a certain extent. This study proposes that the lack of capital in disadvantaged families can be compensated for through policy favoritism, home-community collaboration, and family education guidance. Ultimately, these educational research findings have important theoretical and practical implications for minimizing the adverse effects of family capital on young children's social adaptability in a variety of ways to promote educational equity.

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