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How Does Family Economic Capital Affect the Underlying Logic of Teenagers' Academic Performance from the Perspective of Intergenerational Transmission

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ABSTRACT
Education, serving as the pivotal mechanism for social mobility, has long been a crucial metric for gauging the openness of a society. Nevertheless, the gap in family economic capital is insidiously reshaping the pattern of educational resource distribution. With high-quality educational resources becoming ever more closely associated with economic prowess, "educational consumer products" like after-school tutoring, international exchanges, and housing in prime school districts have gradually emerged as implicit barriers. The impact of family economic capital on adolescents' academic achievements has transcended the scope of individual endeavor and has further developed into the profound logic underlying intergenerational advantage transfer.

KEYWORDS
Education; Family economic capital; Deep-seated logic

1 Introduction

The direct discrepancy in material investment in education is not merely manifested in overt differences. Instead, it is intricately embedded in multifaceted dimensions, including educational decision - making, cultural impacts, and social networking.

Take, for example, the enrollment statistics of a renowned high school in Beijing. Over the past five consecutive years, students from high - income families have consistently accounted for more than 60% of the total enrollment. Conversely, when examining the admission rates of rural and urban students to top - tier universities, it is evident that the proportion of rural students is less than one - third of their urban counterparts.

This structural inequality exposes a sobering truth: the landscape of educational competition has gradually shifted from a pure intellectual contest to a de facto comparison of family economic resources.

This research endeavors to go beyond the superficial aspects of this phenomenon. By delving into the matter, it aims to uncover the various ways in which family economic capital facilitates the intergenerational transfer of educational attainment. Additionally, it will explore the underlying social processes at play. The findings of this study are expected to offer theoretical underpinnings for addressing the challenges associated with educational equity.

2 Literature review

Liu Wenjie, Song Hong and Chen Shiyi (2022) analyzed the impact of educational fiscal policies on family human capital investment and found that family economic capital exerts its influence on children's education through two pathways: Firstly, economic resources are directly converted into educational expenditures such as after-school tutoring and choosing high-quality schools; Secondly, after the economic pressure is relieved, parents are more inclined to adopt long-term educational planning strategies. This study points out that in regions with insufficient educational fiscal investment, the compensatory effect of family economic capital is particularly significant. For example, rural families may reduce current consumption to ensure the education funds for their children. This conclusion is consistent with the research of Li Ying, Zhao Shuhang and Lu Xin (2022), who found that for economically disadvantaged areas, for every 10% increase in family income, the assessment score of children's development will increase by 0.32 standard deviations, and due to the differences in the economic decision-making ability of guardians, this effect is heterogeneous in left-behind children families. Fan Liuchi's (2022) master's thesis further focuses on the preschool education stage and through empirical analysis reveals the screening effect of family economic capital on children's enrollment in kindergartens. The research shows that high-income families, by purchasing school districts, paying sponsorship fees, etc., compared to low-income families, the probability of their children entering high-quality kindergartens has increased by 47%. This early educational opportunity acquisition directly affects the subsequent academic trajectory. This finding supplements the existing research on "starting point fairness" and indicates that the intergenerational transmission effect has already begun to accumulate in the preschool education stage.

Zhou Mengling and Ye Yaojun (2022) used the structural equation model (SEM) to verify the mediating role of family economic capital in the cognition of subjective social status. The study showed that family income, by influencing objective conditions such as living environment and social network, shapes teenagers' social class cognition and thereby forms different educational expectations. Specifically, for every unit increase in economic capital, the subjective social status score of teenagers increases by 0.28 points, and those with higher subjective social status cognition are more inclined to choose an academic-oriented development path. This psychological mechanism is consistent with Wang Shijiang's (2022) research, which found that family socioeconomic status, through intermediary variables such as educational expectations and academic participation, has a correlation of 0.63 with intergenerational education, highlighting the fundamental role of economic capital in the transformation of cultural capital. Zhang Wanying, Mao Yaqing, and Tian Jin (2022) emphasized the multiple mediating effects of parental involvement. Through the analysis of the national sample, they found that family economic capital affects teenagers' social emotional abilities through three dimensions: first, economic support enables parents to participate in school activities ($\beta = 0.31$); second, abundant educational resources improve the quality of parent-child communication ($\beta = 0.27$); third, economic security reduces parents' anxiety ($\beta = 0.19$). These factors jointly explain 42% of the variance in students' social emotional abilities, thereby influencing academic resilience and achievement motivation.

Li Ying et al. (2022) observed that in economically disadvantaged areas, for every 1,000 yuan increase in government transfer payments, the rate of children's cognitive development delay decreased by 8.7%. This indicates that public policies can alleviate intergenerational fixation through the redistribution mechanism. Family economic capital builds multi-dimensional intergenerational transmission paths through material investment, social cognitive shaping, and emotional support networks. Existing research not only confirmed its fundamental role but also pointed out the feasible space for policy intervention. Under the goal of common prosperity, it is necessary to establish a linkage mechanism of "economic empowerment - educational equity - social mobility", through measures such as precise education poverty alleviation and universal preschool education supply, to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and promote the balanced development of human capital.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Theoretical basis

The core analytical tool is Bourdieu's theory of capital transformation, supplemented by Coleman's theory of social capital. The analytical chain of "economic capital - capital transformation - educational output" is constructed. Bourdieu believes that different forms of capital can be transformed through specific mechanisms. Family economic capital can be transformed into children's cultural capital through investment in education, which in turn affects their academic achievements [1]. For example, through paying tuition fees for private schools, children can obtain better teaching resources and social networks. This investment in economic capital eventually translates into academic advantages for the children. Coleman's theory of social capital emphasizes the bridging role of family networks in resource acquisition, providing a supplement to understanding the indirect effects of economic capital.

3.2 Key conceptual explanations

Economic Capital: It not only refers to family monetary income, but also encompasses assets such as real estate and investments that can be transformed into educational resources [2]. For example, school district houses, as fixed assets, their value is directly related to the children's admission qualifications.

Capital Transformation: It includes two paths: direct investment (such as purchasing school district houses) and indirect investment (such as creating a learning environment). Direct investment is manifested as educational consumption, while indirect investment is represented by the creation of a family cultural atmosphere.

Educational Performance: It goes beyond test scores, covering comprehensive dimensions such as learning ability, thinking quality, and admission opportunities. For example, critical thinking ability, cross-cultural understanding ability, etc., are increasingly important in the competition for admission.

3.3 Theoretical relevance

The theory of capital transformation provides a dynamic perspective for analyzing the mechanism of family economic capital's role. Economic capital does not directly determine educational outcomes but is transformed into cultural capital (such as language ability, academic literacy) and social capital (such as social connections, information channels) for intergenerational transmission [3]. This transformation process has the "Matthew effect", where advantaged families continuously consolidate their educational advantages through capital circulation. For example, children from high-income families who obtain high-quality educational resources are more likely to enter elite universities and then obtain high-quality employment opportunities through alumni networks, forming a closed loop of capital reproduction.

3.4 Theoretical application methods

Family economic capital is operationalized into three dimensions: material security capability (basic layer), educational investment capability (transformation layer), and resource integration capability (expansion layer). Through case comparisons, it is revealed how different levels of capital influence educational performance through differentiated paths [4]. For example, the basic layer ensures learning conditions (such as an independent study room, network equipment), the transformation layer supports specialized training (such as piano lessons, programming classes), and the expansion layer connects with high-quality resources (such as international summer camps, school recommendation letters).

4 Research design

4.1 Project significance

In the context of the intensifying trend of class stratification, clarifying the mechanism of family economic capital can provide empirical evidence for educational equity policies [5]. By revealing the "black box" of capital transformation, it helps break the fatalism of "poor families rarely produce outstanding children", and explores intervention paths to break the intergenerational transmission. For example, the research can reveal which educational policies can effectively counteract the influence of economic capital, providing scientific basis for policy formulation.

4.2 Domestic and international research status

International research mostly focuses on class differences under the background of educational marketization. The proportion of students from private schools entering Oxford and Cambridge is 55 times that of public schools, highlighting the screening role of economic capital. Domestic research focuses on the uneven resource distribution under the dual structure of urban and rural areas. Rural teenagers, due to the lack of family economic capital, are at a double disadvantage in the competition for admission: they lack high-quality educational resources and also cannot bear the opportunity cost of failure in admission. Existing research generally acknowledges the importance of economic capital, but the analysis of specific transformation paths is still fragmented.

4.3 Research objectives

Construct an integrated analytical framework for the impact of family economic capital on educational performance, integrating the multi-dimensional influences of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital.

Expose the micro-mechanisms and social consequences of capital transformation, and analyze the power relations and structural constraints during the capital transformation process.

Propose policy recommendations to weaken the intergenerational transmission of capital, providing empirical support for educational equity policies.

4.4 Specific research questions

How does family economic capital achieve cultural capital accumulation through educational investment? For example, how do extracurricular tutoring and international study tours investments translate into academic advantages?

What role does social capital play in the capital transformation process? For instance, how does the family network affect access to higher education opportunities?

What are the structural differences in educational strategies among families with different economic backgrounds? For example, how do working-class families and high-income families differ in their strategies for children's education planning?

4.5 Research subjects

Select urban working-class families (annual income 100,000-300,000 yuan), middle-class families (annual income 300, 000-1,000,000 yuan), and rural families (annual income below 50,000 yuan) as samples. Use a combination of participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Focus on examining the differences in children's education expenditure structure, extracurricular activity selection, and college planning strategies among these three types of families. For example, middle-class families tend to invest in international courses and overseas study tours, while rural families face the dual predicament of scarce educational resources and information asymmetry. The study will cover first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, as well as rural areas in central and western provinces such as Henan and Gansu, ensuring the representativeness of the samples.

5 Analysis of the path of family economic capital's role

5.1 Material guarantee: The basic threshold for educational participation

Family economic capital is first manifested as the supply capacity of learning conditions. Quality school district housing is not only a choice of residence but also implies hidden resources such as teaching staff and peer circles [6]. For example, the average price of school district housing around a key primary school in Haidian District, Beijing, is 150,000 yuan per square meter. The residents' children can directly enroll there, while non-school district children need to go through computer allocation, with an enrollment probability of less than 30%. Families lacking economic support may have teenagers affected by factors such as long commuting time (such as more than 2 hours one way) and insufficient study space (such as sharing a bedroom with family members), which affects their academic engagement. This material guarantee disparity has quietly set the starting line distance at the basic education stage. Research shows that urban students have an average of 1.2 hours more effective study time per day than rural students, partly due to the difference in material conditions.

5.2 Educational investment: The logic of cultural capital accumulation

The process of economic capital being transformed into cultural capital through educational investment presents a "selective reinforcement" feature. Advantageous families can afford multi-dimensional training costs, such as music and programming training, which not only enhance comprehensive qualities but also constitute a differentiated advantage in the college competition. For example, a certain international school in Shanghai charges 250,000 yuan per year, but 80% of its graduates enter universities ranked in the top 50 worldwide. While economically disadvantaged families' educational investment often focuses on academic tutoring, it is difficult to achieve the breadth accumulation of cultural capital. Moreover, the "arms race" of educational investment further exacerbates the capital gap. Middle-class families spend an average of 120,000 yuan per year on their children's education, which is 2.4 times the annual income of rural families. This investment disparity leads to significant gaps in academic ability, international perspective, and other aspects among teenagers.

5.3 Resource integration: The leverage effect of social capital

Family economic capital and social capital have a symbiotic relationship. Middle-class families obtain admission information through alumni networks, parent communities, etc., and even participate in school policy formulation. For example, in a certain key middle school in Shenzhen, 70% of the family committee members are enterprise executives or civil servants, who use resource exchange to enable their children to obtain more development opportunities. This ability to integrate resources further amplifies the effect of economic capital. In contrast, disadvantaged families often find themselves in a passive position in educational choices due to the lack of social capital [7]. For instance, rural parents have an awareness rate of less than 20% for policies such as the "Strong Foundation Program" and "Comprehensive Evaluation Enrollment", resulting in their children missing out on educational opportunities.

6 Social consequences and reflections of inter-generational transmission of family economic capital

The inter-generational transmission of family economic capital is reshaping the connotation of educational equity. When educational achievements increasingly depend on family resources rather than individual abilities, the channels for social mobility will face the risk of narrowing [8]. This trend not only concerns individual destinies but also threatens the innovation vitality and cohesion of the entire society. For example, among the freshmen at Tsinghua University, the proportion of those from middle-class and above families rose from 58% in 2010 to 72% in 2020, while the proportion of rural students dropped from 25% to 12%. This structural imbalance may lead to the phenomenon of "elite reproduction", where social elites replicate themselves through the education system and hinder social mobility.

It is necessary to guide families to shift from a "capital competition" mindset to a "capacity building" approach. For instance, communities can organize low-cost cultural activities, such as reading clubs and science popularization lectures; schools can offer career experience programs, such as enterprise visits and social research, to help disadvantaged families achieve capital transformation through non-economic paths . Additionally, promoting "growth mindset" education, which makes teenagers focus more on improving their own abilities rather than their family background, is also an important path to solve inter-generational transmission.

7 Conclusion

The intergenerational transmission of educational achievements through family economic capital is essentially a reflection of the social resource allocation rules. To solve this problem, both macro policy adjustments at the structural level and cultural innovations at the micro level are necessary. When education truly returns to the "ability-based" principle, and each teenager can obtain opportunities based on their potential rather than their family background, the transmission chain can be truly broken. This is not only an appeal for educational equity but also an inevitable requirement for social progress. Future research can further explore how digital technology changes the transformation logic of educational capital, such as whether online education may become a new tool to narrow the capital gap.

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