



PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Social capital refers to resources that flow through relationships: information, practical support, trust, and shared norms that make cooperation easier. In education, these resources can shape how families choose schools, how students interpret setbacks, and how confidently parents interact with teachers and institutions. The concept is often misunderstood as simply “having many friends”, but sociologists emphasise quality over quantity. A large social circle may offer little educational value if it provides no useful guidance or advocacy, whereas a small network can be powerful if it links a student to advice, encouragement, and credible pathways into further study.

Researchers commonly distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding ties are close, inward-looking connections among people who are similar—family members, close friends, or tightly knit communities. These ties are often valuable in moments of stress because they provide emotional reassurance, childcare help, and practical assistance that keeps daily life functioning. Bridging ties connect across social groups and can open access to different forms of knowledge, norms, and opportunities. Bridging does not necessarily replace bonding; ideally, students benefit from both. But the two types can distribute advantages unevenly, because bridging often depends on who is already connected to institutions that control educational opportunities.

The mechanisms linking social capital to attainment are both practical and psychological. On the practical side, networks can help families navigate complex systems: understanding enrolment rules, identifying scholarships, learning which courses are valued for university entry, or interpreting unfamiliar application timelines. On the psychological side, networks shape expectations. When students see credible role models who have succeeded in education, they are more likely to treat challenges as temporary rather than as proof that they do not belong in academic settings. Encouragement from peers or adults can sustain effort when grades dip or when competing responsibilities arise. In this way, social capital can create a sense of belonging that supports persistence, especially for students who might otherwise experience school as alien or unwelcoming.

Family networks often influence achievement even when schools are formally open to all. Parents with experience of higher education may know how to communicate with teachers, request support, or challenge decisions, and they may be more comfortable translating school expectations into routines at home. Families with fewer institutional connections may value education strongly but still struggle to access timely information or



feel uncertain about approaching staff, particularly when language confidence is low or previous encounters with institutions have been negative. Schools also shape social capital through organisational choices. Mentoring schemes, stable teacher teams, and extracurricular activities create repeated interactions that can generate trust between students and adults. At the same time, policies such as tracking systems can separate students into groups that rarely mix, limiting bridging ties and concentrating certain resources—high expectations, experienced teachers, advanced coursework—within particular streams.

Digital communication has altered how social capital forms and spreads, but not always in equal ways. Messaging platforms can make parent–teacher contact faster and less intimidating, while online groups can circulate study resources and deadline reminders at high speed. However, digital channels can also intensify exclusion. Families who lack reliable access, time, or language confidence may be absent from group chats where key information is shared, and students who rely on limited devices may struggle to participate in collaborative online study. Online spaces can also spread misinformation about exams or application requirements, creating confusion that is difficult for poorly connected families to correct. Technology therefore changes the reach and tempo of social capital without guaranteeing that its benefits are evenly distributed.

Measuring social capital is difficult because many of its most important elements are intangible. Trust, reciprocity, and informal norms are not easily captured by simple indicators such as “number of contacts”. Surveys may ask how often parents speak to teachers, whether students feel supported, or whether families participate in community organisations, but these measures can miss how power and status affect who gains from a network. A relationship can be frequent yet unhelpful, or rare yet decisive if it connects a student to a crucial opportunity. Social network analysis can map connections in detail, but even sophisticated maps may struggle to distinguish between ties that provide meaningful educational help and ties that function mainly as social companionship.

These measurement challenges matter because policy debates increasingly focus on how to build bridging social capital without weakening community bonds. Interventions often include mentoring schemes that connect students with professionals, school–community partnerships, and programmes that explain pathways to higher education in clearer, more practical ways. Yet there is a recognised risk: poorly designed interventions may mainly reach families who already engage with schools, reinforcing existing stratification. To avoid this, effective programmes typically combine mentoring with targeted outreach and with institutional changes that reduce dependence on insider knowledge—for example, making



scholarship information automatic rather than optional, or simplifying application processes so families do not need specialised guidance to participate.

Overall, social capital influences educational attainment by shaping information flows, expectations, and day-to-day support. But it is not a substitute for material resources or school quality. Networks can amplify advantages when students already have stable teaching, safe study conditions, and clear academic pathways; they can also soften barriers by providing advice and encouragement. However, when institutions are under-resourced or when families face severe economic constraints, social capital alone cannot compensate. The strongest evidence therefore suggests an interaction: social capital is most powerful when schools and policies are designed to be inclusive, so that useful connections are not confined to those who already possess them.

Questions 14–17

Select the correct answer.

14 What does the passage emphasise about social capital in education?

- A** It is mainly determined by how frequently students interact with others.
- B** It depends on the usefulness and quality of relationships.
- C** It is most effective when it operates independently of school policies.
- D** It is largely created through participation in community organisations.

15 What is one typical benefit of bridging social capital, according to the passage?

- A** It strengthens support within a tightly knit group.
- B** It reduces the need for institutional guidance from schools.
- C** It can provide access to information and opportunities beyond one's own group.
- D** It ensures students follow the same pathways to university entry.

16 Why is measuring social capital described as difficult?

- A** It includes intangible qualities such as trust and reciprocity.
- B** Individuals often change networks too quickly for research to be possible.
- C** The key elements cannot be captured in any form of questionnaire research.
- D** Researchers can map relationships but cannot identify who holds higher status.

17 What risk is mentioned regarding some interventions to build social capital?

- A** They may reduce the flow of information by limiting online communication.
- B** They may discourage schools from developing mentoring and extracurricular programmes.



C They may replace existing community ties with professional networks.

D They may mainly reach families who already engage with schools.

Questions 18–22

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

18 The passage suggests that bonding and bridging social capital always lead to the same educational results.

19 The passage suggests that parents with experience of higher education may know how to communicate with teachers and institutions.

20 The passage suggests that tracking systems can separate students into groups that rarely mix.

21 The passage gives a precise numerical threshold for how much trust is needed to improve attainment.

22 The passage suggests that social capital can fully compensate for severe economic constraints.

Questions 23–26

Complete the table below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

How social capital influences education

Level	Form or mechanism	Educational contribution or risk
Network resources	Bonding ties	Provide emotional reassurance and practical support during periods of stress.
	Bridging ties	Give access to different forms of 23, norms and opportunities.
Support for attainment	Practical guidance	Helps families understand enrolment, scholarships and application requirements.



Level	Form or mechanism	Educational contribution or risk
	Psychological support	Creates a sense of 24 that encourages persistence.
School organisation	Mentoring schemes and stable teacher teams	Repeated interaction can generate trust between students and adults.
	25	Can separate students into groups and limit the development of bridging ties.
Policy design	Mentoring combined with targeted 26	Extends support beyond families that already engage with schools.

Answer Key

14. B

15. C

16. A

17. D

18. FALSE

19. TRUE

20. TRUE

21. NOT GIVEN

22. FALSE

23. knowledge

24. belonging

25. tracking systems

26. outreach