

## Designing Teaching Methods in Curriculum of Iran's Higher Education based on Development of Social Capital

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**Abstract:** What today is called social capital implies other definition of capital that is critical besides other types of human and material capital. Social sciences scholars believe that one of effective institutions on formation of social capital is educational institutions and curriculums. Through changing curriculums social capital can improve. Accordingly the present research aims to design some teaching method to develop social capital within the higher education system. To do this, qualitative and field survey was used. Also, 12 scholars in the field of curriculum and social capital were interviewed with. Then, the content of interviews was analyzed and in the process of coding, the presented ideas were classified separately and the common ideas were placed in the similar groups. In this part, teaching method was identified as a major issue. Finally, the way this factor affects social capital was examined. So, for the major factor of the current research, its casual conditions, strategies and hypotheses were separated and provided within a paradigm model. The ultimate model was designed thorough generalizing the paradigm segments to social capital.

**Key words:** curriculum; social capital; teaching method; higher education

### **Introduction**

Times prior to appearance of social capital, three types of capital were famous physical capital (facilities and infrastructures, dams, high ways etc.), national capital (stocks, bond, money etc.), and human capital (skills and personal abilities, specialists, distinguished managers etc.). Though, in modern literature the notion of social capital was added to the former types of capital (Mobasheri, 2008). According to Bourdieu, social capital is sum of the potential and actual resources that is the result of an ownership of a resistant network of institutionalized relations of familiarization and

mutual understanding (membership in the group). The network that benefits every member from the support of social capital and validates them. Social capital yet involves some conditions beyond existence of a mere network of connections. In fact, network connections must be in special form. That is it is positive and based on trust (Field, 2003).

According to Putnam(2005) social capital comprises of the constructive elements of individuals' social life through their connections, individuals can efficiently achieve their goals. He believes that this form of capital has an identical significance with other forms of capital.

Fukuyama (2006) describes social capital as a series of available norms in social systems leads to improve of cooperation among society members and decreases interactions costs. Considering different definitions of social capital, it sounds like they are overlap and in most cases they concentrate on the role of group, individuals' relations and their mutual trust.

Actually, social capital as one type of capital has a great impact on the community success. Experts define many functions for social capital. Generally speaking, the effect of social capital on three domains of economy, politics and culture are more evident than others areas. Using from individuals' similarities in different aspects, social capital causes a sense of trust , serves economic benefits and makes the ground in which the cost of using human resources decreases, but their interaction increases. With its moral values and principles in economy obliges peoples to communicate, exchange and decide in different social groups (Woolcock, 2008).

Taking the above points together, it is concluded that social capital in the current world is one of the most significant factor in development of countries and identification of the effective factors in strengthening or weakening it are strongly contributive to expansion of social capital and ends to increase of individuals' social and economic performance. In a natural process, as the scientific society grows, the social capital also develops in parallel. In such conditions, the university task is not education only. In fact, university is neither an economic enterprise nor emits academic degrees. So, formal educations are only a part of the academic programs. On the other hand, scientific, being critical and creative motives, ability to make scientific communications, reproduction power as well as the ability to combine different ideas among students and simultaneously a foresight, participatory and identity fixation in interaction with others have to reinforce in the academic environment. Therefore, university is not a mere educational center. Here since the higher education center and social capital are in communication, the university must be able to develop the social capital (ZakerSalehi, 2008).

Accordingly, the current research concentrates on the formal section of education in general and on the teaching methods in specific. The previous studies have shown that in spite of quantitative development of the higher education system within the recent decades in Iran has been unable to expand social capital. This is true about teaching methods that are a main part of the curriculum. The current study aims to determine the teaching methods of curriculums in the higher education system in accordance with development of social capital. The significance of this study is because it is for the first time that the relationship between components of curriculum and social capital is going to be scientifically tested. Then, the effective factors on expansion of social

capital among students have to be identified and the appropriate teaching method is designed.

Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to design teaching methods of the higher education with an emphasis on identification of effective obstacles, and strategies on development of social capital among students. So, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the obstacles before teaching methods of the higher education curriculum for development of social capita?
2. What teaching methods strategies in higher education curriculum cause the expansion of social capital?
3. What are the consequences of designing teaching methods based on social capital development?
4. Is it possible to design a model for teaching methods to develop social capital in the higher education system?

### **Theoretical framework**

Theoretically social capital is one of the most prominent issues in social sciences and may not correlate with teaching methods. Though, since the individuals spend a considerable amount of their time in educational environments, the effects of happenings in such places on the peoples' behavior and life should not be ignored. So far many several definitions have been proposed for social capital that makes it difficult to achieve a consensus about the actual meaning of social capital. Though, what is understood from all definitions of social capital is "investment in social relations with expected ties".

According to Coleman(1990) social capital consists of a social framework that facilitates individuals' interaction within this framework, in a way that its absence may cause the individual more costs to reach his/her goal.

Putnam (2005) believed that social capital is those characteristics of social life, networks, norms and trust that enable participants to follow their common goals more effectively. As he said, social capital is a means to create social and political development in different political systems as well as trust between people, governors and political elites that bring political development.

Fukuyama (2006) considered social capital as one sociological phenomenon. According to him, participation in values and norm does not naturally leads to production of social capital as these values may be negative. In his definition, social capital has a close tie with degree of trust. How much the domain of trust increases in a social group, social capital will expand and consequently the mutual cooperation and trust among group members will maximize.

Flora (1995) describes collective consciousness as social capital and introduces mutual trust as an index of collective consciousness.

A series of available norms in the social systems end to increase of members' cooperation and contrarily leads to decrease of cost of interactions. In this definition, some concepts like civil society and social institutions hold a close relationship with social capital (Schiff, 2004).

Aisenschtat believed that the most important issue in formation of a community with proper social capital is concerning to individuals' trust, solidarity and social participation. Without solidarity and social participation besides lack of trust, the new social order would be impossible (Chalabi, 2007).

### **Curriculum**

As Mevish in his book " an introduction to sociology " discusses, some of the most fundamental functional needs of a society must be taken into consideration at time of specification of educational objectives, content and method in the curriculums. He stated that social institutions like higher education needs to prepare the required backgrounds for its members in field of making a correct communication with environment due to interacting with individuals (Yarmohammadian, 2012).

However, in spite of extension of the curriculum major at universities, the curriculum scholars have not achieved to an agreement on its components. According to Klein introduced the element of objectives, content, learning activities, teaching methods, learning materials, assessment, time, space and classification as the core elements of the curriculum. The most common attitude yet in this regard sees curriculum document or a specific curriculum including some decision about four components of objectives, content, method and assessment (Mehrmohammadi, 2010).

In its general form, the curriculum is described what is taught in educational institutions and in its specific form, it is an educational activity for the learner on the basis of a special attitude and in specific time. Curriculum can be known as a series of events have been previously designed that end to certain educational results for one or more learners (Eisner, 1979).

The learners of educational system as the members of a society have to know that the community they are living in has what qualities, and how it would be possible to play their social role as much efficient as possible. In case of the instructors and curriculum designers of such problems, the curriculum objects and content probably contradict with social needs and problems and consequently the programs fail to succeed (Yarmohammadian, 2012).

The current research focused on teaching methods as one elements of curriculum in the higher education system.

Jiroux know instructors as transformational thinkers. That is, educational activity creates some form of thinking. Proper selection and implementation of teaching methods as one of important components of curriculum play an outstanding role in formation and strengthening of valuable concepts in the mind. In the process of teaching, professors have to select methods and materials help students in learning the content (Ornstein, 2005).

In fact teaching has different variables that is necessary through manipulation, control or study of its variables, a better condition for students' learning is created ( Khorshidi, 2002). Familiarization with teaching methods and principles and applying them help educational objectives to be achieved more easily and in a shorter time. Generally, teaching methods are categorized in two parts. Firstly, methods were used in long past (historical methods) and secondly, methods are based on psychological and educational findings (new methods). ( Safavi, 1998).

Authorities that are granted to professors in order to change teaching conditions and make the effective factors on their teaching process applicable are teaching patterns. They include problem solving, pre-organizers, individual teaching, social patterns etc. Actually, these patterns work as a plan (Joyce, 2004).

Marjaei (2004) in a study naming “social capital among university students” examined different rate of social capital among individuals with different educations. The results indicate that in most of components a meaningful relationship exists between rate of education and social capital. In other words, descending from PhD degree to associate degree, a considerable decrease is evident in many components of social capital. In addition, the students’ social capital showed a reverse relation with number their study years.

Sharepour (2004) in a study “empirical study of social capital in Mazandaran province” attempted to analyze the effect of educations on social capital. Using a questionnaire with 599 families as sample size, the following results were achieved:

1. no meaningful relationship was identified between individuals’ education and informal networks ( e.g. friends, relatives and family members).
2. The individuals’ education holds a negative correlation with social trust (trusting a stranger). That is with increase of education, social trust decreases.
3. There is a meaningfully negative correlation between rate of education and trusting social institutions (e.g. education, the judiciary, the legislature, etc). As rate of education increases, trusting social institutions and organizations decreases.

Helliwell and Putnam (2007) worked on education and social capital in America. They concluded that increase of average education has maximized trust and it has not reduced level of participation as the second component of social capital. Park (2006) investigated the role of trust in creation of knowledge inside a artificial university. According to Park (2006), the main conditions for production of social capital are opportunity, motivation, and ability. It was conclude that trust affects knowledge creation through opportunity, motivation and ability of combining knowledge in an artificial university and a few factors like informal network, norms, common values and mutual trust are influential on creation of knowledge.

Totterman and Wulff (2007) in their research explored the effect of sharing information at a university on social capital. They reasoned that sharing knowledge through three variables (social identity, effective trust, participation and personal interaction) affects social capital.

William (2012) investigated on the relationship between professors’ interaction with students and social capital. According to the researchers, hidden resources and expertise in social networks greatly affect social capital and it is via social interactions that access and exploitation from social capital advantages become possible.

## **Method**

As the present research purpose to design teaching methods on the basis of social capital, the participants’ opinions were asked via interview. To analyze the data and converting them to quantitative data, the Grounded Theory was used. The Grounded Theory is a deductive-exploratory method enables the researcher in different fields that instead of relying on the existing theories devises a theory personally. This method is a general research method for generating a theory (Flick, 2011).

The population consisted of all professors of curriculum major and sociologists were working at the higher education centers of Iran in 2013. Through purposeful sampling method with desirable cases besides considering the articles published, the participants were selected. They included 12 curriculum and social capital experts. After interviewing and ensuring about the bulk of mentioned ideas, the interview was stopped.

The data were collected via semi-structured interviews. Before the session begins, complete explanations were given to the interviewee(s) about the research object, method and the desired conclusion. In order to have perfect information the interviews were recorded and the content written down. The procedure went in a way that first 2 to 3 general questions were asked and according to the answers of previous questions, the new questions were asked.

During the interview sessions any probable deviation from the main subject of interviews were avoided and whole procedure was carefully guided. Moreover, the basis for determination of reliability and validity of the asked questions was the researcher. The obtained data from semi-structured interviews and theoretical information were gathered together. The interviews were conducted individually and lasted one and half to two hours.

For analyzing the data, the open, axial, and selective data coding was used.

In open data coding, the data related to the studied phenomenon were carefully named and categorized. The unit of analysis was paragraph and the content of interviews were first written down and after removing the irrelevant statements to the research subject, the data were classified in form of paragraphs. The similar paragraphs were written next to each other and the main points were extracted from. In the process of coding, two comparing and asking techniques were applied.

In the axial coding, the data were previously analyzed to concepts and categories in the open coding, were integrated with a new method. In this stage, a major category and its sub-categories were connected to each other. This happened via a Paradigm model including "Causal Conditions, Phenomenon, Context, Strategies and Hypotheses" and juxtaposition of the similar concepts. This caused the concepts could shape the more basic category are identified and each one places in one of these categories.

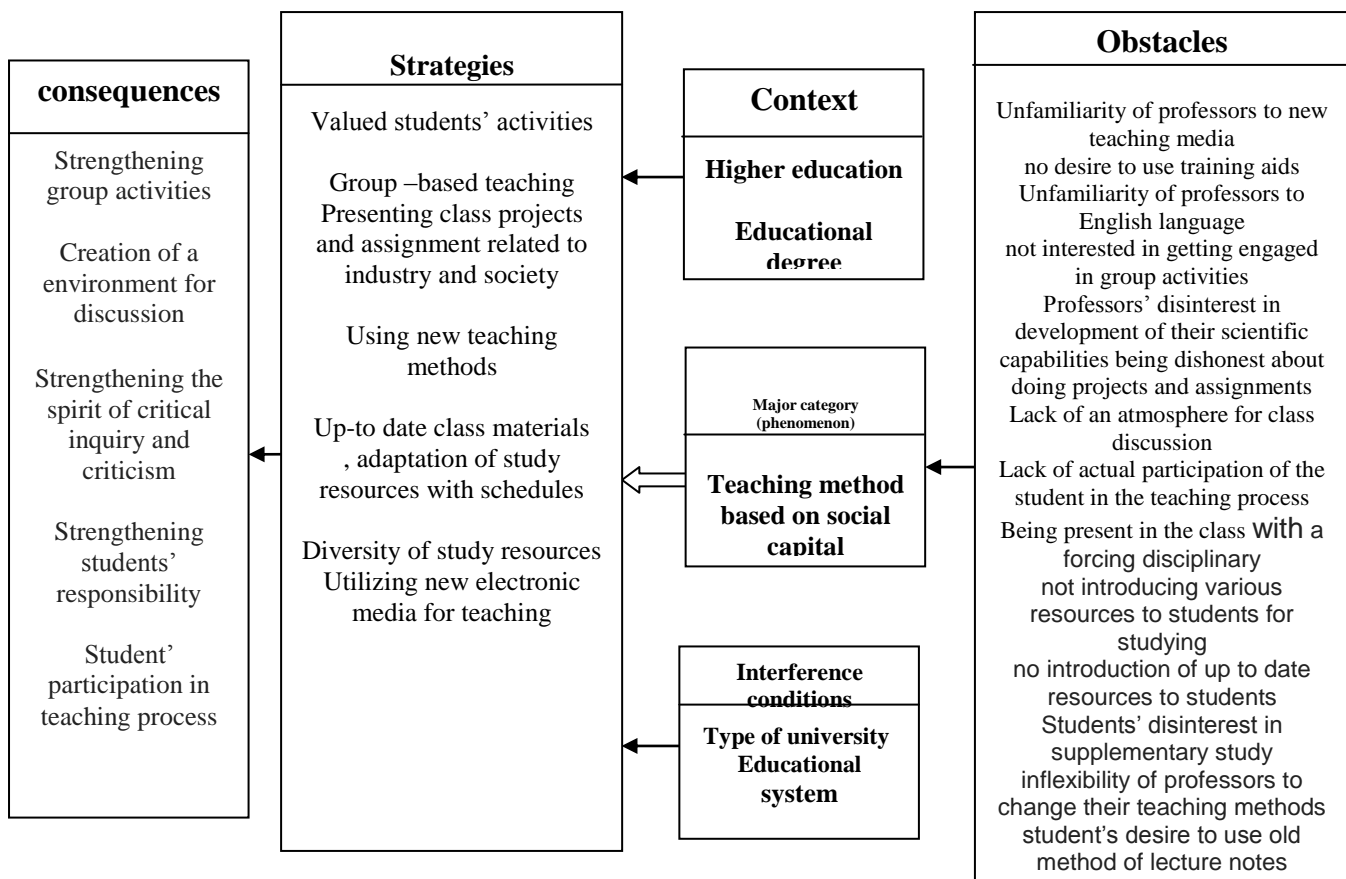
In the selective coding, the core category and its relation to other categories besides increasing validity of such relations would occur through searching for authenticated and not authenticated cases. In the selective coding, the categories are consistent in order to shape the theoretical framework. After specification of the central category, according to the Paradigm model, the minor categories were linked to the major categories. Then, the final model was drawn and the relation of core category with other categories was illustrated.

## **Findings**

In the open coding overall 104 conceptual codes from all interviewees' opinions were obtained. The concepts were compared with each other and similar concepts with the same subject became a category and got labeled. For labeling the categories if the category was a known and clear name in the theoretical resources it was used in order

to prevent the participants' different perception when examining the results. Then, concepts were related were placed next to each other and a new series was formed. In the axial coding process, the second level concepts were achieved. Through this number of concepts decreased significantly. In the last stage, the central category of the research, teaching methods, were identified in selective coding. To draw the Paradigm model, the obtained 104 codes were divided into three sections causal conditions, strategies and hypotheses. The number of level one concepts reduced for causal conditions from 49 codes to 14 codes in the second level, for strategies from 33 codes to 8 codes and for hypotheses from 22 codes to 5 codes. Fig.1 shows the Paradigm model.

**Fig 1. Paradigm model of teaching method**



## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The interviewees' statements indicated that among different educational institutions, only the university institutions considerably affect low levels of social capital. According to them, in spite of a great potential, the higher education system has failed to leave an appropriate effect on the students' social capital. Zaker Salehi (2008) in a study naming "examination of relationship between the higher education system and social capital in Iran" stated that the academic society has not established in Iran yet. So, this problem has prohibited the elites' social capital to develop.

The teaching method was one of the most important issues the interviewees mentioned. The participants believed that quality of the teaching method affects social capital. In designing the curriculum it should be considered that the teaching method must be selected in line with its impact on social capital to increase components of

social capital. In fact, teaching method is a factor directly affects social capital. Therefore, it should be more inclined to be active in learning and teaching.

Active learning is a type of learning occurs with the least possible external interferences. In this method, the instructor acts as a facilitator of learning. Hence, active learning is effective on social capital only when the student is actively involved in the process of learning and manages it.

The results of first research question indicate that one of the most important obstacles before achievement of such program is the student's attitudes toward teaching method and the higher education. Inappropriate attitude here consists of three parts as improper attitude of students about teaching method, education and professors. This attitude then has a mutual relationship with social capital. From one hand, this indicates the students 'to distrust of efficiency of classes and trained materials as well as not being ready to participate in the process of teaching. On the other hand, this type of attitude would decrease the students' participation in the class and so they miss the opportunity for increase of their participation and formation of a collective moral.

The contemporary teaching methods not only fail to motivate the students to active participation and presence in classes, but also they greatly spoil the relation between social institutions and university and their shared trust. Some of obstacles that interviewees mentioned included unfamiliarity of professors to new teaching media, no desire to use training aids, unfamiliarity of professors to English language, not interested in getting engaged in group activities, professors' disinterest in development of their scientific capabilities, being dishonest about doing projects and assignments, lack of an atmosphere for class discussion, lack of actual participation of the student in the teaching process, being present in the class with a forcing disciplinary, not introducing various resources to students for studying, no introduction of up to date resources to students, students' disinterest in supplementary study, inflexibility of professors to change their teaching methods, and student's desire to use old method of lecture notes.

Zaker Salehi(2008) in a study titling " examination of relationship between higher education and social capital in Iran" pointed out that the education system and level of socialization of students are in a low level and universities only have taught academic materials have not scientifically socialized students.

Considering the results of the second research questions, any change in teaching methods can significantly affect students' social capital. From among all elements of curriculum, teaching method holds the highest correlation with students and closes to social capital. According to the interviewees, to influence social capital some changes in the teaching methods seem critical. Teaching methods are important from two points of view. First, teaching method as a strategy for transferring the educational content. And these strategies enable any increase of social capital through content of the curriculum and type of teaching methods. Secondly, expansion of social capital among students in much extent depends upon students' communication methods with other academics especially professors. Overall, teaching methods can greatly facilitate this interaction or hinder it.

Valued student activities, teaching based on group work, presenting class projects and assignment related to industry and society , using new teaching methods, up-to date class materials, adaptation of study resources with schedules, diversity of study



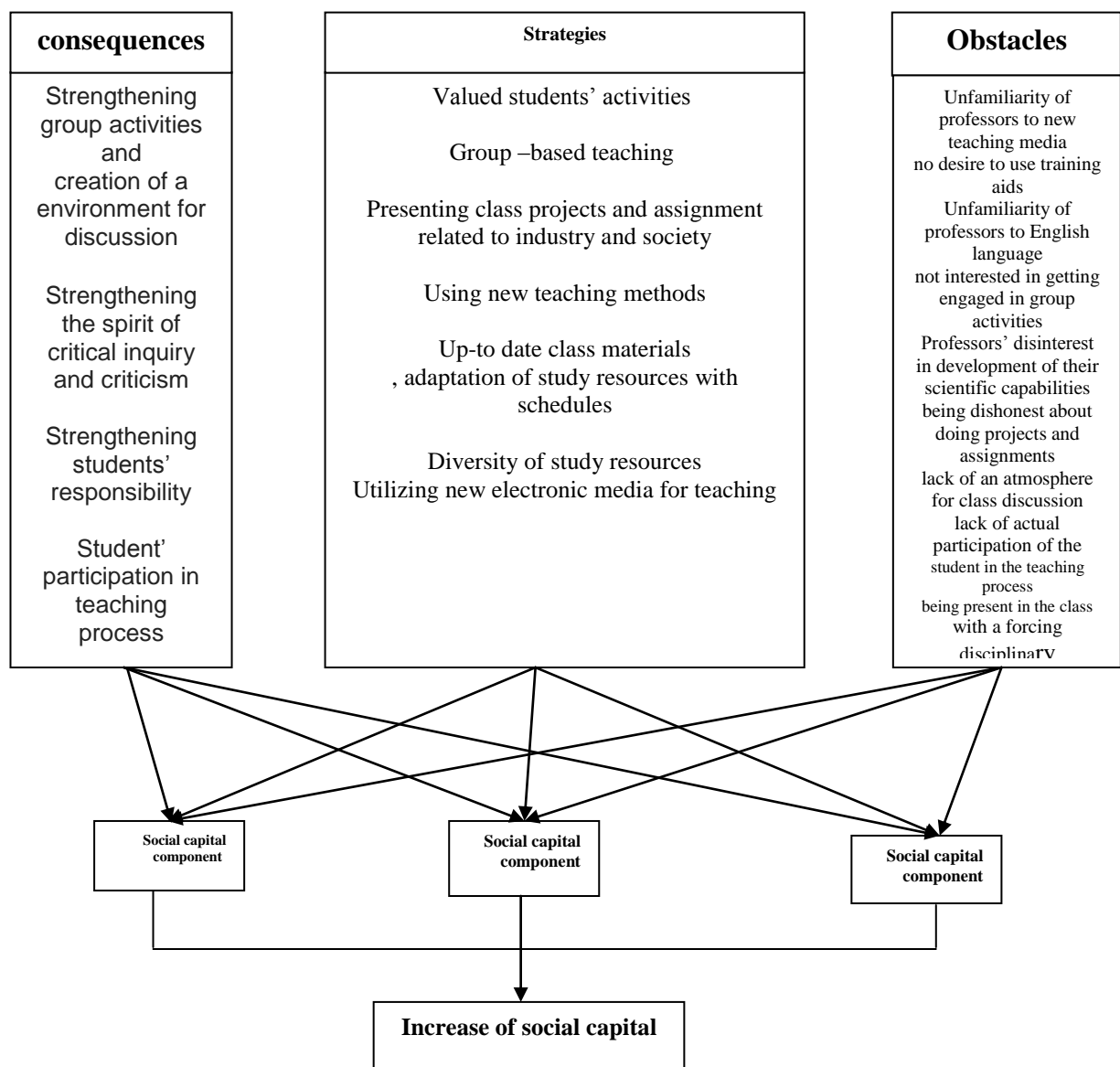
resources, utilizing new electronic media for teaching are a few strategies were mentioned by the interviewees.

Flick and Williamson (2005) concluded that diverse teaching methods cause increase of students' social capital like group learning and learning services.

With regard to the third research question, the first result after changing teaching methods and involving students in these methods was internalization of collective spirit among students. Assigning the responsibility of teaching or presenting assignment related to the student labor market needs makes him/her in connection to other social groups and institutions and consequently, consciously or unconsciously the individual practices socialization. As a matter of fact, the predicted programs for the curriculum enable planners that through other drivers affect the student's socialization process and facilitate it. Strengthening of group work, creation of an environment for discussions, reinforcement of inquiry and being critical, reinforcement of student's responsibility and students' participation in the process of teaching are of consequences the interviewees referred to.

To answer the fourth question, the final research model, which is a combination of the main category and its causal conditions, strategies and hypotheses, was designed as follows. Fig 2. shows the final model.

**Fig 2. Final model of teaching method**



The research findings indicate that decrease of social capital components like trust, participation and integration among individuals after getting admitted at universities is taking place. Actually, university can function as a proper context for most of activities potentially increase social capital. Therefore, it is recommended that the curriculum designers do not distinguish teaching methods from social capital and integrate them together. It is much better than teaching methods that contribute to maximization of social capital are overtly included in the curriculum in order to prevent from any subjective judgment when teaching occurs.

Moreover, the current method in implementation of curriculum is facing with recession. Here, a few modification need to be considered either for redesigning of the curriculum or in appropriate implementation of it. To make some positive changes in execution of the curriculum it is suggested that the active teaching method approach is utilized. Also, the constructionist theories have to be used when planning for learning to happen in the curriculums. According to the constructionist theory, curriculum includes not only specification of objects but deep learning process is also as important as the outcomes. Here, instead of presenting a series of sometimes unrelated concepts and facts to students, it is attempted the learning activities go hand in hand with engagement of students in problem solving situations.

Additionally, when designing curriculums professors have to be free to modify partially or completely the curriculum on the basis of their students' rate of knowledge, interest and perseverance and besides helping students to learn give them the opportunity to play their role in learning based on experience and learning they have. In this approach, the learner authority should be greatly concentrated and the learning process has to move from student to professor and vice versa.

In the active learning and learner-based method, if the goal is to increase social capital, becoming a member of group highly matters. In this way, actual activity in form of a group and responsibility each member toward the ultimate outcome, allows the members to practice the key components of social capital such as trust, participation, and solidarity and get ready for the real life.

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