

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

Humayun Kabir

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Green University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
This study investigates the coexistence of high educational aspiration and systemic exclusion among street connected children in the Khamar Bari area of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Using an analytical framework that integrates Amartya Sen's Capability Approach with Pierre Bourdieu's Capital Theory, the research examines the mechanisms underlying educational deprivation in conditions of extreme urban vulnerability. A Sequential Explanatory mixed-methods design was implemented, comprising a survey (N=41), three in-depth case studies, and a focus group discussion (FGD). Quantitative findings reveal significant structural deficits: 78% cite economic pressure as the primary obstacle, 66% report having no family members, and 66% report no educated family members, while 83% maintain a positive view of education. The principal finding demonstrates that educational exclusion constitutes a multi-dimensional conversion failure. The immediate need for daily survival income, resulting from unmet basic <i>functioning</i> such as food, security, and health, prevents children from converting available educational opportunities (despite high institutional proximity) into <i>capabilities</i>. This failure is further compounded by persistent deficits in <i>social and cultural capital</i> inherited from family breakdown and extreme poverty. The study contends that current rights-based policies are insufficient, as they do not address the interconnected capability capital deficit. The research recommends urgent, multi-sectoral conditional support programs and adaptive learning environments to secure basic functioning and reconstruct the social infrastructure necessary for sustainable inclusion. KEYWORDS: Educational Inequality, Social Exclusion, Capability Approach, Urban Poverty, Street-Connected Youth, Capital Theory (Bourdieu).	Published On: 5 August, 2026 Available on: https://ijmir.com

INTRODUCTION:

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical instrument for achieving social mobility and human development (UNESCO, 1994). For vulnerable populations worldwide, particularly street-connected children in rapidly expanding cities of the Global South, this right often remains an unfulfilled promise. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, exemplifies this global crisis of exclusion. Characterized by swift urbanization and internal migration spurred by rural poverty, joblessness, and climate-related displacement, Dhaka hosts a significant population of children living in extreme vulnerability, frequently lacking family, identity, and security.

Children living on the streets experience severe deprivation across multiple dimensions, with education being the most profoundly impacted aspect. Current research highlights endemic problems such as extreme poverty, hazardous child labor, and insufficient institutional assistance. Despite various governmental and non-governmental initiatives aiming at non-formal education or reintegration (Khan, 2008), these efforts are frequently "limited and ineffective" in achieving sustained engagement. This failure raises a critical question: Why do educational opportunities, even when physically available, fail to translate into sustained educational *achievement* and *capability* for this highly marginalized population?

This article addresses a critical gap in social policy by providing a rigorous, mechanism-focused analysis of educational exclusion. The research advances beyond descriptive accounts of poverty to examine the Paradox of Aspiration and Exclusion, where children's strong individual agency and desire for education (83% view education positively) are systematically undermined by persistent structural deficits.

The study is situated in the Khamar Bari area of Dhaka, a key hub for government administration and commercial activities. The high visibility of street children in this location, proximate to power structures (the Parliament), underscores the political and social

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

urgency of addressing their chronic exclusion. The findings move beyond generic barriers to detail the specific mechanisms of institutional breakdown and structural inequality in this urban context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE NEXUS OF CAPABILITY AND CAPITAL:

The analysis is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework to ensure relevance for high-impact sociological scholarship:

1. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: This framework views educational deprivation not merely as a lack of schooling (a *commodity*), but as a deficit in *capability*—the real freedom a child has to achieve the valued functioning of "being educated" (Sen, 1999). The analysis diagnoses exclusion as a Capability Failure. This failure occurs when unmet fundamental *functionings* (such as being nourished, safe, or healthy) prevent the conversion of educational opportunities into actual capabilities. The ability of 83% of respondents to identify an available school represents Opportunity Freedom. Still, the high dropout rate due to economic pressure (78%) signals a systematic capability failure rooted in the demand for daily survival.
2. Pierre Bourdieu's Capital Theory: This theory is essential for explaining social stratification and intergenerational exclusion. The unequal distribution of non-financial assets reinforces exclusion: Cultural Capital (educational knowledge, qualifications) and Social Capital (networks of recognition, protection, and support). The catastrophic rates of family absence (66% reporting no family) and parental illiteracy (66% reporting no family education) among participants signify a profound, inherited deficit in these forms of capital. This deficit fuels a survival *habitus* fundamentally incompatible with the regulated *field* of formal education.

By integrating these frameworks, the article formulates an Urban Exclusion, demonstrating how immediate survival barriers (capability failure) and generational stratification barriers (capital deficits) interact to perpetuate chronic educational marginalization in urban environments of the Global South.

GLOBAL CONTEXT AND POLICY RELEVANCE:

The educational crisis faced by Dhaka's street children is mirrored globally, particularly in countries struggling with post-pandemic learning losses and rising youth populations (UN DESA, 2023). International reports emphasize that educational outcomes are overwhelmingly determined by parental socio-economic status and occupation, highlighting a pervasive structural inequality (UNICEF, 2018). In Bangladesh, while the constitutional right to compulsory education exists, poverty, family issues, and inadequate enforcement prevent this right from reaching the most vulnerable (Islam, 2015; Jamiludin et al., 2018). The problem is not the absence of policy, but the systemic failure of policy implementation to address the multi-dimensional complexity of exclusion. This study provides the "original real images" of this multi-sectoral failure in Dhaka, offering an empirical foundation for policy redirection.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The primary objectives are:

1. To assess the prevalence and nature of structural obstacles to education using the combined lens of Capability and Capital theories.
2. To investigate the specific social, institutional, and livelihood mechanisms through which deprivation translates into systematic educational dropout and exclusion.
3. To propose evidence-based policy strategies that utilize a multi-sectoral approach to address both the immediate capability failures and the long-term capital deficits.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the primary socio-economic and institutional factors that inhibit street children's ability to access and sustain education in Khamar Bari, Dhaka?
2. How do the concepts of Capability Failure (Sen) and Capital Deficit (Bourdieu) explain the mechanisms of educational exclusion observed among this population?
3. What conditional and adaptive policy interventions are most urgently required to enhance street children's involvement in education?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Drivers of Migration and the Collapse of Social Capital:

Urban migration in Bangladesh is driven by chronic rural poverty, joblessness, and displacement due to natural disasters. This process frequently leads to family disintegration, parental separation, abuse, and conflict, ultimately pushing children onto the streets (Zinia, 2022). Street life, therefore, is often a secondary symptom of profound family and structural collapse.

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

This collapse directly impacts a child's Social Capital (Bourdieu.). Social capital, defined as the resources embedded in social networks and relationships, is a critical protective factor (Coleman). When a high proportion of children (66% in this study) report having no family member, the loss of this vital safety net is nearly complete. Rahman and Samadder's (2015) work similarly highlights that children end up on the streets due to estrangement or leaving unstable homes. This deficit severely limits protection, advocacy, and the basic stability required for educational engagement.

Livelihood, Opportunity Cost, and Cultural Capital Deficits:

The imperative of daily survival shapes the lives of street children, positioning opportunity cost as the primary barrier to education. In Dhaka, street children engage in hazardous, low-income activities such as begging, waste picking, or shop labor to secure daily sustenance (Farid & Mostari, 2015). Hossain (2023) reports that their average daily income may be as low as 50-60 Taka. The necessity of earning income each day constitutes the most immediate obstacle to educational participation.

This economic compulsion is a classic example of Capability Failure (Sen, 1999). The basic *functionings* (being nourished, sheltered, and safe) must be secured before the *capability* of "being educated" can be realized (Munoz-Carrasco, 2024, Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016). Research on street children in Kenya similarly found that universal education fails when economic hardship and lack of safe accommodation are not addressed through dedicated support systems (Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016).

Furthermore, the problem is generational. The demographic finding that 66% of the participants have no educated family members signals a severe deficit in inherited Cultural Capital. Cultural capital the non-financial assets like knowledge, language, and educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986) is essential for succeeding in the formal educational *field*. Children without this capital often lack the cognitive resources and the familiar framework needed to value and navigate schooling, reinforcing intergenerational poverty (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Dutta, 2018).

Institutional Response, Ineffectiveness, and Social Exclusion:

Despite legal frameworks recognizing the right to education (Shamem & Islam, 2020), institutional responses in Dhaka remain insufficient. A vast majority of street children report receiving "no educational support" from government or non-governmental organizations. While some non-formal education projects have demonstrated success in promoting sustainable development through a rights-based approach (Khan, 2008), implementation challenges, including irregular attendance, safety concerns, and societal negativity, undermine their overall effectiveness.

The literature emphasizes that education, even when accessible, is often stratified by material deprivation and cultural obstacles. This leads to Social Exclusion, where children are marginalized due to their appearance and behavior a consequence of their survival *habitus*. Studies in Dhaka report that street children frequently face harassment, abuse, and social discrimination, even from within the educational system (Moon & Azad, 2022; Farid & Mostari, 2015). This structural discrimination—which can include physical and psychological abuse, violence, and health issues creates an unwelcoming atmosphere that pushes children further towards dropout, regardless of their own aspirations (Hossain & Alam, 2016).

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Research Design:

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, where quantitative data collection and analysis are followed by qualitative exploration. The purpose of this design is to first identify general patterns of educational exclusion among street connected children and then explain these patterns in depth through qualitative insights. This approach allows a more comprehensive understanding of both structural conditions and lived experiences.

Study Area:

The research was conducted in the Khamar Bari area of Dhaka, Bangladesh, an urban setting characterized by a high concentration of street connected children and informal economic activities. The area was selected due to its accessibility and relevance to the research problem.

Population and Sampling:

The study population consists of street connected children living and working in the selected area. For the quantitative phase, a total of 41 respondents (N=41) were selected using purposive sampling, as no formal sampling frame exists for this population. For the qualitative phase, three in-depth case studies were conducted, along with one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 6–8 participants.

Data Collection Methods:

A structured questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument for collecting quantitative survey data. The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture key dimensions relevant to the study, including respondents' socio-economic background, educational status and aspirations, family structure, and perceived barriers to education. These variables were selected to provide a

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

comprehensive understanding of the contextual and structural factors influencing educational experiences. Data collection was conducted through face to face interviews, which facilitated better comprehension of the questions, allowed for immediate clarification where necessary, and enhanced the overall reliability and validity of the responses.

Qualitative data:

To support and interpret the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews (case studies) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The in-depth interviews were used to explore individual life histories and educational experiences in detail, allowing for a deeper understanding of personal trajectories. At the same time, FGDs helped capture shared perceptions, collective experiences, and group dynamics among participants. Together, these methods provided rich insights into survival strategies, institutional barriers, and the broader social realities shaping participants' lives.

Data Analysis:

The study used a mixed method approach for data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, with responses coded into key themes such as economic pressure, social exclusion, and educational aspiration. Findings from both methods were integrated at the interpretation stage to ensure a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the results.

Quantitative Findings:

Table 01: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents (N=41)

Gender of the respondents			
Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Male	36	88	Predominant gender group
Female	5	12	Lowest representation
Other	0	0	
Educational attainment of street children's family members			
No Household Member has Formal Education	27	66	Majority of households lack formal education
No Household Member has Completed Primary Education	5	12	Minority with very limited primary completion
At Least One Household Member with Secondary Education	8	20	Moderate presence of secondary-level education
At Least One Household Member with Higher Secondary or Higher Education	1	2	Very limited higher education attainment
Current Participation of Street Children in Educational Activities			
Formal schooling (Primary and Secondary)	8	20	Low participation in formal education
Non-formal or NGO-provided course	7	17	Limited engagement in alternative education
No participation in formal or non-formal schooling	26	63	Majority remain outside any educational system

Source: field survey, February 2026

Table 01 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and selected characteristics related to the educational environment of street children's families (N = 41). The findings provide an initial overview of the structural background within which educational exclusion occurs. Regarding the gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male. Out of the total participants, 36 respondents (88%) were male, while 5 respondents (12%) were female. No respondents identified in the "other" category. This distribution suggests that boys constitute the dominant presence among street-connected children in the study area, which may reflect broader urban street dynamics where boys are more visible in public income-generating activities such as vending, collecting recyclable materials, or informal labor. The smaller proportion of girls may indicate either lower visibility in street spaces or their involvement in hidden or domestic forms of work. The educational attainment of family members demonstrates a significant level of educational deprivation within the households of the respondents. A large majority, 27 respondents (66%), reported that no household member had any formal education. Additionally, 5 respondents (12%) stated that no family member had completed primary education, indicating extremely limited educational capital within the household. Only 8 households (20%) had at least one member with secondary education, while just 1 household (2%) reported higher secondary or higher education. This pattern highlights the profound intergenerational transmission of educational disadvantage. From a capability perspective, the lack of educated family members restricts the household's ability to guide children toward schooling, while in terms of capital theory it reflects a severe deficit of cultural capital that normally supports educational participation.

The table also illustrates the current participation of street children in educational activities, which reveals a substantial degree of exclusion from schooling. Only 8 respondents (20%) reported participation in formal schooling at the primary or secondary level. Another 7 respondents (17%) were involved in non-formal or NGO-provided educational programs, indicating the role of alternative educational initiatives in partially addressing access gaps. However, the majority of respondents, 26 children (63%), were not involved in any form of formal or non-formal education.

The quantitative data clearly illustrate that the primary barriers to education are related to securing fundamental functioning (food, shelter, security), underscoring a systematic Capability Failure.

Table 02: Economic vulnerability and Primary Educational Barriers (N = 41) (Multiple)

Barrier/Livelihood Metric	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Main Obstacle to Learning (Multiple)			
Economic problems	32	78.05%	Highest ranked obstacle
Lack of time (due to work)	8	19.51%	
Health issues	3	7.32%	
Single-parent household	9	21.95%	
Parental illiteracy	27	65.83%	
Trauma (street life, abuse, etc.)	15	36.59%	
Perceived irrelevance of education	18	43.90%	
Daily Income			
Earn below 300 Taka (US\$2.60)	22	53.66%	Insufficient for basic functioning
No income	19	46.34%	
Work Engaged In			
Begging	5	12.20%	
Working in a store/stall	3	7.32%	Labor-intensive, time-consuming

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

Street vending	4	9.76%	
Waste picking / Recycling	6	14.63%	Highly precarious, survival-driven
Day labour	2	4.88%	
Hotel/restaurant work	2	4.88%	
No regular work	19	46.34%	

Source: field survey, February 2026

The data in Table 02 offers a clear empirical entry point into understanding educational exclusion as a function of intertwined capability deprivation and capital deficits among street children in urban Dhaka. The findings reveal that exclusion from education is not driven by a single factor but emerges through a layered interaction of economic hardship, social disadvantage, and livelihood constraints. Economic precarity appears as the most dominant barrier, with 78.05% of respondents identifying financial hardship as the primary obstacle to learning. This aligns closely with Sen's concept of capability failure, where the lack of basic economic resources constrains an individual's real freedom to pursue education. A significant proportion of respondents (53.66%) reported earnings below 300 BDT per day, while 46.34% had no income at all, indicating severe limitations in meeting even subsistence needs. In such contexts, education becomes a secondary priority, often perceived as a luxury rather than a viable pathway. Time constraints, experienced by 19.51% of respondents, further intensify this limitation. Engagement in informal and survival-oriented work—such as waste picking (14.63%), street vending (9.76%), and begging (12.20%) demonstrates how children's daily routines are structured around income generation. These livelihood patterns not only consume time but also reflect unstable and hazardous working conditions, limiting both physical and cognitive capacity to engage in formal schooling.

The high proportion of children with no regular work (46.34%) also suggests intermittent employment, contributing to economic instability and irregular life patterns that are incompatible with structured education systems. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the role of capital deficits is equally pronounced. Parental illiteracy, reported by 65.83% of respondents, indicates a lack of cultural capital within the household, reducing the likelihood of educational encouragement or support. Similarly, the prevalence of single-parent households (21.95%) reflects weakened social capital, where reduced familial networks and support systems further marginalize children's access to schooling. These structural disadvantages are compounded by the perceived irrelevance of education (43.90%), suggesting that children and their families may not recognize education as a meaningful or attainable resource, thereby reinforcing cycles of exclusion. Psychosocial dimensions also play a critical role.

A considerable proportion of respondents (36.59%) reported experiencing trauma related to street life, abuse, or neglect. Such experiences can significantly impair emotional well-being and cognitive development, further limiting the capability to participate in formal education. Health-related issues, though reported at a lower rate (7.32%), still contribute to irregular attendance and reduced learning capacity. Taken together, these findings illustrate that educational exclusion among street children is not merely an issue of access but a manifestation of deeper structural inequalities. Capability failure, in this context, is shaped by immediate constraints such as poverty, time scarcity, and health challenges, while capital deficits—economic, cultural, and social—operate as long-term barriers that reproduce exclusion across generations.

In relation to the research objectives, the table effectively demonstrates the prevalence and nature of structural barriers (Objective 1) while also shedding light on the mechanisms through which deprivation translates into exclusion (Objective 2). The evidence suggests that policy interventions must adopt a multi-dimensional approach. Conditional cash transfers, flexible schooling schedules, community-based learning centers, and parental literacy programs could address immediate capability gaps. At the same time, long-term strategies aimed at enhancing social and cultural capital—such as awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives—are essential to break the cycle of educational marginalization.

Table 3: Family Status and Inherited Capital Deficits (N=41)

Capital Deficit Metric	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Social Capital Loss			
No Family Member	27	66%	Catastrophic loss of Social Capital
Cultural Capital Loss			

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

No one in family has received an education	27	66%	Severe deficit in inherited Cultural Capital
Reason for Dropout			
Family issues/Absence of family	24	59%	Direct impact of Social Capital loss on educational trajectory

Source: field survey, February 2026

Table 3 presents a consistent and deeply concerning pattern linking family structure with deficits in inherited capital and subsequent educational discontinuity. The findings suggest that a significant proportion of respondents are positioned within structurally disadvantaged familial contexts, which directly shape their access to both social and cultural resources.

A striking 66% of respondent's report having no family member, indicating a severe rupture in primary social networks. From a sociological perspective, this reflects a profound erosion of social capital, understood in the Bourdieusian sense as the network of relationships that provide support, guidance, and opportunities. The absence of family not only removes emotional and material support systems but also disrupts the transmission of norms, values, and informal knowledge essential for navigating institutional structures such as education. This "catastrophic loss" is not merely descriptive but signals a structural condition of isolation that limits the individual's capacity to mobilize resources.

Similarly, the data on cultural capital reveal that 66% of respondents come from families where no member has received formal education. This indicates an intergenerational absence of embodied and institutionalized cultural capital, such as literacy practices, educational aspirations, and familiarity with academic environments. Such a deficit constrains the ability of individuals to align with the expectations of formal schooling systems, often resulting in alienation or marginalization within educational settings. The convergence of social and cultural capital deprivation suggests a compounding effect, where the lack of one form of capital reinforces the absence of the other.

The implications of these deficits are clearly reflected in the reported reasons for educational dropout. A majority (59%) attribute their discontinuation of education to family-related issues or the absence of family altogether. This finding establishes a direct empirical link between the erosion of social capital and disrupted educational trajectories. It suggests that dropout is not an isolated individual decision but rather a socially embedded outcome shaped by structural vulnerabilities. The absence of family support mechanisms likely exacerbates economic hardship, emotional distress, and lack of academic guidance, all of which contribute to premature disengagement from education.

Taken together, the table underscores the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage, where deficits in inherited capital significantly constrain life chances. The overlap between social and cultural capital loss highlights a cycle of marginality that is difficult to break without external intervention. These findings call for policy attention toward institutional support systems that can compensate for familial absence, such as mentorship programs, community-based networks, and targeted educational assistance. Without such measures, individuals in these contexts remain at a high risk of continued exclusion from formal education and its associated socio-economic opportunities. Despite the profound structural barriers, the results clearly demonstrate high individual agency and aspiration, revealing the paradox that exclusion is structural, not motivational.

Table 4: Educational Aspiration and Institutional Context (N=41) (Multiple)

Metric	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Aspiration			
Education as important/very important	34	83%	High individual agency/desire for change
Desire to continue education in the future	29	71%	Persistence of hope despite structural barriers
Institutional Context			
Available educational institutions nearby	34	83%	High Opportunity Freedom exists physically

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

Currently not participating in education	26	63%	High Capability Failure
Future Goals			
Seeking social respect/honor	13	32%	Education viewed as key to challenging social exclusion

Source: field survey, February 2026

The findings presented in Table 4 reveal a striking disjuncture between individual aspiration and institutional outcomes, pointing to a structurally embedded form of educational exclusion. A substantial majority of respondents (83%) perceive education as important or very important, indicating a strong internalization of education as a pathway to personal advancement and social mobility. This is further reinforced by the fact that 71% express a desire to continue their education in the future. Taken together, these indicators reflect a high degree of individual agency, motivation, and future-oriented thinking among participants.

However, this aspirational orientation exists alongside a contradictory institutional reality. Although 83% of respondents report the physical availability of educational institutions in their locality, a significant proportion (63%) are currently not engaged in any form of education. This divergence between availability and participation highlights a critical “capability failure,” where the mere presence of institutions does not translate into effective access or utilization. The data suggest that structural constraints—such as economic hardship, social marginalization, or institutional inadequacies—intervene between opportunity and actual participation, limiting individuals’ ability to convert educational availability into meaningful engagement.

The findings resonate with a broader theoretical distinction between “opportunity freedom” and “capability,” where the former refers to the existence of options and the latter to the real ability to exercise those options. In this case, while opportunity freedom appears relatively high in spatial terms, capability remains severely restricted. This reinforces the argument that educational exclusion in this context is not driven by a lack of motivation, but rather by systemic barriers that undermine individuals’ capacity to act upon their aspirations.

Moreover, the data on future goals, although limited, provide additional insight into the symbolic value of education. A segment of respondents associates education with the attainment of social respect and honor, suggesting that educational attainment is not only an economic strategy but also a means of negotiating social identity and challenging entrenched forms of exclusion. This underscores the multidimensional significance of education in marginalized contexts, where it is simultaneously linked to dignity, recognition, and social inclusion. In sum, the cluster illustrates a paradoxical condition: high aspiration coexists with low participation, revealing that the roots of exclusion lie not in individual deficits but in institutional and structural inefficiencies. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond policies that focus solely on expanding physical infrastructure, toward interventions that enhance individuals’ real capabilities to access, sustain, and benefit from educational opportunities.

Qualitative Evidence: The Lived Experience of Exclusion:

The case studies and FGD provide dense empirical evidence illustrating *how* the Capability and Capital deficits operate.

A. Capability Failure in Action:

The life story of Jannat Akhter (age 8) illustrates the fragility of functioning. Her education collapsed immediately following her father’s death because her priority shifted entirely to securing food through begging. This abrupt shift confirms that the loss of a basic functioning (security/nourishment) immediately nullifies educational opportunity. Similarly, Faisal Ahmad (age 5), forced to collect plastic waste for survival, reports being unable to afford necessary medical treatment after being cut by glass, confirming that health functioning interferes with educational possibilities.

B. Habitus Clash and Social Discrimination:

The qualitative data provide explicit evidence of the structural clash between the children's survival habitus and the formal educational field. The FGD participants reported direct social discrimination: "School children laugh at us because we live on the streets". A devastating finding reports: "teachers say, take a bath first, then think about entering class". This is symbolic violence (Bourdieu), reinforcing the children’s marginalized status and driving alienation, causing systemic dropout despite high personal aspiration.

C. Resilience and Policy Alternatives:

Despite the discrimination, 66% of respondents wish to continue studying. This strong agency suggests that educational failure is structural, not motivational (Sen, 1999).⁴ The FGD participants suggested that flexible learning environments, such as open or mobile schools, would be crucial to accommodate their daily labor schedules. They consistently emphasized that the most essential

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

assistance needed is financial support (5%) and access to education (44%), confirming the demand for conditional policy interventions.

Discussion: Synthesizing the Capability and Capital Deficits:

The discussion moves from presenting empirical evidence to offering a rigorous sociological synthesis, interpreting the findings through the lens of the Capability-Capital Nexus. The central argument asserts that educational exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in profound structural failure, rather than a singular issue.

Proximal Barriers: The Failure of Capability Conversion:

The central problem observed in Khamar Bari is a Failure of Conversion, the inability of the institutionally available educational opportunity (83% proximity) to be translated into the actual *capability* of being educated (63% non-participation). For street children, the educational problem is fundamentally pre-cognitive. They cannot fulfill the functioning of "being present in school" when they cannot fulfill the more basic functioning of "being nourished" or "being secured". The necessity of earning less than 300 Taka daily generates a high opportunity cost, making the demands of survival an immediate veto over education. The qualitative case of Jannat, in which her life shifted from school attendance to begging after her father's passing, provides dense empirical evidence of this mechanism. Dhaka's institutions, whether governmental or NGO, are failing to provide the multi-sectoral security and conditional support required to stabilize the child's life and secure the basic functions that enable educational engagement. The vast majority (80%) reporting no institutional support reinforces this severe implementation gap.

Generational Barriers: The Compounded Deficit in Capital:

Even if the immediate survival needs (functioning) were addressed, the profound deficits in capital would still reinforce exclusion, ensuring the intergenerational reproduction of poverty (Rendon et al., 2025). The total collapse of family structure (66% report no family) represents an unparalleled loss of stabilizing Social Capital (Bourdieu). This deficit means children lack the non-financial assets necessary for protection, access to information, and institutional advocacy. Simultaneously, the identical rate (66%) reporting no family education confirms the deficit in inherited Cultural Capital.

This compounded capital deficit results in a fundamental clash of *habitus*. The children's survival *habitus*, forged by the realities of begging, scavenging, and physical insecurity, is fundamentally incompatible with the middle-class norms of the formal educational *field*. The reported instances of social discrimination ("take bath first") constitute symbolic violence, confirming that the institution itself recognizes the children's lack of legitimate capital, thereby alienating and excluding them regardless of their academic aspirations. The cycle is thus reinforced: economic deprivation leads to functional failure, which, combined with capital deficits, locks the child into a social field that reproduces exclusion.

Agency, Exclusion, and Policy Redirection:

The persistence of high aspiration (83% positive view of education) highlights the children's agency their capacity to envision alternative futures (Sen, 1999). This finding reinforces the central argument: the primary barrier is not motivational, but structural. Current policies are ineffective because they conceptualize education as a rights-based provision *in isolation*. Effective policy must address educational exclusion as a multi-dimensional conversion failure, necessitating conditional support programs that restore basic functioning (food and shelter) while simultaneously building essential social and cultural capital (guardianship and mentorship).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of educational exclusion among street-connected children in urban Dhaka by demonstrating that the problem is deeply structural rather than individual. The findings show that despite strong educational aspirations, most children remain excluded due to the combined effects of economic hardship, social dislocation, and institutional limitations. Education, therefore, cannot be understood simply as an issue of access; rather, it is shaped by the inability of children to convert available opportunities into meaningful participation. The analysis highlights that immediate survival needs play a decisive role in shaping educational outcomes. When children are compelled to prioritize income generation for daily subsistence, schooling becomes secondary and often unattainable. This reflects a broader condition where basic needs such as food, safety, and health remain unmet, limiting the practical possibility of attending school. At the same time, the absence of family support and the lack of educated household members further weaken children's engagement with education, reinforcing a cycle of disadvantage that extends across generations.

Another important insight of the study is the clear gap between aspiration and actual participation. A large proportion of children value education and express a desire to continue learning, yet institutional systems fail to accommodate their realities. Rigid schooling structures, social stigma, and limited support mechanisms create an environment where children feel excluded, even when educational facilities are physically accessible. This indicates that current policy approaches are insufficient, as they do not adequately address the complex and interconnected barriers faced by this population. In conclusion, educational exclusion in this

Educational Exclusion As A Capability Capital Nexus: A Mixed Methods Analysis of Street Children's Education in Urban Dhaka, Bangladesh

context should be understood as a multidimensional process rooted in both immediate deprivation and long-term structural inequality. Addressing this issue requires integrated interventions that go beyond formal schooling provision to include economic support, flexible learning systems, and social protection. Without such a comprehensive approach, the gap between aspiration and opportunity will persist, limiting the transformative potential of education for marginalized children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To effectively break the cycle of exclusion, policy recommendations must reflect the necessary multi-sectoral approach derived from the capability-capital framework:

1. **Multi-Sectoral Conditional Support:** Interventions must provide guaranteed food, clothing, and secured shelter, conditional upon consistent school attendance. Financial assistance is paramount (54% favor this), as it directly addresses the Capability Failure by mitigating the opportunity cost of schooling.
2. **Adaptive Educational Systems:** Policy should mandate and support flexible, adaptive learning environments such as open schools or mobile schools (favored by FGD participants) designed to accommodate the children's labor schedules, thereby making educational participation functionally possible.
3. **Social Capital Restoration:** Given the severe crisis of family breakdown (66% no family), initiatives must focus on family tracing, reunification where safe, and establishing structured, supportive guardianship and mentorship programs to restore lost social capital and provide a secure emotional base for learning.
4. **Institutional Re-Training for Inclusion:** Teacher training must be mandated to include socio-economic sensitivity to address the reported social discrimination. The educational field must actively counter, rather than enforce, the stigma and symbolic violence associated with the children's survival habitus.

REFERENCES

- 1) Ahmed, N. A. (2008). Education for the street children in the city of Dhaka. *Journal of Politics & Administration*.
- 2) Dutta, N. (2018). Street children in India: A study on their access to health and education. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*.
- 3) Easin, M., & Das, R. C. (2025). Exploring the educational and health condition of street children: A case study in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*.
- 4) Farid, S., & Mostari, M. (2015). Lives and livelihoods of children living in a street situation in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Research Publications Journal*.
- 5) Hai, M. A. (2014). Problems faced by street children: A study of selected areas in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Science & Technology Research*.
- 6) Hossain, M. (2023). A study on the health and education of the street children in the capital city of Dhaka. *Reader Journal of Multidisciplinary in Business, Applied Science and Engineering*.
- 7) Hossain, S. A., & Alam, M. A. (2016). Socio-economic status of children in Bangladesh.
- 8) Islam, M. R. (2024). Everyday life of street children in Dhaka City, Bangladesh: An anthropological study. *International Journal of Research in Sociology and Anthropology*.
- 9) Islam, R. (2015). Educational conditions of street children in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Management Finance and Education*.
- 10) Jamiludin, D., Dr. Darnawati, Uke, W. A., & Irawaty, D. (2018). Street children's problem in getting education: Economic and parental factors. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*.
- 11) Khan, N. A. (2008). Education for the street children in the city of Dhaka. *Journal of Politics & Administration*.
- 12) Kisirkoi, K., & Mse, S. (2016). Education access and retention for street children: Perspectives from Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*.
- 13) Moon, J. M., & Azad, T. S. (2022). The way street children of Dhaka City live: A survey. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*.
- 14) Rahaman, R., & Samadder, Z. R. (2015). *Lives of street-connected children in Bangladesh*. BRAC Research Report.
- 15) Rahman, M. I., Mou, S., & Islam, M. (2024). Apathy of street children of Dhaka city towards rehabilitation: An assessment. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*.
- 16) Rendon, M. G., Hernandez, A., & Schaefer, D. R. (2025). Social reproduction at a minority serving institution: STEM capital disparities among children of immigrants. *Sociology of Education*.
- 17) Shamem, A. S., & Islam, M. S. (2020). Problems and perspectives of street children schooling: an empirical study from a Bangladeshi perspective. *International Journal of Social Science, Innovation and Educational Technologies*.
- 18) Shahneaz, M. A. (2016). Edifying situation of street children in Bangladesh: A case study in Dhaka City.

- 19) Silva-Laya, A., Hernández-Sosa, A., & Schaefer, D. R. (2020). Urban poverty and education: A systematic literature review. *Urban Education*.
- 20) UN DESA. (2023, April). *UN calls for urgent action to address education crisis as global primary school-age population peaks in 2023*. United Nations.
- 21) UNICEF. (2018). *An unfair start: Inequality in children's education in high-income countries* (Report Card 5). UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
- 22) Zinia, J. (2022). Causes of migration and life on the street: A qualitative study on the street children in Dhaka City. *Global Scientific*.