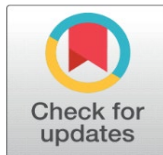


# CULTURAL CAPITAL IN SCHOOLS AS SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: BANGLADESH RURAL GOVERNMENT PRIMARY EDUCATION

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**Received** 28 February 2024

**Accepted** 30 March 2024

**Published** 15 April 2024

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## DOI

[10.29121/Shodhgyan.v2.i1.2024.19](https://doi.org/10.29121/Shodhgyan.v2.i1.2024.19)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identifies that educational institutions are the places of social class reproduction. English is used as a weapon in producing disparity, and cultural capital also enforces social hierarchy and gives birth to inequality. A systematic cultural construct of students is needed to build culture as capital that minimizes social reproduction and promotes class shifting. This qualitative study tries to identify how cultural capital is built in Bangladeshi rural primary-level learners, what are the challenges of accumulating cultural capital and how these challenges can be minimized. Ten rural government primary teachers were selected using convenient sampling, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Using a questionnaire comprising sixteen open-ended questions, interviews were recorded on a device and analyzed descriptively. This research finds that carefully chosen cultural content can build a strong capital in Bangladeshi learners of low socioeconomic backgrounds. There are challenges in the process of building appropriate cultural capital, but a balanced contribution of all stakeholders can ensure sustainable growth.

**Keywords:** Cultural Capital, Bangladesh Government Primary Education, Rural Context, Social Reproduction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English being the language of power reproduces social inequality, and schools are the social institutions that perpetuate disparity. Family environment and social background have an impact on educational achievement. Socially privileged children do better academically [Malik & Mohamed \(2014\)](#). Marginalized groups are victims of inequality. Rural people of lower socioeconomic classes have always been a subject of uneven development worldwide. Bangladesh is no exception too.

The theory of cultural capital by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identifies why some children in school do better than others. Familiarity with prominent

culture turns into a capital that determines educational success [Bourdieu & Passeron \(1990\)](#). Upper-class children bring a rich cultural capital that helps them in higher achievement. Poor children do not bring it from families, and they come to school to learn it Sullivan, Parcel as cited in [Tasdemir \(2019\)](#). Upper-class children bring a rich cultural capital that helps them in higher achievement. Poor children do not bring it from families, and they come to school to learn it. “Schools have the potential of becoming the primary institution and source of cultural capital for pupils with a low socio-economic background” [Tasdemir \(2019\)](#), p. 85.

This sociolinguistic study investigates Bangladesh EFL learners' journey based on their placement in society. It tries to listen to the rural EFL teachers' voices on how cultural capital is accumulated and/or invested by the learners in Bangladeshi rural primary schools. It projects how this capital promotes learning English. It also tries to identify the challenges in the process of growing cultural capital and suggest solutions to these challenges.

### 1.1. MARGINALIZATION IN EDUCATION

Who are marginalized? Actually, “Marginalized groups include women, people with disabilities, people of color, LGBTQ+folks, indigenous people, people of a lower socio-economic status and so on. These groups have been historically disempowered and oppressed by influential and discriminatory groups” [CultureAlly \(2023\)](#). Similarly, Bangladeshi rural poor students are doubly marginalized in terms of urban versus rural and rich versus poor dichotomies.

Neoliberalism and globalism increase the legacy of English which is the language of power. In a neoliberal capitalist world, it is a tool to make money. It dominates the job field so strongly that people who are weak in it are marginalized [Malik & Mohamed \(2014\)](#). Language skill is an important capital that is used as a tool for social reproduction [Naz et al. \(2014\)](#). In diversified contexts, inequality is transferred in various ways. Discrimination based on accent can be regularly found in our daily lives (Lippi-Green, as cited in [Malik & Mohamed \(2014\)](#)). The sociology of Education discusses the relation between inequality and education.

Education is also a tool to perpetuate disparity and promote marginalization. [Recknagel et al. \(2022\)](#) has identified that different education policies in the US for different groups of people of color could not afford equal opportunities for which their attainment or achievement is also poor; Latinx and African American children raised in traumatic home environments are not capable of performing like their white counterparts.

A child's social background has a strong impact on educational achievement. Gramboa & Waltenberg (2011 as cited in [Caprara \(2016\)](#)) have identified the impact of Latin America's inequalities of opportunity in educational development. Social classes have an impact on educational achievement where children from low socioeconomic backgrounds stay in a disadvantageous position at school. According to [Kumari & Kumar \(2014\)](#), “There is a questionable gulf between the success rates of the urban and rural educational institution, rich and poor group, educated and uneducated parental students” (p. 18). Inequality persists generation by generation [Arriaza & White \(2020\)](#). Schools, reproducing the class system, do not provide neutral settings.

### 1.2. CULTURAL CAPITAL

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced the term ‘cultural capital’ which refers to the skills, symbols, tastes, ideas, etc. that can be used as resources in

societal action and invested to make a profit like economic capital. There are three categories of it: embodied (knowledge and skills), objectified (value from objects of culture), and institutionalized (value from the recognition of institutions). Bourdieu finds that upper-class students are in an advantageous position whereas middle-class parents try to give their children cultural and linguistic competencies to have higher educational achievement. Children of lower socioeconomic class cannot perform well as they do not have easy access to such resources. In this way, education reproduces social inequalities [Scott & Marshall \(2015\)](#).

Cultural Capital has a strong impact on students' performance. "Types of capital are important resources for agents to light over symbolic struggles in different fields and can be monopolized in certain cases; they may be transmitted or concerted" [Caprara \(2016\)](#), p.2629. Cultural capital is found as the central element in young Brazilians' performance [Caprara \(2016\)](#). Cultural competence signifies the appreciation and acknowledgment of one's own culture awareness of another's culture; static and rational cultural capital (two forms of cultural resources), relational cultural capital has a high impact on students' future [Arriaza & White \(2020\)](#). Static cultural capital means upper-class activities like going to museums or watching movies whereas relational cultural capital refers to parent-child conversation regarding social and cultural matters. Teachers can increase both. "...for cultural capital to grow, be transported, and exchanged, static and relational cultural capital must be intentionally taught. A more adaptable type of habitus may then spring up, youth will blossom, and, as a result, they will increase their life chances" [Arriaza & White \(2020\)](#), p. 449. Some activities like visiting sources of knowledge like educational institutions, libraries, and museums help to increase cultural capital growth and have a positive impact on career prospects. Field trips take students out of the school, and introduce them with a different perspective on things. They understand learning is something related to life and to be applied in life. It also engages them in a conversation about the topic.

### 1.3. ROLE OF CULTURAL CAPITAL IN MARGINALIZATION

Learners' language use is greatly influenced by social class. "some cues specific to verbal transmission (e.g., pronunciation or accent) signal social class" [Stephens & Townsend \(2019, November 6\)](#), para 1). [Malik & Mohamed \(2014\)](#) have found that a good accent works as a cultural and linguistic capital to gain financial benefits; better job opportunities are offered for fluency and a British accent. American and European accents are appreciated whereas Asian and African accents are ridiculed. Fluency is a marker of self-efficiency and success. Proficiency has become a cultural capital. The service of a teacher with a native-like accent is an opportunity available only to the children of politically and financially elite families.

"Teachers must also acknowledge that the educational system is normed on the dominant class and often does not acknowledge or meet the needs of students for culturally and socially diverse backgrounds" (Byrd 2017 as cited in [Recknagel et al. \(2022\)](#), p. 71). Teachers and students from different culture having different places, histories and values hold a cultural inconsistency. Cultural capital inconsistency or mismatch promotes teachers' low expectations about student's achievement.

[Malik & Mohamed \(2014\)](#) have stated "As learning English is an expensive process, only upper and middle classes from the periphery can afford it. As a result, poor and working people are denied the opportunity to cash in on the cultural capital of English language" (p.72). They also argue, "The oppressed should appropriate it for their own use" (p.73).

### 1.4. SYSTEMATIC CULTURAL CAPITAL FOR THE MARGINALIZED STUDENTS

Arriaza & White (2020) recommend that teachers break the claim of reproduction by planned initiatives to introduce marginalized students to culture. A steady support, cultural traits, and language offer access to special opportunities. Educators can arrange or manage specific opportunities to explore for students from low socioeconomic groups. Schools can take some non-economic cultural actions that can contribute to the student's holistic growth and prepare them to be good citizens of a country with sustainable growth. Promoting cultural capital teachers can control the painful and gloomy inequalities regenerated or reproduced in schools.

Arriaza & White (2020) again have found that cultural capital can be gained by the African American and Latinx students of lower-income communities with some planned processes; teachers are the role models to inculcate culture among their students. Teachers expose their habitus in dealing with students and should carry valuable habitats that can carry an ethical standard. Teachers can reinforce values to be carried through explicit and implicit codes that can become permanent in children as habit formation which is more possible at the early stage of life. If a student works hard in school, he or she can enjoy a better future than the previous generations.

Among three types of cultural capital Gaun (2019) identified that in China teachers sometimes carry very poor pedagogic knowledge (58% about English pedagogy) and embodied cultural capital. They are assisted with a heavy workload for a shortage of staff, so they can't concentrate on their improvement. Very little number of teachers can afford to increase objectified cultural capital through the use of multimedia, magazines, books, movies etc. Teachers can cooperate and coordinate some initiatives to increase it.

Malik & Mohamed (2014) identified that an American teacher DR. Sharma and Joanne carefully arrange classroom activities and intentionally encourage students to accumulate cultural capital and cognitive capabilities so that they can play the role of leaders in the job field in the future. Participating in activities empowers students to create leadership and achieve the highest linguistic proficiency. By employing participatory learning Dr. Davis empowers students and encourages them to make decisions about areas and processes of their learning.

Teachers in Turkey think that course book is the best material to teach cultural capital to remove inequalities, but most of them evaluated textbook as average which lacks the cultural codes students need. They said that a variety of language activities focusing on cultural codes can eliminate discrimination Tasdemir (2019).

Good knowledge and skills of teaching enhance market value and high demand. Teachers should connect the schema of culture and assimilate and accommodate new learning Malik & Mohamed (2014). Pre-service and in-service training can solve many problems. Teachers' in-service training should include the strategies to handle and support less prioritized children Recknagel et al. (2022). Gaun (2019) found that teachers can help teachers, and they can share both material and ideas. Here, classroom observations can help. She also found that only 28% of teachers coming from the four universities of Sichuan Province in China have got a chance to further improve their skills during teaching. They should be made free from overburden. Some online sessions can be arranged for them.

The review of the literature shows that schools are the social institution to reproduce social class, and English is one strong weapon. Schools' reproduction system is also supported by cultural capital that students bring to school. However, a systematic planned cultural capital for marginalized learners can offer a better condition.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Using convenient sampling, this qualitative research selected ten EFL teachers from ten rural schools from three divisions (Khulna, Rajshahi and Dhaka) among six in Bangladesh, and they were interviewed to find out how cultural capital is built in EFL learners at school. Data were collected from these schools: 1. Balapur Govt. Primary School, 2. Balapur Char Government Primary School, 3. Char Nobinagar Government Primary School, 4. Chitla Government Primary school, 5. Kandupodi Government Primary School, 6. Kulpara Government Primary School, 7. Nobinpur Government Primary School, 8. Noyapara Government Primary School, 9. Puran Char Government Primary School, 10. Shaherbati Dokkhinpara Government Primary School.

Eight interview sessions were held online through Zoom, and two were taken over the telephone at teachers' convenience. Data were collected from seven female and three male teachers of varied ages and experience, but the lowest length of experience is six years, and the highest is twenty-seven years. All these sessions lasted thirty to forty minutes, and Zoom sessions were video and telephone sessions were audio recorded to analyze the data later. These semi-structured interviews were taken using a questionnaire consisting of sixteen open-ended questions. The discussion during data collection was in Bengali (the mother tongue of the participants) to ensure the enthusiastic participation of the respondents. These teachers did not like to disclose their names in writing; that is why, these ten teachers are named T1, T2 to T10. The data are analyzed descriptively. Some photos were collected from T10 to show some visual examples.

## 3. ANALYSIS

Ten rural primary school teachers who teach English in school were selected, although they are actually appointed to teach any subject in school. They were interviewed to find their experience and opinions as agents of cultural capital. It is tried to find how these rural schools as social institutions inculcate culture among their students.

### 3.1. BACKGROUND OF THE PRIMARY RURAL STUDENTS:

All the teachers answered that more than ninety percent of students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds where most of the earning members are either farmers or day laborers. They find teaching these students tough for some reasons. First of all, there is a tendency for these students to skip school very frequently. T3 shared:

These children work in the field during harvesting season and do not attend school regularly. Attendance is also poor during excessive hot, cold or rainy seasons. Sometimes students come to school with an empty stomach and that is why can't concentrate on studying.

Another teacher, T7 shared, "Sometimes they are assigned to some family responsibilities like looking after the siblings or taking care of some sick family



members.” All the teachers keep regular contact with family members, sometimes over the phone or sometimes visiting physically, to ensure their attendance at school to stop drop off.

### 3.2. CULTURAL CAPITAL IN STUDENTS OF BANGLADESHI RURAL GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

All these teachers believe that culture should be practiced well for it makes the learning process interesting and more permanent and forms a good habit. It should be built from childhood. However, they find that making enough practice of culture among rural economically marginalized students is challenging. A different preparation for the teachers is required to carry the culture among this background's students. The challenge comes from families too. “Sometimes families do not allow students to participate in some programs especially the girls are not allowed to participate in some open activities like dancing or outdoor sports” (T8). Some restrictions are also imposed from a religious point of view. T5 shared, “Some parents don't allow children to draw something as they think that drawing living things is discouraged in religion.”

When the teachers were asked how culture is taught, they answered that different programs are arranged to observe the important special days like Independence Day, Victory Day, International Mother Language Day, birth and death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Pohela Boishakh (the first day of Bengali year) etc. T1 shared “Around five percent of students (the same group) perform in the programs. We guide and prepare them, but most of the students do not participate.”

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Bengali Year Celebration 2023

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Death Anniversary of Bangabandhu

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Annual Cultural Day 2023

Annually competitions are also arranged on sports, drawing, story reading, singing and dancing. Teachers shared that students' best response is found in sports where, T2 shared, "most of the students participate enthusiastically and enjoy."

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4 Annual Sports Day 2023**

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5 Annual Sports Day 2023**

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6 Book Distribution 2023**



**Figure 7****Figure 7** Prize Giving of Art Competition, 2023

In other competitions, students' response is very poor. When they are instructed to practice something at home, the progress is found very slow. Sometimes parents do not allow children to participate due to their religious beliefs, or they think that these are useless and waste of study time.

A discussion was run to find the involvement of these rural students in the other forms of cultural capital:

### **3.2.1. READING FOR PLEASURE**

It is found that students enjoy listening to stories when read to them in language classes, but it is not done regularly as there is no separate library class for them. However, they do not have a habit of reading by themselves. In primary schools, all the respondents agreed, there is no separate room with a library setup. However, there is a corner in the office room dedicated to the Bangabandhu corner where a bookshelf is kept with some books. Students are allowed to read books from there, but there is no habit of reading books in them. T10 complained:

These children do not handle books with care, and this caring is not taught to them by the families. They even carry poorly torn textbooks throughout the year. In poor socioeconomic farmer families of these students, there is no culture of reading books for pleasure.

### **3.2.2. READING NEWSPAPER**

In most famous Bangladeshi newspapers, there is a page for kids weekly with some writings and pictures. Kids of this age can benefit from reading these, or elders can also read out to them. Seeing the picture can help in building visual stimuli. A strong cultural capital can be built from this reading. These Bangladeshi rural primary school children are deprived of this culture as they do not get any scope to read newspapers either at school or at home.

### 3.2.3. WATCHING MOVIES/VIDEOS

**Figure 8**



**Figure 8** Death Anniversary of Bangabandhu

Recently Bangladesh government has bought one audio-visual material for each school. This equipment is used to display some audio/video content to observe/celebrate special days, for example, “On Independence Day or Victory Day, videos on the Liberation War are shown, or on the birth or death anniversary of important persons, videos on their biographies are shown” (T5). T4 and T7 shared that in their school some patriotic songs are regularly played.

When asked to the teachers how these materials are used for teaching/learning a specific topic, it was found that these materials are used for the whole school on some special occasions but not for teaching any specific topic to a specific class. Teachers also shared that they cannot refer any audio/visual content to these students for learning as they do not get the support of devices in the home environment.

### 3.2.4. BEING A MEMBER OF A LIBRARY

All the teachers shared that none of their students has membership in any library as there is no library in these localities.

### 3.2.5. VISITING MUSEUM

Among these ten teachers, only T2 said:

There is a museum in our district, and we take students there to visit. However, taking students to visit this museum has been stopped since the Covid pandemic period, March 2020. Visiting a museum requires funding which is not available. Parents of these children do not like to afford money for this purpose.

The other nine teachers shared that their students do not get any chance to visit museums either as part of their school activity or as part of their family’s personal

initiatives. The unavailability of museums in these localities might also be a reason behind this.

### **3.2.6. VISITING HISTORICAL PLACES**

This option is adopted only when there is a scope for it in the locality. Among the ten respondents, only again T2 answered that there is a historical place in their district, and they take children there on annual picnic days. T2 shared “Students’ attendance in these visits was fifty to sixty percent as expenditure of these visits was not sponsored by the school, and subscription fee was taken from the students. The rest forty to fifty percent students could not attend because they could not manage the fee. Moreover, this tour has been canceled since the Covid pandemic.” In the case of the other schools’ children, there is no scope to build this capital.

### **3.2.7. INVITING RESOURCE PERSON:**

When the teachers were asked whether they invite any resource person on any specific topic to teach, two (T3, T8) answered that sometimes their schools invite some freedom fighters to share their experience with students; otherwise, no other areas are covered by inviting resource persons.

A question was asked on the self-initiated participation of the learners, and teachers answered that students cannot make choices and take decisions. Teachers encourage and prepare them. However, most of the teachers agreed that students show enthusiastic participation can be noticed in sports.

## **3.3. BUILDING CULTURAL CAPITAL OF ENGLISH**

All ten teachers opined that student can learn English better if it is practiced in some form of cultural capital. When the teachers were asked about the promotion of English through building cultural capital among these children, all of them shared that English is practiced in curricular activities like reading a story or a poem from a textbook in class. They all agreed that there are no co-curricular or extracurricular practices in English among these primary rural learners. Teacher 7 said, “Students’ cultural practices make them confident in using language to express ideas and opinions. Yes, involving more practice of English is required.”

## **3.4. CHALLENGES FOR RURAL CONTEXT**

Under the impact of neoliberalism, there is a huge change in the primary education system in Bangladesh. According to [Akhter \(2023\)](#), “As per the Annual Primary School Census 2021, there were a total of 1,18,891 primary level educational institutions in Bangladesh, including 65,566 government primary schools” (last para). Among the primary schools, forty-five percent of schools are run by the private sector whereas fifty-five percent of schools are run by the government. To get the benefit of free education, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds select the rural government primary schools. All ten teachers find it challenging to teach culture to these students. The biggest challenge here is a lack of funding. To hold any kind of program the schools fully depend on government funding. The allotted funding is not sufficient to arrange a variety of programs. Only nationally significant days are observed with importance, but the arrangement of any other programs and competitions to build cultural capital among the students is rare. The infrastructure is also not supportive. There is no

auditorium in these schools, nor is there any extra room for rehearsal. Lack of logistic support is another reason here. One multimedia set is there in every school, but microphones, a large sound system, musical instruments, enough collection of books etc. are absent. [Kingston \(2001\)](#)

Most of the teachers shared that another barrier comes from parents who prefer to send their children to work after school and find any extracurricular activities a waste of time. T5 said:

Due to their hard-core reality, most of the children work in the field with their families, especially during harvesting. Children are expected to do some household chores. They get neither time nor energy left to practice extracurricular activities at home. Parents sometimes pose restrictions from a religion's point of view.

T8 shared, "Sometimes we arrange some sessions for parents so that parents can contribute to their children's learning."

**Figure 9**



**Figure 9** A Session for Parents in 2023

[Akhter \(2023\)](#) finds that the present teacher-student ratio of primary schools is 54:1. The Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) of Bangladesh offers an eighteen-month Diploma in Primary Education to the teachers. There one module is dedicated to training teachers how to teach fine arts. This module is divided into four parts: art, music, dance, and drama. However, [Chandan \(2023\)](#) finds, "Out of 388,917 primary school teachers, only 78,298 have completed this training so far" (para 10). Only 20% of teachers have got this training. This gloomy picture becomes more faded when it comes to the question of teaching the poor rural children. There is no special planning to answer how to motivate these children.

### 3.5. SOLUTION

Teachers said that separate arrangement is needed for these students to teach culture. All of them said that extra funding is needed to ensure a regular practice of good culture. Most of the teachers said that some equipment is badly needed. Having



a library under infrastructure is mandatory. T9 opined, “Extracurricular activities can be integrated into the main curriculum. Students can recite poems from textbooks or write short dramas and perform in language classes.” T4 shared:

In Bangladesh, there are some popular local cultures that can be adopted, for example, there is a special form of popular local music called ‘Dhamer Gaan’ that people sing during a religious ceremony or ‘Bhawaiya’ that is sung by working-class people. Presenting folklore can build a rich cultural capital.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

More than ninety percent of students of Bangladeshi rural primary schools come from low socioeconomic backgrounds who face various geographical, social and psychological barriers in building a strong cultural capital. Bangladeshi EFL rural teachers opined that building strong cultural capital helps students in learning. When there is no habit of something in the families like reading newspapers or story books, it is difficult to build in children. These Bangladeshi children of lower socioeconomic class are deprived of some offered cultural capital due to lack of money e.g. visiting historical places or museums as these are not fully funded by school.

A planned practice of cultural capital can ensure holistic learning for the sustainable growth of low socioeconomic background children, and contribute to minimizing the school’s role in social reproduction. Limited students’ participation in cultural programs and competitions shows that developing embodied cultural capital in these rural primary-level students is tough. There is also a gap in building objectified cultural capital due to the lack of libraries, supply of newspapers, audio-visual materials etc. Participation of the same students again and again gives birth to social reproduction. There is a chance of social mobility if the majority of students participate in the programs.

Few forms of culture like arranging programs to observe nationally significant days, participating in sports competitions, watching videos on liberation war or meeting a freedom fighter, etc. are to observe some nationally important days, students are extrinsically motivated to participate. Intrinsic motivation is found in learners only participating in sports, and attendance is highest then.

An inconsistency of involving English in co-curricular or extracurricular activities to build cultural capital shows that these children are deprived of some scopes of learning English whereas Critical Period Hypothesis emphasizes an early start of language learning. This might result in social reproduction and marginalization whereas a different scenario is found in urban higher-class context. A planned and systematic involvement of English in building cultural capital can benefit these rural students.

The role of the family in building strong cultural capital is extremely poor. Posed by challenges, there is an attempt by teachers and schools to form some kind of cultural capital. Three main challenges are identified- lack of funding, lack of logistic support and families’ non-cooperation. These schools need strong backup from the government and families to remove unequal attainment. The curriculum of the primary level focuses the importance of building learners’ cultural capital. Teachers are required to be well-trained to build a strong cultural capital. The cultural construct in children should be systematically selected and unbiased. Some local forms of culture can be a strong capital for learners.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the existence of some underprivileged situations where school is also a matter of social class reproduction, it is difficult to hold a constant motivation in learners, and a planned practice of culture can work like capital to be invested for more profit. A careful selection of forms of culture can bring some positive changes in Bangladeshi primary rural students of low socioeconomic class. There is a vacuum space in identifying the appropriate form of culture to be practiced by this specific group of marginalized learners. Now this is the time to identify and control if there is any political, social, or cultural hegemony in building the cultural capital among these children. This is possible with assistance spring from each and every stakeholder, and this can minimize the gulf of discrimination and promote the shifting of deprived social classes. Here we must remember that no group of learners' voices should remain unheard so that they do not feel subaltern. It is expected that all the stakeholders should shoulder the responsibility to minimize the gap of social inequality in achieving sustainable development goals.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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