

## Educational Culture within the Families of School Dropouts in Bandung City

Sanny Marlem<sup>1\*</sup>, Erna Herawati<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Padjadjaran

\*Corresponding author, e-mail: [sanny22001@mail.unpad.ac.id](mailto:sanny22001@mail.unpad.ac.id)

### Abstract

Research on children who have dropped out of school has largely focused on economic factors and access to education, while the dimension of educational culture within families remains relatively understudied, particularly in urban contexts. This study aims to examine how educational culture is understood within the families of children who have dropped out of school and how such understandings influence educational continuation and discontinuation. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews with 25 participants consisting of school dropout children and their family members in several areas of Bandung City. Drawing on the anthropology of education and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of forms of capital, the study found that families continued to regard education as important and actively instilled educational values in their children. However, education was often understood pragmatically as a means of securing employment and improving the family's economic condition. In some cases, working at a young age was considered more realistic than continuing schooling because it provided immediate income. Furthermore, economic constraints, negative academic experiences, and psychological pressures led some children and families to no longer prioritize schooling. The findings reveal that school dropout may occur even when education is valued, as educational aspirations are continuously negotiated against everyday needs, school experiences, and socio-economic pressures. These findings highlight the need for policies that focus not only on financial assistance but also on psychosocial support and culturally informed approaches.

**Keywords:** Educational Culture; Educational Anthropology; School Dropouts.

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## Introduction

In everyday social life, education is not merely confined to classroom learning; rather, it constitutes an integral part of the social and cultural experiences through which individuals develop their understanding of the world around them. From early childhood, individuals learn values, norms, language, and life expectations through interactions with their families, schools, and surrounding communities. These experiences position education not only as a process of acquiring academic knowledge but also as a process of cultural learning and social identity formation. Spindler (1974) refers to this process as *cultural transmission*, whereby values, symbols, and social practices are passed from one generation to the next through everyday life. Within this perspective, educational culture develops through learning habits, parenting practices, family support for education, and the ways communities perceive schooling as an essential component of social life (Jin et al., 2024; Tan & Fang, 2023). A strong educational culture tends to foster students' attachment to schooling and encourages educational continuity. Conversely, communities characterized by weak educational cultures may shape individuals' perceptions of schooling in ways that increase the likelihood of school dropout (Dinesen, 2026; Nuzzaci, 2026).

In large metropolitan cities such as Bandung, education carries even greater symbolic significance. Schools are regarded not only as institutions of learning but also as symbols of family achievement, social status, and pathways out of poverty. However, behind this idealized perception lies a contrasting reality: the persistently high number of school dropouts in urban areas. This phenomenon reveals a contradiction

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between the highly valued social meaning of education and the everyday realities experienced by many working-class families in Bandung. The issue of children being excluded from formal education is particularly evident in the city. According to the Bandung City Statistics Agency (BPS), there were approximately 560,000 school-age children (5–19 years old) in Bandung in 2023. Of these, only 528,000 were enrolled in formal schools, indicating that approximately 32,000 school-age children were outside the formal education system during that year. Furthermore, home visits conducted by the Bandung City Education Office at the end of 2023 identified 3,217 children holding Bandung residency identification numbers (*Nomor Induk Kependudukan* [NIK]) who were not attending formal schools (Herawati et al., 2024). More recent data from the Bandung City Regional Development Planning Agency (*Bapperida*) reported that the number of out-of-school children reached 16,696 in 2025. School dropout is particularly prevalent among families from lower- and lower-middle-income socioeconomic backgrounds who rely on informal employment, including daily wage labor, casual work, and other occupations characterized by unstable incomes. Many of these families reside in densely populated settlements with limited economic resources, making it difficult to sustain their children's educational participation over time. These conditions suggest that school dropout in urban areas cannot be understood solely as a problem of educational access but must also be examined in relation to the social and cultural dynamics of family life under the pressures of urban living.

Previous studies on school dropout have predominantly emphasized economic constraints, educational access, and the influence of the social environment. Numerous studies have identified household economic hardship as the primary determinant of children's educational continuity, particularly among low-income households and informal-sector workers. Other research has demonstrated that social environments, low learning motivation, and negative school experiences also contribute to students' decisions to leave school. Internationally, Ding & Wu (2023) found that families' economic, social, and cultural capital substantially influence children's educational aspirations in urban settings. Likewise, Forsberg (2022) argued that families often perceive education as a symbol of hope and social mobility, despite having to negotiate numerous socioeconomic challenges in pursuing educational opportunities. Beyond economic and social factors, an increasing body of research has begun to emphasize the role of families in shaping children's educational trajectories. Mansyur et al. (2019), studying coastal communities in the Spermonde Archipelago, found that children's educational culture is strongly influenced by parental motivation as the earliest form of non-formal education received by children. Similarly, Salma et al. (2016), in their study of farming communities in Kebumen Regency, reported that education is commonly perceived as a means of acquiring life experience and improving future living conditions. In contrast, Putri and Mardhiah (2020) found that some children from farming families regarded education as relatively unimportant because employment opportunities could still be obtained without higher educational attainment. Khobir et al. (2023) further demonstrated that parents' interpretations of education significantly affect children's educational persistence, particularly among families with low educational backgrounds.

These studies collectively suggest that children's educational decisions are shaped not only by economic circumstances but also by the meanings that families and their surrounding social environments attach to education. Nevertheless, research examining educational culture within the families of school dropouts, particularly in the urban context of Bandung, remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on structural determinants such as poverty, educational access, and social environments, while the cultural dimensions of education embedded in the everyday lives of families with school dropouts have received considerably less scholarly attention. Yet urban families face not only financial constraints but also social pressures, children's school experiences, and shifting educational values associated with urban life. Accordingly, this study seeks to understand how educational culture is interpreted within families of school dropouts and how these interpretations influence both the continuation and discontinuation of children's education in Bandung.

In this study, educational culture is conceptualized as a set of values, beliefs, habits, and social practices that shape how families perceive schooling, education, and their children's future. To examine this phenomenon, the study adopts the theoretical perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of *forms of capital*. Bourdieu's (1986) framework provides a valuable lens for understanding how educational inequalities are produced not only through economic disparities but also through unequal access to cultural, social, and symbolic capital. In this study, these three forms of capital are employed to examine how families construct, transmit, and interpret education in everyday life, as well as how the resources available to families influence children's educational continuity. Cultural capital is used to explain how educational values, learning habits, educational experiences, and aspirations are transmitted across generations. Social capital is employed to examine how social relationships and support networks facilitate or constrain children's educational participation. Symbolic capital is utilized to analyze how education functions as a source of prestige, social recognition, and aspirations for upward social mobility. While previous studies on school dropout have predominantly emphasized economic factors, educational access, and other structural

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conditions, relatively little attention has been devoted to educational culture within the family, particularly regarding how families assign meaning to education, cultivate learning practices, and transmit educational orientations to their children. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the phenomenon of school dropout through the lens of family educational culture.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the research problem of this study is formulated as follows: how is the culture of education interpreted within families of school dropouts in the urban context of Bandung City? This phenomenon is significant because children's decisions to remain in or withdraw from schooling are shaped not only by economic constraints, but also by the possession of cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital within the family, as well as by children's social experiences in both school and community environments. Therefore, the phenomenon of school dropout cannot be understood merely as an issue of educational access; rather, it should be seen as the outcome of cultural negotiations embedded in the everyday lives of urban families. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how the culture of education is constructed and interpreted within families of school dropouts. This research also extends existing scholarship on school dropout, which has predominantly emphasized economic factors and access to education, by positioning family-based educational culture as the central focus of analysis. Employing an ethnographic approach and drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this article examines how schooling is culturally positioned within urban society, and how educational values, norms, and symbols shape the experiences of children who are unable to persist within the formal education system.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic research design. [Creswell \(2009\)](#) explains that qualitative research is used to understand the meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding social or human problems. According to [Spradley \(1979\)](#), ethnography is a qualitative research method that focuses on understanding the way of life of a particular group from the insider's perspective (the native point of view). Ethnographic research aims to provide a holistic account of the research subjects, with an emphasis on describing individuals' everyday experiences through observation and in-depth interviews with participants and other relevant actors ([Krüger, 2008](#); [Spradley, 1979](#)). The use of an ethnographic design in this study enables the researcher to understand the culture of education within urban communities in Bandung City and to portray it in detail from the perspective of school dropouts using an emic approach.

The research process was conducted over approximately 12 months, from December 2024 to December 2025, encompassing stages of preparation, field data collection, data analysis, and academic writing. The primary informants initially consisted of 16 individuals, including children aged 7–18 years who had dropped out of formal education at the elementary to senior high school levels, as well as two families of children still enrolled in formal schooling and residing in Bandung City. In addition, this study involved supporting informants, including parents of school dropouts and several individuals within the children's social environment.

Informants were selected using a snowball sampling technique, beginning with data on school dropouts obtained from the local Education Office, and subsequently expanded through access facilitated by neighborhood associations (RT/RW), village and sub-district officials, and community health volunteers (posyandu cadres). In total, the main informants in this study comprised 25 individuals, including school dropout children and their parents. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data collection involved observations of the informants' homes and surrounding environments to understand family social conditions, children's daily activities, family interaction patterns, and local social relations. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted by visiting informants' residences, with each interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. To strengthen data validity, supporting informants such as neighbors, local officials, and community members were also included. Secondary data were obtained through a literature review of numerical data sources related to school dropout rates in Bandung City.

Data analysis was carried out in stages, beginning with the transcription of interviews, followed by coding of field data, and the development of thematic matrices to identify patterns, categories, and relationships among the research findings. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from school dropout children, parents, neighbors, posyandu cadres, and local officials to assess data consistency. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation was conducted by integrating findings from in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation throughout the research process. To enhance data credibility, the researcher also conducted repeated observations with selected informants as needed for verification and clarification of field data. Additionally, field notes were used to document social situations, informant interactions, and the researcher's reflections throughout the research process.

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## Results and Discussion

This study finds that the backgrounds of school dropouts in Bandung City cannot be separated from family socio-economic conditions and the broader urban environment, both of which shape children's experiences and perceptions of education. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, the school dropouts involved in this study predominantly come from lower to lower-middle-class families, with parents working as laborers, informal workers, or homemakers. The educational attainment of parents is also relatively low, with most having completed only primary school or not completing it at all, and only a few having attained junior or senior secondary education. These conditions influence how families interpret education, the forms of support provided to children, and children's educational experiences in everyday life.

### School Dropouts' Perspectives on the Culture of Education

In the urban context of Bandung City, education occupies an important position as a cultural value often associated with aspirations for a better future. Most of the interviewed school dropouts perceive schooling as important, particularly in relation to securing decent employment. For many of them, the most significant aspect of schooling is obtaining a certificate (*ijazah*), which is seen as a key requirement for accessing better job opportunities. This perception indicates that, although they have exited the formal education system, the value of education as a symbol of social mobility remains deeply embedded.

Many of these children express regret over leaving school and demonstrate a desire to return, recognizing that educational credentials can enhance their competitiveness in the labor market. As expressed by EP:

“I actually regret it when I see my friends still attending school and eventually obtaining their certificates. I have the same desire to complete my education and earn a certificate like them. In my view, a certificate is very important to secure a better and more decent job. If I can obtain a good job, I want to improve my home conditions and help my family achieve a better standard of living.” (Interview, August 25, 2026).

Conversely, some school dropouts do not perceive schooling as important, either as a means of obtaining credentials or acquiring knowledge. They believe that working without formal education is sufficient to meet daily needs, particularly within the informal sector, which is widely accessible in urban environments. Work experiences have led some children to feel that they can earn an income without continuing formal education. This is illustrated by AD's statement:

“I never really liked school from the beginning. Even if I were offered the chance to return or join an equivalency program, I wouldn't want to. During computer classes, I was often forced to help classmates who didn't understand, and then the pandemic made me even less motivated to attend school since I got used to studying at home. Many of my friends also dropped out, so when a relative invited me to work, I joined to earn my own money. I've worked in factories, workshops, and taken on various informal jobs so I wouldn't just stay at home and could earn income. At first, the workplace was quite far, so I didn't stay at home. Now that I'm not working there anymore, I help neighbors when they need assistance while waiting for other job opportunities.” (Interview, August 19, 2026).

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that among children and adolescents from socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds, education is often interpreted pragmatically as a pathway to employment and economic security. Zava et al. (2022) found that academic aspirations and school engagement are closely linked to students' future orientation, but such aspirations tend to weaken when education is perceived as offering limited economic returns. Similarly, Yusof et al. (2023) demonstrate that students' perceptions of the usefulness of education for future employment significantly shape their learning motivation and decisions to persist in or withdraw from school. These findings suggest that the meaning attributed to education is not neutral but is shaped by children's social experiences and economic conditions. The variation in how children interpret education indicates that the culture of education among school dropouts is not homogeneous; rather, it is constructed through diverse social experiences, family backgrounds, and economic positions. Children who continue to value schooling tend to position education as a means of acquiring symbolic capital in the form of educational credentials. In contrast, those who no longer consider schooling important tend to replace educational value with work experience and income as sources of social legitimacy.

From this perspective, educational certificates can be understood as institutionalized cultural capital, as well as symbolic capital that derives its value from recognition and legitimation within the labor market and broader social structures (Bourdieu, 1986). When schooling is interpreted primarily as a means to obtain

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credentials, education functions as an instrument for accessing economic opportunities rather than as a process of cultural internalization. In this context, schools are positioned more as tools for achieving economic mobility than as spaces for character formation and social development. In line with this, education is often viewed as a means of producing individuals with general knowledge as a form of future investment, rather than as a space for holistic personal development shaped by social context (Laksono, 2016).

Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework of forms of capital, the ways in which children interpret education illustrate how cultural and symbolic capital are negotiated in everyday life. Educational credentials are valued because they can be converted into economic capital through access to employment. However, when children begin to earn income from informal sector work, economic capital derived from work experience can gradually replace the legitimizing function of formal education. This finding highlights a significant insight: in the context of urban poor communities, work experience and the ability to generate income may substitute for the legitimacy of formal education in the eyes of some school dropouts. In other words, economic capital obtained through labor is increasingly perceived as more valuable than formal cultural capital in the form of educational credentials.

### **Family Perspectives and Support toward Education among School Dropouts**

The cultural value of education within families of school dropouts is reflected in a strong belief that schooling is important and should ideally be undertaken by every child. Parents of school dropouts generally perceive education as playing a crucial role in shaping the future, despite the fact that they themselves or their children have been unable to complete the expected levels of schooling. In this context, education is understood as an ideal social norm, while dropping out is viewed as an undesirable condition, even when it is perceived as unavoidable. This perspective reveals a gap between the cultural value families attach to education and their actual capacity to realize it.

Nearly all parents regard education as an investment in their children's future, although it is sometimes simultaneously perceived as a financial burden due to economic constraints. Educational success is often associated with the possibility of securing decent employment and achieving a better quality of life. Furthermore, the cultural value of education is shaped by family dynamics, including parental expectations toward children. Education is viewed as a responsibility that children must fulfill to meet parental expectations and avoid disappointment. These expectations are often accompanied by specific emphases. For instance, some parents believe that boys should attain the highest possible level of education, as they are expected to become breadwinners responsible for supporting their families. As expressed by the mother of AK:

“AK actually dropped out of school because of our mistakes as parents. We were in conflict, and it affected our children, so I feel guilty. I have tried to re-enroll AK in school, but administrative barriers have made the process difficult, and until now my child has not been able to register and often feels discouraged. I regret that my own ego led to AK dropping out, because for me, education is an investment especially for boys, who will eventually work and be responsible for supporting their families.” (Interview, August 24, 2025)

While most parents state that educating both boys and girls is equally important, there remains an implicit distinction: boys are expected to secure stable employment to provide for the family, whereas girls are often assumed to take on domestic roles in the future. Although not always explicitly articulated, these differing expectations indicate that the cultural value of education intersects with gender norms within the family.

These findings suggest that low-income families in Bandung City maintain a generally positive orientation toward education despite economic limitations. In other words, children's discontinuation of schooling is not necessarily the result of a lack of educational awareness within the family, but rather stems from constraints in economic capital that limit the family's ability to realize these values. This finding aligns with Mikus et al. (2020), who demonstrate that family cultural capital contributes to educational success through parenting practices, the transmission of educational values, and support for schooling. Similarly, Tan & Fang (2023) highlight the role of social and cultural capital in shaping children's educational orientations.

However, this study also reveals that the presence of strong educational values within families does not automatically guarantee school persistence. Among families of school dropouts in Bandung City, educational aspirations are often challenged by economic hardship, negative schooling experiences, and the pressures of meeting daily needs. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, this condition reflects an imbalance between cultural capital and economic capital. Families continue to perceive education as a form of social investment capable of improving children's future life chances, yet economic constraints make it

difficult to sustain such investment over time. Thus, the culture of education within these families is inherently ambivalent: education is highly valued as a source of future hope, yet its realization is frequently constrained by the economic realities faced by the family.

However, the cultural value of education within families is not always accompanied by the capacity to provide adequate support. Efforts to return children to school often intersect with financial constraints, children's own willingness to resume schooling, and family perceptions of education. For low-income families, education is frequently not the primary priority, as household attention is largely directed toward meeting basic needs such as food and daily survival. Limited economic capital reduces the capacity for educational investment, rendering schooling less feasible and, at times, less relevant. In this context, education as a long-term investment tends to be overshadowed by more immediate economic demands, leading some parents to deprioritize education in practice, even if they do not explicitly reject its value normatively.

Although economic pressure is often a key factor constraining the continuity of children's education, field findings also reveal contrasting cases in which some children are able to sustain their schooling despite economic hardship. These experiences demonstrate that educational persistence does not solely depend on adequate economic conditions, but is also shaped by awareness, sacrifice, and survival strategies enacted by both children and their families. One informant, EG, managed to continue schooling despite significant financial limitations following the death of their father, with the mother serving as the sole breadwinner through informal labor. Although the family frequently struggled to meet school fee (SPP) payments, EG's mother remained committed to supporting the child's education. At the same time, EG actively contributed by saving pocket money to cover school-related expenses, thereby reducing the financial burden on the family. As expressed by EG's mother:

“As long as my child still wants to go to school, I will always try my best. Even though I have to work irregular jobs like this, if my child is willing and motivated to study, I feel happy. I was even surprised to learn from friends that my child had participated in a competition without telling me. Even though they didn't win, I am still proud. Because we know our financial situation is limited, EG often brings food from home instead of buying snacks at school, and saves the money to purchase school supplies so as not to burden me. I am grateful that my child understands our situation.” (Interview, August 20, 2025)

These findings on the culture of education in Bandung are consistent with studies suggesting that children's educational continuity is not determined solely by family economic conditions, but also by the broader educational culture within society. Research on Minangkabau and Nias fishing families in Padang by [Eriyanti et al. \(2018\)](#) shows that increases in family income do not automatically lead to improved educational outcomes. Among Minangkabau fishing families, economic improvement is often accompanied by a stronger commitment to schooling, as education is viewed as a pathway for social mobility and an exit from physically demanding and uncertain livelihoods. In contrast, among Nias fishing families, increased economic capacity does not necessarily translate into higher educational participation, as formal education is not perceived as a primary necessity, while fishing skills are considered sufficient for sustaining life.

Similarly, [Lareau \(2015\)](#) demonstrates that children's educational success is strongly influenced by family cultural capital and their ability to navigate the education system. Children from more advantaged social groups benefit from closer alignment with institutional norms and expectations, whereas those from marginalized families often face difficulties in navigating schooling and recognizing its long-term benefits. [Reay \(2023\)](#) further highlights that families from different social classes construct distinct meanings of education and adopt varied educational strategies, particularly under conditions of socio-economic constraint. [Gorski \(2016\)](#) also emphasizes that low educational persistence among disadvantaged groups is not merely a matter of family motivation, but is closely linked to inequalities in access to resources, social support, and cultural capital. These findings indicate that the culture of education shapes how families interpret schooling, prioritize household expenditures, and make decisions regarding children's educational trajectories even under relatively similar economic conditions.

Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework, the practices of low-income families who continue to support their children's education can be understood as strategic efforts to accumulate and convert different forms of capital. Despite limited economic capital, these families invest in education because schooling, particularly educational credentials, is perceived as symbolic capital with the potential to enhance future social and economic opportunities. Parental moral support and economic sacrifices, such as engaging in informal labor, represent concrete practices of accumulating cultural and social capital that enable educational continuity despite structural constraints. This study contributes a novel insight by demonstrating that educational persistence among low-income families is not solely determined by economic capital, but also by the family's

capacity to simultaneously mobilize social, cultural, and symbolic capital. In doing so, this research extends previous studies that have tended to position poverty as the primary determinant of school dropout.

### **Factors Contributing to School Dropout: The Meaning of Schooling**

The culture of education embedded within families and social environments shapes how children perceive the role of schooling in their lives. Values, expectations, and experiences transmitted within the family not only influence children's decisions to remain in or leave school, but also construct the subjective meanings attached to schooling itself. On the one hand, educational culture can function as a driving force that sustains children's participation in formal education, particularly when schooling is understood as a pathway toward a better future. On the other hand, when the culture of education is weak, or when schooling is experienced as a site of economic, academic, and psychological pressures, it may instead be perceived as a burden that is difficult to sustain. These perceptions are shaped by children's experiences in navigating the demands of formal education, which do not always align with their family's socio-economic conditions. In many cases, the accumulation of such pressures leads children to interpret school not as a space for self-development, but as a source of strain.

One of the key factors contributing to school dropout is the economic limitation of families, which affects children's ability to meet the demands of formal education. Economic pressure is not limited to school fees, but also includes the ability to provide supporting resources such as mobile phones, internet access, uniforms, and other school supplies. During the period of online learning, these constraints became more pronounced, as schools required access to digital devices that were not equally available to all families. This is reflected in RD's statement:

“At first, I stopped going to school because I felt embarrassed for not having a mobile phone or gadget during COVID-19, while classes were conducted online and required a phone to complete and submit assignments. My parents couldn't afford to buy one. I felt ashamed to borrow from neighbors, so I decided to stop schooling rather than be unable to participate. My friends and teachers even came to persuade me to return, but I refused. Besides, both of my older siblings also dropped out, so I followed them. Sometimes I help my father with informal work so I don't just stay at home.” (Interview, August 26, 2026).

The absence of learning facilities not only leads to delays in completing schoolwork, but also generates psychological pressure in the form of shame and feelings of inferiority. Children perceive themselves as different from their peers and unable to meet the standards expected by the school. Under such conditions, schooling is no longer experienced as a space for learning, but rather as a setting that visibly exposes the family's economic limitations. Mutiara (2021) demonstrates that online learning during the pandemic exacerbated educational inequality, as not all students had adequate access to learning facilities. When children are unable to effectively participate in the learning process, feelings of exclusion and inadequacy accumulate, ultimately encouraging them to withdraw from school.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this condition reflects the absence of objectified cultural capital, namely, the possession of material resources recognized as integral to educational practice, such as digital devices, books, and school equipment. Without such capital, children are unable to perform according to the cultural standards of educational institutions, leading them to perceive schooling as a symbolic and social burden. This finding highlights that school dropout is not solely the result of poverty, but also stems from children's inability to meet the culturally legitimized standards imposed by the schooling system.

In addition to economic burdens, schooling is also experienced as an academic burden. Several children reported that school subjects were perceived as difficult and misaligned with their interests. The pressure to achieve specific grades in order to progress to the next level, along with repeated remedial requirements, contributed to declining motivation to learn and, ultimately, to decisions to leave school. This experience is illustrated in FJ's account:

“I lost interest in school because I don't like studying. I started waking up late on purpose so I would be late and not go to school. It began when I entered junior high school and had to take remedial classes. From that point, I decided I didn't want to go to school anymore because I didn't enjoy learning. Teachers and friends often came to persuade me to return, but I would run away because I didn't want to go back. Since my parents were afraid I might run away again, they stopped forcing me to attend school, and now I prefer working because it feels more beneficial as I can earn money.” (Interview, August 19, 2025).

Repeated experiences of academic failure lead children to feel incompetent and lose self-confidence. Consequently, school is perceived not as a space for growth, but as an environment characterized by pressure and repeated failure. This finding is consistent with Rosada & Lestari (2022), who show that boredom with

school routines and academic pressure are key factors in declining student motivation. Similarly, [Gubbels et al. \(2019\)](#) identify negative attitudes toward school as one of the strongest risk factors for absenteeism and dropout, shaped by a combination of learning difficulties, low academic achievement, and limited support from both school and family environments.

From the perspective of Bourdieu's forms of capital, these academic experiences reflect limited cultural capital in relation to the demands of educational institutions. When children are unable to achieve academic recognition, schooling loses its symbolic meaning as a pathway for social mobility and instead becomes an arena of social pressure. Beyond economic and academic pressures, psychological burdens also play a significant role in driving school dropout. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds often experience feelings of shame, inferiority, and social exclusion when they are unable to meet the material and social expectations of schooling compared to their more advantaged peers. These conditions are further exacerbated by negative social experiences within the school environment, including peer conflict, difficulties in social adaptation, and bullying. This is reflected in AM's statement:

"I dropped out of school because I was often sick, I have a gastric condition, so I missed school frequently. Because of that, I felt insecure and ashamed, and I didn't have friends at school. I didn't want to go back because I felt embarrassed being alone without friends. Now I feel indifferent when I see others my age going to school. Compared to formal schooling, I prefer teaching Qur'an recitation near my home, and I would like to attend an Islamic boarding school, but my parents cannot afford it." (Interview, August 20, 2025).

These experiences indicate that schools may lose their function as safe and supportive spaces for children. [Gao et al. \(2019\)](#) find that difficulties in adapting to the social environment of school, including conflict and isolation, are significant contributors to dropout. Similarly, [Habibi & Setiawan \(2017\)](#) show that feelings of shame and challenges in building new social relationships are major barriers for children attempting to return to school. From a form of capital perspective, these psychological and social experiences reflect limited social capital in terms of children's ability to build relationships and gain acceptance within the school environment. When children fail to obtain social recognition and a sense of belonging, schooling is no longer perceived as a space for personal development, but rather as an environment that reinforces feelings of alienation and social failure.

Despite the fact that schooling is often experienced as an economic, academic, and psychological burden, the findings reveal that it is not perceived entirely negatively. Beneath these pressures and discomforts, school continues to hold meaningful significance for children as a social space and a cultural arena in which experiences of togetherness, identity formation, and peer relationships are constructed. Most of the children interviewed expressed that what they missed about school was not primarily classroom learning, but rather everyday experiences such as commuting with friends, playing within the school environment, and spending time in the school canteen. This finding highlights that peer relationships constitute a central component of children's educational experiences. When children feel accepted and develop a sense of belonging within peer groups, school tends to be perceived as an enjoyable and worthwhile space to maintain. Conversely, when children experience social isolation or lose connections with peers, their attachment to school weakens, thereby increasing the risk of dropout.

This finding aligns with [Dinesen \(2026\)](#), who argues that educational experiences are not limited to formal learning processes but also involve the formation of identity, a sense of belonging, and children's social relationships with their surrounding environment. In the context of this study, children's longing for school is largely rooted in shared experiences and social relations rather than academic activities. [Eslamian et al. \(2023\)](#) similarly demonstrate that the desire to return to school can serve as an initial motivational resource for out-of-school children, although its realization remains constrained by structural and cultural barriers. In urban contexts such as Bandung, schools continue to be regarded as important institutions functioning not only as sites of learning but also as spaces for play and social development. This suggests that schools are understood not merely as formal educational institutions but also as social environments where children cultivate a sense of belonging within peer communities. Fundamentally, schools perform a dual function: as spaces of formal learning and as arenas of socialization. Within schools, children acquire various social values and skills, including discipline, communication practices, learning habits, and the ability to collaborate with others. Children who drop out lose access to these experiences, including opportunities to engage in routine reading, participate in collective learning environments, and gain recognition as students. Thus, dropping out of school does not simply entail the loss of academic knowledge but also the loss of opportunities to develop social and cultural competencies derived from schooling experiences.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, these everyday practices within school can be understood as forms of cultural capital that support the continuity of children's educational trajectories. This finding is consistent with [Ripamonti and Barberis \(2018\)](#), who show that cultural capital significantly influences the risk of school

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dropout. [Brown et al. \(2025\)](#) further argue that decisions to leave school are shaped not only by poverty but also by educational values embedded within families and social environments. [Kart & Şimşek \(2026\)](#) demonstrate that families can mobilize their cultural capital such as values, aspirations, and beliefs about the importance of education to support children's educational persistence. Therefore, children's educational experiences are the result of interactions among school, family, and the broader social environment, which collectively shape the cultural capital that either sustains or constrains educational continuity. For children from economically disadvantaged families who continue their education, school is often perceived as a pathway out of hardship, although this meaning tends to be pragmatic in nature. Education is valued primarily for its promise of obtaining formal credentials, which are understood as a minimum requirement for securing employment perceived as better than that of their parents. Within this framework, education is not necessarily associated with the process of knowledge acquisition or long-term capacity development, but rather understood as a form of symbolic capital that can be converted into economic capital in the future.

This interpretation is consistent with [Chen et al. \(2023\)](#), who show that children's educational aspirations are shaped through communication and expectations instilled by parents. Other studies indicate that families across diverse social backgrounds continue to regard education as a means of social mobility and improved life opportunities ([Yong et al., 2025](#)). Even under conditions of limited resources, educational aspirations are often maintained as strategies for achieving a better social position ([Drucker, 2024](#)). [Kang & Kim \(2026\)](#) further emphasize the role of parental expectations in shaping children's educational aspirations. Within economically disadvantaged families that continue to support schooling, education is also perceived as a form of non-material inheritance that parents can provide for their children. However, this meaning remains conditional and fragile. [Jiang et al. \(2026\)](#) show that economic constraints affect educational continuity through limited access to family-based cultural capital. When economic pressures intensify or when education is no longer perceived as capable of delivering immediate and tangible returns, school loses its symbolic appeal and is often replaced by alternative strategies considered more realistic, such as entering the workforce at an early age.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the culture of education within families of out-of-school children in Bandung is both ambivalent and dynamic. Education is not always understood as a process of knowledge development; rather, it is more frequently interpreted in pragmatic terms as a means of securing employment and improving living conditions. Within the context of economically disadvantaged urban families, educational culture is shaped through ongoing negotiations between idealized values regarding the importance of schooling and the realities of economic pressure, children's social experiences, and the demands of everyday survival. Accordingly, educational culture can function as a driving force for school persistence when education is perceived as possessing symbolic and economic value. However, it may also weaken when schooling is no longer regarded as relevant to the practical needs of children and their families.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of the anthropology of education by demonstrating that children's decisions to leave school are influenced not only by limitations in economic capital but also by the processes through which education is socially constructed and interpreted within family relationships, school experiences, and peer group interactions. The findings further reveal that work experiences, academic pressures, and social relations outside of school can generate alternative forms of legitimacy that displace the role of formal education in children's lives. The novelty of this study lies in its demonstration that the educational culture surrounding out-of-school children is not singular or fixed, but rather continuously negotiated within the social life of urban communities.

From a policy perspective, these findings highlight the need for more context-sensitive educational approaches that respond to the realities of children from economically disadvantaged urban families. Addressing school dropout cannot rely solely on financial assistance; it also requires strengthening learning systems that are more relevant to children's future orientations, such as the development of skills-based curricula and the provision of social and psychological support for children at risk of leaving school. Such approaches are essential to ensure that schooling is not merely perceived as a formal obligation, but as a meaningful and relevant space in children's lives.

This study is not without limitations. It focuses specifically on the experiences of out-of-school children in the urban context of Bandung, and therefore does not fully capture the dynamics of educational culture in different social settings. In addition, the study primarily emphasizes the perspectives of children and families, without extensively examining the role of educational institutions and broader policy frameworks. Future research is therefore recommended to explore the strategies and contributions of families in sustaining children's educational trajectories, as well as to examine the influence of school environments, peer communities, and educational policies in shaping the culture of education among school-aged children.

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