

EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL READINESS FOR STREET CHILDREN AGED 3–5 YEARS IN DHAKA: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Exploring factors affecting school readiness for street children aged 3-5 years in Dhaka: Perspectives of Parents and Teachers

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1. Source of population

Parents of street-connected children aged 3–5 years and teachers working with young children in formal or non-formal educational programmes in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects: No
- b) Social risk: No
- c) Psychological risk to subjects: No
- d) Discomfort to subjects: No
- e) Invasion of privacy: No

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study: Yes
- b) Procedures to be followed: Yes
- c) Physical risk: Yes
- d) Sensitive questions: Yes
- e) Benefits to be derived: Yes
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study: Yes
- g) Confidential handling of data: Yes
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved: Yes

4. Will signed verbal consent be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants: Yes
- b) from parents or guardian: Yes
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect anonymity of subjects? Yes

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

- a) Proposal: ☒
- b) Consent Form: ☒
- c) Questionnaire or interview schedule: ☒

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Abstract

Street-connected children in Bangladesh face significant barriers to accessing early childhood education, yet limited research has examined school readiness for children aged 3–5 years from the perspectives of parents and teachers. This qualitative exploratory study investigated the barriers to school readiness for street-connected children in Dhaka, Bangladesh, exploring the perceptions of both parents and teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five parents of street-connected children aged 3–5 years and five teachers working in formal and non-formal early childhood settings. Thematic analysis revealed that parents held strong aspirations for their children's education but faced insurmountable barriers including poverty, child labour, geographic isolation from learning centers, and limited institutional support. Teachers demonstrated a holistic understanding of school readiness encompassing communication, social, emotional, and physical development, yet acknowledged inadequate training, insufficient resources, and weak institutional preparedness to effectively support street-connected children. Both parents and teachers showed limited awareness of government programmes, reflecting a profound disconnect between policy commitments and community outreach. The findings underscore the need for accessible community-based early learning centers, comprehensive teacher training in trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate practices, strengthened parent engagement, improved government–NGO coordination, and targeted financial support to reduce economic barriers. This study contributes to the limited body of research on school readiness among preschool-aged street-connected children in Bangladesh and provides evidence to inform early childhood education policy and practice.

Keywords: School readiness; street-connected children; early childhood development; parental perspectives; teacher perspectives

Dedication

To my family, for your love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in me.

To every street-connected child, for your resilience and your right to education.

To the parents and teachers who shared their stories, thank you for trusting me with your voices.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Sarwat Sarah Sarwar, for her invaluable guidance, thoughtful feedback, and unwavering support throughout this research journey. Her expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this study.

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List of Acronyms

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
IDI	In-Depth Interview
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter I: Introduction & Background

Introduction

Early childhood, particularly ages 3–5 years, is widely recognized as a critical period for the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Zahangir et al., 2025). During this stage, children acquire foundational abilities that influence school readiness, social interaction, and future learning outcomes. Early childhood development (ECD) during these years promotes healthy brain development and establishes the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being, particularly for children who have limited access to quality early childhood services. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018; Heckman, 2006).

However, street children in Bangladesh are more likely to miss this important developmental stage due to socioeconomic challenges, unstable living environments, and engagement in survival-related activities such as street work or informal labor (Rahman et al., 2015). Street-connected children in Bangladesh are among the most socially and economically marginalized populations (Rahman & Samadder, 2015). In Dhaka city alone, approximately 249,200 street-connected children live in vulnerable conditions, many of whom are street-working children who engage in informal income-generating activities during the day and return to their families at night (Rahman & Samadder, 2015). This study focuses on street-working children aged 3–5 years who are deprived of critical early developmental opportunities due to poverty, unstable living conditions, and involvement in survival-related work such as begging, waste picking, and assisting in small shops (Rahman et al., 2015). These circumstances may limit their access to structured early learning opportunities during the formative years. As a result, children who lack early learning experiences may face potential long-term challenges, such as delayed language development, difficulties in social-emotional adjustment, and limited academic achievement later in life.

Research shows that these children face extreme socioeconomic disadvantages, including poverty, homelessness, and child labor, which limit their access to early childhood education (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015). Their unstable living conditions, engagement in income-generating activities, and lack of consistent adult supervision make attending early learning programs difficult (Zahangir et al., 2025). Structural barriers such as unsafe living environments, migration, lack of birth registration, and financial dependence on child labor

further restrict participation in educational activities (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015).

Additionally, parental attitudes toward early learning are influenced by socioeconomic pressures and safety concerns, which affect their willingness to send children to structured programs (Zahangir et al., 2025). Families living in poverty often depend on children's income-generating activities, such as begging, waste picking, or informal labor, making regular attendance in early learning programs difficult (Zahangir et al., 2025). Furthermore, unstable housing, food insecurity, and limited financial resources reduce parents' ability to prioritize early education over immediate survival needs. Safety concerns, including fear of abuse, trafficking, and unsafe travel conditions, also discourage parents from sending young children to formal or structured early childhood programs (Heckman, 2006; Zahangir et al., 2025).

For this study, street-working children are defined as those who spend most of their daytime hours on the streets engaged in various forms of informal labor but maintain some form of family connection, returning to their families at night. These children typically live with their families in footpath settlements or under the bridges, rather than being entirely orphaned or abandoned. Their families often reside in extreme poverty and depend on the children's daily earnings for household survival. This study specifically targets street-working children aged 3–5 years, a critical developmental window when foundational skills for school readiness are formed. These young children are often engaged in survival-related activities such as begging, waste picking, selling flowers or snacks, and assisting in small roadside shops (Rahman et al., 2015). Their early exposure to street life and labor significantly limits opportunities for structured early learning and exposes them to multiple developmental risks.

Existing research in Bangladesh mainly concentrates on older street children aged 6–15, emphasizing their survival strategies, health risks, violence exposure, and educational deprivation (Rahman & Samadder, 2015). Rahman and Samadder (2015) found that 38.9% of street-connected children had never attended school, while only 50% had some experience of formal primary education. Economic hardship, migration to street life, and negative school experiences were identified as major barriers to educational continuity. However, little attention has been given to preschool-aged street-working children despite early childhood being a crucial period for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development (Heckman, 2006; UNICEF, 2019).

Research also shows limited understanding of school readiness among parents in urban Dhaka. Mehnaz (2013) found that many parents view school readiness only in terms of academic ability and have limited awareness of supportive home literacy practices. In addition, parents' and teachers' perspectives on school readiness for street-working children remain largely unexplored in Bangladesh.

Therefore, this study aims to explore parents' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness for street-working children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city. The study seeks to understand how school readiness is defined by parents and teachers, identify barriers affecting children's readiness for school, and explore the support needed to improve early learning opportunities for this population. This study is significant because it addresses a major research gap regarding early childhood education and school readiness among street-working children aged 3–5 years in Bangladesh. By centering the experiences and perspectives of parents and teachers, the study aims to contribute evidence-based recommendations for developing culturally appropriate and effective early childhood education programs for marginalized children in Dhaka.

Statement of the Problem

Socioeconomic and Environmental Barriers to School Readiness

Street-working children in Bangladesh grow up in circumstances characterized by persistent poverty, unstable living conditions, limited social protection, and irregular family income (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015). For many families, immediate survival takes priority over long-term educational planning, and young children may spend considerable time on the streets engaging in activities such as waste picking, street vending, assisting in roadside shops, collecting recyclable materials, or begging to contribute to household income (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Zahangir et al., 2025). These circumstances reduce children's opportunities to participate in structured early learning and may affect their cognitive, language, social, and emotional development (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Zahangir et al., 2024). In addition, street-working children may experience inadequate nutrition, irregular meals, illness, and unsafe or unpredictable environments, which can affect their attention, emotional security, and readiness to participate in formal learning (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Zahangir et al., 2025). The lack of stable caregiving and nurturing environments may further influence the development of communication, self-regulation, and positive social interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Heckman, 2006). Thus, socioeconomic disadvantage and environmental instability can create

developmental disadvantages from the early years and make it particularly difficult for children aged 3–5 years to develop the foundational skills required for school readiness.

Family, School, and Support-Related Barriers

Family involvement and early learning experiences are also important for children's school readiness. Research indicates that children from low-income families are more likely to experience disadvantages in early literacy, language, and self-regulation (Isaacs & Magnuson, 2011). Parents' engagement in conversations, asking questions, explaining ideas, and providing supportive learning experiences can contribute to children's language and early literacy development (Swick, 2007). However, parents of street-working children may have limited time, energy, educational resources, or awareness to provide such experiences because of long working hours and ongoing economic pressures (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Zahangir et al., 2025). Parental involvement, communication, and emotional support are particularly important for children's adjustment and early school success (Negovan, 2014). At the same time, children who have limited experience in structured learning environments may face difficulties with attention, behavioral regulation, communication, or interaction with teachers and peers. Such behaviors may be interpreted as signs of being "unready" rather than as responses to poverty, instability, or limited previous educational experiences (Sabol et al., 2018). Teachers' understanding and support are therefore important in helping these children transition into formal education.

Research Gap and Need for the Study

Despite growing recognition of early childhood as a critical period for cognitive, language, social, and emotional development (Heckman, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), research in Bangladesh has largely focused on older street children and their survival, health, and educational experiences (Rahman & Samadder, 2015). Comparatively little attention has been given to street-working children aged 3–5 years, particularly in relation to school readiness (Hossain & Alam, 2016). Existing research also suggests that parents and teachers may understand school readiness differently. While parents may place greater emphasis on academic abilities, teachers may also consider social, emotional, behavioral, and communication skills important for successful school entry (Mehnaz, 2013; Swick, 2007). However, there is limited evidence regarding how parents and teachers in Dhaka understand school readiness specifically for street-working children and what barriers or forms of support they identify as important. Without understanding these perspectives, early childhood

programs may not adequately address the realities and needs of this vulnerable population. Therefore, the present study explores parents' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness for street-working children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city, focusing on how readiness is understood, the barriers that affect children's preparation for school, and the support needed to improve their early learning opportunities.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore school readiness among street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city who have parents or a parent, with particular emphasis on parents' and teachers' perceptions of what school readiness means for this population. The study seeks to understand how parents and teachers define school readiness, what skills and abilities they consider important for children before entering formal school, and what barriers may prevent street-connected children from developing these foundational skills. It also aims to explore the challenges faced by these children in accessing early learning opportunities, regardless of whether or not they are engaged in street-based work, and the support that parents and teachers believe is necessary to prepare them for successful school entry.

The study further aims to understand the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the role of early learning programs in supporting the holistic development of street-connected children. By examining their experiences and perceptions, the study seeks to identify the educational, family, socioeconomic, and environmental factors that influence school readiness and to explore how early learning opportunities can be made more accessible and appropriate for this vulnerable population. The findings are expected to provide insights that can contribute to the development of culturally appropriate and inclusive early childhood education programs and inform relevant stakeholders about the support needed to improve school readiness among street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city.

Significance of the study

Understanding Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions

This study is significant because it captures parents' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness for street children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city, offering insight into how local communities understand and define readiness for this vulnerable population. Understanding these perspectives can inform the design of early childhood programs that promote school readiness in ways that are culturally suitable, practically workable, and attentive to the distinct

developmental vulnerabilities of street-connected children (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Begum, 2018).

Addressing the Research Gap

Street children aged 3–5 years remain among the most neglected and invisible groups within Bangladesh's education system, yet school readiness during this critical period lays the foundation for later academic success and life outcomes (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Shekh & Farid, 2016; Heckman, 2006). Despite their urgent developmental requirements, very few studies have concentrated specifically on school readiness for this early age bracket, especially in Dhaka city's urban setting, where rapid urban expansion, internal migration, and economic hardship intensify existing disadvantages (Rahman et al., 2015; Uddin, 2014). In the absence of focused research and reliable evidence on what constitutes school readiness for street children, early childhood education efforts risk overlooking the particular developmental obstacles these children encounter before they ever enter a classroom (UNICEF, 2019).

Importance of Stakeholder Perspectives

The views of parents and teachers are essential to understanding school readiness, as their beliefs and actions influence children's developmental outcomes, program delivery, and lasting viability (Zahangir et al., 2025; Epstein, 2011). Families living on the streets often face urgent survival needs, safety apprehensions, and financial strains that shape their understanding of what it means for a child to be "ready" for school and whether they prioritize early learning activities at home (Swick, 2007). Similarly, educators' preparedness and their beliefs about their ability to effectively teach street children significantly shape how they assess readiness and what support they provide (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; OECD, 2017). By examining these stakeholder viewpoints on school readiness, this study can contribute to developing practical, acceptable, and contextually relevant interventions that prepare street children for formal schooling. Ultimately, the research seeks to produce evidence-informed recommendations that influence government policy, broaden access to school readiness programs, and deliver meaningful developmental support for street children in Dhaka city (Zahangir et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

Contribution to Early Childhood Education and Policy

Although existing literature records the economic deprivation, health hazards, and coping mechanisms of street children in Bangladesh (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015; Hakim & Rahman, 2015), little research has specifically addressed school readiness for those

aged 3–5 years. In particular, empirical evidence is scarce regarding how parents and teachers define school readiness for street children, what barriers they identify, and how organized early learning centers or state-supported programs might mitigate the developmental vulnerabilities that hinder school readiness. Moreover, earlier investigations seldom examine the perspectives of key stakeholders, especially parents and teachers, concerning school readiness for this population. Stakeholder perspectives are vital because parental support for early learning at home and teacher preparedness to address developmental delays significantly affect children's school readiness outcomes (Epstein, 2011; Begum, 2018; Swick, 2007). Therefore, investigating the opinions of parents and teachers is crucial for understanding the practicality and prospective impact of early childhood education programs designed to promote school readiness for street-connected children in Dhaka city.

Overall Significance of the Study

In summary, earlier research has shown that street children in Bangladesh encounter numerous interconnected obstacles, including poverty, housing instability, poor nutrition, and social marginalization, all of which restrict their developmental opportunities and compromise their readiness for school (Hossain & Alam, 2016 has shown that street children in Bangladesh encounter numerous interconnected obstacles, including poverty, housing instability, poor nutrition, and social marginalization, all of which restrict their developmental opportunities and compromise their readiness for school (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015; Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Zahangir et al., 2025; Shekh & Farid, 2016). Research from other contexts has demonstrated that socioeconomic disadvantage remains one of the strongest predictors of low school readiness, with children from low-income families scoring significantly lower on measures of early literacy, language, and self-regulation (Isaacs & Magnuson, 2011). Additionally, negative engagement in early childhood settings, including conflict with teachers or peers and lack of behavioral control, has been shown to predict poor academic and social outcomes that undermine school readiness (Sabol et al., 2018). However, there is insufficient evidence examining how early educational interventions could address these school readiness challenges during the formative years of 3–5 years for street children in Bangladesh. This gap underscores the necessity for further research that not only addresses access to early childhood education but also considers the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding what school readiness means and how government-supported programs can improve developmental outcomes for street children in Dhaka city (Uddin, 2014; UNESCO, 2021).

Research Questions

- What are the perceived barriers to school readiness for street children aged 3–5 years from the perspectives of both parents and teachers in Dhaka city?

Sub-Questions

1. What factors do parents and teachers perceive as contributing to barriers to school readiness among street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city?
2. What are parents' and teachers' views on government-supported early learning programs, and what supports do they recommend to address school readiness barriers for street children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka city?

Operational Definition

- **Street-connected children:** Children aged 3–5 years who spend a significant amount of time in street environments and may engage in street-based activities, while remaining connected to one or both parents or their families. In this study, the term refers to children who may or may not regularly participate in street-based work but whose daily lives and access to services are influenced by their connection to street environments and vulnerable living conditions (Rahman & Samadder, 2015).
- **Street-working children:** Children who participate in income-generating or survival-related activities in street environments. Such activities may include begging, waste picking, selling flowers, snacks, or other items, collecting recyclable materials, or assisting in small roadside shops or businesses. In this study, street-working children are considered a subgroup of street-connected children who may engage in such activities as part of their family's livelihood (Rahman et al., 2015).
- **School readiness:** The range of developmental skills, abilities, and competencies that help children enter school, adjust to the school environment, participate in classroom activities, and engage successfully in learning. These include not only early academic abilities but also physical, social, emotional, communication, behavioral, and self-regulation skills that support children's successful transition to formal schooling (SEPTAN, 2005).
- **Early Childhood Development (ECD):** A multidimensional process through which children develop their physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional abilities during the early years of life. ECD encompasses the period from birth through approximately 8 years of

age and is influenced by children's relationships, caregiving environments, health, nutrition, learning opportunities, and broader social and environmental conditions (WHO, 2018).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Street children in Bangladesh represent one of the most socially and economically marginalized populations globally. Existing literature primarily examines their survival strategies, socio-economic backgrounds, and exposure to risk rather than structured educational development, particularly in early childhood (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015; Shekh & Farid, 2016). This review synthesizes previous research under multiple central themes related to street children, school readiness, and early childhood development (ECD). The review draws upon scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, research reports, and international policy documents.

Theme 1: Definition and Categorization of Street Children

The term "street children" lacks a universally accepted definition, creating challenges for research and policy development (Begum, 2018; Rahman & Samadder, 2015). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2003), street children are individuals below 18 years of age who live, work, play, and sleep on the streets while being deprived of their basic rights. UNICEF (1986) broadly defines street children as minors who live and earn their livelihood primarily on the street, while receiving inadequate care, direction, and supervision from responsible adults (cited in Shekh & Farid, 2016, p. 3).

Researchers have identified multiple categories of street children. Rahman and Samadder (2015) classify street children into four distinct groups: First, orphan children living permanently on the streets; Second, slum-dwelling children who spend most of their daytime playing or working on the streets but return to their families at night; Third, street children without guardians (lost, abandoned, eloped, or separated from families); and Fourth, street children with guardians who become street-connected due to their parents' migration to the street. Similarly, Begum (2018) distinguishes between street-living children, street-working children, and children at risk of coming to the streets. In line with these classifications, this study focuses on street-connected children aged 3–5 years who spend significant time in street environments, may or may not participate in street-based activities, and remain connected to one or both parents or their families. This categorization is essential for understanding the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of street-connected children, particularly those aged 3–5 years who may fall into multiple categories.

Theme 2: Socio-Economic Background and Causes of Street Migration

Poverty and Economic Hardship

Poverty is consistently identified as a primary driver of children's migration to the streets in Bangladesh (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Uddin, 2014). Hossain and Alam (2016) found that most street children come from extremely low-income households with limited parental education and minimal awareness of the importance of early learning. Begum (2018) further highlights that street children face multiple economic barriers, including lack of food, clothing, shelter, and medical facilities.

For younger children, poverty within the family can also limit access to appropriate care, stimulation, and early learning opportunities (Hossain & Alam, 2016). Families experiencing severe economic hardship may prioritize immediate survival needs, making it difficult to provide young children with regular early learning experiences and adequate developmental support (Zahangir et al., 2025).

Family Disintegration and Domestic Violence

Beyond economic factors, family disintegration and domestic violence play significant roles in pushing children to the streets. Rahman and Samadder (2015) found that domestic violence, arguments with parents or step-parents, and corporal punishment are prominent push factors. Conticini and Hulme (2006, cited in Rahman & Samadder, 2015) challenged the dominant notion that poverty alone drives children to the streets, arguing that domestic violence also plays a significant role. For younger children, family instability, conflict, and inadequate caregiving may also affect their safety, emotional security, and opportunities for healthy early development.

Theme 3: Living Conditions and Daily Survival Strategies

Street children in Dhaka face extremely precarious living conditions. Hossain and Alam (2016) reported that 37% of street children live on footpaths, while others reside in railway stations, parks, bus stoppages, and under over-bridges. Families with young children may also live in slums, footpath settlements, or other unstable environments where access to safe shelter and consistent living conditions is limited. Rahman and Samadder (2015) documented that children sleep in public places such as mazar premises, launch terminals, scrap shops, and local slums. The study found that boys primarily sleep in areas like pavements, public parks, and under over-bridges, while girls often live in slums with their parents or relatives.

Begum (2018) noted that street children frequently change their living places due to various problems, including police harassment, theft, and violence. The instability of housing directly impacts children's ability to access consistent early learning opportunities, as survival needs take precedence over educational engagement. For families with young children, unstable housing may further disrupt routines, caregiving, and opportunities for structured early learning.

Theme 4: Violence, Abuse, and Child Protection Concerns

Physical and Verbal Abuse

Street-connected children may experience physical and verbal abuse in their everyday environments. Begum (2018) noted that street children are often subject to discrimination, beating, torture, and sexual harassment. For children aged 3–5 years, exposure to violence during this formative period can lead to toxic stress, which disrupts brain development, impairs emotional regulation, and undermines the development of secure attachments necessary for healthy social-emotional development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research on child abuse in Bangladesh indicates that approximately 89% of children aged 1–14 years experience some form of physical or emotional violence from caregivers (Rahman, 2025). For young children in street-connected families, the risk is even higher due to parental stress, overcrowded living conditions, and lack of access to support services.

Parental Substance Abuse and Its Impact on Young Children

Parental substance abuse is a significant concern for young children in street-connected families. Children aged 3–5 years may be primarily affected by their parents' substance use through reduced caregiving capacity, neglect, inconsistent supervision, and emotional unavailability (Rahman & Samadder, 2015; Uddin, 2014). Children whose parents struggle with addiction are at higher risk of neglect, abuse, and developmental difficulties. Additionally, maternal substance use during pregnancy may have lasting effects on children's neurodevelopment, including attention deficits, behavioral problems, and cognitive impairments. Experts emphasize that parents' addiction affects children's personality development and self-confidence (Kamal, 2017). For young children, the consequences of growing up in a household affected by substance abuse include increased risk of developmental delays, behavioral problems, and difficulties forming secure attachments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The stress and instability associated with parental substance abuse compound the other risks faced by children in street-connected families.

Theme 5: Health, Nutrition, and Early Childhood Development

Nutrition and Health

The health and nutritional status of street children in Dhaka is alarming. Hakim and Rahman (2015) found that approximately 65% of street children are underweight, with 77.5% taking meals three times daily and 22.5% eating only twice a day. However, the quality of their meals is very poor in nutritional value. Rahman et al. (2015) reported that street children often eat discarded food considered rationally impure and medically harmful, sometimes stealing or begging for food from hotels and restaurants.

The study by Hakim and Rahman (2015) revealed that about 60.5% of street children are able to take a daily bath, and 61.3% have suffered from various diseases during the three months prior to their study. Common diseases include cold fever, influenza, stomach upset (diarrhea and dysentery), and skin diseases. Begum (2018) documented that undernourishment, hazardous environments, and adversity obstruct children's development during their growing age. Heckman (2006) established that early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development, with skill formation following a dynamic process where early inputs strongly affect the productivity of later inputs. Malnutrition and frequent illness during this critical period can lead to "toxic stress," a condition that inhibits brain cell connections and the achievement of developmental potential (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; High et al., 2008). The World Health Organization (2018) emphasizes that nurturing care for early childhood development, including health, nutrition, security, and early learning, is essential for children to reach their developmental potential. However, young children in street-connected families lack access to such nurturing environments, compromising their school readiness (Zahangir et al., 2025; Hossain & Alam, 2016).

Early Learning Environments

The home learning environments of young children in street-connected families are characterized by minimal stimulation. UNICEF (2010) reported that less than 50% of parents of children under five in Bangladesh provide care that supports early learning such as reading books aloud, singing songs, telling stories, or drawing with their child. For families living in extreme poverty, this percentage is even lower. The absence of age-appropriate learning materials, books, and toys combined with parents' limited time and energy means that children aged 3–5 years receive little cognitive or language stimulation during the critical window when brain development is most rapid (UNICEF, 2019; World Health Organization, 2018). Research

by Mehnaz (2013) and Swick (2007) emphasizes that parental involvement with children is crucial for school readiness, yet many parents in low-income settings are less engaged with their children due to economic pressures and limited awareness of early childhood development.

Theme 6: Educational Status and Barriers to Schooling

Low Enrollment and Limited Access to Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The educational status of street children in Dhaka is extremely poor. Rahman and Samadder (2015) found that out of 36 respondents, 18 (50%) had experienced formal schooling at the basic level, while 14 (38.9%) had never been to school, and 4 (11.1%) had experienced other types of schooling such as madrasa or non-formal NGO schools. Hossain and Alam (2016) reported even lower enrollment rates, with only 6.66% of respondents enrolled in any educational institution and 93.34% non-enrolled.

Barriers to School Readiness for Young Children

Research on school readiness for street children aged 3–5 years is extremely limited in the Bangladesh context. However, international research provides insights into barriers that likely apply. Isaacs and Magnuson (2011) found that socioeconomic disadvantage remains one of the strongest predictors of low school readiness, with children from low-income families scoring significantly lower on measures of early literacy, language, and self-regulation compared to their more affluent peers.

Sabol, Bohlmann, and Downer (2018) demonstrated that children who exhibited higher levels of negative engagement in preschool classrooms, including conflict with teachers or peers and lack of behavioral control, demonstrated lower performance across literacy, language, and self-regulation domains. For street-connected children who may lack prior experience in structured group settings and may struggle with trust, attention, or impulse control, this barrier is particularly significant.

Swick (2007) emphasized that parents are children's first teachers and that greater use of discourse practices, such as engaging in conversation, asking questions, and explaining ideas, is associated with higher vocabulary and language skills. However, for street-connected families, parents often lack the time, energy, or awareness to engage in intentional teaching or rich verbal interaction with their young children, further compromising school readiness.

Negovan (2014) found that parental style represents a more powerful predictor of children's school performance than socio-demographic characteristics such as family structure, size, or educational level. Children who feel loved and sense their parents' involvement are more likely to achieve academic success. However, for street-connected children, parents may be emotionally unavailable due to stress, mental health challenges, or the demands of survival work.

Theme 7: Parental Involvement and Family Support

Limited Parental Engagement

Parental involvement in children's early learning is severely limited among street-connected families. Swick (2007) found that parents are children's first teachers, and greater use of discourse practices is associated with higher vocabulary and language skills. However, Swick also found that intentional teaching practices were associated with children's significantly higher letter identification scores. For street-working families, parents often lack the time, energy, or awareness to engage in such practices.

Uddin (2014) noted that many parents of street-connected children struggle with economic instability, limited education, and lack of awareness regarding long-term educational benefits and the importance of early childhood development. Immediate survival priorities influence decisions about children's time use and school participation (Begum, 2018; Hakim & Rahman, 2015).

Street Families and Support Networks

Despite the challenges, some street children maintain connections with their families. Rahman and Samadder (2015) found that 50% of respondents were under the guardianship of their mother, and 27.5% came to Dhaka with their mothers. The study documented the concept of "street family" alternative forms of social units among street-connected children based on profession, dwelling places, age, gender, and prevalence of substance abuse. These networks provide means of survival, identity, reciprocity, and opportunities for creating mutual support. However, the quality of care and stimulation within these networks is typically insufficient to promote optimal early childhood development. Negovan (2014) demonstrated that school performance at the beginning of formal schooling depends largely on parents' involvement, including communication and affective support, as well as on the practiced parental style. The absence of consistent, nurturing relationships with adults who can provide cognitive and emotional stimulation represents a critical barrier to school readiness for young street children.

Theme 8: Early Childhood Development Interventions

There is limited evidence of early childhood development interventions specifically designed for street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Bangladesh. Although several early childhood initiatives have been developed for children from low-income, disadvantaged, and marginalized communities, these programs are not specifically designed for or targeted at street-connected children. Several initiatives have been developed to support early childhood development among disadvantaged populations in Bangladesh. BRAC's Play Labs provide safe spaces where children aged 3–5 engage in playful activities, supported by a flexible play-based curriculum led by non-formal educators called Play Leaders (BRAC, n.d.). Research on the Play Labs found that they enable children regardless of their initial readiness or level of privilege, to enter kindergarten equally prepared (Columbia University, 2022). The study also found that parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to early childhood development improved significantly through participation in the Play Labs, demonstrating the importance of engaging parents in early childhood interventions. Similarly, community-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers have been established in garment worker communities and urban slums to provide safe, nurturing environments for young children. These centers serve as a trusted alternative to unsafe childcare, allowing working mothers to work with peace of mind (Terre des Hommes, 2025).

UNICEF has supported a total of 7,858 early learning centers in Bangladesh, located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, urban slums, tea gardens, and other disadvantaged areas. Each center hosts between 25 and 30 children and serves as an entry point to further education, playing an interface role between homes and primary schools (UNICEF, 2010). These centers provide age-appropriate early learning and school readiness for young children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The YOU Foundation has established four new Early Childhood Development units, enrolling 100 preschool children aged 4–6 years, with workshops for parents on children's participation in classes and protection from exploitation (YOU Stiftung, 2023). The Government of Bangladesh has initiated the process of establishing pre-primary schools attached to government primary schools and is aiming to achieve universal pre-primary education (UNICEF, 2010).

Theme 9: School Readiness as a Multidimensional Concept

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) identified three components of school readiness: (1) readiness in the child, (2) schools' readiness for children, and (3) family and community

support and services that contribute to children's readiness (Child Trends, 2000; High et al., 2008). The NEGP highlighted five dimensions of children's school readiness: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge.

Maxwell and Clifford (2004) emphasized that school readiness is more than just about children; it involves children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Schools have the responsibility to educate all children who are old enough to legally attend school, regardless of their skills. This perspective is particularly relevant for street children, who may enter school with significant developmental delays but still have the right to education.

Global Evidence on School Readiness Outcomes

Warburton et al. (2024) demonstrated that school readiness measures conducted at age 4–5 years identify children who are nearly three times as likely to be NEET (not in employment, education, or training) 12 years later (11% vs. 4%). The study found that children who did not reach a Good Level of Development were significantly more likely to later be classified as NEET. This association was mainly realized indirectly through academic attainment, but a direct effect was also observed, suggesting that non-academic aspects of school readiness (e.g., social skills) may be important for long-term outcomes.

Marti et al. (2018) found that higher levels of parent involvement in the Getting Ready for School intervention were associated with greater gains in early literacy, math, and self-regulatory skills among preschoolers from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Children whose parents attended more events showed more growth in pre-literacy, language, and delay of gratification skills, while greater parental time spent doing activities at home was associated with greater gains in early literacy and math skills.

Theme 10: Early Childhood Development and Holistic Development

The Critical Period of Early Childhood

Heckman (2006) established that early childhood is a critical period for skill formation, with early inputs strongly affecting the productivity of later inputs. The architecture of the brain and the process of skill formation are influenced by an interaction between genetics and individual experience. The mastery of skills essential for economic success follows hierarchical rules, with later attainments building on foundations laid down earlier.

The World Health Organization (2018) emphasizes that nurturing care for early childhood development, including health, nutrition, security, and early learning, is essential for children to reach their developmental potential. Early childhood development encompasses multiple interconnected domains, including physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development, as well as self-regulation and learning abilities. However, street children in Dhaka lack access to such nurturing environments due to poverty, unstable living conditions, and limited social protection (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015).

Implications for Street Children

The absence of a stable and nurturing environment during the early years hinders the development of self-regulation, communication skills, and positive peer interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Heckman, 2006). Health and nutrition challenges further affect the development of street children, with high levels of undernutrition, irregular eating habits, and frequent exposure to illness (Hakim & Rahman, 2015; Zahangir et al., 2025). These conditions negatively influence physical health, cognitive and language development, social and emotional well-being, self-regulation, attention, and learning readiness, making it more difficult for children to participate effectively in formal education.

UNICEF (2019) reported that children between the ages of 3 and 6 experience more than 85% of their brain development during these years, providing a critical window of opportunity for girls and boys to build the foundations of learning and develop skills that can help them succeed in school and over the course of their lives. The failure to provide quality early childhood education during this window represents a missed opportunity that has long-term consequences for individual children and society.

Theme 11: Policy and Legal Frameworks

National and International Commitments

Bangladesh has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has developed national policies including the Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy and the National Children Policy 2011. The government has also introduced one year of pre-primary education within the government primary education system (MOPME, 2008, cited in Mehnaz, 2013).

UNESCO (2021) and the OECD (2017) have documented global progress toward universal pre-primary education, but significant gaps remain. Only half of the world's preschool-age

children are enrolled in pre-primary education, with 175 million children missing out. In low-income countries, nearly 8 in 10 children (78%) are not enrolled.

Implementation Gaps

Despite these commitments, research shows gaps in implementation when it comes to highly marginalized urban populations (Rahman et al., 2015; Zahangir et al., 2025). Shekh and Farid (2016) demonstrated that street-connected children often lack access to basic social protection, including education, healthcare, and child protection services. Rahman et al. (2015) argued that street children remain excluded from mainstream services due to systemic barriers and weak coordination among service providers.

Mehnaz (2013) found that many parents in urban Dhaka view school readiness narrowly in terms of academic ability and have limited awareness of supportive home literacy practices. For street-connected families, this gap may be even wider, as survival concerns overshadow educational planning. The lack of understanding of the true notion of school readiness among parents needs to be considered attentively.

Theme 12: Research Gaps and Recommendations for Future Study

The literature review reveals significant research gaps regarding school readiness for street children aged 3–5 years in Bangladesh. Most existing research focuses on older street children aged 6–15 years, emphasizing survival strategies, health risks, violence exposure, and educational deprivation (Rahman & Samadder, 2015; Shekh & Farid, 2016). Very little attention has been given to preschool-aged street children, despite early childhood being a crucial period for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development (Heckman, 2006; UNICEF, 2019).

There is minimal empirical exploration of how government-supported early learning centers could operate in urban street contexts, particularly for children aged 3–5 years (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2015). Research on parents' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness for street children is almost nonexistent in Bangladesh. Understanding stakeholder perceptions is essential because program effectiveness depends not only on policy but also on acceptance, feasibility, and community trust (Epstein, 2011).

The OECD (2017) has called for additional efforts to fill remaining gaps in system-level indicators, including more robust and comparable indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings that enroll children under the age of 3 (OECD, 2017). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), Starting Strong, the Policy Review on Quality in

ECEC, and the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study represent ongoing efforts to develop the scope of available data on ECEC globally (OECD, 2017).

Chapter III: Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research aimed to explore perceptions, beliefs, and expectations regarding school readiness barriers for street children rather than measure quantitative outcomes. The exploratory nature of the study allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents and teachers perceive the challenges street children face in preparing for formal schooling. This design was particularly suitable for capturing the rich, contextualized experiences of participants living and working in marginalized urban settings.

The research focused specifically on street children aged 3–5 years, as early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. By exploring the perspectives of both parents and teachers, the study sought to identify barriers to school readiness from multiple angles. The qualitative approach enabled flexibility in data collection, allowing participants to express their views in their own words and the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes.

Research Site

The study was conducted in selected urban areas of Dhaka city where street-connected families resided. Parents were recruited from Korail slum and areas in close proximity to the settlement, where many street-connected families live in extreme poverty and children often engage in survival activities on the streets. This location was chosen because it provided access to parents of young street children who faced significant barriers to early education.

Teachers were recruited from three different locations in Dhaka: Uttara, Basundhara, and Bailey Road. These areas were selected because they host both formal early childhood education settings and non-formal programs. Interviews with parents took place in their homes or nearby community locations within or near Korail slum to ensure comfort and convenience for participants. Interviews with teachers were conducted at their respective educational settings or nearby quiet locations, depending on their availability and preference.

Research Participants

Participants included parents of street-connected children aged 3–5 years and teachers working in early childhood education settings in Dhaka city. A total of 10 participants were selected to allow for detailed analysis. These parents were from low-income families engaged in informal work on the streets.

The teacher group consisted of five early childhood educators. Among them, three were formal teachers working in recognized early childhood education institutions in Uttara, Basundhara, and Bailey Road. The remaining two were informal teachers working in non-formal education programs. These informal teachers worked in alternative or non-formal learning settings that provide educational opportunities to children who may have limited access to formal schooling. They were included because such programs may serve children from disadvantaged backgrounds, making their perspectives relevant to understanding the experiences and educational needs of children who face barriers to formal education.

Sampling Procedure and Participant Selection Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with street-connected children and early education. This sampling method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals who could provide rich and relevant information about school readiness barriers. Parents were selected based on the following criteria: they had at least one child aged 3–5 years, they resided in or near the Korail slum, and their family was engaged in street-connected activities such as informal labor or begging.

Teachers were selected based on their professional experience working with young children. Formal teachers were recruited from early childhood education centers in Uttara, Basundhara, and Bailey Road. Informal teachers were recruited from non-formal programs. All teacher participants had a minimum of one year of experience working with children aged 3–5 years. Potential participants were approached through community contacts, local NGOs, and direct visits to educational settings.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to explore participants' perceptions of school readiness, barriers to early education, challenges faced by street children, and views on government-supported early learning programs. Separate versions of the

questionnaire were prepared for parents and teachers, with questions tailored to each group's unique perspectives and experiences.

The questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor to ensure validity and relevance to the study objectives. Necessary revisions were made based on the feedback received. The questions were written in simple, clear language appropriate for participants with varying literacy levels. For parents who were more comfortable speaking in Bangla, the questionnaire was translated and administered in Bangla to facilitate natural and open responses.

Data Collection Method and Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews (IDIs) using the semi-structured questionnaire. Prior to data collection, the researcher established rapport with participants through informal conversations and community visits. For parents in Korail slum, the researcher spent time getting to know the community and explaining the purpose of the study to build trust. For teachers, initial contact was made through their institutions, and appointments were scheduled at mutually convenient times.

Interviews were conducted in private, quiet locations to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. Parent interviews took place in their homes or nearby community spaces within or near Korail slum. Teacher interviews were conducted at their educational settings or nearby cafes, depending on their preference. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probe deeper into participants' responses, enabling rich data collection.

Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview. All interviews were audio-recorded only after obtaining the explicit consent of participants. In cases where participants were uncomfortable with audio recording, detailed written notes were taken during and immediately after the interview. The researcher also maintained field notes to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and reflections immediately following each interview. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. The flexible nature of the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to adjust questions and probes based on emerging findings during the data collection process.

Data Management and Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which helped identify patterns and meanings from participants' responses. All interviews were first audio-recorded and then transcribed thoroughly, meaning the recordings were written word-for-word. Interviews conducted in Bangla were translated into English during transcription to maintain accuracy and facilitate analysis. The researcher read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data before beginning the coding process.

After transcription, initial codes were developed by identifying important words, phrases, or ideas from participants' responses. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories, and these categories were organized into themes related to school readiness barriers, early learning opportunities, educational challenges, and perspectives on government-supported early learning programs. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected participants' views rather than predetermined assumptions. This step-by-step process helped ensure a systematic and reliable analysis of the collected data. All transcripts and analysis documents were stored securely, with participant identities replaced by pseudonyms or identification numbers to maintain confidentiality.

Validity & Reliability

Several strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The interview questions were developed based on the research objectives, research questions, and relevant literature on school readiness and early childhood development, and were reviewed and refined with guidance from the research supervisor to ensure their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. Before formal data collection, the interview schedule was reviewed, and necessary modifications were made based on the supervisor's feedback. Credibility was further enhanced through engagement with the research sites and participants, peer debriefing with the research supervisor, and member checking with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from two participant groups, parents and teachers, to obtain multiple perspectives on barriers to school readiness.

Ethical Issues

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection began. Participants were provided with a written consent form explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the fact that their anonymized data might be used for publication.

For participants who were unable to read or write, the consent form was read aloud in Bangla, and verbal consent was obtained instead of a signature. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. All participant names were replaced with pseudonyms or identification numbers in transcripts and reports. Any identifying information was removed from the final written outputs. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected device and deleted after transcription was completed. Participants were assured that their responses would not be shared with any third parties, including community leaders, employers, or government authorities. The researcher also took care to minimize any potential distress by avoiding overly sensitive questions and allowing participants to skip any questions they were uncomfortable answering. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted within a limited geographical area of Dhaka city, with parent participants recruited from Korail slum and teacher participants from educational institutions in Uttara, Basundhara, and Bailey Road. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of street-connected children and their families in other urban or rural areas of Bangladesh, where socioeconomic conditions, access to services, and educational opportunities may differ. In addition, the study included a relatively small sample of only ten participants (five parents and five teachers), which may not have captured the full range of perspectives regarding school readiness.

Second, the study experienced some logistical limitations related to time and participant availability during data collection. Parent participants often had irregular work schedules and livelihood responsibilities, while teacher participants had professional commitments that made it difficult to arrange interviews at convenient times. Consequently, scheduling interviews required flexibility from both the researcher and participants. In some cases, the limited availability of participants resulted in shorter interview sessions than initially planned, which restricted the time available for exploring certain responses in greater depth. However, the researcher made efforts to accommodate participants' schedules and obtain sufficient information relevant to the research questions.

Chapter IV: Results/Findings & Discussion

Results/Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study on school readiness among street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka, based on interviews with five parents and five teachers. The findings are organized into two sections: parents’ perspectives and teachers’ perspectives. The themes describe participants’ perceptions of school readiness, the barriers affecting children’s preparation for school, and the support available to children and their families. The findings are presented primarily through participants’ responses, with brief explanations to clarify the main patterns emerging from the interviews.

Findings from Parents’ Perspectives

Theme 1: Parents Value Education and Aspire to Provide a Better Future

All five parents expressed that education is important for their children and associated education with a better future. Although their children were not enrolled in formal early learning programmes, parents expressed a willingness to provide education if suitable opportunities were available.

One parent stated:

“Education is important, but my daughter is not getting any education.”

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Another parent simply identified schooling as the preferred option for the child:

“Going to school.”

(IDI 2, May 15, 2026)

A third parent emphasized that the type of educational institution was less important than having an opportunity to educate the child:

“Education is important. Whether it is a madrasa or a school, whichever opportunity we get to educate our child is important to us.”

(IDI 3, May 16, 2026)

Parents also connected education with improving their children's future. One parent explained:

“Nowadays, education is very important for children. During our time, education was not considered as important, but now life is difficult without it.”

(IDI 4, May 17, 2026)

Another parent stated:

“Education is important to live a better life. Our life has gone anyhow, but I want my child to have a better life.”

(IDI 5, May 18, 2026)

Parents also indicated that they would send their children to a free learning center if one were available nearby. Thus, the findings show that parents generally valued education and expressed aspirations for their children's future, despite their children's limited participation in early learning.

Theme 2: Poverty and Livelihood Demands Restrict School Readiness

Poverty and the need to earn a daily income were identified as major barriers to children's participation in education. Parents described difficulties in meeting school-related expenses and explained that their livelihood responsibilities often took priority over education.

One parent stated:

“Money is the problem. School fees are high. I did not get any support to send her to school.”

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Another explained:

“Money is the problem. If I spend money on their education, how am I supposed to run my home?”

(IDI 2, May 15, 2026)

Similarly, one parent described the pressure of earning a living:

“We are poor and do not have enough money for admission. We have to work; otherwise, we will not survive.”

(IDI 3, May 16, 2026)

The difficulty of balancing work and childcare was also evident:

“My husband and I both work, so there is no one to take him to school. That is why my child goes to work with me.”

(IDI 5, May 18, 2026)

These responses indicate that financial hardship and parents' work responsibilities restricted their ability to provide regular educational opportunities and supervision for their children.

Theme 3: Limited Access to Early Learning Opportunities

Parents reported that the lack of nearby schools or learning centers made participation in early education difficult. Distance and concerns about children's safety were particularly important barriers.

One parent stated:

“There is no school near me, and the schools are far from the slum.”

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Another explained:

“The school is far from our home. That is why we cannot send our child. It is difficult for such a young child to travel that far alone.”

(IDI 3, May 16, 2026)

Safety concerns were also highlighted:

“The school is far away. My child cannot go alone. Someone has to accompany him. The roads are unsafe, and there are no other children to go with him.”

(IDI 4, May 17, 2026)

Another parent confirmed:

“There is no school near us. The schools are far away.”

(IDI 5, May 18, 2026)

The findings therefore show that geographical distance, transportation difficulties, and concerns about children's safety limited access to early learning opportunities.

Theme 4: Children’s Daily Lives Offer Limited Learning Experiences

Parents described daily routines that mainly involved playing, accompanying parents, begging, or other activities rather than structured early learning. These routines provided limited opportunities for children to participate in activities specifically intended to develop school readiness skills.

One parent described the child's routine as:

“She begs with me and plays.”

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Another stated:

“She plays and does nothing else.”

(IDI 2, May 15, 2026)

One parent explained:

“My child wakes up, eats, plays, argues—that is what children do. Sometimes my child picks waste with friends.”

(IDI 3, May 16, 2026)

Another reported:

“My child wakes up, plays, eats, runs around, and does nothing else.”

(IDI 4, May 17, 2026)

Similarly, one parent stated:

“He eats, sleeps, and plays throughout the day.”

(IDI 5, May 18, 2026)

These responses suggest that children's daily routines were largely shaped by their living and livelihood circumstances, with limited exposure to structured learning activities before school entry.

Theme 5: Lack of Institutional and Government Support

Parents reported little or no support from government or other institutions regarding their children's education. Some parents were also unaware of existing programmes or services that might support their children's education.

One parent stated:

"The government did not provide any help for my child."

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Another said:

"I never got any support or heard of any, so I do not know."

(IDI 2, May 15, 2026)

A parent also expressed a desire for government assistance:

"No, we have received no help from the government. I want my child to go to school. I also want the government to help us educate our child."

(IDI 3, May 16, 2026)

The findings indicate that parents experienced limited institutional support and, in some cases, had limited awareness of available government programmes.

Theme 6: Additional Challenges Affecting Children's Development

Parents also identified other circumstances that made it difficult to provide consistent care and learning opportunities. These included disability, parental health difficulties, safety concerns, and limited social support.

One parent described the challenges associated with travelling with her child:

"It is hard to travel with an autistic child. School fees are high."

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

The same parent explained:

"I try to give her time, but since I am also sick, it is hard to give her enough time and care."

(IDI 1, May 12, 2026)

Safety was another concern. One parent explained that the roads were unsafe and that she did not feel comfortable sending her child with neighbours (IDI 4, May 17, 2026). Another parent stated:

"We do not know anyone in Dhaka. That is why my child goes to work with me."

(IDI 5, May 18, 2026)

These responses show that, in addition to poverty and limited access to education, families faced individual and social circumstances that affected their ability to provide stable learning and care environments.

Findings from Teachers' Perspectives

Theme 1: Understanding School Readiness as Holistic Development

Teachers generally described school readiness as preparation for entering and adapting to school rather than simply knowing academic content. Their responses included physical, emotional, social, behavioral, communication, and early learning skills.

One teacher explained:

"Preparing to go to school; helping children feel they are doing something important."

(IDI 1, May 19, 2026)

Another described it as preparation that could take place at home or in preschool:

"Preparing children to join school, either at home or in preschool."

(IDI 2, May 20, 2026)

A teacher emphasized physical and emotional preparation:

"Preparing children physically and emotionally so they can adjust easily to a new environment."

(IDI 3, May 22, 2026)

Another focused on behavioural skills:

"A child should listen to elders, sit calmly, and have some motivation to learn."

(IDI 4, May 23, 2026)

Similarly, one teacher stated:

"Preparing a child for school so they can easily adapt to a new environment."

(IDI 5, May 24, 2026)

Teachers also identified communication, social interaction, self-regulation, physical health, resilience, and early literacy as important skills for children before starting school. Overall, their responses reflected a broad understanding of school readiness across several developmental areas.

Theme 2: Barriers to School Readiness for Street-Connected Children

Teachers identified poverty, child labour, begging, waste collection, family instability, and parents' work responsibilities as major barriers to children's school readiness. These circumstances reduced children's opportunities for learning and contributed to irregular participation in education.

One teacher stated:

“Child labor, begging, waste collection, and helping parents work reduce opportunities for learning and development.”

(IDI 1, May 19, 2026)

Another explained:

“Parents are busy earning a living and cannot spend enough time preparing children for school.”

(IDI 2, May 20, 2026)

A teacher identified several interconnected difficulties:

“Poverty, child labor, family instability, violence, and parental neglect affect school readiness.”

(IDI 3, May 22, 2026)

Another stated:

“Poverty pushes children toward earning money instead of preparing for school.”

(IDI 4, May 23, 2026)

One teacher also noted:

“Unstable family situations limit children's learning opportunities.”

(IDI 5, May 24, 2026)

Teachers further reported irregular attendance caused by work, illness, and family responsibilities, as well as difficulties adjusting to peers and following classroom routines. These findings indicate that children's circumstances before entering school can continue to affect their participation and adjustment after school entry.

Theme 3: Teachers' Readiness and Training Needs

Teachers expressed concerns about whether they were adequately prepared to support street-connected children. Most identified a lack of training, resources, and guidance as important challenges.

One teacher stated:

“No. Many teachers lack training in trauma-sensitive teaching and emotional support.”

(IDI 1, May 19, 2026)

Another explained:

“No. Teachers lack resources, schools, and proper guidelines.”

(IDI 2, May 20, 2026)

A teacher similarly stated:

“No. There are limited opportunities and support for teachers working with street children.”

(IDI 3, May 22, 2026)

One teacher expressed a different perspective:

“They should not discriminate.”

(IDI 4, May 23, 2026)

Another noted:

“It depends on the teacher, but training is necessary.”

(IDI 5, May 24, 2026)

Teachers identified training needs related to children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development, behaviour management, confidence-building, and the educational needs and rights of street-connected children. They also described difficulties in building trust, maintaining children's attention, managing behaviour, supporting self-regulation, and helping children interact with peers.

Theme 4: School and Institutional Readiness

Teachers reported that schools and learning centers were not sufficiently prepared to respond to the needs of street-connected children. They highlighted inadequate training, limited resources, learning gaps, irregular attendance, and insufficient guidelines and support systems.

One teacher stated:

“Support is limited due to irregular attendance and learning gaps.”

(IDI 1, May 19, 2026)

Another explained:

“Not sufficiently prepared because of a lack of training.”

(IDI 2, May 20, 2026)

A teacher stated:

“No. Many educators lack patience and preparation.”

(IDI 3, May 22, 2026)

Another responded:

“No, but they should be.”

(IDI 4, May 23, 2026)

One teacher emphasized the need for stronger institutional guidance:

“No. More guidelines and support systems are needed.”

(IDI 5, May 24, 2026)

The findings indicate that teachers perceived school readiness as involving not only children's preparation but also the capacity of schools and educators to accommodate children with different backgrounds and learning needs.

Theme 5: Government and Community Support

Teachers expressed a need for stronger government and community support for street-connected children. Suggested forms of support included free learning centres, health and nutrition services, inclusive educational environments, educational materials, and stronger implementation of existing programmes.

One teacher recommended:

“Free learning centers and provide health, nutrition, and hygiene support.”

(IDI 1, May 19, 2026)

Another suggested:

“Preschool compulsory and ensuring school readiness guidelines are followed.”

(IDI 2, May 20, 2026)

A teacher emphasized:

“Inclusive educational environments through collaboration with organizations.”

(IDI 3, May 22, 2026)

Another teacher recommended:

“Free access to schools, books, and educational support.”

(IDI 5, May 24, 2026)

Teachers also demonstrated limited awareness of government programmes for street-connected children. One teacher reported that such programmes existed but were limited and insufficient, while another stated that existing programmes were not implemented effectively (IDI-1; May 19, IDI-2; May 20, 2026). The remaining teachers reported that they were not aware of specific government programmes (IDI-3; May 22, IDI-5; May 24, 2026).

The findings indicate that teachers perceived a need for stronger government involvement, better implementation of support programmes, and greater coordination between educational institutions and organizations serving street-connected children.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that school readiness among street-connected children aged 3–5 years is influenced by a combination of individual, family, community, and institutional factors. Parents expressed strong aspirations for their children's education, while teachers understood school readiness as a multidimensional process involving physical, social, emotional, communication, behavioural, and early learning competencies. However, poverty, livelihood demands, limited access to early learning, children's involvement in survival-related activities, safety concerns, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited institutional and government support restricted children's opportunities to develop and demonstrate these

competencies. This interpretation is consistent with the broader conceptualization of school readiness as a shared responsibility involving children, families, schools, and communities (SEPTAN, 2005).

Theme 1: Parents' Educational Aspirations and the Reality of Poverty

One of the most important findings was the strong value parents placed on education despite their disadvantaged circumstances. All participating parents expressed a desire for their children to receive education and associated schooling with a better future. One parent stated, *"Education is important, but my daughter is not getting any education"* (Parent IDI 1, May 12, 2026), while another simply identified *"Going to school"* as the most beneficial opportunity for the child (Parent IDI 2, May 15, 2026). Another parent explained, *"Education is important. Whether it is a madrasa or a school, whichever opportunity we get to educate our child is important to us"* (Parent IDI 3, May 16, 2026). Parents also expressed a strong desire to provide their children with opportunities that they themselves had not received. As one participant explained, *"Education is important to live a better life. Our life has gone anyhow, but I want my child to have a better life"* (Parent IDI 5, May 18, 2026).

These findings suggest that parents' limited participation in early learning should not be interpreted simply as a lack of interest in education. Isaacs and Magnuson (2011) emphasize the importance of parental educational aspirations in children's educational development, while Mehnaz (2013) similarly demonstrates that disadvantaged parents may value education even when socioeconomic circumstances restrict their ability to provide it. The present study supports this distinction between aspiration and access. Parents indicated that they would send their children to a learning centre if it were free and located nearby. Thus, their responses suggest that the primary issue is not whether parents recognize the value of education, but whether they have the resources and opportunities required to act on that recognition.

Poverty was the strongest factor preventing parents from translating their aspirations into educational opportunities. Parents described school fees, admission costs, household expenses, and the need to earn a daily income as competing priorities. One parent stated, *"Money is the problem. If I spend money on their education, how am I supposed to run my home?"* (Parent IDI 2, May 15, 2026). Another explained, *"We are poor and do not have enough money for admission. We have to work; otherwise, we will not survive"* (Parent IDI 3, May 16, 2026). These accounts illustrate how poverty can place education in direct competition with immediate household survival. Previous research has similarly identified poverty and socioeconomic vulnerability as major barriers to the educational participation of street-connected children (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman & Samadder, 2015).

Importantly, poverty also affected parents' availability to support their children's education. One parent explained, *"My husband and I both work, so there is no one to take him to school. That is why my child goes to work with me"* (Parent IDI 5, May 18, 2026). Therefore, the economic barrier extended beyond the direct cost of schooling. Parents' livelihood responsibilities reduced the time available to accompany children, supervise them, and provide learning opportunities at home. This is particularly significant for children aged 3–5 years because they cannot independently travel long distances to educational settings. SEPTAN (2005) emphasizes that school readiness depends partly on the developmental support children receive from their families and communities. When families are required to prioritize daily survival, their ability to provide such support becomes constrained.

Teachers' perspectives reinforced this relationship between poverty and educational opportunity. They identified child labour, begging, waste collection, and helping parents work as major barriers to children's learning. One teacher stated, *"Child labor, begging, waste collection, and helping parents work reduce opportunities for learning and development"* (Teacher IDI 1, May 19, 2026), while another explained, *"Poverty pushes children toward earning money instead of preparing for school"* (Teacher IDI 4, May 23, 2026). These accounts correspond with previous research identifying poverty and survival-related activities as important factors affecting street-connected children's access to education (Hossain & Alam, 2016; Rahman & Samadder, 2015). The present study further demonstrates how these conditions operate in children's everyday lives, limiting both their access to education and the time available for developmental preparation.

Theme 2: Limited Access to Early Learning and Children's Everyday Experiences

Geographical and physical access to early learning opportunities was another major barrier identified by parents. Several parents reported that schools were located far from their homes, making attendance difficult for young children. One parent stated, *"There is no school near me, and the schools are far from the slum"* (Parent IDI 1, May 12, 2026). Another explained, *"The school is far from our home. That is why we cannot send our child. It is difficult for such a young child to travel that far alone"* (Parent IDI 3, May 16, 2026). Safety concerns further intensified the problem. One parent stated, *"The school is far away. My child cannot go alone. Someone has to accompany him. The roads are unsafe, and there are no other children to go with him"* (Parent IDI 4, May 17, 2026).

These findings demonstrate that the physical presence of schools within a city does not necessarily make education accessible to street-connected children. Distance becomes a significant barrier when children are too young to travel independently and parents cannot

accompany them because of livelihood responsibilities. From the perspective of SEPTAN (2005), this is important because school readiness is not solely a characteristic that children develop individually; children also need environments that provide appropriate and accessible opportunities to develop the necessary competencies. Therefore, accessibility should be considered an important component of school readiness for highly marginalized children.

Parents' descriptions of children's daily routines provide further insight into the limited learning opportunities available to them. Children's days were commonly described in terms of playing, eating, sleeping, accompanying parents to work, begging, or collecting waste. One parent stated, *"She begs with me and plays"* (Parent IDI 1, May 12, 2026), while another said, *"She plays and does nothing else"* (Parent IDI 2, May 15, 2026). Another parent described the child's routine as, *"My child wakes up, eats, plays, argues—that is what children do. Sometimes my child picks waste with friends"* (Parent IDI 3, May 16, 2026). A further participant stated, *"He eats, sleeps, and plays throughout the day"* (Parent IDI 5, May 18, 2026).

These accounts do not mean that children have no developmental experiences. Play and interaction with peers are important parts of early childhood. However, parents did not describe regular exposure to guided play, storytelling, books, shared reading, sustained adult-child conversations, or other intentional learning activities. Roskos et al. (2003) emphasize the role of meaningful interaction and developmentally appropriate experiences in early literacy, while Millard and Waese (n.d.) highlight the importance of everyday communication and learning environments. Similarly, the Center on the Developing Child (n.d.) emphasizes responsive interactions and play-based experiences in the development of executive functioning and self-regulation.

The findings therefore suggest that the issue is not that street-connected children have no experiences from which they can learn, but that their everyday environments provide limited opportunities for intentional and sustained learning. This is particularly relevant because teachers identified communication, self-regulation, social interaction, physical health, early literacy, and emotional preparedness as important components of school readiness. These competencies develop through children's interactions with adults, peers, and learning environments (SEPTAN, 2005; Roskos et al., 2003). Thus, the limited learning opportunities described by parents may contribute to the learning gaps that teachers later observe.

Theme 3: Teachers' Understanding of School Readiness and Their Preparation

Teachers in this study demonstrated a broad and multidimensional understanding of school readiness. They did not define readiness solely in terms of academic knowledge. Instead, they emphasized children's ability to communicate, interact socially, regulate their behaviour and

emotions, maintain physical health, follow instructions, and adapt to a new environment. One teacher described school readiness as *"Preparing to go to school; helping children feel they are doing something important"* (Teacher IDI 1, May 19, 2026). Another explained, *"Preparing children physically and emotionally so they can adjust easily to a new environment"* (Teacher IDI 3, May 22, 2026). A further teacher stated, *"A child should listen to elders, sit calmly, and have some motivation to learn"* (Teacher IDI 4, May 23, 2026).

This understanding closely corresponds with the multidimensional framework presented by SEPTAN (2005), which includes physical well-being, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition. Teachers' emphasis on communication and interaction also reflects the importance of meaningful early experiences identified by Roskos et al. (2003) and Millard and Waese (n.d.). Their responses therefore demonstrate an understanding that successful school entry involves more than the ability to read or write.

However, the findings also revealed a gap between teachers' understanding of children's needs and their own preparedness to address those needs. Most teachers reported inadequate training, limited resources, and insufficient institutional guidance. One teacher stated, *"No. Many teachers lack training in trauma-sensitive teaching and emotional support"* (Teacher IDI 1, May 19, 2026). Another explained, *"No. Teachers lack resources, schools, and proper guidelines"* (Teacher IDI 2, May 20, 2026). A third teacher stated, *"No. There are limited opportunities and support for teachers working with street children"* (Teacher IDI 3, May 22, 2026). Although one teacher emphasized that educators should not discriminate against children and another noted that preparedness depends partly on individual teachers, the overall findings indicate a need for stronger professional preparation.

Teachers identified several specific difficulties when working with street-connected children, including building trust, providing emotional security, maintaining attention, helping children follow instructions, managing behaviour, supporting self-regulation, addressing language difficulties, and facilitating peer interaction. One teacher described the challenge as *"Building trust and emotional security"* (Teacher IDI 1, May 19, 2026), while another identified *"Managing behavior, language difficulties, and self-regulation issues"* (Teacher IDI 3, May 22, 2026). These concerns are particularly relevant to the Center on the Developing Child (n.d.), which emphasizes the importance of understanding executive functioning and self-regulation in children's development. They also relate to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), who discuss the effects of early experiences and adversity on children's development.

The findings consequently suggest that teachers cannot be expected to respond effectively to complex developmental and behavioural needs without appropriate preparation. Teacher training in child development, emotional and social support, behaviour management, self-regulation, and approaches appropriate for children experiencing adversity may therefore be an important component of improving school readiness. At the same time, training alone may not be sufficient if teachers continue to work within institutions with limited resources and weak support systems.

Theme 4: School, Government, and Community Readiness

The study also revealed that school readiness is closely connected to the readiness of educational institutions. Teachers reported that schools and learning centres were not sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of street-connected children. They identified inadequate training, limited resources, irregular attendance, learning gaps, insufficient guidelines, and a lack of appropriate support systems. One teacher stated, *"Support is limited due to irregular attendance and learning gaps"* (Teacher IDI 1, May 19, 2026), while another explained that institutions were *"Not sufficiently prepared because of a lack of training"* (Teacher IDI 2, May 20, 2026). Another stated, *"No. More guidelines and support systems are needed"* (Teacher IDI 5, May 24, 2026).

These findings are closely related to the concept of "ready schools" discussed by SEPTAN (2005). Rather than expecting all children to enter school with the same developmental experiences, ready schools are expected to respond to children at different developmental levels. In the present study, however, teachers' responses suggest that institutions often struggle to accommodate children whose prior experiences have been shaped by poverty, mobility, work, and limited early learning opportunities. Consequently, irregular attendance and learning gaps should not be interpreted simply as shortcomings of the children; they are partly connected to the conditions that restrict their participation.

Limited government support was another important issue identified by both parents and teachers. Parents generally reported receiving little or no assistance. One parent stated, *"The government did not provide any help for my child"* (Parent IDI 1, May 12, 2026), while another explained, *"I never got any support or heard of any, so I do not know"* (Parent IDI 2, May 15, 2026). Another participant stated, *"No, we have received no help from the government. I want my child to go to school. I also want the government to help us educate our child"* (Parent IDI 3, May 16, 2026).

Teachers' responses showed a similar lack of awareness. One teacher indicated that government initiatives existed but were limited and insufficient, while another stated that programmes were

not implemented effectively. The remaining teachers were unable to identify relevant government programmes. This finding is important in the context of the Country Report (2013), which identifies multiple actors within Bangladesh's pre-primary education sector and highlights inadequate coordination. Rahman et al. (2015) also identify systemic barriers affecting street-connected children's access to services, while Shekh and Farid (2016) discuss difficulties experienced by street-connected children in accessing social protection and other services.

The findings therefore point to a distinction between the availability of services and their accessibility in practice. Even where policies or programmes exist, their impact may remain limited if families do not know about them, cannot reach them, or cannot meet the conditions required to participate. The limited awareness reported by both parents and teachers suggests that stronger communication, community outreach, coordination, and implementation are required. Teachers' recommendations for free learning centers, health and nutrition services, inclusive educational environments, books, and educational support further demonstrate that addressing school readiness requires a coordinated response rather than an intervention focused solely on classroom learning.

Theme 5: An Ecological Understanding of School Readiness

Taken together, the findings support an ecological understanding of school readiness in which children's development is influenced by interconnected environmental systems. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) emphasize that development occurs through interactions between children and the multiple environments in which they participate. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) similarly highlight the importance of children's relationships and developmental contexts. The present study demonstrates this interaction clearly: household poverty affects parents' ability to support education; livelihood demands affect children's daily activities and attendance; community conditions influence safety and access; limited early learning opportunities affect children's developmental preparation; and institutional conditions influence teachers' capacity to respond to children's needs.

This ecological interpretation also helps explain why the findings from parents and teachers converge despite their different perspectives. Parents primarily described barriers to accessing education, while teachers described the developmental and educational difficulties that emerge when children have limited prior opportunities for learning. Parents' accounts of children spending their days playing, accompanying parents to work, begging, or collecting waste help contextualize teachers' observations of learning gaps, irregular attendance, difficulties with

self-regulation, and challenges in adapting to school environments. Thus, the difficulties observed by teachers cannot be separated from the conditions described by parents.

The findings further reinforce the multidimensional understanding of school readiness proposed by SEPTAN (2005). Teachers emphasized communication, social competence, emotional development, physical health, self-regulation, and early learning rather than academic knowledge alone. However, parents' accounts indicate that children often have limited access to the interactions and learning experiences through which these competencies can develop. As Roskos et al. (2003) and Millard and Waese (n.d.) emphasize, children's early language and literacy development is closely related to meaningful interaction and everyday learning experiences. Similarly, the Center on the Developing Child (n.d.) emphasizes responsive relationships and play-based experiences in developing self-regulation and executive functioning.

An important implication is therefore that improving school readiness cannot depend solely on asking parents to enrol their children or teachers to accommodate them. The surrounding systems must also become more responsive. Parents require affordable and accessible learning opportunities; children require safe spaces and developmentally appropriate experiences; teachers require specialized preparation and institutional support; schools require flexible approaches to irregular attendance and diverse learning levels; and government and community organizations require stronger coordination and outreach. Such a comprehensive approach is consistent with the shared-responsibility perspective of SEPTAN (2005) and the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998).

Overall, the central issue identified by this study is therefore not simply whether street-connected children are "ready" for school. Rather, it is whether the surrounding systems provide sufficient opportunities and support for these children to become ready and participate successfully in education. The findings demonstrate that school readiness is shaped by interconnected barriers at the child, family, community, school, and government levels. Addressing these barriers requires coordinated action across these levels rather than placing responsibility primarily on children or their parents.

Summary of Discussion

The discussion demonstrates that school readiness among street-connected children is shaped by the interaction of educational aspirations, poverty, livelihood demands, access to early learning, children's everyday experiences, teacher preparedness, school readiness, and institutional support. Parents clearly valued education and wanted better futures for their children, but economic hardship, geographical distance, safety concerns, and work

responsibilities restricted their ability to provide regular learning opportunities. This supports previous research showing that disadvantaged parents may maintain strong educational aspirations despite substantial socioeconomic constraints (Isaacs & Magnuson, 2011; Mehnaz, 2013).

Teachers similarly demonstrated a broad understanding of school readiness, emphasizing physical, social, emotional, communication, behavioural, and early learning competencies. However, they reported that poverty, child labour, family instability, irregular attendance, and limited early learning opportunities created substantial barriers. They also identified inadequate training, resources, guidelines, and institutional support as challenges to effectively supporting street-connected children. These findings reinforce the concept that schools must also be prepared to respond to children with diverse developmental experiences (SEPTAN, 2005).

Finally, the limited awareness of government support among both parents and teachers highlights a wider gap between policy, implementation, coordination, and accessibility. The Country Report (2013) and Rahman et al. (2015) provide a broader context for understanding these systemic challenges. Overall, the findings indicate that improving school readiness requires more than preparing individual children. It requires accessible early learning opportunities, supportive families and communities, prepared teachers, responsive schools, and coordinated government and institutional support. In this sense, school readiness among street-connected children is best understood as a shared and ecological responsibility, rather than as a condition that children must achieve on their own.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for policy and practice are proposed to improve the school readiness of street-connected children aged 3–5 years in Dhaka.

First, the Government of Bangladesh should establish accessible, community-based early learning centers in or near slum communities where street-connected families reside. These centers should be free or low-cost, operate with flexible schedules, and provide integrated services including early childhood education, health care, nutrition, and psychosocial support. Such an approach would address the multiple barriers identified by both parents and teachers and promote children's holistic development before entering primary school (SEPTAN, 2005). This recommendation aligns with the government's recently proposed nationwide rehabilitation project, which includes the establishment of 150 open schools, 19 shelter homes, and 3 transit homes to expand educational opportunities for street-connected children (Saif, 2026).

Second, comprehensive professional development programmes should be introduced for teachers working with street-connected children. The findings revealed that teachers require additional knowledge and skills in trauma-informed teaching, classroom management, inclusive education, behavioral support, and children's social and emotional development. Training programmes should include practical teaching strategies, mentoring, and continuous professional development to strengthen teachers' confidence and effectiveness in supporting vulnerable children (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.; Roskos et al., 2003; Millard & Waese, n.d.).

Third, parent engagement initiatives should be strengthened to support families in preparing their children for school. Although parents in this study highly valued education, poverty and demanding livelihood conditions limited their ability to support their children's learning. Community-based parenting programmes should therefore provide practical guidance on early childhood development, school readiness, positive parenting practices, and home-based learning activities. These programmes should also be delivered in flexible and accessible formats that consider parents' work schedules and literacy levels (Millard & Waese, n.d.; Isaacs & Magnuson, 2011).

Fourth, stronger collaboration should be established among government agencies, schools, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to improve access to early childhood education for street-connected children. The findings indicated that many parents and teachers were either unaware of existing government initiatives or perceived them as insufficient. Strengthening coordination, increasing awareness of available services, and improving communication with vulnerable families would help reduce service fragmentation and improve programme implementation (Rahman et al., 2015; Country Report, 2013; Shekh & Farid, 2016). The government's proposed rehabilitation project, which emphasizes family reintegration, rehabilitation, and inter-agency collaboration, provides an important opportunity to strengthen these partnerships if implemented effectively (Saif, 2026).

Fifth, targeted financial support should be provided to reduce the economic barriers that prevent street-connected children from participating in early childhood education. Parents consistently identified financial hardship as the primary reason for delaying or preventing school enrolment. Policies should therefore eliminate educational costs by providing free admission, learning materials, transportation assistance, school meals, and conditional cash transfers for vulnerable families. Such initiatives would reduce children's involvement in labour while encouraging regular participation in education (SEPTAN, 2005; Heckman, 2006;

Hossain & Alam, 2016). Similarly, the proposed government rehabilitation project includes financial assistance, educational stipends, and livelihood support for vulnerable children and their families, which could help address many of the barriers identified in this study if implemented effectively (Saif, 2026).

Finally, regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of early childhood education programmes for street-connected children. Monitoring should examine children's school readiness outcomes, programme quality, teacher preparedness, family engagement, and access to support services. Evidence generated through continuous evaluation would enable policymakers and practitioners to improve programme quality, ensure accountability, and develop interventions that better meet the needs of vulnerable children.

Overall, improving school readiness among street-connected children requires coordinated efforts from government agencies, educators, families, communities, and development partners. Implementing these recommendations would contribute to more equitable access to quality early childhood education and support the successful transition of street-connected children into formal schooling.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that street-connected children in Dhaka face multiple, interconnected barriers to school readiness, including poverty, child labour, geographic isolation, institutional inadequacy, and social and health challenges (Rahman & Samadder, 2015; Hossain & Alam, 2016). While parents hold strong aspirations for their children's education and teachers possess a comprehensive understanding of school readiness (Isaacs & Magnuson, 2011; SEPTAN, 2005), neither group can overcome these structural barriers alone (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). The findings underscore the need for coordinated action among government, non-government, and community actors to provide accessible early learning centers, comprehensive teacher training, and effective parent support (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Without such intervention, the cycle of poverty and educational deprivation that prevents street-connected children from reaching their developmental potential will continue (Heckman, 2006; UNICEF, 2019). The study contributes to the growing body of research on educational inequality in Bangladesh and highlights the urgent need to address the needs of one of the country's most vulnerable populations (Rahman & Samadder, 2015). By investing in early childhood education for street-connected children, Bangladesh can fulfill its

commitment to leaving no child behind and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential (SEPTAN, 2005; Save the Children, n.d.).

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Appendix A.

Research Tools

Interview Questions for Parents

1.What do you think is the role of education for a child aged 3–5 years?

১। আপনার মতে, ৩–৫ বছর বয়সী একটি শিশুর জীবনে শিক্ষার ভূমিকা কী?

2.In your opinion, what is more important for your child – going to school or helping the family earn money?

২। আপনার মতে, আপনার শিশুর জন্য কোনটি বেশি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ – স্কুলে যাওয়া নাকি পরিবারকে অর্থ উপার্জনে সাহায্য করা?

3.Can you tell me what a normal day looks like for your child, from morning until night?

৩। আপনার শিশুর সকাল থেকে রাত পর্যন্ত একটি সাধারণ দিনের বর্ণনা করতে পারবেন? সে সাধারণত কী কী করে?

4.Does your child get time to play during the day? If yes, what do they play and who do they play with? If no, could you explain a bit more about that?

৪। আপনার শিশুর কি দিনের বেলায় খেলার সময় হয়? যদি হয়, সে কী খেলে এবং কার সঙ্গে খেলে? যদি না হয়, তাহলে একটু বিস্তারিতভাবে বলবেন?

5.Can you share your daily routine?

৫। আপনি কি আপনার দৈনন্দিন রুটিন সম্পর্কে বলতে পারবেন?

6.What problems make it difficult for your child to go to school or get enrolled?

৬। আপনার শিশুকে স্কুলে পাঠানো বা স্কুলে ভর্তি করাতে কী কী সমস্যা বাধা সৃষ্টি করে?

7.Does anything about your home or neighborhood make it difficult to send your child to school? If yes, could you explain a bit more?

৭। আপনার বাড়ি বা আশেপাশের পরিবেশের কোনো বিষয় কি আপনার শিশুকে স্কুলে পাঠানো কঠিন করে তোলে? যদি হ্যাঁ, তাহলে একটু বিস্তারিতভাবে বলবেন?

8.What support does the government provide for children's education in your area, and what would you like your child to learn from school?

৮। আপনার এলাকায় শিশুদের শিক্ষার জন্য সরকার কী ধরনের সহায়তা প্রদান করে, এবং আপনি চান আপনার শিশু স্কুল থেকে কী কী শিখুক?

9.Do you think the government and community should do more to help your child become ready for school? What kind of help would you want?

৯। আপনার কি মনে হয় সরকার ও সমাজের উচিত আপনার শিশুকে স্কুলের জন্য প্রস্তুত করতে আরও বেশি সহায়তা করা? আপনি কী ধরনের সহায়তা আশা করেন?

10.If the government opened a free learning center near your home where your child could learn, play, and receive food, would you send your child there?

১০। যদি সরকার আপনার বাড়ির কাছাকাছি একটি বিনামূল্যের শেখার কেন্দ্র খোলে, যেখানে আপনার শিশু শিখতে, খেলতে এবং খাবার পেতে পারে, তাহলে আপনি কি আপনার শিশুকে সেখানে পাঠাবেন?

Interview questions for teachers

1. What should a child need to learn before starting school?

১। স্কুল শুরু করার আগে একটি শিশুর কী কী শিখতে প্রয়োজন?

2. What skills do you think a street child aged 3–5 needs to have before they can start school?

২। আপনার মতে, ৩–৫ বছর বয়সী একটি পথশিশুর স্কুল শুরু করার আগে কী ধরনের দক্ষতা থাকা প্রয়োজন?

3. In your opinion, what are the factors affecting the school readiness of street children aged 3–5 years?

৩। আপনার মতে, ৩–৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুদের স্কুলের জন্য প্রস্তুতির ওপর কী কী বিষয় প্রভাব ফেলে?

4. Do you think teachers are generally ready to teach street children aged 3–5 years?

৪। আপনার কি মনে হয় শিক্ষকরা সাধারণভাবে ৩–৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুদের পড়ানোর জন্য প্রস্তুত?

5. What problems does a street child face before and after joining school?

৫। স্কুলে যাওয়ার আগে এবং পরে একটি পথশিশু কী কী সমস্যার মুখোমুখি হয়?

6. What are some of the biggest challenges for a teacher when helping a street child aged 3–5 adjust to a classroom?

৬। আপনার মতে, একটি ৩–৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুকে শ্রেণিকক্ষে মানিয়ে নিতে সাহায্য করার সময় একজন শিক্ষকের সবচেয়ে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ কী হতে পারে?

7. Do you think schools, learning centers, or teachers are prepared to support street children?

৭। আপনার কি মনে হয় স্কুল, শেখার কেন্দ্র বা শিক্ষকরা পথশিশুদের সহায়তা দেওয়ার জন্য প্রস্তুত?

8. What training or support would help a teacher feel more ready and confident to teach street children aged 3–5?

৮। ৩-৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুদের পড়ানোর জন্য একজন শিক্ষককে আরও প্রস্তুত ও আত্মবিশ্বাসী হতে কী ধরনের প্রশিক্ষণ বা সহায়তা প্রয়োজন বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

9. What do you think the government and community should do to help street children aged 3-5 become ready for school?

৯। আপনার মতে, ৩-৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুদের স্কুলের জন্য প্রস্তুত করতে সরকার ও সমাজ কী করা উচিত?

10. Are you aware of any government-led education program for street children aged 3-5 in Dhaka?

১০। ঢাকায় ৩-৫ বছর বয়সী পথশিশুদের জন্য সরকারের কোনো শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম সম্পর্কে আপনি জানেন কি?

1. Consent Form

Date: _____

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am aware that my responses will remain confidential and my identity will not be disclosed. I understand that my anonymized information may be used in research reports or publications. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____

Thumbprint: _____

Researcher Name: _____

Signature: _____

১. সম্মতি ফর্ম

তারিখ: _____

আমি স্বেচ্ছায় এই গবেষণা অধ্যয়নে অংশগ্রহণ করতে সম্মত হচ্ছি। এই অধ্যয়নের উদ্দেশ্য আমাকে ব্যাখ্যা করা হয়েছে এবং আমি বুঝতে পারছি যে আমার অংশগ্রহণ সম্পূর্ণ স্বেচ্ছামূলক। আমি অবগত আছি যে আমার উত্তরগুলি গোপনীয় থাকবে এবং আমার পরিচয় প্রকাশ করা হবে না। আমি বুঝতে পারছি যে আমার বেনামী তথ্য গবেষণা প্রতিবেদন বা প্রকাশনায় ব্যবহার করা হতে পারে। আমি আরও বুঝতে পারছি যে আমি কোনো প্রশ্নের উত্তর দিতে অস্বীকার করতে পারি বা যেকোনো সময় কোনো পরিণতি ছাড়াই এই অধ্যয়ন থেকে প্রত্যাহার করতে পারি।

অংশগ্রহণকারীর নাম: _____

স্বাক্ষর: _____

অঙ্গুলিচিহ্ন: _____

গবেষকের নাম: _____

স্বাক্ষর: _____

Timeline

Serial	Task	Month 1				Month 2				Month 3				Month 4				Month 5				Month 6				Month 7			
		W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Initial Meeting & Topic Finalization																												
2	Proposal Writing & Literature Review																												
3	First Draft Submission																												
4	Supervisor Feedback																												
5	Proposal Revision																												
6	Final Draft Propo																												

[illegible]