

**Exploring Teachers' & Parents' Perception of the Role of Playgrounds In
Children's Development**

By
Adrita Roy Choudhury

Student ID: 24155015

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

Brac Institute of Educational Development
Brac University
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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.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

Adrita Roy Choudhury

Student ID: 24155015

Approval

The thesis titled “Exploring Teachers' & Parents' Perception of the Role of Playgrounds in Children's Development,” submitted by Adrita Roy Choudhury (24155015) of Spring 2024, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science in Early Childhood Development in August, 2026.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:
(Member)

Syeda Fareha Shaheeda Islam
Senior Lecturer, Brac Institute of Educational
Development
Brac University

Program Coordinator:
(Member)

Ferdousi Khanom
Senior Lecturer, ECD Academic Program
Brac Institute of Educational Development
Brac University

External Expert
Examiner:
(Member)

Nafisa Anwar
Senior Lecturer, Med, Department
BRAC Institute of Educational Development

Departmental Head:
(Chair)

Dr. Erum Mariam
Executive Director
Brac Institute of Educational Development
Brac University

Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Exploring Teachers' & Parents' Perception of the Role of Playgrounds in Children's Development

Student name: Adrita Roy Choudhury

1. Source of population: Parents and teachers in Dhaka

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 for 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

Ethical Review Committee:

Authorized by:

(chair/co-chair/other)

Dr. Erum Mariam
Executive Director
Brac Institute of Educational Development
Brac University

Abstract

Outdoor play is widely identified as an important area of development within early childhood period, supporting the child's holistic development as well as fostering school readiness. However, rapid urbanization, increasing screen time, demolition of outdoor areas, academic pressure and parents' work pressure have reduced the opportunities for outdoor play, especially in dense urban environments such as Dhaka, Bangladesh.

This research has examined outdoor playground outcomes in children's holistic development and school readiness from the perspectives of parents and preschool teachers. Following Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents and preschool teachers of 4-6 years old in Gulshan and Dhanmondi areas of Dhaka following a qualitative phenomenological approach.

The findings showed that individuals have believed daily outdoor play is important for the holistic development of the child including problem-solving skill, emotional well-being, creativity, self-independence, and school readiness. Academic pressure, asymmetric relaxation increases screen time and reduce participation in outdoor play. The findings also highlighted the importance of collaboration among families, schools, communities and policymakers to create safe, practical and inclusive outdoor play environments for all children as well as lead to few essentials recommendations for educators, parents, policymakers and researchers to rethink about how playgrounds should be included in children's' lives for early years' developments.

Keywords: Outdoor play, child development, school readiness, early childhood, cognitive, digital era, screen time, parents' perspectives, teachers' perspectives, parents, teachers, holistic, benefits, Bangladesh.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all children and to all parents across the world. To every child who deserves to be born into a world filled with love, safety, dignity, and hope; to every child who has the freedom to play, learn, imagine, explore, and reach their full potential; to every child whose development must never be limited by poverty, social status, place of birth, gender, disability, or any circumstance beyond their control.

May you always be surrounded by care, stay free from all harm, and gain sufficient development opportunities; may you receive an education that nurtures your mind, heart, character, creativity, self-confidence, and sense of belonging. May you witness a world that treats your fundamental needs not as privileges but rights and may you receive all the unconditional care, support and encouragement you need to grow fully.

To the expectant parents preparing to welcome a new life, and to the parents who have already taken the grand responsibilities of raising a child: the core of parenthood goes far beyond providing food, shelter and education. It is to use lifelong actions to help children build their earliest understanding of love, security, trust, kindness, and courage. This responsibility lives in quiet sacrifices, sleepless nights, gentle guidance, patient listening, and the choice to keep growing as an empathic and ideal person for your child's future.

May all parents recognize the long-lasting impact of their companionship, and raise their children not through fear, comparison, or pressure, but with empathy, understanding, respect, and unconditional love.

For the children who deserve a better world, and for the parents who can create that world with love and choice, this dissertation is dedicated to you.

Acknowledgement

The completion of this dissertation marks the end of a remarkable chapter of my educational voyage. This journey was filled with valuable experiences, adversities, and self-discovery, which fill my heart with utmost gratitude. I could not have reached this milestone without the support, guidance, and unwavering faith of my ECD faculty, my family, and friends, who were my guiding light at every step.

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Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who, through support, prayers, and good wishes, have accompanied me on this journey in one way or another. This thesis is much more than just fulfilling an institutional requirement; it is a reflection of the love, support, guidance, and encouragement given by countless extraordinary people around me. I thank you for your unwavering faith in me.

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List of Acronyms

ECD	Early Childhood Development
IDI	In-depth Interview
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
EST	Ecological System Theory
ST	Sociocultural Theory
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Early childhood, particularly between ages 4 and 6, is a crucial period of neurological, physical, social, and emotional development. During this stage, children develop cognitive skills, the foundation for language, peer relationships, and self-regulation, which play a vital role in shaping academic success and overall health later in life (Erol & Erol, 2026). Play, particularly outdoor play, has been widely recognized as one of the most effective ways for children to learn and build knowledge at this stage. When children play outdoors – strolling, climbing, exploring nature - they engage in physical activity that strengthens gross motor skills and overall health. At the same time, they experience rich, varied stimuli that spark curiosity and encourage social interaction. Major child development organizations and professionals emphasize the importance of outdoor play; for example, the *American Academy of Pediatrics* recommends “A Daily Dose of Play” for children to support healthy development. However, the culture of outdoor playgrounds is gradually declining in the digital age, particularly in cities.

In metropolitan areas such as Dhaka, increasing urbanization, compact open spaces, heavy traffic, concerns, pedagogical stress, and the proliferation of virtual devices have significantly altered children’s daily outdoor play routine. Digital devices have replaced playgrounds as the number one place for enjoyment and social engagement. While digital technologies offer certain benefits, excessive screen time is sometimes associated early in life with reduced physical interest, limited peer interaction, behind-

schedule language development, short attention spans, and extended risk of obesity and behavioral disorders.

The theoretical foundation for this study comes from the Sociocultural Theory of Lev Vygotsky and the Ecological Systems Theory of Uri Bronfenbrenner. Both theories emphasize the importance of environmental interactions in child development.

Rapid urbanization, safety concerns, educational pressures, and longer screen time each simultaneously and indirectly affect outdoor play compared to previous generations of children. In cities like Dhaka, playgrounds and open spaces are few and often inaccessible, hindering opportunities for preschool children. Parents also keep children indoors due to traffic, pollution, or safety concerns, thereby inadvertently limiting unstructured play, which is critical for development. As a result, there is a growing concern that younger children may be missing the holistic developmental benefits of outdoor play. These problems highlight the necessity to re-emphasize outdoor play in early childhood development and, at the same time, explore how teachers and parents in dedicated outdoor play areas can help preschoolers' holistic development.

Linking with the previous, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued in Ecological Systems Theory¹ that child development occurs within nested environmental systems: the family, school, neighborhood, and wider societal environment. Playground availability, parental attitudes toward outdoor play, neighborhood safety, school infrastructure, and cultural shifts toward digital entertainment are part of the ecological systems that influence

¹ Ecological System Theory states that isolation disrupts human development but through active interactions with their surrounding environment, people grow better.

children's development. If playgrounds are rare or inaccessible, the ecological support for healthy physical and social development is diminished.

As adults are the primary decision-makers regarding children's access to outdoor spaces, acknowledging their perceptions is crucial. This thesis explores parents' and teachers' perceptions of the role of outdoor playgrounds in child development and how well-designed outdoor playgrounds contribute to 4- to 6-year-old children's physical growth, cognitive development, social skills, and emotional health in urban contexts. While parents and teachers may recognize the developmental benefits of outdoor play spaces, it remained important to examine whether this understanding is reflected in children's everyday experiences, habits, preferences, and choices within the fast-growing urban and digitally influenced context of Bangladesh.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The lack of safe outdoor playgrounds for children in urban environments has become a serious problem, affecting their ability to grow up in today's digital world. The number of children who go outside to play has decreased in recent years. After all, more children choose to spend their free time at home using electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and televisions. The recent trend of children spending more time on screens than playing outside with their friends raises alarms, as this period of their lives requires them to develop physical skills. Children who stop playing outside to spend time on digital devices have experienced developmental problems, which include speech delay, increased obesity levels, decreased motor abilities, and social withdrawal and attention difficulties, together with various other cognitive and emotional issues (Duch, 2013).

Multiple factors contribute to the decrease in outdoor play areas in urban settings. The two most common are rapid growth of population and commercialization. Urban development has resulted in a permanent lack of public playgrounds and green spaces over the years. According to the journal *The Role of Playgrounds in Promoting Children's Health – A Scoping Review*, Dhaka has been facing a growing population and fast industrial development, which leads to the redevelopment of existing parks and playgrounds for commercial construction (Skippur, 2024).

While parents and teachers already understand the developmental importance of outdoor play, it remains questionable whether this understanding is incorporated into their daily practices and choices regarding the use of playgrounds by young people in the primary urban context of Bangladesh.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The research examined how urban parents and teachers perceive playgrounds as important places for children aged four to six. Although existing research strongly believes in the importance of outdoor play for the holistic development of children, most has been conducted in global or particular country-specific contexts, shaped by the particular sociocultural and technological environment at different periods.

So, the ultimate goal of this research is not to re-examine existing evidence, but to discover how parents and teachers in urban Bangladesh understand, perceive, and interpret the developmental benefits of playgrounds in their regular activities, decisions, and priorities, especially balancing outdoor play with academic plans.

Furthermore, the vision sought to identify practical limits to children's participation in outdoor play, including limited access to playgrounds, conservation conditions, urban infrastructure constraints, parenting schedules, and performance times, thereby aiming to create contextually appropriate insights based on lived experiences.

1.4 Significance & Justification of the Study

This study addressed increasing challenges in urban environments where the lack of outdoor play spaces significantly affects children's physical health, social interaction, cognitive development, and emotional wellbeing. Outdoor play provides children important opportunities to develop gross motor skills, creativity, and social skills (Fjørtoft 2004; Ginsburg, 2007).

With increasing digitization in urban areas, including Dhaka, and lower access to safe outdoor play spaces, children spend a lot of time indoors, especially in front of digital devices. While parents and teachers may be aware of the developmental benefits of outdoor play, there is a gap between this awareness and actual practice. The problem is not acknowledging the importance of outdoor play, but whether parents and teachers in Dhaka include outdoor play in children's daily activities while also actively prioritizing academics and the rising use of digital devices during this time.

Therefore, this study addressed a context-specific gap in the literature by reviewing how urban Bangladeshi parents and teachers recognize, value, and foster outdoor play in children's lives within increasingly virtual technologies.

The research examined parents and teachers of children from 4 to six years of age, as this age range represents the period when children experience peak physical growth and cognitive and social skills developments. Studies show that this age group is important for acquiring basic skills in language, emotion regulation, and peer relationships (Berk, 2013). Furthermore, this period is the beginning of school readiness, which is why outdoor play areas help children expand their teaching skills while practicing emotional management and self-regulation (Zhu, 2024). This study has used Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to analyze how they influence children's development.

This research filled an essential gap in current research on outdoor playgrounds, specifically in Dhaka, as an urban space where rapid urbanization and socio-economic conditions reduce the availability of outdoor playgrounds and green spaces. The observation aimed to generate valuable, context-specific insights by exploring barriers to outdoor play when virtual media and urban living conditions shape those perceptions. Besides, this study also presented evidence-based suggestions for promoting outdoor play and tackling the health-developmental demands of adolescents and urban environments

1.5 Research Questions

How do teachers and parents perceive the role of outdoor playgrounds in children's overall development?

What factors limit children's participation in outdoor play in the digital era?

1.6 Operational Definitions

- **Outdoor Playground:** A designated open space or facility, either at school or within the community, where children can engage in recreational and play activities. It may include slides, swings, sandpits, and open grass areas.

- **Children's Development:** Developmental progress of children's physical and cognitive growth, language, social interaction with peers, and emotional control.

- **Screen Time:** Time spent on gadgets (for example, tablets, smartphones, the television, and gaming consoles). It can affect attention span, physical health, and social behavior.

- **Social Security Concerns:** Parents' fears about their children's safety and well-being in outdoor environments, including concerns about crime, pollution, or the lack of supervision, which may deter children from playing outdoors.

- **Parental Work Schedule:** Parents' work schedules and hours can affect their ability to supervise or encourage their children's outdoor play. This also includes financial status that may inhibit the ability to provide structured or recreational activities outside the home.

- **Neighborhood Infrastructure:** The availability of public spaces (playgrounds, parks, or recreational areas) and safety measures (e.g., secure fencing, lighting) that enable children to play outside in the neighborhood.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Outdoor playgrounds are essential for children's holistic development, especially during the early formative years, as this time is crucial for molding the base for social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development (Fjørtoft, 2001; Schipperijn, 2024). However, in the modern digital era, outdoor play has decreased due to several factors, including rapid urbanization, limited access to open playgrounds, and the widespread use of digital technology. All these factors drastically altered the perception of how children spend their leisure time.

Several factors, including pollution, safety concerns, time constraints, city planning, and screen time, shape perceptions. This literature review seeks to offer insight into the benefits and drawbacks of outdoor playgrounds for children's development.

2.1 Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's Influence on Playgrounds and Child Development

Vygotsky stated that children learn through interacting with others in their social environment. They use outdoor playgrounds to play with their friends and through it, children develop language skills, their abilities to learn about new things, interact with others, and solve problems (Vygotsky, 1980). The interactions between children during playtime are crucial for their mental development. Children develop their understanding of social roles through direct experience and subsequent practice.

Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* (1979) increases complexity by showing how environmental systems create a web of networks that impact child

development. The development of toddlers involves three main systems: microsystems that is connected with their family and school life, mesosystems that link parents and teachers, and exosystem that bridges parent's workplace and neighborhood effects into their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Playgrounds function as microsystems that create spaces where children build friendships with peers and adults as their developmental paths unfold.

The two theories show that children need to engage in outdoor play for physical activity because this helps them develop cognitive and social abilities across various environmental situations. The research shows that understanding how teachers and parents view these spaces helps us understand the playground activities that contribute to children's complete development.

2.2 Physical Benefits of Outdoor Playgrounds

Outdoor playgrounds provide an important space for physical activities that support healthy body development. Playgrounds serve as spaces where children practice various physical activities, such as climbing, walking, swinging, and leaping, which help them build essential gross motor skills and coordination (Schipperijn, 2024). The importance of these activities cannot be overstated because children need physical health to achieve their full well-being. Energetic outdoor play has been shown to reduce weight problems in children while improving cardiovascular health ²and boosting immune defenses, according to Broekhuizen (2014).

² Cardiovascular Health indicates the health of human heart and blood vessels.

Schipperijn conducted a study in 2024 that combined data from 247 datasets. The study found that children with regular access to outdoor playgrounds achieve the recommended physical activity levels more often than those without playground access (Schipperijn, 2024). Moreover, research showed that children who start exercising in their early years develop better physical abilities as adults, demonstrating that outdoor play is an essential element in building long-lasting physical wellness in children (Fjørtoft, 2001).

Despite the benefits of outdoor playgrounds, parents and teachers often prioritize safety and available resources when evaluating physical activity. Teachers believe that the outdoor activities they organize will help children to improve their health by strengthening immune systems. Ironically, they are also well aware that budget limitations and insufficient playground equipment will limit outdoor play at schools (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Parents also sometimes restrict their children's outdoor play out of concerns about dangers which they believe exist.

2.3 Cognitive and Social Benefits of Playgrounds

Outdoor play is widely regarded as an important contributor to a child's cognitive and social development. Unlike established classroom games, outdoor environments offer children the opportunity to discover, experiment, to solve problems, talk with peers, and combine knowledge through direct communication. These foster curiosity and unfettered wonder³, generate cognitive skills that form the base of lifelong expertise (Bento & Dias, 2017).

³ Unfettered wonder: Deep and free curiosity

From the sociocultural angle, children learn most effectively through active participation and meaningful interaction with their physical and social environment. Vygotsky (1978) believed that children's cognitive development occurs through cooperative learning, culture, language, and social interaction. Outdoor playgrounds perfectly create opportunities for children to talk, collaborate, negotiate, prevent conflict, and think creatively. Such interactions promote language improvement, self-regulation, emotional stabilization, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for successful school readiness. Outdoor play provides children with mental and social benefits that go beyond its physical advantages. Outdoor activities, including problem-solving, pretend play, and social activities, lead children to develop their cognitive abilities. Research indicates that unstructured outdoor play improves creative thinking, attention span, and executive functioning abilities⁴ (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Outdoor activities enable children to examine their surroundings as they select among various options, which helps their cognitive development and future academic achievement.

Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's EST model emphasizes that children's development is shaped through interactions with their immediate environments, including homes, teachers, friends, and neighborhoods (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Thus, outdoor playgrounds represent important developmental settings where children actively engage with people, objects, and nature. These repeated interactions encourage cognitive flexibility, social competence, confidence, and adaptive behavior, which contribute to overall development.

⁴ Executive functioning abilities defines a state of mind that organize and manages daily tasks through focus

Research consistently shows that unstructured outdoor play undoubtedly affects executive functioning, including working memory and inhibitory control⁵interest, cognitive flexibility, and planning skills. During outdoor play, children constantly assess dangers, choose among options, adapt techniques, and solve unexpected challenges (Smiđ,1988). Executive functioning developed through sport is associated with classroom behavior, learning engagement, and academic readiness.

Following this sequence, Fjørtoft (2001) observed that preschool children who frequently participate in nature-based, fully outdoor play show broad improvements in gross-motor coordination, spatial orientation, balance, and creative play behaviors. Moreover, exposure to a variety of environments boost situation handling skill, out-of-the-box thinking, and promotes curiosity, which can be necessary supplements to cognitive development. Children who spent more time outdoors showed better spatial awareness⁶ and problem-solving skills than those with limited access to nature-based play (Fjørtoft,2004). The development of cognitive and language capabilities depends on these types of interactive experiences

Nevertheless, outdoor play also plays a significant role in children's language development alongside creating games, assigning roles, sharing ideas, and resolving conflicts. These appropriate interactions expose children to new vocabulary, conversational skills⁷, storytelling, and collaborative communication that cannot be fully modeled through instructor-led command.) Simulated play and peer interaction facilitate

⁵ Inhibitory Control: A process that works as brain's "brake system" for thoughts, emotions and actions

⁶ Spatial awareness indicates the ability to understand how body and objects relate to each other in physical world.

⁷ Conversational skills indicate good listening, asking questions and taking turns to communicate.

symbolic questioning, language development, and self-regulation, all of which contribute to the child's cognitive buoyancy and readiness for formal schooling (Burke,2006).

The developmental benefits of outdoor play expand emotional well-being and resilience. The outdoor environment allows children to enjoy potentially challenging situations, compare dangers, and overcome obstacles independently. Successfully navigating those experiences strengthens self-confidence, emotional regulation, tolerance, and vanity. Ginsberg (2007) argued that free play allows children to manage stress, regulate emotions, develop resilience, and form healthy peer relationships (Ginsberg,2007). Such emotional skills are increasingly recognized as important moderators of school readiness because they allow children to develop effectively in classroom routines and social settings.

.

Ginsburg (2007) states that children who spend time outdoors exhibit improved emotional resilience and social skills, which lead to better peer relationships, increased group participation, and enhanced empathy development.

2.4 Playground Access and Socioeconomic Inequalities

The urban expansion process leads to two major environmental impacts, including decreased public park space and reduced green area coverage. Cities' development often involves turning public parks and playgrounds into commercial buildings and residential complexes, creating fewer outdoor areas for children to use for physical activity. The 2005 research study by Karsten demonstrates that Dhaka and similar cities experience urban expansion that occupies public play spaces, making it difficult for children to find safe

areas to play (Karsten,2005). Public parks, which once existed everywhere, now exist only as private or commercial spaces, leaving behind playgrounds that either lack equipment or are in poor condition.

In *Last Child in the Woods*, Louv (2008) argues that environmental degradation and urban growth create a nature-deficit disorder, leading children to lose contact with nature and resulting in negative effects on their physical health, cognitive development, and creative abilities. Outdoor space for children to play and create their own activities faces major restrictions because outdoor space has become less available (Louv,2008).

Urbanization has led to increased socio-economic inequality, as access to playgrounds and recreational areas has become more limited. Low-income communities face serious barriers to accessing public playgrounds and amusement parks, while affluent metropolitan areas have more play opportunities, better safety, and greater access. Economic inequality and the privatization⁸ of public open spaces worsen the problems of children from low-income families. Karsten's study found that wealthy areas have better playgrounds with appropriate play facilities, well-maintained play equipment, and public maintenance, whereas low-income areas lack even basic playground facilities (Karsten,2005).

Social development through children's access to playgrounds has been ruined by existing socioeconomic differences. At the same time, the commercial forces that manipulate urban design processes treat public playgrounds and recreational areas as needless focal points. Lack of safe outdoor spaces limits children's physical exercise and

⁸ Privatization refers to transferring ownership

social play time, which are necessary to develop their social skills, empathy, and teamwork skills (Fjørtoft, 2004).

2.5 Teachers' and Parents' Perspectives on Outdoor Play

Most teachers believe that physical activity, emotional control, sharing, teamwork, conflict resolution, and social learning depend on outdoor playgrounds and thus must be supported because they are critical. Vygotsky's *Sociocultural Theory* (1978) states that play requires social engagement, an essential component of mental development. Playgrounds serve as social hubs for children, helping them build emotional intelligence while learning social customs. The people involved acknowledge that time restrictions, along with school policies, create barriers that prevent outdoor play from becoming the primary activity at school. According to a 2017 study, *The Importance of Outdoor Play for Young Children's Healthy Development*, preschool teachers recognize the importance of outdoor play for children's healthy development, especially in encouraging physical, social, and cognitive growth (Bento & Dias, 2017).

Scant⁹ spaces pose significant challenges for schools as they lack outdoor play areas and proper sports equipment, hindering students' participation in outdoor sports after school hours. Additionally, the emphasis on academic work, besides test preparation leads students in competitive environments to spend less time outdoors. Teachers must balance their scheduled teaching time with brief periods for students so that they can fully utilize the developmental benefits of the school playground.

⁹ Scant: Small or inadequate

On the other hand, parents understand that outdoor play offers health benefits, helping children develop gross motor skills, improve coordination, and enhance overall health (Ginsburg, 2007). Outdoor play activities that children engage in provide essential benefits for their development, whereas indoor activities keep them inactive. The natural environment as a playground for children shows that children who spend more time in outdoor natural settings exhibit better immune system functioning, lower stress levels, and improved cardiovascular health (Fjørtoft, 2001). On the other hand, children with devices and fewer outdoor activities face obesity, a fragile immune system, slow growth, and develop introvert nature.

Jayasuriya discovered, through research published in *Parents' Perceptions of Preschool Activities*, that urban parents display positive attitudes toward the benefits of outdoor play (Jayasuriya, 2016). However, concerns about crime, pollution, and safety issues restrict their outdoor playtime with children. Parents in Dhaka avoid letting their children play outside because they worry about traffic accidents, outdoor pollution, and street crime. Parents who think that public parks and playgrounds pose safety threats will prevent their children from playing in those areas. As a result, parents prefer their children to play in indoor playrooms, which provide more controlled play environments. The theory of urban development and safety issues presented in Louv's *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children* shows how these factors prevent children from experiencing nature and is labelled '*Nature-Deficit Disorder*' (Kelley, 2007).

Digital devices have become more convenient as humans prefer to use devices due to their fascinating features effortlessly usable. Thus, technologies such as tablets, smartphones, laptops, etc. increasingly become a part of people's daily lives. Children

who spend longer time looking at screens show much less physical activity, which can lead to weight gain and related fitness problems.

Twenge and Campbell, in their population-based approach, found that children who spent time using devices experienced negative consequences, along with less physical activity, socializing, and spending time with family (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Parents may want to balance their efforts to reduce screen time with the desire to encourage outdoor play as children experience more virtual distractions in this digital era.

2.6 Slow Aggregation of Digital Media and Screen Time on Outdoor Play

The digital devices now have become deeply integrated into the daily lives of children. Devices, including smartphones and tablets, can provide recreational and educational opportunities for young generation if used correctly. Yet the growing use of virtual products has also raised concerns about children's declining participation in outdoor sports. Outdoor play can help children develop six central skills, along with physical activity, imagination, and social skills. In 2019, the WHO recommended that children aged 2 to 4 should spend no more than 1 hour per day using a stationary screen, and that less screen time is better (Actively,2019).

International studies show that longer screen time is often associated with reduced physical activity and less outdoor engagement in children. A 2023 systematic review through Larouche found that children's time spent outdoors is shaped by several interrelated factors: parental encouragement, community protection, access to outdoor areas, and utilizing kinship (Larouche, 2023).

Screen time may additionally impact developmental outcomes related to school readiness. An experiment conducted through Madigan found that children who were in touch with excess screen time at 24 months and 36 months, more critically they performed better on later developmental screening tests (Madigan,2019). Excessive screen use reduces family time, minimizes outdoor play, hinders learning, and limits interaction with peers. Thus affecting children's language development, problem-solving skills, self-regulation, and social development. But now, not all virtual media consumption is worthless or dangerous. Finding age-appropriate teaching materials can help children to master new concepts. But only under full parental monitoring. Additionally, parents and teachers must teach them about the downsides of using the device incorrectly.

However, outdoor play can provide unconventional developmental learning that cannot be fully reflected on digital screens. Hinkley (2018) observed that outdoor play in preschool children is definitely associated with emotional and social skills, although asymmetrical¹⁰ use of a digital device is associated with dreadful compliance (Hinkley,2018). These findings suggest that individual play creates opportunities to cooperate, communicate, negotiate rules, resolve conflicts, and build friendships.

2.7 Outdoor Playground Access in Bangladesh

Children in Bangladesh currently have severely restricted access to outdoor play areas due to urban reforms that have led to densely built environments and reduced access to outdoor spaces. Studies in Dhaka's neighborhoods prove that children use outdoor play areas less as they grow away from their neighborhoods to access their homes space does

¹⁰ Asymmetrical: Imbalanced or not equal

(Bhuyan, 2021). The impact of socio-spatial inequality is highlighted. Overall, the findings suggest that urban children in Bangladesh have unequal opportunities for outdoor play due to lack of proximity to safe areas, which limits their ability to participate in physical hobbies, social interactions, and exploration.

Research in Bangladesh shows a huge problem with playgrounds, as many agree that the current provisions do not meet the educational and social aspirations of the child. Examining school floor design in Bangladesh, researchers found that outdoor spaces serve as important relaxing environments that teachers and parents consider essential for mastery, socialization, and general child development (Khan, 2019). Their findings revealed that outdoor spaces are often neglected due to inadequate design and retarded integration in children's daily routines, as well as recent studies in urban Bangladesh showing that children's opportunities for outdoor play are fading using more elements and the foundation for indoor play growing. Together, those studies suggest that outdoor play in Bangladesh intersects with urban planning, educational practices, parental concerns, and child development rights.

Understanding the attitudes of fathers, mothers, and coaches towards playgrounds in Bangladesh is important to determine how urban children enjoy outdoor play.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study used a qualitative method to comprehensively explore parents' and preschool educators' perceptions of the impact of outdoor play on children's overall development and school readiness in this digital age. Qualitative Phenomenological research¹¹ was conducted to obtain rich, context-based information by apprehending interviewees' lived experiences, values, and interpretations (Creswell, 2017). This research focused on how parents and teachers understand the role of indoor and outdoor play space in the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of four- to six-year-olds, even analyzed barriers caused by increased digital involvement and urban environmental constraints¹². A phenomenological method was used within the research philosophy, which allowed the researcher to discover the participants' subjective experiences as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In-depth interviews (IDIs) were used as the primary data collection method because they are effective in exploring participants' ideals, reasoning, and feelings about a particular topic in a flexible and exploratory manner (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

¹¹ A phenomenological study is a qualitative research approach that seeks to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences. The methodology originates from phenomenology, a philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl which emphasizes the direct examination of phenomena as they are perceived by consciousness, without the application of preconceived assumptions by the observer (Van Manen, 2021).

¹² Constraint: Limitation

3.2 Research Site

In qualitative studies, research sites are purposefully selected to understand the phenomenon under study through engaging participants in person (Creswell, 2017). This study took place in Dhanmondi and Gulshan urban areas, densely populated and economically vibrant neighborhoods of Dhaka, Bangladesh. These areas were chosen because they represent contexts where children's access to outdoor play is particularly constrained by factors such as traffic congestion, limited open spaces, high academic pressure, and widespread digital device use. The researcher approached participants at or near their homes and institutions to capture valuable insights into their diverse experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives regarding outdoor play and child development within an urban Bangladeshi context.

3.3 Research Participants

This study involved two groups of participants: parents of children aged 4 to 6 years and preschool teachers working with children in the same age range. A total of 7 participants were engaged in individual in-depth interviews. The parent group consisted of four participants: two fathers (F1 and F2) and two mothers (M1 and M2), all with children attending preschools in Dhanmondi and Gulshan. The teacher group consisted of three participants: one male teacher (T1) and two female teachers (T2 and T3), all employed in kindergarten or preschool settings in Dhanmondi and Gulshan. Ages ranged from 26 to 36 years among teachers and from 30 to 37 years among parents. Teaching experience among teacher participants ranged from 3 to 16 years. Following that, both teacher's and parents' educational qualifications ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate level, including professional degrees in education, business, and medicine.

3.4 Inclusion Criteria:

- Parents of children aged 4 to 6 years currently enrolled in a preschool or kindergarten in Dhanmondi and Gulshan
- Preschool or kindergarten teachers currently working with children aged 4 to 6 years in Dhanmondi and Gulshan
- Willingness to participate in an in-depth interview and share personal experiences and opinions related to outdoor play and child development
- For teachers: a minimum of two years of teaching experience in an early childhood education setting

3.5 Participant Selection Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, a widely adopted approach in qualitative research for identifying individuals who can provide rich and contextually relevant data aligned with the research objectives (Creswell, 2015). This approach targeted parents and preschool teachers from Dhanmondi and Gulshan, ensuring diverse perspectives across genders, occupations, and levels of professional experience. Parents were selected based on having a child within the target age range, residing or attending an educational institution within the study area, and willingness to engage openly with interview questions. Teachers were selected based on their direct experience working with children, familiarity with issues surrounding outdoor play and digital influence, and availability to participate in the interview. Participants were contacted through direct outreach, and the study's purpose was clearly explained before scheduling.

3.6 Data Collection Tool

Data were collected exclusively through In-depth Interviews (IDIs) using a semi-structured interview guideline developed by the researcher. The IDI guideline was designed to elicit rich, detailed responses about participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions across the study's thematic areas. In-depth interviews used open-ended questions to gather data about participants' understanding, emotions, and reasoning on a particular topic, allowing for flexible exploration of emergent ideas (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The interview guide was organized into four sections: (A) Demographic Information, (B) Understanding of Playground and Child Development, (C) Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era, and lastly (D) General Questions covering access to playgrounds, the role of gadgets, urban infrastructure, and support systems for parents and teachers. The guide was reviewed by the academic supervisor before data collection to ensure alignment with the study's objectives and research questions.

3.7 Data Collection Method and Procedure

Data were collected following a systematic set of procedural steps to ensure consistency, ethical compliance, and methodological precision:

- Demographic information, including age, gender, occupation, educational background, and child's age and school type (for parents), as well as years of teaching experience and institution type (for teachers), was collected at the outset of each interview.
- The researcher developed the IDI guideline based on the research questions, covering participants' understanding of outdoor play, perceived developmental benefits, barriers to outdoor engagement, and recommendations for improving access.

- The academic supervisor reviewed the interview guideline to ensure clarity, thematic coverage, and alignment with the study's objectives.
- Participant selection was carried out through direct outreach. The researcher clearly explained the study's purpose, objectives, and voluntary nature of participation during all initial interactions.
- Contact details were gathered, interview timings were arranged according to participants' availability, and participants were notified in advance of interview schedules.
- All interviews were conducted in person, fostering a comfortable and trust-based environment to encourage open and detailed sharing of experiences.
- Seven IDIs were conducted in total: four with parents and three with teachers. Parent interviews ranged from approximately 45 to 60 minutes each. Teacher interviews lasted approximately 40 to 50 minutes each.
- Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' prior consent, and supplementary field notes were maintained throughout.

3.8 Data Management and Analysis

According to Creswell (2015), understanding text and visuals is fundamental to qualitative data analysis and to building answers to research questions. To that end, when all interviews were completed, audio recordings were carefully reviewed for completeness and accuracy. All recordings were transcribed verbatim, and brief field notes were expanded into detailed analytical narratives. The study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework to analyze the data systematically and inductively.

The analytical process proceeded through the following stages. In the first phase, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading and re-reading all transcripts, noting initial observations and impressions. In the second phase, initial codes were systematically generated from the dataset to identify meaningful information relevant to the research questions. In the third phase, codes were sorted and grouped into potential themes and sub-themes. In the fourth phase, themes and transcripts were reviewed against the coded data for coherence and accurate fit. In the fifth phase, themes were defined and named with precision, and their relationships were outlined. In the final phase, findings were produced by summarizing key insights under each theme and integrating¹³ direct participant quotations to support the analysis. Both parent and teacher responses were synthesized within each theme to enable comparison and to identify concurrence and variances across participant groups. The analysis aimed to identify patterns in participants' perceptions of outdoor play, its developmental values, the barriers children face, and the structural changes needed to improve access to outdoor play in urban Bangladesh.

Figure 1 Data Analysis Plan



¹³ Integrating means combining things

3.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the IDI guideline was reviewed and approved by the academic supervisor before data collection. Interview questions were designed to explore each thematic area from multiple angles, enabling cross-verification of participants' responses and reducing the risk of misleading data. To ensure reliability, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written immediately after each interview to capture contextual observations and nonverbal details. Triangulation was achieved by including both parent and teacher perspectives within the same study, enabling comparison and strengthening the credibility of the findings. Participants were also encouraged to expand on and clarify their responses throughout the interview process, thereby enhancing the depth and consistency of the data.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout all stages of this research. All participants received a clear explanation of the research's purpose, objectives, and procedures before data collection. Verbal informed consent was obtained from every participant before any interview was conducted. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. No physical, psychological, legal, or social harm occurred during the interview sessions. Participants were assured that all data would be stored securely and used exclusively for academic research purposes. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout; all participants were identified using coded pseudonyms (F1, F2, M1, M2 for parents; T1, T2, T3 for teachers) to protect their identities. The study was conducted under

the supervision of an academic expert, in accordance with the institution's ethical standards.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

1. The study relies entirely on qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews, which capture participants' subjective perceptions, experiences, and opinions. No other data collection methods were used in this interview process. Therefore, findings may be influenced by participants' personal beliefs, memories, or interpretations rather than objective measurements of children's development.

2. Participants may have provided responses they considered socially or professionally appropriate, particularly with respect to parenting practices, teaching approaches, and children's screen time habits. This social desirability bias may have influenced the authenticity of some responses.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

4.1 Results

This chapter presents the findings from seven in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted with four parents and three preschool teachers in urban Dhaka. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive account of participants' perceptions regarding outdoor playground activities, their contribution to child development and school readiness, the barriers created by digital device use and urban environments, and the structural and community-level changes required to support children's outdoor engagement. Data from both parent and teacher interviews have been synthesized and analyzed thematically, and findings are presented under six overarching themes with associated sub-themes.

Participant quotations are integrated throughout to ground the analysis in participants' voices, and convergences and divergences between parent and teacher perspectives are identified where relevant.

4.2 Demographic Information

The study was conducted among two groups of participants: parents of children aged 4 to 6 years, and preschool and kindergarten teachers, all based in the urban areas of Dhanmondi and Gulshan, Dhaka.

The parent group comprised four participants: two fathers (F1 and F2) and two mothers (M1 and M2). F1, aged 33, is a businessman with a BBA and MBA qualification, residing in Gulshan, with a 6-year-old child attending a private preschool. F2, aged 37, is a corporate employee with a BBA and an MBA, based in Dhanmondi, with a 5-year-old child attending a private school. M1, aged 30, is a teacher with a BA and MEd, living in Dhanmondi, and has a 4-year-old child enrolled in a private preschool. M2, aged 34, is a doctor holding an MBBS and FCPS, based in Gulshan, with a 4-year-old child in a private preschool. Parent participants' ages ranged from 30 to 37 years, and all held at least undergraduate qualifications.

The teacher group comprised three participants: one male (T1) and two females (T2 and T3). T1, aged 26, holds a BA and has 3 years of teaching experience in a kindergarten in Dhanmondi. T2, aged 28, holds a BA and an MSc and has 5 years of experience across both preschool and kindergarten settings in Dhanmondi and Gulshan. T3, aged 36, holds a BA, MA, and MEd and has 16 years of teaching experience in a

kindergarten in Dhanmondi. Teacher participants' ages ranged from 26 to 36 years, with teaching experience spanning from early-career to highly experienced educators.

Together, these seven participants provided a cross-sectional view of outdoor play experiences and perceptions from both home and school perspectives, with diverse professional, educational, and personal backgrounds enriching the data.

4.3 Findings

This section presents the primary findings of this study, organized into six themes derived from thematic analysis. Each theme is introduced analytically in sub-themes before participant quotations are integrated and interpreted; where relevant, similarities and differences between parent and teacher perspectives are discussed.

Theme 1: Understanding of Playground and Child Development

This theme explored how parents and teachers understand the role of outdoor playgrounds in children's overall development. The sub-themes differ between the two groups, reflecting the different interview questions and experiential vantage points of each. Parents were asked about the importance of outdoor play for holistic development and school readiness, as well as the most meaningful developmental benefit for children aged 4 to 6. Teachers were asked about outdoor play's contribution to daily school activity, its role across developmental domains, and how they integrate it into subject-specific learning and school readiness.

Parents' Perspectives on Understanding of Playground and Child Development

Sub-Theme 1.1: Importance of Outdoor Play in Children's Holistic Development

Most parents described outdoor play as something genuinely necessary for children rather than simply beneficial. They spoke about it based on what they had personally seen their children do and become, not on abstract ideas. Outdoor environments, in their accounts, offer something that indoor settings and devices simply do not: unscripted interaction with other children, freedom to move and explore, and contact with the physical world. F1, a father from Gulshan, put this plainly:

"I believe daily outdoor play is extremely important for a child's overall development. Children need opportunities to explore the world beyond their homes. Outdoor environments allow them to interact with nature, including trees, grass, fresh air, and open spaces, which are not available indoors. It also allows them to interact with other children, which helps develop communication skills, social competence, and even leadership qualities." (IDI#01, Parent F1, Businessman, 15-05-2026)

Most parents pointed to physical gains first, running, jumping, climbing, and cycling, building the kind of strength, coordination, and stamina that cannot be developed sitting still. M2, a doctor and mother, brought a clinical angle to this, noting that physical activity through outdoor play directly strengthens muscles, increases energy levels, and supports healthy growth. M1 observed that on days her child played outside, the effects were visible: better sleep, more energy, a noticeably lighter mood.

On social and emotional grounds, most parents recalled specific moments that stayed with them. F2's account is worth quoting because of how directly it captures what outdoor engagement can actually change:

"My child used to sit in front of the television for most of the time, and she was fond of digital devices. After playing outside for a few days, she started playing with us, and she became more active than before." (IDI#02, Parent F2, Corporate Employee, 22-05-2026)

Some parents also identified cognitive dimensions. M1 observed that when children invent their own games, navigate unfamiliar environments, and make decisions during play, they build critical thinking skills that structured learning rarely asks of them at this age. F1 noted that his son, through playing football with children from different backgrounds, had grown in social curiosity and breadth in ways he had not anticipated.

Parents in this study understood the developmental value of outdoor play not through theory but by watching their own children. Their accounts point consistently to the same conclusion: physical freedom, peer contact, and unstructured time outdoors produce changes in children that other experiences do not, and those changes are visible to the people closest to them.

Sub-Theme 1.2: The Role of Outdoor Play in Children's School Readiness

Most parents made a direct connection between regular outdoor play and children's readiness for the classroom. The skills they named were not academic ones. They were behavioral: the ability to listen, follow instructions without resisting, sit still for reasonable periods, take turns, manage frustration, and work alongside others. M1, who is both a parent and a teacher by profession, described these connections with particular precision:

"Yes, I believe outdoor play prepares children for school in many ways. It helps them develop listening skills, follow rules, cooperate with others, and build concentration. These are important skills for adjusting to a classroom environment. Outdoor play also supports physical development, which helps children sit comfortably, write, and participate in school activities." (IDI#03, Parent M1, Teacher, 16-05-2026)

F1 emphasized the social dimension of readiness, noting that children who play regularly with others become more comfortable in unfamiliar social settings, which eases the transition into new classes and peer groups. M2 reinforced this, noting that communication, the ability to share, and the confidence to approach other children are all things that outdoor group play teaches in ways that home environments and screens do not.

A few parents, F2 among them, framed school readiness in more immediate, practical terms: outdoor play builds language through conversation during games, counting through physical activities, and communication through constant negotiation

with peers. These, he felt, are the real building blocks for what children are asked to do when they start school.

Across all parent accounts, outdoor play came across not as preparation for school in the narrow sense of academic skills but in a broader, more important one: children who play regularly with others arrive at school already knowing how to be in a group, follow a shared set of rules, and manage the ordinary social demands of a classroom day.

Sub-Theme 1.3: Developmental Benefit of Outdoor Play for Children Aged 4-6

When asked to name the single most important developmental benefit of outdoor play for children aged 4 to 6, most parents converged on social and communicative development as the foundation on which everything else rests. M2 drew on her medical background to frame this:

"Although outdoor play supports many areas of development, I believe its greatest benefit is socio-emotional development. Through outdoor play, children learn social interaction, communication, cooperation, and relationship-building skills. These abilities are crucial during the early years and form the foundation for future learning and social success." (IDI#04, Parent M2, Doctor, 27-05-2026)

F1 similarly highlighted social adaptability and communication, arguing that exposure to peers of different ages and temperaments through outdoor play teaches children to interact flexibly in ways that structured environments cannot replicate. Some

parents, M1 included, preferred a more integrated view that physical coordination and social development reinforce each other during outdoor play and cannot meaningfully be separated.

A few parents resisted the question itself. F2 observed that between ages 4 and 6, children are developing across all domains at once through physical engagement, and that what makes outdoor play distinctively valuable at this stage is precisely that it builds the body, the mind, and social confidence together, not one at a time.

What connected all parent responses on this point, despite their different emphases, was a shared recognition that the 4 to 6 age window is formative in ways that compound over time. Whether they named social confidence, physical coordination, or the two together, parents understood that what children gain through outdoor play at this stage does not simply disappear; it shapes how they learn, relate, and engage for years afterwards.

Teachers' Perspectives on Understanding of Playground and Child Development

Sub-Theme 1.1: Contribution of Outdoor Play in Students' Development as Part of Daily Activity in School

All three teachers were clear that outdoor play belongs in the school day as a developmental necessity, not a reward or a gap-filler between lessons. Most grounded this view in what they had observed across years of teaching rather than in developmental theory alone. T3, with 16 years of practice, made the neurological connection directly:

"During the early years, children's brains develop rapidly, and physical movement is closely connected to brain development. Outdoor play encourages active movement, improves blood circulation, and ensures that the brain receives sufficient oxygen, supporting learning and overall development. Therefore, outdoor activities should be considered an essential part of daily school routines rather than an optional activity."
(IDI#07, Teacher T3, Kindergarten Teacher, 18-05-2026)

Most teachers described outdoor play as supporting all four developmental domains at once: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. T2 drew attention to the sensory qualities of outdoor environments, specifically noting that sand, water, and physical play materials allow children to explore and experiment in ways that classroom settings structurally cannot. She had watched quiet, withdrawn children become expressive and socially engaged the moment they were outside and saw that confidence carry back into the classroom. T1 recounted something similar: a shy student who gradually started leading group playground games and, over time, became noticeably more willing to speak up in class.

A few teachers also pointed to specific physical competencies, such as gross motor skills, coordination, and stamina. They observed that children who had been outside returned to class in a noticeably more alert and settled state.

What these teacher accounts share is not just knowledge that outdoor play matters but conviction, built from years of watching the same patterns repeat. Children who play

outside return to the classroom differently. Teachers who have seen this enough times stop treating outdoor activity as optional.

Sub-Theme 1.2: Importance of Outdoor Play in Children's Holistic Development

Most teachers gave detailed, domain-specific accounts of how outdoor play contributes to children's development, and their descriptions were grounded in direct observation rather than generalizations. Regarding physical development, most pointed to the gross motor skills children build through running, jumping, climbing, and balancing activities, which strengthen muscles, improve coordination, and build the kind of physical fitness that sedentary classroom time cannot provide.

Regarding cognitive development, most teachers emphasized that outdoor environments foster a different kind of thinking from that encouraged in classrooms. T1 noted that children who design their own games, solve problems on climbing equipment, and navigate physical challenges develop decision-making and strategic thinking skills that structured lessons rarely ask of them. T2 described sand play, treasure hunts, and exploration activities as contexts where children think critically and experiment freely.

On social development, most teachers observed that group outdoor play is where children actually learn to cooperate, negotiate, and manage the small frictions of shared activity. T2 described this directly:

"Playgrounds create opportunities for children to interact with peers through group games and collaborative activities. They learn how to communicate, cooperate, negotiate, share resources, follow rules, and work as a team. Outdoor play also helps children understand concepts such as winning and losing and promotes healthy social relationships. (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

On emotional development, most teachers noted that outdoor settings give children more room to express themselves than the classroom does. T3 observed that completing a physical challenge on the playground gives children a real sense of achievement, one that builds resilience and emotional steadiness over time. A few teachers, T1 among them, added that outdoor play gives children a healthy way to manage frustration and bounce back from small failures, which matters considerably when they return to structured learning.

Across all four domains, teachers' accounts point to the same thing: outdoor play is not one enrichment activity among many. It is a context where physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development occur simultaneously through the same activity, in ways that cannot easily be replicated indoors. The weight of these accounts stems from their being drawn from repeated, daily observation over many years.

Sub-Theme 1.3: Incorporation of Outdoor Play in Subject-Specific Learning

All three teachers confirmed that they actively integrate outdoor play into subject-specific learning rather than treating the playground as a separate space with no

connection to academic content. Most described concrete strategies they use regularly. T1 explained how outdoor settings provide real-world contexts for mathematics and science:

"In mathematics, students can count objects, measure distances, or practice shapes and patterns outside. In science, observing plants, insects, or weather conditions helps students connect theoretical concepts with real-life experiences. Outdoor learning makes lessons more engaging and helps children understand concepts better through hands-on experiences." (IDI#05, Teacher T1, Kindergarten Teacher, 16-05-2026)

T2 described a more game-based approach. She runs treasure hunts where children search for clues tied to lesson content, and uses ball-passing games in which students construct sentences using assigned vocabulary words. The learning, she noted, becomes meaningful precisely because it is embedded in movement and play rather than isolated in a worksheet. A few teachers, T3 among them, also described nature-based homework collecting and labelling leaves or flowers for a scrapbook as a way to extend outdoor learning into children's home routines without requiring school resources.

These examples carry a practical significance worth noting. The teachers in this study were not simply aware that outdoor learning is possible; they were making it happen under institutional constraints that did not always support them. The fact that they did it with minimal resources and on their own initiative points to what is possible when teachers are trusted with flexibility rather than just curriculum coverage targets.

Sub-Theme 1.4: Role of Outdoor Play in Children's School Readiness and Academic Performance

Most teachers identified a direct relationship between regular outdoor engagement and children's readiness for structured classroom learning. The skills they named concentration, self-regulation, communication, social confidence, and problem-solving are the same ones that underpin classroom performance. T1 was direct about this:

"In my experience, children who regularly participate in outdoor play are generally more attentive, motivated, and prepared for classroom learning. Physical activity helps improve concentration, memory, and energy levels. Outdoor play also develops important skills such as following instructions, working with others, and problem-solving, which contribute positively to academic performance and overall school readiness." (IDI#05, Teacher T1, Kindergarten Teacher, 16-05-2026)

T2 added that children who engage physically in learning are less likely to disengage or become bored, and that integrating outdoor activity with academic content increases motivation in ways that sitting-down instruction alone does not. Most teachers observed that children who had been outside returned to class more settled and focused. A few noted that the readiness benefits go beyond cognitive alertness. Children who play regularly with peers are also more socially confident in the classroom and better equipped to manage the interpersonal demands of group work and shared learning.

Teachers' accounts of school readiness bring something specific into view: being ready for school is not about knowing the alphabet or counting to ten. It is about listening,

sitting, cooperating, managing frustration, and engaging with others. All three teachers made this connection independently, through children they had personally observed, which gives their accounts a grounding that theory alone cannot provide.

Taken across both parent and teacher perspectives, Theme 1 established a consistent, deeply held understanding of outdoor play as far more than exercise or leisure. Whether speaking from direct parental observation or from years of classroom experience, participants understood outdoor play as a context where the body, the mind, and social and emotional capacities develop together in ways that other environments do not. The fact that two very different groups of adults, approaching the question from very different positions, arrive at the same conclusion adds considerable weight to the finding.

Theme 2: Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era

This theme examined what prevents children from engaging in regular outdoor play. Both parents and teachers identified overlapping but distinct sets of structural, environmental, and behavioral obstacles. The sub-themes differ between the two groups, as the questions were designed around each group's context. Parents were asked about what prevents their child from playing outside, the influence of screen time, children's preferences, and what neighborhood changes would help. Teachers were asked about urban limitations, the effects of screen time, school-level barriers, and how digital influence changes children's physical and social behavior.

Parents' Perspectives on Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era

Sub-Theme 2.1: Factors that Prevent Children from Outdoor Play

Most parents described children's limited outdoor play as the result of several interconnected pressures rather than a single identifiable cause. The lack of safe and accessible play spaces, academic demands, parental time constraints, and the pull of digital devices came up across all four interviews, not as separate issues but as conditions that reinforce one another in daily life. M1, based in Dhanmondi, described the spatial dimension of this problem with particular clarity:

"Living in Dhanmondi, one of the biggest challenges is the lack of open playgrounds that are freely accessible to all children. Most available fields are at sports academies, where children need to enroll in specific sports programmers. Many schools in the area either lack playgrounds or have very small fields. Traffic, weather conditions, academic schedules, and safety concerns are also important factors." (IDI#03, Parent M1, Teacher, 16-05-2026)

Most parents noted that children's afternoons have become heavily structured with tuition classes, coaching, and homework, leaving very little genuinely unscheduled time. Some parents, M2 in particular, pointed to the time poverty specific to working parents she can only reliably take her child outdoors at weekends. A few parents also observed that screens have become the default activity in those unstructured gaps that do exist, reducing children's spontaneous inclination to go outside even when nothing is stopping them.

What these accounts make clear is that barriers to outdoor play are not isolated. They compound. Even motivated, aware parents find themselves navigating a combination of missing infrastructure, overcrowded schedules, safety concerns, and the constant availability of indoor entertainment that together make outdoor play the exception rather than the routine for many children in this context.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Influence of Screen Time on Children's Outdoor Play

Most parents expressed concern that screen time does not just compete with outdoor play but also gradually reshapes children's preferences, making outdoor activity feel less attractive over time. The mechanism they described is straightforward: digital devices deliver immediate, low-effort entertainment, and children who grow up with consistent access to this begin to find physical play comparatively effortful. F2 acknowledged that screen time discussions often overlook that parental habits are part of this:

"As we are being digitized day by day, parents are using their devices in front of their children, and that is how children are being fascinated by digital devices. Moreover, parents rely on digital devices while children are eating food, and this has become a practice." (IDI#02, Parent F2, Corporate Employee, 22-05-2026)

Most parents acknowledged that without active monitoring, children drift naturally toward screens. Some, such as M1, argued that this preference is partly situational; children are more likely to reach for a device when no accessible outdoor alternative is nearby, suggesting that infrastructure and screen habits are connected. A contrasting

experience came from M2, whose child consistently chooses outdoor play when given the option, which she attributed to managing screen time deliberately from early on. That contrast matters: it shows that the pattern is not fixed.

The household's digital culture, shaped by parental modelling as much as by children's own preferences, plays a more significant role in how screen time affects outdoor play than is usually acknowledged. Where that culture is actively managed, children show a stronger pull toward physical play. Where it develops by default, screens tend to fill the available time.

Sub-Theme 2.3: Children's Preference for Screen-Based Activities over Outdoor Play

Most parents observed that children in the current generation are increasingly preferring screen-based activities over outdoor play. Most attributed this not to any inherent quality of this generation of children but to the environment they had grown up in. These children have had screens around them from birth. Most parents felt that the preference is an outcome of that exposure rather than an intrinsic characteristic. F2 described this plainly:

"Games and TV apps are so common for people in today's world. And this generation sees these digital devices from birth, so they naturally grow fond of them. That is why children are less interested in playing games outside at home. And also at the same time, there are not enough playgrounds in this city for children to go and play." (IDI#02, Parent F2, Corporate Employee, 22-05-2026)

Some parents, M1 among them, argued that the preference for screens is situationally determined rather than fixed. Children who have access to engaging, nearby outdoor spaces tend to choose play. M2's experience with her own child supports this: deliberate screen management and consistent access to outdoor experiences have produced a child who, in practice, does not prefer screens. A few parents framed screen preference less as a children's problem and more as an environmental one; the city does not offer children enough alternatives.

Children's preference for screens is real but not permanent. It develops in environments where screens are always accessible and outdoor alternatives are not, and it can change when those conditions change. That is a meaningfully different conclusion from the idea that today's children are simply less interested in outdoor play than previous generations were.

Sub-Theme 2.4: Set-Up of Neighborhood Playground to Increase Children's Outdoor Play

Most parents were specific about what neighborhood infrastructure improvements would actually make a difference: safe, freely accessible, well-maintained community playgrounds close enough to home to use without planning an expedition. The desire was not for elaborate facilities but for basic, reliable, child-appropriate outdoor spaces that did not require paid enrolment in a sports program. M1 described this in practical terms:

"I think having more community playgrounds that are open to all children would make a big difference. Safe walking paths, reduced traffic near play areas, better maintenance of open spaces, and more green areas would encourage parents to allow outdoor play. In residential buildings, larger play areas with greenery and age-appropriate equipment would also help." (IDI#03, Parent M1, Teacher, 16-05-2026)

Most parents stressed that these spaces must be accessible, as the current dominance of private academy-run fields excludes children who do not need structured sports programs, just a place to play. F1 added that community norms matter alongside infrastructure: environments where parents routinely bring children out together multiply the effect of any physical developments. F2 was direct about the parental role, recommending that families actively take children to available outdoor spaces, intentionally limit device access, and teach children about the value of physical play rather than waiting for them to choose it independently. A few parents specifically called on schools to improve their own playground facilities, with F1 noting that playground availability had been a deciding factor in his choice of his son's school.

What parents described here is not an ambitious wish list. It is a modest, locally grounded set of requests for the restoration of outdoor spaces for children that were once standard, accessible, free, and maintained, and that have gradually disappeared from large parts of urban Dhaka. The consistency of these requests across all four parent participants points to a shared gap that has gone unaddressed as the city has grown.

Teachers' Perspectives on Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era

Sub-Theme 2.1: Limitations that Prevent Children from Playing Outdoors in Urban Environments Today

All three teachers identified the rapid shrinkage of safe outdoor space as the most serious structural barrier to children's outdoor play in Dhaka. Most described this not as one problem but as several compounding ones: disappearing green space, school buildings without playgrounds, traffic and pollution concerns, packed academic schedules, and parental safety anxieties that make unsupervised outdoor time feel too risky. T2 captured the school-level dimension of this clearly:

"The biggest limitation is the lack of space. Many schools operate within buildings and lack adequate playground facilities. As a result, children miss opportunities to engage in activities that support different developmental domains. Many schools also lack specialized outdoor areas for activities such as sand play, mud play, obstacle courses, creative arts, or nature-based exploration." (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

Most teachers described how safety concerns interact with infrastructure deficits, thereby compounding the deterrent. T3 noted that working parents and schools operating under strict curriculum requirements face particular difficulty, as time for outdoor activity gets squeezed from both ends. A few teachers, T1 among them, also acknowledged that extracurricular commitments, such as tuition classes and coaching, consume what little after-school time remains, leaving children with almost no unscheduled outdoor time even when spaces are available.

Teachers described not a single problem with a single fix but a convergence of pressures that reinforce one another. Improving one factor, building one playground, and removing one hour of tuition would not be enough on its own. What they are describing is a gradual, systemic failure that will require a systemic response.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Influence of Screen Time on Children's Interest in Outdoor Play

Most teachers reported that excessive screen use meaningfully reduces children's motivation to play outside. The pattern they described is consistent: digital platforms provide immediate, continuous stimulation, and children habituated to that level of stimulation find outdoor environments comparatively dull. T2 named the specific platforms she sees most commonly affecting this:

"Many children become highly engaged in digital games such as Roblox and Minecraft, as well as short-form content such as reels and videos. These platforms provide continuous stimulation and rewards, making outdoor play seem less attractive. As a result, children may become reluctant to participate in outdoor activities unless parents and caregivers intentionally develop a routine that includes regular outdoor play." (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

Most teachers observed that extended screen use gradually shifts children toward sedentary behavior, making active outdoor exploration feel less natural over time. T3 noted that this also affects children's social behavior. Less time outdoors means fewer face-to-face peer interactions, with consequences for social development that compound

quietly. A few teachers emphasized that the most effective counter to screen dominance is that routine outdoor play must become a consistent daily expectation rather than an occasional activity if it is to compete meaningfully with the pull of screens.

Teachers observed this pattern in their own classrooms in children's energy levels, attention spans, and social ease when they arrive each morning. Their accounts point to something easy to underestimate: the competition between screens and outdoor play is not a fair one, and without deliberate effort from both schools and families, screens win by default.

Sub-Theme 2.3: Factors that Limit Children's Participation in Playground Activities in School

Most teachers identified institutional and community-level factors, separate from digital influence, that specifically restrict playground participation. The dominant pattern was clear: academic scheduling leaves very little room for outdoor play within the school day, and the absence of community playgrounds limits what families can do outside school hours. T2 described the scheduling tension teachers face directly:

"Schools often operate under strict schedules and curriculum requirements, leaving limited opportunities for outdoor play. Teachers are expected to complete academic content within designated time periods, reducing flexibility for play-based activities. Additionally, some communities lack nearby playgrounds, making access difficult for families. Long travel distances discourage parents and caregivers from taking

children to outdoor play spaces regularly." (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

Most teachers noted that homework, coaching, and tuition classes consume the after-school hours that might otherwise be used for outdoor activities. T3 pointed to the absence of safe, walkable community play spaces as a further structural barrier. When play spaces are far away, the practical difficulty of outdoor play increases sharply for families. A few teachers, T1 among them, noted that weather conditions and parental safety concerns add situational restrictions on top of the structural ones.

The limiting factors teachers named here sit at the level of institutional design and community planning, not individual choice. Teachers who want to incorporate outdoor play face real structural constraints that good intentions cannot dissolve. What their accounts point toward is the need for changes to scheduling policy, playground provision, and community infrastructure conditions that create outdoor play rather than leaving it to whoever manages to find the time.

Sub-Theme 2.4: Effects of Digital Influence on Children's Physical Activities and Social Interactions

Most teachers reported observing real and concerning changes in children's physical activity levels and social interaction patterns as a direct result of increased screen use. Their observations pointed consistently to the same dual effect: children who spend long periods on screens are less physically active and less at ease with the spontaneous, face-to-face interaction that outdoor play requires. T1 described this plainly:

"Increased use of digital devices often leads to reduced physical activity because children spend more time sitting and less time engaging in active play. This can affect their fitness, coordination, and overall health. In terms of social interaction, many children communicate more through screens than through face-to-face. Excessive use may limit opportunities to develop important social skills such as cooperation, empathy, conflict resolution, and effective communication." (IDI#05, Teacher T1, Kindergarten Teacher, 16-05-2026)

Most teachers observed that children who spend significant time on screens become progressively less comfortable with the unscripted, collaborative quality of playground interaction. T3, drawing on 16 years of classroom experience, noted that this erosion happens gradually, and the enthusiasm for group outdoor play diminishes slowly among children who spend more time on devices. The change becomes visible to teachers who work with the same children over months. A few teachers noted that the social effects are most apparent during playground time, where children accustomed to screen-mediated interaction sometimes struggle to initiate or maintain the kind of cooperative play that outdoor environments are designed to support.

What teachers add to the conversation about digital influence is ground-level continuity. They are not describing a general trend from a distance. They are describing children they teach, whose behavior has shifted in ways that are visible, consistent, and worth taking seriously. That kind of evidence carries weight that usage statistics and survey data cannot easily replicate.

Across both parent and teacher perspectives, Theme 2 presented a consistent picture of outdoor play being compressed from multiple directions simultaneously. Infrastructure is inadequate. Schedules are packed. Screens are always accessible. Safety concerns are real and rational. What stands out is not any single barrier but the way they interact with each other, making the others harder to address. Both groups understood this clearly and pointed toward the same kind of response: changes at the levels of environment and system, not just at the level of individual families or classrooms.

Theme 3: Children's Access to Outdoor Play and Playgrounds

This theme examined how both parents and teachers perceive the importance and current adequacy of children's access to outdoor play and playground spaces in urban Dhaka. Both groups answered the same questions, and their perspectives are integrated below. The central finding across all seven participants was consistent: access to outdoor play is not a convenience but a developmental necessity, and what is currently available in urban Dhaka falls well short of what children need.

Most parents and teachers agreed that the erosion of safe, accessible outdoor spaces has become one of the most serious developmental challenges facing children in the city today. Participants from both groups described this not as an inconvenience but as a rights failure; children are entitled to the developmental experiences that outdoor play provides, and the environment is not delivering them. T2 articulated this in terms of institutional responsibility:

"Access to outdoor play and playgrounds is extremely important because it supports children's holistic development. Outdoor environments contribute to cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. Schools have a responsibility not only to provide academic education but also to support children's overall development. Since parents often rely on schools to contribute to their children's growth and well-being, educational institutions should ensure that children have regular opportunities to participate in outdoor play." (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

Parents reinforced this from the ground. F1 noted that, compared to his own childhood, children today have far fewer opportunities to play in open spaces, and that choosing a school with a large playground had been a deliberate decision rather than a preference he could take for granted. Some parents, particularly those in Dhanmondi, described the particular difficulty of finding freely accessible play spaces where children do not need to be enrolled in a paid sports program. M2, as a doctor, framed the absence of outdoor access as a public health concern, not just an educational one. A few participants drew a generational comparison: M2 and several teachers recalled that schools in their own childhoods routinely had dedicated playgrounds, a feature now absent from many urban institutions.

Theme 3 made something explicit that earlier themes only implied: the problem of outdoor play in urban Dhaka is not primarily one of awareness or motivation. Both parents and teachers know why it matters. What is missing is the infrastructure and institutional commitment to make it possible. Until those changes at the school and urban community

levels, the gap between what participants know and what children actually experience will remain wide.

Theme 4: Role of Gadgets in the Development of Children

This theme explored parents' and teachers' perceptions of how gadgets, such as smartphones, tablets, and television, shape children's development. Both groups responded to the same questions, and their perspectives are integrated below. No participant argued that gadgets are wholly harmful or should be removed from children's lives. All seven held a balanced position: digital technology has genuine educational value, and the concern is not with technology itself but with unregulated and excessive use.

Most parents and teachers acknowledged that gadgets, used thoughtfully, can support learning. Educational videos, songs, interactive applications, and rhymes were identified as content that can helpfully introduce children to letters, numbers, colours, and language. What participants objected to was the conditions under which children are actually using devices in most households for entertainment rather than education, for extended periods, without adult oversight. M2 put both sides of this clearly:

"Gadgets have both positive and negative effects on children's development. On the positive side, educational videos, songs, rhymes, and learning applications can support cognitive development. For example, children can learn the alphabet, numbers, colours, and other concepts through educational content. However, excessive gadget use can reduce physical activity and limit opportunities for outdoor play, so a balanced approach is important." (IDI#04, Parent M2, Doctor, 27-05-2026)

Teachers shared this assessment but placed particular weight on what they see in classrooms, given heavy screen use at home. Most observed that children who spend a lot of time on devices tend to have shorter attention spans, lower levels of physical activity, and greater difficulty with face-to-face interaction. T3 stressed that adult supervision is not optional if technology is to play a genuinely constructive role:

"Gadgets have both advantages and disadvantages. Educational applications, videos, and interactive content can support learning and cognitive development. However, excessive use of gadgets may negatively affect physical activity, attention span, social interaction, and overall well-being. Therefore, gadgets should be used in moderation and under adult supervision to ensure a healthy balance between digital learning and active play." (IDI#07, Teacher T3, Kindergarten Teacher, 18-05-2026)

Some parents and teachers took a more cautious line, arguing that, in practice, gadgets in most urban households are used far more for entertainment than for education, making their net effect more harmful than helpful. F2 was the most direct among parents, stating plainly that gadgets make children less active and less focused. A few participants reflected on how hard it actually is to maintain balance. The reward-based design of popular platforms makes moderation genuinely difficult without sustained adult effort.

The shared position across all seven participants expressed that gadgets are neither categorically harmful nor unconditionally useful is itself a significant finding. It reflects a pragmatic, experience-informed understanding that the developmental impact of

technology depends entirely on how, how much, and under what conditions children use it. That is a more honest and more actionable conclusion than either a blanket warning against screens or an uncritical embrace of educational technology.

Theme 5: The Role of Urban Planning and Community Infrastructure in Outdoor Play

This theme addressed how both parents and teachers understand the relationship between urban planning, community infrastructure, and children's opportunities for outdoor play. Both groups responded to the same questions, and their perspectives are integrated below. A consistent view ran through all accounts: the urban environment in Dhaka has not been designed with children's developmental needs in mind, and improving access to outdoor play will require deliberate planning decisions, sustained public investment, and genuine collaboration across government, schools, and communities.

Most parents and teachers called for urban planning to explicitly prioritize child-friendly environments. The request was not for grand interventions but for something comparatively modest: safe, well-maintained, freely accessible playgrounds within residential areas, close enough to home that children can reach them easily and parents can feel confident about their safety. The fact that this basic provision is currently absent from large parts of Dhanmondi and Gulshan, two of Dhaka's more established urban neighborhoods, makes clear how systemic the problem is. T3 articulated what most participants were calling for:

"Urban planning should prioritize child-friendly environments by ensuring the availability of safe parks, playgrounds, open spaces, and recreational facilities within residential communities. These spaces should be easily accessible, well-maintained, and designed to meet children's developmental needs. Collaboration between government authorities, schools, and local communities is essential to create supportive outdoor environments." (IDI#07, Teacher T3, Kindergarten Teacher, 18-05-2026)

F1 framed this as a matter of civic responsibility as cities grow and available land gets absorbed into construction, protecting and expanding outdoor space for children must be treated as a public obligation:

"Urban planning should prioritize child-friendly environments by preserving and developing playgrounds, parks, and open recreational spaces. As cities become increasingly crowded with buildings and construction projects, children are losing access to safe play areas. Government authorities and community organizations should work together to create and maintain more outdoor spaces where children can play, socialize, and engage in physical activities." (IDI#01, Parent F1, Businessman, 15-05-2026)

Beyond new infrastructure, some participants offered practical interim suggestions. T3 recommended that parents make regular use of the existing public parks in Dhaka, Ramna Park, Shahabuddin Park, and Suhrawardy Udyan, particularly on weekends. T2 suggested that social media could be used constructively to raise community awareness of outdoor play and advocate for converting unused public land into child-friendly spaces. A few participants focused specifically on schools, arguing that playground provision should

be a basic requirement of any educational institution and that teachers need greater scheduling flexibility to take children outside as part of regular learning.

Participants described not a distant policy aspiration but a practical vision of the city as a shared resource for children's development, one that requires deliberate design and maintenance to serve that purpose. Their suggestions were realistic and locally grounded. These are not abstract demands; they are specific, achievable changes that would make a real difference to the daily lives of ordinary families.

Theme 6: Support for Teachers and Parents to Ensure Children's Outdoor Play

This theme examined what kinds of support both parents and teachers believe are needed to ensure that children in urban Dhaka have regular, safe, and meaningful access to outdoor play. Both groups responded to the same questions, and their perspectives are presented together below. No participant placed the entire responsibility on one actor. The picture that emerged across all seven interviews was one of shared obligation: o, schools, families, communities, and government each have a distinct but interdependent role, and the support children need will only materialize when all of these work in the same direction.

Most parents and teachers agreed on four things that need to happen: schools must schedule outdoor play as a protected activity, parents must actively engage in outdoor routines at home, communities must invest in accessible infrastructure, and public awareness efforts must shift how outdoor play is valued across society. The consensus was not just that these are all desirable, but that progress on any one of them is more likely to

stick when the others are also moving. T1 described the basic model of shared responsibility that most participants recognized:

"Schools can schedule regular outdoor play sessions, while parents can motivate children to participate in physical activities outside school. Community awareness programmers can also help." (IDI#05, Teacher T1, Kindergarten Teacher, 16-05-2026)

T2 expanded this model by proposing that public awareness be delivered through digital channels using the same platforms that compete with outdoor play to advocate for it and by calling on government authorities to identify and convert unused public land into accessible play spaces:

"Public awareness campaigns can play an important role in promoting outdoor play. Social media and online platforms can be used to educate parents, teachers, and communities about the benefits of playgrounds and outdoor activities. Governments and educational authorities should identify unused public spaces and convert them into child-friendly playgrounds. Investing in accessible, safe, and engaging play environments will help ensure that all children have opportunities to benefit from outdoor play." (IDI#06, Teacher T2, Kindergarten and Pre-school Teacher, 24-05-2026)

Parents placed particular weight on the family's own role. F2 argued that structural change means little if parents do not also take personal initiative:

"We should give time to our children. We should play with them and provoke them to go outside and play. We should not give access to digital devices to certain age groups. We should take them to the playground and the swimming pool. We should teach them the benefits of playing outside rather than staying at home." (IDI#02, Parent F2, Corporate Employee, 22-05-2026)

Some participants offered specific, locally grounded suggestions for practically extending outdoor engagement. T3 recommended nature-based homework collecting and labelling leaves or flowers for a scrapbook as a way to bring outdoor learning into children's home routines without requiring school resources. She also suggested regular weekend visits to existing public parks in Dhaka as something families can do now, without waiting for infrastructure improvements. A few participants, M1 among them, stressed that many parents need access to clear, practical information about the developmental value of outdoor play before they can advocate for it effectively, pointing to a role for schools and community organizations in building awareness alongside physical provision.

What emerged from this theme was Theme 1 established a coherent and multi-layered vision of support in which no single group bears the full responsibility. Schools, parents, communities, and government each have a specific contribution to make, and lasting change depends on all of them making it at the same time. The practical, specific suggestions participants offered, from weekend park visits to social media campaigns to nature homework, are a useful starting point for the kind of coordinated response the situation requires.

Discussion

This section brought together the key findings and examines them in relation to both existing research and the study's two research questions: how parents and teachers in urban Dhaka perceive outdoor playgrounds and their contribution to children's development, and what factors limit children's outdoor play in the current digital era. The aim was not to restate what participants said but to draw out what the findings meant, where they align with or extend existing knowledge, and where the most important contributions of this study lie.

On the first research question, the findings were both clear and consistent. All seven participants: four parents and three teachers, held a well-grounded, multidimensional understanding of outdoor play as genuinely necessary for children's development rather than merely enjoyable. Parents described specific changes in their children while teachers described specific children. F2 recalled his daughter abandoning the television and inventing imaginative games after a few days of outdoor play. T1 described a shy student who gradually took leadership roles on the playground before becoming more participatory in class.

These were not illustrations of a general point; they were evidenced, grounded in direct observation, that outdoor environments nurture capacities in children that other settings did not. This aligns with research that positions outdoor environments as uniquely capable of offering children the freedom to move, explore, take risks, and negotiate with peers in ways that indoor settings cannot replicate (Bento & Dias, 2017; Brussoni, 2015).

There was also a beautiful union between the two groups on school readiness. Both parents and teachers identified the same cluster of skills- listening, following rules, managing frustration, cooperating with peers, and concentrating- as the key outcomes linking outdoor play to classroom readiness. This was consistent with research showing that play-based environments support executive function development, which predicts academic outcomes more reliably than early academic instruction alone (Diamond & Lee, 2011; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Teachers extended this understanding by actively integrating outdoor play into subject-specific learning: treasure hunts tied to vocabulary, outdoor counting activities, and nature observation in science. This pedagogical bridge between play and curriculum reflects a practical awareness that deserves recognition, given the institutional pressures teachers face to prioritize content delivery over experiential learning.

Moving forward, the two groups differed in emphasis rather than substance. Teachers were more likely to describe in detail the cognitive and physical developmental benefits of outdoor play, drawing on classroom observations over many years. Parents emphasized social and emotional outcomes first, speaking from the experience of watching a particular child change over time. These are complementary rather than contradictory perspectives, and together they provided a richer scenario of outdoor play's developmental contribution.

On the second research question, the factors limiting outdoor play, the findings presented a more serious picture. The most serious barrier identified across both groups was the absence of safe, accessible open space in urban Dhaka. Rapid urbanization has reduced the availability of public playgrounds, and what remains is largely managed by

private sports academies requiring paid enrolment, making free outdoor play effectively a privilege. This mirrors the rapid urbanizing contexts in the Global South, where children's spatial needs are consistently deprioritized in city planning (Malone & Rudner, 2011).

Following the sequence, teachers were more likely to point on institutional barriers, such as schools without adequate outdoor facilities and academic pressures that decreased outdoor play time in the class schedule. Parents were more likely to emphasize safety concerns and insufficient time, particularly for working parents who cannot accompany children outside on weekdays.

Screen time sat across both groups' accounts as a compounding barrier. When outdoor space is limited, schedules are tight, and devices are always within reach and designed to draw attention, children are naturally attracted to screens. The interview revealed that parents' habit of using smart devices in front of children normalizes screen dependency in the household significantly. Additionally, it points out that it is not only children's habits that matter but the digital culture modelled by adults at home. For instance, F2's experience on this matter contrasts with the experience of M2. M2's child actively prefers outdoor play because screen time has been consistently managed from early on, which suggests that the pattern is not inevitable. It requires sustained and conscious effort to interrupt. However, the effort could be harder to sustain if the structural conditions making outdoor play accessible are absent. This aligns with current developmental guidance recommending that screen time for children be limited, purposefully directed, and never substituted for active outdoor experience (World Health Organisation, 2019).

Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is the awareness-action gap. All seven participants understood why outdoor play matters. Most of them found it genuinely difficult to make it happen consistently. This gap is not a knowledge problem as both parents and teachers are well-informed. It is a structural and resource problem. The implication is significant: interventions focused primarily on educating parents and teachers about the benefits of outdoor play are unlikely to produce lasting change on their own. What the findings point to, consistently across both groups, is the need for change at the environmental and system levels in school scheduling, playground provision, urban planning, and community infrastructure that create the conditions for outdoor play rather than relying on individuals to find it despite the conditions.

Conclusion

This study answered two questions: How do parents and preschool educators in Dhaka city understand outdoor play spaces and their contribution to their child's well-being, and what factors currently limit children's outdoor play in virtual technology? Seven in-depth interviews provided the study with clear answers to both questions, and the difference between them is the location, which matters the most.

Regarding the first question, the study found that both parents and teachers hold genuinely rich, experience-based understanding of the developmental value of outdoor play. According to participants' descriptions of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains, outdoor environments offer children something that classrooms, homes, and digital devices cannot provide. This includes: unscripted interaction, freedom to move, real peer negotiation, and contact with the physical world. This was not theoretical

knowledge. It was grounded in observation of a parent whose daughter stopped watching television and started inventing games, and a shy boy who became a playground leader before becoming more confident in class. Teachers extended this understanding into practice, actively building outdoor experiences into mathematics, science, and language lessons. Participants in both groups also drew a direct line between regular outdoor engagement and children's school readiness, pointing to the same bunch of capacities: listening, cooperating, concentrating, and managing frustration as the developmental outcomes that later depend on formal learning.

On the second question, the frame is more difficult. The factors limiting outdoor play are structural, multiple, and reinforcing. Safe, accessible public play spaces have disappeared from large parts of urban Dhaka. Many schools operate without adequate outdoor facilities. Academic schedules have crowded out unstructured time. Working parents face time constraints that confine¹⁴ outdoor opportunities to weekends. Digital devices fill the gaps that remain, gradually reshaping children's preferences in ways that make outdoor activity feel less appealing without deliberate parental effort to counter the trend.

What the study added to the existing literature is a contextually grounded account of how these tensions play out in urban Bangladesh, a setting that remains underrepresented in early childhood research. It also identifies something worth naming directly: the gap between awareness and action is not a knowledge gap. Both parents and teachers understand the problem. What they lack is an environment- physical, institutional,

¹⁴ Confine refers to a situation that stop something to move forward or to grow

and social- that makes the solution practically achievable. Policy responses that focus on educating families about the benefits of outdoor play, without addressing the infrastructure, scheduling, and safety conditions that make it difficult, are unlikely to produce meaningful change.

Minimizing that gap requires effort from multiple directions. Schools need to treat outdoor play as a protected and purposeful part of the school day. Urban planners need to treat playgrounds as essential public infrastructure rather than optional amenities. Families need practical, accessible support for managing screen time and building outdoor routines. None of this is beyond reach. What it requires is a recognition, shared across institutions and communities, that children's right to play is not a soft priority. It is a developmental foundation, and what is built on it, or not, shapes the trajectory of children's learning and well-being for years to come.

Recommendations

All the following recommendations are derived directly from the findings of this study. Each is linked to a specific theme identified in the research and tied to the actual statements of the research participants, while targeting the five categories of stakeholders with the greatest authority to act. And those are: schools, government agencies, urban planners, families, and the research community.

Recommendation 1: Parents and Teachers Should Actively Recognize the Value of Outdoor Play

Both parents and teachers already have well-grounded knowledge of the importance of outdoor play's developmental benefits. However, this knowledge does not always reflect in daily. The awareness is present. What is often missing is an intentional, repeated verbal exchange of that consciousness with young people, with other parents, with high school leadership, and with the broader community.

Parents should approach the idea of outdoor play to their children as a normal part of everyday conversation, just as they often talk about healthy eating or sleeping. Teachers, for their part, should illustrate the benefits of outdoor play in holistic development to high school administrators and parents by explaining the value and need of it. When parents are told that the time their child spends at the playground builds awareness, social confidence, and self-regulation based on formal learning, they are much less likely to see it as time taken away from academic learning. In either case, representation now has to deal with outdoor play not as an alternative, but as something truly worth mentioning and beneficial.

Recommendation 2: Schools Must Designate and Protect Dedicated Outdoor Play Time Within the Daily Timetable

This recommendation is primarily based on themes 2 and 6 of this research interview. In the study, parents and teachers identified consistent academic schedules as the culminating barrier to children's outdoor play. As participant T2 mentioned, teachers are obliged to complete their lesson plan within a fixed timeline, so the time allocated for extracurricular activities is sometimes used as a last-minute slot. Schools should make

outdoor playtime a non-negotiable, constant part of regular activity, no longer a reward for completing schoolwork. At the same time, schools need to link outdoor settings with subject-specific learning.

Recommendation 3: Government Authorities and Educational Regulators Should Make Playground Provision a Condition of School Registration

This recommendation stemmed from the findings of theme 3. Most parents and teachers in Dhaka reported that many neighborhood and urban wards lacked qualified outdoor play centers. Meanwhile, participant F1 clearly stated that an outdoor playground was a highly decisive¹⁵ factor when choosing a school for his son. Parents are actively trying to find schools with playgrounds, but most schools are unable to meet this demand. This discrepancy reveals an unspecified structural gap in the modern regulatory framework, which needs to be addressed immediately. We should include the requirement for playgrounds on school premises, along with setting common standards for the modernity, length, and cleanliness of playgrounds.

Recommendation 4: Urban Planning in Dhaka Must Prioritize the Development of Safe, Freely Accessible Community Playgrounds in Residential Areas

This recommendation is supported by Themes 3 and 5 of the present study. Both groups of respondents identified the lack of freely accessible public play spaces as the most critical structural barrier preventing children from playing outdoors. As observed by

¹⁵ Decisive: Without any doubt

respondent M1, private sports academies own most sites in areas such as Dhaka's Dhanmondi, and children who do not participate in structured training programs cannot use these spaces at all. Urban planners and government departments need to identify underused public land in densely populated urban districts and convert it into well-maintained, free-to-access playgrounds suitable for children aged 4 to 6. At the same time, they must also build supporting pedestrian safety infrastructure in the surrounding areas, including traffic calming measures, safe footpaths, and sufficient lighting, to ease parents' safety concerns.

Recommendation 5: Parents Need Practical, Community-Based Guidance on Managing Screen Time and Building Outdoor Routines at Home

This recommendation stems from Themes 2 and 6 identified in this study. The main supporting evidence comes from the contrasting experiences of respondents F2 and M2. According to F2, her screen-use habits as a parent had normalized screen dependence in her family. This shows that most families do not realize how much their own behavioral patterns can influence their children's choices. In contrast, M2 consciously and consistently controlled her child's screen time from a very young age and eventually raised a child who actively enjoys playing outdoors. This demonstrates that it is possible to completely change the problematic pattern described above. Schools, housing associations, or local health care providers should launch community-level programs to provide accessible, effective guidance to parents. This guidance should include age-appropriate maximum limits on daily screen time, ways to incorporate daily outdoor activities into family life, and information on low-cost local outdoor activities families can

participate in. For example, existing public spaces in Dhaka, such as Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Udyan, could be included in such recommendations.

Recommendation 6: Future Research Should Explore the Outdoor Play Experiences of Urban Children in Bangladesh

This study has one obvious limitation: all the information collected for this study was obtained from adults who were caring and teaching, and no assistance was provided. Although this study found that both the teaching and the teacher had detailed and nuanced knowledge of the role of play, these descriptions only reflect a superficial view. Future research could use well-established methods, such as child-friendly meeting rooms, drawings, and guided imagery, to explore how children aged four to six years initiate play and respond to absences. Its strength lies in highlighting the tone and adding a voice that cannot replace adult statements. In addition, longitudinal research on the developmental outcomes of play at different levels of opportunity could do more to inform local policy-makers.

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ANNEX 1

Title of the Proposal:

Exploring Teachers' & Parents' Perception of the Role of Playgrounds in Children's Development

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers and parents perceive the role of outdoor playgrounds in children's overall development?
2. What factors limit children's participation in outdoor play in the digital era?

In-depth Interview Guideline (IDI)

IDI Questions for Teachers

A) Demographic Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Educational Background:

Years of Teaching Experience:

Type of Institution (Pre-school/Kindergarten):

B) Understanding of Playground & Child Development

1. In your opinion, how do outdoor playgrounds contribute to children's overall development as a part of daily activity in school?

2. Can you explain how outdoor playgrounds contribute to physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development?

- Physical Development

- Cognitive Development

- Social Development

- Emotional Development

3. Can you describe a situation where you observed children benefiting from outdoor playground activities in any of these areas?

4. Do you incorporate outdoor play in students' subject-specific learning?

5. In your experience, how does outdoor play influence children's school readiness and academic performance?

C) Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era

6. What do you think are the main limitations to outdoor play in urban environments today?

7. How does screen time (TV, mobile phones, etc.) affect children's interest in outdoor play?

8. What factors have you observed that limit children's participation in playground activities in your school or community?

9. How do issues like safety, pollution, and lack of time affect how much outdoor play children get?

10. Do you observe that the increasing use of digital devices influences children's physical activities and social interactions? If so, how?

IDI Questions for Parents

A) Demographic Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Educational Background:

Child's Age:

Child's School Type: (Private/Public/Other)

B) Understanding of Playground & Child Development

11. In your opinion, how essential is playing outside every day for your child's overall development?

12. How does outdoor play help your child with the following:

-Physical development (fitness, energy, agility)?

-Social development (making buddies, cooperation)?

-Emotional development (coping with frustration, expressing feelings)?

-Cognitive development (studying, creativity)?

13. Can you provide a specific example of a change you have noticed in your child because of regular outdoor play?

14. Do you consider that outdoor play prepares your child for school? If so, how?

15. In your opinion, what is the most crucial developmental benefit of outdoor play for children aged 4–6?

C) Barriers to Outdoor Play in the Digital Era

16. What factors or challenges prevent your child from playing outdoors regularly?

17. How does screen time (TV, mobile, tablet) influence your child's time to spend playing outside?

18. How do concerns such as traffic, pollution, or safety influence your decision to let your child play outdoors?

19. Have you noticed if your child prefers screen-based activities (like games, apps, or TV) over outdoor play? If so, why do you think that is?

20. What changes in your neighborhood or at home do you think would encourage your children to spend more time playing outdoors?

D) General Questions for Both Teachers and Parents

21. In your opinion, how important is it for children to have access to outdoor play and playgrounds? Why?

22. What role do you think gadgets (smartphones, tablets, TV) play in the development of children these days?

23. How can urban planning and community infrastructure be improved to create more opportunities for children to play outdoors?

24. What support do you think is important for teachers and parents to ensure children make the most of outdoor play spaces?

25. Do you have any suggestions for improving children's access to outdoor playgrounds and activities?

সাক্ষাৎকার নির্দেশিকা

শিক্ষকদের জন্য আইডিআই প্রশ্নাবলী

ক) জনতাত্ত্বিক তথ্য

নাম:

বয়স:

লিঙ্গ:

পেশা:

শিক্ষাগত পটভূমি:

শিক্ষকতার অভিজ্ঞতা:

প্রতিষ্ঠানের ধরন (প্রাক-বিদ্যালয়/কিন্ডারগার্টেন):

খ) খেলার মাঠ ও শিশু বিকাশ সম্পর্কে ধারণা

১. আপনার মতে, বিদ্যালয়ের দৈনন্দিন কার্যক্রমের অংশ হিসেবে বাইরের খেলার

মাঠগুলো শিশুদের সার্বিক বিকাশে কীভাবে অবদান রাখে?

২. আপনি কি ব্যাখ্যা করতে পারেন, বাইরের খেলার মাঠগুলো কীভাবে শারীরিক, জ্ঞানীয়, সামাজিক এবং আবেগিক বিকাশে অবদান রাখে?

- শারীরিক বিকাশ

- জ্ঞানীয় বিকাশ

- সামাজিক বিকাশ

- আবেগিক বিকাশ

৩. আপনি কি এমন একটি পরিস্থিতি বর্ণনা করতে পারেন যেখানে আপনি দেখেছেন

শিশুরা এই ক্ষেত্রগুলোর কোনোটিতে বাইরের খেলার মাঠের কার্যকলাপ থেকে উপকৃত হচ্ছে?

৪. আপনি কি শিক্ষার্থীদের বিষয়ভিত্তিক শিক্ষায় বাইরের খেলাধুলাকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করেন?

৫. আপনার অভিজ্ঞতায়, বাইরের খেলাধুলা শিশুদের বিদ্যালয়ের জন্য প্রস্তুতি এবং পড়াশোনার ফলাফলের উপর কীভাবে প্রভাব ফেলে?

গ) ডিজিটাল যুগে বহিরাঙ্গন খেলার প্রতিবন্ধকতা

৬. আপনার মতে, আজকের শহুরে পরিবেশে বহিরাঙ্গন খেলার প্রধান সীমাবদ্ধতাগুলো কী কী?

৭. স্ক্রিন টাইম (টিভি, মোবাইল ফোন ইত্যাদি) কীভাবে শিশুদের বহিরাঙ্গন খেলার প্রতি আগ্রহকে প্রভাবিত করে?

৮. আপনার স্কুল বা এলাকায় খেলার মাঠের কার্যকলাপে শিশুদের অংশগ্রহণকে সীমিত করে এমন কোন বিষয়গুলো আপনি লক্ষ্য করেছেন?

৯. নিরাপত্তা, দূষণ এবং সময়ের অভাবের মতো বিষয়গুলো কীভাবে শিশুদের বহিরাঙ্গন খেলার পরিমাণকে প্রভাবিত করে?

১০. আপনি কি লক্ষ্য করেছেন যে ডিজিটাল ডিভাইসের ক্রমবর্ধমান ব্যবহার শিশুদের শারীরিক কার্যকলাপ এবং সামাজিক মিথস্ক্রিয়াকে প্রভাবিত করে? যদি করে থাকেন, তবে কীভাবে?

অভিভাবকদের জন্য আইডিআই প্রশ্নাবলী

ক) জনতাত্ত্বিক তথ্য

নাম:

বয়স:

লিঙ্গ:

পেশা:

শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা:

শিশুর বয়স:

শিশুর স্কুলের ধরন: (বেসরকারি/সরকারি/অন্যান্য)

খ) খেলার মাঠ ও শিশু বিকাশ সম্পর্কে ধারণা

১১. আপনার মতে, আপনার সন্তানের সার্বিক বিকাশের জন্য প্রতিদিন বাইরে খেলা কতটা জরুরি?

১২. বাইরের খেলা আপনার সন্তানকে নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলিতে কীভাবে সাহায্য করে:

- শারীরিক বিকাশ (শারীরিক সুস্থতা, শক্তি, ক্ষিপ্ৰতা)?
- সামাজিক বিকাশ (বন্ধু তৈরি করা, সহযোগিতা)?
- আবেগিক বিকাশ (হতাশা সামলানো, অনুভূতি প্রকাশ করা)?
- জ্ঞানীয় বিকাশ (পড়াশোনা, সৃজনশীলতা)?

১৩. নিয়মিত বাইরে খেলার কারণে আপনার সন্তানের মধ্যে আপনি যে পরিবর্তন লক্ষ্য করেছেন, তার একটি নির্দিষ্ট উদাহরণ দিতে পারেন?

১৪. আপনি কি মনে করেন যে বাইরের খেলা আপনার সন্তানকে স্কুলের জন্য প্রস্তুত করে? যদি তাই হয়, তবে কীভাবে?

১৫. আপনার মতে, ৪-৬ বছর বয়সী শিশুদের জন্য বাইরে খেলার সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিকাশগত সুবিধা কী?

গ) ডিজিটাল যুগে বাইরে খেলার প্রতিবন্ধকতা

১৬. কোন কারণ বা প্রতিবন্ধকতা আপনার সন্তানকে নিয়মিত বাইরে খেলতে বাধা দেয়?

১৭. স্ক্রিন টাইম (টিভি, মোবাইল, ট্যাবলেট) আপনার সন্তানের বাইরে খেলার সময়কে কীভাবে প্রভাবিত করে?

১৮. যানজট, দূষণ বা নিরাপত্তার মতো উদ্বেগগুলো আপনার সন্তানকে বাইরে খেলতে দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্তকে কীভাবে প্রভাবিত করে?

১৯. আপনি কি লক্ষ্য করেছেন যে আপনার সন্তান বাইরের খেলার চেয়ে স্ক্রিন-ভিত্তিক কার্যকলাপ (যেমন গেমস, অ্যাপস বা টিভি) বেশি পছন্দ করে? যদি তাই হয়, আপনার মতে এর কারণ কী?

২০. আপনার পাড়ায় বা বাড়িতে কী ধরনের পরিবর্তন আনলে আপনার সন্তানরা বাইরে খেলতে আরও বেশি সময় কাটাতে উৎসাহিত হবে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

ঘ) শিক্ষক এবং অভিভাবক উভয়ের জন্য সাধারণ প্রশ্ন

২১. আপনার মতে, শিশুদের জন্য বাইরে খেলাধুলা এবং খেলার মাঠের সুযোগ থাকা কতটা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ? কেন?

২২. আপনার মতে, আজকাল শিশুদের বিকাশে গ্যাজেট (স্মার্টফোন, ট্যাবলেট, টিভি) কী ভূমিকা পালন করে?

২৩. শিশুদের বাইরে খেলার আরও সুযোগ তৈরি করার জন্য নগর পরিকল্পনা এবং সামাজিক অবকাঠামোর কীভাবে উন্নতি করা যেতে পারে?

২৪. শিশুরা যাতে বাইরের খেলার জায়গাগুলোর সর্বোত্তম ব্যবহার করতে পারে, তা নিশ্চিত করার জন্য শিক্ষক ও অভিভাবকদের কী ধরনের সহায়তা প্রয়োজন বলে আপনি মনে করেন?

২৫. বাইরের খেলার মাঠ এবং বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রমে শিশুদের প্রবেশাধিকার উন্নত করার জন্য আপনার কি কোনো পরামর্শ আছে?