Preschool Attendance and Student Achievement

Research evidence

Findings from a research study carried out by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in 2014 revealed that the pass rate\(^1\) of Primary 6 (P6) students in a standardized English test was positively related to the number of years in preschool. This study which involved 2,711 P6 pupils attending schools that serve families living in the Iganga-Mayuge Health and Demographic Surveillance System (IMHDSS) showed that the pass rate among students who had attended preschool for at least two years was significantly better than that among students who had never attended preschool (Figure 1).

The study also showed that the effects of preschool attendance on student achievement were generally consistent irrespective of student sex, school attended or economic background. Students from more affluent households however, benefitted more from preschool attendance (Figure 2). The study also found that students who never attended preschool were significantly more likely to repeat grades than students who attended preschool (Figure 3).

Preschool attendance was also positively linked to parental level of education. P6 students were more likely to have attended preschool for at least two years if their mother or female guardian had completed a secondary school education at least (Figure 4). The same finding also applied to father or male guardian.

Overall, two in every five P6 students (42\%) in this study had never attended preschool at all and most of the students who had not attended preschool were now enrolled in public primary schools (Figure 5).

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1 Students were considered to have passed if they scored 50\% or more on the test.
P6 students performed much better if they had attended preschool for at least two years.

Irrespective of student sex, wealth background or school type attended, P6 students who attended preschool for at least two years were more likely to pass their English test than their counterparts who attended preschool for less than two years or never attended preschool at all.

P6 pupils who never attended preschool were more likely to have repeated a grade since they started P1 than pupils who attended preschool.
P6 students were more likely to have attended preschool if their mothers or female guardian had completed at least a secondary school education.

Overall, about 42% of P6 did not attend preschool before starting P1.

Most students who had never attended preschool were in public schools.
Policy implications

The Ministry of Education could develop a strategic investment plan to improve access to and delivery of preschool education services, including the construction, and appropriate staffing with specifically trained professionals, of new preschools conveniently located near or within already existing primary schools. The improved services could be accompanied by a sensitization campaign about the benefits of preschool education, especially among parents with low formal education. A community-based approach to providing these services – either through the existing public school system or in partnership with other stakeholders – could be explored in order to ensure that all children get the best possible start to their educational development.

References
