

Optimus *Impact*



What's going on with *Nairobi's preschoolers?*

Preliminary Findings

The UBS Optimus Foundation has partnered with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) to conduct a four-city scoping study of slum-based preschools in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. Preliminary findings are now available from our exploration of Mukuru, Nairobi.

Top-line findings that may surprise you

- Over 80% of 4–5 year olds are attending preschools, with no significant gender gap
- Children from households in the poorest quintiles have participation rates over 70%
- 41% of 3–6 year olds in Mukuru live in households with daily income <2.50 US dollars ppp per capita
- Preschool-related costs averaged 18 US dollars per month (12% of self-reported household income)
- 94% of preschool students in Mukuru are attending private preschools
- Most private primary schools in Mukuru have attached preschools
- Parents estimate their children will earn 33% more as adults if sent to a low-cost private preschool vs. a public preschool

- Preschools average 27 students per class, with sufficient seating and basic learning materials

Top-line findings that concern us

- 100% of Mukuru preschools deliver didactic lessons in numeracy and literacy
- There is little emphasis on social and emotional development, creativity and problem solving
- Storybooks, activity books, art materials & toys were limited or absent
- Most Mukuru preschools do not provide health or nutrition support for their children
- Only 50% of Mukuru preschools have electricity; 87% have latrines; 66% have playgrounds

These are, of course, only preliminary findings from one slum in Africa. We will report additional data from this study once it is completed. Below are more detailed findings from this study.

As part of a larger project launched by the UBS Optimus Foundation, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) performed a scoping study of preschools in Mukuru, a large slum area of Nairobi, during May-June 2013. The goal was to acquire descriptive details on access and quality. Similar scoping studies are underway in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. Chief findings from Mukuru: (1) most young children from even the poorest families attend private preschools; (2) in those preschools, they receive didactic lessons in numeracy and literacy rather than ECD-based cognitive stimulation, nutrition and health.

In Kenya three levels of preschool are common: baby class (3–4 yrs), nursery (4–5 yrs), and pre-unit (5–6 yrs). In Nairobi, the preschool landscape is competitive and booming, and widely viewed as an important preparation for primary school. Parents generally give high priority to sending children to preschool if possible, and put great emphasis on academic study starting even in “baby class.” By our rough estimate, over 75% of urban students may be enrolled in preschool, while closer to 25% of rural students are likely to be enrolled.

Data collection was conducted in the Mukuru slum area, a large industrial community in Southeast Nairobi, Kenya. An estimated 75% of children in Mukuru aged 3–6 live in informal dwellings, generally tin structures. In order to document the scale, cost and quality of preschool education in this area, IPA conducted household and headmaster surveys, and observed classrooms.

The community of Mukuru has grown in response to job opportunities in the many factories nearby. Four sub-locations were included in this scoping study: Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Viwandani, Imara Daima and Land Mawe. In 2009, according to census data, these four sub-locations (“greater Mukuru”) had a population of 272,432. We surveyed a representative sample of 221 households, and then interviewed 29 headmasters and made 32 classroom observations in a random sample of preschools attended by children from those households.

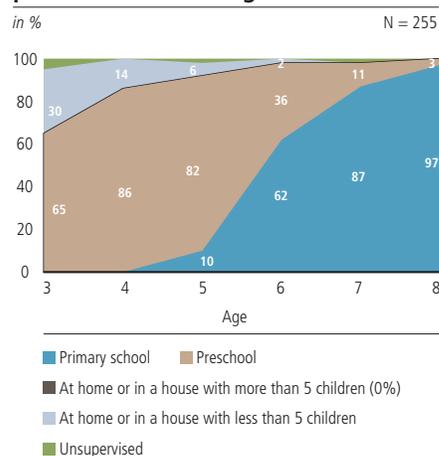
Enrolment is high, even for poor

Preschools abound in Nairobi and can be found on many streets in slum neighborhoods. Over 80% of 4–5 year olds in greater Mukuru attend preschools. There is no significant gender gap (estimated pre- or primary school attendance for girls aged 3–6 is 83%; for boys it is 85%, but this difference is not statistically significant).

There is a positive correlation between preschool attendance and household income. There is also a positive correlation between preschool attendance and educational attainment of adults in the household. Parents view preschools as educational establishments, not daycare centers.

Note: Despite mandatory primary school starting at age of 6, preschool attendance rates for children aged 7–8 is not negligible (Figure 1). The main reason given by parents was that their child had started preschool late. Thus, parents view preschool as part of a normal curriculum that children should follow.

Figure 1: School/preschool participation for children aged 3–8



Preschool children in a slum of Nairobi.

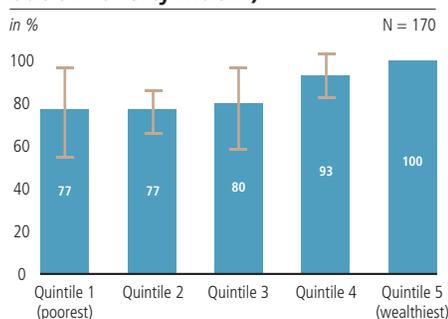


View of the Mukuru slum.

Preschool participation is high despite the fact that 41% of 3–6 year-olds in the area live in households with daily income of less than 2.50 US dollars ppp per capita, and 11% fall below 1.25 US dollars ppp per capita. Preschool-related costs average 18 US dollars per month per child (12% of self-reported household income).

Even in the poorest household income quintile, more than 3 out of 4 children attend preschool (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Participation in school or preschool for the 3–6 years old, by poverty quintile (based on Progress out of Poverty Index®)



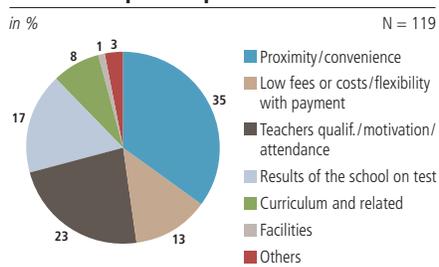
Brackets showing 95% confidence intervals

Private preschools preferred

While Kenya’s government has recently expanded access to public preschools, we found strong evidence that parents perceive private preschools as superior to public preschools, and expensive private schools superior to low cost private preschools. The Mukuru preschool sector is dominated by a growing private school industry: an estimated 94% of preschool students in the study area attend private preschools.

Parents have many preschool options. The average caregiver interviewed knows of 4.9 preschools to which their child could walk. The main factors caregivers consider when selecting a preschool are proximity, teacher quality, fee level and school test results (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Main reason for caregivers to choose a specific preschool



The vast majority of private primary schools in greater Mukuru have attached preschools. Anecdotally, such multi-grade schools seem to be preferred because they allow older siblings to escort younger siblings to and from school.

Parents put great emphasis on academic study as early as age 3. Academic achievement in preschool is seen as important preparation for primary school. On average, parents estimate their child’s income at age 30 will be 33% higher if they attend a low cost private preschool rather than a public preschool.

Infrastructure, health, nutrition

We found adequate infrastructure – including basic learning materials, seating options and teacher supervision – in most of the preschool classrooms that we observed. The average preschool student is in a class of 27 students, with a student teacher ratio of 32:1.

Of the preschools attended by children in our sample, only 50% have electricity. We found very few cases where students had insufficient seating space. However, most preschools provide little or no health or nutrition services.

A large proportion of the schools we visited should be unable to fulfill the Government’s criteria for registration. Only 65% have fenced compounds, 66% have any sort of outdoor play area and less than 50% meet the latrine number requirement (though 87% have latrines). Less than a third meet all three of these requirements. However, about 70% of the preschools are described by their headmaster as being government-registered, and almost all the others (28%) say they have started the process.

Emphasis on didactic schooling

International education experts underline the importance of developing a wide range of skills in preschool years with equal emphasis on social and emotional development, creativity and problem solving. There is further evidence for the value of cognitive stimulation in a child’s mother tongue with games, songs and stories derived from local culture.

Teaching styles in preschools that we observed mimic those of primary schools. In 100% of classrooms, teachers provided instruction from the front of the class to students sitting at their desks. Children are taught literacy and numeracy, given exams, and ranked within the class from as early as “baby class” (ages 3–4). Academic achievement goals in Mukuru preschools are far higher than those of Europe or America.



Preschool children in a slum of Nairobi.



A slum preschool classroom.

The most common learning goals per grade level, repeated across schools, are noted in Table 1:

Table 1

Baby Class (age 3–4)	Nursery (age 4–5)	Pre-Unit (age 5–6)
Know letter sounds a–z	Read 2–3 letter words	Read and write short sentences
Read and write numbers 1–10	Read and write to between 20–50	Simple operations (addition, subtraction)

There was no shortage of very basic learning materials with an average of 100 exercise books per class (generally blank notebooks). However, materials with additional content such as text books, story-books, activity books, art materials or toys were generally limited or absent.

Teacher qualifications

In the preschools that we surveyed, teachers average five years of experience, though only 50% have over three years of experience. Most teachers (95%) are female. Headmasters reported that 76% of their teachers had completed an early childhood development (ECD) or pre-school course or certificate; 13% were enrolled in such a course at the time; and 31% had received in-service training. Training was most often provided by the school chain – in the few instances where the preschool was part of one-, while one of the main other in service training providers is Education for Marginalized Children of Kenya (EMACK).

Independents versus chains

Most of the private schools in greater Mukuru are independent and individually-owned. Five of the schools we sampled (18%) are part of a chain, with three separate chains represented. Of these five schools, four had been founded in the past five years. The largest chain in the area has announced its intention to open more schools in-and-around the slums of Nairobi.

What's next? The UBS Optimus Foundation and IPA will seek to identify the most cost-effective and high-quality preschool programs in the study areas. The Foundation welcomes other funding partners, and IPA is actively seeking research and implementation partners for this effort. For information, please contact:

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