

# Optimus *Impact*



Photo: Kelly Bidwell.

## Exploring Early Education Programs in Peri-urban Settings in Africa: *Summary findings from Lagos, Nigeria*

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) performed a scoping study of the preprimary education sector in Agege, Lagos in August and September 2013. While limited in geographic scope the study aims to present descriptive details on the access to, and quality of preschools in this growing sector, and is part of a four-city project including similar work in Kenya, South Africa and Ghana, launched and sponsored by the UBS Optimus Foundation. The results of this study show that a large number of pre-primary options exist in Agege and that a large majority of young children are attending preschools in general, and private preschools in particular.

Four years of preschool are included in the Nigerian education system. Children enter Kindergarten at age 2 (turning 3), and graduate from Nursery at age 6.

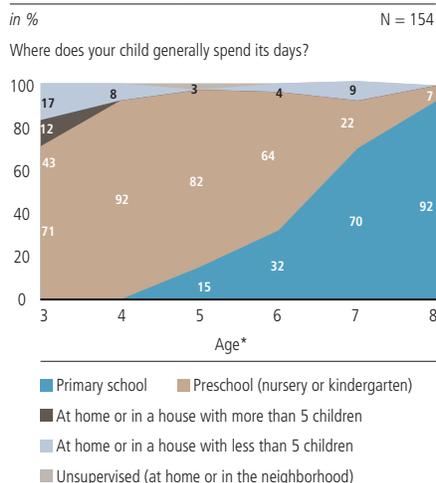
Data collection was conducted in Agege with the aim of documenting the scale, cost and quality of preprimary education in this area. The data collected is representative of the Local Council Development Area (LCDA) of Agege as a whole.<sup>1</sup> In total 126 household interviews and 18 headmaster surveys were conducted.

The Agege LCDA is an area of about 5 km<sup>2</sup> located next to the airport in the north west of mainland Lagos, and is home to a population of over 200,000. Unlike other 'slums' in major African cities a comparatively small proportion of the homes are informal structures; most are made of brick or concrete.

### Preschool participation rates are very high, but are significantly lower for the poorest

There are a large number of preschool options in Agege, and enrollment rates are very high. About 70% of 3 year olds go to preschool, and more than 90% of 4–6 year olds go to either preschool or primary school.

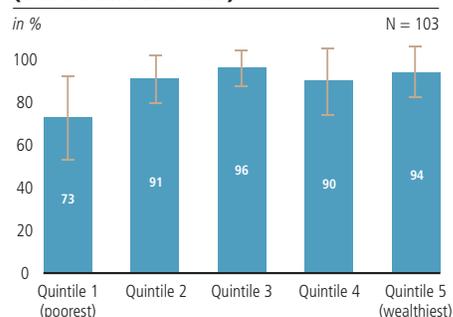
**Figure 1: where children spend their day (by age)**



\*Age is as of the month of August, right after the end of the corresponding school year

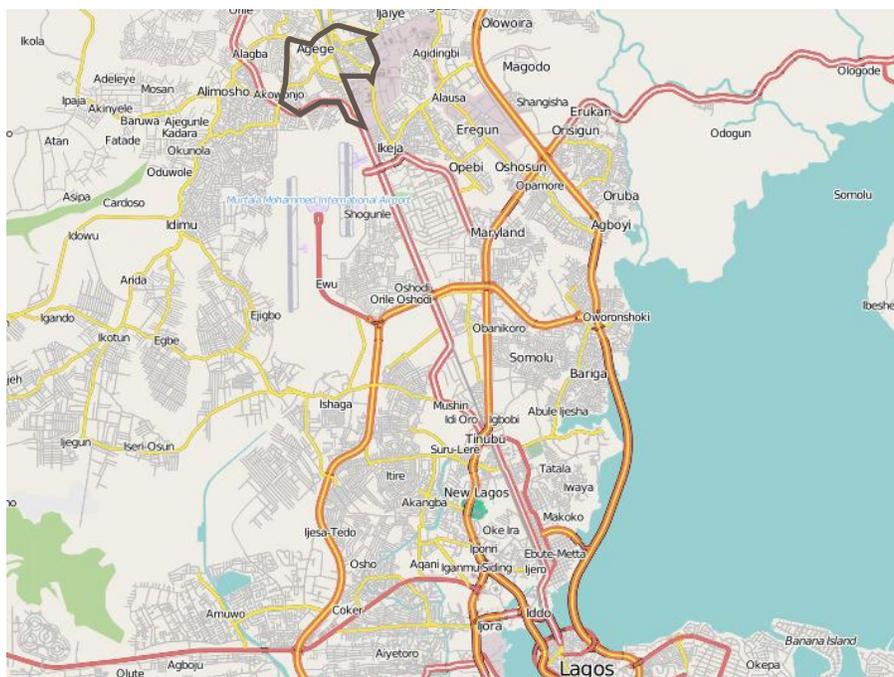
This high participation is achieved despite the fact that an estimated 48% of 3–6 year olds live in households that are below the poverty line of 1 dollar a day.<sup>2</sup> However, preschool participation is positively correlated with both household income and educational attainment of adults within the household. Figure 2 shows that children in the poorest quintile are significantly less likely to attend preschool. There is no significant gender gap on attendance rates for children aged 3 to 6.

**Figure 2: Participation in school (preschool or primary school) for the 3–6 years old, by poverty quintile (based on PPI score)**



\*Brackets showing 95% confidence intervals

The many preprimary school-related costs come to about 27 US dollars per month per child on average, though this varies significantly by income group.<sup>3</sup> Nominal fees constitute only around half of schooling-related costs; major additional costs include food and books.



Map of the study area: the LCDA of Agege (Base: OpenStreetMap).

<sup>1</sup> A 2-stage stratified cluster sampling strategy was used for the household sample. 20 of 237 enumeration areas (EAs) encompassing the whole area were randomly selected. 8% of compounds or structures within each EA were then randomly picked, and all households with at least one child aged between 3 and 12 were visited. For the preprimary center sample, stratified random sampling was used to select centers among the list of those attended by children from the sample of households.

<sup>2</sup> 1.08 dollars per capita per day at 1993 PPP. Poverty estimates were estimated using the Progress out of Poverty Index.<sup>®</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Exchange rate used: 1 USD = 163.9 NGN

### *Preschools are mostly private, and most preschools are attached to a primary school*

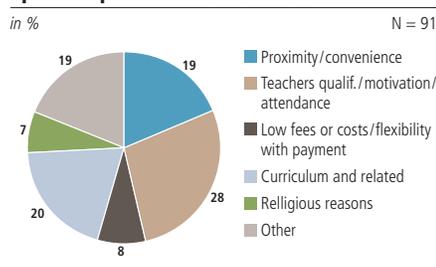
An estimated 82% of preschool students in Agege go to a private preschool. Most preschools are attached to a primary school; only 1% of preschool students attend a standalone preschool. The reverse is also true – most primary schools have a preschool attached; of the 65 primary schools attended by children in our sample only 1 did not have a preschool attached.

Parents have a relatively large number of options when choosing a school for their child. The average caregiver knows of 3.6 preschools that their child could walk to (compared to 2.7 health centers), and only 6% know fewer than 2. The major factors caregivers consider when selecting a preschool are teacher quality and the proximity of the school, though curriculum and cost are also mentioned.

Cost also seems to be a factor even for those who did not mention it as the deciding reason for choose a particular preschool. The parents of 49% of the children who walk to school are not sending their child to the school they consider to be the best within walking distance, and the most common reason for this was that the best school was too expensive.

Overall, preschool is a significant cost and ability to pay seems to act as a significant constraint when choosing a school.

**Figure 3: Main reason for choosing a specific preschool or center**



### *Parents hold preschool education in high regard, particularly for private schools*

Parents do seem to view preschools schools as educational establishments rather than just daycare centers. When asked their main motivation for sending their child to school, for 86% it was to learn skills and be prepared for primary school. Only 1 caregiver said that the main reason was that there was no-one at home to take care of them.

We also find strong evidence that parents perceive private schools to be better than public schools, and more expensive private schools to be superior to low cost private schools. Parents expect that attending a low cost private preschool instead of a public preschool would be associated with higher educational achievement and a 38% greater income at the age of 30.

### *Class sizes are generally small in private schools, and the provision of facilities and services is mixed*

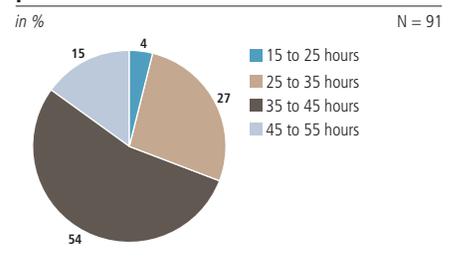
The average number of pupils per teacher in private preschool is just 11. No school that was visited had a teacher/student ratio greater than 1:20.

Wider school infrastructure is generally relatively satisfactory; all schools offering preprimary grades had latrines on the premise, and most also have electricity and some health facilities. A large number of schools, however, lack play materials and a playground, and most do not provide any food.

### *Children spend a significant amount of time at preschool and the style of teaching and learning appears to be quite academically oriented*

All preschool children attend 5 days a week and more than 95% are at school for more than 25 hours in an average week.

**Figure 4: Hours spent in preschool per week**



School materials are geared towards an academic style of learning. All private schools claimed to have both exercise books and textbooks in all preschool classrooms. 90% also claimed to have story-books, but fewer than half had any toys for preschool use.

Homework is generally set from the earliest years of preschool, and learning goals are particularly ambitious: according to the average headmaster of private preschools, children should know the single-digit numbers and the full alphabet by age 3 and a half. 15 out of 16 private preschools in the sample conduct exams in preschool, and a majority, 12 out of 16, conduct exams with the youngest age group (age 2-3). Exams (and most teaching) are in English, despite the Government's official policy that a child's mother tongue should be the principle medium of instruction.

Over 90% of private school teachers have completed secondary school, and almost 75% have a degree, but none have ECD-specific training. 56% of private school teachers have 3 or fewer years of experience.



Photo: Kelly Bidwell

*Most private schools are not approved by the government, and very few schools can meet the approval criteria*

Approved private schools appear to be visited by the Government quite regularly, but only 3 of the 16 private schools in the sample claim to be approved. Most of these had never applied for approval, and the most common reason given was that the school could not meet the government's stringent and costly criteria. Only 6 of the 16 schools could meet a subset of 4 requirements, which include space, safety, sanitation and teacher training. Moreover, none of these schools met the requirement of providing adequate nutrition.

In Agege there is a large preschool sector with high attendance for both boys and girls. Most parents are aware of the value of education at young ages and spend considerable amounts to send their children to relatively formal and very academically-oriented private preschools. There is evidence suggesting, however, that cost remains a barrier that prevents a number of children from attending a good quality preschool.

The profusion of private schools that this study illustrates remains fairly unregulated. Supporting the improvement of the quality of teaching and the expansion of quality preschools across the country are key challenges for the Nigerian education system.

**For further information,** please Contact Callie Lowenstein at IPA ([clowenstein@poverty-action.org](mailto:clowenstein@poverty-action.org)) or Maya Ziswiler ([maya.ziswiler@ubs.com](mailto:maya.ziswiler@ubs.com)) at the UBS Optimus Foundation.

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