

Optimus *Impact*



Exploring Early Education Programs in Peri-urban Settings in Africa: *Summary findings from Johannesburg, South Africa*

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) performed a scoping study of preschools in Soweto, Johannesburg in July and August 2013. While limited in geographic scope the study aims to present descriptive details on the access and quality of preschools in this growing sector, and is part of a four-city project including similar work in Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana,

launched and sponsored by the UBS Optimus Foundation. The study results show that a large number of preprimary options exist and a majority of young children are attending preschool in this area. Preprimaries may be less academically and more broadly oriented towards children's development than in other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the early education landscape of South Africa, a typical distinction is made between the 0–5 age range, for which the main involvement of the government is through subsidies of private Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, and the 5–6 age range, for which the public sector is more directly involved through grade R classes attached to public primary schools.

Given the general focus of this multi-country study on early education programs for children aged 3 to 6, this report encompasses both the part of ECD centers that is targeted to 3 to 5 year-old children – referred to here as “preschool” or “pre-grade R” - on the one hand, and grade R services.

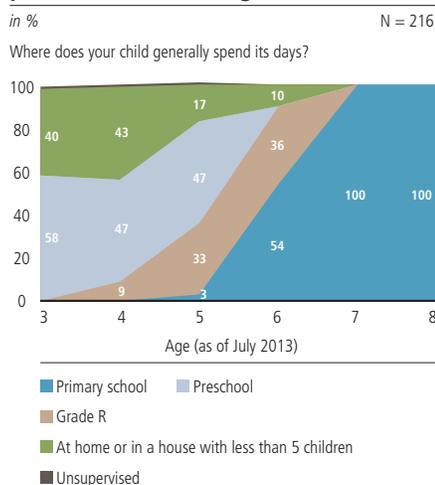
Data collection was conducted in Soweto with the aim of documenting the scale, cost and quality of preprimary education (i.e. both preschool and grade R) in this area. In total 238 household interviews, 30 headmaster interviews and 26 classroom observations were conducted.

Soweto is located about 15 kilometers to the south west of the center of Johannesburg and has a population of more than 1 million. Given the focus of the study on the poor and the very large disparities in income levels in Soweto today, it was decided to select the 8 poorest of the area's 46 wards.¹ Sampling was done such that those results are representative of these 8 wards, which exhibit similar income ranges as in other major townships of Johannesburg. Urban poverty in South Africa is quite different from that of other African countries, in that most urban poor actually live in formal settlement parts of townships, in part due to the large government-provided housing system. In the study area, only about one fourth of the households live in informal settlements.

Preprimary participation rates vary across the age range and are significantly lower for the poor

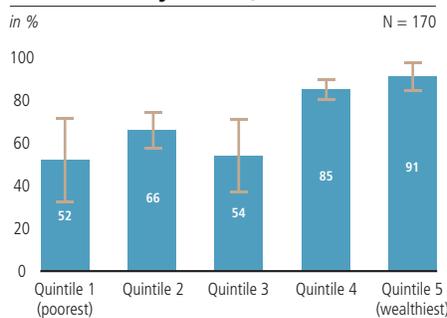
There are a large number of preprimary options in Soweto. 60% of 3 and 4 year olds in Soweto attend school compared to more than 80% of 5 and 6 year olds.

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



There is no significant gender gap on attendance rates for children aged 3 to 6. However, preschool attendance is positively correlated with both household income and educational attainment of adults within the household. In the poorest quintile, only about half of children go to school, as demonstrated in 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

The many preprimary school-related costs come to about USD 51 dollar per month per child on average.^{2,3} This represents about 11% of the total self-reported household income on average.

Pre-grade R are mostly private, but grade R are mostly public

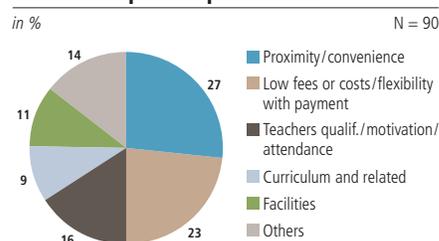
An estimated 71% of pre-grade R students in the study area go to a private preschool but an estimated 74% of grade R students go to a public grade R.

Parents have a relatively large number of options when choosing a school for their child, but fewer options for grade R: the average caregiver knows of 3.3 preschools that their child could walk to, but only 2.1 grade R options.

The major factors caregivers consider when selecting a preschool are proximity and cost, though teacher quality, curriculum and facilities are also mentioned. The government's child support grant is being claimed for 74% of the children attending preprimary in our sample, but little other financial assistance is available from schools or other bodies.

Overall, preprimary choice is certainly affected by poverty level; ability to pay seems to act as a significant constraint when choosing a preprimary.

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



Parents value preprimary education

Parents do seem to view these schools as educational establishments rather than just daycare centers; both preschool and grade R are viewed as important investments in a child's future.

We also find strong evidence that parents perceive more expensive private schools as superior to low cost private schools. Respondents estimated that a child that attended a low-cost preschool as well as grade R would be earning 75% more at the age of thirty than a child that had only attended grade R, and that a child that attended just grade R would be earning 56% more than a child that had no attended no preprimary classes.

¹ Based upon ward-level median income from the 2011 census data. Note that Soweto has a large definition in the present study, namely the Soweto "main place" used by the census, which encompasses newer settlements such as Tshepisoong.

² Exchange rate used: 1 USD = 9.93 ZAR

³ Nominal fees constitute only around half of schooling-related costs; additional costs include food, transport, uniform and admission.

Provision of facilities and services is generally good, though uneven

Of the preschool classrooms observed there was decent infrastructure with basic learning materials, play materials, and teacher supervision in most settings.

The average preprimary student across the survey area is in a classroom where teacher/pupil ratio is 1:21 and the average number of pupils per classroom is 24. There is considerable variation from school to school however; we found student teacher ratios as low as 1:6 and as high as 1:40. These figures differ significantly by level – class sizes tend to be significantly larger for grade R.

Wider school infrastructure was also generally acceptable. All schools offering preprimary grades had latrines on the premises and a fence around the school. All except one had electricity at least some of the time and all except two had a playground.

All but one of the schools in our sample provided at least one meal per day to students (and over 90% provide both

breakfast and lunch). For all but one of these 29 schools that provide food no extra charge is levied; food costs are included within nominal fees. Most schools also have first aid kits and offer immunization programs.

The style of teaching and learning appears to be less academically-oriented than in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

The basic classroom setting appeared to be geared to play and learning-through-play rather than to a formal academic style of learning:

- Children spent considerable time playing on the floor or outside.
- Around half of classrooms we observed containing preschool children had no desks and chairs; children sat on the floor when seated. The same was true for 2 of the 10 classrooms we observed containing grade R children.
- In more than half the classrooms we observed no children wore uniform.
- Schools generally had a decent number and variety of toys available for preprimary use. Only about 10% did not have any toys.

Grade Rs are larger and more academically oriented than preschools. Children in grade R have more learning materials, are more likely to be sitting in rows facing the front, and tend to have more experienced, more highly qualified teaching. These differences are probably reflecting a difference in age range, but also the fact that the public sector is predominant in grade R, while the contrary is true for pre-grade R.

Registered schools are better resourced

Of private preprimaries attended by children within our sample, 62% were registered with the Department of Social Development and/or the Department of Basic Education. Registered schools and non-registered schools differed on a number of scales. Registered schools tended to be larger, have higher teacher salaries, have more learning materials and receive more financial support.



A pre-grade R classroom in Soweto (Photo: K. Parry)



Outdoor playground in an ECD center in Soweto (Photo: K. Parry)



A household survey in an informal settlement (Photo: G. Bridgman)

Teacher qualifications and experience differ widely between private and public schools

According to their headmasters most teachers in schools in our study area – 85% – have completed an ECD-specific training course. This breaks down into 96% of public sector teachers and 79% of private sector teachers. Across the preprimary sector teachers have on average 6 years of teaching experience. In the public sector the average was 8 years, compared to 5 in the private sector. Given that most pre-grade Rs are private while most grade Rs are public, these comparisons are similar for pre-grade R versus grade R teachers.

In general the preprimary sector in Soweto is large and relatively well-attended, though there is evidence that the market is not saturated, particularly for grade R. Most parents are aware of the value of education at young ages, and a majority of 3–6 year olds – particularly at the higher end of the age range – are attending preprimary schools. There is evidence suggesting, however, that cost remains a barrier preventing children from attending good quality preprimaries. Students from the poorest backgrounds and the children of immigrants are significantly less likely to attend school and, if attending, are more likely to be attending schools with poor resources.

What's next? The UBS Optimus Foundation supports IPA and its partner the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL Africa), in their efforts to identify cost-effective programs to improve access and quality of preschool services with both public and private sector partners. The final multi-country study reports will be available by early 2014.

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