

# Optimus *Impact*



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

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) performed a scoping study of preschools in Ashaiman, Accra in September and October 2013. While limited in geographic scope, the study aims to present descriptive details on access to and the quality of preschools in this growing sector. It is part of a four-country study including similar work in Nairobi, Johannesburg and Lagos, launched and sponsored by the UBS Optimus Foundation. The results show that a large number of preschool options exist in Ashaiman, particularly in the private sector, and that an overwhelming majority of young children are attending these preschools.

The Ghanaian early education system includes four years of preschool education. Children enter Nursery at age 2, after which they enter Kindergarten, and enter primary school at age 6.

Data collection was conducted in Ashaiman with the aim of gathering data on the scale, cost and quality of preprimary education which was representative of this community.<sup>1</sup> In total, 286 household interviews, 30 headmaster surveys and 40 classroom observations were conducted.

Ashaiman is a town located about 30 kilometers east of Accra's city center, and 5 kilometers north of the busy industrial town of Tema. The 2010 census estimated its total population to be 190,972. Although Ashaiman is clearly regarded as a "slum area" by Ghanaians, most dwellings are permanent structures made of bricks or concrete.

<sup>1</sup> A 2-stage stratified cluster sampling strategy was used for the household sample. Systematic sampling was used by the Ghana Statistics Service to select 30 enumeration areas (EAs) from the 2010 census. 9% of compounds or structures within each EA were selected, and all households with at least one child aged between 3 and 12 were visited. Stratified random sampling was then used to select preschools among the list of preschools attended by children from the sample of households.

<sup>2</sup> Poverty status was estimated based on the Progress Out of Poverty Index® (PPI)

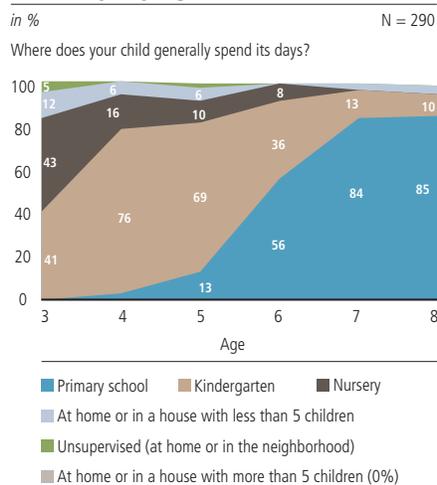
<sup>3</sup> Exchange rate used: 1 USD = 2.1571 GHC

<sup>4</sup> Nominal fees constitute less than half of schooling-related costs; major additional costs include books and – particularly – food.

## Preschool participation is very high across the preschool age range and poverty levels

There are a large number of preschool options in Ashaiman, and participation rates are very high. 70% of 3 year olds attend preschool, and more than 90% of 4–6 year olds are attending either preschool or primary school.

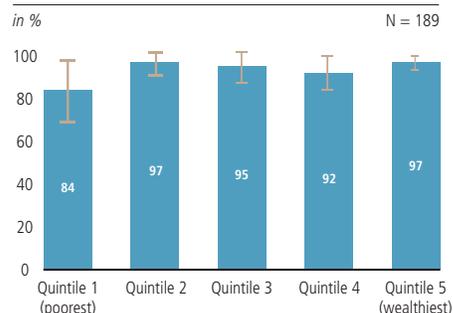
**Figure 1: where children spend their day (by age)**



This high attendance is achieved despite the fact that an estimated 29.4% of 3–6 year olds live in households live below the poverty threshold of 2.50 dollars per capita at 2005 PPP. As shown in Figure 2 attendance is high across all levels of income.<sup>2</sup> There is also no significant gender gap on attendance rates for children aged 3 to 6.

The many preprimary school-related costs come to about 38 US dollars per month per child on average.<sup>3,4</sup> Total expenses do not vary significantly across poverty level.

**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

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

An estimated 91% of preschool students in Ashaiman go to a private preschool. Most preschools are connected to a primary school; only 2% of preschool students attend a standalone preschool. The reverse is also true – most primary schools have a preschool attached; of the 132 primary schools attended by children in our sample only 1 did not have a preschool attached.



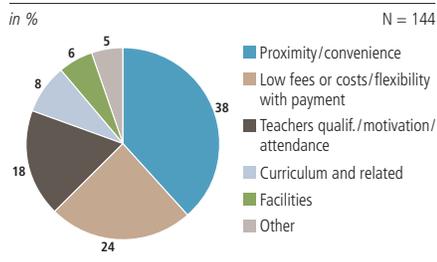
Map of the study area: Ashaiman Town (Base: OpenStreetMap).



A typical dwelling in Ashaiman (Photo: R. Ayibor).

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, and only 7% know fewer than 2. As demonstrated in Figure 3, the major factors caregivers consider when selecting a preschool are the proximity and cost of the school, but factors such as teacher quality are also important. Cost seems to still be a factor even if not emphasized by parents; the parents of 60% 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 was the cost. Overall, preschool is a significant cost and ability to pay seems to act as a significant constraint when choosing a preprimary school.

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



### *Parents have a high view of preschool education, particularly of private schools*

All preschool children attend 5 days a week and spend on average 41 hours per week. No child spends less than 25 hours per week in preschool.

Parents do view preschools as educational establishments rather than daycare centers. 80% of parents said their main motivation for sending their child to school was to learn skills and be prepared for primary school. Only 12% 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.

### *Schools and class sizes vary, and provision of facilities and services is mixed*

The average private school within the sample has 71 students across the 4 preschool grades, compared to 111 in the public sector. On average there are 23 pupils per teacher, though we found ratios as low as 5:1 and as high as 50:1.

Wider school infrastructure is generally satisfactory. All but 1 school had latrines on the premises and electricity at least some of the time. All but two had a playground for the children and a fence around the school. Most schools provide health and nutritional facilities.

### *Content and teaching are academically oriented*

Materials and teaching style are geared towards an academic style of learning. Most preschool classes sit in forward-facing desks in front of a blackboard. Most classrooms have a decent number of exercise books and textbooks per class. There is considerable variation, however, in provision of materials within classrooms; the responsibility of buying school books generally rests with parents and within most classes a minority of pupils remain without learning materials. Toys and play materials were limited; only 26% of children attend schools that had any toys for preschool use.

Homework is generally assigned as of age 3.5, and learning goals are very ambitious. The average ages by which headmasters consider that children should know the single-digit numbers and the full alphabet are 3.6 and 3.7 years respectively. Almost half (45%) of private schools have exams for 3 year olds and 90% have exams for 6 year olds.



A typical classroom setting (Photo: L. Watine).



Children outside an Ashaiman preschool (Photo: K. Parry).

*Most private schools are registered with the government, but actual teaching methods and content are disconnected from the government-sanctioned curriculum*

23 of the 24 private schools in the sample said they were registered with either Ghana Educational Services (GES) or the Ashaiman Municipal Council. There seems to be a relatively high level of government oversight of preschools, though public schools were both more likely to have been visited in the last year and, if visited, had been visited more often.

Ghana also has a complex and comparatively well-developed legislative framework for the preschool sector. The preschool curriculum has been commended by international experts, and the government has recently formulated the ambitious and comprehensive “Operational Plan to Scale-Up Quality KG Education in Ghana”. However, classroom realities

differ from the government’s vision for preschool in two of key ways:

- The child-centered child-led model of teaching espoused by the Government curriculum has not replaced rote-learning techniques in the classroom yet.
- The National Literacy Acceleration Plan (NALAP), which stipulated that 90% of Kindergarten instructional time should be in a national languages and that students should not begin reading and writing in English until Primary 2, has not been fully implemented. About half of the 40 classrooms we observed used 100% English for instruction and content of lesson, and an additional quarter used local languages only to translate a few words or phrases.

In order to bring classroom behavior more in line with government rhetoric, GES has stipulated that teacher training is their number one priority within the preschool sector. They are currently seeking appropriate models of wide-ranging transformational training, which will target Ghana’s 27,000 untrained preschool teachers.

Ashaiman has a large, well-attended preschool sector which is dominated by private providers. Most parents are aware of the value of education at young ages, and pay a considerable amount to send their children to formal, academically-oriented private preschools. There is evidence suggesting, however, that cost remains a barrier that prevents a number of children from attending a higher quality preschool. In general, Ghana seems to be ahead of many of its neighbors in terms of both the quality and quantity of preschool services, at least in some urban areas. Classroom realities, however, do not always reflect the sound pedagogical practices that underlie the government’s vision for preschool. The high numbers of untrained teachers, and the overwhelming usage of English to teach numeracy and literacy, are of particular concern. The Government has recently published an ambitious plan to deal with these issues which, if successfully implemented, could cement Ghana’s status as a leader in preschool education services in Africa.

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