

Policy Focus:

Enrollment and Attendance in pre-primary classrooms

INTRODUCTION

Quality pre-primary education plays a critical role in laying the foundation for improved school readiness and learning outcomes. Investing in high quality pre-primary education in early childhood is both impactful and cost effective, delivering academic, social, and other development outcomes over the lifespan. Recognizing the value of pre-primary education, Tanzania's *Education and Training Policy (ETP)* calls for 1 year of pre-primary as part of compulsory basic education.¹ The national Pre-Primary Curriculum was developed to target children age 5, however, the ETP states that children aged 3 to 5 years may enter pre-primary.

The wide age range of students entering pre-primary has become increasingly problematic for several reasons. First, the curriculum is uniquely designed for 5 year olds given that both younger and older children have different developmental needs. Younger learners require early cognitive stimulation and older children are ready for primary school. Second, classrooms across Tanzania are increasingly overcrowded. At the end of 2015, Circular 5 established fee-free education. By 2016, enrollment dramatically increased, overwhelming classrooms and teachers, seriously hampering instructional quality. Although the enrollment rate was only 40 percent of pre-primary-age children in 2012, it

climbed to 46.7 percent for 5-year-olds by the end of 2016. The gross intake rate climbed to 102.6 indicating that children younger than 5 and older than 6 years were enrolling. In fact, from 2015 to 2016, pre-primary enrollment increased by 47 percent in government schools.² Country-wide, increased enrollment has overwhelmed schools, crowding classrooms and worsening already poor quality learning environments. The overcrowding also further exacerbates the persisting teacher shortage.

As part of the Fursa kwa Watoto (FkW) Learning Agenda, we collected disaggregated data on enrolment and attendance by students' age in May of 2017. With approval from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, we visited 131 randomly selected schools in Moshi and Mwanza. The data indicate that students range in age from 3 to 7 years.

In pre-primary classrooms, we found:

- 3% of students were age 3
- 15% were age 4
- 40% were age 5
- 35% were age 6
- 7% were age 7



Next, we present disaggregated data by location.

Table 1. Enrollment and attendance in Mwanza (n = 65) and Kilimanjaro (n = 66)

| | Mwanza region | Kilimanjaro region |
|---|---------------|--------------------|
| Average number of students enrolled per class | 123 | 56 |
| Average number attending | 84 | 45 |
| Average pupil to teacher ratio | 1:115 | 1:54 |
| Average number of 5 & 6 year olds enrolled | 86 | 44 |
| Average number of 5 & 6 year olds attending | 59 | 36 |

Table 2. Enrollment and attendance by age in Mwanza (n = 65) and Kilimanjaro (n = 66);

| Percentage of students in each age group | Mwanza region % | Kilimanjaro region % |
|--|-----------------|----------------------|
| Enrolled students, 3-year-olds | 3 | 2 |
| Enrolled students, 4-year-olds | 16 | 15 |
| Enrolled students, 5-year-olds | 38 | 39 |
| Enrolled students, 6-year-olds | 33 | 39 |
| Enrolled students, 7-year-olds | 10 | 5 |
| Attending students, 3-year-olds | 3 | 2 |
| Attending students, 4-year-olds | 17 | 14 |
| Attending students, 5-year-olds | 40 | 41 |
| Attending students, 6-year-olds | 31 | 40 |
| Attending students, 7-year-olds | 9 | 4 |

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy context is such that there is a lack of clarity on the target age for pre-primary coupled with a high and growing demand for pre-primary schooling. This is resulting in overcrowded classrooms with too many children which makes it difficult for teachers to cover the national curriculum and manage the classroom. Beyond negatively

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information or to receive updates on activities from the FkW Learning Agenda (2017-2019), please contact Dr. Candace Miller at cmiller@mathematica-mpr.com. Learning Agenda activities include an assessment of 1,500 pre-primary students conducted at two time points, ongoing classroom observations in 120 schools, an ongoing enrollment and attendance study, qualitative in depth interviews with respondents through the education sector, focus group discussions with School Management Committees and parents, and a costing study.

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¹ Government of Tanzania: Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. *Education Training Policy, 2014*. Dar es Salaam.

² Government of Tanzania: President's Office for Regional and Local Government. *Pre-primary, primary and secondary education statistics in brief 2016 BEST 2016 Pocket Size Final*.

impacting educational quality, the overcrowding also poses safety risks as teachers are unable to manage behavior. Thus, in line with recent policy discussions, we believe it is important to consider targeting pre-primary enrolment to children at age 5 to mitigate extreme teacher and infrastructure challenges, and to align with the curriculum. Children age 6 and up should proceed to primary school, while children under 5 years should be directed to early learning and day care centers or other programmes as specified in a National Early Childhood Development Strategy under the oversight of Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDGEC).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given:

- The potential of pre-primary education to improve student academic and social development and other benefits;
- The fact that children have different age-based developmental needs;
- The national curriculum was designed for children aged 5; and
- The severe overcrowding in pre-primary classrooms;

We recommend considering the following:

1. Target pre-primary education to children aged 5 with specified dates for enrollment based on the month that a child turns 5 years.
2. Clarify at the national, regional, district, and local levels that children older than 5 years should proceed to standard 1 in primary school.
3. Further develop early learning and care options for children younger than age 5.

