

The effect pre-primary education on primary school performance ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Report in pdf ^[2]

Executive summary:

Most OECD and many middle income countries have turned to universal pre-primary education in order to give children a better start to life. While there is substantial empirical evidence that pre-primary school programs targeted to disadvantaged children have significant benefits, little is known about the benefits for the population as a whole. Indeed, there is some concern that separating pre-primary age children from their mothers while they are working may have detrimental effects on child development.

In this paper, we attempt to shed some light on this debate by investigating the effect of a large expansion of universal pre-primary education on subsequent primary school performance in Argentina. We examine the returns to pre-primary education by taking advantage of a large infrastructure program aimed at increasing school attendance for children between the ages of 3 to 5. Between 1993 and 1999, Argentina constructed enough classrooms for approximately 175,000 additional children to attend preschool.

Our results show that attending pre-primary school had a positive effect on subsequent third grade standardized Spanish and Mathematics test scores. We estimate that one year of pre-primary school increased average third grade test scores by 8 percent of a mean or by 23 percent of the standard deviation of the distribution of test scores. We also find that preprimary school attendance positively affected student's behavioral skills such as attention, effort, class participation, and discipline. This positive effect on behavioral skills provides evidence of possible pathways by which pre-primary might affect subsequent primary school test performance as preschool education facilitates the process of socialization and selfcontrol necessary to make the most of classroom learning. Moreover, behavioral skills are as important as cognitive skills to future success in life.

Region: Latin America and the Carribean ^[3]

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