

Persistent inequalities in early years' access and learning: Evidence from large-scale expansion of pre-primary education in Ethiopia ^[1]

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Source: Early Childhood Research Quarterly

Format: Article

Publication Date: 30 Jul 2021

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Excerpted from abstract

In Ethiopia, major policy reforms to increase equitable access to pre-primary education were instigated in 2010, leading to a surge in pre-primary school enrolment. This paper investigates the effects of the expansion on who gets access to pre-primary education and on readiness for primary school. We find that inequalities in pre-primary access between advantaged and disadvantaged regions of the country persist following the reforms, with girls less likely to attend school, particularly in more disadvantaged regions. More than half of children enrolled in pre-primary classrooms are below the official age of 6 years. Children from more advantaged backgrounds (those whose parents are literate, have reading materials at home, and live in urban areas) are more likely to participate in pre-primary schools both before and after the reform. Yet pre-primary education could play a role in equalizing opportunities in primary school: we find pre-primary participation to be positively associated with children's reading skills in Grades 2 and 3 of primary school after the expansion. These findings highlight the need to focus policy attention on efforts to reduce barriers to pre-primary access for children in disadvantaged circumstances.

Region: International ^[4]

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