


The Impact of Expanding Preschool Education on Students' Academic Performance: A Case Study of Kenitra Province, Morocco

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preschool education is essential for developing young children's social, cognitive, and emotional skills, which positively impacts their long-term academic success. Research shows that access to quality early childhood education significantly enhances children's language, motor, and social abilities, easing their transition to elementary school. Furthermore, investing in preschool education is highly cost-effective: it reduces socio-economic inequalities, lowers the risk of school dropout, and supports the integration of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is the case in Morocco, which launched a program in 2019 to expand access to preschool education under the framework of NIHD "National Initiative of Human Development. The program aims to provide free, quality preschool education in rural areas. The main objective of this paper is to provide an in-depth presentation of the exploratory phase conducted to enhance understanding of the impact of preschool education on students' academic performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a crucial period for a child's cognitive and social development. This stage of life lays the fundamental foundations for the child's learning and well-being. In view of this, early education is a preparatory stage for the child's basic education, as it combines features linked to awakening, early socialization and preparation for school, with the child's development in an environment conducive to his or her blossoming.

Preschool education, although often seen as the first stage in a child's education, is of fundamental importance to the child's overall development. The first years of life are a crucial period, when the foundations of cognition, language, socialization and emotional well-being are laid. With this in mind, pre-school education emerges as an invaluable lever for preparing young minds for the future challenges of the education system and life in society.

Preschool is more than just an introduction to numbers and letters; it provides a rich platform for sensory, social and cognitive experiences. It is during these early years that social skills, intellectual curiosity and the foundations of language are developed. The preschool environment, if stimulating and inclusive, becomes fertile ground for the child's holistic development. This exploration of the importance of preschool education will take us through the many facets of its impact on individual and collective development. It is a plea to recognize and strengthen this fundamental phase of education, in order to create a solid foundation for future generations.

In this way, preschool education enables children to be better prepared for elementary school, since they possess the social skills, they need to succeed at school.

In the United States, public preschool refers to any center of early childhood education program operated by the federal, state or local government. As for the quality, eligibility and access to these programs, they vary by jurisdiction. (Friedman-Krauss et al, 2020)¹ However, based on reviews and meta-analyses including over 100 experimental and quasi-experimental studies spanning several decades, it has been concluded that, on average, preschool programs in the U.S. have a positive impact on academic aspects of school readiness, such as reading, writing and arithmetic. (Camilli et al., 2010; Duncan and Magnuson, 2013; Kholoptseva, 2016; Phillips et al., 2017).

However, due to long-term changes in the quality of alternative childcare (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013) as well as in access to high-quality preschool, new studies evaluating the effects of modern public preschool programs are needed. Furthermore, previous studies have not examined multiple public preschool programs in the same jurisdiction to understand how variation in program characteristics and eligibility requirements contribute to heterogeneity in effectiveness. (Sulik et al., 2023).

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