

Building on evidence of a promising preschool programme in Mozambique

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- The Mozambique government included early childhood education in the operational strategy linked to the 2012–2016 national education plan.
- The World Bank cited the evaluation findings in supporting the scale-up of Save the Children USA's model of community-run preschools from one district in one province to five of Mozambique's 11 provinces.
- Informed by the study findings about the lack of impacts on vocabulary and language skills, Save the Children USA revised and evaluated the curriculum for the preschools it facilitated.
- Study findings have continued to inform global arguments for greater investment in early childhood development (ECD).

Factors that contributed to impact

- Save the Children USA built and led a multi-stakeholder advocacy coalition for ECD in Mozambique that could facilitate the community-managed preschools if the study showed positive effects. Members from this coalition made up the study's advisory panel, helping build understanding and demand and providing a link between production and use.
- The study team engaged with civil society partners, donors, multiple relevant ministries, provincial administrators and Mozambican academics on preliminary and final study findings.
- Donor-affiliated researchers were able to communicate this evaluation's findings and follow-up evaluations of the scaled-up pilot more widely and on a sustained basis.

Impact evaluation details

Title: [The promise of preschool in Africa: a randomized impact evaluation of early chi...](#)

Authors: Sebastian Martinez, Sophie Nadeau and Vitor Pereira

Status : Completed March 2012



Context

Access to education in children's earliest years helps lay firm foundations for them to integrate and prosper in their societies. Programmes to promote ECD are most critical in Africa, where children face myriad risks of disease, malnutrition, conflict and low-quality education systems. However, empirical evidence on the impacts of ECD programs in Africa has been scarce. This was a challenge in Mozambique, where only 4 per cent of the children attended preschool.

Save the Children USA led the Early Childhood Development Interest Group, a multi-stakeholder advocacy coalition in Mozambique that advocated successfully for the government to include early childhood education in its national educational plan. The NGO also demonstrated how to establish ECD in rural schools. It piloted affordable community-built and run *escolinhas* (preschools) targeting orphans and vulnerable children in selected rural communities in Gaza province.

3ie funded an evaluation of this pilot intervention that started in 2009. It was a time when Save the Children USA and the coalition were working with the government to develop the 2012–2016 national education plan, which would include preschools and a project for integrated development of preschool pupils, called *Projecto de Desenvolvimento Integral da Criança em Idade Pré-escolar* (DICIPE).

The study team included researchers from the World Bank and Save the Children USA. The study addressed the evidence gap about the impacts and cost-effectiveness of community-run preschools in improving readiness for school, primary enrolment, and health and welfare of beneficiary children and their families.

The team deliberately planned to share findings with the government ministries involved in DICIPE and to allow the collection of additional longitudinal data that would provide valuable information on children's progress over time. A study advisory group comprised coalition members from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Social Action, and the Ministry of Health.

Evidence

The 3ie-funded evaluation of the pilot intervention in Gaza District ran from 2009 to 2011. It found that children in community preschools were 24 per cent more likely to enrol in primary school and were significantly better equipped to learn, compared to children not in the pilot scheme. Enrolled children were much more likely than those who were not to show interest in maths and writing, to recognise shapes and to show respect for other children.

A few indicators of emotional development also improved among enrolled children. However, the data showed little impact on language and communication skills. Health impacts were mixed. Enrolled children had a 10 percentage point increase in the probability of being sick in the previous four weeks, but also had decreased skin problems and decreased diarrhoea. Enrolment in the community preschools did not affect children's probability of stunting or wasting, or their height and weight for age.

The preschools had a positive ripple effect on the wider family. Parents of enrolled children were 26 per cent more likely to work, whilst some older siblings were themselves able to go to school. At a cost of US\$2.47 per student per month, the results suggested the intervention was highly effective at improving the lives of preschool children and their families in rural Mozambique.

Evidence impacts

Committed to strengthening the community-run preschools the study findings on the cost-effectiveness of community-run preschools and the ongoing engagement undertaken by the researchers and Save the Children USA, the government revised its national education plan and prepared to extend and evaluate the community-run preschools.

Supported the scaling up of community-run preschools

The World Bank provided funding to the government for this scale-up of the community-run centres model, from one province to five of Mozambique's 11 provinces, citing the positive findings of the evaluation in documenting its support for the expansion.

Strengthened the preschool curriculum

Save the Children USA, the implementing agency responsible for designing the pilot programme, revised and evaluated the curriculum to address the lack of effects on the preschool pupils' vocabulary and language skills that the 3ie-supported evaluation found.

Informing calls for greater investment in preschools

The DICIPE programme of community-run preschool centres and the 3ie-supported impact evaluation continue to be mentioned in the media and in academic and non-academic literature. The study was referenced most recently in a [2017 Cambridge University study](#) that argued for more donor support for preschool education.

Suggested citation

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