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Influence of Preschooling on the Academic Performance of Schoolchildren: The Case of the IEPP Kozah Centre (Togo)

Dr. NAKPAKPERE Souglibé

Sociologist of Education, University of Kara (Togo)

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the impact of preschool on the academic performance of primary school students in the Kozah-Centre Public Primary Education Inspectorate (IEPP), in a Togolese context marked by a learning crisis and inequalities in access to preschool education.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach based on a quantitative survey of 559 students and 165 teachers, supplemented by 21 interviews with teachers and 14 parents. The data were analyzed using statistical techniques and content analysis. The results reveal that preschool improves basic reading, numeracy, and writing skills, facilitates academic adjustment, and promotes better student performance, even though some students still encounter difficulties. The study thus highlights the need to strengthen access to, the quality of, and support for preschool education in order to support academic success and reduce educational inequalities.

KEYWORDS: Schoolchildren, Impact, Kozah, Performance, Preschool.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies marked by profound social, economic, technological, and cultural transformations, education has emerged as a central lever for human and societal development. According to S. Nakpakpere (2019), it constitutes the driving force of sustainable development, in that it enables the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for social integration and participation in collective progress. In this same vein, J. Ki-Zerbo (1990) argues that "after bread, education is the people's first need," thus highlighting its fundamental role in the fight against poverty and in building more equitable and prosperous societies. For African countries, long confronted with the effects of underdevelopment and colonial domination, education remains a strategic imperative for social, economic, and cultural transformation.

Early childhood education, once primarily provided within the family, has gradually taken on an institutional dimension with the emergence of preschool education. This has developed in conjunction with the evolution of modern societies, particularly driven by the need to care for children before they enter primary school. Today, it is no longer seen as simply childcare, but as a structured environment for early learning, socialization, and preparation for formal education. Through play, language, motor, and social activities, preschool contributes to the child's overall development, the acquisition of behavioral benchmarks, and the building of skills necessary for academic success.

In developing countries, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, education systems continue to face numerous challenges related to access, equity, and, above all, quality. While primary school enrollment has increased significantly in recent decades, learning outcomes remain a concern. Many children enter school without acquiring fundamental reading, writing, and numeracy skills. This situation fuels grade repetition, school dropout, and early academic failure. The learning crisis observed in several countries is partly rooted in shortcomings in early childhood education.

In Togo, this reality is also evident in the basic education system. While public policies have certainly broadened access to schooling, increased student enrollment, and expanded educational infrastructure, the quality of learning remains a significant concern. Many students complete the early years of primary school with weak academic achievement, which jeopardizes their academic progress. To address these shortcomings, the Togolese government has undertaken various reforms, including the policy of automatic promotion in certain grades of public primary schools (S. Nakpakpere, 2024). However, this measure has not been sufficient to sustainably resolve the problems of academic performance, leading to questions about the relevance of earlier educational intervention, starting in preschool.

Preschool education is indeed recognized by numerous studies (KY Gbati, 2006, 2007; P. Akakpo and A. Mohamadou, 2007; B. Tchable, 2013; Y. Seka and T. Arsène, 2016) as a determining factor in children's later success. It fosters cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social development, while preparing children to better adapt to the demands of primary school. This research shows that children who have attended preschool have a comparative advantage when entering elementary school: they understand instructions more quickly, demonstrate greater autonomy, integrate more easily into classroom life, and develop basic skills more readily. Conversely, those who have not benefited from this experience are more likely to encounter difficulties in adapting and learning (B. Tchable, 2013).

Despite these widely recognized advantages, preschool education remains underdeveloped in several areas of Togo, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions. Preschool provision is unevenly distributed and often dominated by private, religious, or community-based institutions. Public schools are still scarce in some localities, limiting children's access to this level of education. Furthermore, there is a sometimes reductive social perception of preschool, which some parents still consider mere childcare, lacking any real educational value. This perception can discourage children from attending these institutions and reduce their chances of adequately preparing them for primary school.

In the Kara region, and more specifically in the Kozah Centre Preschool and Primary Education Inspectorate (IEPP), the situation reveals significant disparities in preschool coverage. Although some efforts have been made, not all primary schools yet have a functional preschool program. According to available data, out of 144 schools, only 96 have a preschool, indicating incomplete coverage. This situation raises questions about the local system's ability to ensure all children have the same starting point before entering primary school.

Furthermore, national statistics indicate that, despite slight progress, the gross preschool enrollment rate remains relatively low in Togo. Many children of preschool age do not have access to it, which perpetuates inequalities from the earliest stages of schooling. However, in a context where Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for ensuring access to quality preschool education for all children, it becomes essential to concretely assess the effects of this early schooling on academic learning.

This study, which seeks to analyze the relationship between preschool education and academic performance at the Kozah Centre Primary School in Togo, is situated within this framework. The aim is to determine whether preschool attendance actually contributes to improved academic results in primary school, or whether its influence remains limited by structural, social, and pedagogical constraints. In other words, this research seeks to assess the true impact of preschool education on children's academic success.

Therefore, a fundamental question guides this reflection: to what extent does attending preschool influence the academic performance of students at the IEPP Kozah Centre in Togo? Through this question, the aim is to highlight not only the effects of preschool on learning, but also the conditions under which this influence is exerted.

The aim of this article is therefore to analyze the impact of preschool education on the academic performance of schoolchildren in the Kozah Centre Primary Education District. More specifically, it will examine the level of access to preschool in the study area, identify the perceptions of educational stakeholders and parents regarding this provision, and assess the existence of a link between preschool attendance and academic success in primary school.

1. PROBLEMATIC

Despite the recognized importance of education in the development of individuals and societies, many African education systems continue to face a learning crisis, particularly at the primary level. In Togo, this crisis manifests itself in low academic achievement, early difficulties in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as grade repetition and academic failure. In this context, preschool education is increasingly presented as a crucial tool for preparing children for primary school, as it fosters their cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional development.

However, despite the theoretically and empirically attributed benefits of preschool, access to it remains unequal across Togo, particularly in certain areas of the Kara region and more specifically at the Kozah Centre Primary School. Several schools still lack a functional preschool structure, while some parents continue to view this level as mere childcare, without any real educational value. This situation raises a central question: What is the effect of preschool attendance on the academic performance of students at the Kozah Centre Primary School, in a context marked by inequalities in access and contrasting social perceptions of preschool education?

1.1 Specific objectives classified according to assumptions

1.1.1 Study Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to analyze the influence of preschool education on the academic performance of students at the Kozah Centre Primary School in Togo. More specifically, it aims to:

OS1: Compare the academic performance of schoolchildren who attended preschool to that of schoolchildren who did not have access to it.

OS2: Identify the perceptions of parents and educational stakeholders on the importance of preschool.

Based on this problem, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1.1.2 Study Hypotheses

Preschool attendance positively influences the academic performance of students at the IEPP Kozah Centre. The specific hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Schoolchildren who attended preschool achieve better academic performance than those who did not have access to it.

H2: A positive perception of preschool by parents promotes children's attendance at this level of education.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study falls within the framework of theories of child cognitive and sociocultural development, particularly those of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. From a constructivist perspective, Piaget argues that children actively construct their knowledge through interaction with their environment, via processes of adaptation and equilibration. Vygotsky, for his part, emphasizes the social dimension of learning and shows that cognitive development is built through interaction with others, mediated by language, peers, and more competent adults (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Preschool, as a structured environment for awakening, socialization, and cognitive stimulation, thus constitutes a privileged space for fostering these early acquisitions.

Furthermore, human capital theory allows us to interpret preschool as an early educational investment that can produce lasting effects on skills and academic performance. According to this approach, education is a productive investment that increases an individual's skills, abilities, and future performance (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Within this framework, preschool can be considered an early educational investment that can strengthen cognitive development, facilitate adaptation to school, and improve the likelihood of subsequent academic success (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Recent studies also confirm that higher participation in preschool education contributes positively to human capital and the quality of learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods for descriptive and analytical purposes. Its objective is to examine the relationship between preschool attendance and children's subsequent academic success. This methodological approach is justified by the need to measure, using observable indicators, the effects associated with preschooling, while also taking into account the perceptions of educational stakeholders to better understand the phenomenon under study.

The study focuses on a population comprised of first-grade students (CP), primary school teachers, and parents of students at the Kozah Centre Primary Education Institute (IEPP). The sample was constructed through a purposive selection process to identify the most relevant participants for the research objective. A total of 559 students, 165 teachers, and 111 parents were included. Of the 559 students assessed, 417 attended preschool and 142 did not. This composition allows for a comparison of two contrasting groups and the analysis of potential differences in academic achievement based on preschool experience. The involvement of individuals directly engaged in a child's educational journey ensures the relevance of the information gathered for the analysis.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The instrument was developed based on the research objectives, hypotheses, and theoretical frameworks. It included items relating to the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, their experience of attending preschool, their perceptions of its effects on learning, and certain indicators of academic achievement. The use of these complementary tools allowed for cross-referencing the data, strengthened the validity of the analysis, and facilitated a better interpretation of the results.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Academic performance of preschool and non-preschool students

3.1.1 Evolution of reading skills

The data relating to the evolution of the reading skills of the students surveyed are recorded in the following figure.

Table 1: Evolution of students' reading skills in first grade

Evolution of reading	Preschool students	Non-preschool students	Total
Improvement	390	96	487
Stable	27	46	63
Regression	00	00	9
Total	417	142	559

The data show that of 417 preschool students, 390 (93.6%) improved in first grade, while 27 (6.5%) remained stable. Among the 142 students who did not attend preschool, 96 (67.6%) improved and 46 (32.4%) remained stable; no regression was observed. These results suggest a positive association between preschool attendance and improved reading skills. The findings indicate a significantly higher proportion of reading improvement among preschool students (93.6%) than among non-preschool students (67.6%).

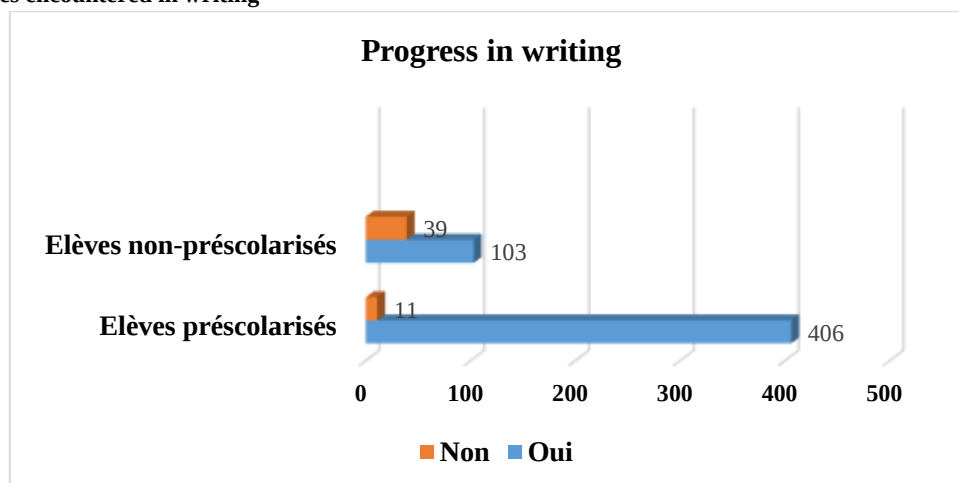
3.1.2 Main difficulties encountered in writing

Table 2: Main writing difficulties experienced by students in first grade

Writing difficulties	Preschool students	Non-preschool students	Total
Spelling	22	17	380
Letter shapes	32	116	148
None	363	9	31
Total	417	142	559

Distinguishing between students attending preschool, 363 of the 417 preschool students (87.0%) showed no difficulties, 32 (7.7%) had difficulties with letter formation, and 22 (5.3%) had spelling difficulties. Among the 142 students who did not attend preschool, 116 (81.7%) had difficulties with letter formation, 17 (12.0%) had spelling difficulties, and 9 (6.3%) had no difficulties. These results highlight clearly contrasting profiles of difficulties depending on preschool attendance.

3.1.3 Main difficulties encountered in writing



Among preschool students, 406 out of 417 showed improvement in writing (97.4%), while only 11 students (2.6%) did not. Among students who did not attend preschool, 103 out of 142 showed improvement (72.5%), while 39 students (27.5%) did not. This demonstrates a significant difference between the two groups, favoring the preschool students.

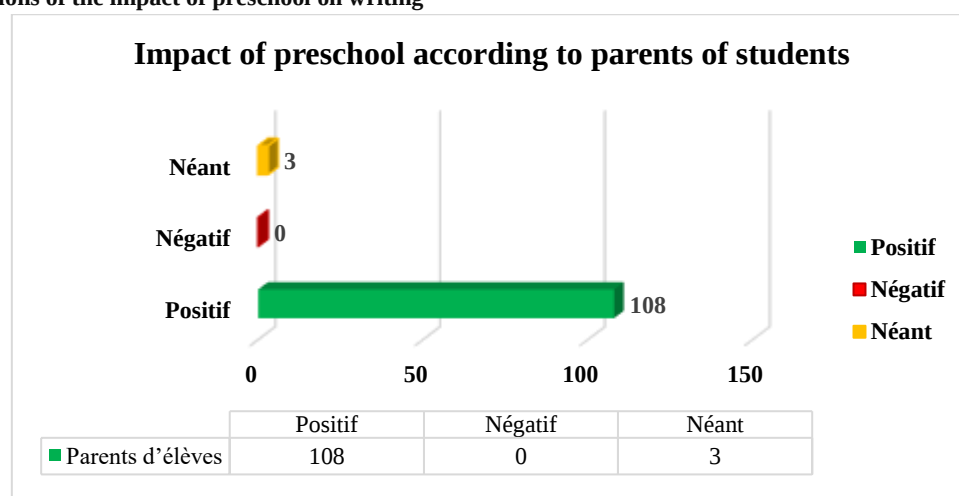
3.1.4 Evolution of reading skills

Table 3: Evolution of students' reading skills in first grade

Evolution in Calculus	Preschool students	Non-preschool students	Total
Strong	376	57	433
AVERAGE	39	32	71
Weak	2	53	55
Total	417	142	559

For the calculation, 376 preschool students (90.17%) showed significant improvement, 39 students (9.4%) showed average improvement, and 2 students (0.5%) showed low improvement. Among the 142 non-preschool students, 57 (40.14%) showed significant improvement, 32 students (22.5%) showed average improvement, and 53 students (37.32%) showed low improvement.

3.2 Parents' perceptions of the impact of preschool on writing



The figure reveals that the impact of preschool, according to parents, is overwhelmingly perceived as positive, with 108 positive responses out of 111, or 97.3%. No negative responses were recorded, while only 3 indicated no impact. This reflects a largely favorable assessment from parents. Parents and teachers share a generally positive perception of academic progress, which strengthens the credibility of our findings on the impact of preschool. Over 87% of the parents interviewed rated their children's academic progress as "Very good" or "Good," which aligns with these results.

Finally, 88.3% of the parents interviewed believe that starting preschool has a positive impact on their children's progress, and 91.9% believe that preschool improves cognitive development. These very positive perceptions, even stronger than those of the teachers interviewed (67.3% reported a strong impact on reading and writing), confirm that preschool is seen as a major driver of academic success and overall cognitive development. One teacher then stated: " *All children should absolutely attend preschool; it shouldn't be optional for parents. The difference is clear... we suffer greatly with children who haven't attended preschool.* "

3.3 Relationship between academic performance and preschool attendance

Table 4: Relationship between academic performance and preschool attendance

			Academic results		Total
			Weak	Students	
Did you attend preschool?	Yes	Effective	23	394	417
		% included in Did you go to kindergarten	5.5%	94.5%	100.0%
	No	Effective	73	69	142
		% included in Did you go to kindergarten	51.4%	48.6%	100.0%
Total		Effective	92	467	559
		% included in Did you go to kindergarten	16.5%	83.5%	100.0%

Analysis of the table above reveals that 94.5% of students who attended preschool and have high academic performance, compared to 5.5% of those who attended preschool and have low academic performance. Conversely, 51.4% of students who did not attend preschool and have low academic performance, compared to 48.6% of their peers who did not attend and have high academic performance. From these results, one conclusion emerges: students who attended preschool have better academic performance in all aspects, while those who did not attend have low academic performance. The chi-square test of independence yielded a statistic of 4.571, a degree of freedom of 1 ($df=1$), and a two-sided asymptotic significance (p-value) of 0.033. This probability is less than the critical threshold of 5% (0.05), i.e., $Pr = 0.03 < \alpha = 0.05$. This means that academic performance and preschool are two dependent variables. Fisher's exact test, as shown in the table below, confirms these results with a two-sided probability of 0.043, which is less than the critical threshold α of 5% (0.05).

Table 5: Fisher's Exact Test

	Value	ddl*	Asymptotic significance (bilateral)	Exact meaning (bilateral)	Exact meaning (unilateral)
Pearson's Chi-square	4,571 ^a	1	0.033		
Correction for continuity ^b	3,204	1	0.073		
likelihood ratio	4,342	1	0.037		
Fisher's exact test				043	039
Linear association by linear	4,488	1	034		
Number of valid observations	55				

* Degree of freedom

a. 1 cell (25.0%) has a theoretical count of less than 5. The minimum theoretical count is 3.93.

b. Calculated only for a 2x2 array.

Data analysis indicates that students who attended preschool produce the best results and are more receptive to integration into school life.

4. DISCUSSION

The study's results validates the initial hypothesis. They show that students who received preschool generally achieve better academic performance than their peers who did not. Among students who attended preschool, 94.5% obtained high academic results, compared to only 5.5% who achieved low results. Conversely, among students who did not attend preschool, 51.4% showed low results, while 48.6% achieved high results. These observations reveal a positive correlation between preschool attendance and academic success in primary school. They also suggest that the absence of preschool may be a detrimental factor to academic performance. These results corroborate those of KY Gbati (2007), B. Tchable (2013), YTA Seka (2016), and Z. Mahamadou (2022).

B. Tchable (2013) highlighted a close and significant relationship between preschool attendance and the academic performance of students in the second year of elementary school (CE2). More specifically, students who attended preschool distinguished themselves with better results than their non-preschool peers, particularly in written arithmetic, writing, and sentence construction.

AS Fall and S. Moussa (2023) argue that preschool contributes to the early development of a child's intellectual potential, particularly by fostering the acquisition of basic skills in numeracy, language, and logical reasoning. These skills constitute important prerequisites for subsequent learning, especially in the area of mathematics. In this sense, preschool attendance appears to be a determining factor for success upon entry to primary school, particularly in mathematics and the language of instruction. PASEC (2020) confirms this trend, showing that students who attended preschool achieve better results, both at the beginning and end of primary school, especially in the language of instruction.

International research, as well as recent work conducted in Senegal (PASEC, 2020; Moussa *et al.*, 2022), converges to show that quality preschool, characterized by adequate duration, appropriate pedagogical support, and qualified educators, produces measurable positive effects on learning.

Beyond cognitive development, this stage also fosters emotional development, socialization, autonomy, and gradual adaptation to the school environment. This is why it now occupies an increasingly important place in educational policies.

Parents' perceptions of preschool largely depend on how they assess its impact on a child's overall development. When they recognize that this stage contributes to intellectual awakening, socialization, autonomy, and better academic adjustment, they more readily develop attitudes favorable to preschool attendance. This positive view also fosters closer collaboration between family and school, a collaboration essential to a child's academic success. In this regard, T. Yaou (2022) notes that "children who have strong psycho-emotional and economic support perform better than those who lack it." Teachers confirm this idea, pointing out that children whose parents provide regular support are often those who have attended preschool. This situation can be explained, in part, by the parents' level of education. From this perspective, T. Yaou states that "being a parent means following your child's schooling" (p. 192, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of preschool attendance on the academic performance of first-grade students. The results show that preschool education is a positive factor in academic success, having a positive effect on fundamental learning skills such as reading, arithmetic, writing, language, and overall grade point average. It also benefits children from disadvantaged backgrounds, although it does not significantly reduce performance gaps linked to social inequalities.

The extent of this effect also appears to depend on several implementation conditions, including teachers' professional commitment, the quality of educational support, and family involvement. Preschool thus emerges as a crucial space for socialization and preparation for learning, in line with Durkheim's perspective that "education is the action exerted by adult generations on those who are not yet mature for social life" (Durkheim, 1922). It is therefore not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but also contributes to the development of the dispositions, norms, and behaviors expected in social life.

In this context, it is necessary to strengthen support mechanisms for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to better mitigate initial inequalities. Furthermore, future research could further analyze the impact of preschool on children's socio-emotional development, as well as on their subsequent academic paths.

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