



Overage enrolment in Early Childhood Education in Liberia

Most children in early childhood education in Liberia are overage.

Sixty-seven percent of children enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) are 6-years old or older, while 5% are older than 11-years. This is despite government policy being that children between the ages of 3 and 5 should be enrolled in ECE, and that there should be no barriers to children progressing to primary school when they are 6-years old.

Overage enrolment is an obstacle to effective early learning.

Participation in quality ECE improves cognitive development and increases school readiness. However, overage children pose a challenge for ECE teachers to facilitate age-appropriate learning activities, and the late enrolment of children in primary school is likely to exacerbate learning difficulties. Disadvantaged and under-prepared children are more likely to repeat grades and drop out of school before completing the primary cycle.

Summary of findings:

52% of children enrolled in ECE are 7-years or older, despite government prescribing ECE between the ages of 3 and 5.

The majority (64%) of parents enrol their children when they are 5-years or younger, but most expect that their children will not progress to primary school even after they are 6-years old.

Almost all principals were aware of the correct age of enrolment, although less than half reported following government policy.

52% of principals and 24% of teachers reported offering additional support to overage children, either through additional teachers or remedial classes. The primary reason for not offering support was a lack of resources.

The Early Learning Partnership (ELP) Systems Research program provides countries with action research to promote quality, equitable early learning at scale. The program is led by Oxford Policy Management, managed by the World Bank, and supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). This brief presents research and policy options to help inform government action on overage enrollment in ECE in Liberia. Key elements of Liberia's education system were analyzed against benchmarks, generating specific policy recommendations to address the challenge.

The research reported here was conducted in schools in 8 counties in Liberia, including 5 of the most disadvantaged: Bomi, Grand Kru, Maryland, Montserrado, Nimba, Rivercess, River Gee, and Sinoe. 490 student assessments, 478 parent interviews (of sampled children), 50 classroom observations, 50 principal interviews, and 50 teacher interviews were conducted.

Contact

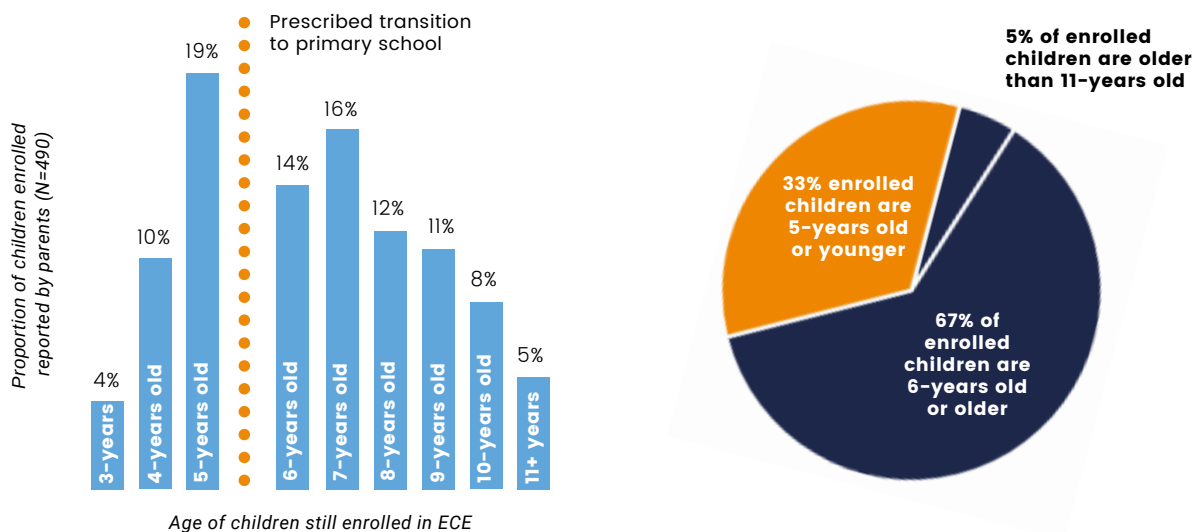
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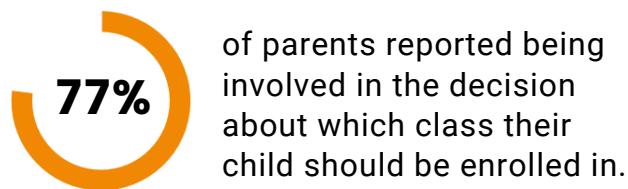
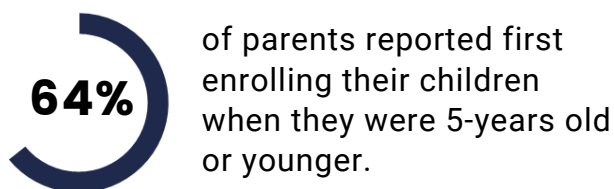
Proportion of overage children

National policy prescribes that children between the ages of 3 and 5 should be enrolled in ECE, and that children older than 6 should be in primary school. However, the majority of children enrolled in ECE are overage.

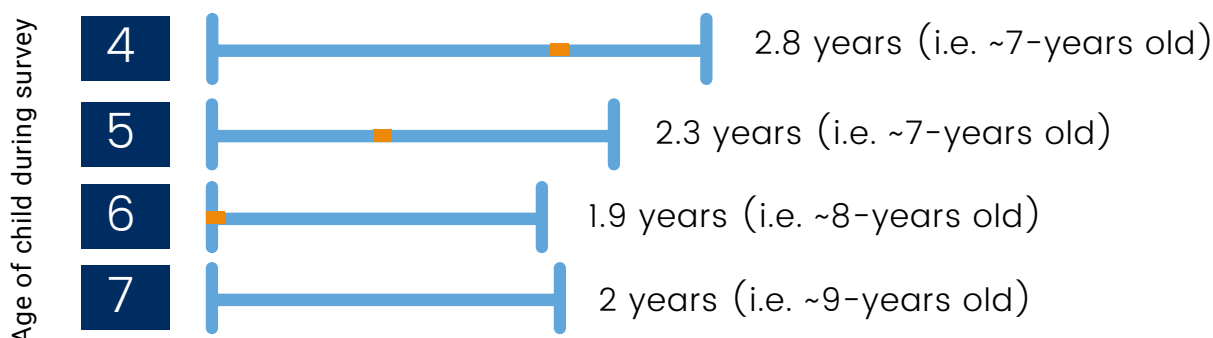


While 67% of children from families in the lowest income quintile were overage, only this was only true for 42% of families in the highest income quintile. Girls were as likely as boys to be overage.

Parents' views



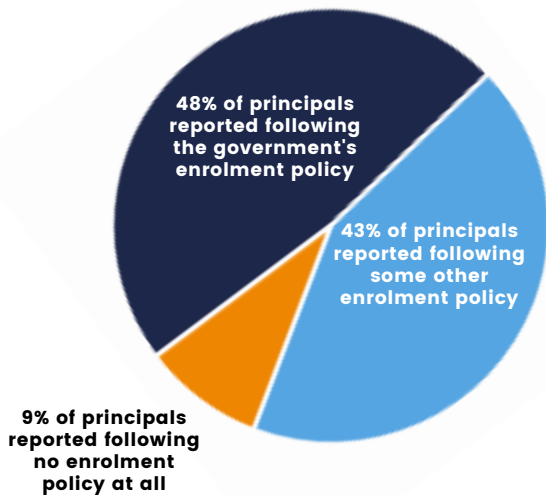
Of those parents who enrolled their child late, 56% reported the reason being not being able to afford the ECE fees. In addition, most parents did not anticipate their child progressing to primary school even after they turn 6-years old:



Time expected by parents until their child progresses to primary school
 Correct age of enrolment into primary school(6-years old) represented by an orange dot

Schools following policy

Principals varied between whether they reported following the government's policy, some other policy, or no policy on enrolment at all.



Of those principals reported not following a policy, 9% said there was no policy and 14% said they did not know the policy.

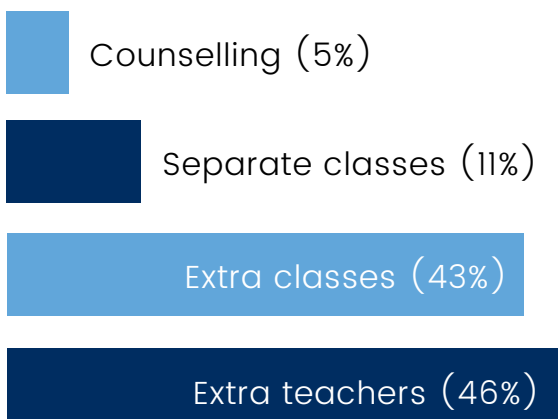
Of those principals reported following a policy, all but one knew the prescribed age range for ECE.

The difference in the proportion of overage children enrolled was large between schools that did (50%) and did not (67%) follow government's enrolment policy. However, this difference was not statistically significant. This may be due to the small sample size of principals interviews.

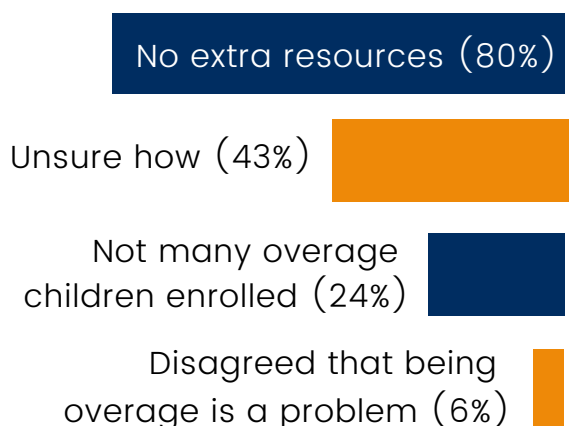
Schools offering support

50% of principals and 24% of teachers reported that their school offered additional support for overage children.

Those that offered additional support reported the following strategies:



Those that did not offer additional support gave the following reasons:



Targets

Benchmark

Good policies about the correct age of enrollment in ECE should be set by the Ministry of Education and implemented in schools. Parents must pay attention to the proportion of children who are overage when choosing schools.

Policy Options

- Conduct an analysis of the costs vs. benefits of enforcing the policy on overage enrolment in order to facilitate buy-in from stakeholders.

Status in Liberia

A policy on the correct age of enrolment exists, most principals, teachers, and parents understand the correct age a child should be when entering ECE. However, the policy is not enforced.

Resources

Benchmark

ECE fees should be affordable to parents, and catch-up programs for overage children must be appropriately funded.

Policy Options

- Consider mechanisms which make fees more affordable for parents such as vouchers, cash transfers, and grants.
- Provide overage children promoted to primary school with support to 'catch up', such as through accelerated learning or teaching at the right level programmes.

Status in Liberia

57% of parents mentioned fees as the main reason for late enrolment. Only 16% of parents pay their school fees in full and on time. 40% of parents noted that children are sent home until fees are paid in full.

Information

Benchmark

Data about overage enrolment should be gathered by head teachers, district education officers, and county education officers and used by parents to inform their choice of school.

Policy Options

- Include specific metrics in the school quality assurance system to ensure that information is collected on overage enrolment
- Empower county and district education officials to monitor overage enrolment during inspection visits.

Status in Liberia

Information about overage enrolment is not included in lesson observations. Parents are informed about the extent to which overage enrolment is an issue at their child's school. Yet parents are unable to use this information to switch schools: most schools share the same overage enrolment problem.

Rewards & Sanctions

Benchmark

Overage enrolment in schools must be monitored/sanctioned by principals and parents.

Policy Options

- Implement sanctions for unauthorized testing and help parents hold schools accountable by providing them with more information about how they can make complaints.

Status in Liberia

According to the Education Reform Act, children should be enrolled in ECE and primary school based on their age only. However, 65% of schools use testing to decide the which grade a child should be enrolled. Parents do not take actions to sanction schools for overage enrollment.

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