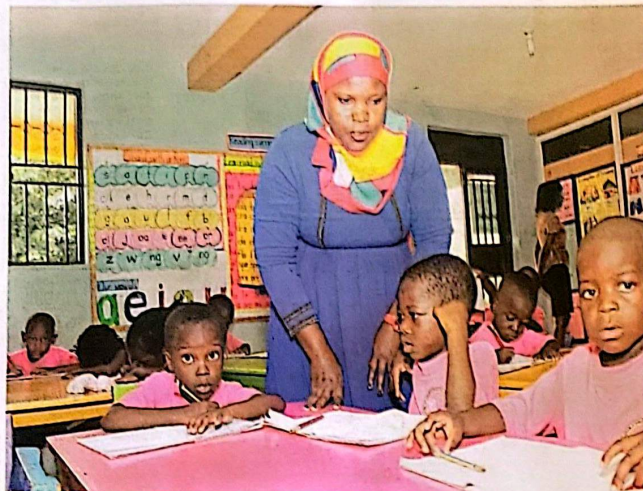


Nursery education boosts



Putting a child through nursery education helps set them up for success in later life. Photos by Tony Rujala

BY GEOFFREY MUTEGEKI AND CONAN BUSINE

Children who receive nursery education are twice as likely to go on and join A-level and later university, according to a 2016 study by Oxford University.

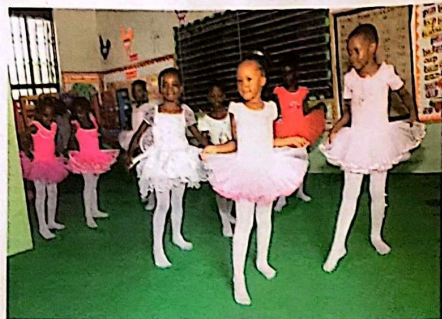
The research also shows that a child's educational experience at home when they are under five matters to their later academic success.

Unfortunately, not all children get the same support from their parents and for these pupils, pre-school is especially important. Our findings prove that an investment in pre-schools pays off, with particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds," reads the Oxford research entitled *The Study of Early Education and Development*.

Kathy Sylva, a professor of educational psychology at Oxford and one of the authors of the research, added: "We think that high quality early education makes the child a more effective learner — not just better at letters and numbers. High quality education turns the child on to learning."

Pre-school, also known as nursery school, refers to an educational establishment that offers early education to under-fives prior to the start of primary school.

In another study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) in the UK, it is clear that "Putting a child through nursery education helps set them up for success in later life."



Nursery education improves on the manipulative skills of children

The research found adults with pre-school education were more likely to be employed and earning higher salaries.

It also found that attending nurseries or play groups could have "long-lasting" effects on cognitive test scores throughout school years. Such tests provide information about a student's intellectual strength and weaknesses, as well as insight into his or her overall cognitive potential. IFS researchers, Alissa Goodman and Barbara Stanfisi, said: "Our findings suggest that starting education before the compulsory school-starting age at five can have long-lasting, positive impacts on children's lives." In their report the authors said

Later success

■ Pre-school, also known as nursery school, refers to an educational establishment that offers early education to children under five years prior to the start of primary school education. In another study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies in the UK, it is clear that "Putting a child through nursery education helps set them up for success in later life."

Developing confidence

Salina Mutumba, a senior education officer in charge of pre-primary education at the education ministry, urges parents to embrace nursery education, if they care about their children's future.

"Nursery education is more important than anything else in all the education levels. Once the child is not equipped from the early days, catching up at a later age may not be possible," Musumba says.

She adds that it is from nursery education that children develop confidence and learn most of the other skills that they will need in their cycle of growth and education.

"It helps them improve on their social and emotional aspect. You cannot tell easily from your home, if a child can socialize or control their emotions. But this can easily be seen, in a school environment," Mutumba says. She, however, warns teachers and parents not to force children to learn what they do not want to. "Alternatively, just they should just be encouraged. Forcing toddlers can gravely affect their learning process, later in primary and secondary," she says. "However, unqualified nursery teachers mishandle children. This may affect the child and make him or her lose

interest in schooling. But with the right teachers, nursery education is a great foundation for the child's education," Musumba says.

She adds nursery teaching should be more practical with teachers interacting with learning in an enjoyable way. Florence Kakyoo, a teacher in Fort Portal, Kabarole district, says self-confidence gained by learning in a playful manner adds to the personality development of the child.

"Through playing in the mud, reciting poems in front of class and singing songs, children are able to improve on their language and communication skills," Kakyoo says.

It is said a person's life successes, health and emotional wellbeing have their roots in early childhood.

A retired nursery teacher, Beatrice Kugonza, says taking a child to an early learning centre improves their speech, learning ability and prepares them for school.

"Children learn to pronounce words when they are still in nursery. It is from here that they get to know that they have to focus on, to achieve the set learning teachers," Kugonza says.

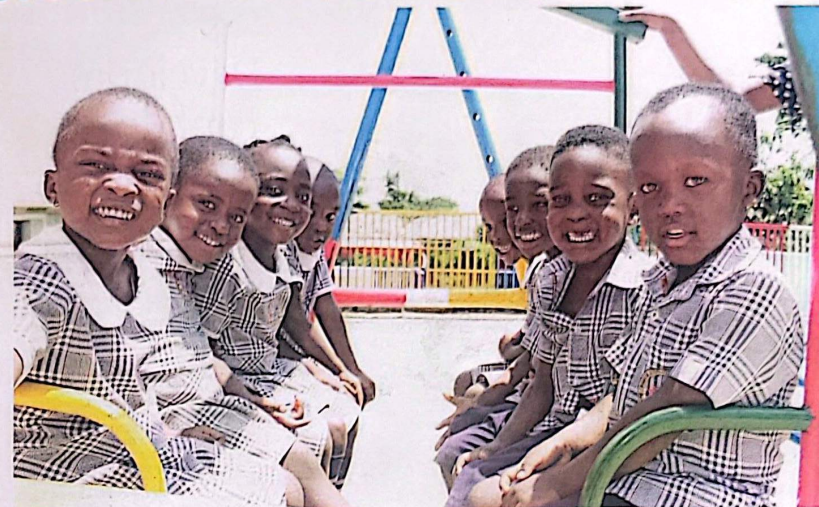
Parents, caregivers and teachers are always encouraged to behave in a way that imparts positive ideas in their mind

has proven that learning and mental development begin immediately after birth.

Studies show that during the first three years of a child's life, essential brain and neural development occurs. Therefore, children greatly benefit by receiving education before kindergarten.

Besides all evidence showing the value for early childhood education, there is currently no law that makes it mandatory to attend kindergarten. In fact, only 23.4% of all children in Uganda of ages three to five were officially enrolled by 2011, according to a 2014 study titled *Early Childhood Development: A Solid Investment in Uganda's Future* by UNICEF Uganda. However, the report suggested that

academic success – studies



Research found that adults with pre-school education were likely to be employed and earning higher salaries

a large number of nurseries and community-based early childhood development centres were outside of the formal education system, which means their quality is unchecked. The UNICEF report indicates that if steps are taken to ensure that these establishments meet the quality criteria, get registered and obtain a licence, there is capacity to provide places for 41.4% of children of pre-primary school age.

According to the Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, the number of pre-primary schools increased from 703 in 2007 to 7,368 in 2012.

Providing pre-primary education to all children needs no argumentation in Uganda. *The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy* underscores that "learning begins at birth and that whatever experiences a child goes through during these formative years will impact on a child's learning in later years positively or negatively."

Many studies world over have shown that even at a later age, individuals with pre-school

experience fare better than those without, leading to important benefits for society.

"Pre-primary education does not only facilitate the progression of children through the education system, but it also strengthens their position on the labour market; their productivity and their income generation capacity; their parenting skills," says the UNICEF report.

In his 2012 study, Godfrey Ejiu, an education psychologist and early childhood development specialist at Kyambogo University, noted that whereas the ECD policy implementation is supposed to be monitored annually, this is not the case due to financial challenges.

"If things continue as it is now, our children will keep missing the golden window of opportunity in their critical stage of development and will fail to compete favourably with other children from privileged communities in the world," Ejiu writes in his study titled *Status of Implementation of the ECD Policy in Uganda*.

But, Uganda's Government is planning an extension of learning to

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pre-schools, though the process is still slow, compared to what had initially been announced. The Government's plan is to have

an additional nursery school on all its public schools in the country. This is meant to supplement the private nursery schools in the country.

NUMBERS

23.4%

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33

Adults with a nursery or play group background were more likely to have gained qualifications and be in work at the age of 33.

Last year, the Government came up with the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECD).

According to the National Integrated ECD Policy Action Plan of Uganda (2016-2021), the Government is to establish an ECD centre at every primary school and support community based centres.

The Government's plan is based on the fact that researches on nursery education have shown that children taught at an early age usually have improved social skills, fewer behavioural problems and better grades without special attention.

According to Salina Mutumba, a senior education officer in charge of pre-primary education at the education ministry, majority of the things that determine a child's future are in many ways made up by eight years of age.

"Early learning helps children become better communicators at an early age. It gives them those learning skills that can help them throughout their lives," Mutumba said.



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