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POLICY BRIEF · TOGO

Quality Preschool Can Improve Learning in Togo if Expansion Is Matched with Targeted Support

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Key messages

- **Scale up quality preschool education to strengthen early learning outcomes:**
  - Expand public and community preschools, train qualified teachers, and support disadvantaged children;
  - Pair expansion with remedial programs, continuous learning assessments, and differentiated instruction so lower-performing students catch up, because higher-performing students benefit most from preschool.
- **Prioritise high-quality early childhood education in rural areas:** new classrooms, qualified teachers, and stronger quality standards to close the urban-rural gap.
- **To sustain preschool gains,** the Ministry of National Education should strengthen primary schools through better teacher training, reliable learning materials, regular assessments, and targeted support for struggling rural schools.

The learning crisis in Togo and the role of preschool education

Despite progress in school enrolment, Togo faces a severe learning crisis: over 70% of students lack basic reading and mathematics skills by the end of primary school (PASEC, 2019). Preschool is a proven lever for improving learning outcomes, but access remains marginal in Togo. Just 35% of children are enrolled in 2019, well below the regional average for sub-Saharan Africa (42.17% in 2020), and rural children have far less access than their urban peers (UNESCO, 2021).

The Government has made early childhood education a priority, introducing free public preschool in 2008 and adopting a National Strategy for Preschool Education (SNDEP, 2025–2030). But expanding access alone does not guarantee better learning: preschool's benefits depend heavily on the quality of both preschool and primary schooling (Blanden et al., 2022), and gains can fade in weak systems. As Togo scales up under the SNDEP, policymakers need evidence on how preschool reduces learning inequalities and for whom.

About the study

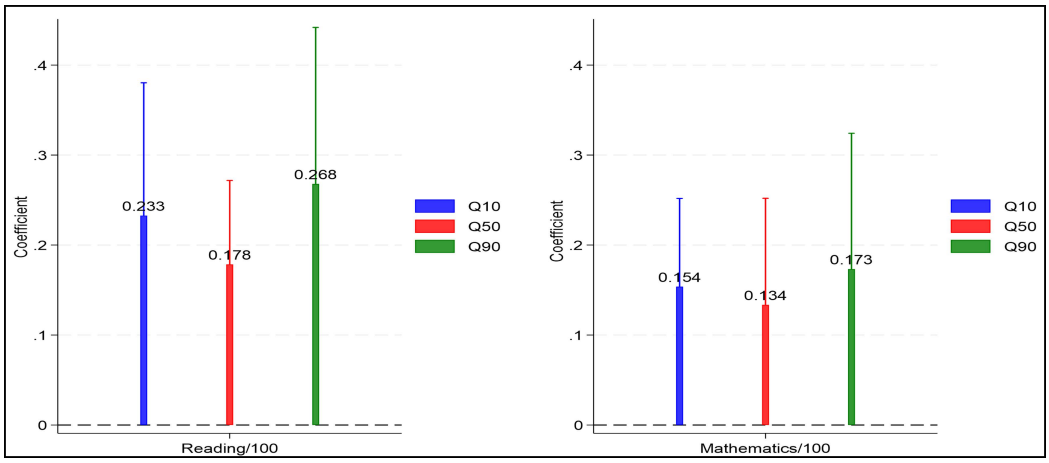
This study examines whether, and for whom, preschool attendance is associated with improved learning outcomes in Togo. It draws on data from the 2019 Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC), the largest international assessment of educational achievement in French-speaking Africa. The study uses nationally representative data from 8,209 Grade 2 and Grade 6 students. In addition to measuring reading and mathematics achievement, the dataset includes information on students' socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers, schools, and preschool attendance. This enables the study to examine which groups benefit most from preschool education and provide evidence to inform education policy. See PEP Working Paper 2026-07 for the full methodology.

Key findings

a. Preschool education improves learning outcomes

- Students who attended preschool performed better in reading and mathematics than those who did not.

Figure 1: Distributional relationship between preschool education and learning outcomes in primary school in Grade 2



Notes: Source: Author's estimates. The coefficients indicate the effects of the association between access to preschool and school performance for each quantile (Q); the shaded area shows 95% confidence interval. Outcomes expressed in standard deviation (SD) units (PASEC score ÷ 100; population SD ≈ 1).

- In Grade 2, preschool attendance was associated with higher scores across lower-, average-, and higher-performing students.
- Positive associations remained evident in Grade 6, particularly in reading and mathematics among average- and higher-performing students.
- These results suggest that preschool provides a strong foundation for children's learning.

b. Benefits differ across groups of students

- Higher-performing students experienced larger learning gains from preschool than lower-performing students.
- Lower-performing students also benefited from preschool, although the gains were smaller.
- The findings indicate that children do not benefit equally from preschool education.

c. School quality matters

- Better school infrastructure, classroom resources, and access to electricity were associated with improved student performance.
- Larger class sizes were associated with poorer learning outcomes.
- Teacher characteristics were also associated with student achievement.

d. Rural students face greater disadvantages

- Most students in the sample lived in rural areas, where access to preschool and quality education remains more limited.
- Rural students were less likely to experience the full benefits of preschool because of weaker learning environments.

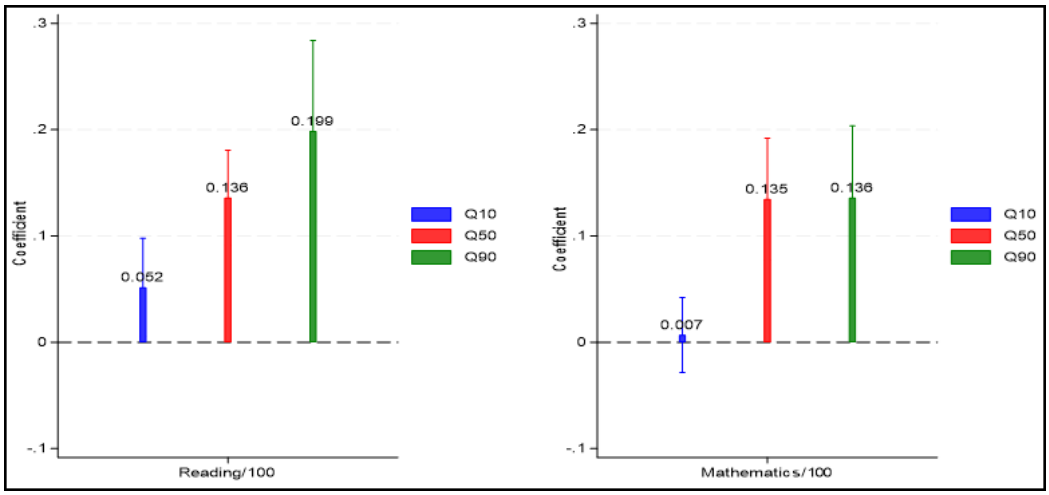
Conclusion and policy messages

Expanding access to high-quality preschool education can improve learning outcomes in Togo while advancing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Preschool education plays an important role in improving learning outcomes in Togo in accordance with a National Strategy for the Development of Preschool Education (SNDEP) for the period 2025–2030, which sets out the Government's vision and strategic priorities for early childhood development (Ministère des Enseignements Primaire et Secondaire, 2025). However, its benefits are uneven and depend on broader education system conditions. To maximise impact, policymakers should move beyond access expansion and focus on quality, equity, and system-wide coherence.

Policy messages

- Expand quality preschool education in rural and disadvantaged communities through new facilities, qualified teachers, learning materials, and financial support for vulnerable households.
- Strengthen preschool and primary education together through better teacher training, harmonised curricula, regular learning assessments, and targeted remedial support to sustain learning gains.
- Coordinate preschool expansion with health, nutrition, and social protection programmes to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

Figure 2: Distributional relationship between preschool education and learning outcomes in primary school in Grade 6



Notes: Source: Author's estimates. The coefficients indicate the effects of the association between access to preschool and school performance for each quantile (Q); the shaded area shows 95% confidence interval. Outcomes expressed in standard deviation (SD) units (PASEC score ÷ 100; population SD ≈ 1).

Table 1: Policy options

Policy options	Potential benefits	Costs/challenges	Priority	Time frame
Expand access to preschool education in rural and disadvantaged communities	Expands access and reduces urban-rural inequality; helps children enter school with stronger foundational skills.	Requires significant investment in infrastructure, teachers, and materials; constrained by budget and capacity.	High priority	Short term (1–2 years)
Strengthen preschool quality, reinforce primary education systems, and provide targeted remedial support to low-performing students	Strengthen children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, maximise the benefits of preschool participation, sustain learning gains throughout primary education, and reduce learning gaps, particularly for disadvantaged students.	Requires sustained investment and comprehensive education system reforms, including teacher training, curriculum improvement, assessment systems, and school support, with benefits emerging over the medium to long term and challenges to nationwide scale-up.	High priority	Medium to long term (3–5 years)
Integrate preschool policies with social protection, health, and child welfare programs	Addresses multiple barriers at once; more efficient use of public resources.	Needs strong inter-ministerial coordination and sustained political commitment.	Medium priority	Long-term (5–10 years)

Notes: Source: Author.

Policy implementation roadmap

To translate these findings into action, the following steps are recommended:

Short-term (1–2 years)

- Identify underserved rural areas using geospatial and administrative data (Ministry of National Education, INSEED, Regional Education Directorates) and prioritise preschool expansion there.
- Step up recruitment and training of preschool teachers for rural areas, and establish enforceable national quality standards on infrastructure, staffing, safety, and class size.

Medium-term (3–5 years)

- Invest in constructing and rehabilitating preschool and primary facilities, reducing class sizes, and ensuring adequate textbooks and learning materials, particularly in underserved areas.
- Establish targeted remedial learning programs for low-performing students and align national early childhood strategies with SDG 4 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026–2035.

Long-term (5–10 years)

- Establish an integrated Early Childhood Development strategy linking education, health, nutrition, and social protection, jointly led by the relevant ministries with support from UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO, and UNESCO.
- Strengthen national learning assessment systems aligned with PASEC, secure dedicated budget lines for early childhood education, and work toward universal, tuition-free preschool education.

Cross-cutting actions

- Raise community and parental awareness of early learning.
- Strengthen coordination between government agencies and development partners through a structured education-sector mechanism.

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About this brief

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