

Access, Public Investment, and Equity in ECCE: The Nexus in Nine High-Population Countries

In 1993, the heads of state and government of nine high-population countries – Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan – launched the E-9 Initiative¹ aimed at achieving concrete progress in basic education. The Initiative calls for the education ministers of these nine countries to meet every two years to review their progress. The topic chosen for the 5th E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting, held in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2003, was early childhood care and education (ECCE). This note presents some highlights of progress achieved in ECCE access in the nine countries.²

Demographic trends

The E-9 countries are home to nearly 55% of the world population under age 14. The average proportion of this age group in the countries is shrinking, from 35% in 2001 to a projected 30% in 2015; and the fertility rate is also declining, from 5.8 (1970-75) to 3.2 (2000-5), per woman. Overall population growth in E-9 countries is projected to be 1.5% by 2015 compared with 2.1% in 1975-2001.

With fewer children to serve, if the countries' investment in early childhood remains constant, more can be spent on improving quality. Concomitantly, if early childhood services continue to expand at a constant rate, eventually there will be a surplus of ECCE places, though current participation in ECCE in the E-9 countries is so low that it will be a long time before enough places are created to cater for all ECCE age cohorts.

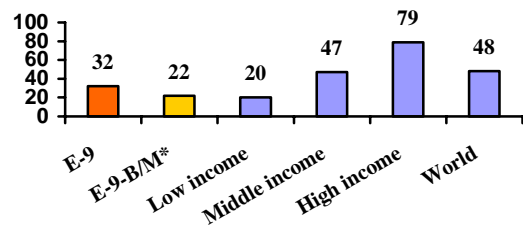
The urban population in the E-9 countries is expanding, from 45% in 2001 to 53% in 2015. In Brazil and Mexico, the proportions will be about 88% and 78%, respectively. Given that a rise in urban population is closely associated with a rise in dual income households with less access to childcare support from family members, the countries with large urban populations will face a particularly acute challenge to meet demand for ECCE services from working urban parents.

Level of participation³

The E-9 average gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education⁴ (GER-PPE) in 2000 was 32%. This is lower than the averages for middle and high-income countries and lower than the world average. Without Brazil and

Mexico, the group's ratio drops to 22%, closer to the average of low-income countries (Figure 1).

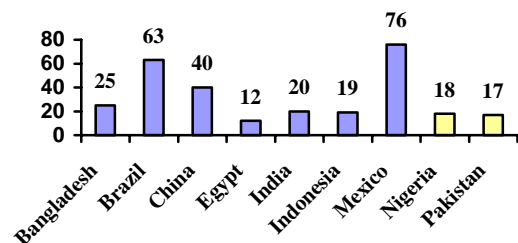
Figure 1: Global comparison of E-9 countries' GER-PPE, 2000⁵



*E-9-B/M: E-9 without Brazil and Mexico

The individual GER-PPEs of the E-9 countries are as follows.

Figure 2: GER-PPE in the E-9 countries, 2000⁶



Mexico shows the highest rate of 76%, followed by Brazil (63%) and China (40%). Egypt shows the lowest (12%), but this reflects a more than 100% growth from 1990. During the same period in Egypt, private enrolments⁷ in pre-primary education dropped drastically from 87% to 49% (Figure 3). The overall expansion of access in the country coincided with an increased proportion of public services.

¹ "E" for education, "9" for nine countries.

² More detailed information can be found in the UNESCO synthesis report, Early Childhood Care and Education in E-9 Countries: Status and Outlook (in print). Contact: sh.choi@unesco.org

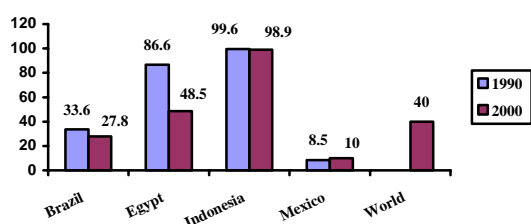
³ Due to limited data, the discussion focuses only on pre-primary education.

⁴ Following the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), pre-primary education refers to centre or school-based services for children of at least three years of age. Country's data on pre-primary education could differ in age group of reference, depending on the entry age into primary school.

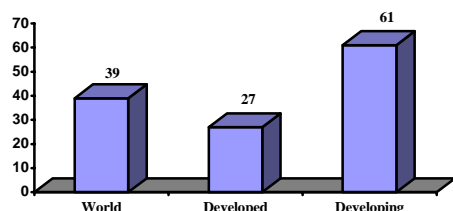
⁵ World Development Indicators (2003). World Bank.

⁶ World Development Indicators (2003). World Bank. Data for Nigeria come from UNICEF MICS (1999); and for Pakistan, from Financing of Education in Pakistan, 1999-2000. Ministry of Education. Data for these two countries could be incompatible with those of the others in terms of age group and year of reference.

⁷ In services managed by non-public agencies including NGOs and religious institutions.

Figure 3: Private enrolments in PPE in selected E-9 countries, 1990/2000⁸

Similarly, Mexico, which has a higher enrolment ratio than Brazil, has a comparatively smaller proportion of private enrolments. In general, countries with a higher enrolment rate tend to show a smaller proportion of private enrolments. As shown in Figure 4 below, in developed countries, for instance, private enrolment makes up only 27% of the total, compared with 61% in developing countries. Public investment has a clearly positive association with expanded access.

Figure 4: Regional comparison of private enrolments in PPE, 2000⁹

Returning to Figure 3, according to their national EFA plans on ECCE, Egypt and Indonesia, whose proportions of private enrolments in 2000 (48.5 %, 99%, respectively) exceeded the world average of 40%, are aiming for the largest, among the E-9 countries, enrolment increases¹⁰, beyond 200%, by 2010 and 2015, respectively. Though public investment is not the only means of expanding access to ECCE, given its inevitable association with expanded access, these countries will face a steep challenge of increasing public investment to meet their targets.

The issue of equity¹¹

In most E-9 countries, national disparities in access across different population groups and regions are a matter of concern. This is particularly so in Brazil. Brazil's national enrolment ratio of 6-year-olds in pre-school education is 61%, but in the impoverished North region the ratio is only 39%.

Brazil, however, is not a country short of investment in ECCE. As a percentage of GDP, Brazil's investment in PPE (0.4%; direct public expenditure only; 1998) equals that of OECD countries in the developed region¹², but its

enrolment ratio of 3-4-year olds in PPE (25%, 1999) is lower than the OECD mean (64%, 2000).¹³ WEI countries¹⁴ spend only 0.2% of their GDP, but they feature a similar enrolment outcome (22%). Meanwhile, Brazil's per-student expenditure in PPE (US\$1,222¹⁵, 1998; in public institutions only) is almost twice the WEI mean (US\$612, 1999). In Brazil a small number of children are attending relatively expensive public services.¹⁶

Speaking of expensive ECCE services, Indonesia is another case in point. The Philippines spent in 1998 US\$ 46 per-student in PPE,¹⁷ while Indonesia spent US\$ 53 in 2000.¹⁸ But Indonesia's enrolment rate for 3-4-year olds is negligibly small, while the Philippines's enrolment is registered at 16% (2000).¹⁹ In the case of Indonesia, 95% of expenditure on PPE is private and the majority of enrolment in PPE is private, suggesting that in Indonesia it is the individual families who are paying for access to relatively expensive services provided by the private sector.

Thus, in Brazil, the problem of inequity may have to do with an ineffective distribution of public resources, while in Indonesia, the absolutely small amount of public investment may have been a cause for inequity.

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¹³ Unless mentioned otherwise, the enrolment data are from both public and private institutions.

¹⁴ The 19 countries that participate in the OECD/UNESCO World Education Indicators (WEI) programme: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay, and Zimbabwe.

¹⁵ Converted using PPPs

¹⁶ As one of the reasons for Brazil's expensive services, one can think of the cost for quality. But this does not seem to be the case, as far as the pupil/teacher ratio in PPE is concerned: the ratio in Brazil (2000) is 19, while it is 16 in developed countries. EFA Global Monitoring Report (2003/4). UNESCO.

¹⁷ This figure is from public institutions only.

¹⁸ There is a possibility that the expenditure is 15% higher, if data that were not included due to the recent decentralisation policy in place had been included.

¹⁹ Even though the comparison is not completely justifiable, as the per-student expenditure data in the Philippines are from public institutions only, given the possibility that the expenditure figure of Indonesia could be even higher than presented and the relatively large difference in enrolment, the overall argument can stand as it is.

⁸ EFA Global Monitoring Report (2003/4). UNESCO.

⁹ EFA Global Monitoring Report (2003/4). UNESCO.

¹⁰ For 4-6 year olds in both countries.

¹¹ The data presented in this section are all from: Financing education: Investment and returns. Analysis of the World Education Indicators (2002). Paris: OECD/UNESCO.

¹² Unless mentioned otherwise, the expenditure is from both public and private sources.