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Delayed primary school enrolment among boys and girls in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Using the fifth Ghana Living Standards Survey, this paper examines whether delayed entry is as likely among girls as it is among boys and the importance of the household's poverty status in understanding delayed entry. No gender difference is found in the likelihood of delayed entry. However boys are much older for their grades than girls suggesting that they may experience a more extended period of delayed entry. The poverty status of the household is not an important correlate of delayed entry among girls or children in urban households but is important for boys and rural children.

1. Introduction

Ghana has achieved significant strides in the provision of basic education for all children, however, the sector is still bedeviled with drawbacks and limitations (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Although gross primary enrolment rates exceed 100 percent, net enrolment rates were about 84 percent in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013). Net primary enrolment rates of less than 100 percent indicate that the goal of universal primary education has not been achieved whilst gross enrolment rates of more than 100 percent suggest that there are overaged children in primary school.

The presence of overaged children in primary and secondary school can be due to one or a combination of reasons. These are failure of children to be enrolled in primary school at the official entry age which is usually six years old, class repetition or interrupted enrolment in school. Age-grade inappropriateness increases the risk of a child dropping out of school. Wils (2004) found that in Mozambique children who enter school late had substantially higher drop-out rates than younger entrants. In Ghana, Akyeampong et al. (2007) found that whilst enrolment rates increase rapidly for children between the ages of 8 and 13, there is a decline in enrolment rates among children between the ages of 13 and 16. When girls enroll in primary school later than the official entry age, they are more likely to drop out, especially as they approach adolescence (Rose and Al-Samarrai, 2001; Wils, 2004). Delayed entry into primary school can make the attainment of the goal of universal primary education difficult for two reasons. First, not all children at the official entry age for primary school will be enrolled in school. Second, delayed entry can increase the likelihood of non-completion of primary education.

Not many studies on education in Ghana have examined the incidence of age-appropriate grade enrolment or the determinants of age-appropriate grade enrolment. This paper intends to contribute to the literature on this important subject. It has three objectives. The first is to find out whether girls are just as likely as boys to experience delayed entry. The second is to identify the correlates of delayed entry for girls and boys and the importance of socio-economic circumstances of the household. The third objective is to examine the factors associated with the extent to which a child is overaged for his or her class.

2. Evidence on the determinants of age-appropriate enrolment

A few studies have examined the incidence of age-appropriate grade enrolment in the African context (Burke and Beegle, 2004; Moyi, 2011, 2010; Wells, 2009) and more particularly in Ghana (Akyeampong et al., 2007; Glewwe and Jacoby, 1995). Using data

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from the Core Welfare Indicators Survey of 2003, Akyeampong et al. (2007) found that the mean ages of pupils enrolled in primary 1 and primary 6 were 7.5 years and 13.3 years respectively. In some instances children aged ten years or more were in primary 1 or 2. They attributed this to delayed entry into primary school.

Generally, enrolment for boys is higher than for girls in the African context (Glick and Sahn, 2000; Lincove, 2009). There is however, mixed evidence on the relationship between the sex of the child and whether or not the child would be enrolled at the right age. In Tanzania, an interesting revelation by Bommier and Lambert (2000) is that, girls start school earlier than boys. A possible reason assigned to this is the lump-sum gains made after receiving education, such as the bride-price, when the young lady is ready for marriage. These gains are modeled as a lump-sum gain and it was found that when these gains increase girls enroll earlier and stay in school for a shorter period. The intuition is that the present value of such a lump-sum gain is greater when obtained sooner. The parents' interest is in having their daughters ready for the marriage market as soon as possible. Moyi (2010) on the other hand did not find a significant difference in the incidence of delayed entry to primary school between boys and girls in Malawi. Grogan (2009) found that fee elimination in Uganda increases the probability that girls begin school before age nine. Pradhan (1998) found that boys from wealthy households in Indonesia have a higher probability of being enrolled at the appropriate age, though the difference was minimal.

The income or wealth of the household has been found to be significant determinants of age at enrolment. The probability of inappropriate age-grade enrolment declines as the income or wealth of the household increases (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1995; Moyi, 2010; Pradhan, 1998). In Indonesia, consumption per capita is found to increase the probability of enrolling in secondary school at the right age (Pradhan, 1998). Facing credit constraints, parents may choose to send children to work instead of enrolling them in school (especially in rural agricultural communities) in order to build up savings (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1995). Children in poor households may experience delayed entry for a longer period because their parents or guardians may take a longer time to generate the required savings.

There are mixed findings regarding the relationship between the education of the household head and the age at enrolment of children in the household. While Moyi (2010) found a negative association in Malawi between the education of the head of the household and the likelihood of a child enrolling in school late, Pradhan (1998) in a model that included both parents' education and literacy found that parents' education was insignificant but literacy of the mother increased the probability of enrolling at the appropriate age.

The number of children currently in school from a given household or family have been found to be negatively associated with the likelihood of age-appropriate enrolment (Wells, 2009). There are mixed findings concerning the relationship a child's birth order and the likelihood of starting school on time. Pradhan (1998) found that being the eldest child increases age at secondary enrolment in urban areas and being the youngest child in the household reduces the age at enrolment. However, the existence of liquidity constraints can change this relationship. Bommier and Lambert (2000) found that in Tanzania being the eldest in a liquidity-constrained family could reduce the chances of being enrolled on time because these children have to help accumulate funds before they enroll. On the other hand, the youngest child is more likely to enroll early because funds are more easily available. Besides, the younger ones would have access to school materials and logistics handed down to them by their older siblings.

Moyi (2010) has shown that in the Malawian context, children living in households headed by women are more likely to enroll early. In addition, the death of a mother is less injurious than the death of a father to the likelihood of being enrolled in school on time. Ainsworth et al. (2005) also found a similar relationship between mother's survival and delayed enrolment among children in north-western Tanzania.

In addition to the characteristics of the household and the family the child belongs to other factors have been found to be associated with delayed enrolment. Bommier and Lambert (2000) found that the age at the time of school enrolment and schooling duration in Tanzania are both functions of a set of variables describing schooling costs and school quality.

Glewwe and Jacoby (1995) focused attention on the effect of childhood nutrition on age of enrolment and school attainment in Ghana, while controlling for other community, household and individual characteristics. Strong evidence was found for nutritional deficiencies in early childhood; children with stunted growth start primary school later.

Using more recent data (2005/06 Ghana Living Standards Survey), this paper investigates whether girls and boys are just as likely to start primary school late and the importance of socio-economic correlates of delayed enrolment at the entry level. A revisit of the issue on delayed entry is pertinent given the introduction of policies to improve access to basic education in the intervening period since the Glewwe and Jacoby study and the implications delayed entry has for the attainment of the goal of universal primary education.

3. Ghana's education system

The education reforms of 1987 introduced fundamental changes to Ghana's education system. The reforms were introduced as part of broader economic and structural reforms implemented under the aegis of the World Bank and IMF beginning in 1983 (see contributions in Aryeetey et al., 2000 for a discussion of the reforms). The structure of the education system was streamlined and the number of years of pre-tertiary education was reduced. The new structure introduced the basic education system which comprised six years of primary school and three years of junior high school. Basic education was subsequently redefined to include two years of pre-school. The official age of entry into primary 1 is six years. The completion of basic education is the first official transition point in the education system. All students sit for the official terminal examination that either marks the end of formal schooling or is the transition to senior high school education.

The reforms of 1987 aimed at increasing access to education for both boys and girls and across income groups, changing the structure of the school system, improving the quality of education through improvements in pedagogy and the introduction of a more relevant curriculum, attaining financial sustainability and improving the management of resources within the sector. User fees were introduced to bring about financial sustainability. This however had an almost immediate detrimental effect on enrolment which was contrary to the objective of improving access. In the face of this the user fee policy had to be revised. The policy of free, compulsory and universal basic education was introduced in 1995 and had as one of its objectives the provision of free quality education at the basic level to all children by 2005. The components of education expenses that were to be provided free were tuition, textbooks, equipment and tools. At the junior high level, pupils were expected to pay a textbook user fee equivalent to not more than 10 percent of the average total cost of the textbook supplied per pupil.

In 2004/05 the capitation grant scheme was introduced. The grant covers the extra cost and levies (such as examination, facilities management, security charges, games and sports) that parents usually pay as "school fees" in public schools. The National