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**Assessing a Low-cost School Readiness Program in Mozambique**

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**Objectives/aims**

Despite a twofold increase in primary school enrolment in Mozambique over the past 15 years, educational outcomes remain largely disappointing. In 2014, the average primary school dropout rate in Mozambique reached almost seven percent, and only six percent of students achieved basic reading competency by the third grade. In the absence of universal, public preprimary education, accelerated school readiness (ASR) programs could potentially increase on-time enrollment and early-grade achievement for children in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the limited implementation of such programs to date necessitates further testing to validate their effectiveness. In this study, we conduct an RCT and process evaluation of the UNICEF-funded, Save the Children-implemented summer Accelerated School Readiness (ASR) program in the Zambezia province in Mozambique.

Our objectives for this evaluation are to (a) determine the extent to which provision of the ASR program improves children’s school readiness, and on-time enrollment and academic achievement in grade one relative to comparable children in communities with no preprimary education; (b) calculate the community- and child-level costs of providing the ASR program; and (c) identify which aspects of community context and implementation seemed to facilitate or inhibit the success of the ASR program.

**Methods**

In this study, we conduct a mixed-methods RCT and process evaluation of the Accelerated School Readiness (ASR) program. The quantitative data collection includes a validated-school readiness assessment and family questionnaire at baseline; followed by the school readiness assessment, school record review, program implementation checklist, and school record review at midline; and lastly the school readiness assessment and school record review at end line. The qualitative process evaluation focuses on the relevancy, fidelity of implementation, and perceptions of the program. The qualitative data collection takes place at midline and includes focus groups with participants, including parents and trained parent leaders, and key informant interviews with key program staff and implementers.

**Main findings**

Our midterm assessment of the program shows that program participants are more likely to enrol in primary school. We also find some evidence of children being more prepared for primary school as measured in terms of some key cognitive and socio-emotional constructs. The overall results show that, in addition to the positive effects on children, the low-cost ASR model is a promising policy option for improving school readiness in rural Africa.