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Behind Before They Begin: The Challenge of Early Childhood Education in Rural China

Journal Article

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The main goal of this paper is to analyze the factors (access, attendance and quality of preschools) that may be affecting the educational readiness of China's rural children before they enter the formal school system. Using data from a survey of 80 preschools and 500 households in 6 counties in 3 provinces of China, this paper documents the nature of early childhood education (ECE) services and the educational readiness of children aged 4-5 in rural China. We present evidence that ECE services are seriously deficient. Households in many areas of rural China do not have convenient access to preschool facilities. Preschools have poor facilities, inadequate health services, and little concern for the nutrition of their students. Most teachers have little formal training. In part due (perhaps) to the poor quality and low participation in preschool, in this paper we will show that China's rural children score much lower on standardized educational readiness tests. In fact, according to our findings, more than one half of the rural children in our sample are "not ready" for continuing into the next level of formal education. Our analysis implies that it is necessary to improve the facilities and quality of teachers and to increase the probability that children will be sent to ECE institution.

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