Children attain positive attitude towards learning as well as adaptive behavior for learning from preprimary education. The skills they develop during preprimary education such as pre-literacy, pre-numeracy, executive functioning and prosocial behaviors will help them when they enter formal primary education. In Ethiopia most of the preprimary access used to be provided through a three-year Kindergartens (KGs) which are more accessible to children from urban and better off families. A one-year preprimary education program named O-Class was introduced to ensure access to children in the rural and from low socioeconomic status. The main purpose of this study is to compare the school readiness of children entering Grade one after completing KG and O-Class. The Child-child Direct Assessment tool of the Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes (MELQO) tool was used to assess the school readiness of children. The tool assesses children’s school readiness through four different domains, namely language and literacy, math and numeracy, executive function and socioemotional skills. Parent/Caregiver Report of MELQO was also used to gather some background data on the household and family status of the child. Data was collected from children who started Grade one in the current academic year after completing either KG or O-Class in the same school – public schools in Addis Ababa. Accordingly, children with KG background were found to have a better school readiness. The school readiness difference was 0.46 standard deviations higher for KG with a medium effect size of .45 Cohen’s d. Children with KG background also did better for each of the domains except for socioemotional. Regression analysis also confirmed significant difference on the scores of children even after controlling for some background characteristics. The study concludes that there is a significant difference in school readiness between children with KG and O-Class backgrounds, in favor of KG, which indicates a risk of introducing a systematic inequality for rural and low socioeconomic status children attending O-Class. The study concludes by recommending gradual upgrading of O-Classes into KG as a long-term strategy for preprimary education.

Key words: school readiness, preprimary, education, Kindergarten, O-Class, Early Childhood Education