

Early Childhood Education Home-visit programs

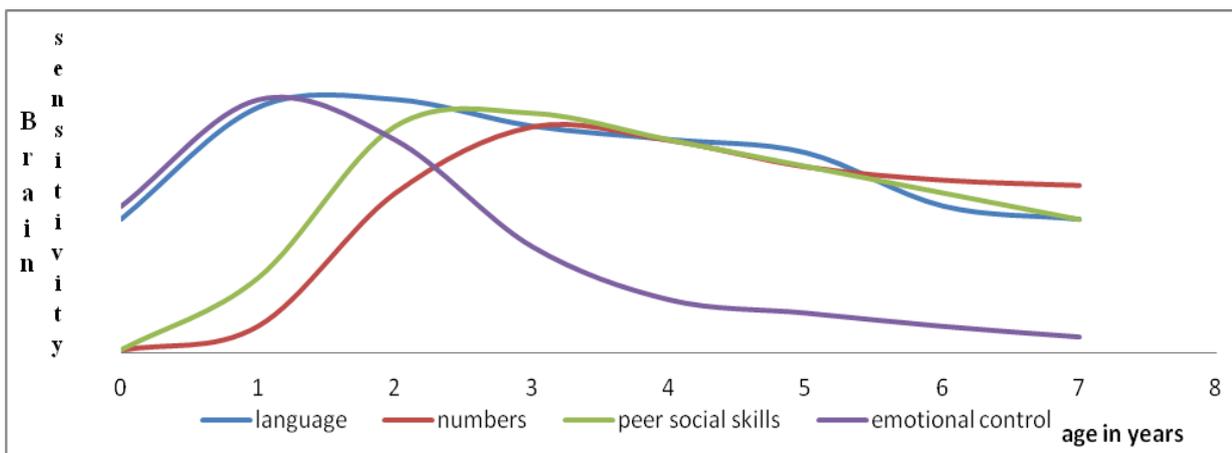
Gunay Agayeva

R.Behbudov str. 32, Baku, Azerbaijan
gisrafilova@gmail.com

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Abstract. According to neurological research, kids are ready to learn right after birth. The first five years of a child life is very important in the brain developmental process. In the light of this, early childhood education is very important during this critical period because it can result in gaining the necessary cognitive, emotional and social skills required for children to transition effectively into other developmental stages.

Figure1. Sensitive periods in early brain development



Source: Council Early Child Development (2010) from the World Bank, *Investing in Young Children, an Early Childhood Development Guide for Policy Dialogue and Project Preparation*, 2011.

1. Introduction

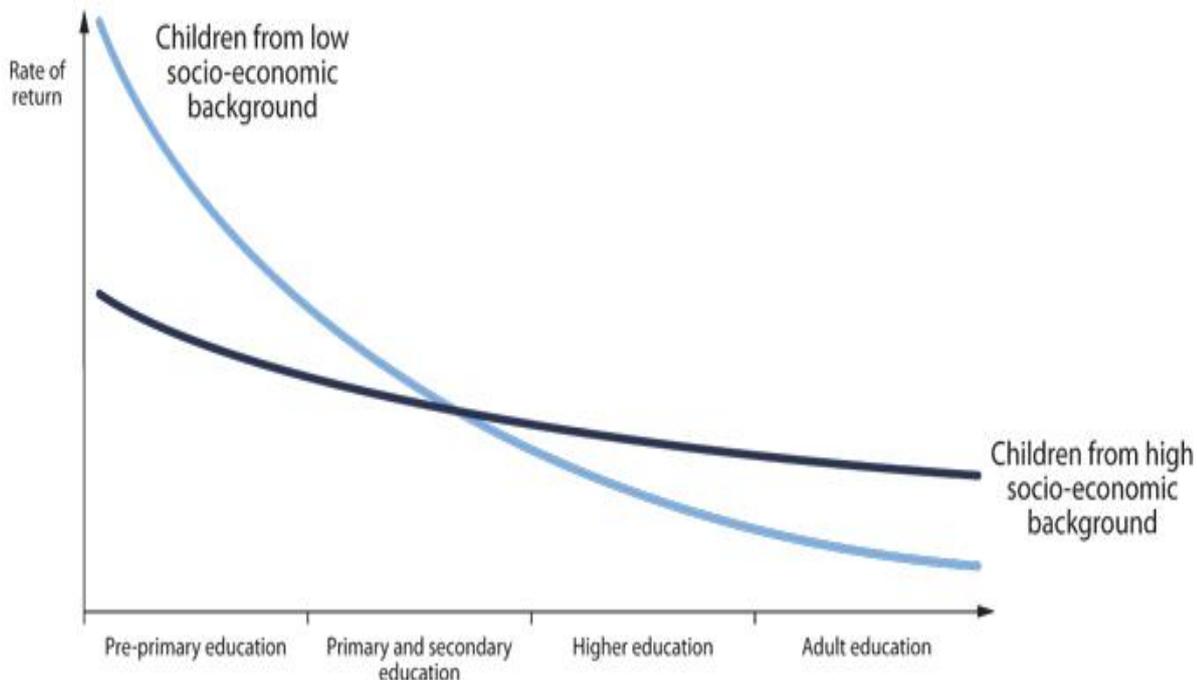
According to research, investment in early education has a wise return; it has long and short term benefits for both families and for the economic development of countries. Long-term benefits include:

- Fewer grade repetition and Lower demand for remedial and special education
- On time completion of schools and continuation of higher education
- Well-prepared employees for future labor market
- Higher job performance
- Lower costs for criminal justice due to lower delinquency rate; lower healthcare cost due to fewer narcotic use and lower pregnancy rate among teenagers

Children from affluent families go to kindergartens and possess essential life skills easily. However, children from disadvantaged families are mostly deprived of important life skills development opportunities because of the expenditure and these children lag far behind the children from rich families with adequate life skills.

According to James J. Heckman the amount of money spent to eliminate the failures arisen in the result of lack of early education is much more and less effective than the money spent on early childhood education. In addition, the return rate of investment in childhood education is much more prevalent in children from disadvantaged families. Therefore, investing in early childhood education is a wise choice, especially for children from disadvantaged background.

Figure 2. Returns on investment to different levels of education



2. Home-visit programs

Considering inequality between the children from low and high socio-economic background, many countries have started their early childhood intervention projects in this area. Home visiting programs for children from disadvantaged families are considered to be an essential part of these projects.

Families involved in this program are provided with voluntary, in-home services for their children. These programs are especially applied for disadvantaged families with children under five years old. Different models of home visit programs exist depending on the services they offer. In general, trained home visitors, supplied with various materials (story books, rhyme books, toys, etc.), meet with families for some period of time, teach children, as well as parents, give them sound advice in child development issues, and inspire parents in their children's education. In this process both parents and children learn. Parents, particularly mothers, are encouraged to take part in their child's development and be part of the child's early education.

Expanding at-risk families' access to quality home visiting programs is a priority for most countries worldwide. The U.S. President Barrack Obama has shown interest in such programs and to expanding home visiting services for children from disadvantaged families across all 50 states, \$1.5 billion has been considered from the budget of 2014 fiscal year.

2.1 Home-visit program models

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) in several countries such as Israel, Germany, Canada, South Africa, the USA, etc,

Child First in New Zealand, PAT (Parents as Teachers), Child Parent Enrichment Project (CPEP), Early Head Start-Home Visiting (EHS-HV), Early Start (New Zealand), Family Check-Up, Play and Learning Strategies (PALS), Project 12-Ways/Safe Care, Mother Child Education Program (MOCEP) in Turkey are successful examples of home-visit programs.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is a two or three-year home-based early education program for children of 3-5 years old, from families with financial needs. The annual visits consist of 30 weeks, with an hour-long visit each week. Each year, at least six group meetings are provided for families. Paraprofessionals of the program support parents in their children's well-being and help them in school readiness. As the method of instruction role-play is used. As a result, parents spend more time with their children, read books with them and prepare them for school.

Within the framework of the program, parents share their ideas, life experiences and learn from each other.

PAT (Parents as Teachers) is one of the home-visiting program models created in the USA in the 1980s. This program has international affiliating in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China and Germany. Considering parents as their children's first and most influential teachers, this program builds on parents' competences and skills in their roles as parents by providing them with early development services. In light of this, the following primary goals are considered to be achieved:

- To inform parents about their child's developmental stages
- To help parents in their children's health issues in order to detect any developmental delays
- To protect children from maltreatment
- To prepare children for school readiness and in life

Families are provided with these services in four ways. During *personal visits*, parent educators encourage parent-child interaction, social connection between them, inform parents about child's developmental stages, help them create healthy and emotional environment for their children's well-being. Families are also assisted with children's activity equipment and given books in each visit. According to PAT curriculum each family is provided with eight foundational visits and subsequent visit can be organized afterwards.

Within the program *group connections* are organized on monthly bases. The main goal of group connections is to maintain family networks.

For the purpose of detecting any developmental delays in children earlier and improve their school readiness, this program provide families with *screening* and it is realized with the help of ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire) when the child is two months old.

Resource networking is an essential part of the program. Within the program families are also provided with community resources according to their needs.

These services are applied to families within two years, beginning from pregnancy up to kindergarten entry with 12 hour-long home visits annually, but can be prolonged depending on the need of the families.

Operating together with the Turkish Ministry of National Education, MOCEP was established in 1993. This program aims to achieve the school readiness of 6 year-old children from the families with low socio-economic status. Parents are trained by professionals or paraprofessionals at adult education centers. The whole program consists of 25 weeks with three hour classes each week.

2.2 Home-visit program outcomes

According to studies quality home-visit programs can result significant outcomes not only for children, but also for families. Academic achievement, school readiness, better health, reduced

juvenile delinquency, use of drugs among teenagers, child maltreatment, family economic self-sufficiency, etc. are the benefits of these kinds of programs. According to surveys, among parents involved to these programs, it has been clear that such programs enable them to reduce parental stress and to be more confident in their roles and to stimulate their children in their academic development.

3. Summary

Considering essential results of the home-visit programs, it is important to broaden this project site, increase the number of visits and start much earlier, from prenatal period in order to achieve better outcomes in child development and health.

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