

THE EVALUATION OF THE SMALL STEPS IN EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Introduction

Mentally disabled children experience problems of survival within their families and society from their birth on words. The necessity of an education from institutions other than their homes, and the necessity of benefiting from school and social stimulants as well as others has increased in recent years.

Special education is a programme that is organised in a proper way to cover the needs of children who have special needs. It is given by one or more educators about helping children, about overcoming the learning problems that involved the disabled group. These educators went houses or they worked with the children in various places like hospitals and houses depending on the age and disability of the child. Special education service is given with a private education programme according to the needs of the child. These programs could be half-day programmes and full-day programmes according to the age and needs of the child.

Family is one of the environments, which take the most effective role in education, and growth of every child. Behaviour patterns about life, especially, some rules and roles about social interactions and basic habits, are gained within the family. The main members of the family, namely parents, have to prepare conditions that help the physical and psychological growth and the development of their children. In the development process, which is very important for the child, parents become the first educators by undertaking this duty.

Small steps early in education Program had prepared for the parents of grown up disabled children ages between 0-4 years old. The program was developed in Macquarie University in Australia. The small steps program have been organized by Mentally Disabled Children Organization in Turkey since 1996. It has been processed by power of the universities (**Pieterse and Treoler, 1996**).

When the child is disabled, parents are forced to fulfill their duties almost with guilt and suffering. Family life becomes less damaged by defining the aims that cover the needs of the disabled child with a well-organised education programme, by setting apart a certain time for applying these aims and by balancing the needs of other family members. (**Darica, at all, 2000**).

Family-centered education are accepted as useful programs for developmentally disabled children in USA, England (**Beverly and Thomas, 1999**).

The effects of early stimulating programmes that were applied to children who have got development backwardness are positive. In adulthood, the brain reaches %80

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of its completion. It has been found out that the measurable mental development of children who ran a risk and who were defined as disabled receded in development for several years of their life unless they had not benefited from early education programme (**Turan, 2000**). There are two kinds of early education programme:

- 1-House-based programmes
- 2-School-based programmes

In house-based programmes, the team who works for early education programme comes to your house meets you and your child. They can visit your house as a whole team. Different members of the team can visit you at the different times. The number of therapists and teachers is determined according to the needs of the child. House-based education is given to the children who are over two years old. Some programmes are for the children who are up to three years old. During the visit, the teacher investigates the child's development in different development areas by working with him/her. Just like in socialization, communication, cognitive areas, etc. Teachers work on different activities with the child and want the family members to try these. Teachers wait for the next task after giving parents homework. The language used in these education programmes must be simple and plain. The aim of these programs is to provide learning through living. In these studies, it is very important that parents must make eye contact with their child. Studies at home must be focused on setting eye contact. In this respect Doing lots of exercises at home studies is important (**Libby, 1994**).

School conceiving special education are programmes which are suitable for children who are over three years old. The teachers in school are people who had been educated in disabled groups. One teacher for three children is a suitable rate. Classes are similar to the other pre-school institutions with their materials and playing grounds. Besides there are programmes including only parents' education. Parents learn how they will support and educate their children (**Powers, 1989**).

The importance given to include the parents of disabled children into these programmes is increasing and positive effects of family-expert cooperation on child's success in education has been wide in recent years. The aim in this cooperation must support family members educationally and emotionally, join them to the planning processes of the programme the disabled to teach them positive family-child interaction and to make family provide educational supplies to children and to make the family know about the adequate and inadequate sides of their child (**Darica and others, 2000**).

According to Lynch families' participation in education has increased gradually in recent years and also become a necessity. Lynch and Arguelles' (2000) to looked at the difference between the views on explaining the inadequacy of the child by families who come from low social and economical level, and by private education teachers in their study. Results have revealed that families and teachers give different information about child's education and they use very different terminology. The results also showed that there so the need of establishing a relation between families and teachers cooperatively

Trivette, et al. (1996); studied the effectiveness of early education programs for the children who have special needs. They define that effectiveness of the program depend on the characteristics and applying of the program. Demographical characteristics of the parents are not as affective as quality of the program.

According to Kelly and Barnard; (1999) early education program is not only family based, also it should be relation-based. Educators should give attention to relations between parent and child

Besides this, studies about the education of mentally disabled children are developing gradually. Moreover, parents choose their children to get the kind of education that facilitates conformity to the social life and lowers children's problems to the least instead of keeping their children in the house. Therefore they demand this kind of developing education programmes. Small steps is an education programme which addresses to parents, attendants and experts, and which has been developed to help the instructions of children who represent development backwardness.

The purpose of the present study to example the perceptions of parents and family guides to determine the effectiveness of the small steps early education programme applied in Istanbul during the academic years of 1999-2001.

For the aim of the study ideas of families and family guides about programme have been taken into evaluation.

2. Methodology

The research about "evaluation of perceptions of families and family guides who participated in the "small steps early education programme" included 16 university students who study at Istanbul University Guidance and Counselling Program and who participated in this program as educators, and 16 parents who had disabled children that also participated in this programme.

A questionnaire form that was prepared by researchers, to evaluate the perceptions of families and family guides about the programme at its completion. The same questions were asked to family guides and families. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions. Participants had a chance to write their evaluations in their own words for these open-ended questions.

This study started in September 1999 and finished in June 2000. At the beginning of the programme there were six sessions of twenty hours to educate students. Families were given lessons of thirteen hours in the first year and lessons of twelve hours in the second year. A family guide for each family and a consultant from university members were given to each family guide. Every family guide went to the house of the child every week and gave lessons to the child as a model for family. From February 2001 onwards, every Sunday, seminar studies by consultants started for families and family guides.

Small steps early education programme was used for the education of mentally disabled children. This programme is education for grown up disabled of 0-4 ages. Small steps was prepared according to Macquarie Grown up Disabled Children Programme that had been prepared in Macquarie University. This programme includes four development processes which are the followings:

- High-Muscle abilities,
- Low-Muscle abilities,
- Receiver language abilities,
- Personal and social abilities (Pieterse and Trelobar, 1996)

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At the beginning of the programme families with family guides evaluated grown up sides of children. By defining problem aspects they started regular education at the end of the programme. The evaluation of families and family guides were compared by chi-square statistic techniques.

3. Results

A question form prepared by researchers had been used with the families and family guides about the small steps programme. In part one of this question form, some questions had been asked to the families and family guides. According to the data gathered, the thoughts of families and family guides had been evaluated. Answers to the questions that were given by the family and family guides were compared.

Table1 presents the comparison of answers of families and family guides to question like “What do you think about the small steps programme; what did the families gain? were answered by both groups as “If it were processed systematically it could be useful for the children”.

Table 1. A chi-square analysis among the “What do you think about the small steps programme what gained to the families?” variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family Guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N= 32						
They can accept the situation easily	2	13.33	0	0.00	2	6.45
They can have conscious the importance of the systematic studying	9	60.00	9	56.25	18	58.06
They can have concious about disabl	1	6.67	1	6.25	2	6.45
They can have conscious their power on the child education	3	20.00	6	37.50	9	29.03
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	15	100.00	16	100.00	31	100.0

	chi-square	Sd	p	%fe<5	fe=0	
	2.97	4	-	80	2	

Table 2nd and 3th shows comparison of answers of families and family guides to question like “Was the time enough for the programme (as an hour, as a year)”: Half of the family and family guides replied “Time was enough” The other half of the group said “Time was not enough”

Table2. A chi-square analysis among the “Was it enough the time for the programme (as a year)?” variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family Guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N= 32						
Yes	8	53.33	7	46.67	15	50.00
No	7	46.67	8	53.33	15	50.00
your suggestion	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	100	15	100	30	100	00
	chi-square	Sd	p	%fe<5	fe=0	
	0.13	2	-	33	2	

Table 3. A chi-square analysis among the “Was it enough the time for the programme (as a hour)? variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family Guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N=32						
Yes	13	81.25	13	81.25	26	81.25
No	3	18.75	3	18.75	6	18.75
Your suggestion	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	16	100.00	16	100.00	32	100.00
	Chi-Square	Sd	p	%fe<5	fe=0	
	0.00	2	-	67	2	

Comparison of answers of families and family guides to question like “Was the home environment suitable for the programme?” showed by both groups said. “Home environment was suitable for the programme”. (see Table 4)

Table 4. A chi-square analysis among the “Was the home environment suitable for the programme variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N= 32						
Yes	15	93.75	13	81.25	28	87.50
No	1	6.25	3	18.75	4	12.50
Total	16	100.00	16	100.00	32	100.00
	Chi-square	Sd	p	%fe<5	fe=0	
	1.14	1	-	50	0	

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Answers to question like “What kind of factors make it difficult to apply for the program?” both groups said. “Lack of materials was the main difficulty” (see Table 5)

Table 5. A chi-square analysis among the “What kind of factors make difficult to apply the program?” variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family Guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N=32						
Lack of support of the family/family guide	0	0.00	4	25.00	4	12.50
Lack of material	4	25.00	5	31.25	9	28.12
Lack of time	5	31.25	1	6.25	6	18.75
The problem of understanding the program	1	6.25	1	6.25	2	6.25
Not knowing how to manage the behaviour Disorder	6	37.50	4	25.00	10	31.25
Not knowing how to study the child	0	0.00	1	6.25	1	3.12
All of them	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	16	100.00	16	100.00	32	100.00
Chi-Square	8.18		Sd	7	p	-
			%fe<5	88	fe=0	4

Family guides’ answers to question like “What kind of factors make easy to apply the program?” were “the support of families and consultants made easy the applying of the programme.”

Families answers that “support of family guides made easy the applying of the programme.”(see Table 6).

Table 6. A chi-square analysis among the “What kind of factors make easy to apply the program?” variable (family and family guide)

	Family		Family Guide		Total	
	f	%f	f	%f	f	%f
N=32						
Support of the family/ family guide	5	3.3	10	66.67	15	50.00
Support of the Consultants	6	40.00	4	26.67	10	33.33
There is no material problem	1	6.67	0	0.00	1	3.33
There is no time problem	3	20.00	0	0.00	3	10.00
Other	0	0.00	1	6.67	1	3.33
Total	15	100.00	15	100.00	30	100.00
Chi-square	7.07		Sd	4	p	-
			%fe<5	60	fe=0	0

Explanations of Written Evaluations of Family Guides about the Programme

Some explanations of written evaluations of family guides about the programme can be listed as;

This programme has guided especially the families who did not know what they could do about their children, in learning more about the subject. This programme has been effective in showing families that they can do something about the education of their children. This programme has had a reinforcing role on the children who received formal education from another institution. This programme has provided us, as family guides, to behave in a responsible manner and to work more systematically than before. Families are not alone in this subject. This programme has given a possibility to the families in getting to know their children better.

In this programme families have found a chance to spend more time with their children by the help of lessons. At the end of the dialogue between the child and the unknown person (family guide), rapport has taken place. This programme has increased the awareness of the family about using lots of material at home for education. This programme has effected the communication between child and family positively. Families have learnt several methods about managing the behaviour problems of children more easily. This programme has helped the families become more objective in evaluation and their expectation level in their children's acquiring abilities. This programme has stayed at the 2nd or 3rd priority in cases where the families had received formal education from another institution. Families have not done the practises given at programme or had not studied as they were supposed to. Fathers have not supported the programme as much as the mothers have. Families could not acquire the awareness of the fact that the duty of the family guides is helping them. It is necessary for the project supervisors to have more meetings with the families. Studies have limped because of the disability of child. Family guides have felt themselves inadequate to motivate families to try.

Discussion and Recommendations

At the end of the study, it has been confirmed that both family guides and families had evaluated the Small Steps project as a useful programme. It is mentioned that it was necessary to use this programme widely in children's education and that it should be started at early ages. It is seen that families and family guides need more information on the subject, education and the position of the disabled children. Besides, because the negative conditions of transportation in Istanbul had effected the contact of families and family guides with project, it is thought that motivation is reduced.

It can be said that the programme is seen useful as it is evaluated as a whole; however families were not aware of the importance of the programme, there was a lack of material. And although there were seminars for families, families still had problems about how they would manage the child's negative behaviour at the end of the programme

The variety of children with disability groups in this programme caused problems. For this reason, the following were offered:

Grouping as giving every disabled group one consultant and a family guide who is supported by the consultant. Increasing the number of seminars given to families and family guides by project instructors about managing the behaviour problems of

children. Educating the families on problem solving, anxiety and communication to reduce the individual problems as well as managing behaviour problems of disabled child. Making the consultants visit the families more regularly and more often. Making group therapy with the families who experiences the same difficult situations in order to make them share and support each other. Advertising and introducing this programme to the consulting services that work with families who have disabled children. Increasing the variety and the amount of the materials used in the programme. While choosing the family guides taking not only the volunteers into account but also the seminars and the education they received before.

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