

Costing early childhood care and development programmes ^[1]

Online Outreach Paper

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Report in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from the report:

Pre-schooling and other early childhood development programmes are known to give children a head start in life and to give parents more time for income-earning and other activities. This paper reviews how the costs of these important programmes can be estimated at programme and individual centre levels.

Such estimates can be very useful for informing the design of new programmes and for reorientating ongoing programmes. They have great potential to identify inequalities in provision where disadvantaged children may not be benefiting due to the extra costs involved in reaching them and because parents cannot afford to contribute to programme costs.

The paper explains three ways of making these estimates. Traditionally, most cost estimates have been based on figures in official budgets and expenditure records. A case study from Bolivia shows how these kinds of estimates often fail to provide accurate and complete costings. They usually fail to include costs that are not included in governments' or programmes' education budgets, such as the funds from health budgets and the contributions in cash, kind and time from local communities and parents. They also often fail to write down the costs of new buildings and capital equipment over their useful life and instead allocate these costs to the year of expenditure.

The paper recommends two other approaches for more accurately estimating costs. The first involves doing field studies to try and capture actual total costs. The example presented from Chile estimates the costs of community participants by giving them a shadow price to reflect the cost of their time. Durable equipment was valued at its market price spread over its estimated useful life while the initial training of personnel was also treated as an investment spread out over the programme period.

The second alternative is to simulate the costs of a programme in a model, based on a range of assumptions about programme components and their costs. A case study from Jamaica shows how this allows for a range of variables to be plotted and adjusted to cover different scenarios such as the number of teachers, the characteristics of the area of implementation and the extent of volunteer contributions.

Overall, the review identifies large variations in the cost of early childhood care and development (ECCD) programmes with estimates ranging from US\$2 per child per year in a parental education programme in Mexico to US\$7,881 per year in a pre-school programme in the USA. However, costing is complicated and results are usually approximate and seldom allow the direct comparison of costs between different programmes.

Region: Latin America and the Caribbean ^[3]

Tags: funding ^[4]

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