

TC ABSTRACT

I. Basic Project Data

▪ Country/Region:	URUGUAY/CSC - Southern Cone
▪ TC Name:	Attendance and quality in preschool education: Empowering parents through information
▪ TC Number:	UR-T1194
▪ Team Leader/Members:	MATEO-BERGANZA DIAZ, MARIA MERCEDES (SCL/EDU) Team Leader; PEREZ ALFARO, MARCELO A. (SCL/EDU) Alternate Team Leader; CROWTHER, NAOMI (SCL/EDU); BECERRA LUNA, LAURA NATALIA (SCL/EDU); CONTRERAS GOMEZ, RAFAEL EDUARDO (SCL/EDU); LOPEZ BOO, FLORENCIA (SCL/SPH); ELACQUA, GREGORY MICHAEL (SCL/EDU); SCANNONE CHAVEZ, RODOLFO ANDRES (SCL/EDU)
▪ Taxonomy:	Client Support
▪ Number and name of operation supported by the TC:	N/A
▪ Date of TC Abstract:	15 Jun 2018
▪ Beneficiary:	Ministerio de Educacion y Cultura-URUGUAY
▪ Executing Agency:	INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
▪ IDB funding requested:	\$ 600,000.00
▪ Local counterpart funding:	\$ 0.00
▪ Disbursement period:	24 months
▪ Types of consultants:	Not applicable
▪ Prepared by Unit:	Education
▪ Unit of Disbursement Responsibility:	Social Sector
▪ TC included in Country Strategy (y/n):	Yes
▪ TC included in CPD (y/n):	No
▪ Alignment to the Update to the Institutional Strategy 2010-2020:	Social inclusion and equality

II. Objective and Justification

- 2.1 The main objective of this Technical Cooperation is to improve children’s learning and development by increasing quality of ECD centers through a higher involvement of parents in the process of service delivery. The specific objectives of the TC are to: (i) improve service quality by increasing parents’ engagement in centers; and (ii) increase attendance of preschool services of 3 to 5 year-old children, by increasing parents’ knowledge of the importance of attending school at this age.
- 2.2 Uruguay is making efforts to strengthen its quality assurance system for the early childhood services by changing the role of supervisors from one of policing to one of quality enhancement (MIDES, 2011). Supervisors spend a great deal of time monitoring compliance with rules and regulations and focus less on supporting centers to implement actions to improve the quality of services. This project intends to develop an early detection system of pre-school center perceived quality by using information provided by parents at a low cost, thus allowing supervisors to identify red flags and act in a timely manner to suggest actions to raise the quality of services (Dansereau et al., 2015; Haddad et al., 2000).
- 2.3 In 2015, Uruguay made preschool mandatory beginning at age 4. However, low attendance for this age group has been persistent. Absenteeism in public centers of 3-5 year-old children was approximately 30% in 2016, while it was only 10% in primary education. The Encuesta Continua de Hogares (2017) suggest that parents of 3 to 5

year olds have not internalized the importance of consistent preschool attendance. Indeed, other than health reasons (26.6%), the factors given for absence are ones that would not be considered excused absence in the formal school system - 51.2% of absences were due to vacation and 11.3% to bad weather.

- 2.4 Addressing low center quality has the potential to increase attendance which is in turn needed to improve child outcomes. The benefits of ECD programs are an increasing function of preschool quality, which directly impacts cognitive and socio-emotional development (Cunningham (2009); Votruba-Drzal et al. (2004); Loeb et al, (2004), Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001). Quality of preschool facility is positively correlated with attendance. Ehrlich et al., (2013) found that attendance was one to one and a half percentage point higher in schools that were either safer, in which trust between teacher and parents was strong, where parents are involved in school, or where school commitment is high among teachers. The issue of perceived low-quality center could be compounding low attendance rates.
- 2.5 Chronic absence prevents children benefiting from programs designed to enhance their development (Chang and Romero, (2008). Several researchers have attempted to influence attendance by providing parents with information about how their child's attendance rate fares are in comparison with its peers (Rogers et al. (2017), Kraft & Rogers (2014), Behavioral Insights for Parenting, 2018). The fact that attendance improves quite dramatically between preschool and kindergarten, and increasingly into primary school (Ehrlich et al., (2013); Dubay and Niikhil (2016)), suggests that logistical difficulties may be one of the binding constraints to preschool attendance. However survey data indicates that the fact that parents undervalue preschool is the key factor. Therefore, programs that could change parents mindsets by emphasizing the benefits of preschool attendance could be impactful.

III. Description of Activities and Outputs

- 3.1 This TC will finance the following three components: (i) development of a real-time, low cost mobile app and digital platform to monitor preschool centers with information provided by parents; (ii) provision of strategic information for parents to increase the attendance of 3 to 5 year-old children at preschool centers; and (iii) dissemination of results.
- 3.2 **Component I: Component 1: ParentIN: a cellphone application to create an early warning alert system for ECD center quality.** A panel of experts will create a quality checklist to be evaluated by parents, plus focus groups of parents will be conducted in Uruguay. Community meetings targeting parents of children enrolled in preschools will be held to explain how to use the application. We will process and analyze INCA and INDI information to compare them to the information reported by parents. A RCT will be run to compare center quality before and after ParentIN use, between treatment and control groups.
- 3.3 **Component II: Component 2: CheckingIN: An initiative to increase preschool attendance.** Focus groups and interviews will be held with Uruguayan parents to explore the reasons not to take their children to preschool. We will run an RCT in which treated parents receive a cellular phone text messaging (traditionally called SMS). The SMS content will be structured to address the hurdles highlighted in the focus groups and informed by ECD experts to provide parents with information on ECD benefits (both short and long term) and will draw upon behavioral economics tools.
- 3.4 **Component III: Component 3: Dissemination of results.** This TC will generate evidence of the impact of behavioral economics tools on influencing parents' attitudes towards child development programs. For being a pioneering intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean, and because of the relevance for future ECD programs in

the region, a complete report with RCT results and analysis will be published. Because of the important public policy implications of Component 1, manuals of use will be written to ensure that the program has continuity.

IV. Budget

Indicative Budget

Activity/Component	IDB/Fund Funding	Counterpart Funding	Total Funding
Component 1: ParentIN: a cellphone application to create an early warning alert system for ECD center quality	\$ 448,000.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 448,000.00
Component 2: CheckingIN: An initiative to increase preschool attendance	\$ 142,000.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 142,000.00
Component 3: Dissemination of results	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 10,000.00

V. Executing Agency and Execution Structure

- 5.1 The project will be Bank executed. A letter of expression of interest has been obtained by Uruguay's Ministerio de Educación y Cultura (MEC), and a letter of non-objection by the Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas will be obtained.
- 5.2 The execution by the Bank is justified for two main reasons: first, by the extensive experience IADB has in carrying out studies on the quality of provision of education services, and especially for ECD programs. Given the need for data collection of quality measures, the IADB is proposed as the executing agency for its technical expertise and as a more agile entity, able to take advantage of its experience to expedite processes and efficiently streamline the activity diagram. Second, this is a highly innovative pilot of a new product that could be of great interest to other countries in the region. Thus, ensuring that the Bank is involved in the design and implementation process will increase the probability of replicability in other countries.

VI. Project Risks and Issues

- 6.1 As a technology-based intervention, a key risk is low parent usage of the ParentIN app, limiting the amount of center quality information uploaded. To mitigate this risk, ParentIN will include a number of engagement practices, such as "parental advice" modules, which will be 'unlocked' after parents evaluate their center, and reminders to do so. Parents will learn about the application and its use in community meetings. Another risk associated with Component 1 comes from the possible tension that may arise if centers perceive the program as a control mechanism. We have discussed this risk with the MEC and agreed to have a strong communication campaign with the centers that will present the intervention as a tool intended to flag issues in a way that resources can be redirected to the centers that need them the most. For Component 2, we will carefully select nudging strategies that mitigate the possibility that parents do not respond to the information. Consultation with experts in behavioral economics will help us frame the information in the most effective manner.

VII. Environmental and Social Classification

- 7.1 The ESG classification for this operation is "C".