

Measuring early learning and development for Roma children: case of Ukraine

Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

June, 2017

Olena Hloba

Introduction

To encourage Roma parents to be more effective teachers and advocates for their children, Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF) provides educational programs for parents – program “Parenting with Confidence” for parents of children from birth till 6 years old, program “Getting Ready for School” for parents of children 5-6 years old. Parents become aware about simple yet effective strategies on how to increase children`s interest in learning and becoming confident in how to provide support to children. One of the results of these programs – more confident parents and better prepared children who enter the schools.

The next important step is to create supportive educational environment which would provide successful start for Roma children`s further education. The work with pre-school and primary school teachers includes introduction of practices, which provide child-centered inclusive approach, such as the morning meeting practice, introduction of Roma assistants` positions, and active cooperation with Roma parents. One of the important aspects of this work is to discuss with the teachers such issues as stereotypes, prejudices, social stigma and to help them understand how to reduce them in their daily work and to how to prevent their formation at children`s level.

All mentioned activities were covered by USSF Project called “Ensuring quality education for Roma children in pre-schools and primary schools”. One of the steps in the project was pre-school assessment to identify the knowledge and capacities of children of a certain age, and then compare and analyze these figures. Attention was focused on determining the difference between the results of Roma children and their non-Roma peers and further efforts to overcome these gaps.

Data Collection and Analysis

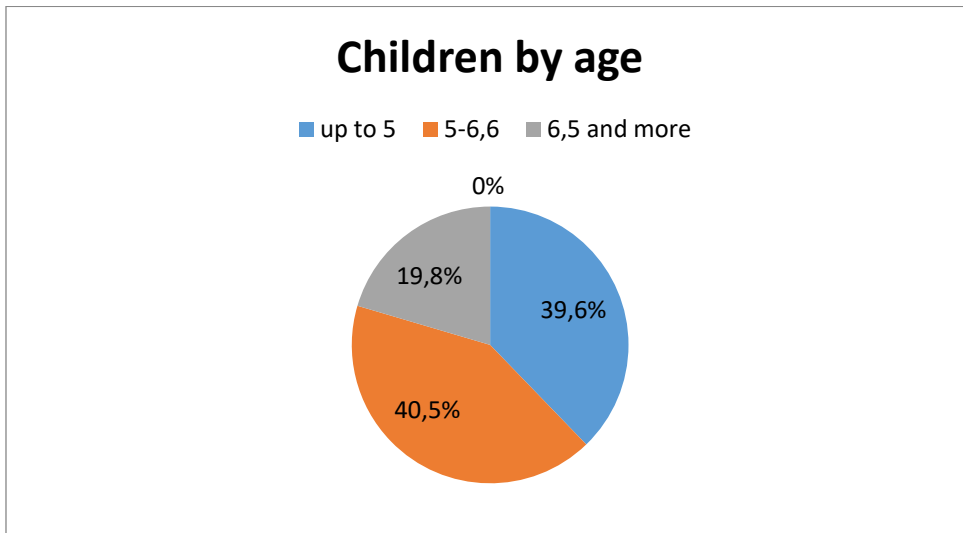
IDELA is an effective tool used to measure the school readiness of children and allowing comparison of the volume of knowledge, skills and development of average preschoolers.

General Data

The assessment was conducted for children (N = 111) from 6 educational institutions of Ukraine (Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Petrovirivka). These regions were selected in accordance with pilot educational institutions that have been involved in the project before. The average age is 5.7 years (the age varies from 4 to 8.5 years). Although IDELA tool is recommended to children of 3.5-6 years old, we`ve seen the necessity to broaden these brackets to 8.5 years. This is explained with the age of Roma children who attend the pre-schools and primary schools in Ukraine. IDELA tool measures the school readiness and it opens obvious that children aged 8 years do not fit the age requirements. Despite this fact, we enrolled Roma children into assessment at the beginning and at the end of the school year. The number of Roma pre-schoolers is not sufficient to compare them with non-Roma peers. In addition, we introduced Roma teacher assistants in pilot school. Thus we wanted to measure development and skills for these groups of kids (Roma and non-Roma) in the schools.

The group of children under the age of 5 is 39.6% (44 children), the age group from 5.1 to 6.5 years - 40.5% (45 children), and from 6.6 to 8.5 years - 19.8% (22 children).

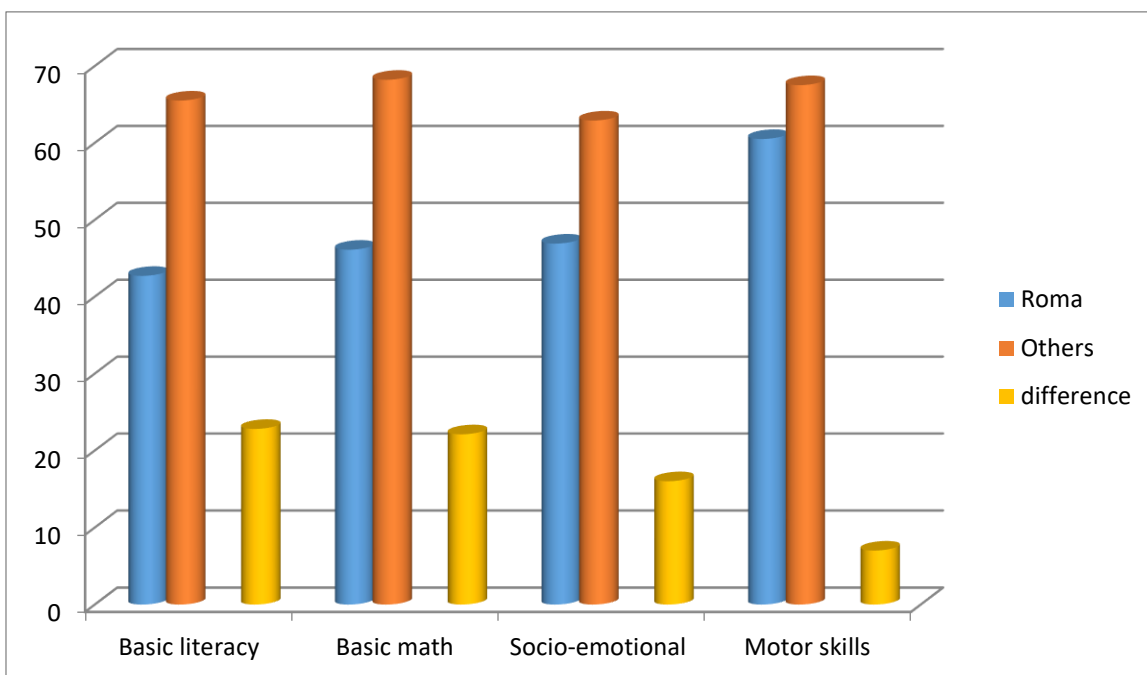
IDELA was applied to 111 children at the beginning of school year.



Almost 80% were children aged 4-6 years. Ukrainian children may choose whether to enter the primary school at the age of 6 or 7. To test the school readiness, children have to fall within the age bracket of 5,5-7 years old. Thus, 20% of children we tested were aged 6+ years.

43,2 % out of all children were Roma (52,3% - girls).

With regards to basic math, Roma children showed 22,1% lower results than their non-Roma peers. Almost the same results were in the core of basic literacy (22,8% lower). The lowest difference was fixed during the assessment of motor skills (both gross and fine) – 7%.

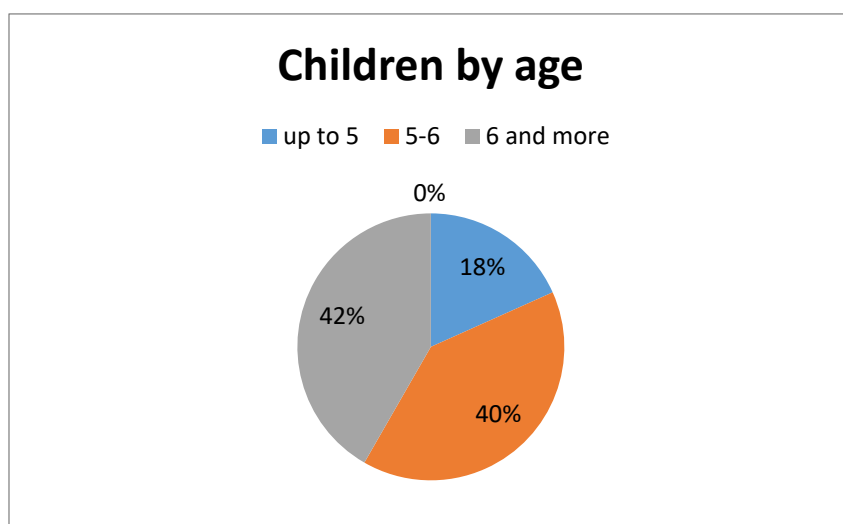


One of the reasons for Roma children to get such results is the lack of educational background. Ukrainian children mostly start their learning at 2-3 years old and by the age of 5-6 years old they have sufficient baggage of knowledge and educational experience. Roma children enter the pre-school at 4-5 years age and more. It makes it more difficult for them to catch up their peers, still be motivated and not to feel they know less. The second reason is insufficient understanding of Ukrainian language. As we test everybody in Ukrainian language, it is obvious that children, whose mother tongue is Ukrainian, have some language skills advantage compared to national minorities. Nevertheless, majority of Roma pre-schoolers are used to being bilingual and multilingual (especially in Transcarpathia region where population speaks Hungarian and Slovak as well). Important to notice that often Roma children do live in poor conditions that lead them to be shy, not

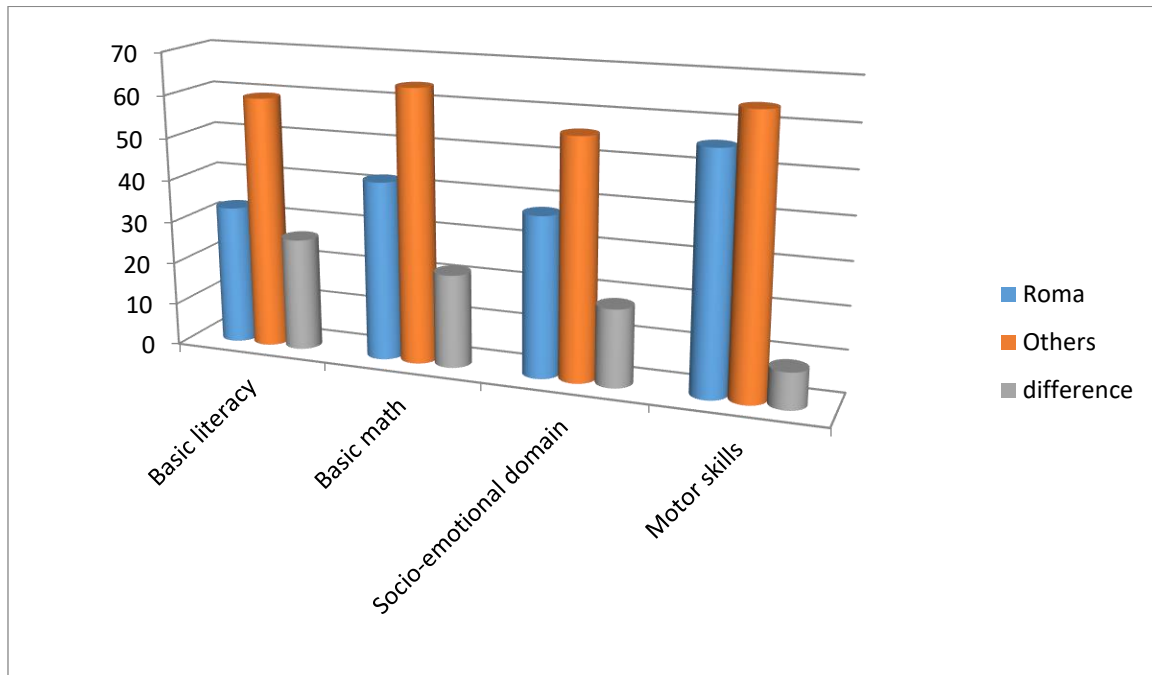
communicative, not open or even frightened and distressed. All these factors can also affect the reliability of the data received. There is no big difference by the gender criteria.

By evaluating the overall IDELA test, among all children, the percentage of correct test answers ranges from 10.5% to 95.6%. On average, girls gave 63.6% of the correct answers, boys - 53.3%. The average value of true answers is 58.7%. Roma children gave 49% of correct answers to the test, and other students - 66%. There is a rather large difference in the performance of tasks for checking the executive function. Roma children showed 44.3% of correct answers, while other children gained 67.4%. However, the high rate of approach to training and testing - 64.2% among Roma children - suggests that they have tried to carry out the tasks, were attentive and concerned with the correctness. This indicator is higher among other children - 77.9%. However, when evaluating this item, it is necessary to take into account the psycho-emotional state of a particular child, his or her age characteristics and social status. So, if the child is easily distracted, hurried, feel hungry or wants to sleep - the results will be lower, because it will be harder for such a child to focus on the task. If the child passes the test for 4 years – he or she may not be interested in completing difficult tasks. Similarly, if a child has problems with establishing communication he or she does not want to reveal own knowledge capacity - We get some "understated" data.

At the end of the school year we conducted one more assessment to explore if there was any educational development and growth. We enrolled the same 4 pre-schools with 60 children (pre-school age) and 2 schools with 31 children. We focused a special attention on the children of pre-school age.



58% were children aged 4-6 years old. 56,7% were Roma children (50% boys – 50% girls).



This time, with regard to basic math Roma children showed 26,6% lower results than their non-Roma peers and 22% lower in basic literacy. The lowest difference was fixed during the assessment of motor skills (both gross and fine) – 8,6%.

Conclusion

It appears that the final results for Roma and non-Roma preschoolers differed even more than they used to be the first time. This might be explained by difficulties that Roma preschoolers experience during their learning. We observe that they still have problems with language skills. In addition there is less parent support and motivation for Roma children.

If we are comparing school-age children results, the difference between Roma and non-Roma results impressively decreased. Sometimes Roma pupils did receive more scores.

IDELA tool helps us to identify most challenging domains and areas in development and learning for Romani kids. We can compare educational progress and propose amendments to existing curricula and training programmes.