

## **The Efficacy of an Early Intervention Program on the Participation and Performance of Preschool Boys from Low Socio-Economic Status Families**

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**Introduction:** Research has shown that children from low socio-economic status (LSES) encounter developmental disadvantage due to environmental deprivation. Occupational therapy (OT) early intervention programs have been found to be effective in improving students' performance. However, most of these programs were home-based or focused on working directly with the children. Only few studies were implemented within educational settings and none were found that combined intervention models which targeted both teachers and children.

**Objectives:** To examine the efficacy of a preschooler early intervention OT program, in improving children's participation and performance in preschool activities, as well as their skills.

**Methods:** This pre-post case-control study included 134 boys between the ages of 4-6 (59 experimental group, 75 control group) from LSES families. The intervention program took place in two preschool settings and included a teachers' training combined with an OT intervention program employing collaborative consultation and monitoring models. The control group only received a teachers'-training program. Pre- and posttests included a structured observation on children's participation and performance in preschool activities, as well as assessment of performance skills, i.e., visual motor integration, motor and pre-academic skills.

**Results:** Data analysis indicated that at pretest, between 30-50% of the children scored at least 1 standard deviation below the mean on at least one of the performance skills. At posttest, the participation and classroom performance of the boys in the experimental group were significantly better than those of the control group. Additionally, the performance skills of the boys in the experimental group were significantly better than those of their peers.

**Conclusions:** It appears that a teachers' training program is not sufficient in improving the participation and classroom performance of preschool boys from LSES families who encounter developmental delays. In contrast, an OT intervention program that takes place in an educational setting and includes a teachers' training program combined with collaborative consultation and monitoring models, may contribute to the advancement of these children.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to the body of evidence indicating that preschool OT early intervention programs may assist in improving the participation and performance of economically disadvantaged preschool boys who encounter developmental delays.