BEYOND BORDERS

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Paid Educational Activities for Preschoolers in Russian Cities with Over a Million People: The Interrelation between Income Level and Parental Investment

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Abstract

In many Russian families, the educational differences between preschoolers are mainly formed outside of the municipal kindergartens through participation in paid classes, which have become increasingly popular in recent years. This created a new problem of increasing inequality in early childhood education (ECE), as not all parents can afford to pay for extra educational activities. This study investigates the effect of income level on parental investment in ECE by examining the relationship between family income and the educational strategies chosen by parents. The study involved 260 families with children aged 3 to 7 years old, living in fifteen Russian cities with populations over one million people. The families were divided into three income brackets. To identify the correlation between the family socio-economic situation (SES) and expenditure, the study assessed the money spent on the children's preschool education, including kindergarten and for extra educational activities. The study also examined the types of extra educational activities for preschoolers, and identified the motives for parental decisions. The families with the lowest income invest significantly fewer financial resources in ECE than the families with low and middle incomes. However, the analysis of the parental preferences and motives in ECE did not confirm that children from poor families are less involved in centre-based classes. Financial constraints lead poorer parents to find other options to provide competitive education. They mostly seek help from family members in conducting ECE, and conduct more ECE activities at home. Furthermore, disadvantaged families try to find the most affordable activities, i.e. cheaper classes at kindergartens or municipal cultural centres.

Keywords: Russian preschool education; parental involvement; educational expenditure; educational services; educational economics; early childhood education.

Declarations of Interest

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is the basis for all subsequent stages of education. This stage is extremely important for the formation of the basic skills that are necessary for personal success and prosperity, including cognitive and non-cognitive skills [Cunha, Heckman 2007]. These abilities determine child success in the future, and also contribute to the economic development of a society as a whole. The difference in the quality of ECE is "the most important component of persistence in earnings across generations" [Restuccia, Urrutia 2004: 1375]. Thus, the practices of Russian families in ECE are an important issue for understanding the roots of social inequality in contemporary society. However, this area of preschoolers' development remains understudied, as Russian scholars have been primarily concerned with the problems of school and university education.

According to the Human Capital Index, Russia ranks 34th in the world [World Bank 2018], which puts it among the countries with a very high level of human capital. Russia owes its high place in the rankings due to its well-developed education system, including public preschool education. However, concerning social inequality, there are significant discrepancies between the recognized level of human capital development and the low income of large groups of people which persists from generation to generation. The modern socio-economic situation in Russia reflects problems in the accumulation and proper use of human capital [Kapeliushnikov 2012; Gimpelson 2016; Gimpelson, Zudina, Kapeliushnikov 2020]. This issue is closely related to the system of ECE.

The first ECE interventions emerged in the US in the form of two experimental projects, Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian program. These two programs for disadvantaged families were found to be an optimal strategy to reduce the income-based achievement gap in the 1960s. As subsequent studies have shown, compared to children who stayed home, children who attended the Perry Preschool or Abecedarian programs completed more years of education, had higher levels of employment and income as adults, and fewer lifetime criminal incidents [Jones et al. 2019]. Many authors have found preschool education to be the most effective way for families and governments to invest in human capital [Temple, Reynolds 2007; Cunha, Heckman 2009; Cleveland, Krashinsky 2010]. The studies provide strong evidence that the positive economic returns of high-quality preschool programs exceed considerably other educational interventions, especially those that begin during the school-age years [Temple, Reynolds 2007]. ECE interventions hold great promise not only for improving lives but also for potentially producing an economic return on investment linked to key outcomes from program effectiveness [Jones et al. 2019].

The legacy of the USSR in the form of widely available free educational and medical services continues to play an important role in the accumulation of human capital [Kosyakova, Yastrebov 2017]. Russia stands out among other countries for the availability of preschool and school education. The coverage of preschool education in Russia is very high, and it is increasing. For example, the preschool enrolment of children aged 3–6 years amounts to 83% [Abankina, Filatova 2018]. Recent research has found that in contemporary Russia the preschool education system is well developed and has been significantly improved since 2013 [Abankina, Rodina, Filatova 2017]. Yet, the modernization of the education system is still underway. The Russian government announced a Decade of Childhood starting in 2018. Nowadays, there is almost no inequality in access to the formal sector of ECE that consists of public kindergartens. As most preschoolers in Russia attend public kindergartens, their starting points in formal ECE are equal. They spend most of the day in a similar environment. Therefore, educational differences between preschoolers are mainly formed during homeschooling and attending paid classes. As a result, the differentiation associated with the families' expenditures on non-formal services is steadily growing, despite seemingly equal participation in formal preschool education [Kosyakova, Yastrebov 2017]. Inequality in the consumption of childcare and early education services depends on the socio-economic status (SES) of the family and leads to educational inequality [Sukhova 2011]. Besides the

financial situation of the parents, the cultural capital of the family, first proposed by Bourdieu, plays the most important role in the educational development of the child. Cultural and economic capital, in turn, form the social capital of the family, which represents their links and position in society [Bourdieu 2002]. Together with formal education, all three forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) have an impact on the early development of the child. Thus, equal access to public educational services comprises only one element of equality. The idea about the absence of equality in education was proposed by Coleman in the early 1960s [Coleman 1968]. He argued that complete equality in educational opportunities for both white and black children can only be reached if all the divergent out-of-school influences vanish.

There has been much emphasis on educational inequality in recent studies on ECE in Russia [Shpakovskaya 2015; Kosaretsky, Kupriyanov, Filippova 2016; Kosyakova, Yastrebov 2017]. Besides, much of the research has focused on emerging paid services [Sukhova 2011; Chernova, Shpakovskaya 2016; Abankina, Rodina, Filatova 2017; Mayorova-Shcheglova 2017; Poplavskaya, Gruzdev, Petlin 2018; Sizova, Korenkova 2020]. However, these studies have not addressed the issue of significant heterogeneity in the economic situation of different families in a country as big as Russia. Based on the concept of human capital and rational choice theory, this study investigates whether parental decision-making regarding the investment in ECE correlates with family's financial status. Research into the factors affecting educational strategies is needed because it can demonstrate the problems of families having low economic status in Russia and provide important insights into educational inequality. Such findings can be useful for adjusting and reassessing educational policies and providing more targeted support to poor and low-income families with children.

Literature Review

This study is guided by the concepts of human, economic, and cultural capital and rational choice theories [Becker 1976; Coleman 1968; Bourdieu 2002]. These approaches are crucial for understanding economic behaviour in the transmission of accumulated family capital from parents to children via ECE. Human capital in a broad sense is understood as the sum of the knowledge, skills and abilities of an individual acquired during their life, used to meet their own needs, achieve social well-being, and maintain and improve working capacity and health. The family as the basic unit of society has its own capital that it passes on to the next generation. These resources include accumulated family capital (level of parental education, experience), material and time resources. A function of the family in the long term is to transform all these resources into the future human capital of the following generations. Coleman's theory includes the concept of rational family action. He argues that considering investments in children's development, parents conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine which strategy to choose. Their decision affects the earliest stages of a child's development. Regarding ECE, parents choose a certain educational pattern for their child that involves additional preschool investments. Coleman's theory makes it possible to trace the relationship between family resources and the accumulation of human capital by a preschool child.

Formal and Informal ECE

ECE is considered as both formal, provided by the state or business, and informal education, enabled by family. Social and economic policies of each country largely determine the form of preschool education. It could be an education arrangement in the year before kindergarten [Ansari 2017], centre-based care [Loeb et al. 2007], low-income family childcare centres [Cleveland, Krashinsky 2010], or migrant children-oriented programs [Ressler et al. 2020]. The direction of research is determined by the specificity of a country's situation [Hu et al. 2017; Delalibera, Ferreira 2019; Ansari et al. 2020]. For example, Campbell-Barr and Nygård [2014] show that in Finland the starting point of ECE policy implementation was work-life balance with a strong focus on child development and well-being, while in England, where the male breadwinner model predominates, ECE was driven by the aims of school readiness and the acquisition of essential skills in preparation for adult life.

Despite the importance of kindergarten [Xie, Li 2020], it has been suggested that family's involvement and parental financial capital play a bigger role than formal schooling in motivating learning and ensuring academic success [Heckman 2011]. The family, an informal educational institution, is essential in determining academic achievement [Cunha, Heckman 2007]. Recent research has found that SES, most commonly measured by parental education and income, is a powerful predictor of school achievement [Restuccia, Urrutia 2004; Schlee, Mullis, Shriner 2009; Heckman 2011]. It also affects decision-making on education [Kotomina, Prakhov, Sazhina 2019]. As wealthier parents are likely to be better educated, they are more able to develop academic ability of their children by helping and guiding them. Liu, Zhang, Jiang [2020] show that the parents with higher SES have higher parenting self-efficacy and greater involvement in their children's home-based activities, which results in their children's stronger cognitive competence. Green et al. [2021] suggest that children of less educated parents may derive more benefit from centre-based care than those with more educated parents. Thus, the educational and economic level of the parents can determine which strategy for the child's education (home-based or centre-based) is more effective.

Parental Economic Status and Involvement

In the last decade, more attention has been given to wealth as an aspect of household economic status. According to Lareau [2002], parents' perceptions of what children need for their successful development are stratified by social class. These differences in parenting represent a key mechanism whereby higher status parents transmit their advantages to children. Schlee Mullis, Shriner [2009] reveal that parents' financial capital is the best predictor of childhood academic achievement. Slicker et al. [2021] support the idea that family economic background may be related to parental education, involvement, and their stronger beliefs in the importance of education. It has also been reported that children were more likely to graduate from high school if they lived in households where parents were homeowners [Aronson 2000]. Restuccia and Urrutia [2004] argue that borrowing constraints affecting parental investments in early education lead to the persistence of low earnings across generations. Chernova and Shpakovskaya [2016] found that poor families are wary of spending on ECE as they are less likely to associate their children's future educational success with preschool development. Therefore, the economic aspects of parental choices lead to the persistence of intergenerational social inequality [Restuccia, Urrutia 2004].

However, economic considerations and educational background of parents are not the only components of success. Another important factor in ECE is parental involvement, a broad concept that includes various behaviours shaping the ability and readiness of a child for education [Heckman 2011; Jeon et al. 2020; Li et al. 2021]; sometimes it is used interchangeably with terms such as family involvement, or family engagement [Barnett et al. 2020]. Such engagement during early childhood (including telling stories and singing) may be especially important, given the links between home activities and children's early academic skills and competencies, such as motivation and persistence. Some studies demonstrate the relationship between high levels of parental involvement and stronger literacy skills as well as mathematics performance among preschoolers [Slicker et al. 2021]. But the correlation between parental involvement and income level remains unclear. Bradley et al. [2001] show that compared to high-income parents, poorer parents not only devote fewer financial resources to their children's education but are also less likely to help them with schoolwork. Besides, parents with higher SES engage more in home-based activities than parents with lower SES [Slicker et al. 2021]. However, Ressler et al. [2020] found out that regardless of income, parents who value their children's education tend to provide more resources to their well-being. Yang and Bansak [2020] suggest that there is an inverse relationship between income and involvement. They demonstrate that rural-to-city migrant parents, who have been away from home for a long time, spend more money on children's education to offset the lack of parental time spent with children. Thus, the concept of parental involvement has been much disputed; there is no exact understanding of how income level correlates with the family engagement in ECE.

Not all studies show the influence of the family engagement on school readiness in relation to the frequency of home activities with a child. One reason for such disagreement may be that the quantity of family involvement

is often based on parental self-reports that do not account for the quality of engagement [Barnett et al. 2020]. Slicker et al. [2021] suggest that based on a person-centred approach, very high parental expectations about kindergarten readiness may be more important than a high quantity of home activities, which requires a significant investment of time. In this situation positive expectations about ECE — not parental income, educational level or home-based storytelling — are more important in promoting school readiness in the case of children from low-income backgrounds

The Historical Context of ECE in Russia

Russia inherited the Soviet system where young mothers are encouraged to return to the workplace as soon as possible. This system was built in accordance with the ideological and economic goals of a socialist society. The economic goal was to provide additional labour to the socialist economy, giving women more opportunities to participate in working life [Kosyakova, Yastrebov 2017]. To accomplish this task, the Soviet Union created a well-developed system of institutions for childcare: nursery groups, kindergartens, five-day, long-term care groups. Many distinctive features of ECE from the last century remain in Russia today.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s pushed many people into financial hardship and instability. The 2000s were characterised by a fall in the birth rate and a reduction in spending on ECE. However, even in those years, a pro-natalist social policy was still pursued. The need to solve demographic problems led to the preservation of expanded social guarantees for families with small children. In particular, parents still retained the right to long maternity leave (up to three years) with a guarantee of returning to their previous workplace [Kosyakova, Yastrebov 2017]. In the 2010s, when the economic situation in Russia was improving, the preschool education system was modernised. Related reforms have contributed to an increase in the birth rate, an improvement in the economic situation of families with children, and the improvement of ECE services. Shabunova and Leonidova [2018] argue that these processes have had a positive effect on the accumulation of knowledge and skills of children and contributed to the formation of their individual human capital. Many parents reported an improvement in the conditions for ECE after 2013, when the reform of preschool education was initiated [Abankina, Filatova 2018].

A well-developed system of public kindergartens is an integral part of modern Russian society. Nowadays women often stop maternity leave early, only 9.4% mothers were on parental leave for more than three years [Gizatullina, Zimova 2019]. Kozina [2010] suggests that the male breadwinner model has become practically obsolete for modern Russia, as the share of mothers' income in total household income averages 42%. The number of preschool educational institutions in Russia is very high, and it is growing. Comparatively cheap state-funded kindergartens provide universal full-day childcare programs, and unlike the systems of many Western countries, these services are available to all families for up to 60 hours per week, regardless of parental income. For example, in the UK, free childcare services for 3-4-year-olds range from 15 to 30 hours per week [Green et al. 2021]. The Russian ECE system is more comprehensive in comparison with similar ones in the US, Europe, and China.

In accordance with the law, all families in Russia are guaranteed to be able to send a child to a municipal kindergarten for up to 12 hours per day, five days a week. All educational services are provided without charge, a fee is charged only for childcare services and meals. The range of the fees depends mainly on the subsistence minimum and the cost of a grocery set in various regions of Russia. For example, starting from 2022 in Kazan a kindergarten group for 3–7-year-olds costs 3,300 RUB per month: 2,000 RUB for meals and 1,300 RUB for childcare services[1]. In the capital city, Moscow, the monthly fee is around 2900 RUB, i. e. 130 RUB (2 USD) per day. In other million-plus cities one full-day ranges from 120 to 160 RUB.

[1] The data are given for 2021–2022. The approximate exchange rate during this period was 73 rubles per dollar.

Such costs are very affordable for most families. However, for various reasons, some parents still prefer to send their children to more expensive private kindergartens, and some keep their children at home until school. Unlike municipal ones, private kindergartens are much more expensive. A full-day group in Novosibirsk costs around 11,000–20,000 RUB per month; 16,000–30,000 RUB in Nizhny Novgorod; 15,000–18,000 RUB in Krasnoyarsk; and 15,000–24,000 in Rostov-on-Don[2]. As a norm, this price includes only supervision and catering services, which does not make private kindergartens different from municipal ones in terms of the educational program. The difference in the level of prices is related not to the quality of childcare services but to the different operating conditions of public and private kindergartens, unequal access to budgetary resources, and high rental costs [Abankina, Rodina, Filatova 2017]. Additional educational classes, both in private and public kindergartens, are paid for by parents separately.

As mentioned above, the predominant number of preschoolers in Russia attend state kindergartens. The opportunities for early development of a child turn out to be similar in many ways, which is especially characteristic of municipal (urban) kindergartens. Inequality in educational opportunities for such children is largely determined by family involvement, attendance of paid additional classes, and homeschooling. These types of education can be termed extra activities (EA) in ECE. This requires the attendance of educational programs besides the traditional child-parent communication at home, and such activities go beyond the formal program of kindergarten [Sizova, Korenkova 2020]. In this study, EA includes paid additional classes in kindergarten or other educational centres at the discretion of parents; paid lessons at home with professionals (e. g., a tutor or nanny); free lessons at home with parents (or other family members) that require their active participation.

Fee-based additional educational services in Russia provided by (1) private organisations (2) municipal and (3) private kindergartens. Normally, the cost of one lesson (30–45 min) in a public kindergarten is between 120–400 RUB. Prices in private kindergartens are slightly higher. According to the Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO), conducted by the Higher School of Economics since 2002, the number of additional classes in kindergartens increases annually. However, the choice of programs is quite limited when compared with the private sector [Abankina, Rodina, Filatova 2017]. Many parents also prefer to pay for more expensive additional classes for children in external organisations alongside classes in their kindergarten (the cost of classes starts from 350–400 RUB per hour). This form of education has its advantages: parents can choose the appropriate venue and time of classes, which in recent years have become more and more varied. Along with traditional classes in foreign languages, sports and creative activities (dance, music, etc.), classes in robotics and programming have recently appeared [Poplavskaya, Gruzdev, Petlin 2018]. The joint development of parents and children is becoming especially popular, for example, yoga for mother and child, and creative workshops for the whole family [Bulganina et al. 2019].

Traditionally, childcare services in Russia are provided by government agencies, while private care has been underdeveloped until recent years [Sukhova 2011]. However, over the past five years, large and medium-sized cities have seen active growth in the ECE private service sector. The sphere of additional education and leisure for preschoolers is becoming more and more attractive for business. According to the Federal Statistical Service, from 2015 to 2017 the number of private organisations providing supplementary preschool education programs increased by almost 78% (from 8,166 to 14,547 organisations).

The emergence of new companies providing educational services reflects the growing demand from parents. Modern kindergarten education seems to be insufficient for some categories of parents. Two features are important for understanding the ongoing processes in Russian ECE: the monetization and professionalisation of childcare. First, well-paid service becomes a new power in preschool education. The willingness of parents

[2] Available at: https://msk.detsad.firmika.ru/ (accessed 15 January 2023) (in Russian).

to pay has become an important factor in the accumulation of human capital. Private classes are much more expensive than public kindergartens. As educational centre-based paid services are developed unevenly in different parts of the country, the EA cost also varies, from more affordable in residential areas to extremely expensive for brand-new activities in city centres. Even accounting for this variation, the cost of regular classes in private centres is significantly higher than the average monthly payment for attending a public kindergarten.

Second, the professionalisation of preschool education has become more visible in recent years. Chernova and Shpakovskaya [2016] found that competition in the labour market leads to the reduction in parental authority. This phenomenon is expressed in the transmission of traditional family functions from parents to experts. However, Kosyakova and Yastrebov [2017] argue that the outsourcing of educational services is more typical for high SES families. So far, it remains unknown how professionalisation affects rational choice in less affluent families. Although it has been recognized that, in general, the low SES of families affects their strategies in ECE, it remains unclear how exactly parents make decisions on EA. Some suggest that in Russia, the families' attitudes to EA are largely shaped by cultural orientations and value attitudes of parents, and not only by the amount of social and material resources [Poplavskay, Gruzdev, Petlin 2018].

Nowadays, parents need to make choices on educational expenditures much earlier than before. Does parental involvement in Russian families act as a countervailing force to compensate for the lack of financial capital? Or are poorer parents forced to spend more time at work in order to pay for their children's EA? As the concept of family engagement is still not fully explained, it is of interest to examine how it reveals itself in Russian families. This study investigates the effect of income level on parental investment in ECE. The study tests two hypotheses:

H 1. Poor and low-income families spend less on extra educational activities.

H 2. Following the commercialization of ECE, children from poor and low-income families are less involved in extra activities in childhood education.

In the following section, the two hypotheses are tested empirically using results of an online survey.

Methods

Data collection

To address these hypotheses, we use quantitative methodology. Data for this study were drawn from a small online survey named "Russian families' perspective on early childhood education and care (3–7-year-olds)", conducted by the author in the spring and summer of 2020. The survey was used to collect information on preschool attendance, family members' support, average spending on caregiving and child educational services, as well as parental perspectives on supplementary educational activities for preschoolers in some large Russian cities.

Data was obtained from a sample of 260 families residing in big cities of Russia in different regions, including Far Eastern, Siberian, Volga, Ural, and Southern Federal Districts. The respondents were asked to participate in the survey anonymously through an online Google form. The survey used closed questions. The study involved parents of children aged from 3 to 7 years old, living in 15 cities with populations over one million people. Among participants included in this study ($N = 260$) around 62% ($N = 161$) live in Moscow (the capital city with a population over 12 mln people), 39% ($N = 99$) reside in cities with a population between 1 and 1.5 mln people.

Survey Instrument

The objectives of the study determined the survey questions (see the appendix). The first part of the survey is concerned with the general socio-economic situation of the family and consists of eight questions about family composition, income, and children's ages. The second part asks about the amount of money spent on the children's preschool education, including kindergarten itself and EA. The third part includes multiple choice questions regarding parent's views on the importance of various aspects of EA in ECE.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into three stages following the three parts of the questionnaire. First, I investigated the economic situation of the family, measured the average per capita household income, and divided the respondents into following categories: poor, low, and middle-income families (Group 1, 2 and 3 respectively). In the second stage, I determined the amount of money spent on ECE and EA. This helped to identify the correlation between the family SES and its expenditures. In this stage, I checked the first hypothesis of the study: Group 1 and Group 2 spend less on EA. In the third stage, I examined the types of EA for preschoolers and identified the motives for parental decisions. Finally, I checked the second hypothesis of the study, namely, that children from Group 1 and Group 2 are less involved in EA.

The variables in the study comprise household size, household income, total money spent on ECE as a whole and extra classes separately (including kindergarten, non-home-based activities, babysitting services), and the cost per hour of EA. Respondents included single-children families (15%), families with two children (31%), and families with three or more children (22%). The average monthly household income for all respondents is 130,000 RUB. The average monthly expenses for ECE start at 1,000 RUB for poor families and can reach up to 50,000 RUB for wealthier categories. Costs for EA ranged from 500 to 35,000 RUB per month. Before analysis, the dataset was checked for missing data and outliers. The data were then analysed using a comparative model with control of variables. All parents in the study had at least one child aged 3–7 years old. At the age of 7 years a child normally completes preschool in Russia. Children are usually sent to the first grade of elementary school at the age of at least 6.5 on September 1. Three years old was chosen as the lower limit because it is the age when the official maternity leave ends, meaning parents should decide if the mother (or father) should return to work or quit their job to continue taking care of the child. This is another reason that paid classes in early development groups mostly target children starting from the age of 3. Some respondents did not report having children of the required age. These responses were excluded from the analysis. In sum, the dataset includes 223 answers for the first stage of the study, 182 for the second, and 207 for the third.

Results

The Economic Situation of the Family

The dataset for the first stage of the study includes 223 responses. Based on them, I calculated the average household income (Fig. 1.). Then, regarding the number of family members living together, I determined the average per capita income (PCI) for each family. Using PCI, I identified families that can be classified as poor. According to the national classification, 19.4 million people in Russia (around 13%) live below the poverty line, meaning they have monthly incomes of 11,160 RUB [Ovcharova 2020]. Slightly more than 7% of the respondents in the survey have PCI of 11,160 RUB or lower, so they were designated as poor families (Group 1). The probable reason for the discrepancy between the number of poor families in the survey and the total number of poor people in Russia is the higher standard of living of the population in the million-plus cities among which the survey was conducted. In addition, it should be taken into account that a certain percentage of people living below the poverty line may include older people as well as disadvantaged families without children.

Second, I identified low and middle-income families. Classifications of the middle class are not consistent either abroad or in Russia. There are various approaches to determining the boundary in the average PCI of low and middle-income families. For this study, I took an average PCI of 36,000 RUB per month, which reflects different approaches. I classified those respondents with the average PCI above the poverty line but lower than 36,000 RUB as the low-income families (Group 2), and over 36,000 RUB as middle-income families (Group 3).

According to various classifications, families with a total income per month of over 250,000 RUB (or with a PCI of 99,000 RUB) are classified as rich in Russia. In this study, 51 families had a total income of over 215,000 RUB, but there were only a few respondents who had an average PCI of over 100,000 RUB. I did not form a separate category for rich families and included them in Group 3 (Fig. 2).

The 223 families were divided by income level into three categories: Group 1, $N = 16$; Group 2, $N = 114$; and Group 3, $N = 93$.

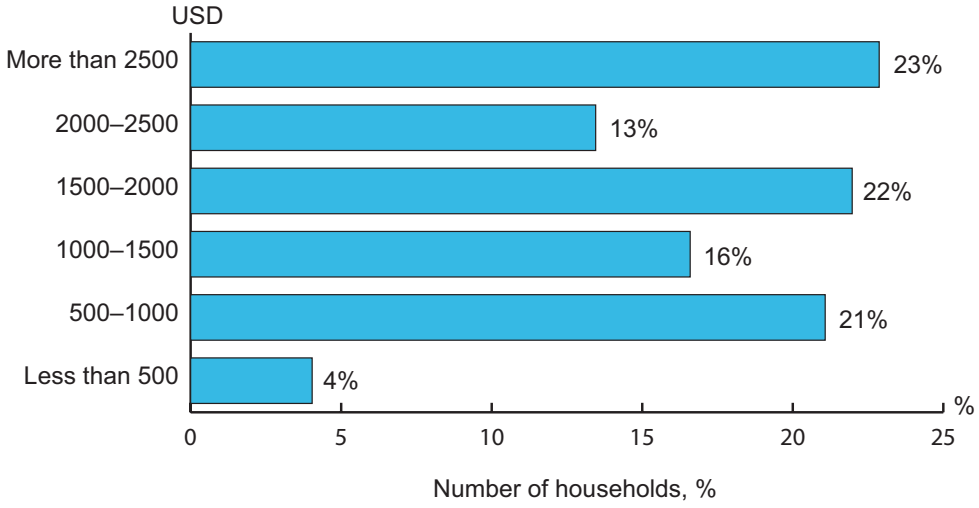

Fig. 1. Household Income per Month, USD

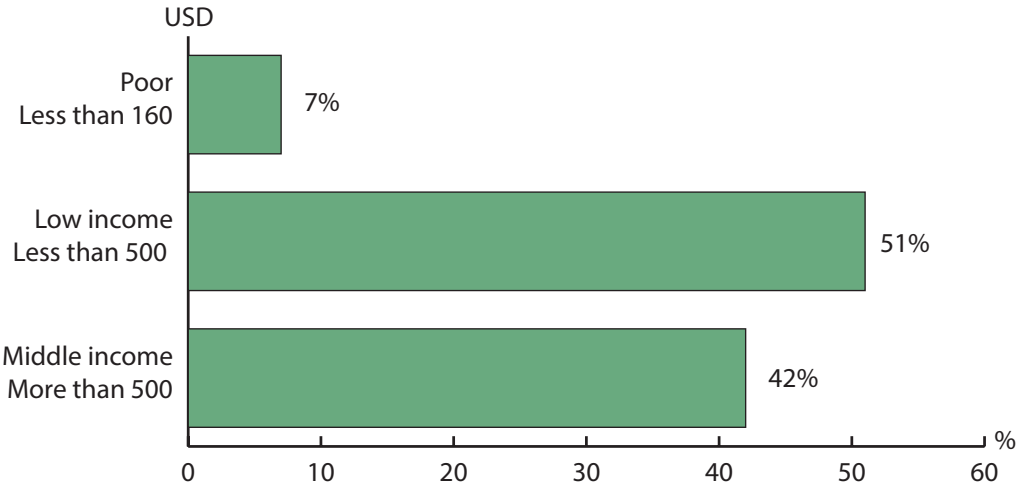

Fig. 2. Per Capita Family Income Level, USD

Expenses for Early Childhood Education

Here, I present the results of the second part of the survey concerning parental investment in ECE, assessing the amount of money spent on children's preschool education, including kindergarten and extra educational activities (EA) inside and outside the kindergarten. By separating economic classes, I analysed the education spending of each group. This explained the relationship between economic status and ECE investment. I tested the first hypothesis of this study: H 1. Poor and low-income families spend less on extra educational activities.

The first part of the survey asked questions not directly related to the money that families spent on education. However, these questions help to assess the overall cost structure for child education and care.

How often do you use the help of relatives in raising a child? The results show that help from relatives (normally grandparents) is substantial. More than half of respondents use grandparents' care at least 1–2 times a week. Even for Group 3, this percentage is almost the same (49%). Group 1 uses the help of relatives most of all: 38% "use help a lot" (only 20% of Group 3 do so). About 30% of Group 3 do not use the help of relatives at all (compared to 13% of Group 1). As we can see, there is an inverse correlation between family income and the involvement of relatives in raising children.

Do you use babysitting or nannying services? The responses demonstrate that this type of service is not popular in Russia. Do not use such services: 100% of Group 1, 91% of Group 2, 69% of Group 3. Only 11% of Group 3 use babysitters for a full-day (over 30 hours per week) and 21% use them for shorter arrangements. This may illustrate the persistence in Russia of a well-developed preschool education system, which allows parents to work without using these services. It also shows that traditional forms of upbringing within the family (without the involvement of professionals) remain dominant. In less affluent families, care for small children is carried out using the personal time of parents or relatives. Thus, the level of parental involvement in these families is higher.

How much money do you spend per child per month? This question asks parents to sum up all spending on their child (babysitter, kindergarten, EA, toys, paid phone or computer apps, sport and leisure activities), not including spending on food and clothing. The amount spent per child per month in Group 1 averages 5,750 RUB (range 3,500–8,000 RUB), Group 2 — 13,083 RUB (10,500–15,666 RUB), and Group 3 — 26,016 RUB (22,495–29,538 RUB). Taking these averages for each group we can calculate what percentage of total household income (THI) is spent on children. Interestingly, these numbers are similar in all three groups. For Group 1 it is around 12% (THI 46,700 RUB), for Group 2 — 13.5% (THI 97,100 RUB), and for Group 3 — 13.7% (THI 189,100 RUB). This is a very interesting result. We see that regardless of the total income of the family, there is a certain portion of their income (not the amount of money) that families allocate to the child, beyond basic expenses for food and clothing. Even wealthier families do not consider it necessary to pay more than this amount.

How much do you pay for kindergarten per child per month? Based on the reports, I have defined which kindergarten the child is attending. The payment for a public kindergarten in Russia is fixed, and in all regions of Russia it ranges from 1,900 to 2,700 RUB per month [Abankina, Rodina, Filatova 2017]. The results show that 53% of the children attend public kindergarten, 27% a private one, and about 20% do not attend at all. The higher the family's income, the more likely the child is to attend a private kindergarten or stay at home. Among Group 3, 28% of children do not attend kindergarten, 39% go to a public kindergarten, and 33% go to a private one. This also explains the difference in the monthly payment for kindergarten: Group 1 — 1,718 RUB; Group 2 — 7,210 RUB; Group 3 — 11,311 RUB.

How much do you spend on extra (educational) activities per child per month? Group 1 spend 1,906 RUB (range 938–2,875 RUB), Group 2 — 7,272 RUB (4,298–10,246 RUB), and Group 3 — 11,344 RUB (7,409–15,280 RUB). We can see that Group 3 spends on EA, on average, almost six times more than Group 1. However,

the difference between Group 2 and Group 3 is significantly smaller, and the increase in spending is about 65% (Fig. 3). It's also important to demonstrate how much of total household income (THI) is spent on EA in each group. For Group 1 the percentage is around 4% (THI 46,700 RUB), for Group 2 — 7,5% (THI 97,100 RUB), and for Group 3 — 6% (THI 189,100 RUB). Therefore, we can see, speaking about the proportion of income, low-income families spend more on educational activities for their children (7.5%) than the middle-income parents (6%). This may show that Group 2 places a high value on the importance of investing in EA.

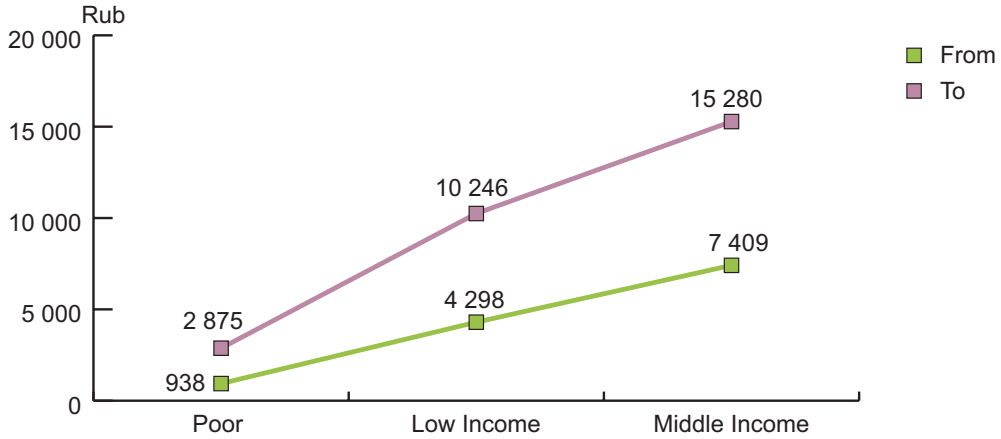

Fig. 3. Extra Activities Fees in Different Families

How much do you pay on average per hour of classes? The results show that families with lower incomes pay less per hour of class: Group 1 — 437 RUB, Group 2 — 706 RUB, and Group 3 — 1,048 RUB (Fig. 4). Such a range in prices could be associated with the organisations that provide the services. The prices for EA services provided by small and medium-sized businesses are usually higher as they are targeted specifically at Group 3. The prices for paid classes in municipal kindergartens and urban cultural centres are lower because of subsidies from the state, regional or local authorities. In order to develop a child, poorer families are motivated to find more affordable activities. Such classes on a free or conditionally free basis can be found in a number of specialised organisations of additional education in Russia. This idea is confirmed by the results of a survey of parents conducted by the Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO) in 2016. Approximately 2,000 families from the nine regions of Russia participated in it. More than half of the parents said that their children received additional education services free of charge, and another 16% made some voluntary contributions [Goshin, Kosaretskii 2017]. Overall, two-thirds of the respondents did not pay the market price for educational services.

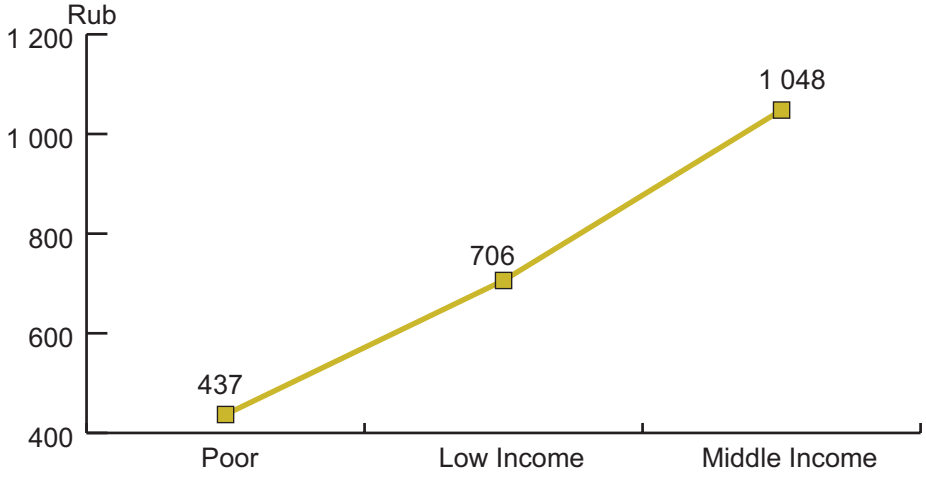

Fig. 4. Fees per Hour per Class

The results of the second stage of the study make it possible to test the first hypothesis (H. 1). They show that there is a positive correlation between income and investment in ECE. The lower the family income, the less parents pay for EA. However, the hypothesis was not completely proven. Group 2 showed a relatively high level of spending on a child's education. Considering the share of family income, Group 2 spends even more than Group 3 (7.5 vs 6%). Even families with a PCI below the poverty-line reported that their children still attend paid classes. A deeper understanding of the parents' motives when paying for EA was gained at the third stage of this research, where I investigated the priorities and values of parents toward EA.

Parental Views on Additional Education

The responses in the third part of the survey covered parents' views on the importance of various aspects of educational practices for their kids. The results show whether children from Group 1 and Group 2 are less involved in EA. Here we tested second hypothesis: Following the commercialization of ECE, children from poor and low-income families are less involved in extra activities in childhood education.

What types of additional education does your child receive outside the kindergarten system? The following options were offered: nothing, personal online lessons with a tutor, tutoring at home, school preparation classes, foreign language classes, paid apps for phones or computers, free apps for phones or computers, sport classes, creative activities (singing, theater, modeling, painting), and educated by babysitter or relatives at home.

Sports, creative activities, and traditional home education are most popular for children from Group 3 and Group 2. For Group 1, free apps are the most popular, and "nothing" accounts for 27%, which could relate to their financial status (Fig. 5). Group 1 evaluated school preparation classes, family education, and sports highly, and is more likely than the other two categories of parents to send their children to school preparation classes (Group 1 — 27%, Group 3 and Group 2 — 20% each).

The answers for Group 3 and Group 2 were very similar overall. This shows that parents from these two categories have much in common in their views on additional ECE. The exception was foreign language courses that are more popular with Group 3 (28 vs 15%).

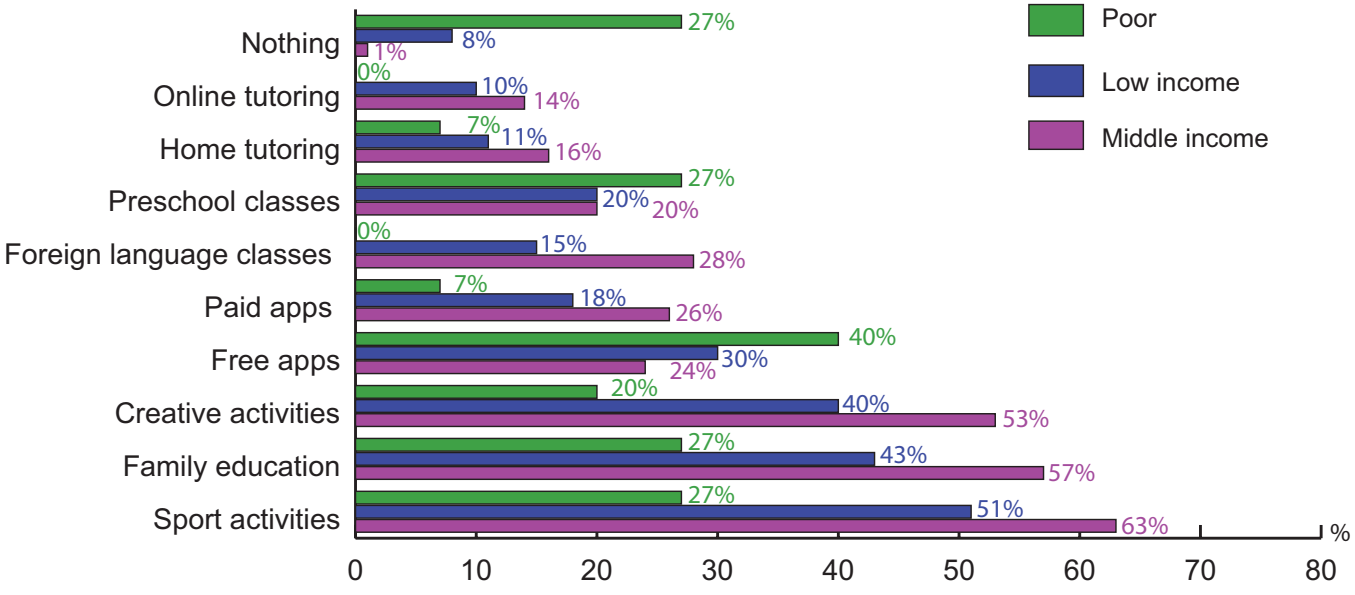

Fig. 5. Types of Extra Activities for Children in Different Families

What is your favorite activity and what is your reasoning for choosing or not choosing it? The following options were offered: only activities in kindergarten; sport activities; creative activities; a foreign language, arithmetic, reading, etc.; professional education; family education; encouraging interests of the child; letting the child enjoy free time; one kind of activity is enough; she/he will learn everything at school.

All families agree on the importance of a child attending creative and sports sections (Fig. 6). These two answers were the most popular with all families. Sports are valued most of all by Group 2 (73%). The third most popular answer was "To encourage child interests" (55% of all respondents overall). Among all three categories, Group 1 is less likely to encourage the child's choice (47%). Hence, we can conclude that these children are more guided by parental choice.

The development of cognitive skills ("Language, arithmetic, reading, etc.") is most valued by Group 2 (46%, compare it to 36% in Group 3).

The answers confirm the professionalisation in ECE. Group 2 and Group 3 rate professional education higher than home education (Fig. 7). It was Group 2 that indicated the need for a professional approach to EA more than the other two groups. This could be attributed to a lack of parental time for home activities. These families still recognize the importance of the child's intellectual development because only a small proportion of Group 2 (18%) spoke about the uselessness of EA. They demonstrate a compromise approach to EA: although limited financially, they are still willing to pay for ECE and consider it important for their children's future.

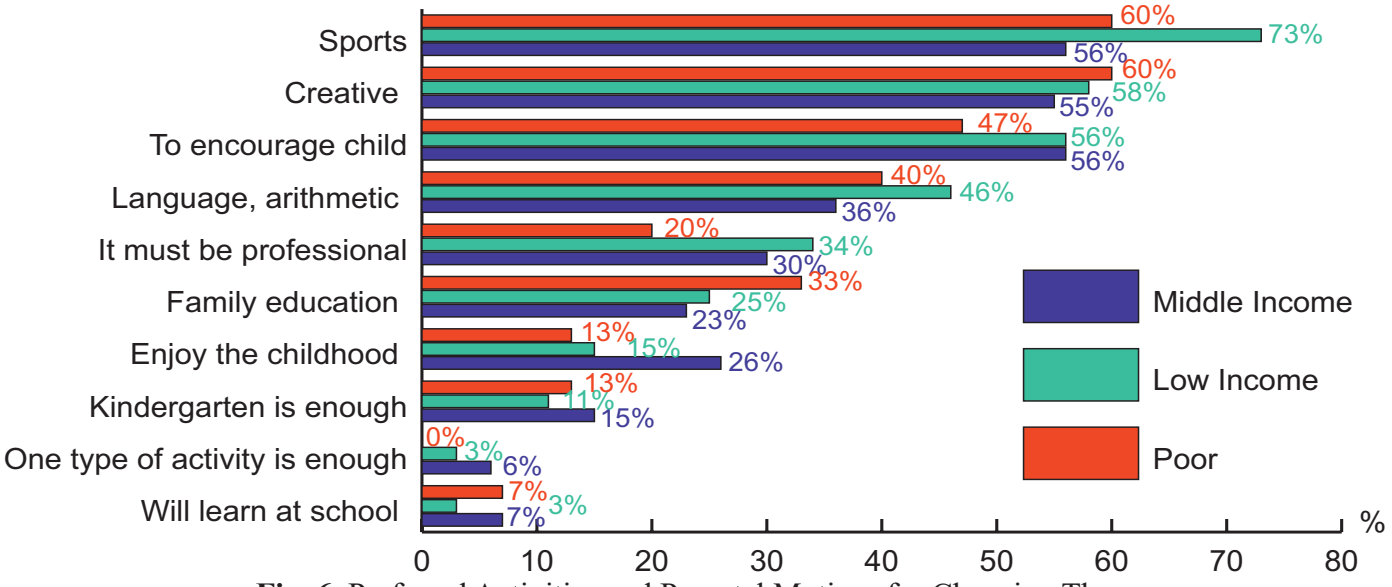

Fig. 6. Preferred Activities and Parental Motives for Choosing Them

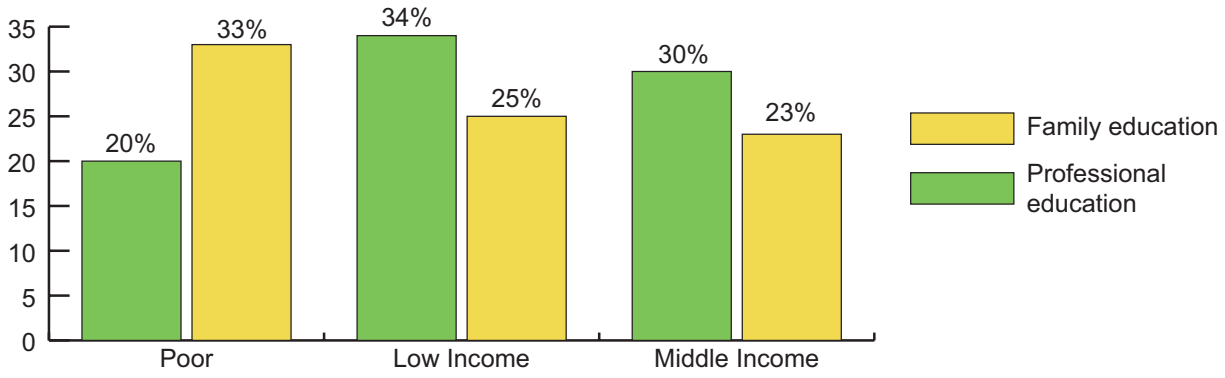

Fig. 7. Professionalisation of Education

Group 1 is more in favour of home education than professional one, which is likely related to financial constraints. However, home education requires more involvement of family members in ECE. The answers about the need for EA showed that there are five times more positive responses than negative ones (the same ratio as in Group 2). Most of Group 1 understands the importance of investing in ECE, so they find ways to compensate for their lack of resources.

Many in Group 3 do not consider EA to be important. They said that the child "should enjoy childhood", "gets optimal development in kindergarten", or the child "will learn everything at school". There were twice as many responses among Group 3 to support EA (128 positive vs 57 negative answers). This can be explained by the higher level of parental confidence in the future and their ability to support their children in case of their educational failures.

The respondents were also asked: Why did you choose these activities? One of the 12 multi-choice responses was "this is an investment in the future". Only 13% of Group 1, compared to 44% of Group 2 and 59% of Group 3, chose this answer. These results suggest that more affluent parents perceive education as an extra investment. Less wealthy families (especially Group 1) concentrate on solving immediate problems: how to maintain children's health through sport, make them ready for school entry, and improve cognitive skills for good performance at school.

The results presented in this part did not support the second hypothesis of the research. Based on the answers of the respondents, the hypothesis that children from less wealthy families receive less education cannot be substantiated. The results suggest different ways of, and views on, investing in ECE but do not support the idea of underestimating the value of EA among Group 2 and Group 1.

Discussion

This study investigated the interrelation between family income level and investments in ECE. Based on previous studies, two hypotheses were constructed:

> *H 1*. Poor (Group 1) and low-income families (Group 2) spend less on extra educational activities (EA) than middle-income earners (Group 3);
>
> *H 2*. Children from poor and low-income families are less involved in extra activities in childhood education.

The main findings from this study suggest that the first hypothesis (*H 1*) is true for poor families. In line with previous research [Schlee, Mullis, Shriner 2009; Heckman 2011; Shpakovskaya 2015], the results indicate that there is a positive correlation between income and investment in ECE. The lower the family income, the less parents spend on EA. However, the data for Group 2 do not support this. The difference in expenses for EA between Group 2 and Group 3 is not significant—the increase in spending for Group 3 is about 68% (7,300 vs 11,300 RUB). Group 2 parents spend even more than Group 3 when considering the percentage of their income spent on EA (7.5 vs 6%). This shows that Group 2 values ECE, but having financial constraints, they like Group 1, choose more affordable activities for children.

These results are consistent with past research. However, there are several additional factors that also influence parental investment in ECE. The results suggest different ways and different views on investing in ECE but do not support the idea of underestimating the value of extra activities in ECE in Group 1 and Group 2. Children in Group 1 are much less likely to attend paid classes; they still do so, although the average cost of classes per hour is 2.5 times lower than that paid by Group 3. In order to develop the child, families with lower incomes look for more affordable activities.

Testing the second hypothesis (*H 2*) of the study, I expected to find evidence for the prevalence of paid services in ECE. However, results do not support this. Findings from this study suggest that traditional forms of children's education within the family (i. e., without the help of professionals) remain dominant within Group 1. The education of preschool children is carried out by parents or relatives. Being limited financially, Group 1 finds ways to compensate for their lack of financial resources. In line with the findings of Shpakovskaya [2015], the results of this study confirm the trend of professionalisation of ECE. I found that the prevalence of paid classes in home activities is not significant. From the survey results, 34% of Group 2 and 30% of Group 3 respondents indicated that ECE should be professional, and 25 and 23%, respectively, reported that these activities should be family based. This finding does not support the second hypothesis. I found no evidence that the professionalisation and commercialisation of educational services reduce the participation of children from poorer families in ECE. Rather, the findings indicate the existence of different strategies in ECE in different categories of families. Based on financial opportunities, parents try to find a balance between paid services and home-based engagement. In doing so, they choose paid, subsidised or free classes. This finding is consistent with the study of Irwin and Elley [2011] on parent's values toward the importance of education in children's life. Their data revealed the generality of commitment to education across a wide range of class circumstances.

Finally, the survey results provide new insights into parental views on investing in ECE. Most of the respondents from Group 1 admit the importance of EA, but they do not treat it as an investment in their children's future. This may mean that Group 1 concentrates on solving more immediate problems. They spend more rationally. Having fewer financial resources, they pay only for what they consider most necessary, with an emphasis on the development of cognitive skills (especially school preparation classes). Parents from Group 2 seek a compromise: being limited financially, they are still willing to pay money for EA, realising its importance for the future. Interestingly, many of the wealthiest respondents do not consider EA to be important. This could be explained by a higher level of parental confidence in the future and their ability to support their children in case of educational failure. This finding with regard to the Russian families is similar to what has been revealed earlier by the British scholars. In Great Britain, some middle-class parents were very confident about their children's future and assured of their educational success. However, many working-class parents were deeply concerned by their children's formal education and manifested strategic orientation towards their children's educational success [Irwin, Elley 2011].

Although this investigation provides insights into the relationship between family income level and investment in ECE, it also has some limitations. First, due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Russian population. Only parents living in Russia's largest cities took part in the survey. There were small shares of poor (7%) and rich families in the survey, but most of the respondents were categorised as low or middle-income families. More than half of the respondents live in Moscow, which implies a higher standard of living and better awareness about educational opportunities. This study did not take into account regional income differentiation. The investigation was based on samples from the survey with just 260 respondents from cities with populations of over one million, which limits the transferability of the findings to other economic contexts. Incomes of residents of such cities in Russia are, on average, higher than those of other regional centres and rural areas. Therefore, further research is necessary for a deeper understanding of poor families' practices in ECE, especially for residents of small towns and villages, where the availability of extra educational services is lower. It is important to understand whether parental involvement in Group 1 and Group 2 can compensate for the negative impact of income level on ECE. It is also necessary to investigate how Group 2 organises activities for their children at home: how much time they spend, what methods and materials are used, what skills are developed. Research in this area might be helpful for organising educational work with parents on the issues of early development.

Second, although the survey groups were quite variable, including single-children families (15%), families with two children (31%) and families with three or more children (22%), the study did not take into account

the impact of family composition on educational practices. We did not ask participants to provide detailed information as to whether they are single parent families. It would also be important in future research to investigate the impact of the number of children or the absence of one of the parents on ECE.

To address the commercialisation and professionalisation of ECE, there is an urgent need for cost-effectiveness studies to be conducted in market services in ECE. It is necessary to compare the quality of the paid services provided in the private and public sector. Such an assessment would help families make better use of limited financial resources.

Despite these limitations, our study provides some insights into the parenting strategies of different socio-economic groups in big cities and fills a gap in existing research. Our analyses showed a correlation between family income and the ECE strategies they choose for their children. It was also found that financial constraints lead parents to find other options for ECE. First, they use the help of relatives and other family members and do more activities at home. Second, they try to find the most affordable activities, for example, cheaper classes at kindergartens or municipal cultural centres. An analysis of the preferences and motives of parents regarding ECE did not confirm that children from poor families are less involved in centre-based classes. The reports of respondents from such families show that parents value the importance of paid classes. However, such spending is perceived not as an investment in the future but as a necessary expense for the child's enrollment in primary school.

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