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Impact of Early Education upon Children's Development and Health

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Abstract

Early education has been an option in place since 1873. Favorable outcome and huge success has been credited towards early education programs. Early education programs do not just focus on the children's learning environment, but also emphasizes the children's literacy, social, emotional, mental health and physical development by laying the foundation for quality early education. Early childhood education also supports the upbringing of actual morals, increased self-esteem, and the mentality for problem solving skills and conflict resolution [1]. In addition, such programs support healthy physical development. It guides children to think with the goal of creating opportunities for them to excel in a safe, secured, clean and nurturing environment. One would think that a public policy program that encourages our future generations would be required; however, early education is not mandated. Fully assessing the situation, researchers believe that there is a solution. For our future generations to come, it is critical that we allow all children the opportunity to succeed with the mandate of early education. In this paper, we will examine the history of early education, the benefits, and disadvantages of early education. Overall, we found that early education helps with provision of solid and secure foundation for our society.

The History

Over time, early education has progressed. Currently, preschool programs usually begin between the ages of (3-5), and anyone can enroll his or her child. In 1965, the United States offered Head Start Program. The Program was for children who really could not afford to go to school. Regardless of affordability and due to its effectiveness, many parents wanted his or her children to attend the program. As a response, the education system changed and kindergarten became a requirement. Early education is a precursor for emotional, social, physical and mental development. Head Start program was really effective. Academics were taught, including literacy development as well as other building skills. In the 17th century, the philosophical foundations of early childhood education were provided by John Amos Comenius, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Its curriculum and methodology were created by the likes of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Frobel, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner. Most recently, it was scientifically grounded by the research and theories of Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson" [2].

What are the issues?

The absence of mandating policy is essentially the issue. Multiple parties are at fault, including the government officials, the parents and educators. Society as a whole plays a role in the establishment of early education because early education does not just affect one person, it is a chain reaction. These young children grow up to become actual members of society, which means their educational and mental stability and health are important.

The Benefits

A few researchers report that early childhood education fosters appropriate behaviors, establishing relationships, interacting socially and responding to stimuli in an emotionally mature manner. In their study

The Opportunity Project (TOP)'s emphasis on early identification and remediation of learning problems has merit. Additionally, the differences in math and reading on the state standardized indicators provided evidence that early intervention has long-term benefits for brain development when its architecture is more pliable. The growing evidence from the data for social skills lends strength to the notion that early education has long-term benefits for children. Whereas kindergarten students benefited from the social, mental health and academic development. TOP children became increasingly adept in their social skills, such that by the time they approached fifth grade and were ending their elementary school years, they were demonstrating increasingly sophisticated social skills: displaying appropriate behaviors, establishing relationships, interacting socially, and responding to stimuli in an emotionally mature manner. Moreover, they were becoming more responsible for their behavior as evidenced by their attendance at school, which increased as they aged [3].

There is evidence that a high-quality preschool education improves a child's outcome in life. In addition, they became more aware of their behavior evidenced by their attendance at school, which only increased as they grew older. After some years, these children achieved success in school academically, socially and mentally which Bakken [3] highlighted when high quality, and early learning was provided. "There were fewer placements in special education.

Results indicated TOP children used significantly more appropriate behaviors, were significantly better at social interactions, and were significantly more emotionally mature than their non-TOP peers (Figure 1).

Research is constantly showing that investments in education, especially the benefits to children, families, and society, promote growth and opportunity over time. One study examined the benefits and costs of investing in Early Childhood Education entitled "The Fiscal, Economic, and Societal Gains of a Universal Pre-kindergarten program in the United States, 2016-2050" [4].

This study describes the benefits and costs of investing in a universal pre-kindergarten program made available to all three and four year olds across the United States. “By 2050, every tax dollar spent on the program would be offset by \$1.37 in budgetary savings for state governments. And in this scenario the federal government would be enjoying \$ 34.8 billion in surpluses in 2050” [4] (Figure 2).

In brief, the total costs and benefits of the preschool programs were determined by multiplying the number of participants of a particular age by the average value of the cost or benefit for each year the cost or benefit was produced by participants of that age as indicated in the figure above. Thus, for example, the costs of the pre-kindergarten program were assumed to prevail only when each participant was three or four years old. The costs of increased high school education attainment were assumed to occur at age seventeen. The costs of higher education were assumed to start at age eighteen and stop at age twenty-two. The reductions in the cost of providing public education per participant, due to less special education, were assumed to kick in when that participant entered the public-school system at age five and were assumed to cease when that participant turned eighteen and left the school system. The savings from less grade retention were assumed to occur when participants were seventeen. The savings from less child abuse and neglect were assumed to start at three and end at age seventeen. Savings from less juvenile crime were assumed to start at age ten and end at age seventeen. Savings from less adult crime are assumed to start at age eighteen and end at age forty-four. The benefits of higher earnings and taxes from the increased workforce participation of the guardians of pre-K participants were assumed to occur during the two years participants were in prekindergarten. The benefits of higher earnings and taxes on the part of pre-K participants were assumed to start at age eighteen and cease at age sixty-five. The savings from less depression and lower levels of smoking start at age eighteen and end at age sixty-five. Of course, all costs and benefits end in the year 2050, regardless of the age of prekindergarten participants in that year, as 2050 is the last year of our extrapolation. Consequently, the benefits ceased being calculated by age thirty-nine for the oldest participants even though they would have continued accruing for many more years.

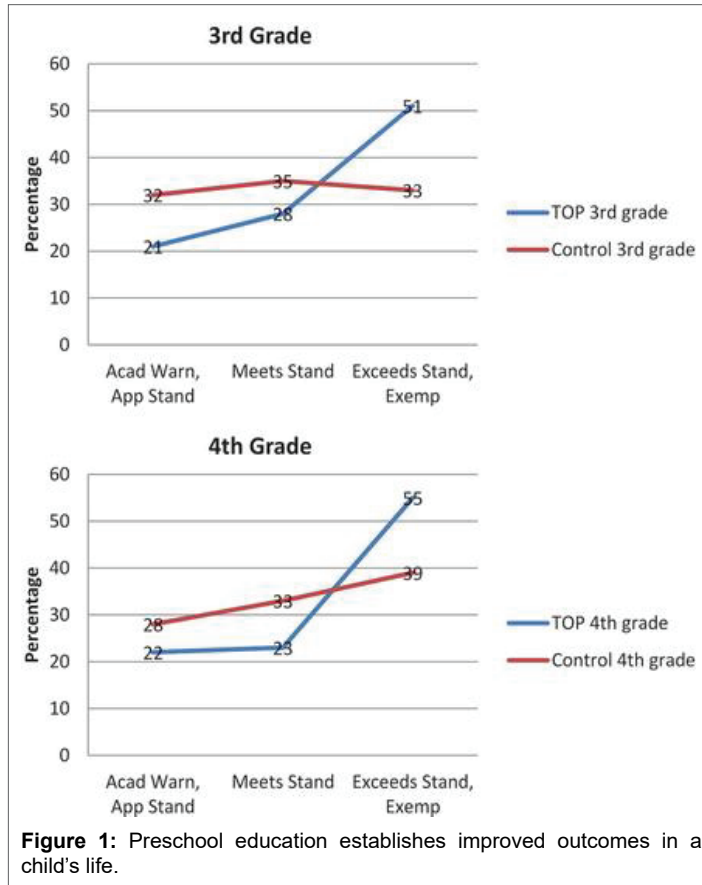


Figure 1: Preschool education establishes improved outcomes in a child's life.

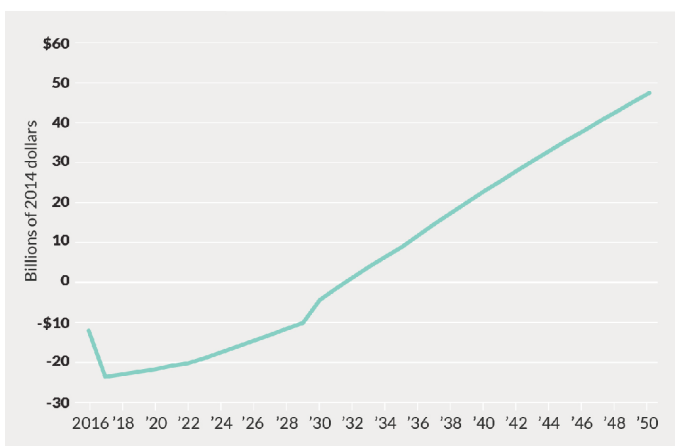
President Obama in his 2013 State of the Union address revealed that several research studies all point towards the same conclusion that early childhood education has a huge impact on life outcomes. “Yet only 51% of three and four year olds in the America” [4] are enrolled in full-day preprimary programs, with no improvements in the last fifteen years. This is as a result of limited access to such programs. Several risk factors were associated with a lower probability of preschool participation: housing instability, sole parent family, other parent in a couple families not employed, low primary career education, potential language difficulties, Indigenous children are seldom read to by parents. Risk burden, participation in early childhood education, care, and child outcomes is relevant to accessibility. As such, there is demand for increasing accessible child education programs.

Wein. H [1] in his study showed that an early education program for children from low-income families shows that “A previous analysis following the children up to age 24 found that those who had been enrolled in CPCs (Child-Parent Center Program) were more likely to go to college, get a full-time job and have health insurance. They were also less likely to go to prison and suffer from depressive symptoms. An economic analysis estimated that every dollar spent on the program generates \$ 4 to \$11 of benefits to the participants and society at large” [1]. “The longest study of its kind shows intensive instruction in reading and math from pre-kindergarten through third grade, along with frequent educational field trips provides benefits that last well into adulthood” [1]. The latest analysis by Reynolds & Temple [5] examined in the program “Science” “those children who participated in CPCs attained a higher level of education, income, socioeconomic status and health insurance coverage than the comparison children” [6]. The participants displayed lower rates of crime involvement and drug abuse.

Early education holds the power to influence a child's mindset for the future. Many preschool activities focus on teamwork for a certain reason; a person who learns how to work around others at an early age will be

Net Benefits to Government Budget from a Universal Prekindergarten Program

By 2050, the net benefits to government exceed \$47 billion.



Source: Authors' analysis.
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Figure 2: Net Benefits to Government Budget from a Universal Prekindergarten Program.

more socially cooperative and may have better chances of being more employable later on in life. Teaching the value of respect is not just limited to people and belongings, but can also mean respect globally. Instilling the importance of teamwork can teach young children skills to benefit their future. There is no better place to learn this virtue than in a preschool environment, where everything is shared and manners are taught and learned.

International Views

Recent Australian research confirms that high-quality teaching is very necessary. Children whose teachers had a type of qualification in early childhood teaching at diploma level and above had better test results regarding literacy in year three of school, compared to those with only a certificate as their level of qualification in childcare or early childhood teaching, or with different types of teaching qualifications. The United States seems to be behind when it comes to early education (preschool). Many other countries show strong beliefs towards early education. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Mexico and France have 100% of their kids in preschool. These developed countries know the importance of early education, and implement it as a part of their society. Socializing with people other than the child's family in a different environment is a great foundational element. Showing value towards difference and diversity are essential to a child's early development. Early childhood education serves as a guide for children to be appreciative towards differences and become well rounded contributors to society. This is critical. A sense of wellbeing provides children with the confidence to explore their talents, skills and interests.

The Problems

Early education can affect children's performance both positively and negatively, depending on the type of risk factors present. Certain factors can stand in the way of early education becoming a reality. Reports have shown that early education costs can be very expensive. "According to a 2012 report from the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, families with children who spend some time in private preschools pay anywhere from \$4,000 to 12,000 in annual tuition costs" [7]. Many parents feel that these costs should be directed towards college tuition instead. Situations regarding creativity can be a problem as well. Parents are not the only ones affected by early education costs. States as well as the Federal government cannot afford the funds for preschool education. The expense is essentially too much to provide early education for all. Even providing pre-k systems across the board, only children of the economically advantaged would benefit. When a child goes to preschool, they are expected to follow a strict guideline provided by the teachers. In a way, this can limit a child's ability to show creativity if they are being told what certain activities to perform. It is important for young children to be able to express themselves without any limitation; Gopnik states that "children should have ample opportunity for spontaneous learning and exploration in a rich, stable and safe environment with affectionate adults" [7]. Studies even show that pressurizing children academically at a young age can cause a setback, which is why it is encouraged for children to learn spontaneously. Being separated from your child can cause certain issues not usually mentioned. The child would have to spend hours away from their parent to be placed in an environment where it is not guaranteed that they would receive the best care. It is important for children that are young to be on the receiving end of attention and care which could increase their bonding abilities. Whilst on the topic of bonding, certain types of bonding can actually become harmful to some young children. Being placed in a preschool environment can expose a child to some negative behavior. Many young children around those ages between 3 and 4 can erupt in tantrums. Many people argue that the benefits of preschool education are limited. Wong [8] addresses the subject in her article through the ideology of Mc Cluskey. "The reality is there is no good research basis to say that

Pre-k is good". Researchers seem to think preschool is over praised; there are investigators who speak about preschool as if it has enough credibility of lasting benefits. Some questions arose towards certain early educational programs standards. "Even head start, federal programs that provides preschool and social services to low-income families-has mixed results, with kids' gains seeming to fade over time, particularly if their elementary education is low quality" [8]. A significant number of the United States private preschools in existence appear to be somewhat better than daycare centers. The employees are not as skilled as perceived to be. Lesson plans that focus on certain academic skills needed to develop are not usually prepared. This essentially makes people question the strive towards Pre-K.

People do not necessarily think about how early education could impact the parents; the focus is more towards the child. Preschool education contributes to the mental and physical health of the parent. Preschool has strict guidelines to follow, like pickup and drop off times. Parents who work the usual 9-5 may have trouble meeting these strict rules. With working parents, they may not be able to witness certain milestones that occur in their children's life. Signs and symptoms of children development are very important to look for as children develops, and that could be missed by parents of children going to preschool every day.

Government's encouragement of children being sent to preschool at 4 is causing some controversy regarding the young age. "Plans to lower the mandatory school starting age to four instead of 3, could trigger a wave of stress and anxiety among children according to new research which suggests starting formal lessons so early may have negative impact on some youngsters' education for life" [9]. Cambridge University's research contains information that states pushing children into school too early could destabilize children completely. Children that young of an age may not be capable of handling a new environment and it could affect them negatively. Other researchers demonstrated that starting school at later age may be beneficial "Suggests that in systems where children start school later, for example, in some Scandinavian countries, the outcomes are more balanced. It says two countries where there are no discernible disadvantages for younger children are Finland and Denmark, where school starting ages are seven and six respectively" [9].

Conclusion

What Can Be Done?

Despite the ongoing argument regarding the mandate of early education, there are alternative measures that can be taken.

1. Universal pre-k/head start
2. Teaching your children at home using educational toys
3. Implementing some types of education requirement before entering school

Universal Pre-k has been shown to work best and more effectiveness. It is a very reliable program that is guaranteed to provide your child with an experience. "President Barack Obama proposed a \$75 billion federal universal pre-k program that involves partnerships with states" [8]. Essentially, this is quite an affordable option for parents who would like their children to have early education. Children would be able to attend universal pre-k due to state funding and their partnership with the government. Universal Pre-k even includes benefits that contribute to the society in the long run. Lynch and Vaghul [4] state "High-quality prekindergarten also benefits government budgets by saving government spending on kindergarten through 12th-grade education, child welfare, the criminal justice system, and public health care. Higher tax revenues also flow into government coffers because of increasing taxes paid by participating parents. Thus, investment in high-quality prekindergarten has significant implications for future government budgets. The benefits

extend to the national, the state and local levels and for the economy as a whole, for education, for crime, and for good health". Head start is similar to Universal Pre-k. They are also a great choice for families who are at an economic disadvantage. Usually these centers are developed by nonprofit organizations.

Another great choice would be to teach your child at home using resources. Many parents use this method to provide their child with early education experience without the added costs. Since we live in a time and age where we are exposed to numerous opportunities, there are many choices of education of the children. There are great and affordable online programs that can give children insight to literary knowledge. Educational toys, books, games and DVD's can also assist children's educational development. These resources actually work well in promoting children's advancement whilst putting money towards college education.

Lastly, the government could implement some type of educational requirement before being allowed to proceed to elementary school. Maybe some type of library program or educational class could be an alternative consideration that will provide educational and mental development of the children in addition to creating healthy bonding opportunities between parents and the children. Moreover, it will create the opportunity for the parents to witness and enjoy the children's developmental milestones. In addition, it will ensure that all children receive early education before going into school. This option does have a pretty good impact on society. Children that are required to go through the library educational programs may be equipped for both academic excellence and healthy development. The children who go through early education and succeed in their academics, will not only become positive contributors towards society, but will be mentally healthy [10].

The authors concluded that the best option out of all of these would still have to be Universal pre-k/head start [3,4]. These programs prove to be the most effective in helping younger children succeed, whilst showing greater benefits towards society as a whole.

Steps to take

Since universal pre-k is viewed as the best option by the authors, it is critical we think of how to make this universal. There are steps necessary to take in order to gain attention of the government and the society as a whole.

1. Speak to a public official about the mandate of universal pre-k as an alternative

2. Get the society and medical board involved
3. Get a petition signed
4. Start making plans in school systems locally.

Expressing one's ideas and views can potentially open doors to changes. Organization of groups of delegates in the community with common interest can potentially lead to successful implementation of successful educational programs. When we examine the advantages and the disadvantages of early childhood education [11], the authors conclude that the Universal pre-k may be the best alternative that will provide children with early education at an affordable rate, whilst impacting society's positive health and development. It is important that we build a solid and secure foundation for our society by the provision of early childhood education to all children.

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