

Early Childhood Education- An Analysis

Dr.Chetana. S.B

Assistant Professor

Department of Law

Government Law Collage, Ramanagara, Karnataka

Abstract

Preschool education increased in the second part of the 20th century. The publicly funded Head Start program, founded in the 1960s to help economically disadvantaged children overcome cognitive, social, emotional, and physical deficits, has led preschool education activity. Head Start programmes promote well-being and school readiness in children and their families by offering a variety of educational and social services. This helps children get the most out of school and succeed in life. Head Start and other programmes for economically disadvantaged children can have a large effect if they improve school and life outcomes. One-fourth of children under six live in poverty, and three-fifths of moms of three- and four-year-olds work outside the home, according to Schweinhart (1985). Head Start enrolls less than 20% of poor three- and four-year-olds. Kindergarten attendance has skyrocketed too. Only seven states require kindergarten, but 95% of children attend (Sava 1987), and 23% attend full-day programmes. (Karweit 1988). Another cause for the dramatic increase in pre-K educational programmes is the need to support low-income children. As mentioned, more moms are working. Many working parents prefer organised day care or babysitting for their children. Finally, some people believe that education is a game and that those who start first will win.

Introduction

Teachers, administrators, theorists, and researchers are also interested in the relationship between early childhood education research and research on general effective schooling. The research base on effective schooling that has developed over the past two decades informs us a great deal about effective school and classroom practises for students in general. This report is part of a series of topical synthesis documents that analyses specific topic areas in the context of the general research on effective schooling to identify areas of congruence and discrepancies between the general and specific bodies of research. In order to accomplish this, the present report references the general effective schooling research cited in *Effective Schooling Practices: A Synthesis of the Research*. (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 1984). It is essential to remember, when reviewing the numerous research findings cited in this document, that the majority of them did not result from studies conducted with children younger than first graders. Many of these studies are therefore inapplicable to these very young children because the settings and treatments used in them represent what Katz described as "formal academic teaching methods that early childhood specialists generally consider developmentally inappropriate for children younger than six years old." (Cotton & Conklin, n.d.)

Early childhood education (ECE) programmes help pre-schoolers to improve school performance. In the second part of the 20th century, US early education expanded. This trend gave most American kids early childhood schooling. Early childcare programmes vary. Preschool and pre-kindergarten are other terms. (pre-K). In 1965, the Head Start programme began in the US. Head Start provides free early schooling to low-income children. It targets low-income or at-risk kids. HHS funds Head Start. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds many preschool programmes. Local educational agencies apply to state agencies for Title I programme approval and receive federal funding. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 encourages preschool programmes to use Title I, Part A money to prepare children for school with language, cognitive, and early reading skills that help them succeed academically. 300,000 Title I-eligible pre-schoolers attended in 2001–2002. Private for-profit firms, churches, and private schools offer other early childhood education programmes- tuition-based programmes. Many states have offered middle- and upper-class children free childcare since the early 1990s. Georgia was the first state to give universal pre-K to four-year-olds. New York and Oklahoma have universal pre-K programs, and Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment for free pre-school for all

four-year-olds by 2005. Nearly three-fourths of American children participate in early childhood schooling. Early childhood education involvement rates vary by group. ECE enrollment is lower for low-income students. Black and white children outnumber Hispanic American children in these programmes. More children with educated mothers engage.

Advantages of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education can produce significant learning and development advantages for children. Numerous children at risk are aided by high-quality early childhood education in avoiding negative outcomes, such as falling out of school. Despite the fact that the benefits appear to cross all economic and social lines, the greatest gains are almost always observed among children from households with the lowest levels of income and formal education. However, it is debatable whether these benefits are long-lasting. Some studies examined the IQ gains of disadvantaged children who participated in Head Start programs, but these gains appeared to be temporary. However, studies also indicate that ECE results in sustained gains on achievement tests and fewer instances of grade retention and placement in special education programmes. Decreased crime and delinquency rates and increased high school graduation are additional long-term benefits. Adults who participated in ECE were less likely to receive welfare than those who had not received early childhood education, according to a comprehensive study.

Early childhood education programmes are not equally effective in fostering the learning and growth of young children. Typically, only high-quality early childhood education programmes yield long-term benefits. A significant issue with early childhood education is that the majority of available programmes cannot be deemed to be of high quality. Moreover, the most effective ones are out of reach for the majority of American families. Multiple factors contribute to the overall efficacy of a programme for young children, including a qualified staff, an appropriate environment, appropriate grouping practices, a consistent schedule, and parental involvement. The U.S. Department of Education lists the following as additional characteristics of a high-quality early education programme:

- The children are provided with a setting that is safe, nurturing, and stimulating, and that is supervised and guided by people who are both knowledgeable and caring.
- The teachers plan a balanced timetable so that the children do not feel rushed or exhausted.
- The school provides meals and refreshments that are healthy for students.
- The programme contains a clear statement of goals and philosophy that is all-encompassing and addresses all aspects of child development.
- The programme engages children in purposeful learning activities and play, with teachers who work from lesson and activity plans.
- There is a healthy balance between activities done individually, in small groups, and with large groups.
- Educators should evaluate their students' development on a regular basis.
- The staff maintains consistent lines of communication with the parents and other carers in order to encourage the parents to take an active role in their children's educational experiences.
- Preschools that provide children with two years of pre-school and operate year-round for the entire day, giving the children a total of four years of pre-school, have shown to achieve better results than preschools that provide less intensive services (*Early Childhood Education - Definition, Description, n.d.*).

Government Participation in Early Education

Equitable government involvement in early childhood education can be justified economically. Even if the result is efficient, economic actors with very unequal endowments (ability, environment, or opportunities) will likely have very unequal allocations. (Inman, 1986). Equity-minded governments can compensate for final results, equalise initial endowments, or both. Program spending can be raised until the marginal benefit of each dollar equalises. However, equalising early endowments through early childhood intervention programmes may be a better solution to unequal allocations because it avoids many of the moral hazard issues that arise when society attempts to compensate those with poor outcomes and may be a more cost-effective way to promote equity than compensating for unequal outcomes. Prevention often beats treatment. Lead abatement and treatment avoid permanent brain damage, and abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy prevents foetal alcohol syndrome retardation. Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan (1987) found that children who started school with disadvantaged families performed worse than other children, even if their parents' situation improved.

Early intervention appeals due to the difficulty of overcoming bad endowments later in life, such as through job training programmes for high school dropouts. Public sector training of low-skilled adult labour yields little. LaLonde (1995) found that most adult male and child training programmes have failed. (the exception for youths being the costly Job Corps program). Training investments may not increase earnings for poor adult women due to quickly diminishing returns. A market failure in early childhood education is another reason for government involvement. Liquidity limitations, information failures, and externalities are likely market failures. Liquidity limitations may hinder parents' investments in their children's human capital. Liquidity constraints only support financial assistance to certain parents, not government intervention in child care services. Information errors may also matter. For instance, there is growing proof that parents struggle to evaluate child care centres and that some pay for care that may harm their children. (Helburn and Howes, 1996; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). This implies that government standards, promotion, and enforcement may improve outcomes. Finally, even altruistic parents may not consider how their child-rearing choices affect others. A welfare mother's tax burden on other citizens may not be regarded by parents when investing in their child's human capital. Externalities support government involvement in early intervention programmes. If intervention cannot enhance kid outcomes, equity or market failure justifications are useless. Thus, the following sections address this issue.

Recent early childhood education literature reviews are superb. Presents information about chosen "model" programs, which were usually funded at higher levels and run by better-trained staff than large-scale, publicly-funded programmes. These model trials have small treatment and control groups, often under 100 children. These studies can illuminate whether early intervention can enhance child outcomes. Despite issues with experimental design and interpretation, randomised trials are the gold standard for this form of research. Randomized trials place minors in treatment and control groups. Random assignment ensures that treatments and controls have no typical pre-existing, unobserved, and uncontrolled variations. When comparison groups are created by a method other than random assignment, one cannot be sure that the differences between treatments and controls reflect the experimental intervention rather than some other unobserved difference between the groups. Barnett (1995) and Karoly et al. (1998) assess 16 model early childhood education programmes in their excellent literature reviews.

The Future of Research and Policy Directions

The Head Start programme is one that is widely known about and utilised. The amount of money allocated by the federal government for this purpose increased under both the Bush and Clinton administrations. In light of all of the debate and optimism that has surrounded the program, the quality of the research that has been conducted on the topic is somewhat disappointing. This is particularly true when it comes to examining the effects of the programme on outcomes that occur over the course of a longer period of time. Nevertheless, not all studies are created equal, and generally speaking, better studies do tend to find Head Start's effects to be larger and more substantial. However, more research needs to be done on large-scale public programmes like Head Start, particularly with large sample sizes, randomization, and an emphasis on long-term follow-up. The evidence regarding the short-term and medium-term benefits of Head Start is convincing enough to indicate that it would be good public policy to fully fund Head Start so that all children from low-income families could participate in the program, and to extend it so that it is available throughout the entire year for a full day. It is also a good idea to expand eligibility to certain groups of children who are not poor but are vulnerable to educational failure for other reasons. These groups include children who are at risk of being abused or neglected, children of parents who dropped out of high school, and children who have limited English-language proficiency. The available information isn't particularly illuminating when it comes to determining whether or not a universal public preschool programme is a good idea. A programme like this would be expensive and would give substantial financial assistance to a large number of families with middle- and upper-income levels, rather than directing the majority of its benefits towards children who are in the greatest need. On the other hand, this kind of programme might garner more support from the general public than an initiative that focuses exclusively on disadvantaged children. Opponents of universal preschool programmes point out that public school systems are having a difficult time meeting their existing educational mandates and are ill-equipped to extend their mission to include preschool education. (for example, Olsen, 1999). The success of Head Start provides an alternative vision for the establishment of a universal preschool programme that is distinct from the public education system but is still subject to some

degree of public oversight. This alternative vision is based on the idea that a preschool programme should be available to all children (Currie, 2001).

Conclusion

Observers should be able to see children engaged in the following activities in high-quality preschool programmes: learning the letters of the alphabet; learning to hear the individual sounds in words; learning new words and how to use them; learning early writing skills; learning about written language by looking at books and by listening to stories; and becoming familiar with mathematics and science. Some people are open to the concept of universal early childhood education programmes that are funded by the government because they believe such programmes could be beneficial to children. The following are some of the reasons why those who are in favour of this campaign do so: The personal and societal expenses of a child's poor performance in their formative years can be substantial. It is estimated that a high school dropout will incur social costs throughout their lifespan that total up to \$350,000. Even relatively minor advancements can sometimes make the expense of ECE worthwhile. According to a number of studies, Americans can cut their future investment costs by seven dollars or more for every dollar they put into high-quality early childhood education (ECE). There is a possibility that fewer people will rely on benefits and other forms of social assistance. Because there are now more people who are able to pay taxes, the government receives more money as a result. Because there is a growing demand for a population that is more highly educated in the twenty-first century, people ought to reevaluate the importance of receiving an education during their early childhood. Intervention at an early stage has the potential to forestall intergenerational poverty. The following are some of the arguments that opponents of comprehensive government-funded early childhood education use to support their position: There is evidence to suggest that the benefits gained from highly priced and labour-intensive pre-kindergarten programmes tend to have a relatively short duration. It is not a good idea to provide a downward extension to three- and four-year-olds, given the state of affairs at the public institutions, which are already riddled with issues. According to the findings of some studies, starting school too early can inhibit a child's growth and development in general by taking away precious opportunities for play. The results of additional studies indicate that an excellent preschool education could cost more than \$5,800 annually as of the year 2004. The government would be taxing a large number of individuals, some of whom might not want to pay for preschool for the children of another family.

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