

Should Early Childhood Education be Mandatory?

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ABSTRACT

Early education has been an option in place for a long while. Loads of success has been credited towards our fellow early education programs. Early education programs don't just focus on the child's learning environment, but also emphasizes your child's literacy, social, emotional, and physical development by laying the foundation. Early childhood education also supports the upbringing of actual morals, increased self-esteem, and the mentality for problem solving skills and conflict resolution. In addition, such programs like this support healthy physical development. It guides children to think with the goal of creating opportunities for themselves to excel in a safe, secured, clean and nurturing environment. You would think a program as successful as this that encourages our future young generation would already be required as a public policy, but it's merely an option. Public policy refers to a policy made regarding certain issues addressed. What could be the issue then? Early education isn't mandatory. Research has been done regarding the mandate of it, but nothing really has been done. I want to get to the bottom of this; looking at both the bad and the good. For the future generation to come, it is critical that we allow all children the opportunity to succeed with the mandate of early education.

INTRODUCTION

Early education has been an option in place for a long while. Loads of success has been credited towards our fellow early education programs. Early education programs don't just focus on the child's learning environment, but also emphasizes your child's literacy, social, emotional, and physical development by laying the foundation. Early childhood education also supports the upbringing of actual morals, increased self-esteem, and the mentality for problem solving skills and conflict resolution. In addition, such programs like this support healthy physical development. It guides children to think with the goal of creating opportunities for themselves to excel in a safe, secured, clean and nurturing environment. You would think a program as successful as this that encourages our future young generation would already be required as a public policy, but it's merely an option. Public policy refers to a policy made regarding certain issues addressed. What could be the issue then? Early education isn't mandatory. Research has been done regarding the mandate of it, but nothing really has been done. I want to get to the bottom of this; looking at both the bad and the good. For the future generation to come, it is critical that we allow all children the opportunity to succeed with the mandate of early education.

The History

Early education has come a long way from where it is today. It usually begins from a younger age (3-5). Anyone and anybody can enroll their children in a pre-school program. Early education is a great way for young children to get a head start on their development emotionally, socially, physically and mentally. Young children who go through some type of early education program gain so much intellect and educational experience. In the United states, the first type of early child program that was offered was called the Head start program started in 1960. It was for children who really couldn't afford to go to school. Because of the effectiveness of it, many wanted their children to have that head start as well. All of this commotion caused there to be a change in the education system. As an aftermath, Kindergarten became a requirement. Academics were taught, including literacy development as well as other building skills. Even back in philosophical times, early education existed. "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 Froebel, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner. Most recently, it was scientifically grounded by the research and theories of Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and Erik Erikson" ^[1].

What's the Issue?

The issue essentially is the absence of the mandate of quality early education, even with the greater benefits that come along with it. One group isn't just involved either. It's the government officials, the parents, the educators; it's society as a whole that play a role in the establishment of early education. This is because early education doesn't just affect one person, it's a chain reaction. These young children grow up to become actually members of society, which means their education and mentality is important.

Positive Research

"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 provided evidence that 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 and academic skills they grew and developed. 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" [2].

There is evidence that a high-quality preschool education improves a child's outcome in life. To also add, 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. "Academic performance increased for children provided with high-quality, early learning. There were fewer placements in special education" [2].

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

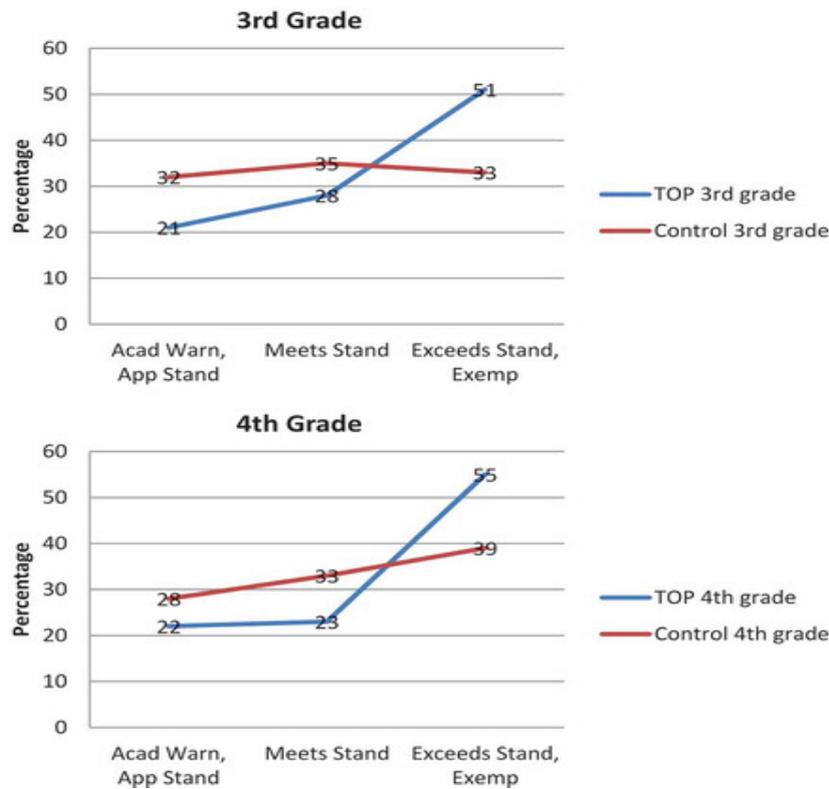


Figure 1. Results indicated TOP children used significantly more appropriate behaviors, were significantly better at social interactions, and were significantly more emotionally mature than their non-TOP peers.

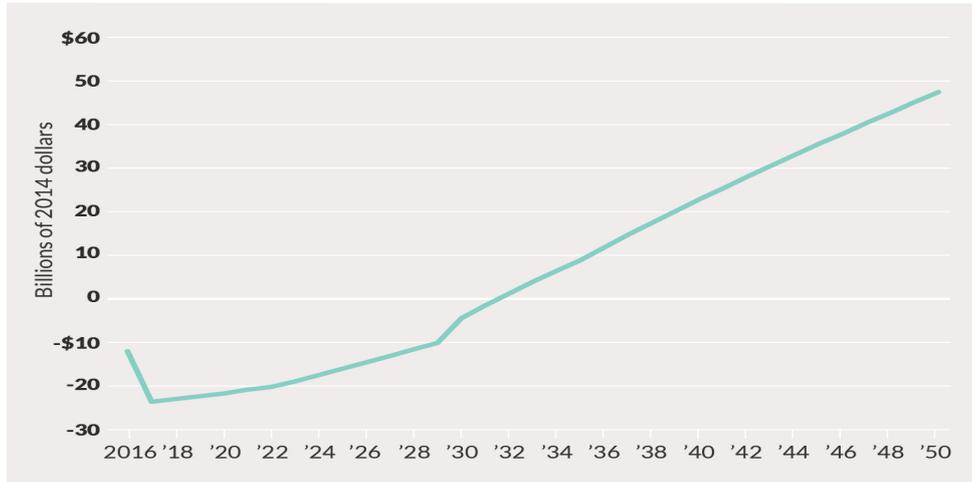
Research is constantly showing that investments in education, especially the benefits to children, families, and society, promote growth and opportunity over time. A certain study studied the benefits and costs of investing in Early Childhood Education entitled "The Fiscal, Economic, and Societal Gains of a Universal Pre-kindergarten program in the United States, 2016-2050" [3].

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 (**Figure 2**). And in this scenario the federal government would be enjoying \$34.8 billion in surpluses in 2050” [3].

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.

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 **Figure 2**. Thus, for example, the costs of the prekindergarten 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.

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 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. Early childhood education supports the establishment of good morals, self-esteem and the provision of an environment for problem solving skills and conflict resolution.

Wein H et al. [4], in his study showed that an early education program for children from low-income families. “A previous analysis following the children up to age 24 found that those who had been enrolled in CPCs 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” [4].

“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” ^[4].

The latest analysis by Reynolds & Temple ^[5] examined in the program “Science” “that children who participated in CPCs attained a higher level of education, income, socioeconomic status and health insurance coverage than the comparison children”. 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 more socially cooperative and more employable later on. Teaching the value of respect isn’t 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 child care or early childhood teaching, or with different types of teaching qualifications. The United States seems to be behind when it comes to early education ^[6]. 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 to the below areas. 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 Negative

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 as if expensive 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 can’t 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 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’s 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 pressuring your kids academically at a young age can cause a setback, which is why it’s 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’s not guaranteed that they would receive the best care. It’s important for children that 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 can actually hurt some young children. Being placed in a preschool environment can expose a child to some not so good behavior. Many young children around those ages between 3 and 4 can erupt in tantrums and what not. I assume that nobody would want their child to take to bad behavior.

Many people argue that the benefits of preschool education are limited. Wong addresses the subject in her article through the ideology of McCluskey “The reality is there isn’t good research basis to say that Pre-k is good”. Researchers seem to think preschool is overpraised; there are too many 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-a federal program 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 a tad bit better than daycare centers. The employees aren’t as skilled as perceived to be. Lesson plans that focus on certain academic skills needed to develop aren’t usually prepared. This essentially makes people question the strive towards Pre-k.

People don’t necessarily think about how early education could impact the parents; the focus is more towards the child. Preschool education involves its environment as well which only can affect the parent. Preschool has strict guidelines to follow, like pick-up and drop off times. Parents who work the usual 9-5 may have trouble being able to follow these strict rules. Being on the topic of 9-5 work hours, this leads me into my next topic. With working parents, they may not be able to witness certain stigmas that occur in their child’s life. Signs are very important to look for as your child develops, and that could be missed going to preschool every day.

Government reviews encouraging children to be sent to preschool at 4 is causing some controversy. “Plans to lower the mandatory school starting age to four could trigger a wave of stress and anxiety among children according to new research which suggests starting formal lessons so early can damage some youngsters’ education for life” [9]. Cambridge University’s research contains information that states pushing your children into school too early could throw off children completely. The research goes as deep as discussing children who are born in summer months have a harder time matching up with their older classmates. Research proves otherwise, with new studies showing that lowering the start age is not much of a help. Children that young of an age may not be capable of handling a new environment like that, and it could affect them negatively. “It suggests that in systems where children start school later, for example, in some Scandinavian countries, the outcomes 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].

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 kid at home using educational toys.
3. Implementing some type of education requirement before entering school.

Universal Pre-k works best in 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]. So essentially, this is a very affordable option for parents who would like for 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 compliment society in the long run. Lynch and Vaghul 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 children and their parents. Thus, investment in high-quality prekindergarten has significant implications for future government budgets, both at the national and the state and local levels, for the economy as a whole, for education, for crime, and for health”. Head start is also a similar form to Universal Pre-k. They are also a great choice for families who are at an economic disadvantage. Usually these centers are developed by non-profit 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 throwing away their wallet. Since we live in a time and age where we are exposed to numerous opportunities, there are many options to supplying your child with great education. There are great and affordable online programs that can give your child insight to literary knowledge. Educational toys, books, games and DVD’s can also assist in your child’s educational development. These resources actually work well in promoting your child’s advancement whilst putting money towards more important things in society. Spending a reasonable amount of money on these smaller businesses will help them improve and grow. Children would also benefit from learning in many different creative ways.

Lastly, the government could implement some type of educational requirement before being allowed to enter grade school. Maybe some type of library program or educational class could be made as a requirement. This will be able to ensure that all children receive early education before going into school. This option does have a pretty good impact on society. Children being required to go through this extra requirement would essentially prepare them for school which equals them excelling academically. The more children who go through early education and succeed in their academics, will on to become positive contributors towards society. Greater revenue will go towards smaller programs as well.

The best option out of all of these would still have to be Universal pre-k/head start. 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

Now that we have universal pre-k as the best option, it’s critical we think of how to get this plan into progress. There are steps necessary to take in order to gain attention of the government and society.

1. Speak to a public official about the mandate of universal pre-k as an alternative.
2. Get the society involved.
3. Get a petition signed.
4. Start making plans in school systems locally.

Expressing your ideas and views can potentially open doors to changes. You could get an interest group, create a website or do some interviews. Bringing the community together on the investments of early education could potentially create an organization.

If a certain number of signatures that prove the importance and need of early education, it could be implemented into today's educational requirements.

Reflection

Researching and writing this paper has brought a lot of knowledge and insight to me. In terms of government and organization, I became more aware of the many different types of governments and their structure. I even gained more knowledge of the type of government I live in. Governments share power; The central and regional governments work hand in hand. Laws are also made through a series of making, enforcing and interpreting them. The main thing is that everyone plays a part. Citizens do play a very important role in government. They pay taxes, obey laws, show participation in public affairs, complete jury duty, and show political engagement. We as citizens have a huge impact on society as a whole. After completing this project, I obviously have gained new knowledge. I've come to knowledge of research analyzing techniques, more understanding of government and public policy and comprehension. Besides gaining information, I used certain traits to research this paper. Self-discipline, individual responsibility and critical thinking are just a few traits that came in handy to complete this paper. To evaluate, I did well on this paper. I was able to research and organize it and put it together. Paraphrasing and analyzing came very easy. I don't think I had many areas I needed to improve in, except for finding more ways to incorporate the negative aspects of early education. It would be better if I was able to create more of a balance between the two. Take some time to analyze this topic in its entirety once again.

CONCLUSION

Various components come into play when we examine the advantages and the disadvantages of early childhood education. The mandate of early education doesn't come easy; there are many measures that need to be taken to make it a reality. Universal pre-k as the best alternative will provide all children with early education at an affordable rate, whilst impacting society in a beneficial way. It is important that we build a solid and secure foundation for our society by the provision of early childhood education to all children with success.

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