

Implications of Positive Effects of Early Childhood Education for Education Policy

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Abstract:- Emerging research on the benefits of early childhood education has sparked interest in making preschool education universal to improve children's readiness for school and their subsequent achievement of social, economic, and professional success. The implementation of early childhood education (ECE) programs, which aim to prepare 4-year-old children for school, has resulted in an increase in public funding. This increase can be attributed to the positive effects of the ECE program on children, as demonstrated by the academic skills of the children measured, which fall within the national average. These abilities include the ability to read and write, speak and understand mathematics, and recognize patterns in numbers. "Investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged families yields the highest rate of return in early childhood development." Thus, the community and local government are required to actively involved in managing preschool structures, enhance the supervision and management of early childhood education. Common challenges encountered recorded nearly half of all teachers acknowledged to having significant levels of stress and burnout over the previous several years, mental health issues, low compensation, etc. Furthermore, NIEER research findings reveals only five states Hawaii, Michigan, Rhode Island, Alabama, and Mississippi meet all ten national program quality standards, which include putting child development guidelines into practice and offering professional development to teachers. Thus, this paper recommends that when formulating schools' improvement strategies, the Department of Education should take into account the enrollment rate in early learning and kindergarten institutions. All early childhood professional development programs aim to improve children's learning in the behavioral, social-emotional, communicative, and cognitive domains over the long run through indirect means.

Keywords:- Early Childhood Education, Children, Teachers, Educational Policy and Child Developments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emerging research on the benefits of early childhood education has sparked interest in making preschool education universal to improve children's readiness for school and their subsequent achievement of social, economic, and professional success (García, Heckman, Leaf & Prados, 2017). According to a UNICEF report (2023), early childhood is defined as the time from birth to primary school admission and this is the most critical developmental stage in a person's life. According to Neuroscience research, the formative years are a "critical period" during which brain connections form at a rate that won't happen again in a lifetime. These connections lay the groundwork for the development of all foundational skills, including motor, sensory, language, cognitive, emotional, and social all of which are important for living a healthy and happy life (UNICEF, 2023). Preschool learning opportunities are therefore essential to ensuring that every child reaches their maximum potential. Furthermore, because a solid foundation aids in the development of the abilities required for children to become functional adults, a child's early years can have long-lasting effects on their physical, social, and emotional development. Particularly, the period of rapid brain growth between birth and the age of three is when individual neurons make billions of connections with one another (Schoch, Gerson, Halle, & Bredeson, 2023). In school-wide multi-tiered support systems, using universal screening instruments to gather data about students' academic, emotional, behavioral, or social needs is a useful practice (Bruhn, Woods-Groves, Huddle, 2014; Eklund, Kilgus, von der Embse, Broadmore, & Tanner, 2017; Oakes, Lane, & Ennis, 2016). From birth onwards, mechanisms and interventions supporting that development must be made available. Children's brain development is significantly influenced by their early experiences. Exposure to beneficial influences, especially stable and receptive relationships with parents and other adults, as well as secure and nurturing surroundings, promotes positive growth. Children's brain development is significantly influenced by their early experiences. Exposure to beneficial influences, especially stable and receptive relationships with parents and other adults, as well as secure and supportive surroundings, promotes positive growth.

The requirements that must be fulfilled for large and diverse communities to develop and execute early education programs in a way that minimizes achievement and opportunity gaps have been outlined by the Department of Education in United States. In a same vein, the Childcare and development block grant accounting department has stepped up attempts to recover the expenses associated with the mandatory screening of children. It is the responsibility of in-district administrators to work with early intervention programs to promote transition initiatives in order to ensure the smooth operation of the ECE programs. The program known as "Preschool Education" aims to foster the intellectual, social, psychomotor, and psychomotor development of children between the ages of 3 and 5 years by implementing an educational policy. The goal of this curriculum is to develop their individuality and lay the groundwork for their future academic success. The program's specific objectives are to: Increase and diversify preschool structures' accessibility, improve the preschool atmosphere and the quality of instruction, make sure the community and local government are actively involved in managing preschool structures, enhance the supervision and management of early childhood education (Bruhn, Woods-Groves, Huddle, 2014; Eklund, Kilgus, von der Embse, Broadmore, & Tanner, 2017; Oakes, Lane, & Ennis, 2016).

Early childhood education and care, or ECEC, has gained popularity across all industrialized nations, but it is currently most prevalent in the United States. According to Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabel (2017), the phrase "early childhood education and care" (ECEC) encompasses a wide range of services provided in the US under the auspices of social welfare, education, and business. Both the public and commercial sectors fund and provide these programs in different ways. They are sometimes designed with an emphasis on the "care" component of ECEC, and other times on "education," or even give equal weight to both. Despite the growing conviction among ECEC scientists and supporters on the necessity of integrating all of these program kinds, categorical funding in conjunction with a variety of social norms persists.

Kindergartens are preschool programs that last one year, usually for children aged five, before they enter primary school. They could be full or half days of classes. While only eighteen states in the United States provided funding for public kindergarten in 1965, by 1970 80 percent of five-year-olds were enrolled in public kindergartens, and by 2000 all states provided funding for kindergarten, the majority of which was universal. Today, nearly all American children attend kindergarten, with 98 percent of them attending for at least half a day before entering first grade. Kindergarten is a crucial transition to primary education. Approximately 60% of students participate in a full-day program at school (Education Commission of the States, 2007; NCES, 2000). But program content differs significantly between states.

The growth of ECEC policies and programs has been influenced by labor market policy, public (social) assistance policy, education policy, child welfare policy, and child development research, among other factors. The most significant of these changes is the sharp increase in women's labor force involvement, particularly among married mothers. As the recent rise in lone moms is more likely than married mothers to work full-time and because female-headed families are a fast-expanding family type, the number of single-mother households has increased demand, particularly for full-day programs. The so-called "welfare reform" law of 1996 and the requirements of the new public assistance legislation for low-income lone mothers and their children are a second significant factor influencing ECEC policy at the moment. Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), a poor woman's lifetime eligibility for aid is limited to five years, and she must "engage" in work within two years after claiming help if she has children three months of age or older. Due to these restrictions, the majority of low-income single moms are now expected to work, even while caring for young children. Congress's acknowledgment of the need for childcare services has grown as a result, even though early childhood education programs and quality attributes have not gotten the same kind of attention.

II. THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Teachers are more equipped to promote children's healthy development and school readiness when they have received specialized training in early childhood education (ECE) (Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010). According to a research by Barnett's (2023), better classroom conditions and child outcomes are associated with specific training in early childhood development. Professional development programs for teachers, early childhood teacher aides, and managers in the preschool education sector which includes private providers as well as in-district and municipal Head Start agencies have become increasingly necessary. This is to make sure that the methodologies, instructional delivery techniques, and appropriate childhood practices suit the needs of young children in terms of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills. When taken as a whole, they show that emphasizing instructional strategies and coordinated professional development can have significant effects on over several developmental domains. (Wasik & Hindman, 2011).

➤ *Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Education*

Several requests have been made to the federal government for expanded system assistance regarding continuous learning programs that aid in the development of children's unrestricted motor, cognitive, emotional, and communication skills. This is especially true for children who are bilingual between the ages of 0 and 5. Preschool instructional coaches and referral specialists in school districts have received recent state funding to support the establishment of early college education programs for youngsters who exhibit challenging behaviors and learning challenges. According to data from a recent study, the proportion of children under 3 years who have received early childhood education has increased from 16% to 35%, with an additional 60% of children aged 4 years having taken part in the program (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. Children in early childhood education (ECE) must master limited abilities related to math literacy, reading, and stronger language achievement in order to learn future skills (Bailey et al., 2017). The academic accomplishments of the enrolled children, however, are only temporary, and in comparison to the children who attended informal care the previous year, the ECE attendees were observed to have less social competencies along with higher levels of conduct issues. To guarantee that the final reports from appropriate monitoring of content standards are positive and consistently consistent throughout the program, well-trained staff members of early learning programs are required to participate in professional development activities and are provided with technical support through targeted interventions.

Additionally, taking part in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) improves the development of infants and toddlers. Children in high-quality early childhood education, for instance, show better language, numeracy, and social-emotional skills at the ages of two and three than children of the same age who are not in ECE. It is more challenging to separate the distinct benefits of infant and toddler involvement in ECE from the cumulative effects of having additional years of ECE before kindergarten admission because the majority of studies on this population track the children across time. Studies indicate that the maintenance of early childhood education gains is dependent on the classroom and school experiences that children have afterward (Ansari & Pianta, 2018; Currie & Thomas, 2000; Johnson & Jackson, 2017; Swain, Springer, & Hofer, 2015; Zhai, Raver, & Jones, 2012).

The implementation of early childhood education (ECE) programs, which aim to prepare 4-year-old children for school, has resulted in an increase in public funding. This increase can be attributed to the positive effects of the ECE program on children, as demonstrated by the academic skills of the children measured, which fall within the national average. These abilities include the ability to read and write, speak and understand mathematics, and recognize patterns in numbers. Identifying the kind of early childhood education

programs that the children participated in and if they attended the same centers or schools when they were three or four years old are two of the difficulties encountered during the research process.

Heckman (2012) claims that the best way to reduce inadequacies is to give impoverished children high-quality early childhood development. It generates better social, health, educational, and economic outcomes that increase income and reduce the need for costly social investment. In addition, Professor Heckman stated, "Investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged families yields the highest rate of return in early childhood development." Starting at age three or four is too late, too little, as this method fails to take into account the dynamic and complementary way that skills build upon each other. In order to achieve optimal effectiveness and efficiency, focus must be placed on the first few years. The best investment for impoverished children is in excellent early childhood development from birth until age five.

Early childhood development has a direct impact on the economic, health, and social outcomes that individuals and society experience, as demonstrated by Professor Heckman's groundbreaking research conducted in collaboration with a group of economists, psychologists, statisticians, and neuroscientists. Unfavorable early environments lead to deficiencies in skills and talents that lower production and raise social costs, increasing the public debt. Productivity can be significantly impacted between the period of birth and age five, when the brain rapidly grows to establish the foundations for the foundation of cognitive and character attributes essential for success in school, health, employment, and life. Early childhood education helps children develop cognitive capabilities in addition to the attention, drive, self-control, and friendliness character traits that turn knowledge into know-how and people become valuable citizens.

III. CHALLENGES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Common challenges associated with early childhood education includes;

➤ *Exhaustion*

An early childhood training group called Teaching Strategies conducted a national poll in 2022 with 2,500 preschool educators. The results showed that almost half of the teachers admitted to experiencing severe levels of stress and burnout over the previous several years. Research indicates that in order to gain the confidence necessary to teach and cope with the psychological and emotional effects of stress in early childhood classrooms particularly when working with young students who might not have developed social and coping skills early childhood educators need more

support, such as professional learning groups, training, and mentorship.

➤ *Mental Health*

A stable relationship between a child and caregiver, as well as the emotional and mental health of the caregivers, are critical elements of health care. According to data from a National Research Council research, social-emotional and behavioral problems are more common among educators who are mentally ill.

➤ *Lack of Resources*

Per-pupil spending on early education has not changed in the last 20 years, even after taking inflation into account. The most recent U.S. Census data shows that states spent an average of \$6,500 on each preschool student in 2022. Census data show that this amounts to less than half of the \$14,400 per public school student in grades K–12 overall, and it roughly corresponds to the same amount spent on early childhood education per pupil as it did two decades prior. Between 2019 and 2021, preschool costs increased by over \$400 for each student; however, NIEER found that the majority of this increase can be attributed to money for pandemic recovery, which is about to expire.

➤ *Low Compensation*

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the need for early childhood educators will increase by 15% for these grades through 2031, which is three times faster than the average growth for all U.S. jobs. The average yearly salary for early childhood educators in the US is \$30,210, which is less than half that of all K–12 public teachers, according to the BLS.

➤ *Professional Development*

Early childhood educators can benefit greatly from professional development, but research indicates that they are less likely than teachers in older grades to receive it. According to the NIEER research, only five states, Alabama, Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, and Rhode Island meet all ten national program quality requirements, which include putting child development guidelines into practice and offering professional development to teachers. Of the sixty-two state-funded preschool programs that NIEER examined in forty-four states and the District of Columbia, fifty of them demand that their lead teachers possess advanced training in early childhood education, and only eighteen of them offer individual professional development plans that include at least fifteen hours of coaching and training for assistants and teachers annually.

➤ *Technology*

Early childhood educators have had to make decisions about how best to incorporate technology into the classroom while also keeping up with rapidly evolving technologies. According to a 2019 research analysis, early childhood educators are less likely to know how to successfully integrate technology into the classroom and are more likely to think it can harm young children.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, funding the foundations of learning high-quality early childhood education for all is a tried-and-true way to close learning disparities, bolster educational systems, lay a strong basis for the development of human capital, and assist a nation's aspirations for economic growth and development. As a result, this paper makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The alignment of instructional content throughout school years, instructors' use of differentiation, teachers' grouping tactics, classroom quality, the involvement of peers, and students' individual experiences in the classroom are among the areas that have been identified as needing attention. Therefore, putting these alignments into practice will maximize the benefits of Pre-K and early childhood education.
- It is strongly advised that the US Department of Education ensure that children from bilingual homes receive appropriate screening. States and districts are required to ensure that struggling elementary schools have a higher proportion of entering kindergarten kids who have taken part in the ECE program. The years we spend in school and the amount of time we spend in the classroom are no longer sufficient for learning: It must be lifelong, life-wide, and available on demand.
- It is necessary to use best practices that help learning staff members become more proficient in teaching dual languages. The federal government ought to call a meeting of the states and order them to create the required standards for curriculum and evaluation.
- To enhance children's social and cognitive development and help prepare them for school, Head Start schools should receive adequate funding. This funding would enable them to provide enrolled children and families with social, health, educational, and nutritional services.

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