

Long-term Effects of Quality Early Childhood Education

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Many years ago, young children were thought of as a “waste of space” or “more workers for the family.” However, over time and after a great amount of research, we know today that children are remarkably interesting and are the key to the future. Scientists, theorists, and philosophers have spent a great amount of time trying to figure out how to give these children the greatest amount of knowledge possible to help them reach their true potential. With this intention, recent research has found that quality Early Childhood Education plays a huge part in helping children reach their full potential. As scientists learn more about development and Early Childhood Education expands, it is increasingly important to understand the outcomes of this type of education and how it benefits children in the future.

Before discussing the effects, it is crucial to understand what Early Childhood Education is and how Early Childhood Education programs qualify to be high quality (Smith, 2014). Early Childhood Education is an organized program where children go without parents and obtain certain educational and social goals. Children who are involved in Early Childhood Education range from birth to 8 years of age. There are various programs that depend on age, time of day, and socioeconomic status including Preschool, Kindergarten, and Headstart.

Nonetheless, children may only benefit a small amount from low or average quality Early Childhood programs. With this in mind, we must understand what determines if an Early Childhood program is high quality. Smith (2014) categorizes quality into two different sections: Structural and process. Structural quality is organized and determines characteristics of the caregiver and program. This would include teacher qualifications, whether the teacher is trained in Early Childhood Education or not, and the size ratio (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Children learn better if there are less children for every teacher. In Early Childhood Education, there is a limit

for the amount of children who can be under one staff member, along with the amount of children in one room. With a quality ratio, students should attain more information, background, and knowledge for the lessons because students can get more one-on-one interaction with the educator.

The second type of quality, process quality, is measured by the tools used to determine how high of quality a program may have along with social relationships and interaction (Smith, 2014). There are six different ways to measure process quality, according to the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (2012). These include the space and furnishing of the setting, the basic care routines, language development, social development, activities that promote learning, and provisions for adult needs. When structured and process quality are combined Smith (2014), along with Gordon and Browne (2011), determined that to create the highest quality Early Childhood Education programs, cognitive development, social achievement and completion, spontaneous learning with reciprocal interactions, skilled and trained staff, small groups of children with a small-scale staff to child ratio, a stimulating and warm environment, and ongoing activities that promote engagement and learning are vital to give children a successful future.

After understanding what quality is, researchers have determined that there are seven dimensions of quality (Jalong et al., 2004). The program must have a successful philosophy with many achievable goals, the physical environment should be safe and updated, the curriculum and pedagogy must be developmentally appropriate and effective, each child should have special attention to his or her basic and special needs, the program and staff must be respectful to each family involved in the program along with the community, the staff and teachers should be professionally prepared, and the program should be evaluated very closely. If a program can

follow these dimensions positively, that program will be a high quality program and will most likely benefit the child in multiple ways.

To teach children in a beneficial way, Early Childhood Education programs also follow certain curricula, which is a promising route to quality (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Although Curricula varies throughout the nation, it helps many students acquire school readiness skills during the Preschool age. “Global” curricula include different subjects Early Childhood Education programs teach their students, including math, literacy, language, socio-emotional skills, and a minimum amount of knowledge of science, arts, and social studies. Most classrooms are “global” curricula based. “Developmentally focused” curricula give children exposure to content that focuses directly on different skills, self- regulation, and the students’ development. It also focuses on many of the same skills that “Global” curricula do. To improve quality and child outcomes in the classroom, many educators are involved in “focused” curricula. Through this, educators have higher qualified professionals come into the classroom about two times every month and receive feedback. This helps teachers learn different methods to educate the children and gives them a chance to monitor the progress of the students.

Each aspect of quality is vital to a high quality Early Childhood Education program and it is important to understand how these programs benefit children. According to Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999), “children’s lives are lived through childhoods constructed for them by adult understandings of childhood and what children are and should be.” Many centers label themselves as “child-centered”; however, that is such an abstract term and is as “child-centered” as adults want it to be. Adults feel that childhood is the process of becoming an adult and children should learn skills and concepts to benefit them the most during their own adulthood. Because of this view, quality has a significant importance because it benefits children the most.

Quality aims at learning, thinking skills, and learning content early so more can be learned throughout the school years (Yoshikawa, 2013).

Furthermore, high quality Early Childhood Education Programs greatly benefit children in the long-term. According to Smith (2014), students who participate in Early Childhood Education are more likely to graduate High School. Along with that, they likely have a higher IQ and achievement in tests than students who are not involved in Early Childhood Education (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These programs also promote school readiness and give children a higher life outcome. Early Childhood Education gives students skills they need throughout school and life at an early age. Additionally, it gives children experiences in the community and other settings, giving the brain reasons to prune. Pruning is the neurological process where the brain decides what knowledge is important and what is not. For example, if a child learns the alphabet and uses it every day, the child will know the alphabet. On the other hand, if the child learns it and then does not use it anymore, the child will forget it. Children learn important skills they will need during their adulthood at an early age so they can really practice and master them. These skills include cognitive, social, persistence, attention, self-regulation, and executive function.

Headstart is vital to Early Childhood Education for children who go are from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Many families involved in Headstart cannot afford to fulfil their children's' health needs; therefore, Headstart impacts children's health greatly. One of the main requirements to be registered in a Headstart program is immunization. Headstart vaccinates all of their children for measles, whooping cough or pertussis, and other respiratory problems along with diabetes. Because of the increase in vaccinations, there has been a shown decrease in child mortality. These children are also given

proper health screening and dental work. Children who come from families who can barely feed them are given the opportunity to have free or reduced lunch, so they do not have to worry about whether or not they will get to eat that day.

According to the Abecedarian Project, a study done by the University of North Carolina, the long term effects of Early Childhood Education are astonishing. The amount of felony convictions by age 21 dropped for students who were involved in Early Childhood Education programs. Moreover, the amount of teenage pregnancy, high school dropouts, and tobacco use were reduced greatly.

Another study shows that 74 percent of students who were in Early Childhood Education programs graduated high school whereas only 57 percent of students were not involved in Early Childhood Education programs did (Smith, 2014). Students who were in Early Childhood Education programs were 21 percent less likely to fail a grade than students who were not in Early Childhood Education programs.

All in all, the benefits outweigh the costs greatly (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). The states save money on special education and grade retention. Also, there is lower involvement of child protection, welfare, and criminal justice systems. Early Childcare Education promotes greater economic productivity and higher earning for students when they go into adulthood.

In conclusion, the quality of Early Childhood Education is greatly important for students as they grow into school children and eventually, into adults. Children young children have the skills and creativity to really become great in the future; however, education programs must enhance these skills so they do not harm the child's education. As a nation, we can give young children the greatest lives in the future if we give them the programs and skills they need to succeed.

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