

A review of the effects of early childhood education

Literature review

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Background

This literature review summarises evidence of the relationship between early childhood education and cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for children. It also summarises evidence from a number of international longitudinal studies and randomised control trials. Australian evidence, though limited, has also been summarised.

Main findings

High quality early childhood education can improve children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes

High-quality early childhood education is robustly associated with positive outcomes at school entry. Children who participate in early childhood education have higher cognitive and non-cognitive development than children who do not participate. The benefits of early childhood education are stronger at higher levels of duration (years) and intensity (hours) of attendance. However, most early childhood education interventions yield short-term outcomes, with effects 'fading out' between one to three years after the intervention.

The Australian evidence base on early childhood education effects is relatively limited. The extent to which early childhood education affects Australian children's development is largely unknown.

Disadvantaged children stand to gain the most from high quality early childhood education

High-quality early childhood education is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as early childhood education provides cognitive and non-cognitive stimulation not available in the home learning environment. Interventions are best provided in the earliest years of life, as these yield higher developmental, social, and economic returns than interventions provided at later stages. Early childhood education interventions

help to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children at the time of school entry.

Small-scale, intensive early childhood education interventions (such as the well-known High/Scope Perry Preschool and Abecedarian programs), that incorporate additional components such as parenting programs and home visits from teachers are found to be most effective. Compared to more universal programs, smaller-scale, intensive interventions produce longer-term outcomes.

The positive effects of early childhood education programs are contingent upon, and proportionate to, their quality

The provision of high-quality early childhood education is beneficial for learning and development. Early childhood education quality typically comprises structural quality (characteristics such as the teacher to child ratio) and process quality (nature of interactions between children; their environment; and teachers and peers).

A policy lever that will increase the positive effects of early childhood education participation is an increase in educational quality.

Early childhood education

Recent analysis of early childhood education quality in Australia undertaken by Melbourne University's E4Kids study, shows that there remains substantial room for quality improvement in Australian jurisdictions, including NSW.

More information

A review of the effects of early childhood education can be found here: <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/a-review-of-the-effects-of-early-childhood-education>