



UNIVERSAL PRE-K REFROM IN THE U.S

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INTRODUCTION OF PUBLIC PRE-K IN THE U.S

Substantial evidence shows that high-quality early childhood education is beneficial for all children, the family, the school, and society. There has been rapid expansion of preschools, especially universal pre-K initiatives aimed to improve the readiness of economically disadvantaged children to enter the K-12 better (Amanda, 2018).

Based on the previous attempts, some of the famous researches of pre-K programs that have shown effects both on academic and social behavior aspects. However, there are recent studies have shown that the benefits were not long-lasting and would fade away quickly. The advocates and policymakers still believe that pre-K could play an important role in narrowing down the SES and racial gap for the children (Amanda, 2018).

To figure out whether these programs have long-term positive effects is pressing to policymakers and researchers. The research Question of this policy brief is by evaluating the previous attempts of public pre-K reforms to infer what are the main factors that would lead to a successful pre-K program.

Not surprisingly, until 2018, thirty-nine states plus the District of Columbia offer some form of Pre-K to those economically disadvantaged children.

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Current Problems

Some recent research raised concerns about the pre-K programs' long-term benefits for children. For example, Children who entered the TNVPK program had a better performance at the early stage, but this benefit faded away gradually. When the participating children entering the third grade, their academic performance was even worse than the children from the control group.

One of the shortcomings of the current pre-K is the infrastructure. As Farran, the researcher from TNVPK Effectiveness Study lamented, “pushing public schools as the primary site for pre-K classrooms suggests we think of this as the beginning of formal school,” and “many school systems don't have the infrastructure to support putting in the kinds of preschool classrooms that would actually be appropriate for children.” (Abbie & Laura, 2016)

Another concern of pre-K is the teachers' quality. Principals and teachers should have a deep understanding of what kind of teaching methods are better for young children. However, pre-K teachers have not received proper continuous training and attention compared to other grades' teachers. (Abbie & Laura, 2016)

Besides, the rocky transition to kindergarten and elementary schools for children is another concern. (Abbie, 2018) The transition from pre-K to K-12 is crucial to the future development for children, and it might be able to increase the pre-K effects on children by giving them the continuous high-quality education through K-12. (Abbie, 2018)



Previous Reform Attempts

a. Head Start

"Head Start is a program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families." (Wikipedia, Head Start Program) One of the most exciting things about the Head Start Program pays attention to parental interference, emphasizes the role of parents as children's first and also important teacher. The study showed small positive effects on reading and mathematics scores at the end of the preschool year. By the end of the third-grade year, the HSIS found almost no benefit for the Head Start group (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016).

b. Abecedarian Project.

The Abecedarian was a well-designed, small educational young child care program. It was a single-site research study in the 1970s at the University of North Carolina. This project focus on extremely in-need families, especially single-mom families. It provided 57 high-risk children who were economically disadvantaged with an intensive, full-time early-learning program when the participating children were only a few weeks old and remained until they entered the kindergarten – the program aimed to improve children's language, cognitive, emotional and also motor development. (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016) The valuable takeaway from this project is that intense, high-quality early-year child caring for disadvantaged children beginning when they are at very early ages could have a positive impact on their future development (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016).

c. Boston Pre-K

Boston pre-K is publicly funded, universal pre-K program, that is free for every child who is four-year-old and lives in this city's school district. This program was operated by the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in 2005, and it currently serves about 2,500 four-year-olds of the city (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016). A highlight of this project is that Boston's pre-K program strongly focus on education quality improvement. The BPS used multiple sources data including the child outcomes and the classroom instructional quality. Besides, teachers receive continuous coaching to maintain and ensure high-quality instruction.

d. Chicago Child-Parent Center Program

This program founded in 1967, and it provided several programs both focus on participating children and their families. It offered a two-year preschool program for the children who were economically disadvantaged and lived in high-poverty neighborhoods; family support, a one-year kindergarten program, and early elementary school intervention until third grade. The goal of the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program was to promote children's academic outcome, social competence, self-sufficiency in economic aspect, and overall health (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016). The highlight of the CPC program must be the parent engagement, and the CPC requires parental engagement at least two and a half hours a week either in school or at home.

e. Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K Program

The Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K Program is a state-funded program launched in 2005 that aims to provide children who are economically disadvantaged opportunities to enter public pre-K program. TNVPK Effectiveness Study showed short-term benefits to children's academic outcome at the end of the pre-K year, but these benefits faded away gradually. (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016).

The TNVPK Study randomly assigned the children who applied to this program into two groups, one group for the children who were successfully entering the TNVPK Program; another group was for the children who failed to be admitted into TNVPK. The research group uses Tennessee's Education Database to track both the children from the treatment group and the control group. One thing needs to be pointed out is that TNVPK study is the only randomized control research of a scaled-up, state-funded, universal pre-K program (Katharine & Elizabeth, 2016).

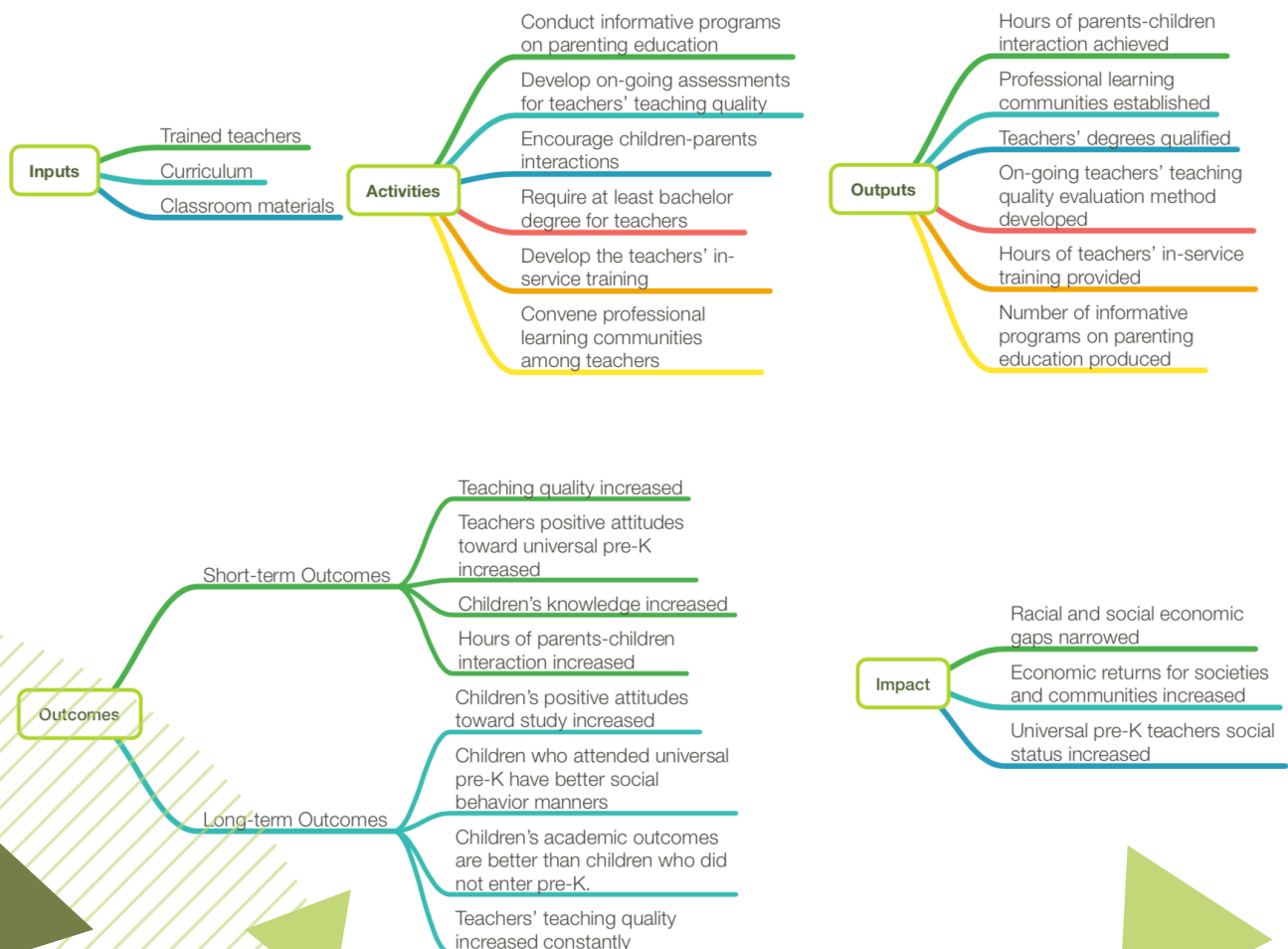
Conclusion

The evaluations of the real five pre-K reform attempts indicate the significance of teacher training, parental involvement, valid assessments, and time of class. However, the approach to make the whole U.S early-age children have access to high-quality pre-K education is still in progress.

Teacher plays a significant role in the success of pre-K programs, such as the continuous training, coaching, appropriate compensation, high-quality feedback, and the respect should be taken into consider. Besides, the pre-K teacher' s requirement is also important, teachers with higher degree have a better impact on children' s development.

The time for instruction and time length in pre-K is another factor. The Abecedarian Project proved the importance of the intense, year-round pre-K program for children's development, especially the economically disadvantaged children. Encouraging parents to engage more in children's at-home and at-school activities is also crucial for the next step pre-K reform. Pre-K could hold a parental workshop, a parent meeting, and assign a cooperate project to both children and parents to promote the interaction between the two generations.

I made a logic model for the ideal pre-K program below. In this logic model I focus on teacher training, academic instruction and parental engagement.



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