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Families' Decisions to Not Enroll Their Children in Pre-K: A Qualitative Study

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Jennifer Scarbrough

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Families' Decisions to Not Enroll Their Children in Pre-K: A Qualitative Study

by

Jennifer Scarbrough

MA, Ball State University, 2011

BS, University of Southern Indiana, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

High-quality preschool is freely available at two locations in a rural area. However, many parents choose not to send their children to preschool at all, despite its availability and demonstrated benefits to children. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families did not enroll children pre-K. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model was used as a conceptual framework for the study, which suggests that child development is influenced by multiple environmental factors. Research questions were related to examining the perspectives of parents who had not enrolled their children in pre-K on their inhibitions and inducements to enroll their children in pre-K. Interviews were conducted with parents who did not enroll their children in high-quality preschool. Semi-structured interviews with 12 parents of kindergarten-enrolled children at a single school in a mid-west state were conducted to address questions. Data acquired from interviews were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Inhibitors to enrollment included lack of transportation, lack of knowledge of program availability, and parental attachment to their young child. Participants reported the currently zero cost as an inducement, and they noted that more convenient transportation and extended pre-K hours would also induce them to enroll their children in pre-K. Parents disagreed about the usefulness of pre-K, with some asserting its benefit in providing academic skills and socialization and others arguing that it is not beneficial to children. This study could lead to positive social change by encouraging public outreach to inform parents better about the benefits of high-quality pre-K programs and ways to increase knowledge of their availability.

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Dedication

To my husband, thank you for letting me pursue my dream. To my Pre-K students, past, present, and future—I want you to have every opportunity available to make you the best you can be.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the faculty at Walden University, my family, friends, and coworkers who helped me and made this possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Researchers have shown high-quality pre-K programs provide children not only a strong start to their academic future but also advantages later in life (Harrington, 2015). Researchers have shown children who attend high-quality pre-K programs as having higher test scores, graduation, college attendance, and job retention rates, as well as lower incarceration rates and higher lifetime earnings (Mitchie, 2014). The years before school are formative for brain development in young children, which can affect the direction of their educational pathways (Belfield & Garcia, 2014). As defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2016), high-quality preschools provide children an educational foundation that can have far-reaching positive impacts.

Because high-quality pre-K can have such positive effects (Sandoval-Hernandez & Taniguch, 2013), the problem that this study addressed was that despite these positive effects, many families did not choose to send their children to pre-K. Specifically, it was not well understood why families made these choices. The societal influence of this effect was that fall entrance scores in reading, math, cognitive flexibility, and approaches to learning were all lower for children who did not attend a high-quality early childhood program than those peers who did attend a preschool program (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015).

In the location where this study occurred, there was a school system where nearly half of the incoming kindergarteners had no pre-K experience, despite there being free pre-K offered at two local locations. One was a nationally accredited Paths to Quality

Level 4 (the Indiana State Rating system for pre-K classrooms) pre-K at the local elementary school, and the other was a federally funded high-quality Head Start program. Both the publicly funded Pre-K program and the Head Start program began each year with openings for more students in their classrooms, yet some families chose not to have their child or children attend. Pre-K would offer these children a chance to experience a classroom setting and schedule, as well as nurture kindergarten readiness skills that could be advantageous for students upon kindergarten entrance (Harrington, 2015). I examined why parents at this location chose not to have their children attend these free and readily available pre-K classes. The data were gathered via open-ended interviews with parents of children who were in kindergarten but did not attend pre-K.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. The background of the problem studied is first presented. The problem studied is identified and discussed. The purpose of the study is then articulated; after, the research question for the study is presented. A thorough discussion of the conceptual framework that underpins the study is then provided. A discussion of the nature of the study, including the rationale for the study's chosen methodology, follows. Definitions pertinent to the study are provided, and then the study's assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are discussed. These sections are followed by a section discussing the study's significance. A summary concludes the chapter.

Background

The literature on the topic was extensive, but many of it focused on the benefits of preschool programs, as well as educational and societal outcomes for children who

attended these schools. There was a paucity of literature on the reasons and rationales behind parents choosing or not choosing to have their children attend pre-K classes that were both free and readily available (Andrews, Jargowsky, & Kuhne, 2012; Ansari & Crosnoe, 2015; Finch, Johnson, & Phillips, 2015; Huston, Bobbitt, & Bentley, 2015; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Sherfinski, Weekley, & Mathew, 2015; Yazejian, Bryant, Freel, & Burchinal, 2015). I assumed that parents who opted not to send their children to pre-K must have identifiable reasons.

There has been some examination of parental thoughts and attitudes in this context. For example, Belfield and Garcia (2014) researched parents' thoughts on their children's kindergarten readiness and if preschool would make a difference in their children's future education. The authors found that a majority of parents viewed pre-K as valuable in this regard, but the researchers made no distinction between parents who had sent their children to pre-K and those who had opted not to send their children. Choi and Dobbs-Oates (2016) similarly examined the role of parental interaction in early childhood development. The researchers considered ways adult-child relationships could make a positive difference in a child's education. These relationships influenced the decision to enroll or not enroll a child in pre-K (Choi & Dobbs-Oates, 2016).

Further, Guninidi (2013) interviewed mothers who had and had not had their children attend preschool. They were asked if their children had socially adapted to kindergarten and beyond, as well as if preschool was a contributing factor to that adaptation or lack thereof. Most of the participants whose children attended preschool reported that in their opinions, it had helped with their children's social development.

However, Guninidi did not ask the corresponding question: Did the mothers whose children had not attended preschool feel that their children had missed valuable social development opportunities as a result?

The decision to enroll a child in preschool may have practical aspects to it, such as time and resource constraints. Kocyigit (2015) examined the benefits of family and parental involvement in preschool. Kocyigit found that practical limitations influenced how involved or uninvolved parents were in their children's preschool activities. This extended to the decision of whether to send them there in the first place; parents who expressed they could not meet the time demands of a preschool program were less inclined to enroll their children in such a program (Kocyigit, 2015). Lombardi and Coley (2014) echoed this sentiment and found that working mothers were often forced to be less involved in their children's early education than they might otherwise choose.

These studies provided examples of parental thinking in their decisions regarding their children's early education (Kocyigit, 2015; Lombardi & Coley, 2014). However, no studies focused specifically on why parents who did not choose to send their children to pre-K made that decision. All studies that I examined used parents who both had and had not sent their children to pre-K. I hoped it would be useful and potentially valuable to focus on the perspectives of those parents who sent their children to kindergarten (in locations where such attendance was not mandatory) but not pre-K.

This study was needed because a significant portion of eligible children in the United States did not attend preschool programs despite their demonstrated benefits (Armour, 2014). Whether children attended pre-K, assuming that such programs were

available in a given locale, was primarily due to decisions made by their parents.

Maxwell (2012) stated, “3 percent of U.S. children who were 3 and 4-year-olds did not participate in preschool in the three years spanning 2008-2010” (para. 1). Given the societal problem of insufficient pre-K attendance, one must understand why parents make those decisions.

Problem Statement

Harrington (2015) demonstrated attendance in pre-K (preschool) classes was highly beneficial for children regarding their social and academic development. Attending pre-K leads to better outcomes later in life, such as academic achievement and future success (Michie, 2014). However, many children did not attend pre-K, even though such programs are readily available and free to all children in most locales (USDOE, 2015). Whether children attended pre-K was due to conscious decisions on the part of their parents. The problem studied was that many parents chose not to have their children attend pre-K, despite the benefits such programs confer. The related problem was that it was not well known why such parents made those decisions. While research examined parental motivations and involvement in their children’s education (Kocyigit, 2015; Lombardi & Coley, 2014), there was little research on why parents chose not to send their children to preschool. The reported lack of pre-K attendance indicated the need to understand why parents made those decisions. This research could help to expand the researcher’s understanding of parental motivations for these decisions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children. This purpose was determined by interviewing parents of children who were in kindergarten but were not enrolled in pre-K. The study's design was qualitative, as the purpose was to understand why this situation existed. A possible beneficial outcome was that school authorities could understand why parents might withhold their children from pre-K to address those concerns and, hopefully, encourage future parents who expressed those same concerns to enroll their children in these beneficial programs. The study problem arose from parents not being aware of the benefits of Pre-K; therefore, such an understanding would be beneficial.

Research Questions

The central research question was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, even though such programs are free and readily available?

From this question, three additional questions were developed:

1. Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs?
2. Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs?
3. What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was that parents wished the best educational, social, and life outcomes for their children and enrolling them in pre-K could help to achieve that goal. Therefore, I wanted to understand why some parents did not enroll their children in pre-K, assuming they wanted their children to have the best education available. Such understanding could help authorities encourage these and future parents to enroll their children in pre-K.

The infusion of preschool into the mainstream school setting and policies that provide public preschool as a family choice has been a state-by-state process that has grown over the past decade (Barnett, 2013). Preschool has gained a reputation for helping children become better prepared for kindergarten (NAEYC, 2016). Preschool models are very diverse in design, and there is no one standard for success.

Figure 1 indicates the infusion process of preschool ideas into the school system. School leaders incorporating pre-K into their practice must educate the public on the benefits of pre-K for their children. As pre-K is not mandatory, only by convincing parents of its value can authorities maximize pre-K enrollment. Figure 1 shows that this is a self-reinforcing and cumulative process; the concept of the beneficial nature of pre-K induces schools to offer such programs, which brings parents into the decision loop, thereby increasing the conceptual awareness of the benefits of pre-K education (see Figure 1).

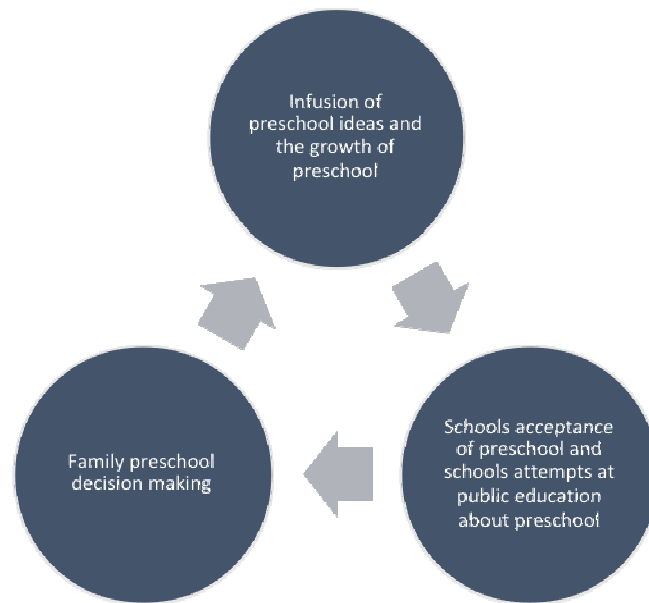


Figure 1. High-quality preschool infusion process (author's graphic).

Barnett (2013) stated much research was conducted on the benefits that high-quality preschool could bring to a child's education and social skills. Finding ways to inform families, and then getting the children into high-quality classrooms, represented a long process (Barnett, 2013). Over time, state leaders have provided funding for preschool (Armor, 2014). State leaders have adopted preschool funding and developed pre-K on many state levels, starting with Georgia in 1995 (Barnett, 2013). The movement was slow and might be linked to the infusion model by Rogers (2013). Rogers suggested that an idea or innovation might have been invented a long time ago, but some might not know it occurred before; therefore, they would see pre-K as new. The adoption of these new innovations was related to three steps: knowledge, persuasion, and decision (Rogers, 2013).

Bosetti (2004) found that families were often viewed as utility maximizers, who made decisions from clear value preferences based on calculations of the costs, benefits,

and probabilities of success of various options. Bowe, Gewirtz, and Ball (1994) pointed out that this simple rational approach failed to consider multiple factors involved when families made a decision. Descollonges (2009) concluded these families did not choose a particular preschool based on advancing their children's future. Instead, the choice was made based on the perception that they would not be viewed as good parents by others in the community if their children did not attend the preferred preschool. Walker and Clark (2010) found that the school choice decision was more heavily influenced by the length of time families had lived in the community, rather than factors of the school itself. Neugebauer (1996) said 89.2% of parents relied on the recommendations of friends, relatives, and coworkers before making a final decision. Students themselves were the primary determiner of which school they would attend (Schultz, 2009). Given this brief survey of approaches, that families' decision-making process was not simple.

School leaders should help families learn about their preschool options in their local areas. They also have a duty to help families understand what makes a high-quality preschool program. One way to start this process was to explore families' expectations regarding preschool to understand their decisions that arose from those expectations of whether to enroll their children in pre-K.

Nature of the Study

This study was a basic qualitative study. The phenomenon examined and understood was that despite the benefits of pre-K, many parents did not enroll their children in such programs. A basic qualitative study is the proper approach when one wishes to understand the perspectives of others on a particular phenomenon (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). The qualitative interview approach is best when one wishes to understand the phenomenon, as it is experienced or influenced by those persons who directly participate in the issue studied (Creswell, 2013).

I employed purposive sampling to select 10 to 12 participants and solicit open-ended responses to interviews. The final sample has 12 participants. Although qualitative samples must be large enough to confirm that the majority of perceptions are discovered, too large of a sample size can become repetitive and, ultimately, redundant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I collected the data by conducting semistructured interviews with parents of kindergarten-enrolled children at a single school in Indiana. The criteria was that the children of those parents were not previously enrolled in a pre-K program, and the families must have lived in the area long enough that enrolling in the local pre-K programs was an option. I collected the data via audio-recording interviews, and then later transcribed these for analysis.

My analysis of the data was completed with the assistance of the thematic coding software, NVivo. I performed open, axial, and selective coding to identify dominant, emergent, and recurrent themes in the data. I directed my analysis to the goal of understanding the “why” of the phenomenon.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms used in the study. Only terms that are used in ways other than their standard dictionary definitions are given.

High-quality program: For the purposes of this study, high-quality meant a school program that was nationally accredited with a high rating (4 out of a possible 4) from the state of Indiana. These two things were true for the study location.

Parental involvement: For this study, parental involvement was defined as decision-making regarding the academic progress of one's children, specifically whether to send one's children to pre-K (Kocyigit, 2015).

Pre-K: Pre-k refers to an abbreviation for pre-Kindergarten. This term refers to early education to prepare children for entry into kindergarten; this has also been referred to as nursery school (Harrington, 2015). For the purposes of this study, pre-K referred only to formal center-based programs.

Preschool programs: For this study, these were defined as any social and/or educational development programs administered to children prior to the start of formal schooling before kindergarten entry (Armour, 2014).

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects of the study that are believed true, but one cannot prove these as true (Creswell, 2013). I assumed that the participants were honest and forthcoming in their answers to the interview questions. I further assumed there were no unusual circumstances in this location that might skew the answers to the questions (e.g., socioeconomic or physical factors). Additionally, I assumed participants correctly self-identified as meeting the study inclusion criteria. For instance, I did not attempt to verify if a parent's child was not on the previous year's pre-K rolls. Moreover, I assumed that pre-K programs were indeed free; there was room for enrollment; and the program

offered was of high quality, as defined in this study. In situations where neither was the case, the central research question would not apply. In the study setting, pre-K was both free and readily available. Both programs met the Indiana state rating of Level 4 (4 being the highest level) in the Paths To Quality Rating system.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included participants who were parents of children attending a single school in a single metropolitan area in Indiana. In this school, 80 children attended kindergarten, and school records showed that 39 of them did not attend pre-K. I interviewed 12 participants using purposive sampling obtained from school records to obtain the necessary number of participants. This process was an appropriate sample size for a qualitative interview-based study (Creswell, 2013).

Delimitations are limitations of the study imposed by the researcher. The choice of a single location for the study was a delimitation. Furthermore, the focus on a single aspect of the topic—why parents declined to enroll their children in pre-K—was a delimitation because there were other ways to study this phenomenon, such as demographic analyses. Additionally, and significantly, I did not ask parents why they did enroll their children in pre-K, as they were not part of the phenomenon under study. This process was a delimitation because the following question could help obtain additional insight: Why did you enroll your child in pre-K?

Limitations

Limitations of the study include dependability of the data. I assumed that participants were honest and forthright, but there was no way to determine if they were

misrepresenting their views and motivations. Likewise, the transferability of the results was limited due to the size and homogeneity of the sample. The interview protocol was a researcher-constructed instrument. However, even if the pilot study appeared to validate the instrument, the choice of that instrument, rather than some other, was a limitation, as it was created for this specific study alone, and it was not tested nor published before.

I did not anticipate any significant effects of personal bias on my part. I believed that pre-K was beneficial, and parents should enroll their children in pre-K whenever possible. However, I understand this view was my own and that it might not be shared by others. I also realized that identifying parents who did not enroll their children might be a sensitive issue. I could never eliminate personal bias, but what I did was remain aware of it to mitigate its effects while conducting my research. I tried to remember to listen to their interview answers from their perspectives and not from my pre-K loving mind.

Significance

The significance of the study was that it could help to understand why parents did not enroll their children in pre-K. The benefits of pre-K for children were significant, which indicated that pre-K should be a standard part of school practice and curricula. However, as pre-K enrollment was not mandatory, educators and authorities must inform parents who made decisions about their children's early education about pre-K's benefits. This study's findings could help educators and administrators in providing such information.

The significance for practice could be that objections that parents had to pre-K enrollment could be identified and addressed in the future. Most parents might naturally

want to enroll their children in pre-K. However, this assumption might not be the case, and the low current rate of pre-K enrollment indicated that, as well.

As a result of this study, positive social change could be that children would receive better education, resulting in their enhanced well-being and life outcomes. Additionally, the findings of this study could be valuable for parent-school interaction. Parents might be encouraged to enroll their children in pre-K at higher rates if school authorities understood the factors that could inhibit them from doing enrolling their children.

Summary

This chapter described the study problem, which was that pre-K enrollment was shown as highly beneficial for children (at the study site, as well as elsewhere), but many were not enrolled. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children. To do so, I intended to interview parents of kindergarteners who did not enroll their children in pre-K. I thematically analyzed the interview transcripts to determine answers to the research question.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a comprehensive review of the recent literature in regard to the study topic. I will also discuss seminal literature relating to the conceptual framework of the study. I will identify and discuss the research gap.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A high-quality pre-K can have positive effects on families and students (Sandoval-Hernandez & Taniguch, 2013). The problem that this study addressed was that some parents elected not to send their children to pre-K at all, despite the published benefits to early education when pre-K was freely available. In the last few decades, pre-K was introduced in many states, with Indiana representing one of the last governments to pilot a program in 2014 (USDOE, 2015). The problem was that in a specific town in Indiana, almost half of the kindergarten age students did not experience attending an early childhood education program, regardless of whether educators offered a free but high-quality pre-K program at two different local area schools. Therefore, this issue was not a problem of cost and accessibility.

One of the programs included the nationally accredited Paths to Quality Level 4 pre-K at the local elementary school, and the other one included the federally funded Head Start program (USDOE, 2015). Both the publicly funded pre-K program and Head Start program's leadership have encouraged more families to enroll their children; however, the yearly numbers have not reached what they have expected. Hence, even though pre-K offered these children a chance to experience a classroom setting and schedule, as well as nurture kindergarten readiness skills, pre-K can help student entrance to kindergarten. There was a need to examine families' choice in terms of choosing one preschool over the other or even none at all. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children. I questioned

what society could learn from families about preschool choice that might inform educational outreach efforts to families going forward.

The current section is the review of existing literature that will highlight the need for this study. This literature review discusses the gap in the research. This chapter begins with review of the literature regarding the conceptual framework and ways in which it will support the current study, followed by the researchers who examined pre-K enrollment. Next is the literature on characteristics of a high-quality preschool and the effects of a high-quality preschool on child outcomes. In addition, Chapter 2 includes the differences between publicly funded pre-K program versus Head Start, the perceptions and attitudes toward preschool held by parents or primary caregivers of children, and the factors affecting these perceptions and decisions to enroll. This will be followed by a review of methodologies used by relevant studies. The literature gap and conclusion will close this chapter.

Materials for this literature review were sourced using Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Keywords used were *childcare decision making*, *early childhood education programs*, *Head Start program*, *parents' preschool decisions*, *parental involvement in early childhood*, and *pre-K enrollment*. A majority of studies included in this review were published within the last 5 years, from 2012 to the present.

Conceptual Framework

Considering the problem identified, study purpose, and research questions, a review of theories that inform the conceptual framework for this qualitative study will be reviewed. These included Bronfenbrenner (2005), which I deemed the most appropriate

for the study. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework informed this study.

Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework for human development was a socioecological model that elaborated on the interrelatedness of person-place contexts. Bronfenbrenner used the ecological systems theory to presuppose that children's development was influenced by multiple environmental factors, such as their relationships with their families, teachers, friends, and communities.

With ecological systems theory, a "child develops within a complex system of relationships affected by various levels of the surrounding environment" (Berk, 2006, p. 26). This theory served to help organize the environmental factors and relationships that can shape child development. An assumption of the theory was that children were amid layers of systems.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) labelled the relationship that a child had with the family, school, and neighborhood as the microsystem. He called the links between these different components of the microsystem the mesosystem. These links could include parent-teacher relationships and interactions, and community-parent relationships. Examples of these included their parents' workplace and the child's extended family. Lastly, there was also a concept called a macro system, which referred to the items that could influence the activities within the layers of the system. Examples of these included customs, values, and laws.

The main argument behind this theory was that various dynamic influences could have significant effects on a child's development, particularly a child's readiness for beginning education. Conversely, educational policies and laws, policymakers, and

national educational values serve as indirect factors behind children's development via the macro system. The expectations, beliefs, and practices of parents and teachers serve as direct factors behind children's readiness to start their education via the microsystem and mesosystem. Several researchers have also used the theory in their studies of children readiness and cognitive development (see Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015).

Parent's devotion to social norms of behavior and achievement includes such values as getting a good education and job, as well as being a productive citizen (Cadima et al., 2015). This aspect also includes the attachment and love that develops between children and key people in their lives, such as parents, teachers, relatives, and friends. In addition, the social links behind early childhood education include the fact that most persons are raised to believe in and value the law. Hence, being an honest citizen, a person makes higher levels of social capital and internalizes the standards of society by making these links between high quality education and adult success in life (Sibley, 2014). The adolescent not making this educational connection is more prone to engage in illegal actions due to lack of socialization (Sibley, 2014).

The social control hypothesis employs the socialization process for researchers to comprehend the causes of deviance and methods to avoid deviance as a developmental theory (Sibley, 2014). Sibley (2014) created the hypothesis with four clear suggestions for public policies. Firstly, Sibley suggested that to decrease abnormal behavior, program leadership must help parents raise their children to emphasize conventionality and the development of strong relationship with prosocial behaviors and approaches. Secondly,

Sibley suggested that the bond between the compliant parent and child must be powerful for youth to develop a strong relationship with conventionality. Therefore, Sibley posited the need for program leaders to help parents build strong bonds with their children.

Sibley posited children must build strong investments in their schoolwork and family life.

Finally, Sibley suggested the program leaders must help young people assess the costs and profit of their actions. Children might not think cautiously about the costs of their actions. Sibley stated they were at risk of only considering the profits of abnormal acts and not the costs.

Cadima et al. (2015) examined behavioral engagement in learning over kindergarten and first grade with the use of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theoretical framework. The researchers examined the effects of child inhibitory control and facets of the classroom context, specifically teacher-child relationship quality, perceived peer-teacher conflict, and students' levels of behavioral engagement during the Kindergarten years. The researchers evaluated 145 children's behavioral engagement levels, as measured by teachers in kindergarten and observed by teachers in first grade. Results showed that at the start of the kindergarten level, inhibitory control, closer teacher-child relationships, and lower levels of perceived peer-teacher conflict led to the students acting more engaged in kindergarten. These findings supported the theory that high quality pre-K was beneficial to later success in life because multiple contributors at the individual, dyadic, and classroom level could all influence and shape a child's development as they transitioned to kindergarten, and then first grade.

There are also studies that used ecological systems theory in the evaluation of preschool enrollment (see Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014; Taylor, Gibson, & Hurd, 2015). Lee et al. (2014) examined an early childhood education program, Head Start, to determine if enrollment in this program linked with the child's school readiness. The researchers also evaluated the program in comparison to other specific types of child care. The researchers used Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological model to describe development as a process that could unfold over time and at the same time, as influenced by interactions that occurred in diverse environmental contexts.

Through this approach, Lee et al. (2014) found no significant differences in kindergarten outcomes between students who enrolled in Head Start and those who did not, if the alternative care arrangements of the students were not considered in the analysis. However, when one disaggregated nonparticipant by type of arrangement, the findings indicated that those who underwent Head Start had better academic outcomes compared to children who just earned their early education through parental care or other non-parental care. However, the findings also showed that children, who enrolled in pre-K and other center-based care before they went to kindergarten, performed better compared to those who enrolled in Head Start. According to Lee et al., the findings of large academic benefits for children who would otherwise not have enrolled in early childhood education programs are both theoretically and practically-sound. This is because most Head Start participants mostly care that children did not have the chance to enter center-based arrangements (Lee et al., 2014).

The findings led to the conclusion that Head Start participation was specifically effective, especially for those at risk of starting their kindergarten education already at a disadvantage to their peers. In addition, Lee et al. (2014) concluded that participation in Head Start could improve the academic skills among children who were diagnosed with low initial cognitive ability. The findings disputed evidence that indicated Head Start did not have effect on the children as strong as pre-K programs in boosting children's cognitive development (Hill, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2015; Magnuson & Duncan, 2016).

Through his views on social constructivism, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that the earlier the children began to process abstract moral concepts, the more likely they were to incorporate these in tangible ways to their outward behavior. In many ways, the preschool educational format provided substantial opportunity to teach the value of fairness to others. Moreover, educators could teach mutual consideration for the rights and sensibilities of classmates, and the principles underlying general concepts of socially appropriate moral behavior in society.

Early Childhood Needs

Parents make decisions, including early childhood education, for their children based on their needs. These needs and the parents' preferences affect decisions involving education and development. This section includes a discussion of these needs during the early childhood years.

Safety Needs

Guaranteeing the physical safety of children is one of the most significant requirements in the childcare environment. Largely, the factors that must be accounted

for to ensure the physical safety of children relate to the timeline of physical development in infants and young children (Britto et al., 2016; Fraiberg, 2015; Hoyne, Schanzenbach, & Almond, 2016).

By toddlerhood, fear of heights and of falling is reflexive; however, one's increased mobility presents potential danger of another type (Ralli & Payne, 2016; Worley & Goble, 2016). Toddler's lack the necessary vestibular feedback efficiency that enables adults to anticipate and adjust for loss of balance (Ralli & Payne, 2016; Worley & Goble, 2016). As a result, they often lose their footing suddenly, whether by virtue of ambulating too fast for their physical abilities or because they change direction without transferring their weight in the manner that adults do without conscious thought countless times every day. Safety in day care facilities is paramount in importance and encompasses numerous considerations (Ralli & Payne, 2016; Worley & Goble, 2016).

The implications of this comparative lack of balance and ambulatory stability in toddlers is that the day care facility must remain free of sharp corners and any other types of protrusions capable of inflicting injury in conjunction with accidental bumps and falls. The most practical methods of implementing this safety measure include selecting furniture and fixtures with rounded edges and applying foam padding to any exposed edges or corners (Kaufman, Kaufman, & Nelson, 2016; Landry et al., 2014). Likewise, one may reduce the chances of injuries from falls by positioning furniture and equipment away from the most travelled paths used by toddlers most regularly. By careful positioning of potentially dangerous surfaces away from open areas, one may reduce the

chance for injury simply by minimizing the opportunity to build up momentum anywhere near exposed corners and edges (Ralli & Payne, 2016; Worley & Goble, 2016).

In the post-toddler years, potential dangers posed by accidents and falls remain high, even though the most common mechanism of the occurrence changes (Kaufman et al., 2016; Landry et al., 2014). Specifically, older children, between ages 4 and 8, are no longer at risk from spontaneous loss of balance, but the risks associated with their high energy level and ability to ambulate with considerable speed presents new dangers equally important to mitigate through careful environmental design. Clear glass is a particularly important concern because highly energetic children are prone to running into things, especially when distracted by environmental stimuli (Kaufman et al., 2016; Landry et al., 2014).

The increasing strength and coordination associated with the middle childhood years also corresponds to increasing risks from falls and other mishaps. This aspect is especially important because relative bone strength and density both lag behind the growing child's ability to generate forces capable of producing significant injury (Kaufman et al., 2016; Landry et al., 2014). For that reason, appropriately padded floors and outdoor play areas are required to minimize the incidence and magnitude of injuries from falls occurring from climbing and roughhousing where hard indoor surfaces or concrete outdoor areas may otherwise present a danger of contusions or broken bones (Kaufman et al., 2016; Landry et al., 2014).

Socialization Needs

One of the most important functions of early socialization is the process of instilling fundamental moral values and a socially conscious perspective that emphasizes mutual consideration and respect of other people. According to experts in developmental psychology (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2005), children are already capable of understanding concepts. These concepts include fairness, compassion, and social responsibility long before children can articulate those ideas verbally.

The preschool environment already presents myriad situations where children must wait their turn or share resources with their classmates (Edwards et al., 2014; Mita, Gray, & Goodell, 2015; Paulus & Moore, 2014). While teachers may achieve compliance strictly through instructions, they should engage students in discussions about the bases of fairness and responsibility during those opportunities for learning. One of the simplest methods of incorporating lessons of this nature may use one's responsibility to keep the preschool classroom clean in conjunction with explanations about the cleaning staff and the fact that their jobs can be made harder or easier by the cooperation of children with respect to picking up after themselves. Often, preschool teachers already require active participation on the part of children in this regard. Therefore, the suggestion relates more to taking advantage of the opportunity for its potential value as a learning tool, instead of requiring cooperation in the short term to accomplish specific tasks without a moral lesson (Edwards et al., 2014; Mita et al., 2015; Paulus & Moore, 2014).

In fact, both the preschool environment and the primary school grades present tremendous opportunities to develop moral lessons from ordinary procedures without the

need for additional expenditures or resources specifically designed for that purpose. For another example, many classrooms already have small pets, such as reptile terrariums or fish tanks. These represent viable bases for specific lessons intended to promote a sensitivity to animals that, according to many psychologists, are closely related to the appropriate development of empathy for human beings as well (Edwards et al., 2014; Mita et al., 2015; Paulus & Moore, 2014). Otherwise, only children already inclined toward sensitivity for animals benefit from their inclusion in the educational environment, while students not so inclined either ignore the classroom mascots or even harm them if given the opportunity. Conversely, when educators actively incorporate the exhibit into a lesson on the moral basis for sensitivity to animals, they contribute to the formation of a moral conscience even where direction of that kind is lacking at home (Edwards et al., 2014; Mita et al., 2015; Paulus & Moore, 2014).

Moral Needs

In much the same way, the preschool and primary grade school environment are conducive to teaching other important moral values that are often postponed until much later, despite the fact that early introduction to those concepts is much more likely to result in absorption compared to later introduction (Aboud, Singla, Nahil, & Borisova, 2013; Husband, 2012). Racism, sexism, and other forms of bias that are no longer condoned in American society are also capable of being addressed in the preschool years, so those important lessons occur before children receive contradictory messages from the external environment (Aboud et al., 2013; Husband, 2012).

All too often, educators and other caregivers perform their professional responsibilities in a vacuum, concentrating strictly on their narrow tasks of teaching the alphabet or providing meals at the appropriate time. Both the classroom setting, and the day care environment can provide myriad of opportunities for children to experience significant social and emotional development, albeit in an informal capacity (Crosnoe, Bonazzo, & Wu, 2015; Guo, Peng, Yu, Xia, & Qiang, 2016; Sette, Baumgartner, Laghi, & Coplan, 2016). The everyday interactions between preschool and grade school students contain a wealth of information into the social adjustment and emotional development of children without any formal diagnostic psychological testing whatsoever. Excessive shyness and reluctance to participate in classroom (or recreational) activities or to contribute to classroom discussions may suggest the need for formal assessment (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2016). In fact, the inclusion of a rich classroom environment is doubly useful, because in addition to promoting attentiveness and subject matter retention, it further highlights the difference between children whose enthusiasm and classroom involvement falls within the normal ranges expected for their age group and vice versa (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2016).

Similarly, while instances of aggression toward others are often dealt with in the context of isolated incidents, these may also provide the basis for concern even without formal assessment of any kind. Researchers have well established that physical aggression or outright violence perpetrated by children often indicates that they have been exposed to violence in the home or to significant other frustrations for which they have no other outlet (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2016). While

professional assessment and expertise is required to explore any such concerns in depth, the preschool educator still occupies a unique position from which preliminary evidence of this nature is clear in the ordinary classroom environment. Excessive competitiveness is also ignored more often than it is appreciated as a possible indication that a child is overcompensating for pressures or inadequacies in the home environment (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2016).

Educators who observe acute competitiveness that exceeds what seems appropriate for age and circumstances may initiate informal assessments by engaging the child in conversation about “winning” versus “participating.” (Chamberlin & Maloney, 2013; Heredia, 2015). Similarly, teasing of the type traditionally considered “normal” in the educational environment is now known to relate to long-lasting consequences to its victims. Behavior of this type, which actually borders on bullying, often indicates social and developmental issues that will require formal intervention at some point.” (Chamberlin & Maloney, 2013; Heredia, 2015). As in the case of other behavioral and developmental issues, informal assessment provides the opportunity for earlier intervention with beneficial results more readily achievable earlier rather than later. In general, the tendency of educators to ignore the potential diagnostic value of observable childhood behavior probably relates to two factors:

1. Children are extremely task-oriented, they tend to respond in a microcosmic instead of macrocosmic way to instances of behavioral abnormalities.
2. Children also lack specific training in child psychology, they may be reluctant to overstep the bounds of their responsibilities into this area

However, the ordinary preschool and grade school environment is far too replete with valuable information and potential insight into the comparative social development and emotional state of children not to encourage educators to make fuller use of their vantage point for the purposes of initiating informal assessments (Chamberlin & Maloney, 2013; Heredia, 2015).

Human social culture differs so much from society to society that it is virtually impossible to assess the meaning or significance of human conduct without reference to the external social environment (Guinote, Cotzia, Sandhu, & Siwa, 2015; Spencer, 2013). Behaviors that are tolerated, condoned, or encouraged in some cultures are discouraged, even punished, in others. Simple examples that pertain to childhood include eating with one's hands, which is perfectly appropriate in certain societies but not in Western culture, where children are expected to eat with utensils, especially by the time they are of age to enter the educational system (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013).

Whereas eating with one's hands is not necessarily harmful to the child in and of itself, persistent refusal to use utensils may indicate developmental issues by virtue of the child's failure to comply with social norms of the culture. This fundamental tenet of ecological psychology emphasizes the importance of appropriate learning of social norms and cultural values as one measure of healthy psychological and social development, wholly irrespective of the objective importance of the particular matter through which noncompliance manifests itself (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013). For another example, concepts of modesty and nakedness vary quite substantially among different human cultures. Whereas it may be perfectly acceptable for children of certain ages to be

unclothed in various degrees in public in some societies, the same behavior is considered extremely unusual and even disturbing in others. Therefore, failing to adhere to societal expectations and social norms pertaining to public nakedness in a society where greater modesty is expected, even of children, may be extremely problematic, particularly in the preschool environment (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013).

Whereas many social norms do have objective moral bases, many more are purely the result of social convention and subjective expectations (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013). In general, children who exhibit difficulty adhering to the most basic social norms are likely to be acting out as a manifestation of a need for attention, or even as a means of asking (indirectly) for help. Again, the educator who witnesses childhood behavior that is profoundly noncompliant with social norms occupies a unique vantage point for initiating informal assessment and possible referral for formal intervention or, at the very least, formal inquiry into causation (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013).

Effects of Preschool

Early childhood education programs have proliferated since the early 20th century. Formal assessments of these programs had been carried out at least five decades ago or since the 1960s (Curtis & Carter, 2014; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). Leaders designed programs, such as Head Start, with the objective of giving low-income children the chance to undergo a preschool program that could respond to their health, social, and psychological needs (Curtis & Carter, 2014; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). Since then, the academic interest in the value and effectiveness of early childhood development programs increased. Until now, researchers have continuously looked at what made early

childhood education and whether it was something that parents could risk foregoing for their children. (Curtis & Carter, 2014; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013).

Researchers have documented the importance of the early years of a child's life, emphasizing this period as the determining factor in the child's subsequent development in health, education, and overall well-being. Researchers have also found that brain development is important during these early years (Heckman & Raut, 2012; Shonkoff, Richter, van der Gaag, & Bhutta, 2012). Early childhood programs are found to benefit all children, but more so children suffering from disadvantages because of their race, socio-economic status, and disabilities (Heckman & Raut, 2012).

Researchers have linked high quality preschool with different positive outcomes (Beecher, Abbott, Petersen, & Greenwood, 2016; Gordon et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2015; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkof, 2016; Sandilos et al., 2015). Children who have attended a high-quality pre-K program have been found by these studies to not only have a better chance at having a positive academic outcome, including lower retention rates and better grades (Beecher et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2015; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkof, 2016; Sandilos et al., 2015). Other researchers have found that even for at least a year of high quality pre-K education, children could already achieve better outcomes in their later years and avoid incarceration (Arteaga, Humpage, Reynolds, & Temple, 2014; Harrington, 2015).

Increased Kindergarten Readiness

Preschool has gained a reputation for helping children become better prepared for kindergarten (NAEYC, 2016). Preschool models are diverse in design, and there is no

one standard for success (NAEYC, 2016). Integration of the preschool into the mainstream school settings and providing public preschool as a family choice for their children is now a state-by-state process that has grown over the past decade (Barnett, 2013; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Karoly, Auger, Kase, McDaniel, & Rademacher, 2016). However, generalizations about the above factors are difficult at best and spurious at worst because of the vast differences that exist in the provision of early childhood development programs, such as Head Start. For example, Entwisle, Alexander, and Steffel (1999) reported that these early childhood development programs are extremely varied in curricular content and delivery methods. In this regard, a Head Start program provided in Philadelphia enrolled socioeconomically disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-old children, primarily African Americans, who received a series of nursery, kindergarten, and first grade programs that were well staffed and "child-centered." Social workers and "home-school coordinators" worked at the Philadelphia Head Start initiative and established close relationships between families and schools (Entwisle et al., 1999, p. 20).

Early childhood development programs also tend to differ in curricular offerings. For instance, a 1-year program provided by Louisville, Kentucky schools involved kindergartners in four different kinds of curricula: two of these programs used small groups and emphasized direct instruction. Two others (Montessori and Traditional) were geared toward "long-term development" and did not include group instruction (Entwisle et al., 1999, p. 19). However, another program was comprised of two or three summer sessions that lasted 10 weeks each. These sessions were then supplemented by weekly or bi-weekly sessions with a trained educator who visited children's homes throughout the

school year, with pupils remaining in the program for 2 or 3 academic years (Entwisle et al., 1999).

Finally, another early childhood development program was comprised of a preschool group that attended preschool during the morning for 5 weekdays for approximately 30 weeks over 2 successive years. This program also included weekly visits with mothers at the home (Entwisle et al., 1999). According to Entwisle et al. (1999),

These Head Start programs varied so widely in content, enrolled students in so many different sections of the country, and enrolled students so varied in age that to identify which elements of the Head Start programs are responsible for positive effects is impossible. (p. 19)

Complicating the analysis of the impact of these programs on kindergarten readiness and later academic achievement was the fact that the enrollments in each of the programs studied was small. These enrollments ranged from a few to a maximum of 100 pupils; as a result, the positive impact of these early childhood initiatives on academic success only became apparent when the data were aggregated at the national level. In this regard, Entwisle et al. (1999) noted the following:

The conclusion is now secure that high quality preschools can have significant long-term positive effects on children's life chances. The early Head Start children were almost all disadvantaged and African American, yet they were more likely than their counterparts who did not attend Head Start to graduate from high school and to graduate on time. It took many years to be sure about benefits from

preschools, but it is now clear that they do help children who are socially and economically disadvantaged to profit more from their subsequent schooling. (p. 20)

Moreover, participation in Head Start programs was also shown to minimize social inequality in the provision of kindergarten services to the extent that socioeconomically disadvantaged children performed at a level that was comparable to their more affluent counterparts (Entwisle et al., 1999).

Children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families will be required to attempt constantly to overcome any pre-existing gap in academic proficiency (Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier, Morgan, Farkas, & Maczuga, 2013). Unlike their more advantaged peers, poor children can experience academic failures more during the summer, because they usually do not have the chance to experience academically enriching vacation experiences that middle-class children experience but take for granted (Entwisle et al., 1999). Examples of these include museum visits, organized sports, camping, and even overseas summer education. This educator recommends that lower socioeconomic families shall expand the provision of kindergarten to include summer months and be universally accessible (Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013).

In this regard, researchers have often used the variables of socioeconomic status and previous experience with an early childhood development setting to establish the individual child's readiness level for entry into kindergarten. These variables were assessed quantitatively by a team of public school kindergarten teachers who received

training from the author in the administration of the assessment procedures (Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013). These relied on enrollment in a school's federally funded free breakfast and lunch program to identify pupils from lower socioeconomic families.

Researchers have shown that for every dollar spent on early childhood development saves seven dollars in future spending (Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013). Research has also shown that early childhood development initiatives are effective in improving academic outcomes for children who are classified as being disadvantaged and at-risk for school failure. Indeed, the growing body of evidence points to a direct correlation between the positive effects of early childhood educational initiatives and academic and professional success in later life (Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013).

In addition, there remains a dearth of national data concerning the impact of children's schooling prior to their entry into kindergarten (Entwisle et al., 1999). Furthermore, most children in the United States attend some type of kindergarten. Despite this, there is an enormous amount of difference in kindergarten standards and policies from state to state, thereby complicating the formulation of developmentally appropriate classrooms while also ensuring that young children are prepared for the academic requirements of higher grades (La Paro, Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2006). For instance, according to La Paro et al. (2006), "Kindergarten lasts merely two and one-half hours in some states, and a full day (6-7 hours) in others; kindergarten attendance is

mandatory in some states and optional in others” (p. 190). Increasingly though, the trend in recent years has been on providing kindergarten in a full-day format.

The trend toward full-day kindergarten has been fueled in large part by changes in U.S. society, as well as the growing recognition of the need for more intensive early childhood development programs (Curley, 2016; Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). The studies of the effectiveness of half-day versus all-day kindergarten in promoting academic achievement have resulted in some mixed findings. Despite these mixed results, a preponderance of the research to date has indicates that students enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs benefitted academically more compared to their half-day counterparts and demonstrated improved behavioral characteristics (Curley, 2016; Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). Likewise, the focus on children’s readiness for early childhood education has increased in significant ways in recent years in the United States based on the growing numbers of failing students and failing (Curley, 2016; Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). These challenges to the provision of high quality educational services have been compounded by the need to educate an increasingly diverse student body, as the United States continues to experience fundamental shifts in its demographic composition (Curley, 2016; Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016)

While the construct of “kindergarten readiness” was both multifaceted and varied, the facilitation of the transition into kindergarten would devolve to the classroom teacher (Benzies et al., 2014; Recchia & Bentley, 2013). These educators also noted, though, that because the transition into kindergarten included a dynamic and interactive process that involved all of the participants, the role of the teacher could not be viewed in isolation

(Benzies et al., 2014; Recchia & Bentley, 2013). By identifying the correlation between children's readiness to make the transition into the formal educational setting provided by kindergarten and actual social and academic achievement levels, if one exists, opportunities for improving the process can be identified and steps taken to focus on those constraints that adversely affect children's ability to make this transition smoothly and successfully (Benzies et al., 2014; Recchia & Bentley, 2013).

Benzies et al. (2014) specifically assessed the effects of early childhood on low-income children's academic performance by following children from preschool to 7 years of age. By tracking their learning outcomes and attributing them back to preschool attendance, Benzies et al. found that students who have attained an early childhood program are more prepared to handle latter grades and do well in their elementary education.

Estes (2015) particularly evaluated the lasting the effects of preschool. In particular, Estes evaluated the influence of early childhood programs on the social and academic readiness of the children. Results indicated that there were long-term effects associated with enrolling in pre-K or other early childhood programs (Estes, 2015). In particular, the early childhood education participation could include a strong link between high academic success and those that attended preschool (Estes, 2015). The program improved the academic attainment of the children and their social skills beyond years.

Recchia and Bentley (2013) in particular, focused on six children and their transition to kindergarten after attending a high-quality preschool program and found that their early childhood education participation strengthened their mind habits. This makes

children's transition toward the kindergarten setting much easier and more successful. Children are more prepared to enter kindergarten. Sandoval-Hernandez and Taniguch (2013) also evaluated the effects of early childhood program on children, but specifically focused on their math achievement from kindergarten to the fourth grade. The majority of the students who participated in an early childhood program experienced above average rating in math testing.

Researchers have confirmed that undergoing or participating in a high-quality preschool can lead to a higher level of readiness among young children to enter elementary school (Andrews et al., 2012). According to these researchers, preschool equips the children with skills that enable them to have better behavioral, socio-emotional, and cognitive outcomes (Andrews et al., 2012). For children who are at-risk of failing or doing poorly at elementary schools, attending or participating in a high-quality preschool can reverse this risk. Studies have shown that this could improve their attendance and test scores when they enter elementary (Andrews et al., 2012). Moreover, it can improve grade-level promotion rates and reduce risks of being referred to special education (Andrews et al., 2012).

Higher Academic Achievement

Children who attend informal care are more likely to watch television during school, are engaged in less cognitively stimulating activities, have fewer educational resources, and have fewer interactions with adults when compared with their peers who attend formal preschool programs (Bumgarner & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Filatriau, Fougère, & Tô, 2013). While there were exceptions, such as homeschooled children doing well in

college, more children who attended high quality pre-K were found to attain higher test scores (Bumgarner & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Filatriau et al., 2013). They are also likelier to graduate, attend, and obtain secure jobs. In addition, they are likelier to experience lower risks of incarceration rates and ultimately be successful, as measured by higher lifetime earnings (Michie, 2014). In particular, Belfield and Garcia (2014) found that the years before school are instrumental in the cognitive development of children because these years are formative for brain development. As such, strong cognition improvement during these years can affect the direction of their educational pathways. Children who attended the program during early childhood were likelier to graduate from college and had greater annual earnings and other better adulthood outcomes (Campbell et al., 2014).

Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, and Barnett (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of early childhood education programs on preschoolers and the extent of cognitive and affective gains that can be derived. Data from 123 comparative studies of early childhood interventions were analyzed, both quasi-experimental and randomized studies. The researchers found that in the host of original and synthetic studies included in their analysis, it can be concluded that early childhood education programs can lead to different positive outcomes, the clearest of which is the enhanced cognitive development of the preschoolers. Preschool programs with a direct instruction component are more effective in enhancing the children's cognitive development. Apart from cognitive development, early childhood programs can also improve the children's social skills and school progress. The findings indicated that contrary to previous researchers' findings, programs with extra services provided did not necessarily produced students with better

cognitive abilities than other programs (Camilli et al., 2010). As such, the researchers concluded that the extra services will only be beneficial if there is extra instructional time. The benefits of extra services could be undermined if these were given within the same period.

Reduced Inequality

Researchers have showed that preschool could reduce inequality and gap (Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Heckman & Raut, 2016; Magnuson & Duncan, 2016; Waldfogel, 2015). According to various literature, it can improve minorities and students with disabilities' academic outcomes (Andrews et al., 2012; Ansari & Crosnoe, 2015; Finch et al., 2015; Huston et al., 2015; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Sherfinski et al., 2015; Yazejian et al., 2015).

Effects on Language, Literacy, and Mathematics

There were studies that specifically found that early childhood education could lead 3- to 4-year old to experience a boost in their early language, literacy, and mathematics skills immediately after the program. The studies that found this particular benefit of early education programs were mostly rigorous in their research. The studies ranged from those that evaluated small demonstration programs and those that assessed large public programs like Head Start and state-mandated pre-K programs (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). According to the studies, early childhood education could provide the students enrolled around a third of a year of extra learning to the students compared to children without access to preschool (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Improves Children's Social Development

Even though not as clear-cut as the positive effects of early childhood education on children's cognitive and achievement outcomes, it has been found that preschool can also positively influence socio-economic development. There are researchers who found that participating in an early childhood program, whether it be Head Start, Perry Preschool and the like, can lead to less externalizing behavior problems when they enter elementary (Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, & Jamil, 2014; Lillard et al., 2013). Some researchers found that problem behavior, including hyperactivity could be reduced. There are researchers who specifically found early childhood education lowered children's level of timidity and increased their level of attentiveness (Hamre et al., 2014; Lillard et al., 2013). Early childhood programs improved children's capability to participate and be engaged in the classroom. They are simply more engaged than neither child who participated in pre-Kindergarten nor Head Start. Researchers have found that early childhood education programs can modestly moderate children's aggressive behaviors (Hamre et al., 2014; Lillard et al., 2013).

Effects on Health

Researchers have found that apart from influencing the cognitive and socio-emotional development, early childhood programs can also have a positive impact on children's health (Campbell et al., 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012). The majority of the researchers who have focused on early childhood education's health effects did so by evaluating Head Start (Campbell et al., 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012). These researchers have revealed that Head Start led to improved child immunization rates and to reduced

child mortality, primarily because the programs offered include health services such as immunization and health screening for common children illnesses, such as measles, diabetes, whooping cough, and other respiratory ailments (Campbell et al., 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012). In addition, researchers have indicated that Head Start generated small positive effects on certain health indicators of the children, such as improved dental care (Campbell et al., 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Leaders at Head Start encouraged parents to ensure their children have health insurance and that they report their children's health conditions. Again, Head Start offers preventive dental care, comprehensive screening, and monitored immunization programs. When children need to access a regular medical home, Head Start assists them with the process (Campbell et al., 2014; Shonkoff et al., 2012).

Limitations of Early Childhood Education Programs

Researchers have also revealed that another year at preschool or the second year of early childhood education is likely to lead to more and sustainable benefits to the children (Starkey, Klein, & DeFlorio, 2013; Wong, Lu, & Lo, 2012). According to these studies, higher-quality preschool can have bigger and more positive effects on the children develop if they are enrolled. If they are enrolled longer, then they are likely to experience sustainable gains, which can last even as the child leaves preschool (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012). Based on the literature, process quality features refer to the immediate experiences of the children with engaging in positive and stimulating interactions. These features serve as the most valuable contributors to the children's improvements in their language, literacy, and mathematics skills. At the same time, these

interactions improve the children's social skills significantly. In addition, the structural features of quality or those described as quality features that change when the settings changed can be instrumental in creating conditions for positive process of quality.

However, these features do not guarantee the positive effects (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012).

In particular, even though smaller group sizes and better proportion of staff to students can serve as the right environment for children to experience more positive interactions, these are not factors that guarantee these improvements in interactions will occur (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012). These conditions are inadequate. Teacher qualifications can be one factor that is lacking. Teacher qualifications, such as higher educational attainment and background, having the right certification to handle early childhood education, and having the right compensation, can have significant effects on the setting for children to experience positive interactions (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012).

However, researchers have claimed that teacher qualifications may not even be enough, as well (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012). The qualifications alone do not guarantee that children will acquire greater gains over the course of their preschool years compared to those who did not undergo preschool. Some researchers have found that stronger outcomes could be achieved if preschool programs have both structural features of quality as well as stronger support for teachers to assure that the immediate experiences of the children are replete with rich content and full of stimulation (Starkey

et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012). However, teachers should also not forget to make the experiences emotionally supportive (Starkey et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2012).

However, there are also researchers who claimed that these positive effects are not lasting. These are only initial benefits but eventually, at-risk students will perform poorly in elementary school (Gomby et al., 2013; Lipsey, Farran, & Hofer, 2015). Some researchers have explained why preschool benefits may not last and might only be experienced as children transition to elementary school. They claimed that the lack of continuous follow-up with the participating students, inadequate family support, and low level of parental involvement, limited intensity, or duration of the preschool program makes the preschool benefits short term (Halpern, 2013). In addition, some studies also asserted that the quality of elementary schools is important. Even if a child attends a high-quality preschool, the benefits one received there cannot last if the child transitioned to a low-quality elementary school (Gomby et al., 2013; Lipsey et al., 2015).

The researchers have claimed that inadequate and inconsistent support can compromise the benefits of the preschool through the early elementary graduates because eventually, the mere participation in preschool, regardless of the quality, will not prevent the children from encountering certain challenges in school (Gomby et al., 2013; Lipsey et al., 2015). Those who were originally at risk for poorer academic outcomes are not protected from encountering the same factors that could affect their performance even if they attended preschool, if they did not have adequate and consistent support. The researchers have recommended and called for ways to sustain early cognitive, social-

emotional, and academic gains so that all students will have the chance to thrive academically for a long time (Gomby et al., 2013; Lipsey et al., 2015).

Pre-K Program Versus Head Start

Evidence showed that high quality learning experiences could lead to higher levels of children's school readiness and subsequent academic achievement (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). As such, recent proposals at the federal and state levels called for the expansion of childhood education programs, which aim not to just serve more children and provide them with more opportunities but to address also the significantly negative effects of poverty on the well-being of children (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Included in the expansion is the federal Head start program, a comprehensive child development program that ensures children as young as three to receive preschool education and other services.

Studies have shown that 3-year-olds make up the majority of Head Start participants, increasing from 24% in 1980 to 40% in 2007. By 2010, they already made up 63% (Aikens, Klein, Tarullo, & West, 2013; Tarullo, Aikens, Moiduddin, & West, 2010). To expand Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, children need more chances of participating in the programs for multiple years. Most new enrollees now complete two years of Head Start (Aikens et al., 2013). Some 3-year-olds transition to pre-Kindergarten programs when they reach age four. The pre-K programs are state funded academically focused programs. It was unclear in the literature whether the Head Start programs could provide 2 years' worth of developmental benefits for children. While it was common for cross-grade curricula to enable students to build on what they

learned from the previous grade, even though they changed schools, it was unclear if the same was true for ECE programs.

Unlike the structure of primary education, wherein children are separated by grade levels or the state pre-K programs that only cater to 4-year-old children, the Head Start model gives both the 3- and 4-year-olds to study together in most classrooms (Hulseley et al., 2011). This implies that those who stayed for the whole 2 years in the program will not acquire that much of new knowledge. If they are already in the second year of the Head Start and yet continue to receive relatively similar experience or undergo similar activities instead of other and complex differentiated learning experiences, the students may not gain that much compared to switching to the more academically-inclined state pre-K program at the age of 4.

Even though many studies were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of individual ECE programs, few studies compared these to the Head Start programs. For example, Hill et al. (2015) calculated different regression discontinuity estimates for each age-4 program in Tulsa, OK and found larger effects from the participants enrolled in the state pre-K programs. However, and according to Ludwig and Phillips (2008), the effects of both types of early childhood programs can depend on the comparison treatment condition. Nevertheless, Zhai, Brooks, and Waldfogel (2011) utilized PS to match Head Start children to children in different ECE programs to evaluate if Head Start can generate improved cognitive and social outcomes among the participants compared to the children who received parental care or other noncenter-based care. They found that Head Start participants had better cognition and social skills compared to these children but not

when compared to pre-K students (Zhai et al., 2011). Instead, Head Start children had better social but not academic outcomes.

Some researchers have evaluated the Head Start program in comparison to the state-funded pre-K programs in terms of their curricula. According to Yoshikawa et al. (2016), a difference between the two programs is the curricula. Because 3 and 4-year-olds study at the same time in Head Start, it is usually the case that at age 3, Head Start graduates will enter their second year of the program and then encountering the same classroom, teacher, books, and other materials. If instruction did not change, then the children will not experience differentiated learning critical for their intellectual development (Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

According to Clifford and Crawford (2009), it is unclear if Head Start programs have hierarchical curricula, in that the learning activities change as the children age. Weiland and Yoshikawa (2013), who have evaluated the Head Start program, stated that the program curricula focused on the whole child, in that learning takes place for children if they completely participate in the studies. Conversely, in effective pre-K programs, the curricula are more domain-specific. Children are equipped with knowledge by experiencing increasingly complex lessons. The programs also build on the inherent hierarchy of skills within that domain (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013).

While there was evidence that the whole child approach could be effective in improving children's early learning (Birch & Videto, 2015; Crosnoe et al., 2015; Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015), there was little support found that specifically focused on the Head Start program (USDOE, 2015). In addition, curricula

effectiveness was heavily influenced by the extent that teachers implemented the curriculum diligently and with fidelity. Most researchers have not assessed this early childhood education (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013).

For children from underprivileged families, childcare programs and quality pre-Kindergarten programs have formed staged, enduring influence on their lives. These comprise of raising their high school graduation rates and reducing sin. One of the programs that make results in these areas is the Head Start program. As adults, Head Start graduates have revealed to have lesser crime rates (Crouter & Booth, 2014; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013).

African-American graduates were less likely to have been later charged or found guilty of a crime compared to their siblings who attended other playgroup programs, according to a large national survey of Head Start graduates (Maxon, Oladunni, & Jarrett, 2015; Sanders, 2015). Likewise, girls who did not attend Head Start were three times more likely to have been arrested by the age of 22 (15% vs 5%) compared to similar girls who had taken part in Head Start, as per a Florida study. For initial childhood expansion programs, Head Start plays a vital role as a national laboratory (Maxon et al., 2015; Sanders, 2015) Head Start took the challenge to concentrate on considerable results for social ability and school-readiness in young children. Head Start Quality Research Centers have been created to instigate this effort by four main educational organizations and Head Start grantees around the country and are piloting new methods to computing and gathering data. Head Start is teaming up with the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health to build up strong scientific research on young children

and is also raising investment in study that follows children and families over time (Maxon et al., 2015; Sanders, 2015).

Some students show elevated levels of unsociable, violent behavior as reported by Head Start teachers (Crouter & Booth, 2014; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013). Elevated levels of rebellious and felonious behaviors are noticeable in later years by most of young children with elevated levels of violent behaviors according to research. By offering services to advance the social/emotional and behavioral development of youngsters, Head Start leaders deal with this problem. The Incredible Years program is used by some Head Start leaders to cure children at-risk for behavioral problems afterwards (Crouter & Booth, 2014; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013).

Problem-solving abilities and nonaggressive communal skills are emphasized in children by parents, teachers, and family service workers who received training at Incredible Years. Children in Head Start were arbitrarily allotted to a control group or The Incredible Years group in a study performed in Washington State. Amongst the children with conduct problems, a remarkable decrease in aggressive and oppositional behavior is observed majority of children in the control group and 96% of those who participated in Head Start/Incredible Years (Crouter & Booth, 2014; Haskins, 2016; Hillemeier et al., 2013).

Children below three get the benefits of Head Start through an established program called Early Head Start (EHS; Ayoub, Bartlett, Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, 2015; Vogel, Boller, Xue, & Murphy, 2013). Through centers or through home visits, families are assisted. Compared to children who had been enrolled to the programs, children who

did not receive the program showed nearly four times elevated adolescent criminal behavior rate and much more harsh offences ten years later (Ayoub et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2013).

The micro system is inclusive of the immediate settings in which the child is developing including home and school (Ayoub et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2013). The microsystem is a significant determiner of the activity, roles, and interpersonal relations and the individual patterns of these. Researchers have defined community as individuals linked by their cultural, ethical, or racial background or a group of individuals sharing common interest, goals, and needs (Ayoub et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2013). The influence of the home and school are the child's first approach to learning (Ayoub et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2013).

Some researchers have evaluated the Head Start programs and Pre-k programs in their peer effects. Jenkins, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, and Vandell (2016) used data from the Oklahoma pre-K study to evaluate these two "pathways" into kindergarten through regression analysis. Authors evaluated the effects of each age-4 program and propensity score weighting to address selection. Their results indicated that children attending Head Start at age 3 acquired stronger pre-reading skills when enrolled in a high-quality pre-Kindergarten at age 4 compared to when they remain for 2 years at the Head Start program. Both pre-K and Head Start have relatively similar effects on improvements in children's pre-writing skills or pre-math skills. They concluded that the sequencing of learning experiences could influence more academic programming effects of early learning programs.

Jenkins et al. (2016) compared children who completed 2 years of Head Start and compared these to the students who attended Head Start at 3-years-old, and then transferred to a high-quality state preschool at the age of four. The researchers evaluated their and found that children who attended 2 years of Head Start attained stronger pre-reading skills compared to those who just attended a year. However, they did not do better compared to those who transferred to a high-quality pre-K. Those who did 1 year of Head Start, and then 1 year in state preschool, had even higher pre-reading skills.

Robinson (2014) analyzed how Head Start helped students become readier and prepared for their academic years as well. Data from 133 preschool children and their social-interpersonal skills as they entered kindergarten were analyzed. Results showed this program enabled children to develop positive early social skills in preschool that were important for school readiness.

Conversely, Winterbottom and Piasta (2015) analyzed kindergarten readiness in children by comparing those enrolled in accredited preschool programs and non-accredited ones. Results showed that accreditation did not differentiate kindergarten readiness of children. Researchers have differentiated between the outcomes of Head Start versus public preschool, showing both have respective strengths and weaknesses (Barnett, 2013; Bierman et al., 2014; Bierman, Welsh, Heinrichs, Nix, & Mathis, 2015; Burgess, Chien, Morrissey, & Swenson, 2014; Coley, Votruba-Drzal, Collins, & Cook, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2016; Love, Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013; O’Gara, 2013; Schmitt, McClelland, Tominey, & Acock, 2015; Wen, Bulotsky-Shearer, Hahs-Vaughn, & Korfmacher, 2012).

OECD (2015) showed that preschool enrollment was rising steadily around the world except for the United States, which was far behind in the percentage of children enrolled in preschool. Belfield and Garcia (2014) conducted research into parent's thoughts on Kindergarten readiness, what it meant to them, and if preschool made a difference in their child's future education. Belfield and Garcia (2014) stated that studies that evaluated Head Start programs alone and not in comparison with other early childhood programs have indicated promising results.

Bierman et al. (2014) evaluated the effects of 1-year participation in the Research-Based, Developmentally Informed (REDI) intervention or "usual practice" of Head Start. They analyzed the learning and behavioral outcomes of 356 children of mixed racial groups as well as the quality of teacher-student interactions, emphasis on reading instruction, and school-level student achievement in 202 classrooms. Carrying out a hierarchical linear analysis, Bierman et al. (2014) found that REDI intervention can lead to higher kindergarten phonemic decoding skills, better learning engagement, and more competent social problem-solving skills. At the same time, the Head Start program led to reduced aggressive-disruptive behavior among the participating children. However, findings revealed that intervention effects on social competence and inattention can be influenced by the kindergarten context. Children entered schools with low student achievement were found to have benefitted the most in the Head Start program (Bierman et al., 2014).

According to Lee et al. (2013), the Head Start curriculum is truly designed for the neediest of children. Unique to the Head Start curriculum is the inclusion of

developmentally appropriate learning practices, wherein students are taught basic skills. The opportunity to learn basic skills is often not found in the pre-K's curriculum because there is an assumption that children had already learned those skills earlier, at home with their parents. According to the researchers, participation in Head Start gave more benefits to the children whose parents have less education compared to their peers with higher educated parents (Lee et al., 2013). In comparison to pre-K, as well as other center-based care, children with less educated parents benefited relatively similar to those who participated in Head Start (Lee et al., 2013). They also have superior academic ability when compared to students of Head Start whose parents are involved in their activities.

According to Lee et al (2013), children from disadvantaged families are less likely to have parents who are supportive and involved in their activities. Their home environments are also less likely to be educational. Their homes are also less likely to be cognitively stimulating compared to the children from more advantaged families. The findings of Lee et al.'s (2013) study also indicated that Head Start students' outcomes could be differentiated whether they are part time or full time. Children in full-time Head Start had more or less similar academic scores as children in pre-K but have higher scores in behavioral problems. This finding indicated that Head Start program leaders should devote more to activities to foster social and emotional wellbeing. This finding also indicated that more generally to higher quality care might be necessary in this early childhood education program (Lee et al., 2013).

Lee et al. (2013) claimed that there was a strong relationship between children's experiences in childcare and the progress of their early development. Therefore, Head

Start funding should be devoted more to targeting children who otherwise would not attend any form of early childhood education program because the cognitive benefits to them were the largest. Leadership expects Head Start programs to target and serve children from poorer backgrounds. Policymakers should focus on the quality of early childhood programs, including that of Head Start. The curriculum on literacy, math, and science must be improved further, as these can highly benefit the children's readiness and achievement in latter grade levels. At the time same time, improving programs' quality involves one encouraging cognitively stimulating and supportive interactions between the teachers and children (Lee et al., 2013). However, Crosnoe, Purtell, Davis-Kean, Ansari, and Benner (2016) claimed that one should not push for a dichotomy in analyzing early childhood education programs. One must compare more than simply Head Start programs and non-Head Start programs.

Factors Behind Perceptions and Enrollment

Parents' perceptions and decisions regarding preschool enrollment can be influenced by different factors. The first is family necessity (e.g., parental employment). Lombardi and Coley (2014) examined the school readiness of the children of mothers who work. Lombardi and Coley evaluated working mothers to check if their employment negatively influenced the cognitive scores of their children and the level of their child's school readiness. Results were inconclusive in that these decisions depended on the age of the child (Lombardi & Coley, 2014). If a mother starts working when the child already turned nine months, the effect is insignificant. However, if the mother started working at a much earlier time, then lower cognitive skills could be observed among the children.

The second set is family resources (e.g., income and household quality). The USDOE (2015) observed the state reports of preschool education and ways in which preschool age children could access early childhood education programs. The body found that because there was insufficient state funded preschool in Indiana, up to 85% have not enrolled in one program. Only 15% enrolled in a Head Start program.

Disadvantaged children enter kindergarten scoring approximately two full years behind their more advantaged peers in areas of early language and literacy development. Moreover, once these children fall behind, they often stay behind (Reardon, 2011). In addition, growing evidence has showed poverty, low parental education, and lack of employment linked with the Latino parents' selection of childcare and preschool (Coley et al., 2016; Crosnoe et al., 2016; Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013).

Particularly, Crosnoe et al. (2016) claimed that parents chose a preschool program according to the amount of money available to them. For parents with insufficient monetary and associated resources, Head Start might be their only viable option. Then, it was not right to generalize that some poorer families still had other resources and recourse to choose other types of early childhood programs, including pre-K.

Mitchie (2014) examined why parents chose a high quality or low-quality preschool program. The results are that often there is a cost factor and the author recommend more state funded high quality preschool programs be available. More research cites inequality of access for low-income families (Adams, Koball, Greenberg, Hanson, & Michie, 2016; Ansari & Crosnoe, 2015; Crosnoe et al., 2016; Glenn-Applegate, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2016; Greenberg, Adams, & Michie, 2016; Hanson,

Adams, & Koball, 2016; Hatfield, Lower, Cassidy, & Faldowski, 2015; Shah, Kaciroti, Richards, & Lumeng, 2016).

The last set is human capital factors (e.g., expectations for children's education). Choi and Dobbs-Oates (2016) studied how adult child relationships could make a positive difference in a child's education. Kocyigit (2015) evaluated the benefits of family and parent involvement in preschool from the perceptions of the teachers, administrators, and parents. The author evaluated the perceptions of these stakeholders during family involvement in preschool activities. Results showed that the time constraints of teachers and administrators often discouraged the parents from being more involved (Kocyigit, 2015).

Conversely, Nitecki (2015) evaluated the preschool programs, wherein parents were very highly involved in their children's activities. The researchers wanted to understand why even though family involvement was associated with higher achievement and success in school, gaps remained in family participation in preschool. Results indicated that even though parents themselves wanted to be involved in their children's education, several barriers prevented them from doing so (Nitecki, 2015). The barriers included time, money, and transportation. However, the parents were aware the involvement could affect their children's academic achievement tremendously.

In relation, Searle, Miller-Lewis, Sawyer, and Baghurst (2013) found that enhanced adult-child relationships could lead to lower risks of child hyperactivity/inattention and increase the level of children's engagement, helping them become school ready. Conversely, Sobkin, Ivanova, and Skobel'tsina (2013) evaluated

parent perspective about school and preschool education and found that parents had different expectations of their child's preschool experience. This finding indicated their choices of the schools for their children.

One more set is cultural factors (e.g., cultural matches between the home and school). Latino families now make up around 17% of the U.S. population and represent the fastest-growing sub segment of the country. By 2050, researchers expected that Latino families would constitute a third of the nation (Ansari & Winsler, 2015). Despite the large number of Latino families across the United States, they are the least likely group to enroll their children in some form of nonparental care, such as preschool, in the year before kindergarten (Ansari & Winsler, 2015). Some researchers have that these decisions are rooted in familial and cultural values (Ansari & Winsler, 2015); whereas, others suggested that it was an issue of access (Ansari & Winsler, 2015). Latino families tend to have less experience in the U.S. educational system (Crosnoe et al., 2016). There is a strong assertion that Latino parents prefer informal care arrangements, but other more recent researchers have disputed these claims and argue instead that the barrier is access (Ansari & Winsler, 2015). Many Latino parents became interested in preschool education and enrolled their children in formal programs when barriers were removed (Ansari & Winsler, 2015).

Childcare Decision Making

Majority of research studies on child care decision making process looks at how parents make child care choices. In general, however, the literature is still not as robust and still quite underdeveloped. Existing literature on this topic only looked at certain

aspects of this process, such as the number of options available to the parents, the sources they use to gather information, and the duration of the search when deciding on a school (Anderson, Ramsburg, & Scott 2005; Coyne, Amory, Kiernan, & Gibson, 2014). In addition, most of the studies looked at how mothers make the child care decisions as opposed to fathers. One of the main findings is that income level affects the decision-making process. Two large studies on how parents make childcare search processes are the ones by Anderson et al. (2005) and Layzer, Goodson, and Brown-Lyons (2007).

Anderson et al. (2005) found around 75% of parents utilizing subsidized care arrangement considered only one option in their search process while Layzer et al. (2007) found that only around 52% of low income parents considered more than one childcare arrangement. They concluded that the lack of income inhibited the parents from considering alternatives. In addition, Layzer et al. (2007) claimed that the number of options and parental satisfaction with the chosen arrangements not significantly relate to each other.

A review of literature showed that the duration of the search process could vary, but the majority claimed that the process did not take a long time. According to Layzer et al. (2007), families on average make a decision within a month. A more recent study by Forry, Isner, Daneri, and Tout (2014) found that 82% of respondents make the decision only within 2 weeks. The rest took longer, with the longest for 11 weeks. Forry et al. (2014) wondered if the short period devoted to the decision-making was linked to the perceived quality of arrangements and satisfaction. They found no differences in the

perceived quality of arrangements and satisfaction of parents who made the decisions within 2 weeks and those who made it after 11 weeks of contemplation.

Researchers on this literature topic also evaluated parental values and preferences in choosing a care arrangement. The studies are inconclusive. According to the literature, these differences can be explained by the methods they used and the dynamic nature of parental nature because of the fundamental differences in their culture, their experiences, and current circumstances (Britto et al., 2016; Johnson, Seidenfeld, Izard, & Kobak, 2013).

Researchers have revealed that parents have different criterion when assessing quality of a certain care setup. Some parents pay more attention to the quality of the caregivers. The trustworthiness of caregivers is one of the main and most important criteria for child care election (Britto et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2013). Conversely, there are also studies that found that financial considerations are the main factors behind a child care selection. Weber and Grobe (2011) found that parents who were part of a subsidy program were more likely to be pickier than those not in a subsidy program. As such, they were the ones who perceived trust as the most important reason when deciding on a provider. Quality of care for some parents was determined by how regular and open communication lines are. Moreover, Forry, Simkin, Wheeler, and Bock (2013) found that regular communication, opportunities for parents to be involved, and provider support of the family were the main signs for the participants that the option of care was of high quality.

Researchers have found that parental characteristics influence the childcare decision-making process (Van Laere & Vandebroeck, 2016). Parent demographics such as age, maternal education, and ethnicity can affect their decision. Findings revealed that those with a college degree are more likely to choose not according to cost but of quality, as measured through child: staff ratio and curriculum (Van Laere & Vandebroeck, 2016). Conversely, those with less than a high school education preferred programs with flexible hours and are low-cost (Grindal et al., 2016).

When it comes to racial identities, African American and Latin American parents were found to be less specific and less nitpicking about the programs (Gross, Breitenstein, Eisbach, Hoppe, & Harrison, 2014; McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, & Mundt, 2013). They were found more likely to say all characteristics and aspects of childcare arrangements were important. Conversely, White parents were found to be more specific about what they were looking for. They were more likely to assess practicality, learning, and other special characteristics of the arrangements before deciding. Moreover, employment and income levels can affect childcare preferences, as well. Mothers with jobs were found to prefer arrangements that offer practicality and flexibility. Researchers found that mothers who worked less hours were more inclined to choose according to quality compared to mothers working fewer hours (Gross et al., 2014; McWayne et al., 2013).

Finally, the literature also indicated that childcare decision making was affected by the parents' childbearing beliefs, as well as their parenting stress levels (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Petrogiannis, Papadopoulou, & Papoudi, 2013). Mothers who

experience high stress were more likely to consider practicality of the program as their main consideration in decision making (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Petrogiannis et al., 2013). Practicality encompass whether they can afford the program, the hours of the program, and the location. Childrearing beliefs refer to the maternal expectations for their children's education. The higher the expectations, the more likely the parents are to choose based on the educational and developmental features of care (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014; Petrogiannis et al., 2013).

Cost-Benefits Analysis of Child Care Programs

The cost-effectiveness of programs has become an increasingly important guide for determining if they are worthy of further dissemination and if they can prove sustainable in the long run (Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011). Early childhood programs are characterized as being the most cost-effective childhood investments, given their recognized and long-term positive effects. One of the methods to determine cost-effectiveness is through the cost-benefits analysis process (Reynolds et al., 2011).

In cost-benefit analyses of the specific programs, cohorts of program and control groups are usually monitored and followed until they reach adulthood. This is necessary because it is only through adulthood when the outcomes of educational attainment, stable occupational status, and positive social adaptation can be determined (Reynolds et al., 2011). Researchers have used the community-based adaptation framework to estimate the effects of programs through dollars (Reynolds et al., 2011). In addition, the analysis can promote health and well-being of the society in three ways.

First, this framework can reveal the economic benefits of certain interventions and programs while accounting for the costs associated with these alternatives (Reynolds et al., 2011). Traditional methods of effectiveness do not consider program costs (Reynolds et al., 2011). Therefore, administrators and policymakers use this framework to have something concrete and practical method at their disposal. Hence, this framework is used for determining how effective a program is and what policies must be enacted to improve effectiveness (Reynolds et al., 2011).

The community-based adaptation method can also facilitate comparative analysis of different programs (Reynolds et al., 2011). For example, since funding available for the programs is limited, interventions with the largest return on investment can be prioritized. The framework can be utilized to understand the precise effects of interventions and policies. The framework uses longitudinal data on the different factors influencing the well-being of the participants, such as crime rates, income levels and many more. Researchers have used the framework to analyze early childhood interventions and showed how promising this is as a method (Reynolds et al., 2011). Some researchers, through the community-based adaptation analysis, have revealed whether economic benefits of a program exceed the costs. The framework revealed that some form of early childhood programs work better than others (Reynolds et al., 2011).

Literature Gap and Conclusion

Considering the national push to expand preschool education (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013), there was a need to understand why some parents continued to resist in enrolling their children in preschool. Not enrolling in preschool was associated with

repercussions to children's short- and long-term school success (Campbell et al., 2014; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Expansion efforts are designed with the idea that if children receive quality preschool education, they can demonstrate higher school readiness and close group-based disparities in school achievement over time. Even so, these assumptions have not been explicitly examined in the extant literature. Literature showed the factors pushing parents to enroll their children in preschool (Campbell et al., 2014; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). However, these evaluations of small and intensive early intervention programs did not show the processes behind parents' decision making.

One must learn why some families were intentionally letting their children miss the pre-K experience. One must know if families were aware they had access to preschool at the local level where there were openings. This study could help local educators and administration discover barriers to enrollment and participation in local preschools. The study might lead to improved public outreach efforts.

According to Crosnoe et al. (2016), one must evaluate further the reasons why some families do not enroll in preschool, especially those from low-income families, no matter the documented benefits of early childhood education programs to them. The researchers added that by determining the factors that could promote the enrollment of children in preschool, particularly those from poor families, findings would support research and policy aiming to close socioeconomic disparities in education. Crosnoe et al. added that low-income families were usually treated as a monolithic population, even though there was diversity in this population. Relative gradients of income disparities might produce different kinds of perceptions and behaviors toward preschool enrollment,

which one could not generalize and standardize. More researchers should evaluate programs according to if these were public/private, adult/child centered, academic/play, or other kinds of preschool programs (Crosnoe et al., 2016). By analyzing early childhood programs through these additional categories, one might get a better idea of the types of choices that parents are making when deciding to enroll their children in early childhood programs (Crosnoe et al., 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children. Guardians who currently had children enrolled in Kindergarten but did not send their children to pre-K were interviewed. I examined how families made their pre-K choices. The following chapter will include the research methodology used for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children, a situation that may be due to parents not being aware of those benefits. I determined this issue by using a researcher-constructed instrument of questions built for this specific study to interview parents of children who were in kindergarten but were not enrolled in pre-K. The study's design was qualitative, as the purpose was to understand why a situation existed. The situation or phenomenon was the lack of pre-K enrollment in many schools, and the intent of this study was to understand why that situation is extant.

This chapter is organized as follows. The research design and rationale are discussed. I then discuss my role in the current research. A detailed discussion of the study's methodology follows. I provide a discussion of the research instrument to be used. Then, procedures for data collection, participation, and recruitment are discussed. I examine my data analysis plan and outline how I plan to establish trustworthiness. I close with a discussion of ethical procedures and safeguards.

Research Design and Rationale

The central research question was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, even though such programs are free and readily available?

From this question, three additional research questions were developed:

1. Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs?

2. Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs?
3. What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs?

The central concept of the study was that pre-K schooling was shown as highly beneficial for children's development; nonetheless, many parents did not enroll their children in pre-K. As pre-K was not widely available and always free in the United States, if a child did attend pre-K, this was the result of a decision made by parents. The study's goal was to understand how parents' perceptions and attitudes affected those decisions.

This research was a qualitative exploratory study. Such an approach was justified when a researcher seeks to understand a situation or problem by talking to the persons who experienced or influenced it (Creswell, 2013). I gained that understanding through interviews with parents who had not elected to enroll their children in pre-K. Because I sought to determine the "why" of the situation examined, the interview-based approach was appropriate.

Other qualitative approaches would not be as suitable. An ethnographic study (Creswell, 2013) would not be as valuable because it was not presumed that the population studied was particularly distinctive or that comparison with other populations would yield usable data. Similarly, a longitudinal study would not work because the condition in the present context (low enrollment despite widespread availability of pre-K) was recent, and I did not seek to understand its evolution over time.

A case study approach, though potentially useful, would best be implemented when the study purpose was best served by comparing cases to one another (Creswell, 2013). This approach might be useful if, for example, pre-K enrollment was particularly low (or high) at the study location. However, I wanted to show that this was not the case; the rate of pre-K enrollment at the study location was typical for Indiana. Finally, I did not use grounded theory and content analysis methods because these methods involved formulating a new theory or modification of an existing theory to explain how outcomes or factors associated with a phenomenon were understood. I did not seek to form a new theory to understand the study phenomenon.

Quantitative research approaches were usually used to document a measurable outcome or effect of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). However, quantitative researchers could not measure lived experiences or the extent to which perceptions influenced how individuals thought about their experiences. While such an approach could yield valuable data, those data would not be as in-depth or nuanced as the chosen interpretive qualitative approach could provide.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of an interviewer. I did not participate in pre-K or other instruction at the study location, nor was I employed in any other capacity there. I contacted school authorities to obtain permission to solicit parents for participation in the study.

I did not have any personal or professional relationships with the participants and was not be involved in their children's education. I made certain that participants

understood this, and no negative consequences resulted for them or their children because of their participation. I endeavored to make the participants comfortable during the interview process and ensured they understood that we were conversing as equals. Moreover, I did not exert any control or authority over them or their children.

I offered no incentives or inducements for participation in the study. I was happy to discuss at length the issues involved with the participants. I provided them with insights that resulted from my initial research if they expressed interest. I used the informed consent forms provided on the institutional review board (IRB) website. One potential issue is was participants might feel uncomfortable with reporting that they did not send their children to pre-K. I endeavored to assure them that not having done so carries no pejorative connotations and that in fact, one of the core premises of the study was that parents had good reasons for the decision.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I asked school authorities for contact information through the school board for parents of children in the current school year's kindergarten cohort. At that time, I provided authorities with detailed information on the purpose and methodology of my study. I used email contacts where possible and phone contacts when needed to solicit potential participants. The potential participants numbered about 40, as based on the previous year's class size and that roughly half of the parents met the study criterion of not having enrolled their children in pre-K.

I assumed the parents that I interviewed meet the study criteria. The number of participants was 12; I did not anticipate difficulties achieving that sample size. Had I not been able to solicit enough participants, I would have continued the study at a similar nearby school.

After receiving responses to my initial solicitation efforts, I sent emails to all potential participants who expressed interest in responding to my emails or phone calls; these follow-up emails detailed the purpose and goal of the study, what was expected of them, benefits and/or consequences of participation, and ethical safeguards. I also included an informed consent form. When I had a signed copy of a consent form in hand, I contacted the participant to set up a time for the interview. I anticipated that the simplest and easiest time and location for the participants were at the school where their children are enrolled, during their children's kindergarten classes. The specific site was a meeting room or lunch room at the school.

Instrumentation

I used a researcher-constructed interview protocol. As these were open-ended interviews, I asked why parents did not enroll their children in pre-K and let them take the discussion from there. There was one source of data for this study: the interviews. The primary data source for analysis was the interview

These data collection methods were enough to answer the central research question and the research questions. I solicited opinions from the participants regarding a major decision they made about their children's education. I used my notes to ensure that I recorded and represented these opinions and perspectives accurately.

As I used a researcher-constructed interview protocol, I asked experts on the subject if the interview questions seemed appropriate for the study and to answer the research questions. I asked them if my questions were ethically appropriate. Modification of the interview protocol was completed, if needed, according to this feedback, and then submitted the study for IRB approval.

During interviews, I ensured that participants were comfortable with the questions asked. Participants were reminded they could end participation, if desired. After consent forms were signed, participants were asked to respond to the questions asked during interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with consent for data analysis purposes. Throughout the interviews, I ensured that questions were not rushed and that participants had enough time to reflect on and respond to questions. To minimize researcher bias, the discussion was not steered in any direction after the initial round of questions. Questions were asked one at a time to avoid confusion. The effects of questions on participants, such as through body language, was observed during the interviews to ensure participants were comfortable during discussions.

Interviews took 30 to 45 minutes each. When the interviews were concluded, I discussed my notes with the participants. When this was completed, I debriefed the participants and asked them if they had any questions. I did not expect to have to call back any of the participants, but I retained their contact information in case I needed to clarify anything from the interviews.

Data Analysis

First, transcripts were read multiple times to process information and record comments on interesting observations and insights in the data. I assigned codes to themes identified in the data. This process aided in using a manual and/or a software-based matrix to provide an overview of the responses, with the goal of answering the research questions. The codes were then arranged according to their relationships to one another (thematic pairings, or axial coding) and assigned hierarchical importance based on frequency and other factors (selective coding). I presented the results in tabular form in the Results Chapter 4.

After the preliminary analysis of data, themes were listed, and I looked for connections between them. Based on the analysis interview data transcripts and coding, I examined data for themes. The next step involved an iterative process of cross-checking themes with what was said in the textual data. Then, a table of themes was created to record frequencies and patterns of theme occurrences. During this process, some themes were combined or eliminated. In the next step, a final table of themes was created using NVivo.

The interviews were semistructured, to allow the participants a wide range of discussion. In this way, the effect of my bias and/or preconceptions was ameliorated, as the discussions were steered in any given direction other than the initial focus, as stated to the participants during the solicitation process. Outliers in the data, such as mentioned themes that occurred only once or twice, were considered but were not given as much weight in the analysis and thematic ranking process. Given the relatively small sample

size, I felt that it was important not to exclude any data. The triangulation methods that I discussed above helped with the handling of discrepant cases.

Trustworthiness

Credibility or internal validity was ensured by data triangulation. Furthermore, the sample size was enough to reach data saturation, a point at which no new information was obtained. Member checking ensured that I interpreted the interview content correctly.

Transferability or external validity was ensured by obtaining rich, thick description from participants. I encouraged them to expound on the reasons for the educational choices they made for their children. As the only common characteristics the participants had was that they were parents of kindergartners in a single school, I expected substantial variation in participant attitudes, values, demographics, and cultural practices. This process helped to enhance the transferability of the study's findings.

Dependability of the data was accomplished by the methods of data triangulation. Checking school policy documents helped to ascertain if participants' reported perceptions of the pre-K school system were accurate. I employed consistent member checking.

Confirmability was the extent to which the study, if replicated, would produce the same results with the same parameters. I thoroughly documented the study's procedures, methods, and results. I realized that a duty of the research was to ensure that others could replicate the research. I especially considered data that tend to contradict my overall results and conclusions.

Ethical Assurances

I obtained permission from the institutional IRB before proceeding with the study. I submitted this prospectus to them, along with copies of the solicitation materials that I used the consent form I provided. I followed all school guidelines for ethical conduct throughout the study, including specific observations and recommendations made by the IRB.

All participants were advised that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they could withdraw their participation at any time prior to or during the study. No incentives were offered to participants. I ensured participants were aware that no negative consequences would accrue to them because of their participation.

Participants were assigned a code number; at no time were they identified by name or other demographic data (other than meeting the study criteria). The informed consent form provided to all participants included a description of the study, its purpose, and how privacy concerns were addressed. No interviews were conducted without a signed consent form from the participant.

The data, such as audio recordings, field notes, school policy documents, and researcher-generated transcripts, were stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access. Electronic data were stored on the researcher's private, password-protected computer. All data would be physically destroyed or electronically erased 3 years after the completion of this study.

I did not anticipate any personal ethical issues in conducting this study. I had no personal or professional relationships with the potential participants. Therefore, there was

no issues of conflict of interest or personal power. I stated above how I intended to mitigate possible issues of personal bias on my part.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the study's methodology, including research design and the rationale for it, population recruitment and sampling, and solicitation procedures. I described how the data were collected and analyzed. I described the study's scope, limitations, assumptions, and delimitations. I concluded with a discussion of ethical procedures. In the next chapter, I will discuss the study's results.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will present the setting of this study, data collection, and data analysis. Moreover, the results of the study and evidence of trustworthiness of these results are discussed. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand why families locally did not enroll their children in pre-K, despite its ready availability and demonstrated benefits to their children. To fulfill this purpose, the central research question was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, even though such programs are free and readily available? From this question, the following three additional research questions were developed:

1. Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs?
2. Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs?
3. What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs?

Setting

The research occurred at a rural elementary school in the Midwest. The interviews took place at the local library in a meeting room. At the study site, the program offered was nationally accredited and had the highest ranking (4 out of 4) from Indiana. Head Start was a national program that enrolled children with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or based on income. This school was also a high quality NAEYC rated school.

Demographics

Students from the local elementary school were 98% White and 2% Black. The total rural elementary school population was 48% low income eligible.

Data Collection

For this study, I interviewed 12 participants had decided not to enroll their children in pre-K education. I asked school authorities for contact information through the school board for parents of children in the current school year's kindergarten cohort and used both email and phone calls to solicit potential participants, which aligned with IRB approval. The potential participants numbered around 40. This population was based on last year's class size and the assumption that roughly half of the parents would meet the study criterion of not having enrolled their children in pre-K.

After receiving responses to my initial solicitation efforts, I sent emails to all potential participants who expressed interest in responding to my emails or phone calls. These follow-up emails detailed the purpose and goal of the study, what was expected of them, benefits and/or consequences of participation, and ethical safeguards. I also included an informed consent form. When I had a signed copy of a consent form in hand, I contacted the participant to set up a time for the interview. A researcher-constructed interview protocol was used and open-ended interviews were conducted by myself.

During interviews, I ensured that participants were comfortable with the questions asked. I made small talk to ease any nerves and offered them coffee or water before moving on to the interview questions. Participants were reminded they could end participation if desired. Throughout the interviews, I ensured questions were not rushed,

and participants had enough time to reflect on and respond to questions. When interviews were completed, I debriefed the participants and asked them if they have any questions. The semistructured interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes; these were all audio recorded, and subsequently transcribed onto a Microsoft Word document with consent for data analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

All transcripts were entered into NVivo (see Appendix A). Next, each transcript was read multiple times to process the information and record comments, interesting observations, and insights in the data. The codes were then arranged according to the relationships with one another (thematic pairings or axial coding). These were assigned hierarchical importance based on frequency and relevance to the research questions (selective coding). After the preliminary analysis of data, themes were listed, and I looked for connections between these. I clustered themes together based on interpretations of the responses. One such theme was inducements, which comprised of ways in which the participants believed certain factors or circumstances (time, transportation, and finances) could change to induce them to enroll their child or children in pre-K. This generalized theme was then broken into smaller subthemes based on the responses of the participants.

The next step involved an iterative process of cross-checking themes with what was being said in the textual data. Then, a table of themes was created to record frequencies and patterns of these occurrences. These themes included inhibitors, inducements, and attitudes toward pre-K. Within each of these themes, subtheme nodes

were created. For inhibitors, these subtheme nodes were practical, financial, and emotional; for inducements, these included personal history with pre-K. There were no subthemes for attitudes toward pre-K.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Within this study, I used negative case analysis and member checking for validity. Negative case analysis involved a conscious search for negative cases and unconfirmed evidence. Creswell (2013) stated that one should present negative or discrepant information, as it helped the account becomes more realistic and valid.

I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the study's findings. One could use member checking as the validity procedure to shift from the researchers to participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). I took the final report to the participants, so they could check for errors, which allowed me to make corrections.

Transferability or external validity refers to the degree that the findings of the research can be transferred to other contexts by the readers, as ensured by obtaining rich, thick description from participants (Beck, 2009). The only common characteristics the participants had were that they were parents of kindergartners in a single school. Therefore, substantial variations occurred in participants' attitudes, values, demographics, and cultural practices. While the small sample size might impede transferability, the results could generate a hypothesis for further research.

Reliability of the interpretation of the data was accomplished by using methods of data triangulation. Data triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple sources of information to form themes or categories in a

study (Creswell, 2013). I checked school policy documents to ascertain if participants' reported perceptions of the pre-K school system were accurate. I also employed consistent member checking.

Confirmability was the extent to which one can replicate the study. I thoroughly documented the study's procedures, methods, and results. In addition, I considered data that tended to contradict my overall results and conclusions.

Results

When asked about what factors served as inhibitors to enrolling their children in pre-K programs, five participants said the preschools were not offering bus transportation, and the short 3-hour preschool sessions were inhibitors to attending. Five other participants stated they were worried about the loss of emotional attachment that formed during these young years. These parents simply wanted more time with their children while they were young. The final two participants did not realize the program was free of cost (see Tables 1 to 2).

Table 1

Part 1 Interview Questions Related to Research Question 1: Which Particular Factors Serve as Inhibitors to Parents Enrolling Their Children in Pre-K Programs?

P	Were there any practical obstacles to having your child attend pre-K? If so, what were they?	Were there any financial obstacles to having your child attend pre-K? If so, what were they?
P1	No, I just wanted her home with me.	No.
P2	No, but knowing about the free preschool now, I may have sent them a day or two a week.	No.
P3	No that was really it. I wish the elementary could get a preschool bus. If they can get a new sports bus, then they should be able to get a preschool bus.	No.
P4	No, though it would have been more convenient if it would have been all day too.	No.
P5	No, I just wanted to keep my son home with me.	No.
P6	No, I just didn't want to send him, he will have plenty of years in school coming up, so I didn't want to rush him.	No.
P7	No, just the age. I didn't want them to be overwhelmed.	No.
P8	No.	No.
P9	No.	I couldn't pay to send her preschool but if its free that would different. I'm on assistance and can't afford anything extra.
P10	The transportation.	No.
P11	No.	No.
P12	I needed all day, so the practical obstacle was the hours.	No.

Table 2

Part 2 Interview Questions Related to Research Question 1: Which Particular Factors Serve as Inhibitors to Parents Enrolling Their Children in Pre-K Programs?

P	Why did your child not attend preschool?	If pre-K is free and available, how did you obtain that information?
P1	I stay at home with my daughter and she is my only baby. I wanted to keep her home with me if possible. I work with her and she can learn what she needs for school with me. We playgames and watch educational television together. I didn't send my children, I didn't want to pay for something that I can teach them at home. I thought preschool was just play and I didn't see the need to pay for that. They can be around other children when we go to the library program for free.	I didn't know that, but I didn't investigate it. I wasn't going to send her, so I didn't pay attention.
P2		I didn't know it was free. Isn't that just for low income?
P3	I looked into preschool but there was no transportation to the elementary, only to Head start and I didn't qualify for their program plus I heard not great things about Head start.	I knew about the free preschool from another parent, my niece went to the elementary and I wanted to send my son, but I couldn't work out the transportation with Ms. pat (the daycare provider). Sometime Artie (pats husband) is able to take the kids to preschool but not on regular days.
P4	My mom kept them, and she couldn't drive them back and forth to preschool.	I heard it was free but I'm not sure who told me I had checked on the bus for preschool and when I heard there wasn't a bus, I just decided to ask my mom to keep the kids.
P5	I wanted to keep my son home with me. I don't work and thought it would be good to spend time together.	I was not aware of that.
P6	I don't think that it's really important for kids to go to Preschool. I know you are the teacher and I don't mean any disrespect, but I think it's not necessary. Preschool is just glorified play.	I didn't but I have never really looked into these programs.
P7	I think children are too young at 3 and 4 to go to school. Even being 5 for Kindergarten is young to me.	I wasn't aware.
P8	we had just moved to the area and things were so crazy. I didn't know anyone, and I asked a few people, but no one really had any ideas either. I got the impression that preschool wasn't important here or maybe not worth it.	Again, I didn't even know there was pre-k let alone a free one. I probably would have jumped on that.
P9	Preschool is just play and not necessary for school. I don't want to pay for my child to play all day.	I knew we had preschool, but I thought you had to pay for it.
P10	I need full time care and preschool is half day. My babysitter told me about the program, but she didn't have a way to get her to the school for preschool.	Yes, my babysitter mentioned that. I did want her to go but I couldn't figure out how to get her there and back to the babysitters for the rest of the day.
P11	I wanted my son with me at home since I wasn't working. I don't really think kids need preschool. I would rather he spend his time with me.	I didn't know but I wasn't asking about it either.
P12	I needed full day care, so I didn't look at half day preschools. Half day isn't practical for working parents.	I was only looking for daycare, so I didn't really ask. I don't think I knew that though.

Regarding factors that served as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs, results showed that three participants were open to sending their children to the programs if there was free school bus transportation to and from the preschool sessions. Three other participants stated that knowing it was free of charge was an inducement. Three participants stated expanded hours of sessions were a consideration. Finally, three participants said that no incentive would get them to enroll their child in preschool; they expressed preschool was not as important as spending time with their child (see Table 3).

Table 3

Factors of Inhibitors Related to RQ2: Which Particular Factors Serve as Inducements for Parents to Enroll Their Children in Pre-K Programs?

P	When you were a child, did you attend pre-K classes? Do you feel that your attendance or lack thereof influenced your decision to not send your child to pre-K? If so, how?	Your actual decision aside, what factors may have induced you to enroll your child in pre-K or may induce you to do so in the future?
P1	No, my mom stayed home with me. I loved my time with mom. I always thought I wanted that with my daughter one day.	HmMMM, I'm not sure. I loved my time with my daughter. I don't know what would make me do things different if I had to do it all again.
P2	Not really, I did fine without preschool and my mom was home with me but really, I didn't send my kids because I didn't really think it was necessary and because I didn't want to spend money on it.	Knowing it was free would have made a difference. I don't know for sure that I would have sent them though. I would have to really think about it though.
P3	Yes, I went to a church preschool, but I don't remember the name. It was in Evansville (about 45 minutes away) Not really My niece went to preschool and my sister in law said good things about it. Transportation was really the problem though.	Like I said, if there was transportation, she would have gone
P4	No, my mom didn't have to work so I stayed home with her. I don't even know if there was preschool in Lewisport (a small town in Kentucky). I don't think so. I know preschool can be good for kids but there needs to be transportation.	Just a bus to take the kids back and forth and maybe all-day times.
P5	No, I went to a babysitter - I am home so I wanted my child to stay home too. I wouldn't want to send my child to a babysitter. I didn't. My mom was home and my brother, and I stayed with her.	I'm not sure. Maybe for the social part of preschool.
P6	I wanted the same bond with my child that I had with my mom. I think that started when we were home with her all day and I was always close to her. I wanted the same for my children instead of shipping them off somewhere.	I can't think of anything. The bond we have is worth more than any skills they would have picked up.
P7	No. Maybe a little. It was more than I thought they weren't ready at that age, and I was able to stay home so it all worked out right.	Not really, back to the age factor.
P8	No, but that was the '70s-didn't all moms stay home? No, I know a good preschool can help a child later in school.	If I would have known they existed.
P9	No, my mom was home with all us kids. No, I just don't think preschool is necessary to pay for They can play at home.	The free cost. Is there transportation too?
P10	Yes, at a local church. No, I don't remember preschool, but I did want my daughter to go if it could have been worked out.	I was ready to send her but couldn't get her there.
P11	I did go to preschool 1 day a week, but I'm not sure where. Yes-I loved being home with mom and wanted to do the same with my son.	Maybe the free cost, but I'm not sure that's enough to make me send another child.
P12	Maybe the free cost, but I'm not sure that's enough to make me send another child.	If the hours change to all day daycare/preschool, then we would go to the elementary.

Regarding the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs, five participants said they believed preschool would be beneficial for their children in social and academic

areas. Five others thought it would be dependent on certain circumstances. Two others believed that preschool would not be beneficial at all (see Tables 4 to 6).

Table 4

Part I Drawbacks and Benefits Related to RQ3: What Do Parents Perceive to be the Benefits and Drawbacks of Pre-K Programs?

P	Do you feel that pre-K would have been beneficial for your child? If so, how?	Do you feel that pre-K would have been detrimental for your child? If so, how?
P1	Maybe bring around other children but I taught her all she need at home. She was ready for kindergarten when she went, and I think that I did a great job.	Yes, my daughter is too young for a school routine. They are just babies still and I don't want to rush her growing up.
P2	I guess more exposure to other children and a break for mom (laughs). I am not sure, it would depend on the preschool program. I love having them home with me though.	No, I don't see how.
P3	Yes, the social skills are good for them My niece had a great time in preschool and I think she learned a lot too.	No.
P4	Yes, for the academic skills. I worked with my kids, but I didn't have a lot of time to do that.	No.
P5	There is a lot expected in Kindergarten, but I love having my son home with me.	No.
P6	Derek (her son) struggled in Kindergarten and I wish I would have worked harder with him on academic skills at home. If I was working then maybe I would have sent him but knowing what I know now, I just would have worked on skills more.	Yes, we would have lost the bond we formed from being together all the time.
P7	No.	I think if you send them too early like that, they may get stressed out or burnt out or overwhelmed and end up hating school in the future.
P8	Yes, with ABC, counting, and things for school later.	No, it would have been helpful.
P9	I'm not sure I still think its play but if it's free, I may send my younger daughter, so she can be with other kids.	I don't see how.
P10	I think she would have loved being around all the other children. She would have loved being in the big kid school and learning the routine of class.	No.
P11	No not really.	It doesn't hurt but it does take parent/child time away from them.
P12	Yes, but I think she is getting that at daycare right now anyway.	No.

Table 5

Part 2 Drawbacks and Benefits Related to RQ3: What Do Parents Perceive to be the Benefits and Drawbacks of Pre-K Programs?

P	Do you feel that, in general, pre-K classes are beneficial for preschoolers? If not, why not?	Do you feel that preschoolers can learn what they need to know to enter grade school in kindergarten? If not, what do you feel that they should learn but do not?
P1	No, Children have lots of years in school and they don't get enough time at home with parents. Why rush it? Parents need to enjoy their time with them and teach them themselves.	No.
P2	Yes, especially if parents work. It lets the children see how school will be I guess. I haven't really looked close at preschool though. It doesn't hurt though.	Yes.
P3	Yes, especially with Kindergarten being more advanced now. I think Kindergarten was more like preschool when I was in preschool and kindergarten.	Yes.
P4	I do. Parents work, and preschool helps give them school experience before they go to Kindergarten. They will be more comfortable in the school and going to class if they have had preschool in the same building.	Yes.
P5	Not really, unless you need childcare. I can teach them at home what they need.	No.
P6	Some people think so, but parents can teach their children the same things at home.	No.
P7	Maybe for some children that need extra help but I'm not sure.	Not sure.
P8	Yes.	Yes.
P9	No, they are glorified babysitters.	No
P10	Yes, I think it helps their socialization and learning to sit in their seat and listen to a teacher to follow directions.	Yes.
P11	No.	No.
P12	Yes.	Yes.

Table 6

Part 3 Drawbacks and Benefits Related to RQ3: What Do Parents Perceive to be the Benefits and Drawbacks of Pre-K Programs?

P	If you have other children, have you enrolled them in pre-K in the past, or do you intend to enroll them in pre-K in the future?	Why?
P1	No.	It worked great for me to be home with my daughter. My husband and I are still able to afford me to stay home and I would do it the same if I had another, which I don't plan to. (laughs)
P2	I would have to think about that. If there is no cost, I may send them a day or two. I'm not sure-I enjoy the time with just me and the kids.	
P3	If we got a bus I would. My older children did not attend because they were at a babysitter too.	
P4	Yes.	If transportation could be arranged. Maybe they could use one of the regular buses for preschool?
P5	I hope to have more children, and I probably will enroll them in preschool if it's free.	
P6	No.	
P7	No.	
P8	Yes.	Now that our lives are settled, and we know there are options. I would look into the schools offered and probably send her.
P9	Yes, probably now that I know it's free.	
P10	Yes.	If I could figure out how to get her there or if they offer all day that would be great.
P11	I probably wouldn't but that isn't an option, so I don't need to worry about it.	
P12	I would still need all day care so probably not.	

The central research question was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, though such programs are free and readily available? Five participants listed reasons for not enrolling. They noted practical concerns, such as transportation and hours of preschool sessions. Five other participants stated that an

emotional attachment to their child kept them from enrolling their child. Three participants stated they did not believe there were significant benefits to attending preschool.

Research Question 1

The results showed the main factors that served as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children included practical, emotional, and financial reasons. Under the theme of practical inhibitors, the respondents chose not to enroll their children to pre-K because it was not an all-day program (and therefore did not aid in the parents' work schedules). Some suggested that it was not convenient; they did not have transportation; they wanted to keep their kids at home with them; or they did not know such a program was free. Five of 12 cited these reasons. However, 2 of 12 did note the challenge of cost. Moreover, 9 of 12 participants were not aware of the local, free pre-K enrollment program in their area. Figure 3 demonstrates the distribution of the responses within the first research subquestion.

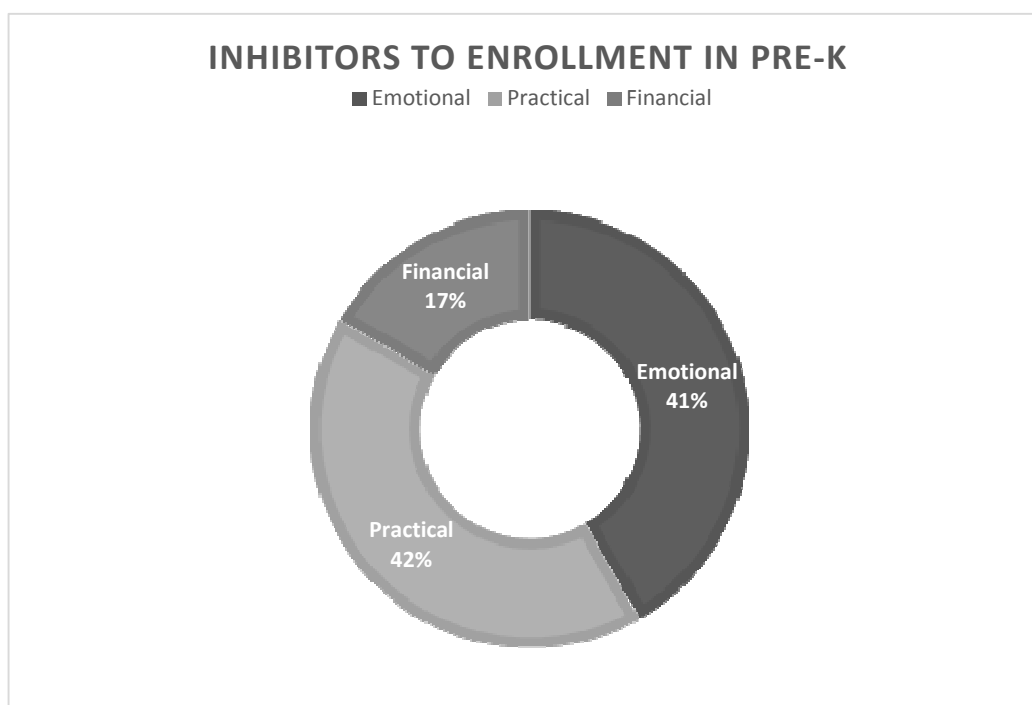


Figure 3. Inhibitors to pre-K enrollment.

Emotional attachment. Five of the 12 participants noted the primary reason that they did not enroll their child to pre-K was due to an emotional attachment to their child. More specifically, the five participants who cited emotional reasons for not enrolling their children noted they wanted to spend more time with their child. Moreover, they stated such a time for parent-child attachment was limited. For P1, not only did she note that bonding was important, but she also believed, as a parent, she could teach her child anything that her daughter would learn in pre-K. P1 described the following:

I stay at home with my daughter and she is my only baby. I wanted to keep her home with me as long as possible. I work with her and she can learn what she needs for school with me. We play games and watch educational television together.

Furthermore, P1 believed that this time for bonding was “the right choice for me and my family.” In part, P1 saw this emotional motive as justified because of academic success. As P1 noted, “My daughter is doing well in kindergarten and I feel like that is because of me.” However, P1 also noted the justification was emotional, saying, “I loved our time together.”

P5 and P11 were cognizant of having time together with their child to connect. P5 explained the choice to keep her son at home as both intentional and grounded in sentiment: “I wanted to keep my son home with me. I don’t work and thought it would be good to spend time together.” P11 echoed those sentiments, saying that she “wanted to keep my son with me longer,” as she could do so “since I wasn’t working.” Interestingly, both these participants noted they could choose to keep their children at home because they were not working.

The other two participants who described sentimental reasons for not enrolling their children in pre-K both rationalized their decisions as age-appropriate. Both P6 and P7 believed children were too young to go to school at that age. P6 explained, “I just didn’t want to send him; he will have plenty of years in school coming up, so I didn’t want to rush him.” P7 had a similar response: “I think children are too young at three and four to go to school. Even being five for Kindergarten is young to me... I didn’t want them to be overwhelmed.”

Practical. Five participants described practical reasons for not enrolling their children in pre-K. The distribution of these responses can be seen in Figure 4.

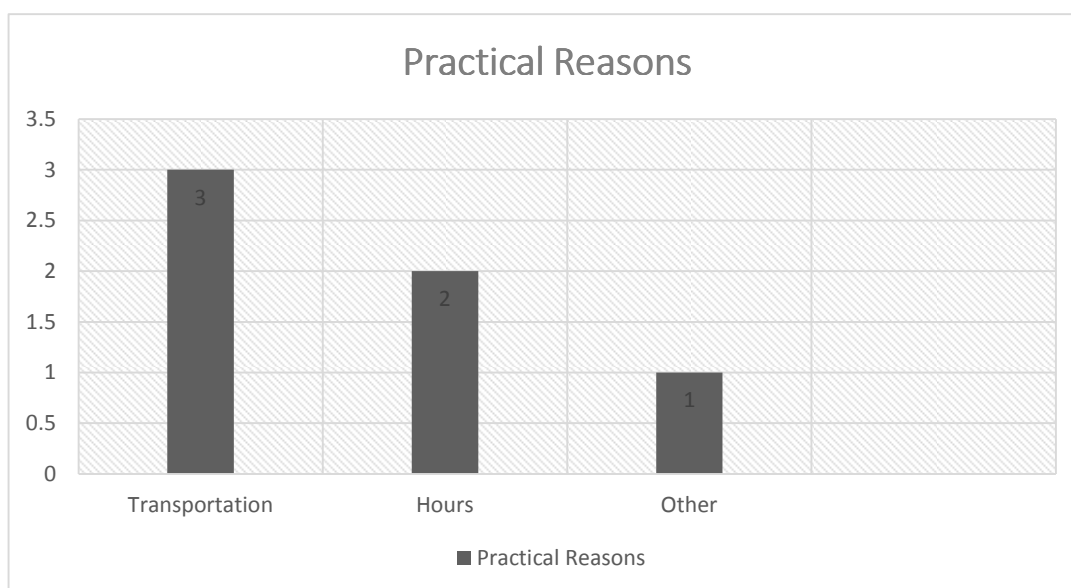


Figure 4. Practical reasons for not sending child to pre-K.

P10, P3, and P4 noted that transportation was a practical hindrance to enrolling their child in a pre-K program. P3 explained that it was lack of a bus that stopped her from enrolling her child into the pre-K program, which was at the local elementary school. She explained the following:

I looked into preschool but there was no transportation to the elementary for preschoolers, only to Head Start and I didn't qualify for their plus I heard not great things about Head Start.... I wish the elementary could get a preschool bus. If they can get a new sports bus then they should be able to get a preschool bus.

P4 also described the practical obstacles of transportation; her childcare was from her mother, who could not drive the kids to and from preschool:

My mom kept them, and she couldn't drive them back and forth to preschool...I don't want to ask anymore of her. She does a lot for me. She would have felt bad

if they missed the bus and I wouldn't want her to stand out in the cold waiting for the bus.

Two other participants noted the main practical problem was the hours of the preschool. For P10 and P12, an all-day solution was needed; because pre-K was only half-day, it did not fulfill their practical needs. P12 said the preschool hours were not useful for those parents who have to work fulltime: "I needed full day care so I didn't look at half day preschools. Half day isn't practical for working parents... I needed all day, so the practical obstacle was the hours." In addition, P10 explained that the limited hours of pre-K also intersected with the problem of transportation: "I need full-time care and preschool is half day. My babysitter told me about the program, but she didn't have a way to get her to the school for preschool."

Finally, one other participant noted that her practical problem was that of knowledge. She was not aware of any pre-K programs when she moved, and therefore could not enroll her child. P8 explained the following:

We had just moved to the area and things were so crazy. I didn't know anyone, and I asked a few people, but no one really had any ideas either. I got the impression that preschool wasn't important here or maybe not worth it.

Financial. Only two people said that financial concerns were the main reason why they did not enroll their child in pre-K. At the same time, the majority of the respondents were not even aware that there was local pre-K free and available to any preschool-aged child. The awareness of this free program is listed in Table 7. Check marks indicate respondents agreed, while "X" means they did not agree.

Table 7

Awareness of Free Pre-K

P	Yes, Heard of Free Pre-K	No, Hasn't Heard of Free Pre-K
P1	X	✓
P2	X	✓
P3	✓	X
P4	✓	X
P5	X	✓
P6	X	✓
P7	X	✓
P8	X	✓
P9	X	✓
P10	✓	X
P11	X	✓
P12	X	✓

The two participants who asserted that they did not send their children to pre-K because of financial costs were also, unsurprisingly, unaware of the free and available pre-K in their area. P2 explained the reason for not sending her children as not paying for what she could do at home or for free:

I didn't send my children, I didn't want to pay for something that I can teach them at home. I thought preschool was just play and I didn't see the need to pay for that. They can be around other children when we go to the library program for free.

P9 had a similar sentiment: "Preschool is just play and not necessary for school. I don't want to pay for my child to play all day." However, when P2 and P9 were told about the free program—about which they were unaware—this changed the participants'

intentions. Both thought the pre-K was only income qualification-based. When asked about knowledge of the program, P2 exclaimed the following:

NO! I didn't know it was free. Isn't that just for low income? I didn't know that. I'm really surprised that preschool is free for everyone. I thought it was all income based. Do parents know this? How do they find out? They should [advertise], more parents would send their kids for free!

P9 added the following:

I knew we had preschool, but I thought you had to pay for it. Has it always been like that? Do you have to income qualify? I couldn't pay to send her preschool but if it's free that would be different. I'm on assistance and can't afford anything extra.

Seven other participants did not cite financial concerns as an obstacle to pre-K enrollment, but they were also not aware of the program. Four of these seven noted they had already decided not to send their child to pre-K, which might be why they were uninformed of the free program. As P1 said, "I didn't know that but I didn't look into it. I wasn't going to send her, so I didn't pay attention." P11 similarly noted, "I didn't know but I wasn't asking about it either." Because of the limited hours, P12 noted, "I was only looking for daycare, so I didn't really ask," but she was not aware of the free program. Only one of the participants who did not cite financial challenges and was unaware of the free pre-K program said that if she had known, it would have changed her intentions. As P8 explained, P1 did not even know "there was pre-K, let alone a free one. I probably would have jumped on that."

Three participants said they were aware of the free pre-K. However, for two of them, the other practical constraints meant that they could not take advantage of preschool, even if it was free. For P10 and P3, it remained a challenge of transportation. P10 noted, “Yes, my babysitter mentioned that. I did want her to go but I couldn’t figure out how to get her there and back to the babysitters for the rest of the day.” The same was true of P3:

I knew about the free preschool from another parent, my niece went to the elementary and I wanted to send my son, but I couldn’t work out the transportation with Ms. Pat [the daycare provider]. Sometimes [Pat’s husband] is able to take the kids to preschool but not on regular days.

Research Question 2

RQ2 was the following: Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs? The results showed that offering free transportation to and from pre-K, making it more public that pre-K was free, and having extended hours could serve as inducements for parents enrolling their children in Pre-K. However, some parents noted there was no inducement that could persuade them to enroll their children. Moreover, I found that having gone to pre-K as a child was *not* an inducement for sending their children. However, those parents who did not go to pre-K themselves remembered their experiences fondly, which incentivized them to keep their children at home. These responses are explored through themes in the following sections.

Personal history with pre-K. The first theme from this second research subquestion was personal history with pre-K, which entailed two parts: (a) whether the

participant herself went to preschool as a child and (b) if that experience influenced their decision not to send her child to pre-K. The distribution of these responses can be seen in Figures 5 and 6.

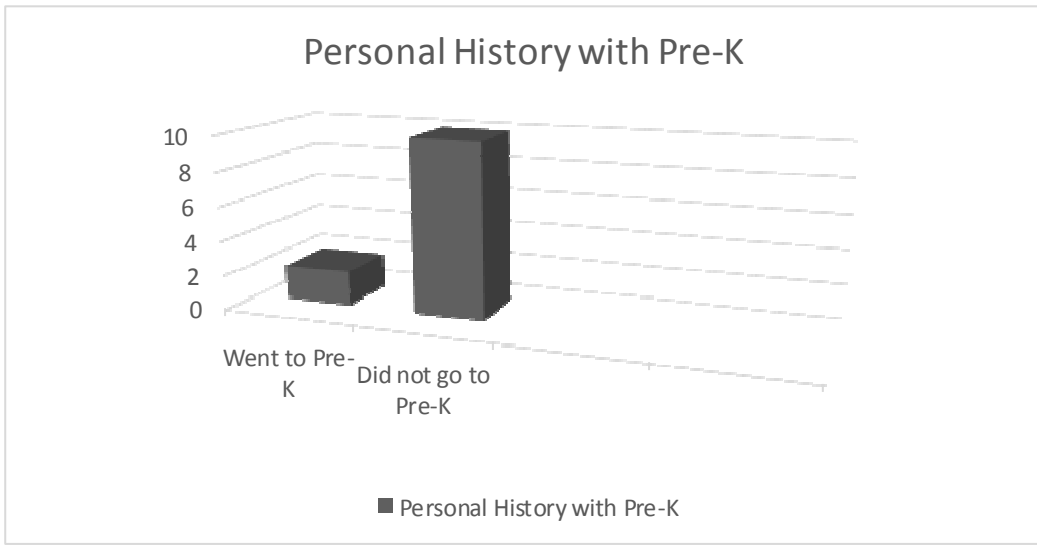


Figure 5. Personal history with pre-K.

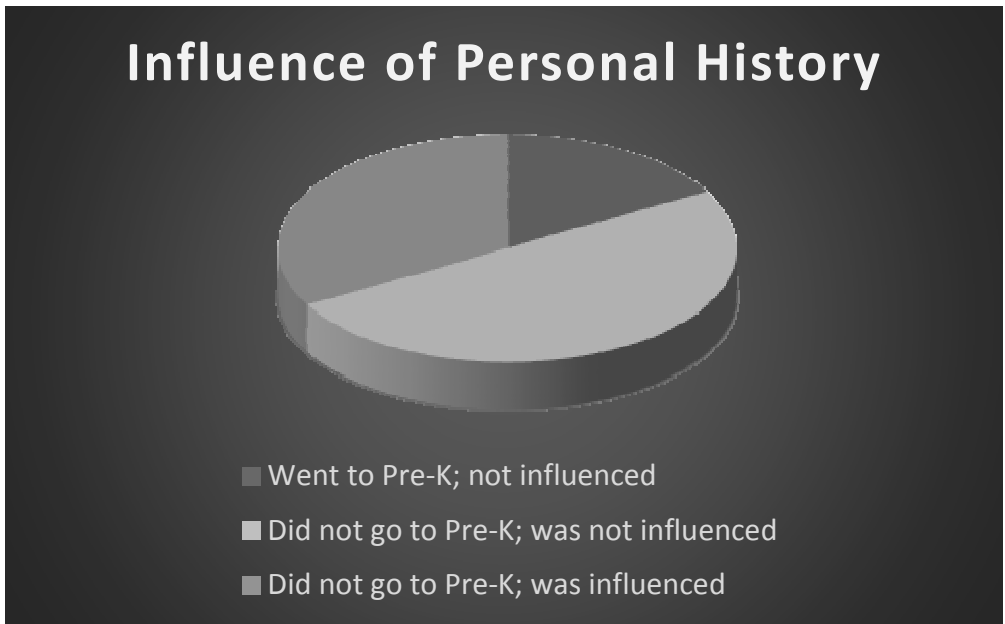


Figure 6. Influence of personal history.

Of the participants, only two had attended pre-K when they were children, while 10 had not. However, within that group of 10 who did not attend preschool, six said that history had no influence on their decisions. Four noted their experiences were a part of their decisions not to send their children to pre-K. Both participants who attended pre-K said it had no bearing on their decisions.

For the four participants who did not go to pre-K and said that was informative in their decision for their children, most had fond memories of bonding with their own mother. P1 explained the following:

My mom stayed home with me. I loved my time with mom. I always thought I wanted that with my daughter one day... I remember it being just mom and me and we played games and cleaned house together. It was so fun.

P11 reiterated this, saying, "I loved being home with mom and wanted to do the same with my son." P6 had a similar response, saying the bond she formed with her own mother was something she wanted for her own kids:

My mom was home and my brother, and I stayed with her... I wanted the same bond with my child that I had with my mom. I think that started when we were home with her all day and I was always close to her. I wanted the same for my children instead of shipping them off somewhere.

However, most of the respondents who did not attend preschool themselves said that a lack of that experience did not influence their decision. Instead, these participants argued that there were other factors that were more important. For P12, it was about the lack of all-day preschool; because of this dearth, she was only "looking for daycare and

the workers their work with the children on things for school.” P4 also cited the practical concerns that were more influential than her own history. P4 noted, “My mom didn’t have to work so I stayed home with her,” and she was from such a small town: “I don’t even know if there was preschool.” Moreover, transportation was the main challenge, even with the knowledge that P4 believed pre-K was valuable for children: “I know preschool can be good for kids but there needs to be transportation.” P8 similarly was with her mother and not in pre-K: “But that was the ’70s-didn’t all moms stay home?” P8 also believed that preschool was useful, despite her decision not to send her child because of cost: “I know a good preschool can help a child later in school.”

P2 and P10 said they did not go to preschool and did not believe it to be needed. While P2 said her own experience was not influential; however, she slightly contradicted this by asserting: “I did fine without preschool and my mom was home with me but really I didn’t send my kids because I didn’t really think it was necessary and because I didn’t want to spend money on it.” P10 also said, “My mom was home with all us kids,” but was more influenced by what she saw was the lack of need for preschool: “I just don’t think preschool is necessary to pay for. They can play at home.”

The only two participants who did go to pre-K said that their experiences—both of which were preschools at a local church—were not an inducement to not enrolling their children. In fact, both participants said that if they could have their children in preschool, without practical concerns, they would have them in the school. P10 said that while she did not “remember preschool,” she still “did want my daughter to go if it could have been.” P3 also did not recall much about preschool; however, she could not send her

children because of a lack of transportation: “My niece went to preschool and my sister-in-law said good things about it. Transportation was really the problem though.”

Cost. The remaining themes were inducements (or in one case, a lack of inducement) that could spur participants to enroll their children in preschool in the future.

Table 8 demonstrates the distribution of these themes.

Table 8

Inducements for Pre-K Enrollment

	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Cost	4	33.3%
Transportation Provided	3	25%
Hours Extended	3	25%
No Inducements Would Work	3	25%
Other	2	16.6%

Four participants said the free cost of a preschool program could incentivize them to enroll their child. P9 cited “the free cost” as a worthwhile inducement, and P5 noted that a free program might cause her to send any other children she would have: “I hope to have more children, and I probably will enroll them in preschool if it’s free.” Two other participants said the free cost could be an incentive, but both were unsure if it would have altered their decisions to not enroll their children. P2 said she might have changed her mind: “Knowing about the free preschool now, I may have sent them a day or two a week.” However, she added, “Knowing it was free would have made a difference. I don’t know for sure that I would have sent them though. I would have to think about it really.” A similar sentiment was noted by P11: “Maybe the free cost” would be an incentive, “but I’m not sure that’s enough to make me send another child.”

Transportation. Three participants cited transportation as a motivating factor in inducing them to enroll their children in pre-K. P10 said, “Yes, if I could figure out how to get her there,” she would consider sending her children to pre-K. P3 agreed, noting that would have allowed her to send her children to pre-K: “Like I said, if there was transportation, she would have gone.” P4 and P9 also noted that transportation would be a useful inducement to enrolling their children in preschool. P4 suggested, “Just a bus to take the kids back and forth and maybe all-day times... Maybe they could use one of the regular buses for preschool?”

Hours. Three participants noted that extending the hours of the pre-K would be an important inducement. For P10, she would need both transportation and all-day coverage. P12 said, “If the hours change to all day daycare/preschool then we would go to the elementary.” P4 agreed, “It would have been more convenient if it would have been all day too.”

Nothing. However, three participants contended there was no inducement that could get them to enroll their child. For 2 of these 3, the time they had—and the bond they formed—with their children was more important than any other inducement. As P1 said, “I loved my time with my daughter. I don’t know what would make me do things different if I had to do it all again.” P6 concurred, “I can’t think of anything. The bond we have is worth more than any skills they would have picked up.” For P7, there was no inducement because of “the age factor.” P7 believed that children were sent to school—including pre-K and kindergarten—too early.

Other. Finally, two respondents had other ideas for inducement. For P5, though unsure of how effective the inducement would be, she believed, “The social part of preschool” could convince her to enroll her child. Conversely, P8 had a practical suggestion for incentive: advertising. She said the following:

I may have if someone had lead me to one or if I would have found a good one in the area... now that our lives are settled and we know there are options. I would look into the schools offered and probably send her...I wish the preschools would advertise.

Research Question 3

RQ3 was the following: What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs? Within this last research subquestion, results showed that parental perceptions of pre-K were essential in how they viewed pre-K. Half of participants believed pre-K would have been beneficial for their own children. Most did not believe it would be detrimental to their children. Additionally, the majority believed pre-K was beneficial to children in general. Figure 7 demonstrates the distribution of these responses.

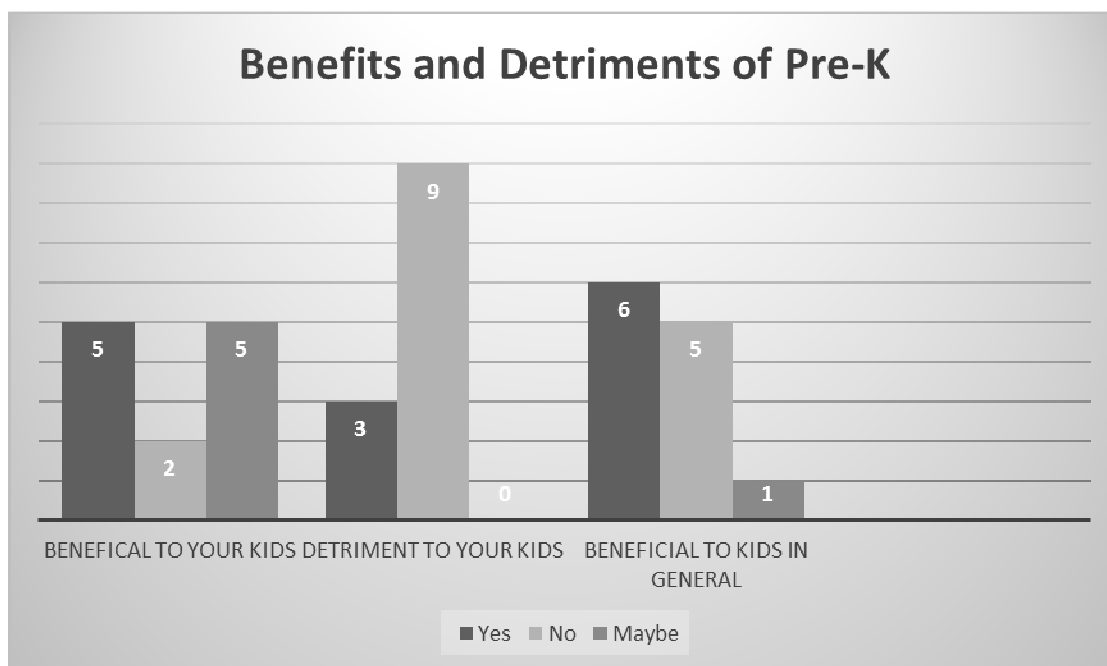


Figure 7. Benefits and detriments of pre-K.

Perceptions of pre-K. Within this theme, participants explored their perceptions of pre-K as these applied to their own children, as well as children more generally. Results indicated the majority of participants believed pre-K was not detrimental to children, while a slim majority thought, in general, pre-K was beneficial for children. However, participants were primarily split about the benefits of pre-K for their own children.

Beneficial for own kids. Within this subtheme, five participants believed preschool would have been beneficial for their children; five thought it dependent on certain circumstances; and two believed pre-K would not have been beneficial for their kids. For the five who thought it would be beneficial, the reasons were primarily academic skills and socialization. As P10 said, “I think she would have loved being around all the other children. She would have loved being in the big kid school and

learning the routine of class.” P3 cited both the social aspect and the academic aspect of preschool: “Yes, the social skills are good for them. My niece had a great time in preschool and I think she learned a lot too.” P4 and P8 focused on academics, with P8 noting that preschool would have been helpful “with ABC[s], counting, and things for school later on.” P4 agreed, saying pre-K would have been beneficial “for the academic skills. I worked with my kids, but I didn’t have a lot of time to do that.”

However, five other participants said preschool could be beneficial, depending on certain factors. For example, P1 thought that the socialization aspect of preschool might have been useful, but the academic factor was arguable. P1 noted pre-K could be useful to “maybe bring around other children.” However, P1 added, “I taught her all she needs at home. She was ready for kindergarten when she went, and I think that I did a great job.”

P2 said that the benefits would depend on the specific program. In addition, she also pointed to the benefits of socialization, as well as the benefits for the mothers: “I guess more exposure to other children and a break for mom [laughs]. I am not sure, it would depend on the preschool program. I love having them home with me though.” P9 was hesitant but likewise pointed to the socialization aspect of preschool, noting its cost would be a factor in her perception of pre-K’s benefits: “I’m not sure. I still think its play, but if it’s free I may send my younger daughter, so she can be with other kids.”

Two other participants were uncertain about pre-K but did note the academic benefits that would have been helpful for their children. P5 noted that preschool might have been useful because “there is a lot expected in Kindergarten.” However, she also

reiterated, “but I love having my son home with me.” P6 noted that despite the rigors of Kindergarten and the academic help preschool might have offered, she remained skeptical if she would have sent him to pre-K. P6 said that her son would have done better:

[He] struggled in Kindergarten... I wish I would have worked harder with him on academic skills at home. If I was working then maybe I would have sent him [to pre-K] but knowing what I know now, I just would have worked on skills more.

Finally, two participants said pre-K would not have been beneficial for their children. P11 noted, “I don’t really think that preschool is important,” and P7 similarly did not see pre-K as valuable.

Detrimental for their own kids. Despite the mixed results, nine participants said that preschool would not be detrimental for their children. P2 and P9 both said, “I don’t see how” preschool would be detrimental, while five others said a simple, “No.” P11 gave a caveat to her answer, saying that while preschool “doesn’t hurt,” it “does take parent/child time away from them.” P8 was more rigorous in the defense of preschool, saying not only was it not detrimental, but that “it would have been helpful.”

However, three participants did believe that preschool would have been detrimental for their children. For P1, the injury would have been a function of their age; P1 saw her children as being too young and wanted them to enjoy their childhood: “My daughter is really too young for a school routine. They are just babies still, and I don’t want to rush her growing up.” In a similar vein, P7 argued that starting children at school at that young age could lead to academic fatigue later in their life: “I think if you send

them too early like that, they may get stressed out or burnt out or overwhelmed and end up hating school in the future.” However, for P6, the detriment would have been emotional; in this case, P6 said preschool would have undercut the child/parent connection: “We would have lost the bond we formed from being together all the time.”

Beneficial for kids in general. Finally, six participants believed preschool was beneficial for children in general, rather than just their own kids. P10 argued preschool was important for social skills, as well as preparing them for school routines in the future: “I think it helps their socialization and learning to sit in their seat and listen to a teacher to follow directions.” Other participants agreed, noting that not only was preschool useful for getting children ready for elementary school, but it was also helpful for the academic rigors of Kindergarten. Two also noted that this was in addition to the benefits of helping working parents. P2 said preschool was useful, “especially if parents work. It lets the children see how school will be.” P4 concurred, “Parents work, and preschool helps give them school experience before they go to Kindergarten. They will be more comfortable in the school and going to class if they have had preschool in the same building.” P3 focused specifically on how preschool prepares children for Kindergarten: “Especially with Kindergarten being more advanced now. I think Kindergarten was more like preschool when I was in preschool and kindergarten.”

P7 said preschool could be beneficial to children, but it would depend on the children. P7 pointed specifically to the need for academic guidance as a reason why preschool would be useful: “Maybe for some children that need extra help but I’m not sure.”

Finally, five participants did not feel as if preschool was beneficial. These participants noted that any academic gains children received could be obtained at home; others believed that pre-K was just another form of childcare and preferred their children with them. P6 explained, “I don’t think that it’s really important for kids to go to Preschool... I think it’s not necessary. Preschool is just glorified play... Some people think so, but parents can teach their children the same things at home.” P9 also believed preschool was not needed, calling it “glorified babysitters.” P5 concurred, saying preschool was “not really” needed, “unless you need childcare.”

Regarding academics, P5 said, “I can teach them at home what they need. P1 added, “Children have lots of years in school and they don’t get enough time at home with parents. Why rush it? Parents need to enjoy their time with them and teach them themselves.” P11 agreed, “I don’t really think kids need preschool. I would rather he spend his time with me.”

Central Research Question: Summary of Results and Themes

The central research question for this study was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, though such programs are free and readily available? The results showed that the answer was a complex mix of reasons, primarily stemming from parents’ own perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K, as well as financial and practical barriers, such as cost, transportation, and the hours of the pre-K.

From the results of the data, nine themes emerged correlating to the three research questions of this study. The first research question was the following: Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs? Three

themes emerged from the first research subquestion: practical, emotional, and financial. The primary hindrance to pre-K enrollment, according to the results of the study, was emotional and practical-based; five respondents each cited these reasons. However, two participants did note the challenge of cost. Moreover, most participants were not aware of the local, free pre-K enrollment program in their area, which could be understood as an obstacle.

The second research question was the following: Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs? Within the second research subquestion, six themes emerged: personal history with Pre-K, transportation, cost, hours, nothing, and other. The first theme, personal history with Pre-K, entailed two parts: (a) whether the participant herself went to preschool as a child and (b) if that experience influenced their decision not to send their child to pre-K. Of the participants, only two had attended pre-K when they were children, while 10 had not attended. However, within that group of 10 who did not attend preschool, six said that history had no influence on their decisions, while four noted their experiences were a part of their decisions not to send their children to pre-K. Both participants who attended pre-K said it had no bearing on their decision.

The remaining themes were inducements that could spur participants to enroll their children in preschool in the future. Four participants said the free cost of a preschool program could incentivize them to enroll their child; three participants cited transportation as a motivating factor in inducing them to enroll their children in pre-K; and three participants also noted that extending the hours of the pre-K would be an

important inducement. However, three participants contended there was no inducement that could get them to enroll their child. Finally, two respondents had other ideas for inducement.

The third research question was the following: What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs? Within this last research subquestion, there was one theme to emerge: perceptions of pre-K. Within this theme, participants described whether they believed pre-K would have been beneficial for their own children, a detriment to their children, and beneficial to children in general. Five participants believed preschool would have been beneficial for their children; five thought it dependent on certain circumstances; and two believed pre-K would not have been beneficial for their kids.

Despite the mixed results, nine participants said that preschool would not be detrimental to their children. However, three participants did believe that preschool would have been detrimental to their children. Finally, six participants believed that preschool was beneficial for children in general, rather than just their own kids, citing the usefulness of academic skills and socialization. One participant said preschool could be beneficial to children, and five participants did not feel as if preschool was beneficial for children as a whole.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The central research question was the following: Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, even though such programs are free and readily available?

From this question, three additional questions were developed:

1. Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs?
2. Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs?
3. What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs?

The results indicated there were three main reasons that parents did not enroll their children in pre-K programs. First, respondents noted practical challenges in taking their children to pre-K. These practical concerns included issues of transportation (not having a bus to take children to and from pre-K) and hours of the pre-K classroom (given the part-time nature of pre-K, such a schedule was unfeasible for parents who worked full-time). Secondly, participants noted the primary reason they did not send their child to pre-K was due to an emotional attachment to their child. More specifically, the five participants in this study who cited emotional reasons for not enrolling their children noted they wanted to spend more time with their child, and such a time for parent-child attachment was limited.

Finally, participants' perceptions about the benefits of pre-K affected their decisions to send their children. Of the five participants who believed preschool would

have been beneficial for their children, all five thought it dependent on certain circumstances, and two believed pre-K would not have been beneficial for their children. In essence, most of the participants (seven out of 12) did not believe that pre-K offered significant or essential benefits academically or developmentally to their children, which influenced their decisions not to send their children.

A large body of research has expounded on the various benefits of Pre-K programs (Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Harrington, 2015; Mitchie, 2014). Researchers have shown high-quality pre-K programs as giving children a head start on academics and basic life skills, which is an advantage for their educational lives and careers (Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Harrington, 2015; Mitchie, 2014). Children who have undergone high-quality pre-K programs have higher cognitive abilities compared to children who have not (USDOE, 2015). Moreover, a growing number of schools provide free pre-K programs to families. However, despite the extensive knowledge found in research studies of these positive effects, many families still chose not to send their children to pre-K. In effect, the purpose of this study was to examine why parents, particularly in the location in which the study occurred, decided not to enroll their children in pre-K, despite the presence of free and readily available programs.

In the discussion of the factors that the participants perceived to inhibit the enrolment of their children in pre-K programs, three main themes emerged. The most frequently mentioned themes included emotional and practical themes, which might indicate that these were the primary inhibitors they perceived. Emotional factors inhibiting the participants' decision to enroll their children in pre-K programs primarily

pertained to their desires to spend more time with their children. The parent-child attachment period was limited; therefore, many participants figured that at the age in which children commonly attended preschool, it was more important they formed strong bonds and connections with their parents at home.

Practical factors inhibiting the participants' decisions to enroll their children in pre-K programs primarily consisted of two main issues. First, some participants found transportation an issue, as the school did not provide any mode of transportation for their children to compensate for their inability to drive their children to school every day freely. Second, some mentioned the half-day scheme of pre-K programs was inconvenient for them, as they had full-time jobs, and therefore could not pick their children up from school. A few participants also mentioned financial factors that inhibited their decisions to enroll their children in pre-K programs. However, these participants, along with many others, did not know about the availability of free pre-K programs in the area. While one participant admitted her knowledge of free pre-K programs would have changed her mind, others thought differently, saying their decisions not to enroll their children was made based on reasons beyond finances.

Regarding the factors that the participants perceived as inducements for them to send their kids to pre-K, six themes emerged. First, participants' personal histories with preschool—if they had attended preschool—generally did not influence their decisions to send their children to pre-K. Only four participants found their personal histories influential—the bonds they formed with their mothers during the time that they did not attend preschool made them want the same bond with their own children. Other

participants found that practical constraints had a larger bearing on their decisions for their children. Second, four participants said free cost for pre-K could incentivize future decisions to send their children to pre-K, but some were unsure if cost alone was enough to convince them. Three participants mentioned that practical measures, such as the availability of transportation and convenient school hours, would further encourage them to enroll their children in pre-K. Furthermore, awareness of free pre-K programs and the social benefits were mentioned as factors that might change their decisions in the future. However, some participants insisted they would not send their children to pre-K despite these incentives.

The participants also expressed their perceptions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs. When asked whether the participants thought that pre-K was beneficial for their own kids, most of their responses were relatively split. Five participants agreed, saying that pre-K was instrumental in developing children's social and academic skills. Five participants had a more conditional answer, saying that it would be beneficial depending on certain factors. The lessons the children would learn in pre-K could otherwise be taught by their parents at home, and the quality and the cost of the program itself had a bearing on whether pre-K programs would be beneficial for their children. The remaining two participants did not consider pre-K important for their child's development.

When asked whether participants thought that pre-K was detrimental for their own children, most participants disagreed. However, some did acknowledge that a disadvantage of pre-K was that it took time away for them to spend with their children.

Only three participants said that pre-K was detrimental to their children. Their reasons were that it was too early to rush their child's growth, and pre-K might result in a weaker connection between them and their children.

When asked whether participants thought that pre-K was beneficial for children in general, there were mixed responses. A very narrow majority said that it was beneficial, acknowledging that kindergarten was more advanced than before. Because of this issue, they recognized that pre-K developed social and academic skills that their children might need for kindergarten. One participant was unsure, suggesting that it might depend on the child. Five other participants did not view pre-K as beneficial for children in general because it was simply not necessary for children.

Interpretation of the Findings

Reasons for Not Enrolling Children in Pre-K

After analysis of the participants' reasons regarding their decisions not to enroll their children in pre-K, overlaps were frequent in their responses. Moreover, participants commonly mentioned similar factors as influential in their decisions. In effect, two main themes stood out as the primary reasons parents did not enroll their children in pre-K.

Practical factors. From the participants' responses, practical factors in their current living situations had a significant bearing on their decisions not to enroll their children in pre-K. The specific factors that seemed to have the largest influence included transportation and scheduling arrangements. Participants who had an issue with the practical aspect of sending their children in preschool programs tended not to have means of transporting their children to school and back home, or they did not have working

schedules to accommodate the half-day scheme common among pre-K programs. A major point of consideration was evident in participants acknowledging the benefits of pre-K and considering enrolling them in pre-K. These participants could not enroll their children because of these practical constraints.

The literature has indicated support for this finding. Many researcher have pointed out the commonality of considering practical factors in deciding if to enroll a child in pre-K. For example, Kocyigit (2015) found that practical factors, such as scheduling, played a major role in the extent to which parents were involved in their children's preschool activities and in their inclinations to send them to preschool in the first place. Working parents in particular might experience limitations in meeting the time demands of pre-K programs, as many pre-K programs followed a half-day schedule, instead of a full-day one (Lombardi & Coley, 2014). Lack of transportation was also a barrier for parents to be involved in their children's education, according to Nitecki (2015).

These findings indicated that if there were improvements in the provisions of schools regarding their pre-K programs, more parents might be inclined to send them to preschool. School leaders might benefit from providing buses to take the students to school and back home. Moreover, changing the programs from a half-day to a full-day activity might be beneficial not only to the parents but also to the children.

Researchers have compared the outcomes of half-day kindergarten programs and full-day kindergarten programs and found that full-day kindergarten programs are more likely to result in higher academic achievement and better behavioral characteristics as compared to half-day kindergarten programs (Curley, 2016; Thompson & Sonnenschein,

2016). While there were no studies in the literature that made a similar comparison in the preschool level, it might be a notable option to improve the quality of preschool education.

Emotional factors. Another strong theme that permeated participants' responses was the emotional implications of enrolling children in pre-K. Along with enrolling children in pre-K, the likelihood occurred of having fewer opportunities to spend time at home with their parents, consequently the possibility of a more limited connection with them. Despite an acknowledgment of the possible benefits of pre-K, the participants placed family relationships high in priority. Some even pointed out that the critical period in which parent-child attachments should be strongly established was at the age in which children supposedly attended preschool.

Interestingly, despite this theme emerging as a primary reason for not enrolling a child in pre-K, there were barely any studies in the literature about the emotional implications of child enrollment in pre-K, particularly in the family context. In this way, this finding expands the current knowledge on the factors that influence parents' decisions on their children's education. As Bosetti (2004) suggested, family decisions were influenced by a multitude of factors, some of which were not explicitly related to financial cost and potential benefits. However, when viewed from the perspectives of the participants in this study, the emotional aspect of not enrolling their children in pre-K lent itself in relation to potential gains. For them, a child's emotional connection with their parents was integral to their development; thus, their decisions not to enroll their children

in pre-K would be a good decision if a strong bond between the child and the parent was gained as a result.

The emotional factors for the decision not to enroll their children in pre-K were found related to some participants' experiences as children. Four of 10 participants whose childhood experiences without pre-K influenced their decisions with their own children expressed one opinion. They expressed the bonds that they had formed with their mothers because they had not attended pre-K opened their eyes to the connections they could establish with their own kids if they did not attend pre-K. This finding supported Choi and Dobbs-Oates (2016), who found that the quality of parental interaction in early childhood was a significant factor in deciding if to enroll a child in pre-K.

Given these findings, parents gleaned from their value preferences and the perceived costs, benefits, and potential outcomes when making decisions regarding their children's education, while also considering their children's well-being. This finding was important, as a growing number of states have relinquished the requirement of enrolment into preschool, instead making it the parents' prerogative to choose if to send their children to pre-K (Barnett, 2013).

Perceptions of the Benefits of Pre-K

The third research subquestion aimed to examine parents' opinions on whether they view pre-K as beneficial or detrimental to children. Based on the participants' responses throughout the interviews, there appeared a divide in perception regarding the value of pre-K. This finding somewhat differed from Belfield and Garcia (2014), who found a majority of the parent participants viewed pre-K as valuable. However, a

difference between these studies was that whereas this study recruited only parents who had not sent their children to pre-K, Belfield and Garcia (2014) recruited both parents who opted to send their kids to pre-K and those who opted not to send them.

Participants who viewed pre-K as beneficial cited the advantages regarding social development and preparation of the child for kindergarten. These effects were examined in past studies, and researchers found that these were likely results of preschool (Sandoval-Hernandez & Taniguch, 2013). To kindergarten preparation, educators of pre-K offer children with experience in a classroom setting and structure for them for them to familiarize themselves with early on (Harrington, 2015). Moreover, Lee et al. (2014) found academic advantages among children who attended pre-K, as children who attended pre-K and other center-based care performed better in kindergarten than did children who only gained informal education from their parents or other non-pre-K programs.

Meanwhile, participants who did not view pre-K as beneficial for children did not think that preschool was not necessary for their child's development. As previously mentioned, researchers have enumerated the benefits that can result from preschool. However, other researchers have found that the positive effects of pre-K may differ across children, depending on certain factors. For instance, early childhood development initiatives, such as preschool, were found to improve academic outcomes immediately and later on in life, particularly for children with disabilities, children from minority cultures, and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Andrews et al., 2012; Ansari & Crosnoe, 2015; Finch et al., 2015; Guinote et al., 2015; Haskins, 2016;

Hillemeier et al., 2013). These children are less likely to have opportunities for academically enriching experiences that other children experience (Entwisle et al., 1999). With the help of preschool, inequality may be reduced among children (Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Heckman & Raut, 2016; Magnuson & Duncan, 2016; Waldfogel, 2015). Considering this, the children of the participants who did not view pre-K as beneficial may have come from certain demographics that influenced factors like these. Unfortunately, this aspect was not considered in this study. Future researchers could examine this interesting point.

After analyzing the participants' responses further, there is a notable difference in their viewpoints. When answering the question regarding children in general, responses were narrowly split, with nearly all participants taking either a beneficial or not beneficial stance. However, when considering their own children, participants were noted as more conditional in their responses, with five participants expressing that their opinions on the matter depended on certain qualities of the pre-K program and other factors in their situations.

This observation appeared as an application of the study's conceptual framework, the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). According to the framework, a child's development is dependent on various factors in their environment. Because of the interrelatedness of the environmental factors, these relationships should shape different situations for different individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Similarly, a possible explanation for the study's observation was that when parents considered the benefits of pre-K when particularly applied to their own children, they were more knowledgeable on

the unique factors in their situations. Thus, it was more likely for them to be critical of the details about pre-K for their children as compared to other children in general.

In conjunction with this, the parent participants' views on the benefits of pre-K were also influenced by their perceptions about the educational level in general. Some participants appeared cognizant of the possible academic and social benefits of preschool. However, a lot of them also viewed pre-K program curricula as consisting of lessons and activities that a child could more or less learn and do at home under their supervision.

General Perceptions on Pre-K

In the process of explaining their opinions on not enrolling their children in pre-K, the participants inadvertently expressed their perceptions on pre-K in general. As previously mentioned, they appeared to have influencers concerning their decisions not to send their children to pre-K. The first of which was that some parents expressed that pre-K was unnecessary, likening it to “glorified play” with “glorified babysitters.” For this reason, they believed they could teach their children everything they would otherwise learn in pre-K programs.

This view was fascinating, as there was a body of research enumerating learning opportunities in preschool programs that might be harder to come by at home. For example, researchers have found the preschool environment presented the child with various situations to develop their senses of morality and social intelligence (Edwards et al., 2014; Mita et al., 2015; Paulus & Moore, 2014). This development occurred particularly through the presence of classmates, which allowed for children to exercise decision-making and behaviors that were appropriate when relating with other

individuals. Additionally, exposure to the external social environment was also instrumental in learning the norms in an individual's social culture and learning how to act accordingly (Guinote et al., 2015; Spencer, 2013). For example, including a child in a classroom environment might better allow for teachers and parents to gauge how the child fares regarding cognitive and emotional development related to the norms expected for their age group (Crosnoe et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2016).

On the other side of the spectrum, other parents did not favor pre-K programs because they thought it would be age-inappropriate—too advanced for children to experience at such an early age. For them, the structure and pressure of pre-K programs might rush the child's growth and lead to academic fatigue. These findings differed from what some researchers have postulated about preschool. Researchers have found that brain development is especially important during a child's early years, and they are supportive of the addition of preschool in a child's life experiences (Heckman & Raut, 2012; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Moreover, preschool has gained a reputation for better preparing children for kindergarten (NAEYC, 2016).

Most participants were unaware of the availability of free pre-K programs in their areas. Although they did not think that the knowledge of such free programs would have been enough to change their minds, it may be a worthy point of consideration that could further encourage them to enroll their children in pre-K. As various states have been providing funding for preschool (Armor, 2014), the participants' lack of information might signify that leaders should improve raising public awareness regarding these state provisions.

The participants' viewpoints were plausible, especially that preschool programs were often diverse in design, content, and standards for success (NAEYC, 2016). However, this diversity also meant that it was far from beneficial for parents to have one same opinion on all pre-K programs provided by different schools nationwide. In general, this study's findings on parents' perceptions on pre-K programs indicated a lack of information sharing to families within the community. Leaders of schools and local communities should publicize the different educational opportunities available in the area (Barnett, 2013). Adoption and development of preschool curricula and programs might differ, which was why families should be aware of their options. They should be able to discern—based on the qualities and capabilities of their children—which pre-K program, if at all, might best suit them (Barnett, 2013; Entwisle et al., 1999).

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study pertained to the dependability of the data and the data sources. While I assumed the participants were forthright and honest during the conducted interviews, there was no way to verified it. In other words, there was no way to verify systematically whether the participants were accurately and truthfully representing their true views and motivations.

Given that the data gathering instrument (interview protocol) was constructed by me for the sole purpose of this study, there was a need to validate the instrument further to ensure that it fulfilled the research objectives and gathered the sufficient data needed to adequately answer the research questions. Despite having conducted a pilot test with the interview protocol, there remained a lack of validity and reliability associated with the

protocol. I took notes during the interviews, transcribed these word-for-word, and reviewed these for accuracy. There were no seen discrepancies in this translation.

Another limitation was related to the size and homogeneity of the study's sample. The problem of parents not enrolling their children in pre-K programs was found in previous studies to be prevalent and occurring in many states across the United States. However, I focused only on families from one location in the United States, namely Indiana. Moreover, the selected participants were all parents of children from a single school in Indiana. This limited the study's external reliability, as the results of this study could only be generalized to parents of children at a single school in Indiana, and these could not be generalized nationally and to all parents of children, regardless of their children's school. The homogeneity of the study's sample also appeared as an issue. Pre-K programs were diverse in design, with different curricula, areas of concentration, and standards of success (Barnett, 2013; Entwisle et al., 1999). The sample of parents with children from a single school posed a weakness in external reliability for this study.

Moreover, the study's research design might use some expansion. As the main objective of the study was to examine parents' reasons for not enrolling their children in pre-K, one could employ a qualitative research design, especially considering the size and homogeneity of the study's sample. However, researchers have pointed out that there are underlying factors, such as demographics, that may influence the participants' opinions (Barnett, 2013; Entwisle et al., 1999). Unfortunately, a qualitative research design would not have the capacity to determine the relationship between these factors thoroughly.

Recommendations and Reflections

The findings of this study highlighted several beneficial matters to address in future research. First, to increase the reliability of the study's findings, future studies can garner a larger number of participants from which to gather data. Therefore, a greater insight may be obtained, and there may be a greater possibility for more themes to emerge. Moreover, garnering a sample that is more diverse regarding location, nationality, socio-economic status, and the type and quality of the child's school may allow for a more in-depth analysis of the factors that influence parents' decision not to enroll their children in pre-K. If these additional factors are included in the analysis, findings may become more generalizable to identify possible trends associated with different groups within the population.

One important recommendation regarding the study's data collection instrument is to conduct continuous validity and reliability testing. This process can be done in future research studies by retesting the interview protocol with other individuals who are not part of the study but are from the same population as the actual participants. Additionally, continuous consultation with experts in qualitative research methods and experts on education studies may be useful to ensure that the questions elicit the kind of information that the interview intends to discover. From the results of the tests and the feedback from experts, the instrument can then be refined and revised as necessary.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicated potential research directions for future studies on this topic. A large body of research has highlighted the advantages that result from attending preschool (Barnett, 2013; Entwisle et al., 1999). Because pre-K has

been studied to improve children's academic and social outcomes, children who have not attended pre-K may have noticeable deficiencies compared to children who have.

However, it was unknown if parents noticed any shortcomings in their children because of a lack of experience in preschool. Future research can uncover parents' views and observations of their child upon entering kindergarten without a preschool experience.

Another way of increasing the validity and reliability of a study is by utilizing multiple research methods and approaches. Having been able to explore the views and experiences of parents who did not enroll their children in preschool by using a qualitative research design was a necessary step forward. However, further understanding of the subject matter can be enriched by quantitative studies. Quantitative methods allow researchers to objectively measure and organize these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Because of the statistical nature, quantitative researchers can determine statistically significant relationships among multiple variables in the study. As the results of this study have shown participants' subjective experiences and insight, future researchers can identify how, to what extent, and under what conditions they apply to the greater population.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The findings of the current study have many implications that may contribute to positive social change in various levels of society. First, the insights garnered in this study may help to provide parents and legal guardians with a broadened viewpoint regarding preschool. Because the study's participants were also parents, their personal

experiences and views regarding their decision not to enroll their children in pre-K, as recorded in this study, were likely to resonate with some readers. If not, these could broaden their perspective on preschool, thus allowing parents to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both sides. Therefore, they may be better able to discern the best option for their children considering their situations.

Second, leaders of schools and centers providing pre-K programs also stand to benefit from the findings of this study. As expressed by the study's participants, multiple factors hinder parents from enrolling their children in pre-K programs, many which can be improved by the schools themselves. Knowledge of the factors that school leaders can control may allow them to further improve their public services, consequently drawing in more students in the preschool level. For example, schools can start providing means of transportation that can bring their students to school and back home after classes. Meanwhile, they can also be more active in advertising their pre-K programs to families in the community, giving thorough explanations on the qualities of their programs and how their children can benefit from these.

Third, this study also has its implications at the societal level. As observed in this study, many parents have a general lack of awareness of the educational opportunities provided by the state for children. This finding can encourage community administrations and municipalities to increase their efforts in disseminating information about these programs to the public. If families are more aware of the different options that are available to them, they will be more capable of finding the course of action that is most beneficial and most suitable for them.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contributed to the currently limited knowledge on parents who chose not to enroll their children in pre-K. The results provided a foundation for literature on the different perspectives of this population. The results also provided insight on ways in which parents might be induced to consider preschool for their children.

A few factors emerged to have contributed to the study's results. The findings may be explained by the study's scope. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 explains that the influencing factors of choice not to send their children to pre-K may differ in type and degree depending on various individual characteristics such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and personal values, as well as situational factors, such as location, awareness, and knowledge of pre-K programs. Unfortunately, these may not have been adequately considered.

One aspect in which this was evident is the sample scope. As explained in Chapter 3, before data collection, all participants were recruited from the same school in the same area. Although personal demographics might not have been recorded in this study, having had only one sample source might have restricted the diversity of the participants in this study. Thus, the conclusions of this study might not be broad enough to generalize to the overall population of parents who did not send their children to pre-K. If the sample of parents were larger and more diverse regarding location and demographics, it would allow for additional insight to be gained.

This study also had its points of weakness; particularly, its research design left much to be discovered. Whereas this study utilized a qualitative methodology, knowledge in this topic would be greatly supplemented through further research carried out with a quantitative or mixed-methods design. Researchers could identify relationships among the different factors at play objectively to determine the prevalence of participants' views across demographics. Integrating a quantitative approach to the study through quantitative surveys, as well as correlational and descriptive analysis, might provide an opportunity to increase its generalizability and establish more connections to expand knowledge on this topic.

Practical Implications

The current study may prove useful to the education sector, primarily to school administrations. Firstly, school administrations can use the findings of this study to devise more initiatives and create possible solutions to the participants' concerns and opinions on preschool. These can be logistical, such as including means of transportation for the students or extending class hours, or curricular, such as revising the curriculum to ensure that parents are more satisfied with the lessons and activities that their children will experience in the program. Moreover, knowledge on the participants' lack of general awareness of the educational opportunities in their vicinity may encourage them to think of ways to spread information of these opportunities to the public more effectively and comprehensively.

Conclusion

This study used a qualitative research design to answer the question: Why do parents choose not to enroll their children in pre-K, despite the availability of free pre-K programs? Understanding answers to this question may expand the currently limited knowledge of parents' views on preschool and the factors that influence their decisions regarding their children's education. This finding may consequently provide insight on ways to improve various initiatives within the educational sector, as well as enlighten other parents on the alternative view regarding preschool programs in the United States.

From the results, situational factors became hindrances to parents' ability to enroll and sustain their children in preschool. There were also personal values, particularly family values, which they held as more important at this stage in the child's life. Parents were not just utility maximizers but also caregivers who genuinely wanted the best for their children, according to what they knew.

Most notably, I found that much of parents' negative preconceptions on preschool programs derived from a lack of awareness about the various programs that were available around them. One thing that was overlooked was the diversity of preschool programs—differences in approach, curriculum, and standards abound across programs. Leaders must overcome the lack of information shared with the public. To provide quality education to the young, parents and guardians must be thoroughly educated about the different qualities of education that they would need early on for their children.

Further research needs to be carried out on a larger and more diverse sample to examine parents' reasons for not enrolling their children in preschool. The knowledge

generated from this study offers useful implications on how educational administrations may improve attendance to their educational programs by providing more information to parents. The discussion in Chapter 5 concludes the study.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Why do parents not enroll their children in pre-K programs, though such programs are free and readily available?

RQ1. Which particular factors serve as inhibitors to parents enrolling their children in pre-K programs?

Were there any practical obstacles to having your child attend pre-K? If so, what were they?

Were there any financial obstacles to having your child attend pre-K? If so, what were they?

RQ2. Which particular factors serve as inducements for parents to enroll their children in pre-K programs?

When you were a child, did you attend pre-K classes? Do you feel that your attendance or lack thereof influenced your decision to not send your child to pre-K? If so, how?

Your actual decision aside, what factors may have induced you to enroll your child in pre-K or may induce you to do so in the future?

I have asked you to participate in this study because you indicated that you did not enroll your child in pre-K, though he/she did attend or is attending kindergarten. Can you tell me why not?

If you were aware that pre-K classes were free and available for all preschool children, how did you obtain that information?

RQ3. What do parents perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of pre-K programs?

Do you feel that pre-K would have been beneficial for your child? If so, how?

Do you feel that pre-K would have been detrimental for your child? If so, how?

Do you feel that, in general, pre-K classes are beneficial for preschoolers? If not, why not?

Do you feel that preschoolers can learn what they need to know to enter grade school in kindergarten? If not, what do you feel that they should learn but do not?

If you have other children, have you enrolled them in pre-K in the past, or do you intend to enroll them in pre-K in the future? Why or why not?