

Abstract

This study examines the effects of ECEC on child development and children's later life outcomes. Using meta-analytical techniques, we synthesize the findings from a recent strand of literature, exploiting natural experiments to identify the causal effects of universal ECEC arrangements (IV; DID; RDD). We use 253 estimates from 30 studies conducted between 2005 and 2015. Our meta-regressions include estimates on a wide variety of children's outcomes, ranging from (non-)cognitive development measured during early childhood to educational outcomes during adolescence and labor market performance during adulthood. We classify these diverse outcomes by whether the effect of ECEC on children's outcomes is significantly negative, statistically insignificant or significantly positive and estimate our main meta-analytical models regressions with ordered probit models. Our findings indicate that the evidence on universal ECEC is mixed. Whether the impact is positive or negative cannot be explained by the age of enrollment nor the intensity of the program. Quality, however, matters critically. Furthermore, there is no evidence of fading out and the effects of ECEC appear to be more favorable in the long run (during adolescence/adulthood). The study shows that the gains of ECEC are concentrated within the group of disadvantaged children.