



On average, interventions which aim to raise aspirations appear to have little or no positive impact

Cost

£££££

Evidence strength



Impact (months)

0

Effect size

0.00

What is it?

By aspirations we mean the things children and young people hope to achieve for themselves in the future. To meet their aspirations about careers, university, and further education, pupils often require good educational outcomes. Raising aspirations is therefore often believed to incentivise improved attainment.

Aspiration interventions tend to fall into three broad categories:

1. interventions that focus on parents and families;
2. interventions that focus on teaching practice; and
3. out-of-school interventions or extra-curricular activities, sometimes involving peers or mentors.

The approaches used in these interventions are diverse. Some aim to change aspirations directly by exposing children to new opportunities and others aim to raise aspirations by developing general self-esteem, motivation, or self-efficacy. For interventions that focus on self-efficacy and motivation specifically in a learning context please see [Metacognition and self-regulation](#).

How effective is it?

The relationship between aspirations and attainment is complex but, on average, interventions which aim to raise aspirations appear to have little or no positive impact on educational attainment. This may seem counterintuitive but there are three main reasons why this might be the case.

First, evidence suggests that most young people already have high aspirations, suggesting that much underachievement results not from low aspiration but from a gap between aspirations and the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required to achieve them. Second, where pupils do have lower aspirations, it is not clear that any targeted interventions have consistently succeeded in

raising their aspirations. Third, where aspirations begin low and are successfully raised by an intervention, it is not clear that an improvement in learning necessarily follows. As a result it may be more helpful to focus directly on raising attainment. In aspiration programmes which do raise attainment, additional academic support is generally present.

The evidence base on aspiration interventions is very limited. More rigorous studies are required, focusing on both student-level and school-level interventions. There are no empirical studies of interventions to raise aspirations that report impact on achievement or learning.

Existing studies have looked at two variables, parental engagement and teaching methodologies, while investigating students' motivation and aspirational thinking. Focusing on high quality teacher-student and parent-student interaction may have a positive impact on students' intrinsic motivation.

Empirical studies are highly needed to explore aspiration interventions and its impact on students learning and achievement in the Arab world.

How secure is the evidence?

The evidence base on aspiration interventions is very limited. More rigorous studies are required, particularly focusing on pupil-level rather than school-level interventions. There are no meta-analyses of interventions to raise aspirations that report impact on attainment or learning. There are two relevant systematic reviews. These indicate that the relationship between aspirations and attainment is complex and that the evidence for a clear causal connection between learning, changing aspirations, and attitudes to school is weak.

This lack of strong evidence does not mean that impact is not achievable, but schools considering aspiration interventions cannot assume that raising aspirations will be straightforward or will necessarily increase attainment.

The majority of studies come from the USA. There has been little robust research on the impact of aspiration interventions in English schools.

What are the costs?

Costs vary widely and are hard to estimate precisely, but overall they are estimated as moderate. After school programmes typically cost about £5 to £10 per session, so a weekly programme lasting 20 weeks might cost up to £200 per pupil. [Parental engagement](#) programmes typically cost between about £200 per child per year when the school covers the staffing costs, and about £850 per child per year for family support involving a full-time support worker. Mentoring approaches aiming to raise aspirations in the USA have been estimated at \$900 per student per year or about

£630.

Costs vary widely and are hard to estimate precisely, but overall they are estimated as moderate. After-school programmes typically cost about 5.0 GBP to 10.0 GBP (6.4 USD to 12.9 USD, 4.6 JOD to 9.1 JOD) per session, so a weekly programme lasting 20 weeks might cost up to 200.0 GBP (USD, JOD) per pupil. Parental engagement programmes typically cost about 200.0 GBP (257.3 USD, 182.4 JOD) per child per year when the school covers the staffing costs, and about 850.0 GBP (1,093.4 USD, 775.2 JOD) per child per year for family support involving a full-time support worker.

Mentoring approaches aiming to raise aspirations in the USA have been estimated at 900 USD (699.5 GBP, 638.1 JOD) per student per year.

Costs originally calculated in GBP and USD; equivalent GBP, USD and JOD calculated via oanda.com on 22/09/20.

As yet there is no information about local costs.

What should I consider?

The relationship between aspirations and attainment is not straightforward. In general, approaches to raising aspirations have not translated into increased learning.

Most young people have high aspirations for themselves. Ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to progress towards their aspirations is likely to be more effective than intervening to change the aspirations themselves.

The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that surround aspirations in disadvantaged communities are diverse, so avoid generalisations.

Effective approaches almost always have a significant academic component, suggesting that raising aspirations in isolation will not be effective.

Have you considered how you will monitor the impact on attainment of any interventions or approaches?

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