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Cost

£££££

Evidence strength



Impact (months)

+4

Effect size

0.31

What is it?

Small group tuition is defined as one teacher or professional educator working with two to five pupils together in a group. This arrangement enables the teacher to focus exclusively on a small number of learners, usually in a separate classroom or working area. Intensive tuition in small groups is often provided to support lower attaining learners or those who are falling behind, but it can also be used as a more general strategy to ensure effective progress, or to teach challenging topics or skills.

How effective is it?

Overall, evidence shows that small group tuition is effective and, as a rule of thumb, the smaller the group the better. Tuition in groups of two has a slightly higher impact than in groups of three, but a slightly lower impact than one to one tuition. Some studies suggest that greater feedback from the teacher, more sustained engagement in smaller groups, or work which is more closely matched to learners' needs explains this impact. Once group size increases above six or seven there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

However, although the above pattern is broadly consistent, there is some variability in impact within the existing evidence. For example, in reading, small group teaching can sometimes be more effective than either one to one or paired tuition. It may be that in these cases reading practice can be efficiently organised so that all the pupils stay fully engaged as each take their turn, such as in Guided Reading.

The variability in findings suggests two things. First, the quality of the teaching in small groups may be as or more important than the precise group size (there is evidence of the benefits of staff professional development on pupil outcomes). Second, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of different arrangements, as the specific subject matter being taught and

composition of the groups may influence outcomes.

Given the uncertainty and the lower cost, small group tuition may be a sensible approach to trial before considering to one to one tuition.

Evidence of small group tuition in the Arab world is still inconclusive, however, studies that have taken place have shown promising results on students' social and academic skills. Studies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and Oman reported that this arrangement provides students with opportunities to interact and be more engaged in their learning. A study of small group tuition in Saudi Arabia found significant improvements to students' Arabic reading comprehension skills in addition to their interaction and cooperative learning.

However, researchers have recommended teachers to be more prepared and trained in applying small group tuition in the classroom. Furthermore, textbooks and curricula in some contexts are considered as potential barriers. That is why in some contexts (i.e, Saudi Arabia), textbooks and curricula were recently developed according to modern strategies to facilitate teachers' work in following students' progress, detect their individual needs, and choose appropriate strategies that could be more suitable to the development of their learning.

To date, research on small group tuition is limited in this region despite the few reported benefits particularly to the development of the Arabic language. More research is needed in this area, including using sample of students and teachers from various course subjects and from different contexts in the Arab world. Additionally, inductive approaches are also needed to collect in-depth information about students perceptions and feelings about working in small groups.

How secure is the evidence?

The evidence mainly relates to low-attaining pupils receiving additional support to catch up with their peers. More research has been undertaken into paired tuition than other kinds of small group tuition, so the evidence for small group teaching across varying sizes of groups and at different levels of intensity is not conclusive and mainly comes from single studies. There are very few studies where group size has been varied systematically to explore the effects beyond one to two and one to three, so more research would be useful in this area. Overall, the evidence is limited.

A 2011 evaluation of Every Child Counts also found that the programme had a positive impact when delivered on a one to one basis or with groups of two or three, with all group sizes making similar amounts of progress.

What are the costs?

Overall, costs are estimated as moderate. Costs decrease as group size increases because the majority of the costs are for staff time. The cost of paired tuition is approximated as 350.0 GBP (450.2 USD, 319.2 JOD) per pupil per term (based on two pupils receiving 30 minutes of tuition, five times a week for 12 weeks) plus any resource or equipment costs, with one to three cheaper still (about 233.0 GBP, 299.7 USD, 212.5 JOD) per pupil).

Costs originally calculated in 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?

Small group tuition is most likely to be effective if it is targeted at pupils' specific needs. How will you assess pupils' needs accurately before adopting a new approach?

One to one tuition and small group tuition are both effective interventions. However, the cost effectiveness of one to two and one to three indicates that greater use of these approaches may be worthwhile. Have you considered trying one to two or one to three as an initial option?

Training and support are likely to increase the effectiveness of small group tuition. Have those delivering the small group tuition been trained in the programme they are using?

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