

About the research

Educational outcomes: the impact of aspirations and the role of student background characteristics

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Current educational reforms and targets, such as increasing higher-level qualifications amongst the working-age population, are reliant on improving the educational outcomes of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This paper follows on from previous research, which has shown that educational aspirations are strong predictors of educational outcomes, including Year 12 and tertiary participation. The focus of the paper is to understand the relationships between student background characteristics, educational aspirations and educational outcomes.

The researchers set out to determine whether student background factors, such as socioeconomic status (SES) and Indigenous status, only affect educational outcomes via their indirect effect on educational aspirations. They also examine whether aspirations have the same effect on educational outcomes for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as those who are not from disadvantaged backgrounds. The analysis is based on data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which collects information on aspirations at age 15 years via questions on intentions to complete Year 12 and post-school study plans.

Key messages

- Educational aspirations have a substantial effect on educational outcomes.
 - Individuals who plan to complete Year 12 are 20–25% more likely to do so, compared with those who do not intend to complete Year 12.
 - Individuals who intend to go onto university are 15–20% more likely to do so, compared with those who do not have post-school university plans.
- Interactions between educational aspirations and student background characteristics do not seem particularly important, suggesting that aspirations have a similar impact on educational outcomes, regardless of socioeconomic status and Indigenous status.
- There were some significant interactions between aspirations and academic performance. For example, those who considered their academic performance to be average or below average, relative to their peers, were less likely to achieve their aspirations compared with those who considered their performance to be above average.

The authors conclude that interventions to lift the aspirations of young people should have a similar impact for all young people, including those most at risk of poor educational outcomes.

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