

Don't Aim Too High for Your Kids: Parental Overaspiration Undermines Students' Learning in Mathematics

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Previous research has suggested that parents' aspirations for their children's academic attainment can have a positive influence on children's actual academic performance. Possible negative effects of parental overaspiration, however, have found little attention in the psychological literature.

Employing a dual-change score model with longitudinal data from a representative sample of German school children and their parents (N3,530; Grades 5 to 10), we showed that parental aspiration and children's mathematical achievement were linked by positive reciprocal relations over time. Importantly, we also found that parental aspiration that exceeded their expectation (i.e., overaspiration) had negative reciprocal relations with children's mathematical achievement.

These results were fairly robust after controlling for a variety of demographic and cognitive variables such as children's gender, age, intelligence, school type, and family socioeconomic status. The results were also replicated with an independent sample of U.S. parents and their children.

These findings suggest that unrealistically high parental aspiration can be detrimental for children's achievement.

Keywords: parental expectation, mathematical achievement, latent difference score model, cross-lagged analysis, aspiration– expectation gap

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