

Young Lives Methods Guide

The Schools Component



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The school component of Young Lives was introduced in 2010 after the Round 3 household data collection. It follows a sample of the Young Lives children to school, where two rounds of data about the character and quality of the education they receive will be collected. Understanding what happens to children at school has become particularly important in a context of increasing diversity in the provision of education.

At the time of writing this Methods Guide in 2011, the first round of the school component had been carried out in Ethiopia and India, was about to happen in Vietnam and Peru. With its addition, Young Lives has become one of only a handful of surveys which gathers detailed information not only about children and their households and communities, but also about their schools. It is also almost unique within the study countries in that it provides linked child, household and school data in a longitudinal panel.

Questions about which children have access to education and which factors enable or constrain that access have been a key element of Young Lives research from the outset, and sections of the longitudinal questionnaire survey are devoted gathering data on these subjects. The school component goes a step further, linking information about individual children and their households to data about schools and educational quality, thereby increasing the potential of Young Lives to answer questions about the effectiveness of education in combatting inequality and preventing the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Ultimately it will allow the examination of certain key causal relationships between the quality of education and livelihoods, health and employment and young people's future prospects. It is framed by the following two broad questions:

- How do the relationships between poverty and child development manifest themselves in and impact upon children's educational experiences and outcomes?
- To what extent does educational experience reinforce or compensate for disadvantage in terms of child development and multidimensional poverty?

A common framework and contextual diversity

In order to take into account the range of contexts and key issues in education policy, the exact content and design of the school component differs slightly in each study country. All school component instruments however share a common framework, intended to capture the children's experiences of education in a way that allows statistical analysis but is also flexible enough to adjust to contextual diversity. In all four countries, the school surveys examine the same core dimensions of education and educational experience:

- educational access and progression
- quality of education
- equity in education
- the role of education in the policy cycle.

Each country school component relies on this common framework and comprises a set of country-specific research questions which are guided by the broad themes of the research. Variations between countries reflect not only an understanding of which areas the school component is best placed to investigate given the other data being collected by Young Lives, but also a careful analysis of the policy context in each country. Consultation and discussion with policy actors has been an important element of research design in each country.

Sampling is a second key area of variation between countries. In each country, a sub-sample of Young Lives children is selected, with each aiming to find a balance between capturing as many children as possible and a reasonable breadth of different kinds of school. Achieving this balance depends partly on logistical and resource limitations, and is also shaped by the same contextual policy analysis that underpins the country-specific research questions.

In Ethiopia, for example, research shows that large increases in primary school enrolment over the past decade are very differently distributed across rural and urban areas, as well as across ethnic groups and regions. Most children attend government schools, where their attendance is often inconsistent and repetition and drop-out levels are high. There have been several policy initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education.

Reflecting this context, the Ethiopia school component specifically looked at monitoring the effectiveness of policy initiatives to improve educational quality. In order to illuminate issues of inconsistent attendance and repetition, children were sampled from both the younger and older cohorts, and siblings of the selected older cohort children were also included. In rural areas, all schools attended by a Young Lives child were surveyed. This was not possible in urban areas, where greater choice means that children are more widely dispersed between schools, so 40 per cent of younger and older urban children were selected. Issues of sequencing the school component with other elements of the Young Lives study meant it was not possible to track children who had migrated out of Young Lives sites, nor children who live in a Young Lives site but go to school outside it.

In India, by contrast, the last decade has seen a rapid growth in private education. In Andhra Pradesh, Young Lives children attend a mixture of government schools and recognised and unrecognised private schools, with the latter being particularly

dominant in urban areas. The children in the sub-sample are also dispersed over a wide geographical area. Against this background, the key sampling requirements were maintaining adequate variation across school types and urban and rural locations, and selecting a logistically manageable number of schools. This was achieved by using a sampling frame consisting of all the younger cohort children who were enrolled in school within Andhra Pradesh in 2009, and then taking a stratified sample through six key types of school, encompassing the range of rural, urban, public, private, recognised and unrecognised institutions.

In Vietnam, where initial access to primary education is now nearly universal, there is an emerging emphasis on the question of primary school completion. The attention of policymakers has also begun to turn towards quality and equity, especially because in respect of children's achievement, regional variation and variation based on household characteristics is very wide, with considerable advantage being afforded by urban location and to the ethnic majority Kinh.

In light of the importance of school completion, the Vietnam school component focuses on the younger cohort children, whose age is ideal to give an understanding of what happens during the latter stages of primary education and the implications of this for later transitions and outcomes. At the time of the first round of the school component, nearly all of the younger children were enrolled at school, and it was anticipated that most would still be there at the time of the second round. The focus of the survey is on those Young Lives children studying in Grade 5 at the time of fieldwork, and each school attended by one or more of these children was selected. A sample was also taken of class peers of Young Lives children studying in these schools, allowing for a more thorough examination of the variation between schools and classes.

Data collection methods

Each country study uses a combination of up to eight separate instruments to collect school data. These include:

- **Principal questionnaire:** personal details and attitudes of the school principal; general information about the school, including governance and links to higher authorities and the community; school-level information about pupils and teachers.
- **Teacher questionnaire:** personal details and attitudes of a teacher of the Young Lives children; general information about the teaching methods and classroom procedures for the classes in which Young Lives children are studying.
- **Child questionnaire:** personal attitudes and opinions about school.
- **Child tests:** in maths and language.
- **Teacher methods assessments:** giving examples of mistakes made by children when doing maths problems, and asking teachers to explain how they would correct the errors.

- **School observation:** looking at the infrastructure, facilities and management of the school and the availability of resources like textbooks and toilet facilities.
- **Child observation:** observing behaviour and environment in the classroom, and assessing homework books.
- **Teacher observation:** observing teaching methods and language.

The exact mix of instruments used in each country varies slightly. In Ethiopia, for example, the child tests were not administered at school, because the school component happened at the same time as the Round 3 of the main Young Lives survey, which carries out cognitive tests with the child at home. In Vietnam, child test instruments were developed to be comparable to those used in a nationally representative pupil survey.

In addition to the eight basic instruments of the school component, qualitative sub-studies have been carried out in some locations. In sixteen Ethiopian schools, in-depth interviews were carried out with Young Lives teachers and principals to explore their perspectives on policy interventions, and interviews and focus group discussions held with Young Lives children and their peers to deepen understanding of their experiences of school. In India, a sub-study on school choice is using quantitative data to develop questions that can be examined in more detail through qualitative analysis.

Challenges

- In common with the broader Young Lives study, there is a tension in the school component between its dual purpose as a public good providing a repository of knowledge on a broad theme and as an analytic study. This tension gives rise to challenges of how to define questions and to sequence the use of different tools.
- Also in common with the broader study, the school component is producing very large datasets, which can present challenges for systematic analysis and prioritising and sequencing analytic questions.
- The different approach taken to sampling in each country means that particular care is needed in discussing exactly what the data represent. Matching data between components of the Young Lives study is made more challenging by the use of slightly different approaches to sampling at different stages of the main survey, and this demands constant vigilance.
- Consulting key actors in education policy at the design stage of the school component may have created expectations that the data it produces will answer very specific policy questions, which may not be the case. The pre-existing Young Lives sample is the foundation of the school component sample and data, and this precludes direct nationally representative measurement of the impact of particular policies, teaching methodologies or approaches.

Some of the pupil tests used in the school component have required considerable adaptation to make them culturally appropriate to the range of contexts.

