

Section 8: School Surveys

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Young Lives has been conducting school surveys across the four study countries since 2010. Recognising the increasingly central role that schooling plays in children's lives, these surveys have sought to improve our understanding of the impact of diverse school environments on children's lives and outcomes. With the addition of school-level data, Young Lives has become one of only a handful of surveys which gathers detailed longitudinal information not only about children and their households and communities, but also about their schools, providing a unique resource for research and policy.

The first round of school surveys took place in all four countries between 2010-13, and focused on school effectiveness at the primary level. Additional secondary school surveys are taking place in 2016-17 in all four countries. Survey design has evolved over time and varies between countries, to take account of important contextual differences, but the research is framed by 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 surveys differs slightly in each study country. However, all school survey instruments 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 countries and at both the primary and secondary levels, 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 school survey 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 survey 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 from the survey design stage through to the dissemination and discussion of results of analysis has been an important element of the research in each country.

Sampling and design is a second key area of variation between countries. The first primary surveys in India and Ethiopia went to the schools of a selection of Young Lives children, adding school-level data to the household data. Later primary school surveys and the forthcoming secondary surveys have moved away from this approach to focus on answering questions of school effectiveness. This has involved the selection of schools in the Young Lives sites, and the sampling of both Young Lives children and their peers, often in a specific grade or class in those schools.

These surveys have also involved a 'test and retest' design in which survey fieldwork has taken place at both the beginning and end of the school year, to enable analysis of the determinants of pupil progress in a single academic year. In each instance, the aim has been to find a balance between capturing as many Young Lives children as possible and producing a balanced school and class level sample for the purposes of conducting research on school effectiveness. 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 Vietnam, for example, 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. The Vietnam school survey in 2011-12 therefore focused on the Younger Cohort children, whose age was 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. The survey focused on those Young Lives children 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 survey uses a combination of up to eight separate instruments to collect school data, with the exact mix and design varying by country and survey. 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 surveyed children; general information about the teaching methods and classroom procedures for the classes in which the surveyed children are studying.
- **Child questionnaire:** personal details; attitudes and opinions about school.
- **Child tests:** in maths and reading comprehension (at primary level) and maths, functional English and transferable skills (at secondary level)
- **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 such as textbooks and toilet facilities.
- **Child observation:** observing behaviour and environment in the classroom, and assessing homework books.
- **Teacher observation:** observing teaching methods and language.

In addition to the eight basic instruments of the school component, [qualitative sub-studies](#) have been carried out in some locations focused on specific research questions of direct policy interest, which arise out of the main dataset.

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 in what sequence to use 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.

REFERENCE

Rolleston, C., Z. James, L. Pasquier-Dourmer and Tran Ngo Thi Min Tam (2013) *Making Progress: Report of the Young Lives School Survey in Vietnam*, Working Paper 100. Oxford: Young Lives.