

This fact sheet presents preliminary findings from the fourth round of the Young Lives survey in 2013. It reports on children's learning and some of the changes that have taken place in key education indicators for our sample children over the eleven years since the first round of data collection in 2002. The data shows that the enrolment rates for the 12-year-olds are high, for boys and girls alike and in both rural and urban areas, although children from the poorest households and ethnic minority communities are still more likely not to be attending school. Education inequalities are more apparent with respect to extra classes, which can be regarded as a private supplement to the public education system, with two-thirds of all children receiving extra tuition – almost 90% of children from better-off households but just a third of children from poorer homes. Education outcomes, measured in the highest grade achieved and maths test scores of 12-year-olds, reflect this. Children from poorer households and ethnic minority groups have completed, on average, fewer grades of school and do less well in our maths tests, which raise concerns about the continued intergenerational transmission of poverty. Encouragingly, we also see evidence that these children among our Younger Cohort are doing better than the Older Cohort when they were aged 12 in 2006 and that the learning gaps that exist between them and their better-off peers are starting to close.

The policy context for education in Viet Nam

In recent years, education policy debates in Viet Nam have been focused on the very real challenge of ensuring that the country's education system can meet the needs of a rapidly expanding economy and create a highly skilled workforce able to compete alongside other countries in the region. But we must not lose sight of tremendous progress that has been made in basic education since the 1980s when Viet Nam was one of the poorest countries in the world.

Enrolment rates at primary school at high (97%), although boys are more likely than girls to drop out of school early, and Vietnam has been performing well against international standards, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In 2013 the Party Central Committee agreed a comprehensive reform in education to meet the requirements of industrialisation and modernisation, revising the curriculum and national examinations, and consolidating the linkages between vocational training, tertiary education and the labour market.

Key findings

- Enrolment in primary schools is high in Viet Nam and we see that also as the Young Lives children enter lower secondary level. Among the Young Lives sample enrolment is high across all socio-economic categories.
- There is virtually no gender gap in enrolment at age 12 when 97.3% of boys and 97.8% of girls are attending school. The gap exists, however, between Kinh majority children, 99% of whom are attending school, compared with just 88% of ethnic minority children.
- Parental levels of education are a strong predictor of a child's enrolment and we see that as many as 13% of children whose mothers had little education had already left school by age 12.
- In 2006, slightly over half of the Older Cohort children (then aged 12) were in Grade 6, while the others (less than a half) were in Grade 5 or lower. In this respect, the Younger Cohort children were doing better, as the average grade at age 12 has increased from 5.6 to 5.9.
- Most progress in terms of closing the gap in grade completion was made among ethnic minority children (whose average grade increased from 4.7 to 5.6) and children whose caregivers had had no schooling (average increased from 4.4 to 5.4).
- Almost two-thirds of all children are taking extra classes: 86% of children from better-off families compared with just 38% of children from the poorest families.
- We find evidence of learning progress in general and in particular that marginalised children are catching up. Children from ethnic minority groups made relatively greater progress and the gap between their maths test scores and those of Kinh majority children narrowed.

School enrolment, school type and grade completion

One of the main achievements of the education system in Viet Nam is high rate of enrolment in primary education, which to some extent carries over to lower secondary level. Among the Young Lives sample enrolment is high across all socio-economic categories (see Table 2), particularly children in urban areas, from better-off households, and whose caregivers have completed lower secondary education.

Parental levels of education are a strong predictor of a child's enrolment and progress at school (in large part because higher levels of education are linked to better livelihoods), and can therefore be considered a factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty. We see this clearly within the Young Lives sample. 99% of children whose mother had completed lower secondary school are in school at the age of 12. On the other hand, as many as 13% of children whose mothers had no schooling had already left school by age 12, although the school attendance among these children had increased slightly for the 12-year-olds in 2013 (87%) compared to the Older Cohort at the same age in 2006 (84%). There is virtually no gender gap in enrolment: 97.3% of boys and 97.8% of girls are attending school at age 12. The gap, however, exists between Kinh majority children, 99% of whom are attending school, compared with just 88% of ethnic minority children, as well as between children from better-off households (99.7%) or poorer households (93.7%).

Viet Nam's Law on Education stipulates that all children should start school in September of the year they turn 6, so that by the age of 12, a child would be normally be expected to be in Grade 6 (the first year of lower secondary school), or in the final grade of primary school. In 2006, slightly over half of the Older Cohort children (then aged 12) were in Grade 6, while the others (less than a half) were in Grade 5 or lower, which is likely to be the result of a combination of late enrolment and grade repetition.

In this respect, the Younger Cohort children were doing better, as the average grade at age 12 was very close to 6, which means that an absolute majority of the 12-year-old boys and girls are in Grade 6 with very few cases of either grade repetition or late enrolment. Most progress in terms of closing the gaps between children was made among ethnic minority children (whose average grade increased from 4.7 to 5.6) and children whose caregivers had had no schooling (average increased from 4.4 to 5.4). The average grade for these groups in 2013 (for the Younger Cohort) is one grade higher than that in 2006 (for the Older Cohort). See Table 1.

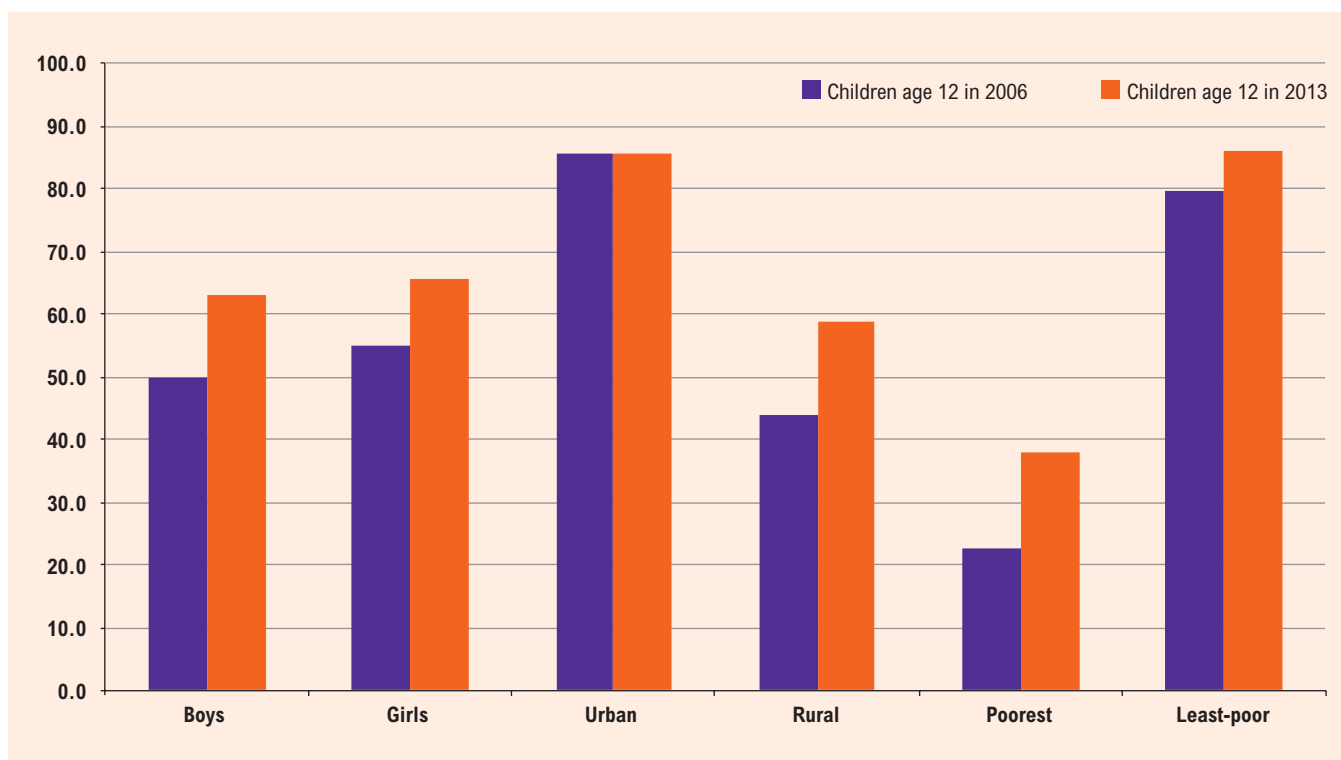
Table 1. Average grade attended by children age 12

	2006	2013
Gender		
Boys	5.6	5.9
Girls	5.6	5.9
Location		
Urban	5.8	5.9
Rural	5.5	5.9
Household wealth level		
Bottom tercile	5.1	5.8
Middle tercile	5.7	6.0
Top tercile	5.9	5.9
Caregiver education level		
No education	4.4	5.4
0-4 years	5.4	5.9
5-8 years	5.6	5.9
More than 9 years	5.9	6.0
Ethnicity		
Majority Group	5.7	5.9
Minority Group	4.7	5.6
Sample average	5.6	5.9

Extra classes and extra tuition

Private schools are rare in Viet Nam, especially at the primary and lower secondary levels. Statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training show that in the academic year 2006-07, there were only 90 non-public schools out of a total of 14,800 primary schools, and in 2012-13 there were only 95 non-public schools and 15,400 government primary schools. At the lower secondary level, there were just 21 non-public and 10,300 government schools in the academic year 2012-13. Young Lives data show that 99% of the children go to government schools. Private education features as supplement to the regular schooling in the form of extra classes, which involve additional instruction in core academic subjects (see Le Thuc Duc and Baulch 2013).

In 2006, half the boys and 55% of girls were taking extra classes at age 12. In 2013 this had increased to almost two-thirds of all children (63% of boys and 66% of girls) (See Table 2). There are inequalities between children from different backgrounds, although these are closing. In 2013, 85% of urban children were taking extra classes compared with 59% in rural areas. Likewise 86% of children from better-off families were taking extra classes compared with just 38% of children from the poorest families (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Children age 12 taking extra classes (by wealth level and urban/rural location)

Schooling and learning outcomes: progress in maths test scores

Young Lives gathers information about children's learning achievement through language and maths tests conducted in each survey round. While we asked some identical questions of the Older Cohort in 2006 and the Younger Cohort in 2013, many of the maths questions we asked are not the same (as we adjusted our tests in 2013 to better align them with the curriculum), so we cannot directly compare the average scores from the tests carried out in the two rounds.¹

However, when we compare similar questions asked in 2006 and in 2013, there is some evidence of learning progress and that children at the bottom are catching up to some extent. While the gap between children in urban and rural areas and the gap between children from better-off and the poorest households changed little, some other gaps narrowed more substantially. The children from ethnic minority groups made greater progress than the ethnic majority children and the gap in their average test scores closed from 31 to 23 percentage points. Similarly, the gap in average maths score between children whose caregivers had no schooling and those whose caregivers had at least nine years schooling reduced from 42 to 29 percentage points (see Table 2). This is clear evidence of the gains that can be made by investing in education for poorer and minority children.

Conclusion

Although public debate in Vietnam on education often reflects more critical than otherwise views, Young Lives survey data show considerable achievement and progress in a number of key indicators. Enrolment remains high among the Young Lives children at age 12 and their grade completion significantly improved. Boys and girls have been doing equally well. The progress in grade completion is greater for marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities and children whose caregivers had no schooling. We also find that catch-up has taken place as well in test scores, as the ethnic gap in average maths test score narrowed.

There remain, however, concerns about inequality in certain areas, notably that 13% of ethnic minority children are no longer attending school, with potential consequences for the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Children from the poorest groups have completed fewer years of schooling on average than their better-off peers, and their average test scores are lower, although the gap in average maths test scores narrowed which is encouraging. A further sign of inequality is in the rate of taking extra-classes, which is currently considered as controversial, at best. The government may curb this activity by expanding the full-day schooling curriculum. Other dimensions of inequalities between the ethnic groups and between the poorest children and their better-off peers necessitate long-term approaches to tackle them and to maintain the momentum achieved in poverty reduction, especially in the mountain areas and for ethnic minority communities.

¹ The maths test for the Older Cohort in Round 2 (2006) consisted of 10 questions, while the test for the Younger Cohort at the same age in Round 4 (2013) contained 34 questions.

Table 2: Schooling and learning outcomes of 12-year-old children in Viet Nam

	Children enrolled in school (%)		Average grade attending		Children receiving extra-tuition (%)		Percentage of children who can correctly solve "Which of these is equal to 342?"		Percentage of children who can correctly solve "It takes Chris 4 minutes to wash a window. How long will it take him to wash 8 windows at this rate?"		Percentage of children who can correctly solve "A piece of rope 204cm long is cut into 4 equal pieces. Which of these gives the length of each piece in cm?"		Average of performance across 3 comparable maths questions		Number of children	
	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	OC in 2006	YC in 2013
Gender																
Boys	96.8	97.3	5.6	5.9	50.0	63.1	85.2	90.7	74.9	81.8	76.5	77.6	78.9	83.4	493	991
Girls	96.4	97.8	5.6	5.9	54.8	65.6	87.9	91.2	80.9	81.6	77.7	76.1	82.2	83.0	497	938
Location																
Urban	100.0	99.5	5.8	5.9	85.4	85.5	92.4	93.0	81.7	88.1	85.3	87.3	86.5	89.5	199	392
Rural	95.7	97.1	5.5	5.9	44.0	58.9	85.1	90.3	77.0	80.1	75.0	74.0	79.0	81.5	791	1,529
Household wealth level (using Young Lives wealth index)																
Bottom tercile	92.0	93.7	5.1	5.8	22.5	37.8	76.5	87.5	65.7	71.7	65.7	64.5	69.3	74.6	286	665
Middle tercile	98.5	99.4	5.7	6.0	51.7	69.8	87.8	91.1	80.7	85.2	79.2	79.3	82.6	85.2	328	622
Top tercile	99.7	99.7	5.9	5.9	79.5	86.0	93.2	94.1	86.8	88.3	86.4	86.7	88.8	89.7	298	642
Caregiver education level																
No education	84.5	87.0	4.4	5.4	14.0	19.0	56.2	80.7	46.1	56.3	41.6	44.3	48.0	60.4	97	207
0-4 years	95.4	95.4	5.4	5.9	35.1	41.8	82.0	89.1	70.9	76.0	69.2	68.5	74.0	77.9	175	282
5-8 years	97.0	99.3	5.6	5.9	44.7	66.2	87.5	91.9	78.1	82.7	77.4	78.9	81.0	84.5	298	669
More than 9 years	99.5	99.7	5.9	6.0	73.5	82.9	94.2	93.4	87.7	89.0	87.7	85.6	89.9	89.3	419	753
Ethnicity																
Majority Group	98.3	99.0	5.7	5.9	58.3	70.8	90.2	93.0	81.5	84.8	81.3	80.6	84.3	86.1	862	1,653
Minority Group	85.2	88.4	4.7	5.6	11.4	23.6	60.5	77.0	52.1	61.3	47.1	51.9	53.2	63.4	128	276
Region																
Northern Uplands	93.5	94.0	5.2	6.0	21.3	42.2	77.4	82.3	68.4	73.8	61.1	66.2	69.0	74.1	199	385
Red River Delta	98.5	99.5	6.0	6.1	79.3	95.4	94.4	91.4	88.2	88.2	84.6	85.1	89.1	88.2	198	391
Central Coastal Urban	100.0	99.5	5.8	5.8	85.6	86.6	92.2	93.1	81.9	87.5	85.0	87.8	86.4	89.5	195	367
Central Coastal Rural	94.0	96.4	5.5	5.7	40.1	47.2	82.9	90.6	73.9	82.2	77.9	73.0	78.2	81.9	199	393
Mekong River Delta	97.0	98.2	5.3	5.8	35.5	50.6	85.8	96.9	77.2	76.7	76.6	72.0	79.9	81.9	199	393
Total	96.6	97.5	5.6	5.9	52.4	64.3	86.6	90.9	77.9	81.7	77.1	76.9	80.5	83.2	990	1,929

Note: Data are from the Older Cohort aged 12 in Round 2 of the Young Lives survey (2006) and the Younger Cohort aged 12 in Round 4 (2013).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

This is the second in a series of fact sheets giving a preliminary overview of some of the key dates emerging from Round 4 of the Young Lives household and child survey carried out in Viet Nam between October 2013 and January 2014. The fact sheets – which cover *Survey Design and Sampling*; *Education and Learning*; *Health and Nutrition*; and *Youth and Development* – were written by Le Thuc Duc and Nguyen Thang, with comments from Nguyen Thi Thu Hang. We would like to thank our fieldwork teams and Vu Thi Thu Thuy from GSO who coordinated the survey fieldwork, the Young Lives Data Manager Nguyen Van Tien, and Patricia Espinoza for support with initial data analysis. In particular, we thank the Young Lives children and their families for their willingness to be part of our sample and answer our many questions.

In Viet Nam, Young Lives is a partnership between the Centre for Analysis and Forecasting at the Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences and the General Statistics Office, working with a team based in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford. Young Lives is funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and co-funded from 2010 to 2014 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from 2014 to 2015 by Irish Aid. In Ethiopia, the Oak Foundation is funding a sub-study of research into practice. The views expressed are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.

Funded by



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands



Irish Aid

An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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