WORKING PAPER NO.29

Extra Classes and Learning Outcomes of Eight-year-old Children in Vietnam

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Preface

This paper is one of a series of working papers published by the Young Lives project, an innovative longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh State), Peru and Vietnam. Between 2002 and 2015, some 2,000 children in each country are being tracked and surveyed at three to four year intervals, from when they are one until they are 14 years of age. Also, 1,000 older children in each country are being followed from when they are aged eight years old.

Young Lives is a joint research and policy initiative co-ordinated by an academic consortium (composed of the University of Reading, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London South Bank University and the South African Medical Research Council) and Save the Children UK, incorporating both interdisciplinary and North-South collaboration.

Young Lives seeks to:

- produce long-term data on children and poverty in the four research countries
- draw on this data to develop a nuanced and comparative understanding of childhood poverty dynamics to inform national policy agendas
- trace associations between key macro policy trends and child outcomes and use these findings as a basis to advocate for policy choices at macro and meso levels that facilitate the reduction of childhood poverty
- actively engage with ongoing work on poverty alleviation and reduction, involving stakeholders who may use or be impacted by the research throughout the research design, data collection and analysis, and dissemination stages
- foster public concern about, and encourage political motivation to act on, childhood poverty issues through its advocacy and media work at both national and international levels.

In its first phase, Young Lives has investigated three key story lines – the effects on child well-being of i) access to and use of services, ii) social capital, and iii) household livelihoods. This working paper is one of a series, considering an aspect of each of these story lines in each country. As a working paper, it represents work in progress and the authors welcome comments from readers as a contribution to the further development of these ideas.

The project received financial support from the UK Department for International Development and this is gratefully acknowledged.

For further information and to download all our publications, visit www.younglives.org.uk.

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Executive summary

Background

Although primary school enrolment in Vietnam is high (91 per cent) only 20 per cent of children receive a full day's schooling. The school year is also short by international standards. Most children therefore receive about half the number of teaching hours compared with international norms. The Vietnamese Government, as part of its development targets, is committed to the provision of full shifts of primary education by 2015. The government has banned 'illegal' extra classes, i.e. those run outside school administrations. However, teachers often register to run home-based crèches but then hold classes instead, to supplement their income. Even legally recognised extra classes are supposed to occupy no more than four hours a week and to cost no more than 4,000–6,000 dong (VND) per month. Extra classes are, nevertheless, proliferating and have become a concern for both society and the government.

Objective

This paper examines the extent and characteristics of extra classes among eight-year-old children in the Young Lives study conducted in Vietnam. It tests for association between taking extra classes and learning outcomes (numeracy, reading and writing skills).

Methods

In 2002, 1,000 eight-year-old children and their 1,000 mothers in five provinces in Vietnam were interviewed in a quantitative household survey using questionnaires.

Results

Forty-six per cent of children in the Young Lives sites took extra classes – mainly (over 60 per cent) at the instigation of their parents. On average children attended extra classes for nine hours a week, with 90 per cent of those taking extra classes exceeding the legal limit of four hours a week. Thirty per cent of household education expenses was devoted to extra classes. The main factors associated with good learning outcomes were: household wealth; having educated parents; being from the majority ethnic group; and having good child mental health. Extra classes did not affect writing or numeracy but were linked with increased reading ability.

Conclusion

The provision of extra classes as a norm should be restricted, as it places great financial pressure on poor households and is not generally associated with better learning outcomes. Social perception changes, the transparency and standardisation of exams, and greater supervision of classroom teaching quality are needed in order to tackle the underlying reasons for the growth in extra classes.

1 Introduction

Education lies at the heart of development. The greatest progress in reducing poverty is being made in countries that combine effective and equitable investment in education with sound economic policies. Since 1986, *Doi Moi*[1] has brought significant changes to education in Vietnam. The Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) of 2002 indicated that net enrolment in primary education increased from 87 per cent in 1993 to 91 per cent in 2002 (World Bank, 2002). The adult literacy rate is 91 per cent (UN Vietnam, 2003). However, the Vietnamese school year of 33 weeks is very short by international standards, and only around 20 per cent of children in Vietnam receive a full day of schooling, i.e. five to six hours a day which is the international norm (Poverty Task Force, 2002). Others receive half-day schooling, or even less for children attending schools operating three shifts per day. As a result, most primary students receive little more than half of the international norm for annual teaching time (WB and ADB, 2002).

The most up-to-date Education For All Plan, for the period 2003–15, was approved by the Prime Minister in government document no. 872/CP-KG dated 2 July 2003. In this plan, the government sets the targets of full-day schooling in all primary schools by 2015 and of mobilising full community participation (EFA, 2003). Public primary education under *Doi Moi* is still subsidised by the government and therefore parents do not have to pay tuition fees for their children. All of these efforts aim to provide equal access to education for all, improve the quality of primary education, and ensure effective management and ever better resource utilisation. However, together with the opening up of private education services under *Doi Moi*, the availability and uptake of extra classes – as market commodities – has mushroomed in all regions and is becoming an issue of increasing importance in Vietnam. In debating this issue, extra classes are sometimes classified into two categories: legal and illegal. Extra classes are provided for low-score performers, to enable them to catch up with their classmates, and for outstandingly talented children. These classes are organised by the school's administration and are classified as legal. In contrast, teachers can create an artificial demand for extra classes by reducing the duration and learning content of their school-based classes and by running extra classes in their own homes: both acts are considered illegal. Nearly ten years after the government banned illegal extra classes and standardised the time quota for legal extra classes (Government of Vietnam, 1993) the availability and uptake of illegal extra classes continues to increase (EduNet Forum, 2004).

This paper discusses the prevalence and type of extra classes, decision-making about using extra classes, payment, determinants of extra classes, and the association between taking such classes and children's learning outcomes. It considers whether primary-level pupils in Vietnam carry an extra burden of study or are merely being given opportunities to catch up with international standards. The findings will benefit policy-makers, given that the government is implementing ongoing strategies to reform the Vietnamese education system.

1.1 Extra classes

The issue of extra classes is not new. Globally, this trend is observed in both developed and developing countries. Trang (2002) summarises reasons for this phenomenon. In the West, the boom in information technology has created pressure on the education sector to transform itself, and economic

1 *Doi Moi* marks a renovation period starting in 1989 when a series of adjustment reforms was initiated in order to boost economic growth and reduce poverty in Vietnam.

arguments emphasise the role of investment in education as cost-beneficial. In East Asia, extra classes are greatly influenced by: the Chinese cultural custom that emphasises and values success and educational qualifications; the policy of having just one or two children in a family which has resulted in more investment in the individual child and placed higher expectations on the child; and the limitations of the education system itself.

All these reasons appear to be relevant in Vietnam, a country where education reforms are being undertaken rapidly. The cost recovery policy that started in 1992 aims to release the burden on the state budget and ask for consumer contributions. In addition, it is also a way to improve the quality of basic services through increased competition among service providers. However, recent reports reveal that poor people have become marginalised due to their inability to pay user fees. The right to education of many poor children has been denied because their parents are unable to afford to send them to school (Neefjes, 2002; Tuan *et al*, 2003). The education decentralisation reform, which aims to generate greater accountability at a lower level, has been progressing despite a number of challenges, such as the limited capacity of lower-level education management. Together with other reforms, these policies aim to achieve the targets of the National Education Development Strategy 2001–10 (Government of Vietnam, 2001), the Vietnam Development Targets (UN Vietnam, 2003) and the Education For All targets (Government of Vietnam, 2003).

In such a dynamic policy context, why are extra classes causing special concern? If extra classes aim to stretch the capabilities of advanced students who are preparing for specialised exams, or improve learning outcomes for low-achieving students, and if they are operated by formal school management structures, why are they controversial? A recently published article (Vietnam News, 2003, p. 5) explained:

> *'Four years have gone by since the Ministry of Education and Training issued instructions to provinces to closely supervise extra classes. However, many primary school teachers registered to run crèches but held classes for children instead. It was difficult to stop teachers and students from running and attending these classes and the suggestion to ban teachers from providing extra lessons for their students was controversial.'*

On the basis of the existing literature, the answer to why the issue of extra classes is controversial can be considered under three headings: demand, supply and impact.

Demand

It has been recognised that attendance at extra classes is motivated by both students and parents. From the children's perspective, in a study conducted in Ha Noi, Ha Tay and Ha Nam provinces (Chau, Ry and Dam, 2000), 89 per cent of primary school children said they took extra classes because:

1. they did not understand lessons delivered by their teachers
2. they wanted to study well
3. they wanted teachers to review old lessons and teach new ones
4. they liked studying
5. they wanted to prepare for exams
6. they were forced to study by their parents.

Reasons 1, 3 and 5 can be seen as related to shortfalls within the education sector overall, in particular to the shorter teaching hours, declining teaching quality and fewer teaching incentives, when compared with international standards. These are three crucial areas for improvement if Vietnam wishes to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

From the perspective of parents, success through learning is every parent's dream for his or her child, and this can be a strong motivating factor in seeking extra classes for their children. With increases in income, parents want to invest as much as possible in their children's education. According to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) study, costs and income are closely related in determining the demand for education (Bhushan *et al*, 2001). Nowadays, parents want their children to develop not only deeply (having as high a qualification as possible) but also widely (achieving an understanding of other subjects such as art and music, as well as literacy). Urban and wealthier children therefore tend to suffer greater pressure to take extra classes: there are more diverse forms of extra learning available in cities and their parents are more able to afford these extra expenses. In cities, sending children to home-based extra classes is also a safe form of out-of-school childcare while parents are working. Ensuring the high performance of full-shift education will therefore be extremely important: not only could it lead to the reduction in extra classes, it could also offer a safe environment for children while their parents are at work.

Supply

In Vietnam, extra classes have been operating for a long time. Before *Doi Moi* they were generally delivered on a voluntary basis and considered legal. In schools, teachers saw their responsibility as enhancing the knowledge of advanced students and helping disadvantaged students to keep pace with their peers. Extra class activity was organised by the school administration, and took place in secondary schools only. Teachers did not receive remuneration and students did not have to pay for their extra classes. Private extra classes were also available for a fee, but only for high school[2] students preparing for university entrance exams. After *Doi Moi*, when the country started to open up to the global economy, the nature of extra classes became more complex and dynamic (Trang, 2002).

Regulations relating to extra classes were issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in 1993. These state that only those students whose mean score is less than five[3] (students with low learning results) or more than eight (students with high learning results), or those who are about to finish primary or secondary school, are eligible to take extra classes organised by the school. Primary school children should not take more than two extra lessons per week, and should not pay over VND4,000–6,000 per pupil per month. Have these regulations been followed in practice? If so, why are extra classes such a hot issue? In other countries, such as South Korea, a system of extra classes has developed very fast. Parents' total financial contribution to extra classes is around two-and-a-half times greater than the government's budget for the whole education sector. Observers found that extra classes in South Korea were based on the real needs of students and parents, and were well managed (quoted in Trang, 2002). Conversely, it has been suggested that in Vietnam they have been manipulated by motives that are not based on real learning needs (Chau, Ry and Dam, 2000; Trang, 2002). Indeed, extra classes have become a business, enabling teachers to generate extra income, and this is a key reason for the negative reaction to extra classes in Vietnam.

2 In Vietnam, grades 1-5 correspond to primary school, secondary school is grades 6-9, and high school is from grade 10 to 12.

3 The maximum score is 10.

Extra classes are advertised widely within a highly competitive environment. It is not only school teachers who provide extra classes, but others such as university students. This paper will concentrate on the former. Teachers are the main suppliers of extra classes, which often take place in their houses after official school hours. Teachers use different ways of pressuring students to take extra classes, such as assigning difficult exercises, teaching official lessons very fast, and discriminating against those students who do not take extra lessons. Extra classes can therefore become a mechanism through which civil servants use their position for private gain (WB and ADB, 2002).

The use of revenue collected from legal extra class provision is another area of concern. In some areas of the country such classes are considered a means of cost recovery, which is described as the 'socialisation of education' in Vietnam, as highlighted by Lo in his study on the socialisation of education in Ho Chi Minh City (quoted in Trang, 2002). In many schools, extra classes that involve additional costs to families have to be approved by the parent-teacher association (PTA). However, the regional poverty assessments in 2003 found that parental representation on PTAs tended to be limited to the more wealthy, socially well-connected members of the community (World Bank, 2003). Many parents felt marginalised and voiceless with respect to education service providers. They saw the PTA as an instrument for mobilising contributions, with limited potential for promoting their interests (World Bank, 2003).

Unauthorized extra classes have been officially banned by the government. Various legal documents have been promulgated to halt the situation, such as *Decree* No. 242/TTg concerning regulations for extra classes which was approved by the Prime Minister in 1993, and a number of circulars. However, they appear to have had no impact. As extra classes take place both in and out of school it is difficult to monitor their quality. In addition, there are still quite a few school principals who are reluctant to address the problem because this might affect the income-generating opportunities of their teachers (Hanoi Department of Training and Education, 2000; Ho Chi Minh City Department of Training and Education, 2000).

Impact on children

Extra classes could have a positive impact on children if they facilitated the learning process, engaged and motivated children, and maximised their learning potential. During inspection trips to the provinces of Nam Ha (now being separated into two provinces Nam Dinh and Ha Nam), Thai Binh, Hai Hung, Vinh Phu, Nghe An, Thanh Hoa and Ninh Binh in 1996 (Trang, 2002), it was found that extra classes were on the increase. Newspapers are increasingly publishing stories about the burden of extra classes that take children away from studying by themselves, and from peer contact and creative activities. In an article in the Vietnamese Journal of Education Development in March 2000, it is suggested that the phenomenon of unregulated extra classes has taken away students' childhood due to the pressures of studying (Minh, 2000). According to Dan, too many extra classes can lead to stress in children, and thus have a negative impact on their physical and mental development (Dan, 2000). The participatory child poverty assessments (conducted by Young Lives) with rural children and adults in Phu Tho province have also identified extra classes as a key issue, with respondents suggesting that they create financial and psychological pressure (Harpham *et al*, 2003). Extra classes might also jeopardise the relationship between teachers and students: those students who do not take extra classes provided by their teachers may be discriminated against. For many families, despite the high costs of extra

classes, they have to enrol their children in order to 'please teachers and avoid problems for children' (World Bank, 2003, p. 64).

Impact on society as a whole

Education is becoming increasingly commercialised. Extra classes often take place in wealthier and more developed areas, especially cities (Chau, Ry and Dam, 2000; Trang, 2002). Evidence shows that wealthier and more urbanised students are far more likely to receive out-of-school tutoring and additional courses (Bhushan *et al*, 2001) that require time and financial investment. The VHLSS 2002 showed that the cost of extra classes accounts for around a quarter of the total direct financial cost of education, which is around VND270,000 per child in primary education. The wealthiest group spent nearly 30 times more on extra classes during their children's primary education than the poorest group (World Bank, 2003). These figures are similar to the results of regional poverty assessments in 2003 (*ibid*). For poor children, it is difficult enough to stay in school all day – due to the loss of time available for farm work and the extra costs incurred for school lunches – let alone attend extra classes (*ibid*). It will be a challenge for the government to shift to universal full-day schooling in primary education by the year 2015, as set out in the Vietnam Development Targets.

1.2 Objectives

This paper aims to identify the prevalence, characteristics and determinants of extra classes in the primary sector and to identify the relationship between extra classes and child learning outcomes. The hypothesis is that children attending extra classes will have better learning outcomes.

2 Methods

2.1 Sample

Respondents were 1,000 eight-year-old children[4] and their caregivers involved in the Young Lives survey, conducted in 20 sentinel sites in five provinces (Lao Cai, Hung Yen, Da Nang, Phu Yen and Ben Tre) in Vietnam. A random sample of 50 eight-year-old children was taken from each sentinel site. In total, 1,000 children and 1,000 caregivers/mothers were randomly identified from a population of 4,716 households with eight-year-old children, and interviewed using quantitative questionnaires (see www.younglives.org.uk for full questionnaires and sampling details). In this paper, all analysis was performed by groups of sentinel sites by region: mountainous (four sentinel sites in Lao Cai and one in Phu Yen); rural (four sentinel sites in Hung Yen, four in Ben Tre and three in Phu Yen); and urban (four sentinel in Da Nang city). In Lao Cai and Phu Yen analysis takes into account ethnicity, as there were both Kinh and non-Kinh children involved. In other study settings, Kinh is the only ethnic group.

2.2 Measures

Extra study

Since extra classes are an important policy concern in Vietnam, an additional set of questions to investigate this phenomenon was added to the main (international) questionnaire for the Young Lives survey. Additional country-specific questions assessed a number of indicators including: child attendance at extra classes after school (yes/no); subjects of extra classes; advisers who prompted the child to take extra classes; number of hours spent attending classes in each subject per week; and total costs (VND) incurred during the previous year for overall education and extra classes.

Household poverty

In the Young Lives study, poverty is assessed using a household wealth index. The household wealth index is a score between 0 and 1 that was constructed as an average of three components:

1. housing quality, which is the simple average of rooms per person, and floor, roof and wall quality (a household scores 1 for each if it has a finished material floor, sturdy roof, brick/plastered walls; it scores 0 if it does not have these)
2. consumer durables, being the scaled sum of the nine consumer durable dummies (a household scores 1 for each if it has any of the following nine durable items: radio, bicycle, TV, electric fan, motorbike, refrigerator, landline phone, mobile phone and car/truck; it scores 0 if it does not have any item)
3. services of drinking water, electricity, toilet and fuel, all of which are 0/1 variables.

In this paper, households are placed in one of three groups according to their overall score:

- <0.25 = the poorest
- 0.25–<0.5 = poor
- >=0.5 = non-poor.

4 These children were in grade 2 or 3, depending on when the survey was conducted.

Child learning outcomes

The learning outcomes measured in the Young Lives study were reading, writing and numeracy. All 1,000 children were asked to read and write a simple sentence and multiply 2 by 4. The result is coded 0 'able to read', 'able to write' if the child performs the task perfectly (non-case) and 1 'not able to read', 'not able to write' if the child cannot read/write at all or can read/write only one word or a phrase but not a full sentence (case). Similarly, 0 is given for correct multiplication and 1 for incorrect multiplication. In this study only one child did not give an answer due to shyness.

Child mental health

Child mental health was measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which consists of 25 items (Goodman, 2004) and has been validated in several developing countries, including Vietnam. The caregiver is asked questions about the child's emotional symptoms, behaviour problems, hyperactivity, interaction with peers and general social interaction. A system of scoring allows children to be classified as 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal'. An 'abnormal' score can be used to identify likely 'cases' of mental disorder.

2.3 Fieldwork and ethics

Data was collected in late 2002. Ethical approval was granted by the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations, London South Bank University, the University of London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the University of Reading. Household interviews were performed by General Statistical Office staff.

2.4 Data analysis

Data was analysed using the survey commands in Stata 8 (StataCorp, 2003) with sentinel sites as strata, the primary sampling unit equivalent to the household, and sampling weight factor (p-weight) denoting the inverse of the probability that an eligible child is included in the sample in each sentinel site due to sampling design. Therefore, the estimates using weighted data in this paper can be generated for all 4,716 eligible children aged eight in the 20 sentinel sites. The Pearson chi-squared statistic corrected for the survey design is used for categorical data, and bivariate and multivariate analysis. The descriptive results present both percentages/figures for the study sample (N=1,000) and estimates of percentages/figures for the population (N=4,716).

To measure the determinants of a child taking extra classes and to test the association between having extra classes and child learning outcomes, measured through correct completion of the reading, writing and multiplication tasks, multivariate analysis was used. Factors from four main variables were put into the model to control for confounding factors:

1. community: region
2. household: wealth status, father's education, number of persons in the household
3. mother: mother's education
4. child: ethnicity and mental health status.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive results

This section presents results found in the study sample (N=1,000) and an estimated figure for the underlying population (N=4,716). Overall 98.8 per cent (988/1,000) of surveyed children have attended school (at some point). The enrolment rate reached 100 per cent in urban areas, but dropped to 95.6 per cent in mountainous sites ($p<0.001$). The estimated rate of enrolment for the underlying Young Lives population is 99.5 per cent. In total, over 99 per cent of children studied at public schools (99.9 per cent in the study sample and 99.6 per cent in the population). Attendance at private schools was found in the urban areas only and accounted for a very small proportion (0.6 per cent). Most children (95 per cent) in the Young Lives population received half-day education (morning shift from 7.30am to 12pm; afternoon shift from 1.30pm to 5.00pm). Fourteen per cent of children in urban, two per cent in rural and 1.3 per cent in mountainous sites attended full-day education.

Table 1: Enrolment rate, type of school and whether having full-day education among 1,000 eight-year-old surveyed children, and estimates for 4,716 children in five provinces

	Region				
	Mountainous	Rural	Urban	Total	p-value
Enrolment					
Number of children enrolled among study sample (N=1,000)	239	549	200	988	
Rate of enrolment among the study sample	95.6%	99.8%	100%	98.8%	p<0.001
Estimated rate of the population children(N=4,716)*	98%	99.8%	100%	99.5%	p<0.05
Attending public school					
Number of children attending public school among study sample (N=985)**	238	547	199	984	
Rate of attending public school among study sample	100%	100%	99.5%	99.9%	p>0.05
Estimated rate of the population children (N=4,716)*	99.5%	99.7%	99.4%	99.6%	p>0.05
Having full-day education					
Number of children having full-day education among study sample (N=988)	4	11	32	47	
Rate of having full-day education among the study sample	1.7%	2%	16%	4.8%	p<0.001
Estimated rate of the population children (N=4,716)*	1.3%	2%	14%	5%	p<0.001

* weighted by total number of targeted children in each sentinel site

** three missing values

Prevalence of extra classes

Table 2 shows that, overall, 46 per cent (95%CI: [.45; .51]) of in-school children in the Young Lives sites were currently taking extra classes. The prevalence increased from 7 per cent in mountainous areas, to 56 per cent in other/non-mountainous rural areas and 58 per cent in urban areas. This difference is highly statistically significant (p<0.001). A higher proportion of Kinh (ethnic majority) children went to extra classes than ethnic minority children (p<0.001). This was consistent with ADB and World Bank research which concluded that wealthier and more urbanised students are far more likely to receive outside tutoring and additional courses (Bhushan *et al*, 2001).

Table 2: Prevalence of extra classes by region

	Prevalence of extra classes				
	Study sample (N=988)			Estimate of the population (N=4,716)	
	N	%	p-value	%	p-value
Region (N=988)					
Mountainous (N_1=239)	13	5.4	p<0.001	7	p<0.001
Rural (N_2=549)	300	54.6		56	
Urban (N_3=200)	123	61.5		58	
Total (N=988)	436	44		46	
Child ethnicity (N=988)					
Non-Kinh (N_1=117)*	3	2.6	p<0.001	3.4	p<0.001
Kinh (N_2=871)	433	49.7		50	

* Of the three non-Kinh children, two were in mountainous Lao Cai and one in the rural Phu Yen site.

Investigating prevalence by sentinel site, there were huge differences between sites (Table 3). In two sites in Hung Yen (rural north delta) 90 per cent and 96 per cent of children were taking extra classes after school, while there were none (0 per cent) in two sites in Lao Cai and only 4 per cent in one site in Phu Yen. There were five sentinel sites (5/20 = 25 per cent) with a prevalence of less than 20 per cent. All the low prevalence sites fall in the mountainous region.

Table 3: Prevalence of extra classes by sentinel site

	Prevalence of extra classes			
			Study sample (N=988)[a]	Estimate of the population (N=4,716)[a]
Enrolment				
Province	**Sentinel site***	**N**	**%**	**%**
Phu Yen	1	27	54	54
	2	13	26.5	26

	Prevalence of extra classes			
			Study sample (N=988)[a]	Estimate of the population (N=4,716)[a]
	3	2	4	4
	4	14	28	28
Ben Tre	5	15	30	30
	6	20	40	40
	7	19	38	38
	8	22	44	44
Lao Cai	9**	0	0	0
	10***	0	0	0
	11	9	18	18
	12	2	4	4
Hung Yen	13	42	84	84
	14	35	70	70
	15	48	96	96
	16	45	90	90
Da Nang	17	33	66	66
	18	34	68	68
	19	22	44	44
	20	34	68	68
Total		436	44	46

* Sample size is 50 for each sentinel site, however ** and *** have only 39 and 49 respectively.
[a] $p<0.001$

Types of subjects taken in extra classes

Around 7 per cent of children taking extra classes (95%CI: [.05; .11]) also had full-day classes. Of those who were taking extra classes, 90 per cent took only one kind of class, for example, either mathematics and Vietnamese together or extra-curricular (so-called arts/sports) subjects such as dancing, swimming, singing, chess, painting, etc. The remaining ten per cent took two types at the same time. Attending extra classes for mathematics and Vietnamese was the most common, accounting for 82 per cent in the study sample and an estimated 80 per cent for the population. One in every five children had extra classes in all the subjects taught in the curriculum at school. Only 7 per cent of children taking extra classes went for extra-curricular subjects.

Table 4: Distribution of type of extra classes by region

			Region						
	Total		Mountainous		Rural		Urban		p-value
Study sample (N=436)	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Type of extra classes taken									
All school subjects	85	20	1	8	54	18	30	24	p>0.05
Mathematics and Vietnamese	356	82	11	85	256	85	89	72	p<0.05
Extra-curricular subjects	29	7	0	0	9	3	20	16	p<0.001
Other subjects	11	3	1	8	9	3	1	1	p>0.05
No. of extra classes taken									
One type	391	90	13	100	272	91	106	86	p>0.05
Two types*	45	10	0	0	28	9	17	14	
Estimated rate of population (N=4,716)		%		%		%		%	
Type of extra classes taken									
All school subjects		20		8		19		23	p>0.05
Mathematics and Vietnamese		80		85		84		73	p>0.05
Extra-curricular subjects		7		0		4		12	p<0.001
Other subjects		3		7		3		1	p>0.05
No. of extra classes taken									
One type		90		100		90		90	p>0.05
Two types*		10		0		10		10	

* No child took more than two types of extra classes. Taking two types of subjects at the same time means that children have extra-curricular classes plus either all school subjects or mathematics and Vietnamese.

Advisers

When asked who suggested taking extra classes, mothers reported that parents and other close relatives were most likely to have prompted children (over 60 per cent for all types of extra classes). Teachers, both in and outside of the schools where the children studied, were the second most common source of encouragement, ranging from 17 to 27 per cent. Fewer than 10 per cent of those children attending extra classes for all school subjects and mathematics/Vietnamese perceived a need for the extra classes themselves, but 17 per cent of children taking extra classes in arts/sport subjects *had* suggested this option themselves. The estimates for the population are very similar to the figures found in the study sample (Table 5).

Table 5: Persons who prompted children to take extra classes

Type of extra class taken	Advisers (N=436)							
	Parents		Teachers		Children		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Study sample (N=436)								
All school subjects ($N_{1=}$85)	56	66	21	25	8	9	0	0
Mathematics and Vietnamese ($N_{2=}$356)	229	64	96	27	29	8	2	1
Extra-curricular subjects ($N_{3=}$29)	19	66	5	17	5	17	0	0
Estimated rate of the population (N=4,719)								
All school subjects		69		24		7		0
Mathematics and Vietnamese		64		27		9		1
Extra-curricular subjects		62		18		21		0

Time spent in extra classes

Table 6 shows the average hours children spent in extra classes per week. This varied slightly across regions, from 7.9 hours in mountainous areas to 8.9 hours in rural and 9.7 hours in urban areas, although this difference is not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). The estimates for the population present similar means (7.8 in mountainous, 8.9 in rural and 9.5 in urban areas). Of the 13 children taking extra classes in the mountainous sites, only two were from an ethnic minority. Therefore, almost all the children taking extra classes were Kinh, whose living habits and education values do not vary much across regions. This may explain why the mean number of hours of extra classes did not vary significantly across regions.

According to government regulations, students in primary education are not allowed to take more than two extra classes, equivalent to 4 hours, per week. In this study, 90 per cent (393/436) of children who took extra classes attended for more than the stipulated hours; 58 per cent of these attended for more than eight hours a week, twice the legal duration (Table 7).

Table 6: Mean hours spent in extra classes per week for children taking extra classes, by region

	Mean hours children spent in extra classes per week			
Study sample[a] (N=436)	N	Mean	Std. Err.	95%CI
Mountainous	13	7.9	N/A	4.5; 11.3
Rural	300	8.9	N/A	8.5; 9.3
Urban	123	9.7	N/A	9.0; 10.4
Total	436	9.1	N/A	8.7; 9.5
Estimate of population[a] (N=4,716)				
Mountainous		7.8	1.6	4.6; 11
Rural		8.9	0.2	8.5; 9.4
Urban		9.5	0.4	8.7; 10.3
Total		9.1	0.2	8.7; 9.5

[a] No significant difference (p>0.05)

Table 7: Distribution of time spent in extra classes among children taking extra classes

Hours in extra classes per week			Region					
	Total*		Mountainous N_1=13		Rural N_2=300		Urban N_3=123	
Study sample	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<=4 hours	43	10	6	46	33	11	4	3
>4–8 hours	139	32	2	15	97	32	40	33
> 8 hours	254	58	5	38	170	57	79	64
Estimate of population[a]								
<= 4 hours		10		46		11		4
>4–8 hours		32		15		32		34
> 8 hours		58		38		57		62

[a] p< 0.001

Expenditure

Table 8 demonstrates the difference in costs that parents incurred for children's education across regions. Parents in urban areas spent around three to four times more than those in rural and mountainous areas respectively ($p<0.001$). The total education cost included basic school fees,[5] uniform, textbooks, notebooks, other school supplies and extra classes.

According to the VHLSS 2002, costs amount to an average of VND270,000 per year for a child in primary school, and around 25 per cent of this amount is for extra classes (World Bank, 2003). In the Young Lives study the average estimate for the population was VND376,000 and 31 per cent of this was for extra classes. This difference might be explained by the fact that the Young Lives study is designed as a sentinel study and the sample is therefore not nationally representative and may exclude extremely poor unregistered children or those living in very remote areas.

In particular, the Young Lives study found that parents in urban areas had to pay a very high amount for their children's extra classes: four to seven times higher than in rural and mountainous areas. As a proportion of total education costs incurred by parents, extra classes constituted 44 per cent in urban areas, while in mountainous and rural areas the proportion was around one-quarter (23–29 per cent) ($p<0.001$).

Table 8: Cost of extra classes (in thousands of VND) by region in 2002 among children taking extra classes

	Cost of extra classes (A)	**Overall cost of education (B)**	**% (Mean A/Mean B when child taking extra class)**
Study sample	**N_1** *Mean (VND)*	**N_2** *Mean (VND)*	**N_3** *%*
Mountainous	**13** *98.8*	**239** *169.5*	**13** *29%*
Rural	**300** *60.0*	**549** *235.2*	**297** *23%*
Urban	**123** *500.7*	**200** *877.0*	**123** *47%*
Total	**436** *185.5*	**988** *349.2*	**433** *30%*
Estimate of the population (N=4,716)	*Mean (VND)* **95%CI**	*Mean (VND)* **95%CI**	*Weighted %* **95%CI**
Mountainous	*96. 6* **[33.7; 159.4]**	*180.6* **[165.7; 195.4]**	*29%* **[20; 40]**
Rural	*60.2* **[53.2; 67.1]**	*236.7* **[224.3; 249.2]**	*23%* **[21; 25]**
Urban	*425.5* **[369.5; 481.5]**	*780* **[711.6; 849.1]**	*44%* **[41; 47]**
Total	**436** *191.7* **[171.1; 212.2]**	**988** *376.8* **[356.3; 397.3]**	**433** *30.7* **[29; 32]**

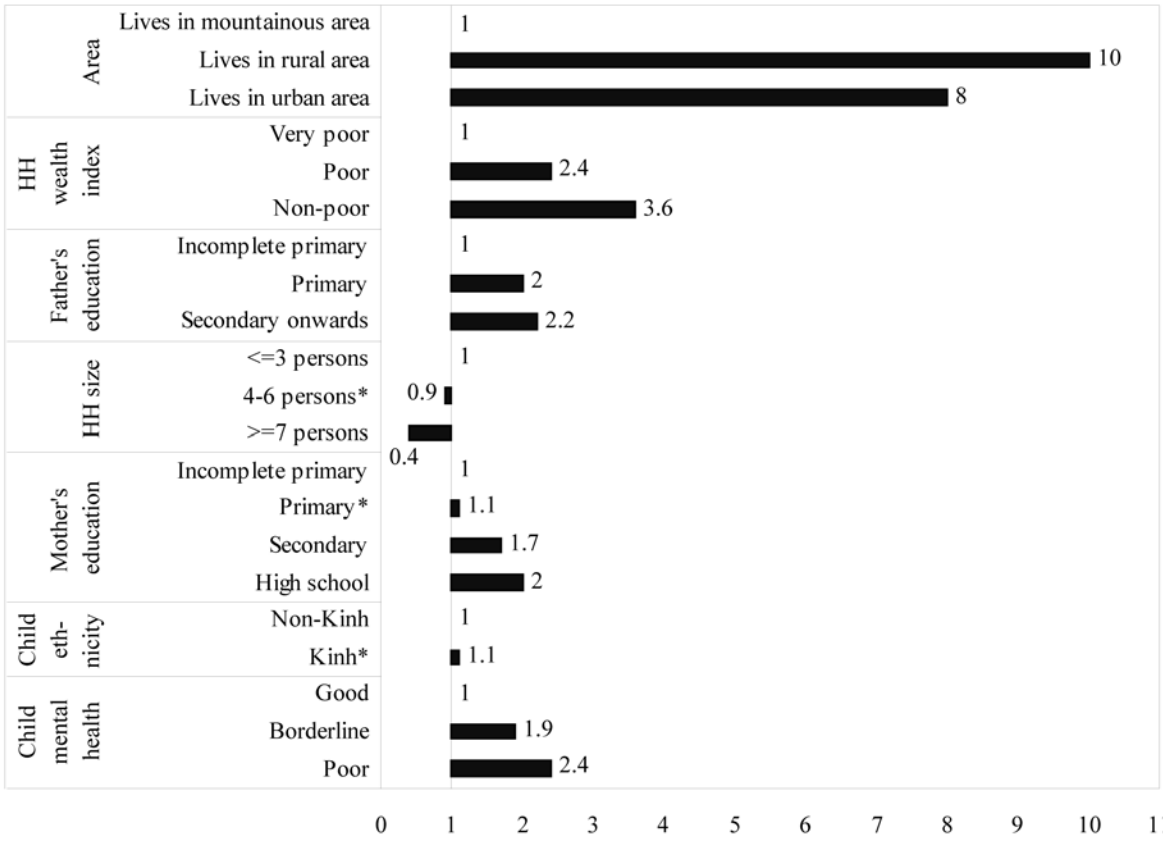
5 Government policy is that there are no school fees, but at the beginning of the school year parents are informed about 'fees' which are described as 'voluntarily contributions to the school'. Therefore, socially they are considered a kind of school fee.

3.2 Determinants of taking extra classes

To assess which factors are more likely to have an influence on whether children take extra classes, region, household wealth status, parents' education, household size, child ethnicity and mental health status were included in a logistic regression model. These factors were chosen in accordance with findings of previous studies and the results of the univariate analysis above. The 2003 World Bank study found that children from wealthier families and from urban areas are more likely to take extra classes (World Bank, 2003). It is well documented that fathers and mothers with higher education levels are more likely to value education for their children (Annan, 2001).

After the effects of the above variables were controlled for, rural children were ten times more likely to take extra classes than those in mountainous areas, while those in urban areas were eight times more likely to take extra classes than those in mountainous areas ($p<0.001$). Children from poor and non-poor families were respectively twice and nearly four times more likely to take extra classes than very poor children. Children whose fathers had completed primary school were twice as likely to take extra classes than those whose fathers had not completed primary school or had never been to school ($p<0.05$). Whether or not the father had completed secondary school made little difference. Children whose mothers had completed secondary school and high school were respectively 1.7 times and twice as likely to take extra classes than children whose mothers had not completed primary level education. Whether the mother completed primary or not did not produce a significant difference ($p>0.05$). Large households (seven persons or more) were 60 per cent less likely to send their children to extra classes ($p<0.05$) than households of three or fewer people. Children with poor mental health were more than twice as likely to take extra classes than children with good mental health ($p<0.001$). It should be noted that as this study is cross-sectional it cannot attribute causality. That is, we do not know whether children might be sent to extra classes because they have poor mental health or whether they develop poor mental health as a result of being sent to extra classes (due to stress and pressure, etc).

Figure 1: Logistic regression estimates (odds ratio) of predictors of taking extra classes



HH = household
* p<0.05
Mountainous, very poor, illiterate and incomplete primary, <=3 persons in household, non-Kinh and good mental health are reference indices.

In summary, region, household economic status, father's and mother's education, child mental health and household size strongly affected whether children were more or less likely to be taking extra classes. Ethnicity did not have a significant impact.

3.3 Extra classes and children's learning outcomes

Overall, most children can read, write and multiply correctly: 89 per cent, 75 per cent and 87 per cent respectively. Table 9 shows a univariate and survey multivariate logistic regression analysis with selected variables, including region, household wealth, father's education, mother's education, household size, ethnicity and child mental health. These variables were selected as they had strong effects on learning outcomes, obtained from bivariate analysis. Also these variables were found by other studies (Annan, 2001; Bhushan *et al*, 2001; Poverty Task Force, 2002; World Bank, 2003) to have associations with child performance at school.

Table 9: Logistic regression estimates of predictors of learning outcomes (reading, writing and numeracy)

	Outcomes					
	Reading correctly		Writing correctly		Multiplying correctly	
	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate
Factors	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)
	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value
Region (N=1,000)						
Mountainous (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Rural	5.6 [3.6; 8.8] p<0.001	1.3 [0.5; 3.1] p>0.05	2.0 [1.4; 2.8] p<0.001	0.9 [0.5; 1.7] p>0.05	1.2 [0.9; 1.7] p>0.05	0.9 [0.5; 1.5] p>0.05
Urban	5.3 [2.6; 10.8] p<0.001	0.9 [0.3; 2.6] p>0.05	2.5 [1.5; 3.9] p<0.001	1.1 [0.5; 2.4] p>0.05	3.7 [2.2; 6.0] p<0.001	2.1 [1.1; 4.2] p<0.05
Household wealth status (N=1,000)						
Very poor (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Poor	4.1 [2.6; 6.6] p<0.001	2.0 [1.1; 3.5] p<0.05	2.3 [1.5; 3.3] p<0.001	1.3 [0.8; 2.0] p>0.05	2.2 [1.5; 3.2] p<0.001	1.7 [1.1; 2.6] p<0.05
Non-poor	12.8 [6.8; 24.1] p<0.001	2.9 [1..3; 6.6] p<0.05	4.3 [2.9; 6.5] p<0.001	1.5 [0.8; 2.8] p>0.05	4.7 [3.2; 6.9] p<0.001	2.7 [1.6; 4.5] p<0.001
Father's education (N=938)						
Incomplete primary (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	4.2 [2.5; 7.0] p<0.001	1.9 [1.0; 3.5] p<0.05	2.2 [1.4; 3.3] p<0.001	1.4 [0.8; 2.2] p>0.05	2.0 [1.3; 2.9] p<0.001	1.4 [0.9; 2.1] p>0.05

	Outcomes					
	Reading correctly		Writing correctly		Multiplying correctly	
	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate
Factors	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)
	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value
Secondary and higher	19.6 [9.7; 39.3] p<0.001	4.4 [1.9; 10.1] p<0.001	6.3 [4.1; 9.7] p<0.001	2.8 [1.6; 4.9] p<0.001	2.9 [2.0; 4.2] p<0.001	1.7 [0.9; 2.8] p>0.05
Household size (N=1,000)						
<= 3 persons (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
4-6 persons	0.6 [0.2; 1.9] p>0.05	0.1 [0.01; 0.8] p<0.05	0.8 [0.5; 1.5] p>0.05	0.4 [0.2; 0.9] p<0.05	1.1 [0.7; 1.8] p>0.05	0.7 [0.4; 1.2] p>0.05
>=7 persons	0.1 [0.05; 0.5] p<0.001	0.05 [0.006; 0.4] p<0.05	0.3 [0.2; 0.6] p<0.001	0.3 [0.1; 0.6] p<0.05	0.7 [0.4; 1.2] p>0.05	0.5 [0.3; 1.0] p>0.05
Mother's education (N=999)						
Incomplete primary (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Primary	3.6 [2.2; 6.1] p<0.001	1.7 [0.9; 3.3] p>0.05	2.2 [1.5; 3.2] p<0.001	1.4 [0.9; 2.2] p>0.05	1.6 [1.2; 2.4] p<0.05	1.2 [0.8; 1.9] p>0.05
Secondary	8.2 [3.9; 17.2] p<0.001	1.4 [0.6; 4.0] p>0.05	3.8 [2.5; 5.9] p<0.001	1.7 [0.9; 2.9] p>0.05	1.2 [0.8; 1.7] p>0.05	0.7 [0.4; 1.1] p>0.05
High school and higher	26.3 [6.3; 110.4] p<0.001	3.1 [0.7; 14.8] p>0.05	6.0 [3.1; 11.4] p<0.001	2.0 [0.9; 4.6] p>0.05	4.1 [2.2; 7.4] p<0.001	1.9 [0.9; 3.9] p>0.05
Having extra classes (N=1,000)						
No (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

	Outcomes					
	Reading correctly		Writing correctly		Multiplying correctly	
	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate	Univariate	Multivariate
Factors	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)	(N=1,000)	(N=936)
	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value	OR [95%CI] p-value
Yes	5.8 [3.2; 10.7] p<0.001	2.2 [1.0; 4.9] p<0.05	1.9 [1.4; 2.7] p<0.001	1.2 [0.7; 1.8] p>0.05	1.1 [0.8; 1.5] p>0.05	0.8 [0.5; 1.1] p>0.05
Child ethnicity (N=1,000)						
Non-Kinh (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Kinh	14.9 [9.2; 24.1] p<0.001	3.1 [1.2; 7.8] p<0.05	4.5 [2.9; 6.9] p<0.001	1.7 [0.8; 3.6] p>0.05	3.3 [2.2; 5.1] p<0.001	1.7 [0.9; 3.5] p>0.05
Child mental health (N=998)						
Good (ref.)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Borderline	0.9 [0.5; 1.5] p>0.05	0.5 [0.3; 1.1] p>0.05	0.9 [0.6; 1.3] p>0.05	0.8 [0.5; 1.3] p>0.05	1.0 [0.7; 1.5] p>0.05	0.9 [0.6; 1.4] p>0.05
Poor	0.9 [0.5; 1.6] p>0.05	0.5 [0.2; 0.9] p<0.05	0.5 [0.4; 0.7] p<0.001	0.4 [0.3; 0.7] p<0.001	0.6 [0.4; 0.9] p<0.05	0.6 [0.4; 0.9] p<0.05

When the factors mentioned above are kept constant, having extra classes does not significantly increase eight-year-old children's writing and multiplying ability. However, children taking extra classes after school are more than twice as likely to be able to read correctly than children who do not have any extra classes ($p<0.05$).

Which other factors have a strong association with child learning outcomes? Child mental health status and household wealth are the most significant factors. Children with poor mental health are 42-58 per cent less likely to perform literacy and numeracy tasks correctly ($p<0.05$). Household wealth has a significant impact on reading and numeracy skills, with children from wealthier families more likely to read and multiply correctly.

Other factors, such as parental education, household size, ethnicity and region were found to have significant effects on a single outcome only. Children whose fathers completed primary and secondary school were respectively almost twice and four times more likely to read correctly. They were almost three times more likely to write correctly if their father had completed secondary school ($p<0.001$). No significant association between father's education and child numeracy was found. Children whose mothers had completed primary school were nearly twice as likely to read correctly although statistical significance was not found. No significance was found for writing or numeracy. The more people there are in the household the lower the chance the child can read and write correctly. However, this effect was very slight and significant only for literacy. Kinh children were three times more likely to read correctly than non-Kinh children, which might be explained by the fact that reading materials in school are in Kinh and not their mother tongue. They therefore have to make more effort to learn to read than those learning in their mother tongue. No significant difference was found regarding writing or multiplication. Regarding region, children living in urban areas were twice as likely to be able to multiply correctly than children living in mountainous and rural areas ($p<0.05$). The study did not find a significant effect between region and child reading and writing abilities when other factors were controlled.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Although the government launched *Decree* No. 242/TTg in 1993 banning the proliferation of extra class provision, and *Circulars* No. 16/TT-LB/1993, No. 17/GD-DT/1995 and No. 15/CT-BGD&DT/2000 (quoted in Trang, 2002) providing guidance on the control of extra classes, taking extra classes after school at primary level is still common in Vietnam (46 per cent). While most children (90 per cent) attend extra classes for longer than the maximum four hours stipulated by the MoET and families have to incur very high education costs, extra classes were not found to have a significant association with child learning outcomes (writing and numeracy). The better reading rates associated with extra classes arguably does not compensate for the associated pressure on the child, the lack of time for recreation, the lack of time for self-education and the high costs involved. However, a limitation of this study is that we did not ascertain whether children were taking extra classes in order to catch up with their peers or because they were exceptionally talented students, or for one or more of the 'illegal' reasons considered in the introduction. Thus, we cannot identify the true rate of 'illegal' classes occurring in this sample.

What factors motivate the taking of extra classes? In cities, sending children to home-based extra classes could be a safe form of out-of-school childcare. A second explanation could be that families and children indeed consider that extra classes help children to achieve required performance and pass grades. A third explanation could be that parents follow a trend of sending children to extra classes because they are afraid that their children will be left behind by their friends or suffer discrimination from teachers if they do not attend. Alternatively, it also might be that teachers place subtle pressures on parents to send children to extra classes. How much each factor leads to the current boom in attendance at extra classes in Vietnam needs further investigation.

To stop extra classes being the social norm, first social perceptions of extra classes and their effectiveness need to change. It is necessary to help parents understand and engage with the government's education policy, and understand MoET requirements and the true quality of extra classes. In order to do that, more independent research results need to be conveyed to the public through various channels. It is also vital to undertake research which allows children's voices and opinions (about whether extra classes do or do not help them learn better) to be gathered and disseminated to the public. Second, the government in general and the education sector in particular could perhaps focus on full-day schooling implementation for primary children and a promulgation of a transparent, standardised system of pupil assessment based on age and textbook. In addition, the MoET and the government need to improve the management of teaching activities, in both public and private schools. This could be achieved by establishing high cash penalties against, or dismissing from the education sector, anyone who provides illegal extra classes for the purpose of cash generation and anyone using discrimination or reducing the duration and learning content of school classes in order to promote their extra classes at home. It is argued that teachers continue to provide extra classes at home due to their low salaries. It would therefore be worthwhile reviewing and developing an appropriate teachers' salary and incentive scheme in order to ensure that teachers receive an adequate income from legal academic classes.

In summary, this study found that household wealth had the strongest effect on all three child learning outcomes. The study also highlighted that extra classes do not have a significant effect on eight-year-old children's learning outcomes at grades 2 and 3, except for their reading abilities. Therefore, while extra classes may be necessary for children needing to 'catch-up', they should not be the norm for a generation of primary school children. This change would reduce pressure and costs, for both children and their parents. Once the 'artificial' extra classes are controlled, extra classes might have a true value in helping vulnerable children and children experiencing learning difficulties to catch up with their peers and pass grades. The broader finding – that poor children suffer poorer learning outcomes while their families still have to incur very high education costs despite the government's policy on no tuition fees in primary education – calls for more equity in both the provision and the quality of primary level education. It also calls for better monitoring of items that parents have to pay for, in order to reduce education-related costs, guaranteeing that poor children have an equal chance of benefiting from education.

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The Young Lives Partners

Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), India

Department of Economics, University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

General Statistical Office, Government of Vietnam

Grupo de Análisis Para El Desarrollo (GRADE), Peru

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK

Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (IIN), Peru

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK

Medical Research Council of South Africa

Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford

RAU University, Johannesburg, South Africa

Research and Training Centre for Community Development, Vietnam

Save the Children UK

South Bank University, UK

Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading, UK

Young Lives is an international longitudinal study of childhood poverty, taking place in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, and funded by DFID. The project aims to improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty in the developing world by following the lives of a group of 8,000 children and their families over a 15-year period. Through the involvement of academic, government and NGO partners in the aforementioned countries, South Africa and the UK, the Young Lives project will highlight ways in which policy can be improved to more effectively tackle child poverty.

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