Young Lives

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Education and Learning:

Preliminary Findings from the 2016 Young Lives Survey (Round 5): Viet Nam

This fact sheet presents findings from the fifth round of the Young Lives survey in Viet Nam in 2016. Young Lives has followed two cohorts of children, born seven years apart. This fact sheet gives a snapshot of key education indicators for 15-year-olds in 2016 (Younger Cohort), and compares that to the data for 15-year-olds in 2009 (Older Cohort) to show changes and recent progress in the context of children's education over that period.

At age eight almost all girls and boys were attending school, most enrolling in the right grade for their age. However, from the early grades, proportionally fewer ethnic minority children are reported as being in school, with this gap widening especially between ages 12 and 15. The scale of this gap is also evident in learning outcomes at higher levels of schooling. At ages 12 and 15, we find consistent inequalities in terms of enrolment, over-age, and cognitive outcomes between the ethnic minority and the Kinh majority, and between the children of caregivers with no education or few years of schooling and the children of caregivers with more years of schooling.

Overall, Younger Cohort children performed better than their Older Cohort counterparts in attaining the right grade for their age and scored higher on comparable maths questions. Rather than evidence of a gender gap in favour of boys, we find girls doing better than boys. However, even with the progress made among marginalised children, educational differentials between disadvantaged and advantaged children remain significant.

Key Findings

- Enrolment rates decrease as children grow older. Between the ages of 12 and 15, school enrolment dropped from 97% to 80%, the biggest drop being among children whose caregiver had no schooling (from 86% to 55%).
- In terms of the grade attained and performance in cognitive tests, the differences are largest between children whose caregivers had no schooling and those whose caregivers completed lower-secondary level or higher.
- At age 15, girls are more likely to be enrolled in school than boys (84% and 76% respectively). At this age, girls are also less likely to be over-age for their grade, and outperform boys in maths tests.
- Differentials by ethnicity are persistent in other educational outcomes such as the grade attained and cognitive achievement. By age 15, ethnic minority children had, on average, attained one school grade lower than those from the Kinh majority, and they scored significantly lower in both maths and vocabulary tests than their Kinh counterparts.
- Overall, the Younger Cohort children did at least as well as the Older Cohort in all the educational outcomes. The Younger Cohort outperformed the Older Cohort in enrolment at the right age and in cognitive achievement, although there was no improvement in the highest grade completed by age 15.

The policy context for education in Viet Nam

When the country was still among the poorest in the world, Glewwe (2004) indicated that 'Viet Nam's performance in education is much higher than that of other low-income countries'. Over the years, both public and private sectors have made concerted efforts to invest in education (GSRV, 2016). However, the government recognises that there is the risk of education lagging behind, which may increasingly widen the economic and skills gaps between Viet Nam and other countries in the region.

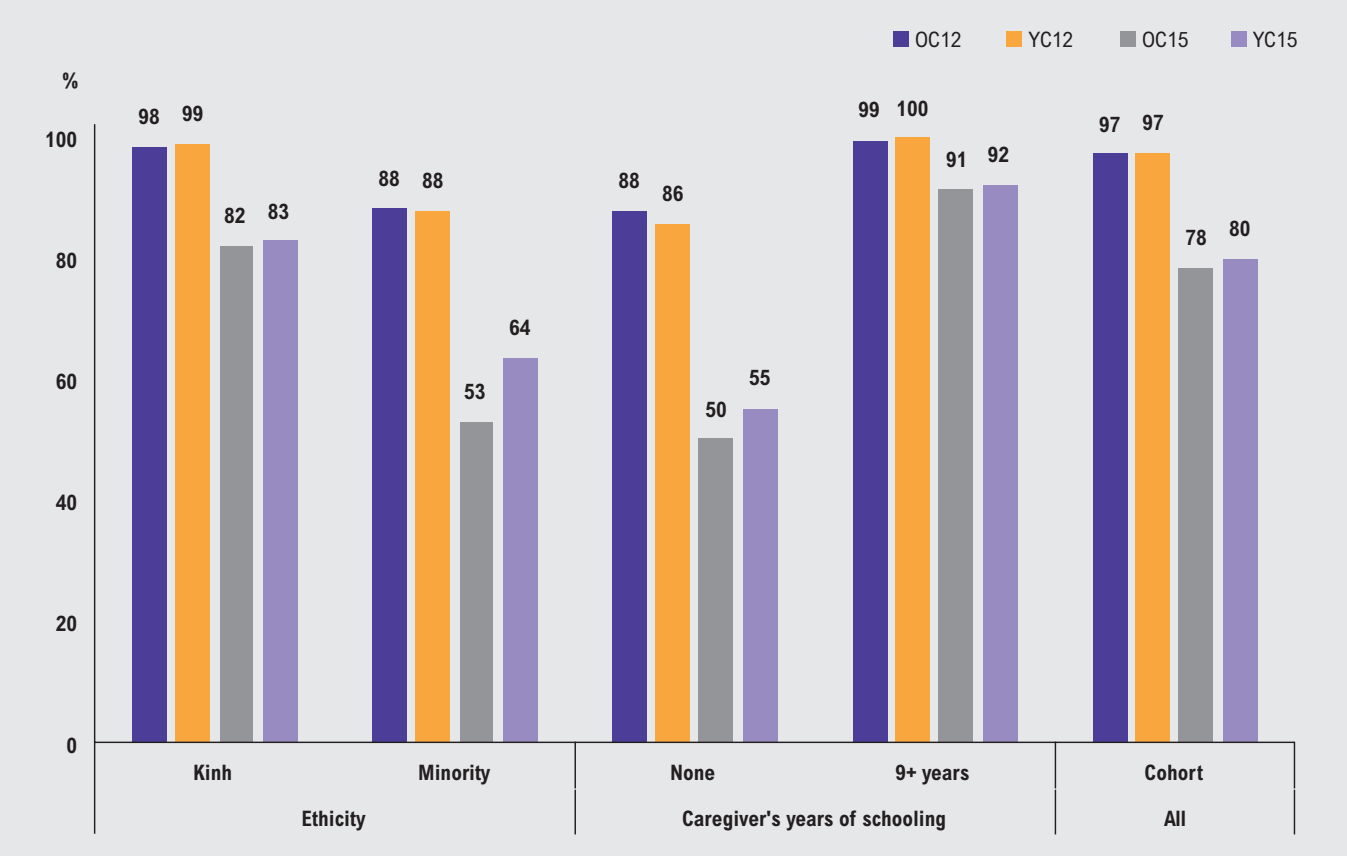
A number of policies have sought to improve the quality of the education system. In 2007, the Vietnamese government made Decision 55 on Fundamental School Quality Level and Standards for Assessment (of Education).[1] In 2009, the Minister of Finance applied the regulation that ring-fences 20% of government budget expenditure for education. Further, following the National Assembly's decision of November 2014, the Ministry of Education and Training started preparation for a major curriculum reform, to be implemented in 2018, aiming to improve the efficacy of schools in teaching competencies and personal skills. Meanwhile, Viet Nam's private education sector has developed slowly and, in 2015, still accounted for only a tiny fraction of schools.

School enrolment and progress through grades

Enrolment: According to the Education Law of 1998, children should start formal schooling in September of the year during which they turn six, and Young Lives data show that in practice the average age children from both cohorts started school was 6.1 years. However, this average conceals some differences within the cohorts; among the Younger Cohort, children whose caregivers had no education and those from ethnic minority groups enrolled in school earlier than their counterparts born seven years earlier (Table 1). At eight years old, while enrolment for all children from the Younger Cohort was near universal (99%), the corresponding figure for ethnic minority children was 92%. From age 12 to 15 years, there were significant decreases in rates of enrolment for both cohorts (Figure 1).

While the overall enrolment rates are similar, the data show the emergence of differences across groups over time. Among the Younger Cohort, enrolment rates fell between the ages of eight and 12 and dropped even more substantially between the ages of 12 and 15. This is partly because, in order to be admitted to public upper secondary school, pupils have to pass entry exams (Le and Nguyen 2016). Between ages 12 and 15, the biggest drop in enrolment was among children whose caregiver had

Figure 1. *Enrolment rate at ages 12 and 15 years for both cohorts*



1 MOET (2007)

no schooling; the enrolment gap between children whose caregivers had no education and those whose caregivers had nine years or more is 37 percentage points. Similarly, 15-year-olds from ethnic minority groups are more likely to be out of school. These same groups however made the greatest advance in enrolment compared to Older Cohort children of the same age in 2009 (Figure 1).

Grade progression: Young Lives' data on education history enable us to analyse how children are progressing through school and to investigate how many children are over-age for their grade (i.e. in lower grades than they should be) owing to late enrolment, grade repetition, or a combination of both. Our data show that the Younger Cohort's progress through school was better than that for the Older Cohort. In 2016, 10% of 15-year-olds were over-age for their grade while the corresponding figure is 21% for 15-year-olds in 2009. Given that children from both cohorts started school at the same age, the lower prevalence of over-age for the Younger Cohort means that fewer children are repeating grades and the majority are enrolling at their correct age.

Among the Younger Cohort, girls made better progress towards their grades at age 15 than boys. Other significant differences at age 15 are in relation to children from ethnic minorities (35% of whom are over-age in contrast to 7% of children of the Kinh majority), and in relation to those whose caregivers had no schooling (43% over-age in contrast to only 5% of children whose caregivers have nine years or more of education).

In terms of grade attainment, children from disadvantaged groups are likely to have achieved lower grades at all ages. Specifically, among 15-year-olds in the Younger Cohort, children of caregivers with no schooling, those from ethnic minority groups, and those living in the bottom wealth tercile were lagging a full grade behind children from the Kinh majority, those whose caregivers had completed primary school, and those from the top wealth tercile respectively. For the whole sample, the average grade completed by 15-year-olds in 2016 was 8.2, the same as that achieved by children of the same age in 2009.

Learning outcomes

Young Lives gathers information about children's learning achievement through vocabulary and maths tests. Of the children who answer all the comparable math questions at age 15 correctly, girls perform better than boys (three and six percentage points difference for 2016 and 2009 respectively). There is no significant difference in girls' and boys' performance in the vocabulary test. In both tests, the greatest differences in performance are between children from the ethnic minority groups and those from the Kinh majority (19 and 12 percentage points difference in average scores in maths and vocabulary respectively) and between children whose caregivers have no schooling and those whose caregivers have completed lower secondary school (26 and 15 percentage points difference in average scores in maths and vocabulary respectively). It is noteworthy that scores for children whose caregiver had even between one and four years of schooling show significant differences from those whose caregivers had no schooling (an 11-point difference in average maths scores) (Table 1).

In 2009 and 2016, 15-year-olds' ability in maths was tested in terms of three comparable questions: (1) two-digit division, (2) reading a pie chart, and (3) solving a problem.[2] The results show a general improvement; 15-year-olds in 2016 (38%) being more likely to answer all three questions correctly compared to 15-year-olds in 2009 (35%). Similarly, the average number of the comparable questions answered correctly by Younger Cohort children in 2016 increased compared to the Older Cohort in 2009. Caregivers' level of education is strongly associated with children's scores: 51% of children whose caregivers completed lower secondary level and above answered the three selected questions correctly in 2016, compared to only 16% of children with caregivers with no schooling. Most improvement happened in the first two questions rather than in the one related to problem solving for which 49% of children were able to answer it correctly in both 2009 and 2016. For this question, children living in the wealthiest households and those in urban areas performed best, with 60% and 64% respectively answering correctly in 2016.

Conclusions

15-year-olds from the Younger Cohort did better in terms of appropriate grade for their age, and performed better in cognitive tests compared with 15-year-olds from the Older Cohort seven years earlier. There is some evidence that girls were generally doing better than boys both in enrolment and in maths test performance. In terms of socio-economic status, favourable equalities in enrolment during the early stages of schooling gradually eroded by the time the children in different socio-economic groups reached upper secondary school age (15 years). Disadvantaged children, including ethnic minority children, those from poor households, and those whose caregiver had no or few years of schooling, performed worse in almost all educational indicators. The differentials between disadvantaged and advantaged children narrowed in certain areas, such as enrolment and over-age, but remain significant. Education reforms currently underway should focus on ethnic minority groups and the children of caregivers with no schooling in order to protect them from falling further behind, with the consequence of disadvantage and inequality being transmitted to the next generation.

2 Because the full maths tests administered in 2009 and 2016 to 15-year olds were not identical, we have selected three maths questions which were the same in both tests to compare children's performance at two different times. The results of a fuller test are also reported in Table 1 but this is only available for the Younger Cohort.

Table 1. *Schooling and learning outcomes for 15-year-old children in Viet Nam*

	Age at start of schooling		Children enrolled in school (%)		Average of highest attained grade		Children who attend extra classes (%)		Children who are over-age for grade (%)		Children answering 3 maths questions correctly (%)		Average number of questions answered correctly (out of three)		Average score in 31 maths test questions (%)	Average score in vocabulary test (%)
	Older Cohort (OC)	Younger Cohort (YC)	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2009	2016	2016	2016
Gender																
Male	6.1	6.1	75.4	76.4	8.1	8.1	70.1	66.8	24.6	11.9	31.9	36.7	1.9	2.0	45.7	78.3
Female	6.1	6.0	80.9	83.7	8.3	8.3	79.8	67.4	18.7	8.8	37.8	39.7	2.0	2.1	48.7	78.6
Ethnicity																
Kinh majority	6.0	6.0	82.0	82.7	8.3	8.4	79.2	70.7	18.5	7.0	37.8	41.5	2.0	2.1	49.7	80.1
Minority group	6.4	6.2	52.9	63.5	7.2	7.1	34.5	39.0	52.9	35.4	15.7	16.4	1.4	1.5	30.7	67.9
Caregiver's years of schooling																
No education	6.7	6.3	50.0	55.2	7.0	6.6	23.1	24.1	65.6	43.1	11.7	16.3	1.2	1.4	29.1	66.9
1–4 years	6.1	6.1	63.3	69.5	7.9	7.7	62.4	53.1	33.0	14.2	22.8	27.7	1.7	1.8	40.1	76.8
5–8 years	6.0	6.0	78.5	78.9	8.3	8.3	69.1	68.4	25.0	8.7	32.8	34.6	1.9	2.0	46.0	79.2
9+ years	6.0	6.0	91.2	92.0	8.5	8.8	89.7	77.4	11.0	4.9	47.1	50.6	2.2	2.3	55.6	81.6
Household wealth terciles																
Bottom	6.2	6.1	61.6	65.9	7.6	7.5	46.7	55.4	31.3	18.5	23.9	25.1	1.7	1.7	38.6	74.4
Middle	6.0	6.0	82.4	81.7	8.4	8.4	75.6	67.0	21.2	7.8	32.0	37.6	1.9	2.1	48.0	79.7
Top	6.0	6.0	90.7	92.2	8.6	8.7	94.7	75.5	14.9	5.9	49.1	50.6	2.2	2.3	54.9	81.3
Location																
Urban	6.0	6.0	89.9	91.9	8.4	8.6	88.7	74.5	14.9	6.8	43.9	54.3	2.1	2.3	57.1	79.1
Rural	6.1	6.1	75.7	77.3	8.1	8.1	71.9	65.1	23.0	11.4	33.0	34.3	1.9	2.0	44.5	78.3
Full sample	6.1	6.1	78.3	79.9	8.2	8.2	75.4	67.1	21.3	10.3	35.0	38.2	2.0	2.0	47.2	78.5
Number of children	827	1,879	815	1,889	638	1,510	638	1,510	629	1,524	808	1,745	808	1,745	1,760	1,866

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The images throughout our publications are of children living in circumstances and communities similar to the children within our study sample © Young Lives

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