

YOUNG LIVES LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH IN VIETNAM



Globally children are the largest age group affected by poverty and deprivation. This has both severe and lifelong consequences for individuals, households, communities and countries. **In order to break national and global patterns of the transmission of inequality and poverty, childhood is the place to start.**

The DFID funded [Young Lives Programme](#), based at Oxford University, is a unique international study, collecting data on poverty over a fifteen-year period from some 12,000 children. Two cohorts of children, born in 1994-95 and 2001-02, are participating in the study in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. This story follows one report, but in 2012-13 Young Lives [published 83 peer-reviewed papers](#).

In Vietnam, the programme took a focus on education by introducing a school survey to look at the teaching and facilities at the schools children attended. The findings from this survey identified a variety of strengths and weaknesses in the system and lessons that can be applied in other countries, particularly in relation to the causes of underachievement amongst ethnic minority groups. Since their publication, Young Lives findings have been presented to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education, who have used the research to inform their policies.

Introduction

The DFID-funded Young Lives study is a longitudinal research programme in four developing countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam). It looks in detail at the lives of **12,000 children in two cohorts**, born in 1994-95 and 2001-02, collecting information from families, communities, schools, and directly from the children themselves. Young Lives does not just look at education but at nutrition, social protection and other matters of child poverty.

Already holding much background household data on children's educational outcomes in Vietnam, the team wanted to be able to take into account the environment provided at school. They surveyed 4 regions, broken into 19 communities, 56 schools, 92 'school sites' and 3,284 pupils. This consisted of tests in mathematics and Vietnamese, as well as questionnaires completed by pupils and staff during school visits, which examined areas from attitude to education to what support was available at home.

The children were Grade 5 (aged 10-11), and deliberately spanned the geographical and economic range of the country. This ranged from rural Lao Cai, home to many ethnic minorities (13% of Vietnam's population) to prosperous and industrialising Da Nang.

Research Findings

Some findings were as one might expect: those schools with better facilities like working electricity, storage cupboards and separate classrooms were more effective. Children from more advantaged backgrounds, with greater access to resources outside of school, tended to do better.

There were other, less usual findings. Whilst by age 10 there were significant gaps in attainment in particular groups; the less advantaged and ethnic minorities, these gaps did narrow over the course of the year, contrary to experience elsewhere. The less well-equipped schools often had better 'value-added' scores; that is, saw the greatest level of improvement, if not best end grades. There was also little evidence

to suggest that less socially advantaged children were 'filtered out' of the better schools. Strikingly, girls had higher academic confidence, and results, than boys, which stands in contrast to other countries studied by Young Lives. Work is ongoing on the particular local, governmental and cultural drivers of this.

One area of particular interest for education policy is how to improve quality of education for all children. Therefore the Vietnamese government is particularly interested in looking at how to monitor, evaluate, and improve schools that aren't performing so well.

Implications of the research are that disparities between groups emerge early in children's education trajectories and must be acted upon. Evidence also suggests that raising achievement of low achievers actually brings up standards across the board.

Outcomes and Impacts

This research is already finding its way into influential circles in the Vietnamese government. From the start, Young Lives engaged the education ministry, World Bank and regional policymakers to work with them to design the survey questions so that the research

would provide evidence to help answer priority questions for the government. As well as working with the Vietnamese government, the project's unique ability to provide data on changes happening within a household has attracted the attention of the World Bank. They make extensive use of Young Lives data in their recent Development Report.

"We are increasingly working through committees of the National Assembly... this is thanks to the trustful relationships built with local partners and relationships carefully built in Vietnam"- Young Lives Team

Wider environment

Vietnam has identified education as a priority if it is to continue to grow and reach middle-income country status. Vietnam already has a strong education sector, ranked 17th in the 2013 PISA ranking. However, the government is increasingly interested in evidence-based policy to create a workforce proficient not just in core areas like literacy and numeracy but in a range of other adaptable and transferable skills.

Wide consultation on research questions and approaches with education policy stakeholders generated early interest in the survey and findings

Results presented at well-attended launch hosted by Norwegian Embassy, followed by meeting with Deputy Minister of Education the next day

Close engagement with World Bank staff throughout this process led to survey evidence used in World Bank's 2013 Vietnam Development Report on skills

Lead qualitative researcher invited to advise technical consultation team on Early Grade Reading Tests as a tool for evaluation of the School Education Quality Assurance Programme (SEQAP)

A full report was presented at a conference attended by the Vice-Minister for Education in September, at which he announced the expansion of SEQAP to more provinces, on the basis of the results they had found.

INFLUENCE PATHWAYS

Whilst this was but one factor influencing the Vietnamese government, rather than a direct 'cause', the Young Lives team is increasingly interacting with committees in the National Assembly to discuss how evidence can assist with policymaking.



RESEARCH AREAS

References: Vietnam Development Report 2014, World Bank, December 2013. Young Lives Working Paper no. 71, October 2011, Stefan Dercon and Abhijeet Singh
Images: Young Lives Team.

Key contacts
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www.younglives.org.uk/our-themes/education