

Chapter 2

Education

The questions respondents were asked relating to education aimed to provide general information about schooling and young people's educational experience. They covered age of attending and leaving school, achievement levels, reasons for non-attendance and school drop-out. A group of questions also explored the school environment in terms of teacher-student relationships, treatment of students, students' satisfaction and enjoyment of learning. Resulting data should not be used as a measure of the effectiveness of specific aspects of the curriculum or the standard of the education system.

2.1. School Attendance

Of the young people surveyed, 96.2% had attended school at some time in their lives (98.6% for urban compared to 95.4% for rural young people). This finding is consistent with prior enrollment and attendance data¹. SAVY found similar primary school enrollment figures for boys (97%) and girls (95.4%). Of some interest is that SAVY found similar enrollment and education achievement figures for young men and women at every level. A small but concerning 3.8% of respondents have never been to school.

44.8% of the sample reported to be attending school at the time the survey took place, including college or university. As expected, more of the

youngest group are in school; 75.2% for the 14-17 age group, decreasing to 27.7% in the 18-21 age group and 7% in the oldest group. More urban respondents were in school (53.4%) than rural (42%). Male participation was a little higher (48.1%), compared to females (41.5%).

Table 2 shows the level of educational achievement attained by young people at the time of SAVY. The most common level of educational achievement for the sample is lower secondary school (49.7%), comprising 53.7% of rural and 38.7% of urban young people. However young people in urban areas are more likely to have achieved upper secondary school level (30.7%) compared with their rural equivalents (21.1%). Another differential found in educational achievement is that twice as many rural students only complete primary school level (20.2%) compared to 9% of urban students.

The SAVY enrollment figures of above 95% are encouraging, though the disaggregated data shows lower attendance and achievement in poor areas, rural areas and among ethnic minorities. Young women from ethnic minorities were the most likely to have never attended school (19%) compared to 2% of their Kinh counterparts. In comparison, 10% of boys from ethnic minority populations have never attended school and only 2% of Kinh boys. Of the total group who had never attended school, 52% were from ethnic minority areas. The right to go to school is written into The Education Law in Viet Nam reflecting the government's priority for education. Viet Nam has announced universalized primary education. Of particular significance is the fact that education is free for primary school children, and that the government has a special policy for children in poor areas.

TABLE 2 School Achievement Levels

Level	Location		Ethnic		Total
	Urban	Rural	Kinh	Ethnic Minorities	
Primary school	9.0	20.2	13.9	39.8	17.2
Lower secondary	38.7	53.7	40.9	48.3	49.7
Upper secondary	30.7	21.1	25.8	9.4	23.7
Less than bachelor degree	7.5	3.1	4.7	1.4	4.3
Bachelor or higher degree	13.9	1.5	5.4	0.9	4.8
Did not complete primary	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100

TABLE 3 *Reasons for Non-attendance at School*

	Number	Percent
Can't afford school fees	121	44.1
Have to work for my family	73	21.2
Don't want to go to school	38	15.7
Family doesn't want me to go to school	16	5.3
Too ill, disabled	13	4.4
School was too far from home	12	4.2
Don't know Kinh language	9	2.7
Other	5	2.3
Total	287	100.0

According to SAVY the main reason for not attending school is still because families ‘can’t afford school fees’ or schooling expenses (44.1%). These education-related expenses may include text books, stationary, clothing, contributions for school infrastructure and transport. This is followed by ‘having to work for my family’ (21.2%) (see Table 3). The constraints and difficulties in paying education-related costs and having to work to help families fall far more heavily on those living in poverty, of which young people from ethnic minorities are over represented. This explains to a certain extent why young people from poor areas, as well as those from ethnic minorities, have a significantly high percentage of not attending school (Table 2).

2.2. School Drop out Rates

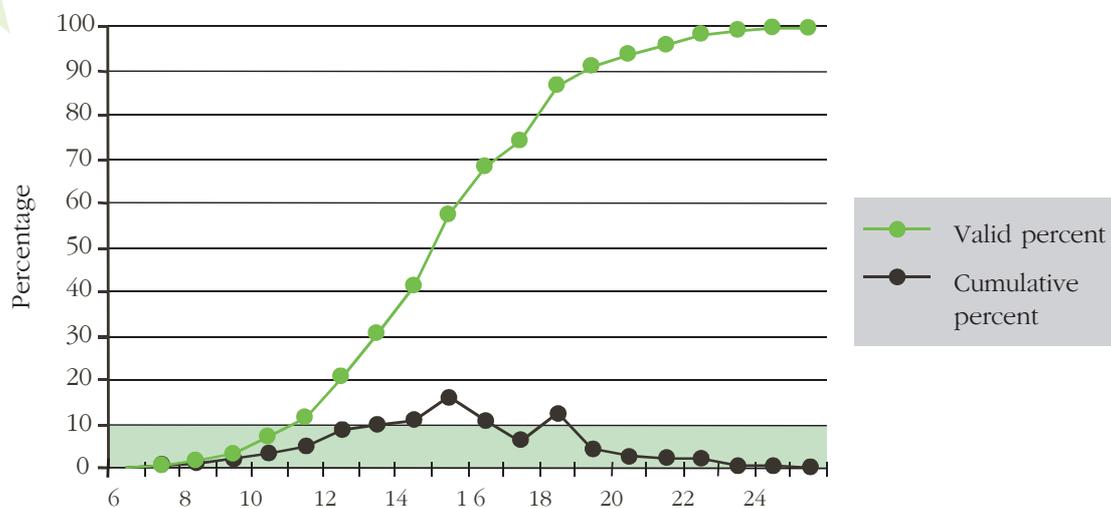
Graph 3 shows that the school drop-out rate is high between the ages of 12 to 16, low at 17 to 18 years and high again at the age of 19. This corresponds to the three education end points: primary, secondary and high school (see Graph 4). Graph 4 indicates that 30% of those who have dropped out of school completed Grade 5, but the cumulative drop-out rate reaches 75% by the end of Grade 9.

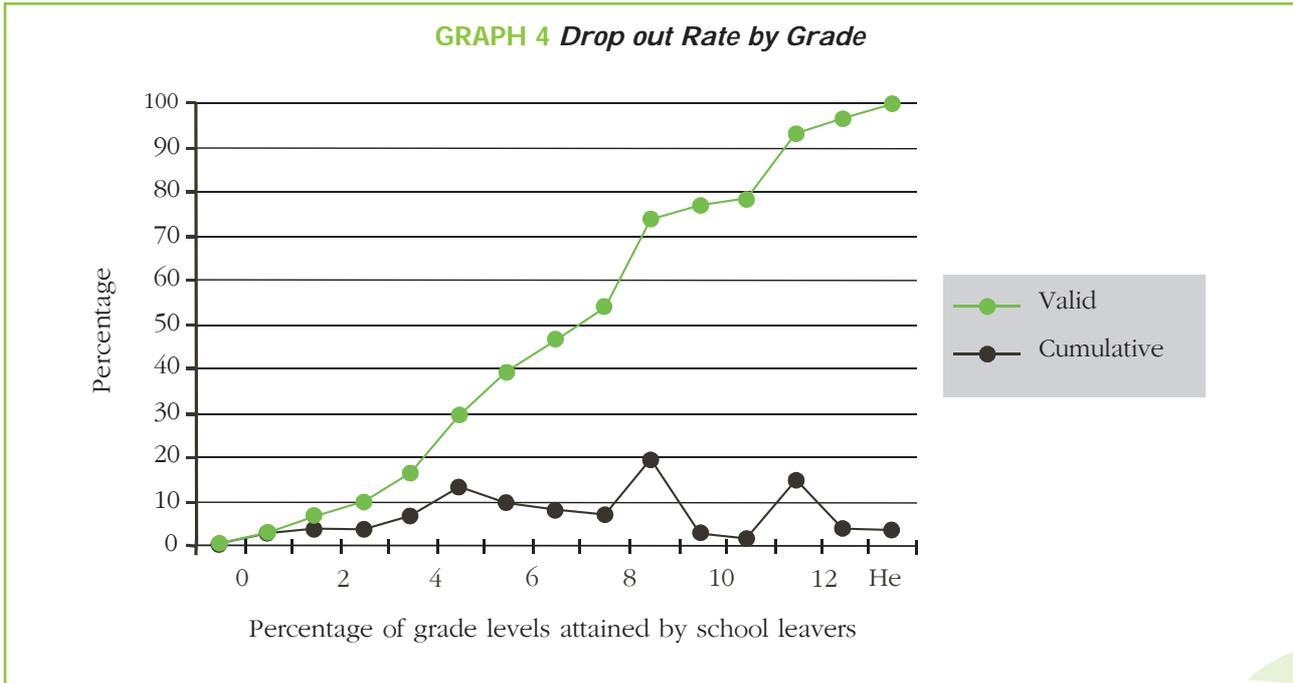
The main reasons why young people drop out of school are similar to the reasons for non-attendance, with 25% reporting that they couldn’t afford to continue and 20% dropping out to work for their family. A further 13.8% said they did not want to continue studying.

Young people from ethnic minorities are over represented in non-school attendance and in drop out figures. For example, 28.8% of those in the sample who had stopped school reported to have only achieved primary education level, but this increases to 53.3% of ethnic minority compared to 24.8% of Kinh. The disadvantaged situation of ethnic minorities and the high rate of ethnic minority drop outs are listed as major challenges to be met in the 2001-2010 Education Development Strategy.²

However there are also other reasons, failure in studies is a significant reason for drop out too, reported by 13.5%, and 6% identified their limited

GRAPH 3 *Drop out Rate by Age*





abilities to study or attend school as a reason for dropping out. When combined, failure in studies and poor academic skill account for 20% of school drop outs, which is relatively high. Because failure and lack of success have been identified as behavioral risk factors for young people, the findings are a useful indicator for the school system to explore ways in which young people can be encouraged to stay in the more protective school environment.

To some extent, the education system is challenged to accommodate the needs of every young person in Viet Nam, and this obviously affects the drop out rate particularly for those in disadvantaged areas. In order to continue on to secondary level, young people from ethnic minorities must often leave home for boarding school, as there are few high schools in mountainous areas. High schools that are situated in the plains (delta) areas can only take limited numbers, and national entrance exams limit their admissions. Young people from ethnic minorities and from poor areas – who are already disadvantaged by economics, by having to travel long distances to school, and often by being educated in a language other than that used at home – are least likely to pass these exams. They are also least likely to afford the additional costs of studying away from home. Awareness of these educational difficulties and inequalities has resulted

in special government arrangements including incentives, differential standards and economic subsidies for young people coming from disadvantaged areas. However it is difficult to achieve equity over night.

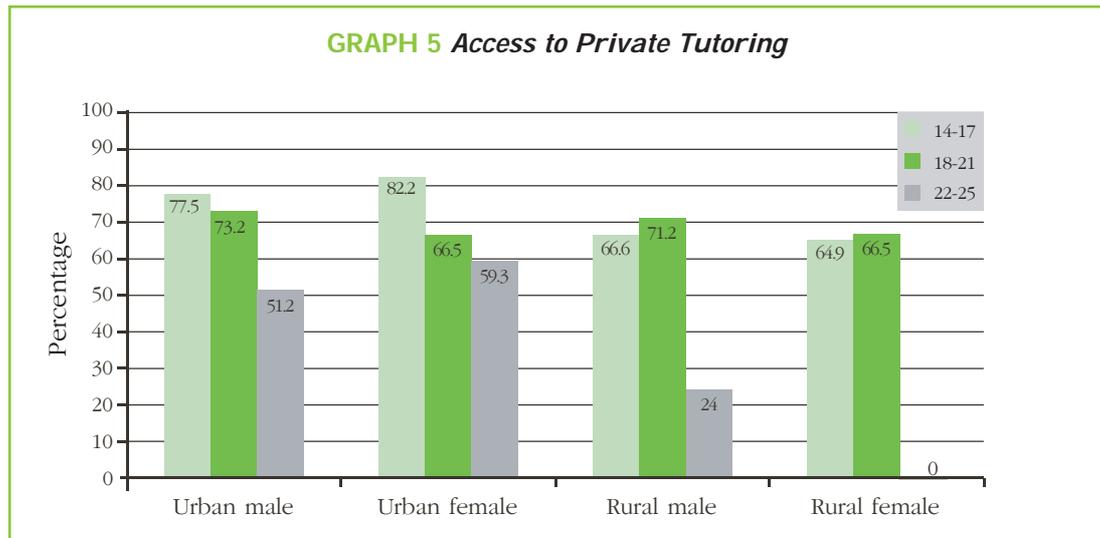
As a final note, although many other countries have identified school bullying as a significant influence on the school drop out rate, this does not appear to be the case in Viet Nam according to this survey.

2.3. Literacy Rates

Participants were asked about their level of literacy and their access to building skills in literacy in their current school. The urban literacy rate was 96.9% and the rural was 91.5%. Among the 96.2% of young people having gone to school, 92.8% know how to read and write, meaning that 3.4% are illiterate. Those who had not finished primary school (16.4% of those who have dropped-out of school, and 8.7% of all surveyed youth) are particularly vulnerable to re-illiteracy.

2.4. Private Tutoring

Young people in school and full time study were asked about private tutoring. There is an extremely high percentage of private tutoring recorded outside



of school hours by this group of young people (69%). As very few young people in the 22-25 age group were in full time study (n=14), private tutoring really relates to the 14-21 age group, of which 70% reporting occurrences of private tutoring. More private tutoring was reported in urban areas and with Kinh young people (78% urban, 66% rural, 74.3% Kinh, 31.7% ethnic minority).

The reasons for such high levels of private tutoring could include the improved economic situation of families, increased pressure and competition to succeed at school, the quality of student performance and tutoring as a de-facto salary for teachers. The reasons for the discrepancies between urban, rural and ethnic minority young people may include economic factors, availability of tutors, differing priorities and values placed on formal education.

2.5. Perception of Schools and Teachers

Those young people who were currently studying in school or university were asked a number of questions about their attitudes and perceptions toward schools and teachers. Overall the findings are extremely positive across regions, age groups, ethnicities and gender. 90% of students agreed that teachers treated all students equally, although boys agreed at higher rates compared to girls (92% versus 87%). However, 25% of older female students (22-25) disagreed with the statement. 90% of students reported that they had the opportunity

to 'have a say' at school. This is similar to a UNICEF study on youth participation and opportunities for speaking out in school³. Kinh young people agreed more than their ethnic minority counterparts at 83%. Young people's ability to have a say may be affected by the actual opportunities provided and individual characteristics of teachers and students, as well as cultural norms about speaking out. In addition, 85% of respondents agreed that teachers praised them when they did well. This was generally consistent across all groups, with the highest percentage in rural groups (87.7%) and the lowest in the older age group of 22-25 (78.4%).

While few of the students surveyed have been formally disciplined at school, those that had were generally boys (7.9%), with fewer girls at 1.9%. This is in keeping with other school research that shows boys take up more teacher time than girls in terms of discipline problems. There is also some evidence that teachers may focus more on the negative behavior of boys.

The majority of students reported that they try to study hard (90.8%). Interestingly, 73.9% did not agree that the workload was too heavy, with 10% being undecided and 16.2% agreeing it was too heavy. There has been significant discussion within education circles about the increasing stress on students resulting from study pressure. The findings of this survey – with few students reporting a heavy workload – are surprising and seem to be at odds with prior findings⁴. Only 15% of the 14-17 year age group agreed that the work load was too

heavy compared with 25.2% of the older group. Factors influencing this finding may include: young people don't report the workload as too heavy because they perceive a heavy workload as a good foundation for success; reporting the work load as too heavy may reflect a student's academic weakness; the media and parents have overstated the workload issue; and students may feel obliged not to criticize the curriculum and will therefore report an appropriately weighted work load.

It should be noted that only the SAVY respondents who were studying were asked about school workload. As they are aged from 14-25 (Grade 9 or above) the data cannot be applied to work loads in primary and lower secondary grades (between grade 1-8).

The majority of young people who were studying



report that they wanted to go to university (90%). This is in stark contrast to the actual numbers that attend higher education or university or gain a degree at less than 10%⁵. This high expectation might result in many students feeling disappointed about not reaching their goal, as well as creating increased competition to attend university. However high expectations may also drive young people to perform at a high level.

Vocational training research suggests that the expectations and high status afforded to university may impact negatively on young people's willingness to participate in job/vocational training⁶. This survey shows a low level of vocational training at 18.9%. Further exploration about the availability of training compared with demand for vocational training might be useful, particularly tailor-made vocational training courses that provide direct entry into jobs.

A rather high number of young people surveyed (70%) felt that schools provided access to disabled students. This perception seems not to fit the reality, where young disabled students have limited access to education, particularly higher education. This high percentage also reflects young people's sympathetic and accepting attitudes to others with disabilities but does not reflect the capacity of school environments to meet young disabled needs. Issues of inclusivity in education have gained greater prominence and will be of interest to track in future surveys.

1. United Nations in Viet Nam. Millennium Development Goals: Bringing MDGs Closer to the People. Hanoi; 2002 Nov.
2. Government of Viet Nam. 2001-2010 Education Development Strategy. Hanoi; 2001.
3. UNICEF Speaking Out 2000 Op Cit
4. Presentation at Quality of Education Forum, Joint UNESCO and MoET Forum, Hanoi 2003
5. Quyen BT, Nguyet CN, Kim Dung NT, Bhuong TB, Haughton D, Haughton J. Education and Income. In: Haughton D, Haughton J, Phong N. editors. Living Standards During an Economic Boom: The Case of Viet Nam. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House; 2001. p. 79-94.
6. United Nations Country Team Viet Nam. Challenges to Youth Employment in Viet Nam Hanoi; 2003 Jun. Discussion Paper No. 3.