

EDUCATION IN VIET NAM: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2009 CENSUS

This factsheet presents key highlights of the current education and training situation in Viet Nam based on the 2009 Population and Housing Census and other relevant data. By analyzing this data in the current policy and legal context, a set of recommendations have been developed to help Viet Nam address the identified gaps and disparities in education and training.

ISSUE

Since the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 which ensures that all children have the right to education, Viet Nam has made remarkable progress towards ensuring that all children are able to realize this right. At present approximately 92 per cent of primary school-age children are enrolled in primary education.

Despite a number of major achievements and substantial progress in the education sector, a number of key challenges remain. In addition, the overall success in primary education enrolment does not guarantee the quality of education or a continuation of study at higher levels.

Viet Nam is now in a period in which a sizeable young population of about 1 million people is entering the labour market each year. Thus, quality education will be of paramount importance to Viet Nam's socio-economic growth in the coming decades. Now that the country has reached middle-income status, increased spending on education and improving educational standards are imperatives.

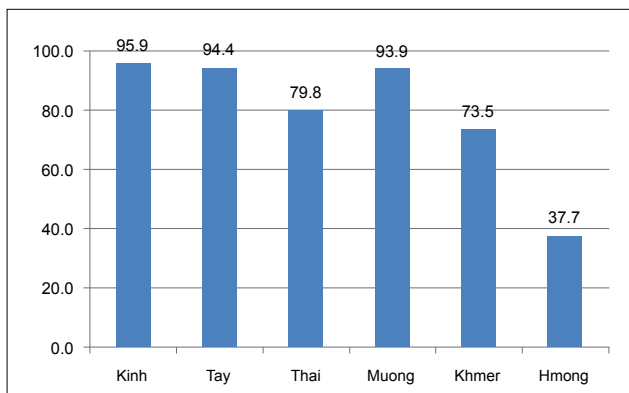
MAIN FINDINGS

1. A persistent gap exists in literacy and education achievement for ethnic minority groups compared to the Kinh majority

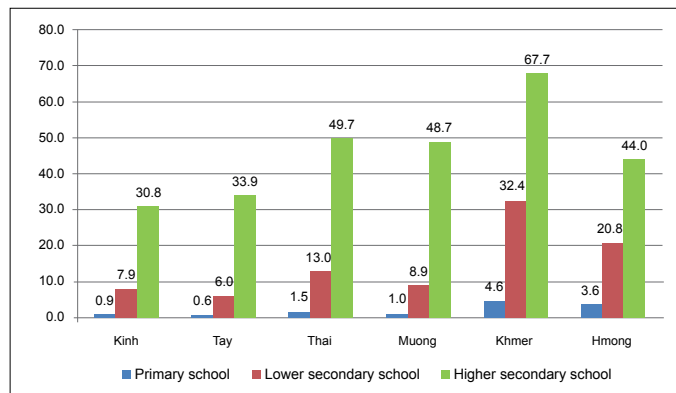
The literacy rate of the Vietnamese population aged 15 years and over is 93.5 percent – an increase of 3.2 percent since 1999. Even though the national literacy rate is very high, the rate is still rather low among Thai, Khmer, and Hmong ethnic groups compared to the Kinh majority (see Graph 1). Kinh people have much higher levels of educational attainment compared to ethnic minorities: 22.7 percent of Kinh people completed high school or a higher level of education compared to an average of only 9 percent among other ethnic groups. It is also apparent that school dropout rates are highest among ethnic minority groups (see Graph 2).

FACT AND FIGURES

- Over 93.5 per cent of the Vietnamese population aged 15 years and older are literate.
- There has been a sharp decline in the gender gap between literate males and females aged 15 years and above, falling from 10 per cent in 1989 to 4.4 per cent in 2009. However, rural females have seen the fewest gains in terms of professional and technical qualifications.
- 22.7 percent of the Kinh population completed high school or a higher level of education versus an average of only 9 per cent among other ethnic groups.
- 18.9 per cent of Viet Nam's population aged 25 years and over have a 'medium level of educational attainment', and only 5.4 per cent of Viet Nam's population aged 25 and above reached UNESCO's 'high educational attainment' level.



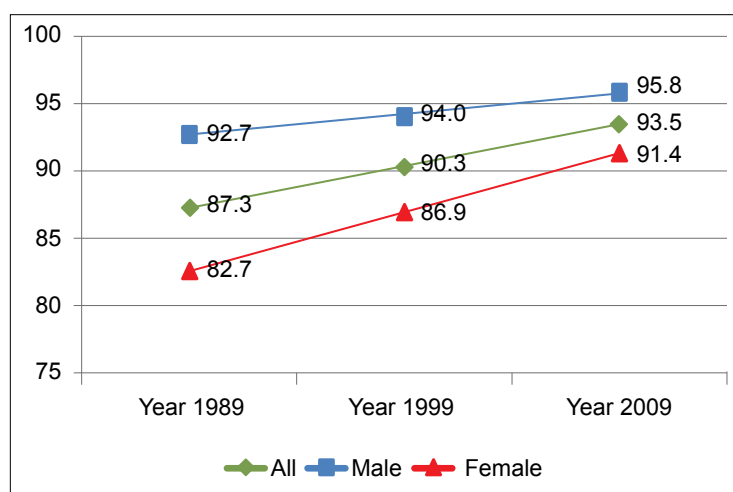
Graph 1: Literacy rate of population aged 15 years and above by ethnic group



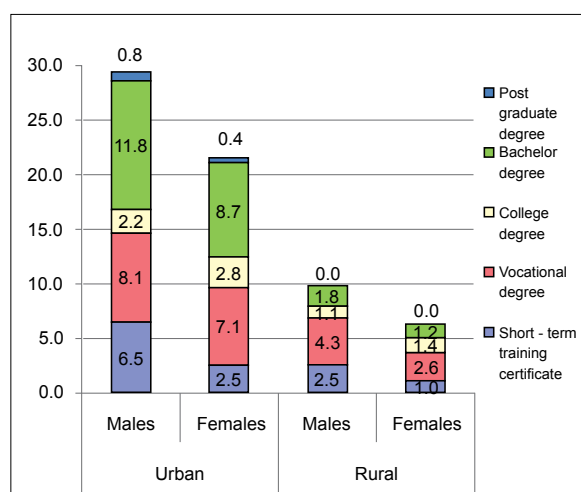
Graph 2: School drop-out rate, by ethnic group

2. Significant educational achievement for women, but rural areas still lag behind

Nationally, the male literacy rate of people aged 15 years and above is higher than the female literacy rate. However, an analysis of the data from the three censuses conducted from 1989 to 2009 indicates that there has been a sharp decline in the gender gap – falling from 10 percent in 1989 to 4.4 percent in 2009 (Graph 3). This demonstrates consistent progress towards achievement of MDG 3 on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.



Graph 3: Literacy rate of population aged 15 years and above



Graph 4: Percentage of highest professional attainment, by sex and urban/rural setting

Regional data on literacy, however, reveal that there is still a disparity between males and females, while rural females lag behind other groups the most in terms of professional and technical qualifications.

3. Regional and provincial differences exist with dropout rates highest in the South

The 2009 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census indicates that the dropout rate in southern provinces among those of school age (5-18 years) was much higher than in the northern provinces. Overall, the dropout rate was the lowest in the North, including low rates in Ha Noi (7.8 percent), Thai Binh (8.1 percent) and Hai Duong (8.9 percent), while it was highest in the southern provinces, such as Binh Duong (30.8 percent), Bac Lieu (26.2 percent), An Giang (25.9 percent) and Soc Trang (25.8 percent). At the same time, the Mekong Delta region has always had the lowest rate of high school completion and the lowest proportion of the population with short-term, vocational, college or higher training degrees.

4. Education level is correlated with fertility rate and age at first marriage

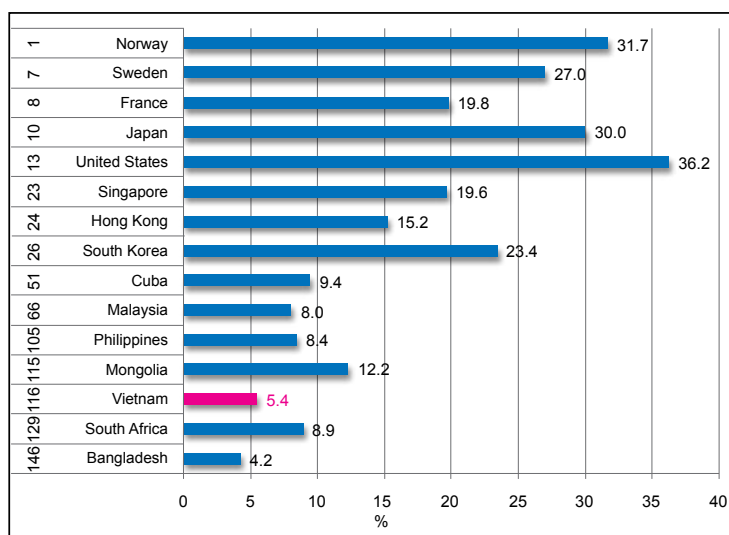
The data indicate that at the provincial level, the total fertility rate (TFR) is correlated with the literacy rate: the lower the literacy rate, the higher the TFR. In addition, a correlation was also found between the mean age at first

marriage and the professional and technical qualifications of women: provinces where women are getting married at a younger age (on average) form a smaller proportion of the population in possession of college or higher degrees.

5. Low levels of technical qualification pose challenges for the future

In 2009, among the population aged 15 years or older, only 1.63 percent had a college degree, 4.17 percent had a bachelor degree, and 0.21 percent had a post graduate degree. Based on the international classification of UNESCO for educational achievement, 18.9 percent of Viet Nam’s population aged 25 years and over have a ‘medium level of educational attainment’¹, and only 5.4 percent of Viet Nam’s population aged 25 years and above have reached UNESCO’s ‘high educational attainment’ level (see Graph 5).

The international comparison in Graph 5 also includes the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking and illustrates that Viet Nam has a lower proportion of its population with high educational attainment compared to countries with almost similar (or even lower) HDI rankings, such as Mongolia and South Africa. This highlights the significant challenge that Viet Nam still faces in terms of educational attainment.



Graph 5: proportion of adults aged 25 and older with high educational attainment

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The level of educational qualification of ethnic groups other than the Kinh majority remains a challenge. There needs to be more emphasis placed upon reducing the disparity between these vulnerable groups and the rest of the population. In the short run efforts need to be made to increase the rate of school enrolments of Thai, Khmer and Hmong, and to reduce the dropout rates among ethnic minority groups. In particular, focus needs to be maintained on ensuring access of minorities to mother tongue-based bilingual education, which has been proven to lead to a higher level of Vietnamese language achievements by this group.

Viet Nam’s efforts towards achieving the MDGs are on the right track and progress to date is promising, particularly for MDGs 2 and 3 on achievement of universal primary education and gender equality respectively. Recent data also shows great success in Viet Nam in terms of women’s educational attainment and professional qualifications compared to men. There is, however, still a great need and rationale for improving the empowerment of women – especially in rural areas.

The correlation between a high fertility rate and low educational achievement, and between early marriage and a low rate of professional and technical qualification among women, is quite prominent. It confirms the important role of female education and training policies and programmes, these policies and programmes should be particularly designed to meet the needs of different population groups in disadvantaged rural areas.

Appropriate solutions should be sought to tackle regional educational and technical qualification disparities by the relevant ministries. It is also recommended that the Viet Nam Education Development and Vocational Development Strategies for 2011-2020 should address this issue towards strengthening professional and technical qualifications of people to meet local needs. It is necessary to study the underlying factors of the high drop-out rates in the South. For example, the Mekong Delta region has always had the lowest rate of high school completion and the lowest proportion of the population with short-term, vocational, college or higher education and training degrees.

Data from the 2009 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census, as well as Ministry of Education and Training statistics, show that the burden of universal education provision will not be reduced within the next 10 years. However, in the

¹ UNESCO defines ‘medium educational achievement’ as education equivalent to a vocational or college degree in Viet Nam. ‘High educational achievement’ is defined as education equivalent to a university or post-graduate degree in Viet Nam.

long run, with low fertility, this burden will decrease as the number of children entering the primary education system gradually declines. This should be taken into consideration in the development of the national strategies on primary education. Especially, the mid-term and long-term education plans of each province need to utilise its provincial population projection to estimate the number of school age children for each education level. The low proportions of the population having high professional and/or technical qualifications (bachelor degrees or higher) is alarming. This is an enormous challenge facing the quality of human resources for Viet Nam's socio-economic development policies and sustainable economic growth both at present and in the future. Therefore, investment and related efforts to improve the quality of education and training must be a top priority for the government of Viet Nam.

MAIN REFERENCES:

1. *Government of Viet Nam, Resolution on major comprehensive renovation of Viet Nam university education in the phase 2006-2020. Number 14/2005/NQ-CP.*
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3. *MOET. Viet Nam Education Development Strategic Plan for 2011-2020, draft 23, Ha Noi.*
4. *National Assembly of Viet Nam, Education Law, Number 38/2005/GH11.*
5. *UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008, Global Education Digest 2008: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World.*
6. *UNICEF 2008, UNICEF and the Children of Viet Nam – Education Program Policy Brief.*