

Extra Classes and Subjective Well-being: Empirical Evidence from Vietnamese Children

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The transition to a market economy in countries such as Vietnam and China tends to lead to a significant increase in private tutoring. This may be due to an increase in the returns to education in these transition economies which has led to a higher demand for formal education and private tutoring, combined with a public education system which is often regarded as inadequate. In Vietnam a typical school day is short, as is a typical academic year. Despite a very high primary school enrolment rate, most primary school students receive little more than half of the teaching input of the international standard. This paper investigates the potential impact of private tutoring on children in Vietnam from a novel angle by exploring the relationship between taking extra classes and a child's subjective well-being, which is defined as the child's self-evaluation of his/her current life and expectations of what it will be in four years time. The key question we ask is whether taking extra classes will make children feel happier and, if so, whether such an effect persists in the long run.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, attention is restricted to the Young Lives' Older Cohort of Vietnamese children born in 1994. Two rounds of the survey have been carried out in 2002 and 2006, when the children were aged 8 and 12 respectively. We only use Round 2 data because information on the children's subjective evaluation of their lives is absent in Round 1.

The analysis uses the Ordinary Least Squares and Ordered Probit methods of estimation. Here, the dependent variable measures the child's subjective well-being and the independent variables are a set of observable characteristics such as parental education, household wealth and assets, whether the child takes extra (private) tuition, whether the child is in a lower than average grade for her age, parent's evaluation of the school environment and whether the household is in debt. A set of control variables include the gender of the child, ethnicity, household size, urban/rural residence, whether the child has any long-term health problems, etc.

To control for potential endogeneity of households' choice to purchase extra classes, Propensity Score Matching is applied.

Findings

We find that:

- Children taking extra classes tend to be more satisfied with their current life and that this positive link also exists in the long-run. Children may feel happier taking extra classes because it helps improve their academic performance or provides more opportunities to acquire knowledge.
- Children who are proud of their school achievements are also more likely to have higher degrees of life satisfaction both for their current and future lives.
- Parental education levels also tend to have positive and persistent effects on children's subjective well-being.
- Being in a very poor household with a low level of assets and living in rural areas are associated with a lower degree of satisfaction for both current and future life.
- Some factors, such as being in a school grade lower than the average, only have a temporary effect on children's subjective well-being.
- Some factors tend only to have a long-run effect on children's attitudes and feelings. It is shown that health problems only make children worry about their future. Similarly, being a minority has only a long-run negative effect.

Policy implications

In terms of policy implications, results from this paper indicate that access to private tutoring could influence children's current and long-term subjective well-being. Therefore, if the popularity of private tutoring is due to the inadequacy of formal schooling, the government should improve both the quantity and quality of public schooling. Nevertheless, further research which better controls for endogeneity issues is necessary in order to establish a more convincing causal relationship between private tutoring and children's subjective well-being.

