

## The Impact of Family Socio-economic Status on Access to Higher Education in Vietnam

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**ABSTRACT** The importance of university education as a solution to the advancement of a nation cannot be overemphasised. However, it has been observed in Vietnam that the socio-economic situation of the family is one of the factors affecting students' access to higher education. Therefore, it became imperative to analyse the influence of these factors on the grade 12 students, by taking cognisance of how they affect the continuity of their university education. The study was conducted on 788 participants (including 394 students and 394 parents of these students) in Da Nang city, by means of questionnaire surveys. Results show that low family income and university expenses are major barriers to students' decision to attend university, and that the cost of private tutoring adds to this burden. The research recommends that the state should have policies on students' credit to enhance the ability to complete university education.

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education does not only play a significant role in the socio-economic strategy of each country, but it is also the main means of social mobility of individuals. Families with higher education have more opportunities to provide higher education to their children, thereby providing upward mobility (OXFAM 2018). In accordance with the Weberian perspective, social classes have different chances for education and income. According to Weber, this is due to the socio-economic situation, including property or qualifications that allow you to work (Weber 1994; Ballantine 2001). Researchers Konstantinovskiy (1999), Bowles et al. (2002) and Salazar et al. (2019) note the direct impact of socio-economic status on income and the indirect effect on educational achievement and the level of intelligence of students. Bourdieu (2002) showed the influence of various forms of capital (social, economic, cultural and symbolic) on the formation of the status hierarchy and social practices, and the implementation of educational needs. Researchers consider various factors that influence the choice of admission to a university (Arabsheibani 1988; Voznesenskaya et al. 2004; Roshchina 2005, 2012; Hannanova et al. 2008).

Moreover, Coleman et al. (1982) point to the dependence of student performance on social background and peers, as well as the type of school. Financial barriers do not only impede university enrolment, but also affect the choice of course or institution, especially for families with lower socioeconomic status (Lynch et al. 2006; Prakhov 2012, 2015; Gromov et al. 2017). In particular, inequality is increasing in access to higher education between the rich and the poor, in which the wealthier families with higher incomes continue to attend higher education than other groups (Tilak et al. 2019). In addition, the study by Olson-Strom et al. (2020) also pointed out that socio-economic factors have become major barriers in accessibility of education for Asian women.

In Vietnam, the issue of inequality in terms of access to higher education in relation to the socioeconomic status of the family was also considered. Do (2005), Vu et al. (2012) and Le's (2015, 2018) research has shown the inequality between rich and poor in the accessibility of higher education. Studying the relationship between the family's economic status and academic success, Phung (2010) pointed out that students from affluent families studying "good" and "excellent" are 1.41 times more than stu-

dents from low-income families. Analysing the situation of rural youth in the orientation toward higher education, Tran et al. (2014) conducted a series of in-depth interviews aimed at identifying the reasons that hinder the continuation of studies at the university. Among these reasons are high costs of training and low family income. Nguyen and Tran (2014) and Pham (2015) claim that tuition fees are one of the main barriers to higher education in Vietnam, especially for poor families. As a result, there are increasing in the percentage of children who come from low income families do not pursue higher education. In fact, they directly participate in the labor market after graduation from high school. One of the reasons is that their families do not have fulfill finance to pay for the cost of higher education (Nguyen and Nguyen 2019). Thach’s study (2020) emphasized that children from low-income families access to higher education lower than their peers. This affects their chances of escaping poverty.

In general, there has been a number of studies on the role and impact of the socio-economic situation of the family on the accessibility of higher education, but there are no studies on inequality in the accessibility of higher education under the impact of family economic factors. Moreover, previous studies have not forecasted the influence of this factor on the accessibility of higher education in Vietnam as well as in Da Nang.

**Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of the economic situation of the family on the accessibility of higher education in Vietnam, as well as to identify the problem of inequality in its higher education system.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

The study was conducted by mass survey in Da Nang (Vietnam) from 2018-2019. The survey was carried out using a stratified sample, and the total sample size was 788 respondents (394 twelfth grade students, which is the last level in the Vietnamese school, and 394 of their

parents (fathers or mothers). In fact, the percentage of women, that is, female students and mothers are more than men at 53.0 percent and 56.6 percent, respectively. In terms of living location, the respondents live in the centre, that is, 29.4 percent live in the suburbs and 18.8 percent live in rural areas. Among the 394 parents surveyed, there are 29 people at the elementary school level, 117 people with secondary school level education, 130 people with high school level, 12 people with professional secondary level, 17 people with college level, 77 people with university degree and 12 people with postgraduate degree. Regarding the occupation of parents, the largest proportion comprises small traders (20.6%). Meanwhile, the figure of self-employed persons, state officials, workers, business, farmers, retired people and other group are 19.5 percent, 17.8 percent, 17.5 percent, 9.6 percent, 8.9 percent, 4.65 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants.

**Table 1: Overview of the participants of the survey**

	<i>Parents</i>		<i>Students</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	171	43.4	185	47
Female	223	56.6	209	53
<i>Living Place</i>				
Center	204	51.8	204	51.8
Suburban	116	29.4	116	29.4
Rural	74	18.8	74	18.8
<i>Education</i>				
Primary school	29	7.4	-	-
Secondary school	117	29.7	-	-
High school	130	33.0	-	-
Intermediate	12	3.0	-	-
College	17	4.3	-	-
University	77	19.5	-	-
After university	12	3.0	-	-
<i>Occupation</i>				
Public servants	70	17.8	-	-
Farmer	35	8.9	-	-
Worker	69	17.5	-	-
Small business	81	20.6	-	-
Business	38	9.6	-	-
Retire	18	4.6	-	-
Self-employed	77	19.5	-	-
Other	6	1.5	-	-

**Measure**

The data collection tool consists of two questionnaires, one of which is designed to survey

students and one to survey their parents. In both questionnaires, the first part is about demographic and social items. The following parts are the survey items about decision to continue to attend higher education, the difficulties of attending higher education, parents' income and study expenses. A surveyor selected all questions. In addition to the question about the barriers when deciding to go to college, the respondents can choose many options (at least 1 option).

### Data Analysis

To analyse the impact of the socio-economic situation of the family on access to higher education, the collected data is processed through SPSS programme version 22. The multivariate regression analysis was used to consider the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable.

## RESULTS

The results of the study show that 85.3 percent of the students surveyed want to go to college, while 14.7 percent of the students surveyed decided to go to secondary vocational schools. There are a number of reasons for not wanting to go to college (Table 1).

**Table 2: Distribution of answers to the question: "What reasons led you to decide not to go to college?", (in% of choice)**

<i>Reasons for unwillingness to enter universities</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Students</i>
This is a family decision	-	7.6
Limited individual abilities	36.8	18.6
Poor health	10.5	7.6
Low standard of living	52.6	24.6
Studying at a university is a lost time and it is difficult to find a job	47.4	11.4
Lack of information on specialties	21.1	7.6
Lack of career guidance in schools	-	4.2
University too far from home	-	3.6
High costs of studying at a university	26.3	14.8

The survey data (Table 2) shows clearly that the respondents do not want to continue their studies at the university. In addition to individual inabilities, the main reasons for the response

given by the respondents include a low standard of living (parents surveyed: 52.6% and students surveyed: 24.6%), and high costs of studying at a university (parents surveyed: 26.3% and students surveyed: 14.8%). It is seen clearly from here that the financial factor is becoming one of the serious obstacles to the continuation of studies at universities. This can be explained such that although Da Nang is one of Vietnam major cities, the living standards of the households are not higher than other cities, such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. On the other hand, families practicing fisheries account for a large proportion in Da Nang. Moreover, among largest cities of Vietnam, Da Nang has ethnic minorities who are mostly low-income families. Therefore, their decision to attend higher education depends heavily on the affordability of the household.

The income level of parents also influences the decision to continue their studies at universities, because it directly or indirectly, determines the possibility of paying for tuition or other educational services. The results of the study show that the average income level of the respondents (father or mother) per month is 4.1 million Vietnamese Dong (VND) (equivalent to about USD 177).

**Table 3: Proportion of respondents - parents who decided to educate their sons and daughters in the university, depending on their income per month (in%)**

<i>Income Level (VND)</i>	<i>Share</i>	
	<i>Admission to the university</i>	<i>Non-admission to university</i>
Less than 1 ml.	4.1	16.7
More that 1.1 to 3 ml	18.6	83.3
More that 3.1 to 5 ml	29.0	0
More that 5.1 to 10 ml	31.1	0
More that 10 ml	17.2	0
Total	100	100

The research data (Table 3) suggests that the majority of students who choose to go to college have the following ratings of students from high-income families comprising 31.1 percent of respondents (these are with parents who earn 5.1 to 10 million VND, which is about USD 220 to 430), while the proportion of students who cannot afford to study at the university

falls on families with low incomes that comprise about 83.3 percent of the respondents (these are from parents who earn 1.1 to 3 million VND, which is about USD 47 to 130). Thus, there is a difference in deciding for children to study at the university between high-income and low-income families.

**Table 4: Structure of the tuition fee for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students per month**

<i>Payment</i>	<i>Share (%)</i>	<i>Average payout (ml. VND) per month</i>
Training	16.9	
Purchase of educational literature, clothes	6.6	
Additional courses	73.5	1.98
Parent fund	1.9	
Other	1.1	
Total	100	

The results of the study in Table 4 indicate that the average cost of a family of schoolchildren for preparatory courses is 1.98 million VND (which is about USD 85). At the same time, payment of additional training courses at the university is the largest part in the structure of the family budget (73.5%). Consequently, upon admission to the university, the ability to successfully pass exams, get high grades and excel in competitions obviously depend on the level of preparation of the applicant for entrance exams and the size of the competition for his chosen specialty. The level of training depends both on the quality of schooling and on the possibility of obtaining knowledge that complements the school curriculum. It should be noted that in Vietnam, additional classes in colleges and especially additional classes with a tutor, are considered as forms of additional courses more often than others.

Regression analysis of factors included education, living place, occupation, average monthly income and the level of costs for additional courses indicate Adjusted R Square = 0.533. This means that the regression model is consistent with the data sample set at 53.3 percent, that is, the independent variables explain the 53.3 percent change in the dependent variable of “monthly fee for additional courses”.

Moreover, ANOVA data shows that the independent variables statistically and significantly predict the dependent variable of “monthly fee for additional courses” (F = 16.055, Sig. = 0.000 <0.05). This proves, the regression model is consistent with the overall.

**Table 5: Regression model of the monthly tuition fee**

<i>Independent variables</i> n= 394	<i>Average cost of private tutoring monthly</i>	
	<i>Coef (B)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
Living place	-0.12	-0.20; -0.03
Average monthly income	0.14	0.08; 0.21
Occupation	-0.01	-0.04; 0.03
Education	0.07	0.02; 0.11

*p*<0.05

The results of the regression model study on the monthly cost of private tutoring for students of households from Table 5 prove that living location, average monthly income and education level of father or mother relate to the average monthly cost of tutoring of their childrens (*p*<0.05).

In particular, the living position has a negative impact on the cost of private tutoring of children, meaning that investing in private tutoring for children is not only for families living in urban areas but also for households in suburban and rural areas. On the other hand, the income level of the parent has a positive impact on the cost of extra tutoring of the children, as when the income level increases by 1 unit, the cost of tutoring increases by 0.14. The educational level of the parents also positively affects in comparison with the cost of tutoring, which means the education level of the parents increasing by one level leads to the cost of extra tutoring for children increasing by 0.07.

**DISCUSSION**

The study analysed the influence of socio-economic factors of the family on the decision to perusing higher education. Except for factors of personal competence, the financial capability becomes one of the major barriers to the decision to continue attending university.

The cost of education for children to increase their ability to study at the university in Da Nang city is quite high. The higher income of households who decides to send their children to university and vice versa. This proves that the difference in household income affects children's access to higher education. In the household expenditure structure, the tuition fee of private tutoring is the largest. The additional study contributes to strengthening knowledge and skills for students to achieve high scores in national examinations and admission to university. The location, the income level and the education level of the parents affect the cost of private tutoring for their children. The cost of private tutoring for children becomes a burden for families in rural areas. Therefore, the higher the socio-economic status of the family, the more opportunities there would be for admission to the university.

### CONCLUSION

Given the above study, the researchers can formulate the following conclusions about the economic barriers to the accessibility of higher education in Vietnam at the stage of entering a university. The economic status of the family is the main factor in the accessibility of higher education. The higher the level of family incomes, the less difficulties they have to overcome in the process of their sons and daughters' entry into university. In the structure of educational expenses the amount of payments for additional courses is related to the level of income of families, parental education and place of residence. In order to reduce the economic barriers, which affect the possibility of access to higher education in Vietnam, the following suggestions are made. The student loan system in Vietnam should be reviewed. It is necessary to increase the amount of lending and also to reduce the interest rate (currently this interest rate is 0.65% per month). The lending policy should change to embrace students from dysfunctional families who are in various schools and various levels of study because currently, loans are granted only to students from dysfunctional families who study at the university, college, and institutions of secondary vocational education.

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