

The impact of child labor on school enrollment rates and education quality in Northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam

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Abstract: Child labor and the sustainable development goals for human beings is an urgent topic, which remains a significant barrier to achieving equitable education in many developing regions, including Vietnam's Northern mountainous provinces. This study investigates the impact of child labor on two critical educational outcomes as school enrollment rate and education quality, using panel data from 25 provinces over the 2019–2024 period. Based on the Household Economics Model of Schooling and Child Labor by Basu & Van (1998), the research employs a quantitative approach based on secondary data and applies multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationships while controlling for key socio-economic variables such as poverty rate, ethnic minority population, and education budget expenditure. The results reveal that child labor has a negative and statistically significant impact on both school enrollment and education quality. In particular, provinces with higher rates of child labor tend to report lower school attendance and reduced rates of timely program completion. Among the control variables, poverty rate also demonstrates a significant negative effect, whereas education budget expenditure shows a positive correlation with educational outcomes. The effect of ethnic minority proportion does not show the statistical significance. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of the child labor–education nexus in marginalized contexts and offer practical implications for policymakers. Specifically, the study underscores the need for integrated strategies that reduce child labor, strengthen poverty alleviation efforts, and increase investment in education to ensure inclusive and quality education for all children, especially in disadvantaged regions.

Keywords: Child labor, education quality, human capital, school enrollment, sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the global pursuit of sustainable development, investing in human capital, especially through education, is regarded as one of the most effective strategies for breaking the cycle of poverty, fostering economic growth, and promoting social equity (World Bank, 2018). Education not only equips individuals with knowledge and skills but also empowers them

