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Email: tapchikhoahoc@hvu.edu.vn Website: www.hvu.edu.vn

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' INVESTMENTS AND ENGLISH TEST RESULTS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PHU THO PROVINCE

Bui Thi Hong Minh*, Nguyen Ngoc Quynh, Nguyen Thi To Loan

Hung Vuong University, Phu Tho, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Based on an overview of the English learning situation at primary schools in Phu Tho province both in rural and urban areas, the paper explores the relationship between parents' investments and English test results of primary students. Primary survey data from 52 households in urban and rural areas were applied using a convenient sampling method combined with qualitative methods to clarify research objectives. Nowadays, parents are showing their willingness to invest more time and money in their children to learn English in general, especially outside classes with foreign teachers. We found that there is a gap between the investment for learning English in rural and urban areas, therefore urban primary students seem to have better learning outcomes compared to primary students in rural areas. Regarding the findings, we propose a recommendation in terms of designing the guideline for parents (in terms of teaching methods and investment levels) to study English with their children at the primary level.

Keywords: *English test results, Learning English, parents' investment, primary students, Phu Tho province.*

1. Introduction

Vietnamese general education consists of three levels with 12 grades. English was introduced broadly in Vietnam after the Renovation (1986) and currently, it is characterized by the rapid growth and expansion within the country. It is the first foreign language to be taught in Vietnam. English has been considered as a passport to find a better job in the new market economy in Vietnam. Therefore, there are more and

more English teachers and students at any level. People believed that "Parents are showing a willingness to invest more time and money in their kids to learn English". But, is there still a big gap between the investment for learning English in rural and urban areas. This important question needs to be addressed in the context of Vietnam.

X.T. Wang (2016) provided a definition of parental investment. It is referred to as any expenditure (time, energy, resources, etc.) that

*Email: hongminhpt556@gmail.com

a parent incurs to benefit an offspring. Parental investment theories explore mechanisms underlying parent and their kids' relationships and investment. Lee (2009) found that countries with a higher level of English proficiency among the fraction of its population are likely to grow faster. His finding provides evidence of a positive correlation between initial English proficiency and economic growth only for the countries in Asia and Europe. Asian countries can be attributed to the heavy investment in the creation of human capital that fosters English-speaking culture and promotes a climate of the use of English. Wang *et al.* (2009) examined economic returns to proficiency in English in China and found a positive relationship. The economic returns to proficiency in English across age groups, coastal and inland provinces, the income distribution, levels of education and occupation.

Phu Tho province has 322 kindergartens, 318 preschools, 295 primary schools, 249 junior high schools, 44 high schools in 2018. There were 135,105 primary school students, 82,526 junior high school students, and 37,981 high school students (Phu Tho Statistics Yearbook, 2018). The province is gradually equipping students with the knowledge, necessary competencies, and standard of foreign languages for them to confidently become global citizens. The percentage of primary students studying English in schools is over 90%. In the coming years, teaching English requires adequate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for students, focusing on developing two listening and speaking skills right from

primary school. From our own in-deep survey, we observed that there is a difference between rural and urban primary school students in terms of teaching methods: Grammar-based teaching is mainly applied in rural areas and drama-based methodology started expanding in schools in urban areas.

In fact, there are many difficulties and challenges for studying English at the primary schools: The lack of staff (primary school teachers); not every English teacher meets the B₂ level standards required by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET); lack of the textbook (the textbooks that focus on pictures, listening and speaking); the difficulty of the remote schools (these schools do not have the support facilities as required for the lessons); most schools do not have their own English classrooms. Only a few English Centers are equipped with facilities such as interactive boards, projectors, screens, etc as required by the curriculum, and for teaching some classes.

This paper examines the English language situation at the primary school level in Vietnam from an investment perspective. The paper aims to: Provide an overview of teaching English in Vietnam and at the primary level; to find out the relationship between the parents' investment and English test results of primary school students in Phu Tho province; to find the solutions that will make teaching English at a primary level more efficient. It also discusses language policy for foreign language teaching in Vietnam, providing a picture of the role

of English in foreign language education. It analyses parents' investment (in terms of time and money), teaching results, and teaching conditions. It critically discusses the future of teaching English in primary schools in Vietnam.

As far as we know, there is no study to examine the relationship between the parents' investment and English test results at primary students in the Vietnamese context.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection

Primary survey data from 52 households in urban and rural areas in Phu Tho province were applied using a convenient sampling method combined with qualitative methods to clarify research objectives. The content of the questionnaire focuses on the household demographics (sex, age, income per month, region distribution, parents' occupation), parents' background and English activities of primary students, English result tests, parents' investment in terms of time, money, equipment, etc. The time to distribute the survey was June 2019 (via email), after the author collected 52 questionnaires (reaching 35% of total sent questionnaires). Due to the limitation of the observation, we employed an in-depth interview method with some English teachers and parents to clarify the relationship of investment and English results tests of primary students at schools in order to clarify our main objectives.

The collected data is classified, synthesized, cleaned and entered into Excel software to calculate necessary indicators and draw illustrative charts.

2.2. Comparison study method

The study uses descriptive statistics and comparative analysis to see the fluctuations of analytical criteria. Analysis and evaluation: Using data tables, forms in the research to process, analyze and evaluate the data collected, using the comparative method to see the difference of demographic indicators, parents' investment (time, money, equipment) and primary students both in a rural and urban school in Phu Tho province. We applied the comparison study to find out the difference in English activities between primary students in rural and urban areas.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Parents' information

Within the total sample, over 80% of interviewed parents (43 out of 52) are female. Approximately 70% of the respondents (38) under forty, over 80% have a monthly income below 15 million VND per month. The respondents living in urban areas account for three-quarters of the total sample. Regarding occupation, 36,54% of parents are government officials, nearly 33% are farmers, 21,15% are wage laborers and others. Thus, we can see very clear diversity in our sample, all of the respondents having kids studying at the primary schools (See Table 1).

TABLE 1: Respondent characteristics

Ord	Respondents (Parents)	Number	Percent-age
1	By sex	52	100,00
	Male	9	17,31
	Female	43	82,69
2	By age	52	100,00
	Under 30	2	3,85
	From 30-40	36	69,23
	From 40-50	12	23,08
	Above 50	2	3,85
3	By income per month	52	100,00
	Under 10 million VND	28	53,85

	From 10-15 million VND	15	28,85
	From 15-20 million VND	7	13,46
	Above 20 million VND	2	3,85
4	By region	52	100,00
	Rural	13	25,00
	Urban	39	75,00
5	By occupation	52	100,00
	Government official	19	36,54
	Farmer	17	32,69
	Wage laborer	11	21,15
	Others	2	3,85

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

Respondents were asked to rate the English language ability of each on 5-point Likert scales (1- Don't know; 2- Very poor; 3- Normal; 4: Good; 5: Very good). Descriptive results revealed that 90% of respondents identified themselves as a poor and normal level (e.g, mean of 2.5 for listening, 2.3 for speaking, 2.9 for reading and 3.2 for writing). These results support the fact that English learners in Vietnam mainly focus on grammar (see Chart 1).

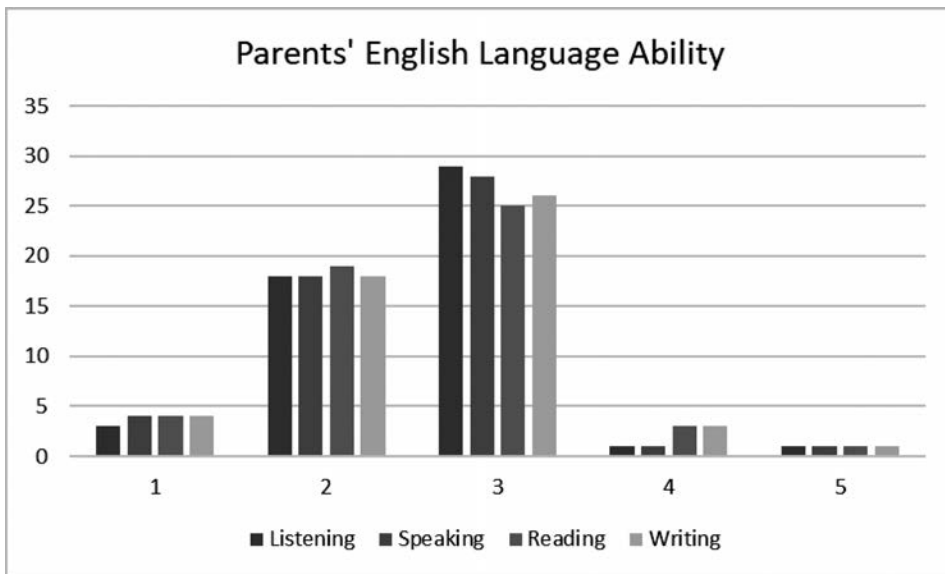


Chart 1: Parents' English Language Ability

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

With regard to the English certificate parents acquired, there is 65.4% having at least one certificate (see Chart 2). Due to the fact that being students at (high school, college and university level), they had to pass English tests before graduating. In some cases, they needed English certificates for/ to apply for Jobs at foreign companies or government establishments. However, 34,6% of parents do not have any certificate, leading to the assumption that they have never learned English before or never sat for any tests.

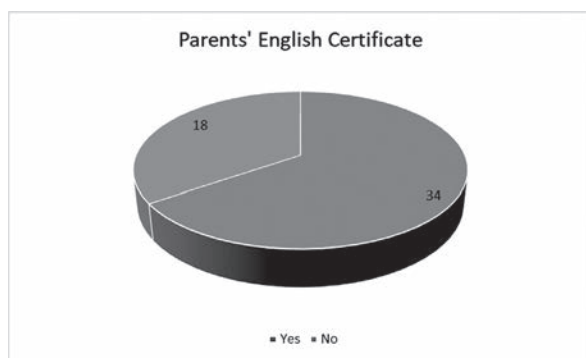


Chart 2: Parents having English certificate

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

3.2. Primary students' English learning activities

Table 2 presents the surveyed results of English learning activities by region (rural and urban areas). It can be seen that the learning activities mainly focus on participating in extra English class (tutoring), using software or online courses, and practical learning process outside of class time. There are differences in the nature of English activities between students living in rural and urban areas. In our sample, approximately 95% of students living in cities and towns have

an extra class (out of the formal program), meanwhile, this activity in rural areas is nearly 70%. Primary students in urban areas have more English classes per week, and they have better access to the online course and software (that are also rather costly). However, there is no difference between primary students living in both regions in terms of participating in any practical experience in the English learning process (approximately 30%).

From the finding, we can see that besides the formal education system, participating in English activities outside of school in Vietnam, as also in Phu Tho province has been getting much attention. The number of English centers, English tutors in this province has also been increasing rapidly. For instance, there are some language centers of universities, private enterprises, and a number of foreign and joint venture language centers. This informal education sector provides various English courses at different levels to meet the high demand of the learners as well as their parents. Rich families tend to invest more in learning English with foreign teachers compared to poor families. In addition, the local government has implemented several programs to support English teachers improving their teaching capacity and motivating students through joining English contests (e.g. IOE - Internet Olympiads of English, Olympic). Thanks to these efforts, English in Phu Tho province has been developing faster and the quality of English teaching and learning at primary schools drastically improved.

TABLE 2: Primary students’ English learning activities

Ord	Learning activities	Total		Rural		Urban	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	Students who participate in extra English classes outside of class time (instruction, tutoring)	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	46	88,46	9	69,23	37	94,87
	No	6	11,54	4	30,77	2	5,13
2	Time for students to learn English (classes / week)	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	One	6	11,54	4	30,77	2	5,13
	Twice	31	59,62	9	69,23	22	56,41
	Three	11	21,15	0	0,00	11	28,21
	Four	4	7,69	0	0,00	4	10,26
2	Students use software, online courses on the Internet	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	23	44,23	2	15,38	21	53,85
	No	29	55,77	11	84,62	18	46,15
3	Students have participated in any practical experience in the English learning process	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	15	28,85	4	30,77	11	28,21
	No	37	71,15	9	69,23	28	71,79

Source: Authors’ survey, June 2019

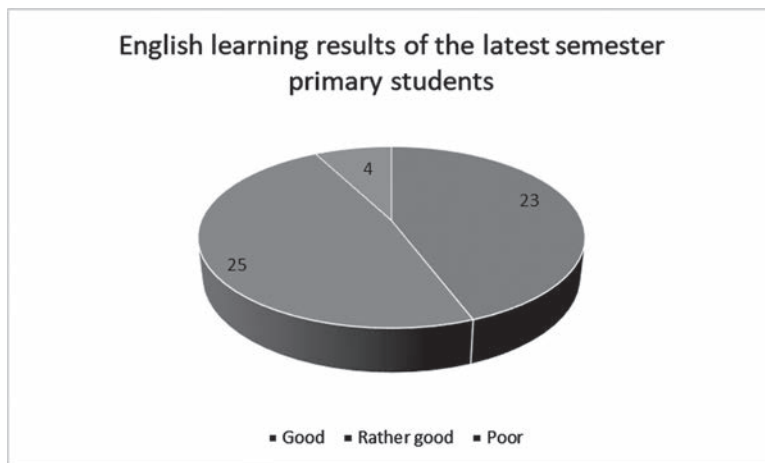


Chart 3: English learning results of the latest semester students

Source: Authors’ survey, June 2019

In our random sample, over 44% (23 out of 52) primary students having a good English result in the latest semester, nearly 50% (25 out of 52) students getting a fair result. The percentage of students having a poor result is only 5%. We observed that the primary students living in urban areas having better results compared to other students studying in rural areas (e.g, good result 53,85% compared to 15,38%; and poor result 5,13% compared to 15,38%). Moreover, primary students living in urban areas are likely to participate in English contests and receive awards in comparison with the students living in rural areas (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: English learning results and contests of the latest semester students

Ord	Learning results	Total		Rural		Urban	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	English result tests	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Good	23	44,23	2	15,38	21	53,85
	Rather good	25	48,08	9	69,23	16	41,03
	Poor	4	7,69	2	15,38	2	5,13
2	Has the student participated in any English contests?	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	22	42,31	2	15,38	20	51,28
	No	30	57,69	11	84,62	19	48,72
3	Has the student won any awards from English contests	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	15	28,85	1	7,69	14	35,90
	No	37	71,15	12	92,31	25	64,10

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

3.3. Parents' investment in learning English

* In term of expenditure on English

Primary students still learn English according to the primary school curriculum, but parents are not assured, they decided to let their children learn more at the English centers and tutoring outside because "good at foreign languages for better learning and employment opportunities". Because the children are young, families do not put more pressure on them, mainly to facilitate their contact with native speakers and the English speaking environment so that they do not "fear" the language.

TABLE 4: Parents' investment in English learning (economic perspective)

Ord	Learning results	Total		Rural		Urban	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	Average amount of English learning per month of the student	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Below 300 thousand VND	14	26,92	10	76,92	4	10,26
	From 300 - 500 thousand VND	29	55,77	3	23,08	26	66,67
	From 500 - 1.000 thousand VND	7	13,46	0	0,00	7	17,95
	Above 1.000 thousand VND	2	3,85	0	0,00	2	5,13
2	The cost of purchasing documents, English textbooks, average monthly learning materials of students	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Below 50 thousand VND	21	40,38	6	46,15	15	38,46
	From 50-100 thousand VND	25	48,08	6	46,15	19	48,72
	Above 100 thousand VND	6	11,54	1	7,69	5	12,82
3	You have an internet connection for your child to learn English	52	100,00	13	100,00	39	100,00
	Yes	46	88,46	10	76,92	36	92,31
	No	6	11,54	3	23,08	3	7,69

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

Within the sample, most of the respondents invested in English learning for their kids in terms of money and equipment (e.g. internet connection, computer,...). Urban families are to pay more money for their kids learning English than rural ones. On average, the payment for learning English monthly per family is less than 500 thousand VND. The cost of purchasing documents, English textbooks, average monthly learning materials of students is not really different between the two groups, it ranges from 50-100 thousand VND per month. Most of the

urban families have an internet connection (over 90%) and 75% of rural family has (see Table 4). The internet is a means of E-learning education. Primary students can learn a foreign language, look up information. They also can take online courses. The internet is almost an unlimited source of English materials for the kid to get in case of their parents having no ideas about English or their English level very low.

Table 5 presents the willingness to invest in English courses by the parents for their

kids. Most of them are very likely to invest more in English courses, especially English language courses with foreigners (over 70%) and signing up for English experience programs for their children (approximately 80%). These findings show an increasing trend for investment in learning English at primary schools.

People said that learning English has been a common trend that parents deserve to help

their children develop listening, speaking, reading, writing skills and accumulating rich vocabulary, and grammar in English. Primary students are exposed to English from the beginning, especially learning English with foreigners, which will help them develop their language skills naturally. Besides, according to many experts, children will develop intelligence, enhance thinking ability when they are acquainted with a language other than the smallest English.

TABLE 5: Willingness to invest for English course

Ord	Content	Number	%
1	Are you willing to enroll your children in English language courses with foreigners?	52	100,00
	Totally disagree	6	11,54
	Dis agree	0	0,00
	Normal	8	15,38
	Agree	23	44,23
	Totally agree	15	28,85
2	Are you willing to sign up for English experience programs for your children?	52	100,00
	Totally disagree	2	3,85
	Dis agree	0	0,00
	Normal	9	17,31
	Agree	27	51,92
	Totally agree	14	26,92

Source: Authors' survey, June 2019

* In term of time and social interaction

Besides of investment in learning English in terms of money and equipment, parents also show their love and support in terms of taking their kids to schools or English centers (over 80% of parents usually taking kids to go to study English). In addition, they are also involved in

studying English with their kids (50% of parents sometimes and usually studying English with, only 20% never study with them). In addition, nearly 70% of parents have close contact with English teachers as well as primary teaching to keep up to date English learning process of primary students (see Table 6).

TABLE 6: Parents’ investment in English learning (social aspect)

Ord	Content	Number	%
1	Do you take your child to and from school to learn English	52	100,00
	Never	2	3,85
	Rarely	1	1,92
	Sometime	7	13,46
	Usually	42	80,77
2	You are involved in studying English with your children	52	100,00
	Never	10	19,23
	Rarely	16	30,77
	Sometime	18	34,62
	Usually	8	15,38
3	Do you often talk to your English teacher	52	100,00
	Never	1	1,92
	Rarely	15	28,85
	Sometime	25	48,08
	Usually	11	21,15

Source: Authors’ survey, June 2019

* Parents’ difficulties in the process of guiding and learning English with their children

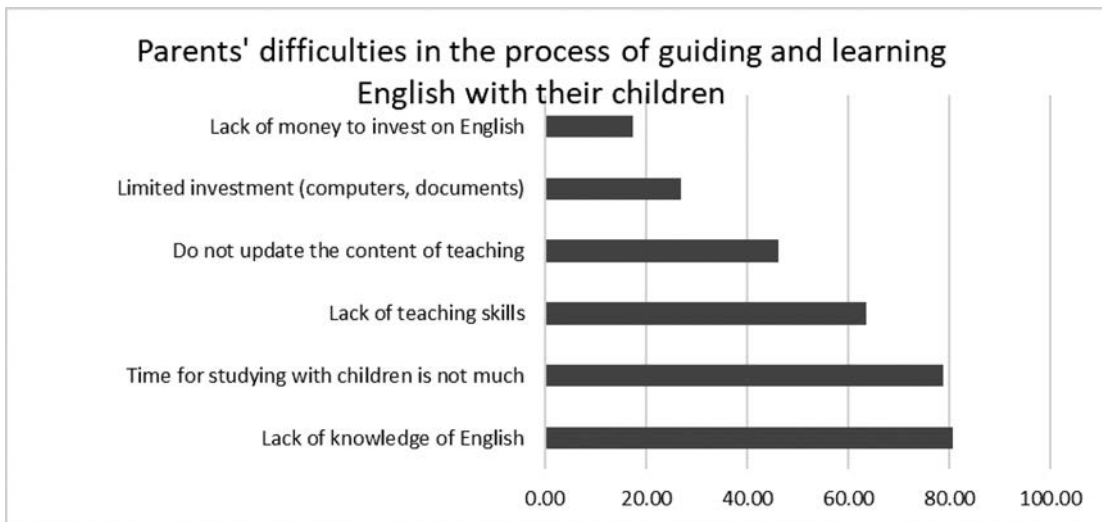


Chart 4: Parents’ difficulties in the process of guiding and learning English

Source: Authors’ survey, June 2019

During the survey, we observed some difficulties when parents help their children learning English. Actually, money is not a major problem but a lack of knowledge and time constraints are the main difficulties. The main reason leading to difficulties in English communication by parents is the traditional teaching and learning method with the wrong approach compared to new methods (e.g., E-learning, drama-based). During the last 10 years, the learners (parents) only focused on learning vocabulary, structure and grammar principles but not on listening and speaking skills. This method of study is only suitable for the purpose of passing final exams, transferring or graduating exams in school, but will not help them to communicate in real-life English as well as support their kids during the studying process.

3.3. Discussion

Learning outcomes of primary students, in general, depend on many factors such as parents' interest, parents' investment in their children's learning. Research on the relationship between the amount of money and time parents spending with their children's English learning results plays a crucial role in the learning process. Due to the fact that nearly 35% of respondents having no English certificate and many of them do not have enough time could lead to the difficulty in supporting their children studying English effectively. In addition, finding the relationship between the parents' investment and the English test results that still have some concerns since the test results sometimes do not represent English performance and proficiency. Therefore,

it is necessary to assess students' English proficiency, not the grading scores at the primary level.

Using the surveyed data and qualitative methods, we found the difference in the parents' investment in learning English for their kids by region. Primary students in urban areas seem to attend more in informal classes, using more English software and online courses to support the formal education system. These facts were supported by an in-depth interview. However, it might not clear whether parents invest a lot of money or time, their children's English learning proficiency and performance are better? What parents should do in supporting their kids learning English? These opened questions will be paid more attention from wide researchers and policy-makers.

4. Conclusion

In this study, we analyzed the data among parents' background and their investment in learning English for primary students in rural and urban areas, as a case study of Phu Tho province. The results reveal that parents are increasingly investing more in learning English for their children outside of class and formal English programs. We found that there are some differences between the investment of families living in rural and urban areas, especially in terms of money and English programs with foreigners. There is a slight difference between rural and urban primary students in terms of teaching methods (grammar-based mainly applied in rural areas and drama-based learning started expanding in schools in urban areas) that

could explain their English test performance. In addition, we found that most parents are willing to support their children studying English by giving them money to go to the English center and spending time to study with them. However, in this process, they face some challenges because of the low English levels. Based on the findings, we suggest that the guideline for parents to study English with their children at the primary level should be designed.

Due to time constraints, the article still has some limitations, especially the numbers of observations that are rather small and may not really representative of the whole sample. We acknowledge these issues and will address in a further study using a larger observation and apply quantitative methods.

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MỐI QUAN HỆ GIỮA MỨC ĐẦU TƯ CỦA PHỤ HUYNH VÀ KẾT QUẢ HỌC TẬP TIẾNG ANH CỦA HỌC SINH TIỂU HỌC TẠI PHÚ THỌ

Bùi Thị Hồng Minh, Nguyễn Ngọc Quỳnh, Nguyễn Thị Tố Loan
Hung Vuong University, Phu Tho, Vietnam

TÓM TẮT

Trên cơ sở đánh giá khái quát về thực trạng dạy và học tiếng Anh của học sinh bậc tiểu học ở khu vực nông thôn và thành thị ở tỉnh Phú Thọ, bài viết bước đầu phân tích mối quan hệ giữa mức độ đầu tư của phụ huynh và kết quả học tập tiếng Anh. Sử dụng số liệu điều tra sơ cấp từ 52 hộ gia đình ở khu vực thành thị và nông thôn theo phương pháp chọn mẫu thuận tiện kết hợp với phương pháp phân tích định tính để làm rõ mục tiêu nghiên cứu. Thực tế cho thấy, các bậc phụ huynh trên địa bàn tỉnh sẵn sàng đầu tư nhiều hơn thời gian, công sức và tài chính cho việc học tiếng Anh của học sinh tiểu học, đặc biệt là học tiếng Anh với người nước ngoài, sử dụng các phần mềm và chương trình giảng dạy tiếng Anh online. Từ kết quả khảo sát thực tế và nghiên cứu sâu, có một khoảng cách chênh lệch về mức độ đầu tư cho việc học tiếng Anh giữa các hộ gia đình ở khu vực thành thị và khu vực nông thôn, điều này dẫn tới kết quả học tiếng Anh của học sinh ở khu vực thành thị kết quả cao hơn so với khu vực nông thôn (dựa trên đánh giá điểm số). Từ những kết quả nghiên cứu bước đầu, nhóm tác giả đề xuất cần thiết kể một cẩm nang hướng dẫn các bậc cha mẹ trong quá trình lựa chọn phương pháp hỗ trợ học tập và mức đầu tư học tiếng Anh ở bậc tiểu học một cách phù hợp và hiệu quả.

Từ khóa: *Học tiếng Anh, học sinh tiểu học, kết quả học, mức độ đầu tư, tỉnh Phú Thọ.*