

Chapter I

Introduction

Background and Significance

Lao People Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is situated in Southeast Asia and bordered with China to the North, Vietnam to the East, Myanmar and Thailand to the West, and Cambodia to the South. Though Lao PDR is a landlocked country that is not bordering with any sea coastal areas, the Government of Lao PDR uses the term 'land-linked'. As the Southeast Asian region develops, the country is becoming a significant gateway to Southeast Asia from China, transit route between Vietnam and Thailand, with the main waterway, the Mekong River – which is sharing a long border with Thailand – and linked by an increasing number of bridges, opening up trade routes, boosting the economy and bringing ever-increasing exposure to the outside world.

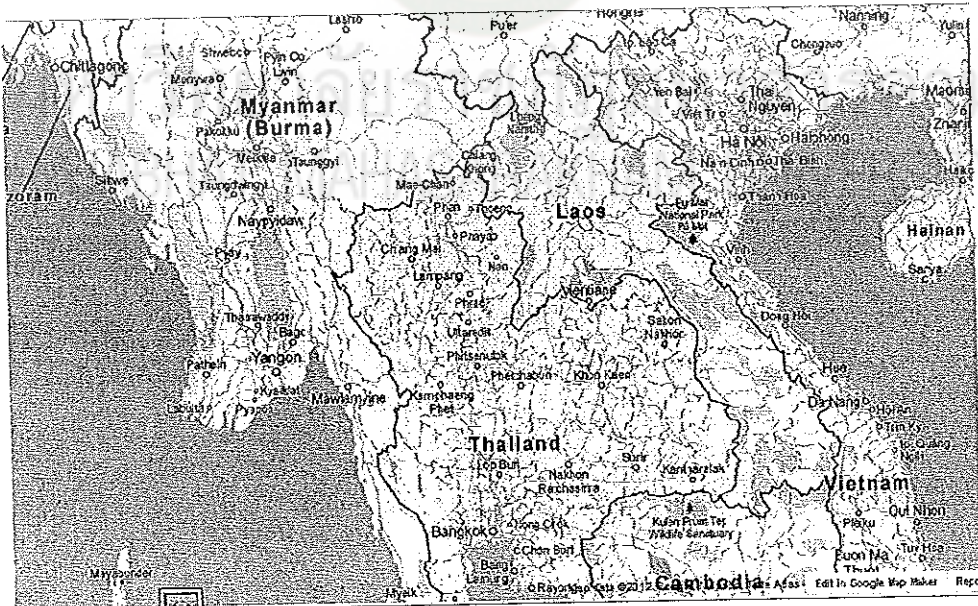


Figure 1: Map of Lao PDR

According to a Human Development Index Report (UNDP, Human Development Report. 2009), Lao PDR is still one of the poorest countries in the world; with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.619, it is ranked number 133 out of the 182 countries listed. Major causes of poverty include inadequate delivery of public services, particularly education and health; the lack of ownership of land and livestock; limited access to credit; and poor infrastructure. With population of 5.6 million in the Lao PDR, it represents a rich and mixture of ethnic groups creating a significant advantage in the country's human resource base and the country has a unique education system: five years of primary and four years of lower secondary education and three years of upper secondary education. One of the key priorities of the Government of Lao PDR is improvement of the quality and access to basic education.

After liberation and establishment as the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, the government of Lao PDR prioritized a restructure of the education system inherited from the Royal Lao Government and integrates it into the new national system. From 1983 to 1984, the government of Lao PDR launched an adult literacy campaign mobilizing literate people across the country to teach reading and writing skills. It had been estimated that 92% of men and 76% of women aged 15-45 learned basic literacy skills. However, because of the lack of reading materials, particularly in remote and rural areas, many adults lost their new skills after only a few years. Following the economic liberalization with the New Economic Mechanism in 1986, the government launched a series of education system reforms aimed at: (a) making education more relevant to the socio-economic context at the local level; (b) improving and expanding training in the sciences; (c) extending education to remote and mountainous regions; (d) recruiting minority teachers; and (e) developing cooperation among the various ministries, mass organizations, and communities in development of the education system.

In 1990, Lao PDR became a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration of Education for All (EFA) and in 1991, established the National Committee for EFA headed by the Vice-Minister of Education and comprising members from various ministries and departments. Since then, the government has put in place a number of laws, conventions, and policies to facilitate implementation of EFA. The Compulsory Education Decree of 1996 stipulates that

free primary education must be provided to all Lao citizens regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, and social or economic status. It explicitly recognizes the need to expand education in ethnic group areas, where enrolment and literacy rates are low in comparison to other parts of the country and the need to improve the quality of education through the training of teachers. As a result in many parts of the country classes are held infrequently, sometimes for only a few hours a day. Dropout rates are high and primary completion rates are low because many of the primary schools are "incomplete. Low enrolment rates in primary education can be attributed to a number of interrelated "supply" and "demand" factors. On the "demand" side, in the poorer and more remote communities, poverty is a major determining factor, as families cannot afford the hidden costs of schooling, such as pens, notebooks and clothing, nor can they afford the loss of children's labor. Another factor is the perceived lack of usefulness and relevance of the education curriculum in remote regions. Livelihoods are also an important factor, as agricultural cycles require intensive periods of labor and/or migration that conflict with the school calendar. Finally, girls in many ethnic communities are expected to get married and/or contribute to the household economy. On the "supply" side, enrolment rates are affected by factors such as quality, language of instruction, and curriculum content. In remote, rural areas, teachers are more likely to be unqualified, and many teachers recruited from urban areas to work in remote and rural areas tend to be isolated from the community. This isolation is exacerbated in ethnic group villages where the population does not speak Lao and there is no tradition of literacy. Due to these combined factors, enrolment rates for some ethnic groups have been significantly lower than that of the culturally and linguistically dominant lowland Lao. There continues to be significant disparities in educational achievement linked to ethnicity, gender, and rural-urban location. Because poverty and gender differences tend to be greater among disadvantaged ethnic population, educational achievement is lowest among these groups. People with disabilities are another vulnerable group in Lao PDR. Orphans are yet another historically disadvantaged population. While orphans are known to be living in orphanages operated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, there is little information about their numbers or their educational opportunities.

For over the last three decades, Lao PDR has continuously made extensive progress in education system development, but it is still among the lowest in Southeast Asia and has not evenly been developed across the demographic and geographic areas. On primary education development, Lao PDR ranks 80 of 148 countries on the global competitiveness index 2013-2014 (World Economic Forum Report, 2013). For secondary education gross enrollment rate (45.8%) ranks 122 of 148 countries (World Economic Forum Report, 2013). Though, the improvements have been better at higher levels of education as the survival rates for girls went up faster than for boys. Significant disparities persist between urban and rural areas, and between road accessible and non-accessible rural areas. The latter are home to a large number of poor ethnic minorities, and are the most disadvantaged and the most cut off from access to schools and educational services. A significant proportion of children - especially girls and ethnic groups in remote areas - are out of school. Indeed late school entry is common: some 60 per cent of six-year old in the 56 educationally disadvantaged districts are not enrolled. A gender gap exists from early on, with the ratio of girls to boys widening in favor of boys in secondary and tertiary education. Limiting access to quality secondary and tertiary education is a significant factor for ethnic and remote girls and boys. About 70 per cent of pupils who start grade 1 reach grade 5. About 45 per cent of students enroll in secondary education but only about 75 per cent complete the full secondary schools. Many poor families do not see the relevance of formal education for improving their livelihoods, and the lack of interest by parents discourages children from attending school. Linguistic barriers and cultural attitudes towards education also perpetuate low human development and the vicious cycle of poverty that many ethnic minority groups find themselves in. (MOE, EMIS Report, 2011-2012)

Moreover, the negative impact of poverty on dropout rates and transition rates from school is significant at all levels of general education. Even at the primary school level, the completion rate stands at 63% making progress towards universal primary school completion by 2015 very challenging. Transition rates from lower secondary school to upper secondary school are low in rural areas. Studies frequently note that girls from ethnic populations are the most disadvantaged in terms of student retention rates. Educational quality as measured by

examination results is significantly lower in rural areas. Poorer settlements in rural areas perform worse than the poor in urban areas.

It is important to note that a problem of education in Lao PDR is that the quality of teaching influences parental decisions whether to keep their children in school or not. Teachers' attitude is increasingly recognized as a major influence on school dropout patterns. (MOE, EMIS Report, 2011-2012)

The Education Law of 2007 reinforces the key strategic directions of the National Education Sector Reform Strategy and affirms the regulatory environment in support of the on-going development of the education system. Strengthening the national education system through the education reform process is now the Government's flagship program for national economic development. Formal schooling and national education system management are increasingly a focus of public investments in the sector. With the Education Law a new structure of school education will be introduced. General education follows a formula for five years of primary education, four years of lower secondary education and three years of upper secondary education. This reinforces a key Education for All principle of nine-year of high-quality basic education. The new school organizational structure will be strengthened through the introduction and on-going development of new curricula within a new curriculum framework approximating from Kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12 mode). In order to meet international norms and standards in education, the Government of Lao PDR introduces the new schooling organizational structure. The introduction of the new structure involves significant and challenging changes in implementation of an expanded and competency-based school curriculum.

In Lao PDR, the formal education system consists of general education, vocational and technical education, and higher education. General education comprises pre-school (childcare for children up to two years of age, and kindergarten for children ages three to five), primary education (five years of schooling for children aged six to ten), lower secondary (four years of schooling for children aged 11 through 14); and upper secondary (three years of schooling for children aged 15 through 17). Primary education is compulsory and free by statute. Basic education is defined as primary and lower secondary school which

comprises of nine years of education. Due to the lack of infrastructure and teacher supply for pre-school education, many primary schools include a pre-primary, or preparatory class to prepare young entrants for grade one.

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Vocational education programs are available for students completing grade nine or twelve and normally consists of up to three years of study. This includes teacher training for pre-school through lower secondary school teachers, for which there are several paths. To become a pre-school teacher, completion of upper secondary school plus one year of pedagogical training is required. Only one teacher training institution, located in the capital, provides this training. To become a primary school teacher, there are two main options: a three-year training program upon completion of lower secondary school, or a one year teacher training program upon completion of upper secondary school. Training is available at seven teachers' training institutes that are located across the country. Private education is taking an increasingly important role in the education system, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels and in urban areas. There is as yet no private teacher training degree program available.

Higher education is available for students completing upper secondary school; courses of study range from four to seven years depending on the subject area. For upper secondary teachers, the course of study is four years. All teacher training institutes are under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Sports. A non-formal education system exists to provide literacy and continuing education for out-of-school children and adults as well as vocational training for adolescents and adults. In Figure 2 below is the illustration of the education system in Lao PDR.

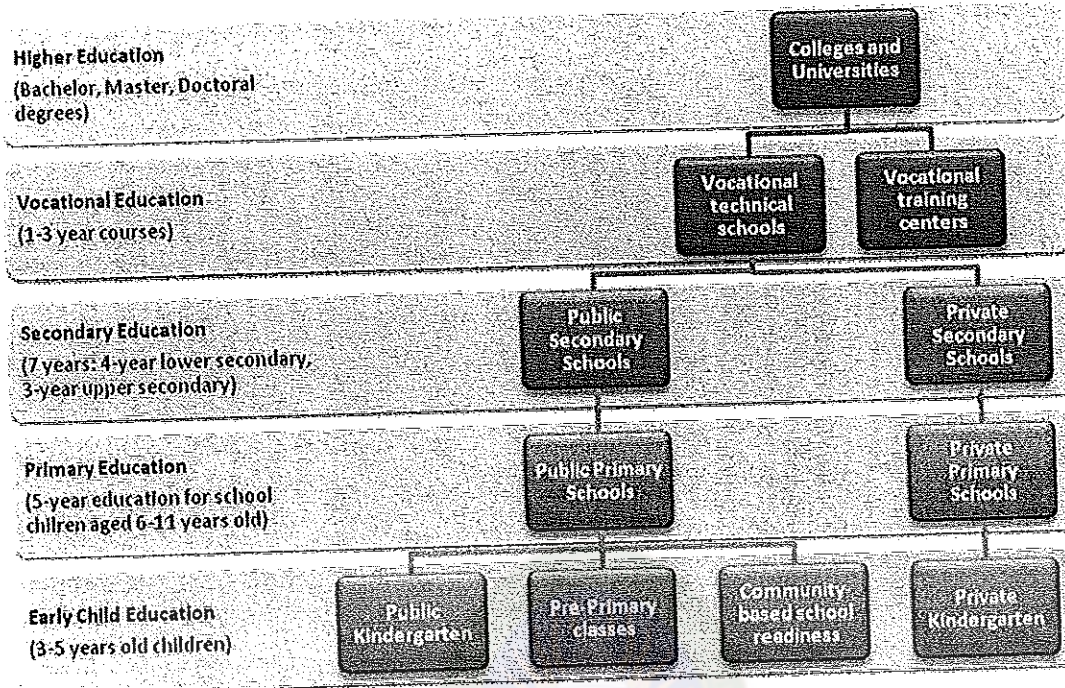


Figure 2: Education System in Lao PDR (Education, Ministry Education Law, 2007)

secondary schools in Lao PDR are under direct supervision of District Education and Sports Bureau. At the school level, the school director is a key person in leading, directing and managing school activities together with school management team, teachers and pupil parent association. District Education and Sports Bureau provides technical and financial support to secondary schools within their district.

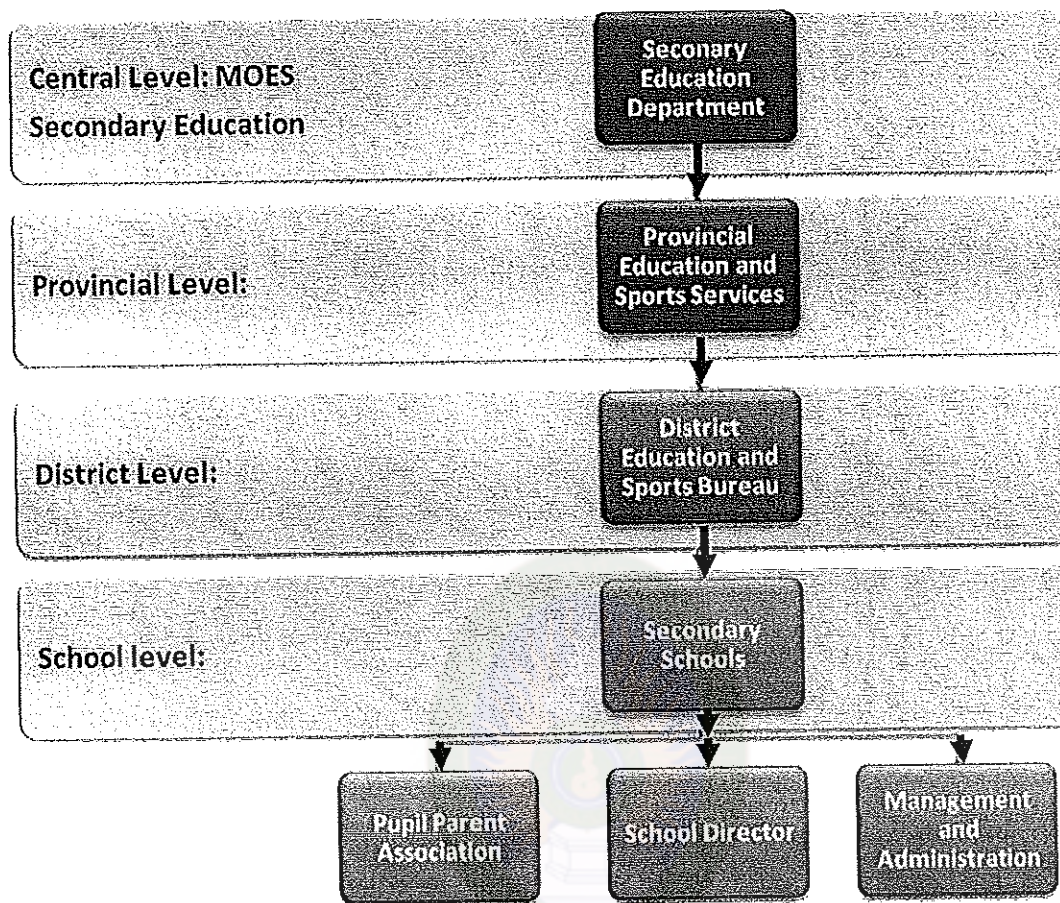


Figure 3: Secondary Education System in Lao PDR (Education, Ministry General

Education Management System, 1997)

In the Lao PDR, an academic year starts from the beginning of September and finishes by the end of June. The academic year is divided into two semesters. The first semester begins on the first week of September and finishes at the end of the 3rd week of January. The first semester breaks is the 4th week of January. Then, the 2nd semester begins on the 1st week of February and finishes by the end of June. School summer holiday starts from the 1st week of July till the end of August.

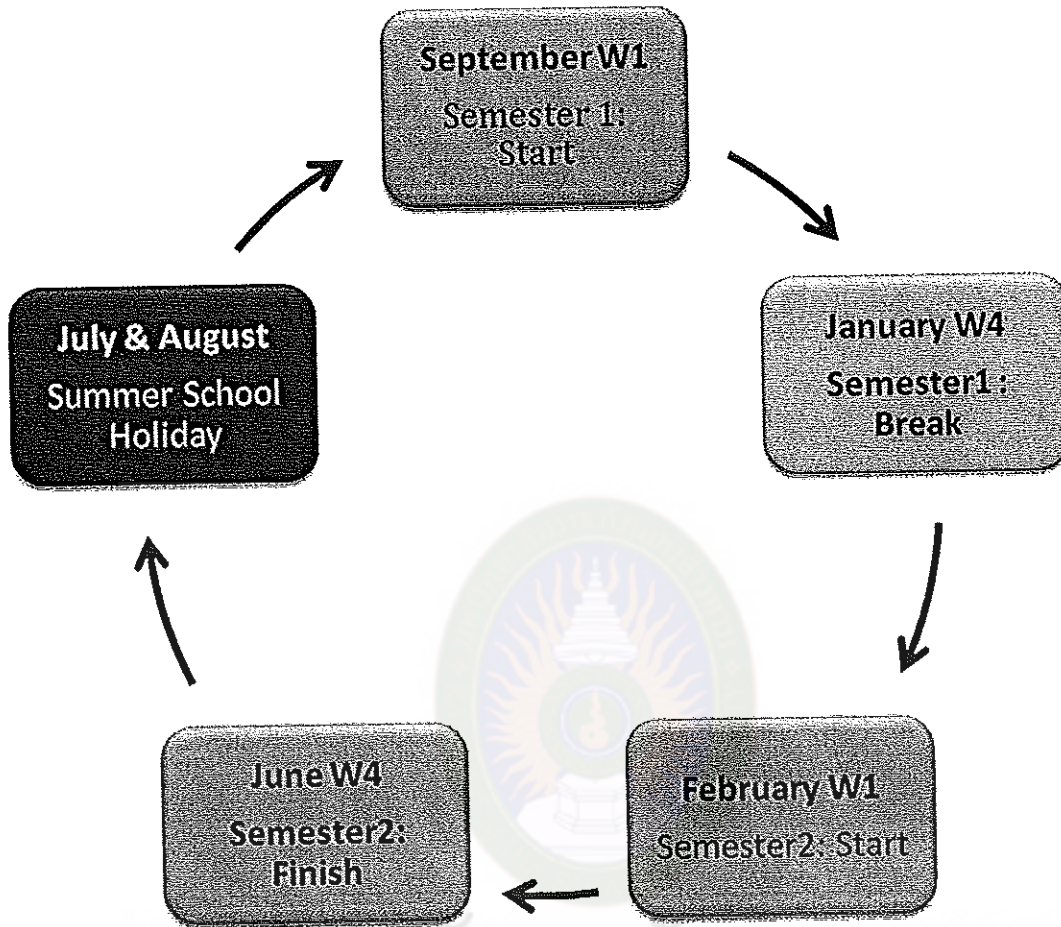


Figure 4: School Academic Year in Lao PDR (Education, Ministry Education Law, 2007)

The education management administrative structure consists of three levels: the central Ministry of Education and Sports, Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS) for each of the 17 provinces, and a District Education and Sports Bureau (DEB) for each of the 144 districts. District Education and Sports Bureaus have direct responsibility for primary schools, whereas Provincial Education and Sports Services are responsible for secondary schools. Pedagogical Advisors based in the DESB and PESS hold primary responsibility for technical support and supervision of teachers at primary and secondary schools, respectively.

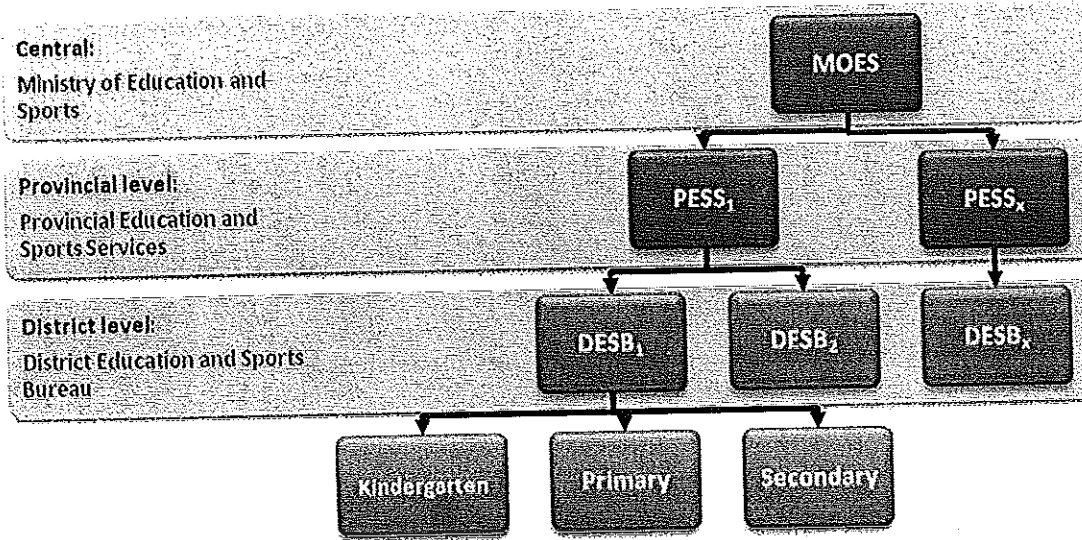


Figure 5: Educational Management Administrative Structure in Lao PDR

The Government considers Education as the central factor of the human resources development and pays particular attention to developing individuals to perform good behaviors, be foreseeable and scientific prospective. This means to develop human resource to acquire knowledge, skills, creativity and profession to develop a knowledge-based society, and to gradually develop local competence-based economy. The Government pays particular attention to the early childhood education and makes active efforts to achieve the goals on the compulsory of primary education. The Government increases the investment in education and considers as the first priority in the national financial policy. The Government and the society together develop actively the national education to improve its quality; increase opportunities to access of all people to education, especially to people in the remote areas, to women, to girls and to disadvantaged people. Besides, the Government provides to Lao people the opportunity to have more access to vocational education. The Government promotes and encourages individuals, internal and external institutions/agencies including private sector, to invest in the development of the national education through diverse policies such as policy on bank credit, on free of taxes and duty in accordance with regulations and laws

The Government of Lao PDR's policy and strategy documents acknowledge that underpinning economic development is a requirement for substantial reform to the national education system. In implementing social and education sector activities, the Government has ensured that poor and vulnerable groups and ethnic populations have equal access to basic social services, thus supporting opportunities for employment and participation in economic activities. This means the provision of satisfactory levels of education; food availability and health are recognized as the fundamentals for moving out of poverty and vulnerability, especially from the cycle of inter-generational poverty. As in both the 6th and 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 focus on improvement of the education of the whole population to concentrate on equitable access, quality, relevance and management of education. Increasing primary school attendance and literacy rates particularly for people in under-served areas, such as ethnic peoples, children with special needs and girls, is an important foundation step. Accessibility to quality secondary education has to be improved to raise the number of students entering and completing secondary education and hence going on to a third level education.

From Ministry of Education and Sports statistical report in school year 2011-2012 (MOE, EMIS Report, 2011-2012), there are 1,329 secondary schools nationwide with 488,143 school children attending. In secondary schools, the low enrolment rate (45.7%) and high drop-out rate 10%) indicate that only half of primary school children who completed schools continue their study in secondary school and many of them drop out before completing secondary education level. Also, the transition rates from lower secondary school to upper secondary school are low in rural areas and studies frequently note that girls from ethnic populations are the most disadvantaged in terms of student retention rates. With these indications, the major challenge is how Ministry of Education will be able to provide equitable access, relevance to student needs and context, quality education for the vulnerable and disadvantaged children in rural remote areas. Many schools, particularly those in remote areas and ethnic communities, have an insufficient number of teachers, especially female teachers. Systemic barriers prevent young people in these areas from reaching the educational threshold to enroll in teacher training colleges. The recent addition of an extra year at lower

secondary level, plus a new policy to be introduced that will set upper secondary qualification as the minimum entry requirement for trainee teachers, will most likely to compound the problem.

In order to improve education quality of basic education, Ministry of Education and Sports in collaboration with UNICEF Laos, has implemented the Child Friendly School or Schools of Quality in primary school level by piloting in three primary schools in 2007 and since then having expanded to 1,891 primary schools in the 11 target provinces. Through the Schools of Quality, Ministry of Education and UNICEF strive to achieve nationally and internationally set goals, in line with the United Nations Development Framework to support the achievement of increased and equitable access and to a quality basic education for Lao PDR by the year 2015. UNICEF has developed a framework for rights-based, child-friendly educational systems and schools that are characterized as inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families, communities and children

For a new country program cycle 2012-2015, Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNICEF Laos is interested in applying Schools of Quality into secondary education. This will be responded to improvement of quality basic education as defined in the National Education System Reform Strategy to achieve Education For All and Millennium Development goals by 2015 in the most educationally disadvantage provinces, particularly in Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu. (Country Program Action Plan, 2012-2015 and UNICEF & MoES, 2011)

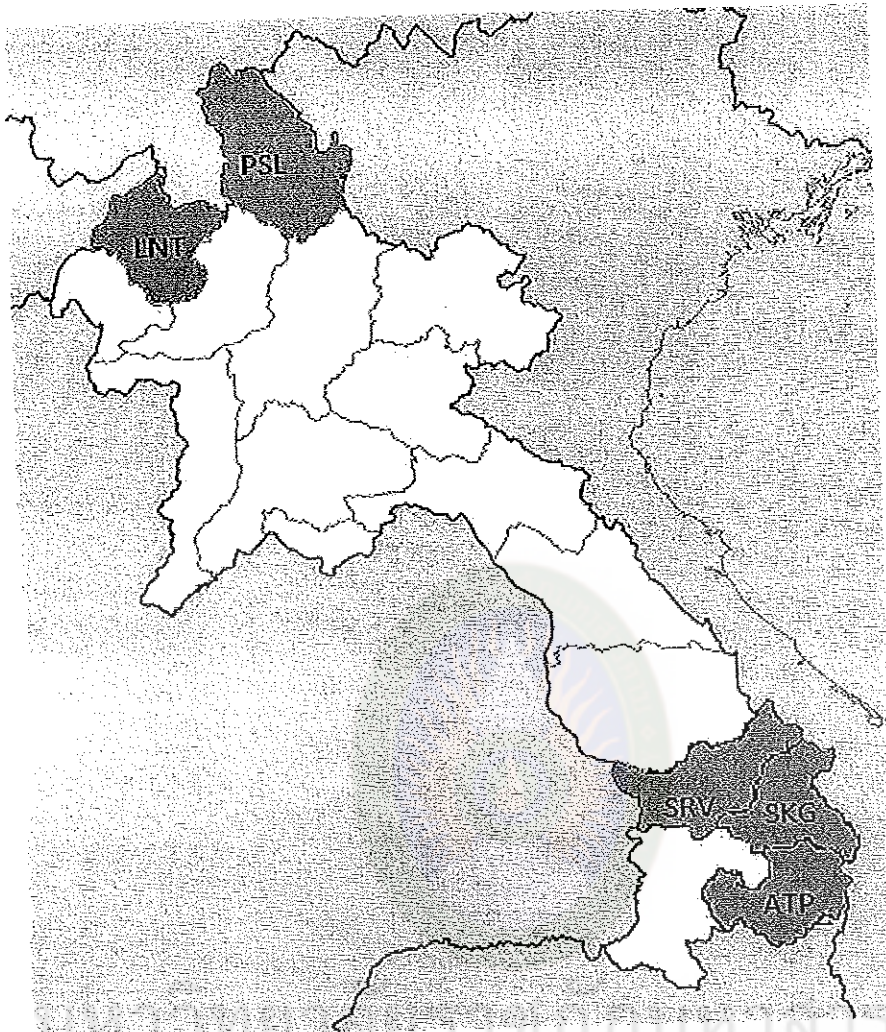


Figure 6: Map of the five target provinces in Lao PDR

The Schools of Quality aim to create child friendly learning environments in schools, with a special focus on remote rural areas, as does it aim to achieve the targets set by the National Plan of Action for Education for All by the year 2015. The Schools of Quality also supports the vision of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child of which the principle of non-discrimination forms the heart of the Convention of the Rights of the Child; each and every child should have an equal right to education, and an education of quality, and support development of his or her personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. The Schools of Quality are a rights-based and child-friendly

approach to improve quality of education. The underlying principle for Schools of Quality is that school systems bases on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, to which Lao PDR acceded in 1991. As such, the Schools of Quality approach aims to ensure all children realize their rights to a basic education of good quality that prepares them with the life skills required to be healthy, productive members of society, prepared to face the challenges of a fast-changing world.

So, the researcher is interested in studying what factors contributing to the development of Schools of Quality for secondary schools by creating a development model for implementation of Schools of Quality for secondary schools in the target provinces that UNICEF Laos supported with an aim of raising enrolment rate, reducing drop-out rate and providing equitable access and relevance to students' needs and context, and enhancing effective teaching and learning environment for secondary school children in rural remote areas.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors contributing to the development of Schools of Quality for secondary schools?
2. What is a development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools like?
3. What are the findings from evaluating of implementation the constructed development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools?

Research Objectives

1. To study the factors contributing to the development of Schools of Quality for secondary schools in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
2. To construct the development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools in Lao People's Democratic Republic.
3. To implement and evaluate the development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Research Hypothesis

1. As a result of having reviewed literatures, theoretical concepts and the relevant studies (as mentioning in Chapter II), the researcher was able to define the research hypothesis to experiment the correctness of the theories. It was assumed that the key influencing factors contributing to success in implementing Schools of Quality in secondary schools consisted of school directors and leadership, teachers, students, community participation, pedagogical advisors, school management and administration, teaching and learning, and school environment and equipment.

2. After implementing the constructed development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools, the schools had better performance in promoting Child Rights, effective teaching and learning that was relevant to students' needs and context, and an environment that encourages learning, welcoming, gender-sensitive healthy, safe and protective.

Research Scope

The researcher set the scope for this study is as follows:

1. **Geographic Target Area:** The geographic target areas for this study were secondary schools in the five UNICEF target provinces namely Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu. There were 163 secondary schools with 81,500 school children.

2. **The Research Phases:** This research had three phases as follows:

Phase 1: It was a quantitative research which studied on what causal factors that influenced the success in implementing Schools of Quality for secondary schools in Lao PDR.

Phase 2: It was a qualitative research in order to construct a development model for implementing Schools of Quality for secondary schools in Lao PDR.

Phase 3: It was a research and development. In this phase, the constructed development model was implemented and evaluated in the five secondary schools in the five

UNICEF target provinces for the country program 2012-2015 which included Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu.

3. Population, Samples and Variables

3.1 Phase 1: The Population, Samples and Variables

3.1.1 The Population and Samples

1) The population is a total number of 163 secondary schools in the five UNICEF target provinces. (MOE, EMIS Report, 2010-2011)

2) The samples are a total number of 116 secondary schools. The Taro Yamane formula sampling technique was used for determining the sample size. (Taro Yamane, 1973 : 727).

3.1.2 The Variables

1) The independent variables are causal factors that influenced the success in implementation of Schools of Quality project including:

1.1) Leadership

1.2) Teachers

1.3) Students

1.4) Pedagogical Advisors

1.5) Participation of Community

1.6) School Environment and Equipment

2) The middle variables are causal and effect factors. They are:

2.1) Management and administration

2.2) Teaching and learning

3) The dependent variable is the success in implementing of Schools of Quality for secondary schools.

3.2 Phase 2: The Target Group

The target groups for phase two consisted of 20 experts from educational, pedagogical, and development fields.

3.3 Phase 3: The target implementing groups

3.3.1 The target implementing groups for phase three are the five secondary schools namely Hmong Chao in Phongsaly, Boten in Luangnamtha, Nakoysao in Saravan, Kokpoong in Sekong and Sethathirath in Attapeu.

3.3.2 The Variables:

1) The independent variable is a development model for implementation Schools of Quality in secondary schools.

2) The dependent variable is the success in implementing Schools of Quality in terms of a) it is inclusive of all children; b) it supports effective education which was relevant to children's lives; c) it has a welcoming, clean, healthy, safe and protective environment; d) it promotes gender balance; e) it actively encourages community members to participate in school development activities and teaching and learning; and f) it has good management and administration.

Definitions of Terms

For mutual understanding of the terms used in this research, the key words and phrases are defined as follows:

1. **A development model** is an improvement form for schools of quality for secondary schools in the Lao PDR.

2. **Schools of quality** are the secondary schools that adopted the education quality standard for secondary education.

3. **The education quality standard for secondary education** is the criteria based on the concept of the Child Friendly School and the Rights of the Child which has six dimensions including: 1) inclusiveness of all children; 2) support effective education which is relevant to children's lives; 3) a clean, healthy, safe and protective environment; 4) promoting gender balance; 5) active encouraging community members to participate in school development activities and teaching and learning; and 6) good school leadership and management.

4. The success in implementation of Schools of Quality for secondary schools is that the school administration that meets the education quality standard in which consists of six dimensions of Schools of Quality approach (also known as Child Friendly School).

4.1 Leadership is a school director's ability in school administration and management of School of Quality implementation.

4.2 Teachers are school instructors who facilitate in Schools of Quality teaching and learning process in Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu.

4.3 Students are secondary school pupils who are learning in the secondary schools within the five target provinces namely Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Saravan, Sekong and Attapeu.

4.4 A pedagogical advisor is a district instructional specialist who manages the content of learning activities of Schools of Quality approach in secondary schools.

4.5 Management is the school administration and instruction managing of schools of quality in secondary schools.

4.6 Teaching and learning is the instructing method for schools of quality by using participatory child-centred teaching and learning techniques to teach life skills such as: critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving and active learning.

4.7 Participation of community is an involvement of community members in school development which includes supporting local wisdoms teaching and learning process, planning, implementing, monitoring school maintenance or renovation.

4.8 School environment and equipment are the physical school environment and equipment including school site, buildings, classrooms, libraries, laboratory, ICT rooms, indoor and outdoor sports/activity arena, latrines, garbage pitch and drainage, and other school furniture.

5. A representative of community is a person who is one of the village education development committee members within the school catchment areas..

Expected Research Benefits

1. Availability of information on factors that influence the implementation of Schools of Quality for secondary schools in Lao PDR.
2. Availability of a development model of Schools of Quality Approach for secondary schools that can apply in other secondary schools in Lao PDR.
3. To be a development model of Schools of Quality for secondary schools in Lao PDR.



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