



World Data on Education

Données mondiales de l'éducation

Datos Mundiales de Educación

VII Ed. 2010/11





Lao People's Democratic Republic

June 2011.

Principles and general objectives of education

The general goals of future development are to elevate Lao PDR from being one of the least developed countries by keeping the rate of its economic growth at a moderate and stable level; and to develop human resources who will be equipped with suitable knowledge and ability. An effort must be made in the area of education to build people with good ideological thinking, ability and good discipline, who will then be capable of exploiting and mobilizing potential in the modernization process alongside with other friendly countries. People's basic thinking and outlook for development is to build Lao PDR as a country of well-rounded development in economy, culture, science and technology and ecology with a view to making the development objectives correspond to those of socio-economic development. As a consequence, investment in education should be focused and increased to meet the needs of socio-economic sectors. In particular, education is considered on a major intervention for poverty alleviation. The general goals of education in the twenty-first century are to educate Lao people to be good citizens and loyal to the country and to the people's democratic regime; to strengthen the national education system in order for increasing students' learning outcomes; and to train skilled labour force. (MOE, 2000).

The goal of the educational reform is to prepare young generation with a scientific world viewpoint, spirit of patriotism, and sense of solidarity with all Lao multi-ethnic people and the people all over the world. Young people should be trained as good citizens who: recognize the rights, interests and duties; are able to preserve and promote the finest national tradition and culture; have a consciousness of self-reliance and self-sufficiency; are able to combine the individual and public interests; possess the general, scientific and technological knowledge, and vocational skills; are well-disciplined, responsible for job and commitment; have a good health, creative thinking, healthy lifestyle; and are ready to take part in the cause of the national development. (Khamphay Sisavanh, 2001)

In the context of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010, education is a crucial priority and one of the four pillars of the poverty reduction strategy. This includes building a workforce that is knowledgeable and competent in implementing development policies and programmes and has the capability to apply the results of modern science and technologies for the benefit of the Lao society. One of the main goals of the education policy is to develop quality human resources to meet the needs of the socio-economic development of the nation and thus contribute to poverty reduction. In order to improve the education of the whole population, it is necessary to concentrate on equitable access, quality, relevance and management of the education system.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Article 19 of the **Constitution**, promulgated in 1991 and amended in 2003, states that educational, cultural and scientific activities are the means to raise the level of knowledge, patriotism, love of the people's democracy, the spirit of solidarity between ethnic groups and the spirit of independence. The pursuit of compulsory education is important. The State permits private schools that follow the State curriculum. Article 22 stipulates that the State shall ensure the implementation of the education development policy and shall implement the compulsory primary education scheme, with a view to training the Lao to be good citizens with a revolutionary mentality, knowledge and capacities. The State and society shall endeavour to improve the quality of the national education system, to create opportunities and favourable conditions for all the people to receive an education, particularly the inhabitants of remote and isolated areas, ethnic minorities, women, children and disadvantaged persons. The State shall promote and encourage investment by the private sector in the development of the national education system in accordance with the law. Article 38 states that Lao citizens have the right to receive education and upgrade themselves.

The **Decree on Compulsory Primary Education No.138/PMO/96** of 1996 made primary education free and compulsory for all children. It also stipulates that the education service can be provided by either public or private institutions, provided that the teaching-learning content complies with the national curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, as well as the minimum standards stated in the Regulations of the General Education System.

The **Decrees No. 0922, 0923 and 0924** dated 17 July 2001 regulate the use of credit system in higher education, the organization of teaching and learning, the structure of curriculum and the duration of study, as well as other matters related to the higher vocational diploma, the bachelor's and the master's programmes.

The **Education Law No. 03/AN** was enacted on 8 April 2000 and amended in 2007 in order to meet the requirements of the national socio-economic development. The Education Law reiterates that all Lao citizens have the right to education without discrimination based on their ethnicity, origin, religion, gender, or social status. The amended version specifies that all individuals and organizations have obligation to invest and contribute to education and changes the duration of lower secondary education, increased from three to four years. The Law also establishes that the government has the duty to expand secondary education as appropriate for creating conditions for the development of Lao citizens' necessary knowledge and capacity for their occupation or further study; the government carefully plans the expansion of vocational education according to the needs of the labor market and individual occupation; and the development of vocational education has to get support and contribution from all concerned sectors of the government and the involvement of state-owned and private enterprises.

Administration and management of the education system

Administratively, Lao PDR is divided into 16 provinces and the Capital City Vientiane, together comprising 142 districts and some 10,500 villages (2005 Census). The administration was centralized in 1975, decentralized in 1986, and then recentralized in 1991. The 1986 decentralization was inadequately planned, making revenue generation and management problematic, as richer provinces did not subsidize poor ones under decentralization. Recentralization brought strategic planning and fiscal functions of the administration under the central government. In 1999, recognizing the difficulties in establishing a fully centralized system and the possible drawbacks, the government moved towards a de-concentrated approach to general administration. (MOE, 2000; April 2008).

At the central level the education system is administered by the **Ministry of Education** (MOE). Offices of the **Provincial Education Services** (PES) are responsible for educational development within their jurisdiction, including teachers' supply, inspection, and the coordination of support for schools. **District Education Bureaus** (DEB) are responsible for educational development in their areas, and support schools also through pedagogical advisers. Under the guidance of PES and DEB, at the local level **Village Education Development Committees** ensure the involvement of the community in school affairs. Education is mainly funded by central, provincial and district authorities.

The De-concentration Decree issued in March 2000 outlines the specific roles and responsibilities played by provinces, districts, and villages as follows: the province acts as the strategic unit for development, capable of supervising and leading management in all areas; the district acts as a planning and budgeting unit, with responsibility for the preparation of plans and projects, and monitoring and evaluation of their implementation; and the village acts as a basic implementation unit.

In the context of the education sector, MOE shares its responsibilities with the PES and the DEB. Each PES is responsible for secondary level institutions and vocational institutions that are delegated by the MOE. Each DEB takes responsibility for pre-primary, primary and non-formal education institutions within its own area. Communities often take initiative in support of primary and secondary education. In some cases, this initiative extends to construction and maintenance of school facilities, employment of teachers, and part of payment for salaries to teachers who are contracted by the communities. DEBs are responsible for the administration of the examination in primary schools and admission to lower secondary schools; PES oversee the examinations in lower secondary schools and admission to upper secondary schools. Upper (general) secondary school examinations are administered and assessed at the national level by MOE. (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008).

On the basis of the Education Law of 2007, the functions of the MOE include among others: studying and developing the policy framework, the strategic plan, action plan, education development projects and submitting them to the government for approval; drafting laws and regulations related to education; elaborating and



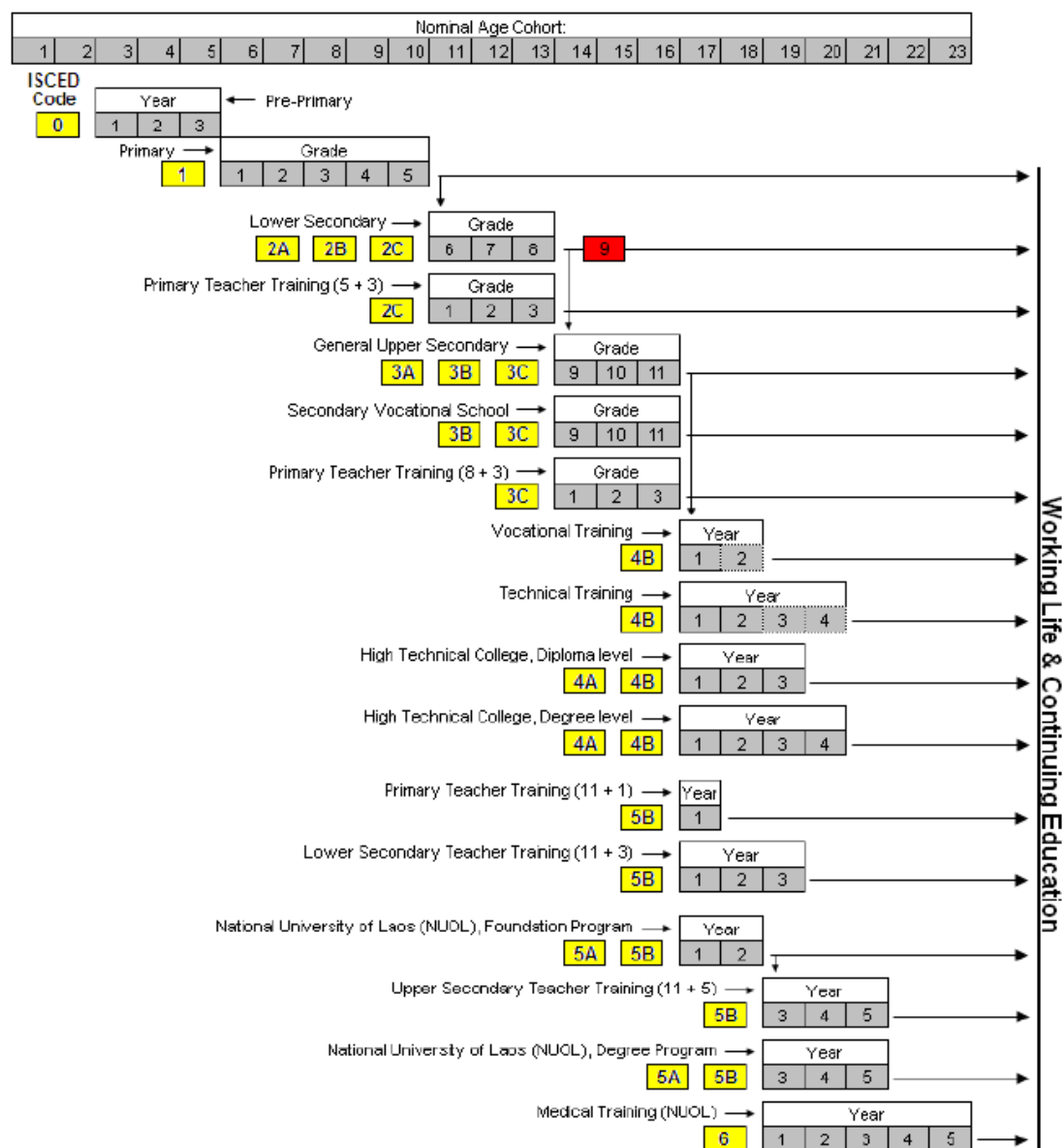
developing curricula, teaching aids and teaching-learning materials for all grades; leading literacy activities; teacher training and management; leading, monitoring, encouraging, supervising, inspecting and evaluating the education work. (ADB, 2009). In 2009 the MOE was organized into 13 Departments, each including a number of divisions, sections, units or bureaus. The main departments include: primary and preschool education, secondary education, technical and vocational education, teacher education, higher education, universities, non-formal education, private education, and the education inspection. The **Research Institute for the Educational Sciences (RIES)**, reorganized in 2007 and now under the MOE, is in charge of curriculum development and research. The RIES also encourages provincial and district level participation in the textbook development process. The **Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center (ESQAC)** has recently been established within the MOE. ESQAC is responsible for improving the knowledge base about education, and to provide advice on ongoing educational initiatives, practices, and investments. Under Moe there are also the **Inclusive Education Center**, the **Strategic Research and Educational Analysis Center** (established in 2009) and the **Education Statistics and Information Technology Center**. The **Education Printing House** is an external agency affiliated to MOE.

In addition to MOE, the **Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry** and the **Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW)** run technical and vocational training institutions in their field of competence. There are also training centers under the **Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU)** and the **Lao Women Union (LWU)**. Other ministries such as Industries and Commerce, Transport, Roads and Communications, Health, Information and Culture, and Finance, also provide training courses. The MLSW provides persons with disabilities with vocational training, employment and caring for victims of war. The **National Commission for Disabled Persons** is an inter-ministerial body headed by the Minister of LSW; members include the vice-ministers of Health, Education and Foreign Affairs, as well as representatives from related ministries. The Commission is mandated to represent and protect the legal rights of persons with disabilities, gather data, develop and propose policies, raise general awareness about disability and encourage the public to help persons with disabilities.

Under the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) Master Plan 2008-2015, it is envisaged that the **National Training Council** will be in charge of the national list of professional standards, qualification system analysis, and regional training councils. The MLSW will be responsible for the development of the financing system of the skills development fund, labor market analysis and follow up, skills testing and validation of experience, and job counselling.

Structure and organization of the education system

Lao People's Democratic Republic: structure of the education system



Source: MOE, 2008.

Pre-school education

According to the Education Law of 2007, early childhood education (ECE) is offered in crèches and kindergartens. Crèches are for children from 3 months to 3 years of age, while kindergartens cater to children aged 3-5. In 2002, the government started a programme aimed at establishing pre-primary classes in primary schools in rural and remote areas, being progressively extended nationwide. Preschool education is not compulsory.



Primary education

Primary education is compulsory and lasts five years. The entry age is 6. Primary and lower secondary education are considered as part of basic education. At the end of primary education pupils having passed the primary education achievement examination receive a certificate.

Secondary education

Under the previous system, secondary education consisted of six years, divided into lower and upper secondary education, each lasting three years. Starting from 2009/10, the structure has been changed into four years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary education. Admission to upper secondary education (general and vocational, including primary school teacher training) is open to all students having passed the lower secondary achievement examination. At the end of upper secondary education, students having passed the upper secondary achievement examination receive a diploma. Vocational training institutions offer either three-year programmes for lower secondary school graduates or four-year programmes for primary school graduates (the latter only in institutions under the Ministry of Information and Culture). Technical education institutions at the upper secondary level offer three- or four-year programmes. Within the framework of the new structure of secondary education established by the Education Law of 2007, it has been planned to introduce a vocational stream in upper secondary education.

Higher education

Higher education is offered in the National University of Laos (NUOL), three other universities, teacher training colleges, and private higher education institutions. Academic, professional and technology programmes are offered. Programmes leading to the award of a higher diploma normally take three years to complete. At the university level, programmes leading to the award of a bachelor's degree take five to seven years to complete, including one or two years of foundation/general studies and a compulsory stage. Professional and technology programmes are also offered; the duration ranges between three and five years. Master's degree programmes last a minimum of one and a half to two years, while a doctoral degree programme take a minimum of three years to complete.

The school year consists of 33 working weeks at all levels. The academic year is divided into two semesters, each comprising 16 to 17 weeks.

The educational process

As regards the curriculum implemented nationwide since 1994/95, the concept of integration was adopted in order to overcome the problems related to curriculum overload. The curriculum has been designed with a combination of content and competency-based approach. Educational objectives in the curriculum were set up in terms of cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains covering five educational pillars: moral, intellectual, labour, physical and aesthetic. The corresponding topics and contents were determined according to the learning objectives. The school



curriculum designed by the Research Institute for the Educational Sciences (formerly the National Research Institute for Educational Sciences) was discussed and reviewed by a National Curriculum Advisory Committee chaired by the vice-minister of education and consisting of representatives of different MOE technical departments, officials from other ministries as well as representatives of mass organizations.

In order to effectively manage and implement the curriculum, national workshops were held for local educational administrators from school to provincial levels. As soon as the curriculum was approved and published, the textbooks of every subject for all grades of general education were also compiled, revised, adopted, printed and disseminated nationwide. Before the implementation of the curriculum ten-day orientation workshops were organized for teacher trainers in three main geographic areas. In turn, these trainers organized other ten-day workshops for pedagogical advisors and teachers of their own provinces. (Khamphay Sisavanh, 2002).

In line with the National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS) 2006-2015, and with the target set by the Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action 2003-2015 to extend the duration of lower secondary education by one year, a curriculum reform committee was established in 2007. The committee started drafting the objectives and reform content, and sub-committees organized by each subject matter started developing specific objectives and curriculum content based on the committee's tactics. This reform started with grade 6 (first year of lower secondary education) in 2007. (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008).

In the context of the Education Sector Development Framework 2009-2015, the development of an integrated and relevant inclusive education curriculum is a key area of the education reform process, including the early childhood education (ECE) school readiness curriculum, the non-formal education curriculum, the local curriculum, and vocational skills learning (e.g. setting new education and training standards for vocational training and technical education). The immediate priority is to ensure that the quality of curricula for grades 1 to 12 will be in line with international standards, with well-defined learning outcomes. Agreed education standards based on student learning outcomes will be revised for the proposed K-12 curriculum framework. The curriculum framework will be developed and confirmed over the period 2009-2015; it will define agreed educational standards by subject and year level. The improved grade 1-9 curriculum framework will be based on an inclusive curriculum, with 20% of content set aside for the local curriculum. A new teacher education curriculum (for grade 12 graduates) will also be required. The new teacher training curriculum is to be developed over the period 2010-2012 in order to reflect the new school organization structure. (MOE, 2009).

Pre-primary education

As mentioned, early childhood education (ECE) is offered in crèches and kindergartens. Crèches are for children from 3 months to 3 years of age, while kindergartens cater to children aged 3-5. ECE is intended to ensure the growth and physical and emotional development of the children, providing it with basic knowledge in speaking, writing, reading and listening, observing and drawing as well as fundamental social skills and behavior. (ADB, 2009).



The Pre-school Division of the Department of Preschool and Primary Education, under the Ministry of Education, has developed a set of School Readiness Competencies (SRCs) to be used for monitoring and assessing the development of children in kindergarten and pre-primary classes and their readiness for primary education. SRCs has been piloted in 2007/08 and were expected to be implemented nationwide in 2008/09. (MOE, October 2008).

The gross enrolment ratio at the pre-primary level was estimated at 10.6% in 2005/06. More than a quarter of all children enrolled in preschool programmes were in the Capital City Vientiane (with an estimated gross enrolment ratio of 30%), and almost 29% of children were enrolled in the private sector (74% in Vientiane). In the same year, there were 46,237 children enrolled (of whom 23,471 girls) and the total number of teachers was 2,882 (of whom 2,865 were females); the average children/teacher ratio was 17.1:1. The percentage of crèche or kindergarten teachers with the required qualifications was estimated at 83%. (*Ibid.*).

Primary education

The aims of primary education are to fully develop children to become patriotic, love the people's democracy, and acknowledge and preserve the national multicultural setting. It builds children knowledge and skills and prepares them to continue their education. It develops the children basic competency in general vocational skills to improve local living conditions. It also prepares children to live in society by fostering the spirit of patriotism; loving their hometown, village, family and their own school; admiring leaders, parents, seniors and friends; having patience in study; and acquiring basic knowledge of nature, society and humanity. (MOE, 2008).

The primary education yearly lesson timetable in 2002 is presented in the table below:

Lao PDR. Primary education: yearly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of yearly periods in each grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Core curriculum:</i>					
Lao language	396	330	264	264	264
Mathematics	99	132	165	198	198
The world around us	66	66	99	99	99
Drawing	33	33	33	33	33
Arts	33	33	33	33	33
Handicraft	33	66	66	66	66
Physical education	66	66	66	66	66
<i>Co-curricular activities:</i>					
Saluting the flag	33	33	33	33	33
School activities	132	132	132	132	132
Assembly	33	33	33	33	33
Total yearly periods	924	924	924	957	957

Source: Khamphay Sisavanh, 2002. The school year consists of 33 working weeks. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in grades 1-3 and 40 minutes in grades 4 and 5. 'The world around us' is a combination of science and social sciences and include contents related to: moral education; civics; history; geography; biology; physics; health education; environmental studies; HIV & AIDS prevention; and drug abuse prevention. School activities include: environmental studies; sports; art performance; life skills for drug abuse and HIV & AIDS prevention. In principle, local authorities and schools can change 20% of the official prescribed contents according to local conditions and needs.

Teachers assess the learning outcome of their pupils through monthly, half- and end-of-the-year examinations and small quizzes, conducting exercises at the blackboard and various other methods. Examinations in grades 1 through 4 are set by the school principals and the teachers. At the end of primary education pupils sit the primary education achievement examination. The District Education Bureau is responsible for preparing the primary leaving examination papers and for organizing examinations, including formal and non-formal education and for issuing certificates for successful students. The transition rate to lower secondary was estimated at 77.6% in 2005/06. Provincial transition rates for boys and girls combined vary considerably from a low of under 65% in Sekong province to a high of nearly 90% in Vientiane province, closely followed by Vientiane Capital City with a transition rate of nearly 87%. (MOE, October 2008).

Most of the villages without primary schools are located in mountainous (upland) areas. In addition, many of the primary schools in these villages are incomplete (e.g. they do not offer the full five-year primary cycle) or have multigrade classrooms. The gap widens as children grow older and they progress through the educational system, resulting in sharp disparities between educational attainment of the populations living in rural and urban areas. While 30.6% of non-poor, Lao-Tai urban youth have access to a lower secondary school, only 3.3% of poor, non Lao-Tai rural youth do so. On average, urban populations have access to schools that are better equipped than do rural populations. These schools are more likely to have electricity and specialized rooms for teachers and principals. Variations are also significant when



comparing schools in the highlands and the lowlands, with the latter group having significantly worse school infrastructure. Although the official age of entry to primary school is 6, most children enter the primary cycle at ages 9 or 10, and remain there until their middle to late teens. High dropout and repetition rates are pervasive, placing a serious obstacle to academic advancement. School progression is slow; by some estimates, it takes an average of 10 years to produce a primary school graduate. Overage enrolment is most serious for girls. Large differences in school enrollment are also present between poor and non-poor children, with the latter group more likely to be out of school. In rural areas, 70% of boys and fewer than 60% of girls are still enrolled in school at the end of grade 5. Probability of survival beyond grade 5 is lowest among poor girls. (World Bank-MOE, 2007).

Actual observed classroom behavior suggests that the primary method of instruction in schools is frontal lecturing, copying lessons on the blackboard and encouraging recitation and memorization. Group activities are seldom and teachers tend to dominate the time-on-task through lecturing or asking questions. Students are mostly passive recipients of instruction, while there is some opportunity for copying exercises there is comparatively little time devoted to practical exercises or application of knowledge. (*Ibid.*).

In 2004/05, the average drop-out rate was estimated at 13% in grade 1, 6.8% in grade 2, 7.7% in grade 3, 7.2% in grade 4, and 9.8% in grade 5. Some of the grade 1 dropouts could appear later as new entrants. Girls are dropping out more frequently than boys in grade 1, 2 and 4. Furthermore, there are great variations between provinces with a difference of 14 percentage points between the lowest and highest scoring province, Oudomxay (17.1%) and Sayabury (3.1%) respectively. The number of out-of-school children still remains significant; considering the age group 10-18 years, 8-9% of the boys and 14-18% of the girls, depending on the estimates, have never been to school, the proportion being much higher in poorest districts and for non Lao-Tai children. MOE data suggests that in 2005/06 an estimated 40% of school buildings in the country were of temporary structure, and less than 20% of the primary schools had fully functioning water supply and sanitary facilities. (MOE, October 2008).

According to MOE statistics, in 2009/10 there were 8,968 primary schools in the whole country; about half of them (57%) were complete schools offering the full primary education programme. The rest were incomplete schools, mostly in rural and remote areas, and therefore placing local populations at a disadvantage for school access and educational attainment. The MOE has policy of upgrading incomplete school to complete ones for schools where conditions make it possible. There were around 32,000 classrooms for primary classes, and about 8,600 classrooms (27%) were used in a multigrade setting. Multigrade classes are most often found in rural areas; they face challenges for teachers who have not received proper training to deal with multiple ability settings or are unable to tailor their teaching to different grades. In the same year there were around 920,000 children in primary school. The pupils/teacher ratio has remained stable at around 31:1. However, this ratio seems to be higher in the rural and remote areas; for example in Oudomxay and Saravan provinces the ratio was 40:1.



In 2009/10 there were 31,782 primary teachers in the country, and about 51% (or 16,250) were women. Around 30,000 were regular teaching staffs, and 9,000 (about 30%) were unqualified, i.e. have not passed the minimum standard or qualification of teaching skill by upgrading through the teacher education 8+3 programme (complete lower secondary, according to the previous system, plus three years of training). Most unqualified teachers are teaching in the remote area; most are young and lack experience. Every year, there are in-service programmes are organized to upgrade the teachers' qualifications. However, the number of teachers who can attend the training is still limited for several reasons. In 2008/09 about 2,280 teachers were upgraded from the 5+3 qualification (complete primary plus three years of training) to 8+3.

The net enrolment ratio (NER) for primary education was estimated at 92% in 2008/09. Gender differentials at primary level have dropped by about 7.5 percentage points since 1996 (from 21.6% to 14.2%). Even so, significant gender differentials remain. At the primary level, girls' enrolment lags behind significantly, and at entry level for lower secondary (grade 6) it is more than 10 percentage points less than that of boys. The differential between achievements of ethnic groups has yet to be fully quantified. Evidence from the annual school census indicates that the average repetition rate in primary education is 15.9%; the highest rate is grade 1 (30.9%), decreasing to 15.1% in grade 2, 10% in grade 3, 6% in grade 4, and 3.6% in grade 5. Average repetition rates are higher than 20% in the provinces of Phongsaly, Bokeo, Savannakhet and Xekong. For grade 1 Xekong province ranks highest with 46.8%; for grades 2 to grade 4 the Bokeo province shows the highest rates (21.6%, 15.4% and 8.7%, respectively). For grade 5, the Phongsaly has the highest rate (10%). (MOE-ESQAC, 2011).

Secondary education

Secondary education aims to enhance students' knowledge, life skills and talent. The emphasis is on the accurate use the Lao language and to achieve a basic knowledge of mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, laws, information systems, international language, technology, and vocational skills. (MOE, 2008).

There are three different types of institutions offering secondary education: lower secondary schools (grades 6-8, according to the previous system, or grades 6-9 under the new system), upper secondary schools (grades 9-11), and complete secondary schools, which provide both lower and upper secondary education (grades 6-11 or grades 6-12 under the new system). Under the new system there will be also combined primary and lower secondary schools (covering grades 1-9, or basic education). All institutions offering general secondary education are under the authority of the Ministry of Education. (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008).

The yearly lesson timetable for lower and upper (general) secondary education in 2002 (according to the previous system) is shown below:

Lao PDR. Lower and upper (general) secondary education: yearly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of yearly periods in each grade					
	Lower secondary			Upper secondary		
	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Core curriculum:</i>						
Lao language	198	165	132	66	33	33
Lao literature	–	–	–	66	99	99
Mathematics	198	198	198	198	198	198
Drawing	33	–	–	–	–	–
Arts	33	33	–	–	–	–
Physical education	66	66	66	66	66	66
Social sciences:						
– History	33	66	66	66	66	66
– Geography	33	66	66	66	66	66
– Civics	33	33	33	66	66	66
Natural sciences	99	165	231	–	–	–
Biology	–	–	–	66	66	66
Physics	–	–	–	99	99	132
Chemistry	–	–	–	66	66	66
Foreign languages	99	99	99	99	99	99
Technical studies	66	66	66	66	66	33
<i>Co-curricular activities:</i>						
Saluting the flag	33	33	33	33	33	33
School activities	132	132	132	132	132	132
Assembly	33	33	33	33	33	33
Total yearly periods	1,089	1,155	1,155	1,188	1,188	1,188

Source: Khamphay Sisavanh, 2002. The school year consists of 33 working weeks. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

In both lower and upper secondary education, each school conducts monthly and semester tests to assess students' learning. Annual promotion is decided mainly based on the accumulated test results from monthly and semester tests. Therefore, in principle, each school is held responsible for the assessment of its students. Students' graduation from lower and upper secondary schools is decided based on the results of the examination administered at the end of grade 8 (the final year of lower secondary education according to the previous system) and grade 11 (the final year of upper secondary education), respectively. The results of this examination are used both as a school-leaving assessment and as an entry requirement to the next level of education. The achievement examination for the lower secondary education is conducted at the provincial level by each PES, while the examination at the end of upper (general) secondary education is administered and assessed at the national level by MOE.

Although lower and upper secondary education is legally free of charge, schools are entitled to raise registration fees, as well as fees for specific purposes. Money from registration fees is used for school operation and maintenance, including small repairs and subsidies for teachers in some cases, since recurrent budget from



MOE does not include any provision for school operation and management. There are some schemes in place to provide special assistance to ethnic groups in disadvantaged areas. (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008).

There are two types of secondary level technical and vocational education (TVE) institutions, e.g. vocational training and technical education institutions. Vocational training institutions are administered by several governmental bodies, including the MOE, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transportation, and Ministry of Culture and Health. In 2005/06 there were 12 vocational training institutions in the country, offering either three-year programmes for lower secondary school graduates or four-year programmes for primary school graduates (the latter only in institutions under the Ministry of Information and Culture); the total enrolment was 2,585 students, 831 of whom were girls. Technical education institutions provide three- or four-year programmes at the upper secondary level for lower secondary school graduates. There were 17 technical education institutions in the country in 2005/06, with a total enrolment of 10,219 students (of whom 3,403 girls). Under the ongoing reform (National Education System Reform Strategy 2006-2015), students will be able to shift their specialization from TVE to general education and vice versa. (*Ibid.*).

In June 2007 the Strategic Plan for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) from 2006 to 2020 (TVET Strategy) was approved by the Prime Minister. A Master Plan was needed in order to identify and plan all activities, including budget issues. An inter-ministerial team was set up in order to design a TVET Development Master Plan. Both the TVET Strategy and the Master Plan are based on three key concepts which form the basis of the Education Sector Development Framework, e.g. equitable access, quality and relevance, and management and administration. A wide range of formal, non-formal and informal curricula, certificate and diploma courses are provided by many institutions and organizations. Some are short courses varying from one week to one year. Others are skills development courses offered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW). Employers, training institutions, students, and parents do not have any reliable way of assessing the value of any given certificate. Training programmes managed by the MOE include: short courses (lasting less than six months); courses for skilled workers (six months to three years); certificate-level courses (two to three years); and diploma courses (two or three years) at the post-secondary level. Training programmes may be full-time, part-time or may include some work experience components (dual training courses). It is recognized that salaries are low and teachers might teach longer than they should (30 to 40 hours a week). In 2007 there were 18 TVET schools and colleges running under the MOE, offering training in 58 professional disciplines and 33 different areas of studies; 10% of the students came from the quota system and 60% from the national examination system. The majority of the students were following accounting studies. Most of the schools focused on training programmes leading to the higher diploma (80% of the students were at the higher diploma level). Many TVET teachers and staff had a comparatively low level of education. In 2007, within the TVET staff under MOE, two were PhD holders, 29 were master's degree holders, 160 had a bachelor's degree, and 793 were at the level of higher diploma or lower. Most of the teachers were young and many were lacking real working experience.



Overall, in 2007 there were 50 registered TVET curricula in 27 areas covering four main fields (agriculture, business, industry, and handicraft). A total of 47 public and private institutions and more than 50 training centers were providing short courses; 15 departments, 10 ministries and two mass organizations were involved in vocational education and training. Most of TVET is implemented by institutions under the Ministry of Education but many other institutions provides training: schools under provincial departments of education, schools under other ministries, training centers under MLSW, the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU), the Lao Women Union (LWU), Community Learning Centers (CLC), private sector schools, company training centers, and NGOs.

Under the TVET Strategy and Master Plan, TVET institutions will be encouraged to provide courses for different target groups including new labor market entrants (school leavers), existing workers, young people, adults and disadvantaged groups. Education and training institutions have been responding to a social demand for training in business, computing, and English language as well as for higher level courses that can give access to the bachelor's degree level. However, there has been little incentive for students to enter training in areas where there is high demand in the labor market, such as mechanical engineering, construction, mining, hospitality, and production planning management. There are skills gaps in many employment sectors and at the same time there is an oversupply in other sectors. TVET institutions will be expanded to all provinces and in addition "Centers of Excellence" will be developed for various specialist areas such as hospitality, automotive engineering, garment manufacturing and agriculture. To ensure the optimum use of resources (both equipment and personnel), the concept of Integrated Vocational Education and Training (IVET) will be implemented in a step by step process. Using this approach, the various institutions will have more flexibility to propose a range of courses for different types of students.

A National Qualification or Certification Framework could be an initial step to ensure the quality of the training, upgrade the qualification closely to regional and international standards and prepare for the international integration. Competency standards are directly linked to kind of National Qualification or Certification system selected. The country can fully develop its own standards; however, it will be much more cost effective to use standards developed in other countries and to adjust these to match the need of Lao trade sectors. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has already developed Regional Model Competency Standards for a number of industries including manufacturing, tourism and hospitality. Additional competency sets are also planned for construction, agriculture and a number of other areas. Regional cooperation is developing and sets of competency standards developed by other countries could be available. National labour market analysis will be needed to support national strategies and plans; these can include specific surveys (on request), annual labour market reviews, local skills needs analysis and permanent observatories in close cooperation with the professional associations.

The TVET Master Plan envisages the creation of professional disciplines and curricula based on local labour market assessment through collaboration among different sectors, departments, trade working groups at the local level. Schools can be partly responsible for the implementation of local surveys. Vocational subjects will be progressively included in the general education curriculum. The Ministry of



Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) Master Plan focuses on strengthening the four existing agricultural schools through the improvement of curricula, competency-based training and production facilities. The MLSW Master Plan includes important components to link to the TVET Master Plan: strategies on training and assessment for skills standards, labour market information, and the use of the training fund. There will be the need to strengthen coordination between the different ministries and other relevant stakeholders within the National Training Council. (MOE, TVET Master Plan, 2008).

In 2005/06, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for lower secondary education was estimated at 52% (57% for boys and 46% for girls), and the net enrolment ratio at 28%. The survival rate to grade 8 was estimated at 75.8% on the average (76.5% for boys and 75.3% for girls). The average repetition rate at the secondary level is low: 3% in lower secondary, and 2.2% in upper secondary in 2005/06. In the same year, the transition rate to upper secondary was estimated at 76.5%. The GER at the upper secondary level was estimated at 36.7% (30.6% for girls and 42.6% for boys). The average students/teacher ratio was 23:1 in lower secondary and 28.3 in upper secondary. The average class size was 45.7 students at the lower secondary and 53.4 students at the upper secondary level. (MOE, October 2008).

The GER at the lower secondary level was estimated at about 63% in 2008/09. For upper secondary, the net enrolment ratio was estimated at 37% in the same year. At lower secondary level, girls' enrolment has increased by over 5 percentage points from 2003 to almost 58% in school year 2008/09, compared with a 2 percentage point increase for boys to 67% in the same school year. (MOE-ESQAC, 2011). According to MOE statistics, in 2009 there were 722 lower secondary schools with 264,600 students enrolled and 17,600 teachers; the total enrolment at the upper secondary level was 157,300 students.

Assessing learning achievement nation-wide

The Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center (ESQAC) has recently been established within the MOE. ESQAC is responsible for improving the knowledge base about education, and to provide advice on ongoing educational initiatives, practices, and investments. With the support of Plan International, ESQAC has conducted a study in a representative sample of 30 schools (a total of 676 grade 3 pupils) in two relative remote districts in Bokeo province in northern Lao PDR. The study examines curriculum-based learning outcomes in grade 3 mathematics, Lao language, and 'the world around us', an integrated subject combining contents of social studies and science. Both students and teachers were tested and interviewed. Information was also collected on the schools and on teacher and student background variables such as gender and ethno-linguistic group. The average score over all three tests was 42%. For the mathematics test, over 78% of the pupils tested had scores of 50 points (out of 100) or lower. For 'the world around us' (WAU), 54% of the pupils had scores of 50 points or lower. For Lao language, 64% of the pupils had scores of 50 points or lower, and 4.6% of pupils had 0 points in Lao language. Mathematics proved to be the most difficult subject. Ability to communicate in the Lao language clearly influenced the test results for WAU and Lao language. In general, for WAU and Lao language, girls from Lao-Tai group performed better than other groups including boy from the same group. For mathematics, however, boys from the



Hmong-Iu Mien group performed higher than other groups. Lao language presented mixed results. Not surprisingly, pupils from Lao-Tai ethno-linguistic groups excelled in listening comprehension. Differences were much less for writing, however. Reading comprehension was poor for all groups; the average score over the whole sample was only 24 points.

Teachers were given the same tests as the pupils. Although scores for the teachers were considerably higher than for the pupils, there was a clear relationship between items that the teachers found difficult and those the pupils found difficult, especially in mathematics and Lao language, where teacher scores were quite varied. Teachers mean scores for mathematics was about 90% and the mean score for Lao language was 85%. Teachers generally strive to support the teaching and learning processes with instructional materials. However, many teachers can not catch the objectives of curricula; some have never even seen the curricula and haven't known what the teaching curricula are. Many teachers face difficulties on teaching Lao language to the non Lao-Tai ethno-linguistic groups. Teachers usually assess the learning outcome of their student by monthly examination and small quizzes, but few teachers give homework to their students. Teachers generally give verbal support to child-centered or active learning, but many do not understand the concept. Most teachers felt that it was difficult to implement. Classes often lack instructional materials, textbooks, and teacher guides. Pupils in multigrade classes tended to have lower scores than pupils in single-grade classes. Sometimes multigrade classrooms have many more pupils than the target pupils/teacher ratio, and teachers have difficulty managing the teaching and learning situation.

This study was informed by previous findings in the work of the Research Institute for the Educational Sciences (RIES), which tested grade 5 learning outcomes in selected provinces in 2007. RIES study tested pupils' achievement in three core curriculum subjects, namely mathematics, Lao, and WAU. The results showed that grade 5 pupils perform well in Lao language and WAU, but the mathematics mean score was at level 3 (pre-functional level) out of six levels defined. The results showed variation between provinces, communities, and students from different home backgrounds.

The ESQAC study recommended establishing school performance monitoring mechanisms or quality assurance processes nationwide. The MOE Department of Primary and Preschool Education and ESQAC are developing the education quality standard for primary level. The mechanism of quality assurance, e.g. school self-assessment, the internal assessment by district, province, and MOE, and a macro-development plan should be clearly identified and announced to schools. The learning achievement standard for each grade should be developed based on the existing list of basic competencies. The nationwide examination for primary level also has to be reviewed to assure the quality of curriculum implementation and improving children achievement. (MOE-ESQAC, 2011).

The grade 5 assessment study carried out by RIES tested a representative sample of schools in Lao language, mathematics and WAU. All test items were based on the grade 5 curriculum. Results showed that the majority (78.5%) of grade 5 pupils operated at a basic Lao language literacy competency level (Levels 3 and 4). In other words, they have mastered functional skills as suggested by international benchmarks.



With respect to mathematics skills, pupils tended to perform poorly, e.g. at Level 2 (49.1%), followed by Level 3 (19.7%), and Level 1 (16.3%). These results suggest low levels of mathematics proficiency; the competency level of the majority of pupils could be described as having pre-functional skills. As regards WAU, the majority of pupils exhibited moderate to high levels of skills. Thirty-six percent of pupils placed at Level 5, followed by 19.2% at Level 4 and 22.8% at Level 3. In this case, pupils would be considered to have reached either a functional or an independent learning competency level with respect to the natural and social science skills included in this subject. These national averages hide some important differences across regions. Rural pupils are more likely to place at Level 3 in Lao language and Levels 1 and 2 in mathematics than urban students. Pupils from higher socio-economic backgrounds scored significantly higher than students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. (World Bank-MOE, 2007).

Teaching staff

Several primary school teacher training pathways exist: (a) '5+4', a qualification based on the completion of primary education (five-year programme) plus four years of teacher education and training, targeting prospective teachers from remote and ethnic communities; (b) '8+3', a qualification based on the completion of lower secondary education (a total of eight years of schooling, or complete lower secondary according to the previous system) plus three years of teacher education and training, currently the minimum standard qualification; and (c) '11+1', a qualification based on the completion of upper secondary education (a total of eleven years of schooling) plus one year of teacher education and training.

Lower and upper secondary teachers are required to having completed 11 years of formal schooling, followed by three years of pre-service teacher training for lower secondary teachers, and four to five years for upper secondary teachers. The three-year programmes are currently offered in five Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) for the following seven courses: natural sciences, social sciences, English, French, Lao language, mathematics, and sciences. Four- to five-year training programmes are provided by the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos. As part of pre-service teacher training, students are required to complete a three-month practical training. There are also three Teacher Training Schools (TTS), two additional institutions responsible for training physical education and arts teachers for all levels, and an institution training secondary teachers for monk schools. There are in-service teacher upgrading centers in the different provinces (a total of 17 centers in 2007). However, training is currently institutionalized only for primary school teachers. Training sessions for secondary school teachers are organized on an ad-hoc basis in the context of donor projects. (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; MOE, October 2008).

TTCs prepare students for secondary school teaching (11+3), issuing high level certificates. TTS train future preschool and primary teachers (11+1, 8+3 and 5+4). Graduates receive medium-level certificates. It is envisioned that these institutions will be harmonized as Teacher Training Institutions (TTI). In addition, the Faculty of Education at the National University of Laos (NUOL) offers a degree level programme for upper secondary teachers. Half of teachers at the eight teacher training institutions (an estimated total of 520 teachers) have bachelor's degrees, and one-third have 11+3 qualifications. Male teachers hold higher qualifications on average than

female teachers. Interestingly, older faculty have more qualifications on average than younger faculty, perhaps suggesting that hiring standards have been lowered in recent years or younger workers have more attractive alternative job opportunities. (World Bank-MOE, 2007). From 2008/09, the 11+1 programme has been upgraded to 11+2. The vast majority of the kindergarten and pre-primary class teachers have undergone a one year pre-service training at a TTC. There are two systems of preschool pre-service training: one year pre-service training (11+1), certificate level 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary); 30 week in-service training (in ELPS Project), equivalent to certificate level. (MOE, October 2008).

Students can enter the regular program through four different channels: Quota, Exam, *Nangobay*, and Non-Quota. Students that enter the regular course through the Quota system undergo an extensive application process; they obtain free tuition and a stipend. Exam students are selected on the basis of their scores on the teacher training institution (TEI) entrance exam. They receive similar benefits to Quota students. *Nangobay* students must submit an application letter to be considered for this category; this pathway is reserved for children of teachers, national heroes, leaders, and retirees. Non-Quota students are those who did not pass the TEI exam, but were admitted into the TEI as fee-paying students. In some TEIs, Non-Quota students are taught separately from other students in regular courses. In 2005/06, TEIs enrolled 15,738 students. Two-thirds of the students are enrolled in regular coursework and one-third in special courses. Regular courses are part of the official teacher education programme. They train teachers for preschool, primary and lower secondary teaching. Special courses are offered in the evenings to fee paying students. These courses are based on the 11+1 and 8+3 teacher training curricula, but seldom lead to a teaching career. The emphasis of these courses is usually to improve English language skills, rather than pedagogy. Many students that attend special courses are sponsored by their employers and usually receive a salary increase upon completion. TEIs offer 11 different pre-service programmes in its regular courses leading to different teaching certificates. Each programme has various minimum requirements in terms of how many years of schooling students must have before admission as well as the type of certification sought. The customization of these programmes to the years of formal schooling of trainees implies an open recognition that secondary education graduates are in very limited supply. The largest programme in terms of student enrolments in 2004/05 was 11+3C (leading to a qualification to teach English in lower secondary schools), followed by 11+1Z (leading to a qualification to teach in primary schools) and 11+3B (leading to a qualification to teach social science in lower secondary schools). (*Ibid.*).

In 2004/05, there were 48,113 teachers in Lao PDR working at all levels (from preschool to higher education). About one half of these (46%) were women. Most teachers (57%) were placed at the primary level, while 30% were at the lower and upper secondary and 6% at the preschool level. According to the grade 5 assessment study carried out by the Research Institute for the Educational Sciences in 2007, primary teachers in Lao PDR were 34 years old on average. Sixty-one percent were male and 39% were female. Rural primary schools were more likely to have male teachers than schools located in urban areas. Approximately half of all teachers taught in the same village where they were from. Lower secondary teachers were slightly older than primary teachers (36 years old). Little more than half (54%) of them were male. Teacher qualifications are classified by a combination of formal school years



and period of teacher training. Qualified teachers are generally defined by length of teacher training. In non-poor districts only 11.2% of primary teachers are untrained, compared to 24.6% of primary teachers in the poorest districts. Provinces with the highest percentage of poor villages (such as Huaphanh and Phongsaly) had the highest percentages of untrained teachers (38.5% and 33.2% respectively). Most primary teachers have obtained either an 8+3 certification or a certification that requires fewer years than that. Only one quarter of primary teachers have 11+1 certification or above. A large proportion of lower secondary teachers (86.8%) have an official teaching certificate. (*Ibid.*).

Teacher postings are determined by the MOE and teachers are centrally assigned. In principle, when a classroom reaches 33 students, MOE assigns another staff member to that school. In practice, teachers are unequally deployed among provinces and individual schools, resulting in an oversupply of teachers in some schools and severe undersupply in others. Rural and remote areas largely rely on local teachers to staff their schools. The main category of teachers is the “Quota” teacher category. These teachers are hired as civil servants and are paid according to the Civil Service salary schedule. Contract teachers are those who, regardless of qualifications, are employed in a public school, but not under the civil service regime. These teachers are also referred to as “Non-Quota” teachers. Teachers in private schools are also considered contract teachers, as are teachers who are hired directly by communities. Teacher salaries are mainly determined by qualification, function performed (type of teacher and level) and years of experience. Teacher salaries are low (an average of US\$39 per month for primary school teachers and US\$45 per month for lower secondary teachers), well below the GDP per capita average, and since 1993/94 lost much of their value in real terms. Around 85% of this salary corresponds to base pay and 15% to bonuses, supplements and family allowances. In rural and remote areas, in addition to salary payments, teachers receive in-kind contributions from villagers or village authorities such as rice and housing. Without village support, teachers may have difficulty to survive due to long delays of salary payments. In general, primary work 36 hours a week. In addition to hours spent teaching in school, primary teachers prepare lessons and mark homework at home for an average of seven hours per week. Teachers also spend an additional amount of time meeting parents. Parent-teacher meetings took place four times a year on average. (*Ibid.*).

References

Asian Development Bank. Lao PDR: *Sector-wide approach in education sector development*. (Prepared by Cambridge Education Ltd and Burapha Development Consultants Co. Ltd for the Ministry of Education of Lao PDR). Project Number: 35312, October 2009.

Khamphay Sisavanh. *Educational reform in Lao PDR*. Paper presented at the “First International Forum on Education Reform: Experiences in selected countries”, Bangkok, 30 July-2 August 2001.

Khamphay Sisavanh. *Analysis of national curriculum for basic education in Lao PDR*. (Draft situation analysis produced as part of the project IBE-UNESCO Bangkok ‘Basic education in South East Asia’). Paper discussed at the sub-regional workshop



“Building capacities of curriculum specialists for educational reform.” Vientiane, Lao PDR, 9-13 September 2002.

Ministry of Education. *The education strategic vision up to the year 2020*. Vientiane, 2000.

Ministry of Education. *Master plan. Development of TVET from 2008 until 2015*. Vientiane, 2008.

Ministry of Education. *The development of education. National report: Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Presented at the 48th session of the International Conference on Education, Geneva, 2008.

Ministry of Education. *National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS) 2006-2015*. Vientiane, April 2008.

Ministry of Education. *Education for All Mid-decade Assessment*. Vientiane, October 2008.

Ministry of Education. *Education Sector Development Framework 2009-2015*. Vientiane, April 2009.

Ministry of Education. *Education Quality Assurance Strategic Plan for 2011-2020*. Vientiane, May 2010.

Ministry of Education. Department of General Education. *Education for All. National Plan of Action 2003-2015*. Prepared with technical and financial support from UNESCO Bangkok, Bangkok, 2005.

Ministry of Education. Department of Non-formal Education. *Lao PDR country report on adult learning and education*. October 2008.

Ministry of Education. Department of Private Education Management. *The current situation of higher education in Lao PDR*. Vientiane, September 2008.

Ministry of Education. Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center. *Research report on teaching practice and learning outcomes in grade 3 in Bokeo Province*. Supported by Plan International, Vientiane, February 2011.

UNESCO Bangkok. *Secondary Education Regional Information Base: Country profile Lao PDR*. Bangkok, 2008.

UNESCO Bangkok. *Secondary teachers in Lao PDR: Priorities and prospects*. (Prepared by K. Gannicot and C. Tibi). Secondary Teacher Policy Research in Asia, Bangkok, 2009.

UNESCO. *UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) – Lao PDR, 2008-2013*. Draft, May 2008.



UNICEF Vientiane Office. *School of quality in Lao PDR: an evaluation 2009*. Vientiane, December 2009.

World Bank and Ministry of Education. *Teaching in Lao PDR*. (Prepared by L. Benveniste, J. Marshall and L. Santibañez), Human Development Sector, East Asia and the Pacific Region, Washington DC, 2007.

Web resources

Ministry of Education: <http://www.moe.gov.la/> [In Lao and English. Last checked: June 2011.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>