

Chapter 11

Teacher Education in Lao People's Democratic Republic



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Abstract This chapter covers teacher education and the characteristics and deployment of school teachers in Lao PDR. The teacher education programs covered here range from early childhood education and development through upper secondary general education. Both pre-service and in-service teacher professional development are covered. Policy and practice concerning inclusive education and other equity issues are also discussed as they relate to teacher education. The historical development of teacher education from the post-revolutionary period to the end of the twentieth century is discussed elsewhere (Amarathithada et al in *Teachers and teacher education*. Chapter 7 in Noonan (Ed.), pp. 163–190, 2020). The most significant policy and other developments in teacher education in the twenty-first century and current problems and policy issues in teacher education are discussed in depth here. Although the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare also provide some education and training services, this chapter is limited to the professional preparation of teachers in public and private pre-school institutions and primary and secondary schools operating under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). Both public and private schools are covered.

Keywords Teacher education · Lao PDR · Characteristic · Deployment · Policy · And practice

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASLO	Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes.
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education.
DESO	District Education and Sports Office.
DHE	Department of Higher Education.

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DTE	Department of Teacher Education.
DTVE	Department of Technical and Vocational Education.
EFA-NPA	Education for All National Plan of Action.
EQASP	Education Quality Assurance Strategic Plan [for 2011–2020].
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan [for 2011–2015].
ESQAC	Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center (Ministry of Education).
ESSDP	Education and Sports Sector Development Plan [for 2016–2020].
FOE	University Faculty of Education.
GPIA	Gender Parity Index Adjusted.
IEAD	Institute for Educational Administration Development.
LAOSIS	Laos Statistical Information Service.
LS	Lower Secondary (Grades 6–9).
LSSS	Lower Secondary School Survey.
MDG	Millennium Development Goal.
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports. (Note that the Ministry of Education was renamed Ministry of Education and Sports in September 2011).
MOPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment.
NCTC	National Charter of Teacher Competencies.
NESRS	National Education System Reform Strategy.
NOUL	National University of Laos.
NRIES	National Research Institute for the Education Sciences.
PA	Pedagogical Advisor.
PDN	Professional Development Network.
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Services.
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
QA	Quality Assurance.
RIES	Research Institute for Education Sciences.
SITC	Statistics and Information Technology Center (MOES).
STEP	Secondary Teacher Education Program.
STR	Student/Teacher Ratio.
SY	School Year.
TDC	Teacher Development Center.
TEI	Teacher Education Institution.
TESAP	Teacher Education Strategy 2006–2015 and Action Plan 2006–2010.
TTC	Teacher Training College.
TUP	Teacher upgrading program.
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
UBE	Universal Basic Education.
US	Upper Secondary (Grades 10–12).
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee.
VEDI	Vocational Education Development Institute.
WAU	World Around Us. (Civics education at primary level).

Introduction

This chapter covers the area of responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES),¹ Department of Teacher Education (DTE), i.e. on teachers serving from pre-school through upper secondary general education. More complete coverage of teacher education in Laos can be found in the following:

- Teachers and teacher education: Amarthithada et al. (2020), Chap. 7, pp. 163–190;
- Teacher education for technical and vocational education and training: Phoumilay and Noonan (2020, Chap. 5, pp. 111–142);
- Non-formal education and lifelong learning: Saleumsouk et al., (2020, Chap. 6, pp. 143–163);
- Post-secondary and Tertiary Education: Moxom and Noonan (2020, Chap. 8, pp. 191–216); and
- Buddhist Education: Vongsopha and Noonan (2020, Chap. 10, pp.245–263).

Teachers play a most significant role in children's education, and many policy issues relate specifically to teachers and teacher education:

- Selection of candidates for teacher education;
- The candidates' employment intentions after completion of the program;
- Available and preferred teaching positions;
- Employment conditions;
- Deployment conditions; and
- Availability of physical facilities and teaching/learning materials.

Although it is more progressive to refer to “teacher education” and “teacher education institutions” (TEIs), the terms “teacher training” and “teacher training college” (TTCs) are still widely used. “TEI” here is a generic term, and “TTC” and “Faculty of Education” (FOE) are used when the distinction is necessary. There are four categories of TEIs:

- Eight provincial and regional Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) for general education teachers, under the MOES Department of Teacher Education (DTE);
- Four Specialized TTCs under DTE;
- The Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI), under the Department of Technical and Vocational Education (DTVE), which serves as a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) teacher education institution; and
- Four University Faculties of Education (FOEs).

Section [Emerging Teacher Education Policy](#) below concerns general policy on teacher education. Section [Teacher Education Institutions and Programs](#) concerns teacher education institutions and programs. Section [Teachers and Teaching/Learning Practices](#) covers teaching and learning methods used in the

¹ Note that in late 2011 the Ministry of Education (MOE) was renamed Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). In this chapter, the contemporaneous acronym is always used.

schools and TEIs. Section [Teacher Recruitment, Employment, Deployment, and Management](#) covers issues related to recruitment, employment, deployment, and management of teachers. Section [Issues and Challenges](#) discusses some of the issues and challenges in teacher education and training in Laos today and some of the policy responses. Section [Statistical Trends](#) provides some statistical evidence about the teacher corps and current trends in teacher education and training.

Emerging Teacher Education Policy

Education Sector Vision, Strategy, and Planning. The twenty-first century began with a renewed thrust for the quantitative and qualitative development of the education system. Whereas in the past, development of the education system was based on a sub-sectoral approach, the new century began with a program approach across sub-sectors and a sector-wide approach. A major theme was qualitative development, and teacher education and deployment were a centre of focus. The aims for education system development by 2020 were set in key official documents shown in Box 11.1.

Box 11.1 Major Policy Documents for Teacher Education

- Education Strategic Vision up to the Year 2020 (MOE, [2000](#)).
- Education Strategic Planning 20 Years (2001–2020), 10 Years (2001–2010), and 5 Years Development Plan for Education (2001–2005) (MOE [2001](#)).
- Education for All National Plan of Action (2003–2015) (EFA-NPA) (MOE [2005](#)).
- Teacher Education Strategy 2006–2015 and Action Plan 2006–2010 (TESAP) (MOE, [2006](#)).
- National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NCTC) (MOE, [2007](#)).
- Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2016–2020 (ESSDP) (MOES, [2015](#)).

The seminal documents Education Strategic Vision (2000) and Education Strategic Planning (2001) pointed the way for the quantitative and qualitative development of the education system, including extending compulsory education. Improvement of teacher preparation was a major recurrent recommendation. Most teachers at pre-primary and primary school level, had “8 + 3” or lower qualifications, i.e. completed lower secondary (LS) education followed by a three-year teacher training program. About half of the teachers at secondary level had “11 + 3” qualifications, i.e. completion of upper secondary (US) education followed by a three-year teacher education and training program. At the beginning of the twentieth about half of the teachers had only “8 + 3” or lower qualifications (MOE [2000](#), pp. 7–46).

Education for All National Plan of Action. The Education for All National Plan of Action (EFA-NPA) (MOE 2005) was developed to meet the EFA goals. It focussed on three main target areas: (1) Access and Participation; (2) Quality and Relevance; and (3) Management. All objectives under the Quality and Relevance program concern activities directly related to either teacher education or the deployment of teachers, as shown in Table 11.1. Education quality and relevance were to be improved by both improving teacher education and providing more equitable and inclusive deployment of teachers.

The EFA-NPA indicated future plans to add one grade to LS, changing the structure from an 11-year system (5 + 3 + 3) to a 12-year system (5 + 4 + 3) to align the Lao school system with the standard in the region. That made improvement of teacher education all the more urgent. The aim was to improve teacher:

- To reform the teacher education curricula in line with the future 5+4+3 school system structure;
- To strengthen both pre- and in-service teacher and staff development;
- To implement national teacher certification and accreditation standards; and
- To transform TEIs into degree-granting institutions.

The aim was to make teacher deployment more equitable and inclusive by attracting more TEI applicants from rural, remote, and other disadvantaged areas and by providing incentives for new TEI graduates to teach in such underserved

Table 11.1 FA-NPA quality and relevance in primary and lower secondary education

No	Objective	Activities
6.1	Improve management and coordination of teacher education delivery	17
6.2	Develop a comprehensive but flexible teacher training curriculum	15
6.3	Capacitate teacher trainers through training of trainers program for different modalities of teacher training	8
6.4	Improve management capacity in TEIs through management training	4
6.5	Provide research to support teacher education development projects	2
6.6	Increase recruitment and retention of teachers, and improve their status through teacher incentives	4
6.7	Effective deployment of trained and professional teachers	10
6.8	Improve quality of pre-service teacher training	9
6.9	Improve quality of in-service teacher training	10
6.10	Provide learning materials and adaptation to local conditions	11
6.11	Improve student assessment systems	5
6.12	Improve management and supervision of schools	7
6.13	Expand health promotion in primary schools (HPS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and concerned organizations	8
	Total Activities	110

Source MOE (2005, pp. 58–63)

areas. In addition, minimum standards of student learning outcomes were set for Grades 3, 5, and 9.

Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan. A seminal document guiding the development of teacher education in the early years of the twenty-first century was the Teacher Education Strategy 2006–2015 and Action Plan 2006–2010 (TESAP) (MOE 2006). The aim was to support the quantitative and qualitative development of basic education. The Strategy included continuing professional development, enhancing the status of and incentives for teachers and teacher educators, and improving teaching methods.

National Charter of Teacher Competencies. The TESAP was followed by the development of the National Charter of Teacher Competencies (NCTC) to support career-long professional development (MOE 2007). It also led to the development of a system of accreditation and certification of teachers and a quality assurance (QA) system for TEIs.

National Education System Reform. The restructuring from a 5 + 3 + 3 school system to a 5 + 4 + 3 system was formalized in the Education Law of 2007 for implementation in the 2009/2010 school year (SY). Implementation was guided by the National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS) 2006–2015 (MOE, 2008). The reform strategy included the improving of the competence and status of teachers. It included upgrading of some of the TTCs to enable the awarding of the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) programs in cooperation with the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos (NUOL).

Education Sector Development Plan. The first Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) (MOES 2011a) focussed on equitable teacher supply, especially assuring that remote, isolated, and underserved communities have access to qualified teachers. This was to be achieved by:

- Providing scholarships for students from such communities to attend teacher training;
- Improving incentive for recruiting and retraining well-qualified teachers to remote and poor districts; and
- Enhancing the status of teachers and their living conditions.

The Education Standards and Quality Assurance Center (ESQAC) was established at MOE in 2008, leading to the Education Quality Assurance Strategic Plan for 2011–2020 (EQASP) (MOE 2010), which covered the whole education system. Program 5 of the EQASP covered the development of a QA system for teacher education, as shown in Table 11.2.

The first Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP 2011–2015) (MOES 2011a) established new target distributions for teacher qualifications. The second ESDP (ESDP 2016–2020) targets represented a stronger focus on qualifications of TEI teachers than of school teachers (MOES 2015). Improvement of teacher education through upgrading of qualifications of TEI lecturers was a strategic priority for improvement of student learning outcomes at school level.

Table 11.2 Quality assurance strategy for teacher education, 2011–2020

Main activities
<i>To Develop</i>
Quality standards for TEIs and FOEs;
Mechanisms for quality self-assessment and internal and external assessment;
Standards for teacher training programs and modules;
A registration system for programs and modules for efficient management; and
Rules for credit transfer between teacher education programs
<i>To Establish</i>
QA units in TEIs and FOEs; and
A council for teacher education institution quality accreditation
<i>To Organize</i>
Internal assessments with assessor teams TEIs and FOEs;
Teacher education external assessors training
Teacher education external assessment
<i>To Strengthen</i>
Self-assessment capacity in teacher education

Source MOE (2010, pp. 9–13)

Teacher Education Institutions and Programs

Pre-service Teacher Education Institutions and Programs

Prior to the National Education System Reform, teacher education for lower secondary school teachers was based on completion of lower secondary followed by a three-year Certificate-level teacher education (8 + 3) or completion of upper secondary followed by a three-year Diploma-level program (11 + 3) intended specifically for teachers at lower secondary level.

Many pre-primary and primary teachers at that time had received pre-service professional preparation based on completion of a 3-year Certificate-level teacher education program following lower secondary school (9 + 3). Today most pre-primary and primary teacher trainees participate in a two-year Diploma-level program (12 + 2). The 9 + 3 program is still important, however, because it enables lower secondary school graduates from poor and remote non-Lao Tai minority ethnic communities to receive teacher education and return to their communities to teach.

Most TEIs no longer offer separate programs for lower- and upper secondary teachers. Instead they offer combined secondary programs, which allows teachers to serve from Grades 6 to 12. Today pre-service education for secondary school teachers is based on 4-year Bachelor degree programs or on Master degree programs.

TTCs offer Bachelor degree programs, and University FOEs offer Bachelor and Master degree programs for secondary school teachers. University FOEs also offer Master degree programs for TTC lecturers to upgrade their qualifications.

Most TEI students in pre-primary and primary programs are enrolled at Certificate or Diploma level, but most students in secondary teacher education programs are enrolled at Bachelor or Master degree level. In the specialized TEIs (Music and Arts, Physical Education) most of the enrolment is at the Certificate or Diploma level.

There are altogether 17 teacher education institutions providing professional preparation:

- Eight regional or provincial TEIs under supervision of DTE;
- The National Art Education Teacher Training College, the National Physical Education Teacher Training College, and two Buddhist Teacher Training Colleges, also under the supervision of DTE;
- Four university faculties of education (FOEs), serving under the supervision of the Department of Higher Education (DHE); and
- The Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI), under the joint supervision of DHE and the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DTVE).

The distribution of TTC enrolments by institution and teaching level is shown in Table 11.3, and the distribution of FOE enrolments by degree level is shown in Table

Table 11.3 Enrolments in teacher education institutions 2018/19

TTC	Program Grade Level			
	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Total
<i>Provincial & Regional TTCs</i>				
Luangnamtha	141	316	387	844
Luang Prabang	217	125	575	917
Khungkhay	116	92	643	851
Bankern	204	92	596	892
Savannakhet	194	201	711	1106
Saravane	303	213	273	789
Pakse	136	123	631	890
Dongkhamxang	573	368	200	1141
<i>Specialized TTCs</i>				
Music and Arts			436	436
Physical Education			471	471
Wat Ongtue Monk TTC, Vientiane			280	280
Wat Thahin Monk TTC, Champasack			298	298
Total TTCs	1884	1530	5501	8915

Source MOES (2019a, Table 58, pp. 58–65)

Table 11.4 Enrolments in university faculties of education 2018/19

University faculties of education and institutes	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree
National University of Laos. (Vientiane)	1575	177
Souphanouvong University (Luang Prabang)	564	
Savannakhet University	546	
Champasack University	976	
Vocational Education Development Institute. (Vientiane)*	141	
Total University Faculties of Education & Institutes	3802	177

Source MOES (2019a, Table 60, pp. 69–74)

* The Vocational Education Development Institute (VEDI) is under the joint responsibility of the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DTVE)

11.4.

In-service Teacher Education Programs

The continuing professional development of teachers is provided with formal and non-formal programs, self-development, and collaboration among schools, usually at the district level. Following the school system structure reform (from 5 + 3 + 3 to 5 + 4 + 3), teacher upgrading programs (TUPs) are used for raising teachers' formal academic qualifications, especially for teachers with out-of-date 5 + 3 Certificates or 8 + 3 Diplomas. In each province there is a designated In-service Teacher Upgrading Center (ISTUC) for primary school teachers. An ISTUC can be a TTCs (possibly in a neighbouring province), a Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS), or a District Education and Sports Office (DESO). Teachers with basic qualifications have the right to relevant professional upgrading, which is usually provided by a TTC or an FOE.

“Refresher” programs usually introduce new content, pedagogical methods, or policies for teachers generally. Refresher courses are usually delivered by teams of district or provincial trainers, often Pedagogical Advisors (PAs) or staff from the PESS or a TTC. PAs are well-qualified, experienced teachers at district or provincial level. They are responsible for monitoring, supervising, and supporting teachers at school level. PAs serving at primary level are usually based at the DESO, while those serving at secondary level are usually based at the PESS.

There are several pathways for upgrading the formal qualifications of teachers:

- Professional development programs at TEIs, which are usually organized during the school summer breaks and often continuing for several summers;
- School-based training with internal supervision and the support of the Professional Development Network (PDN); and
- Online programs.

There are also upgrading programs that do not upgrade formal qualifications, including:

- Not-for-credit workshops; and
- Workshops for learning more in-depth about government policies.

To support the new 5 + 4 + 3 school system structure, competency-based curriculum development and assessment methods were introduced. Pre-service programs were updated, and the commitment to Universal Basic Education (UBE) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was strengthened.

The MOES Institute for Educational Administration Development (IEAD) was established for improving the Ministry's human resource development functions. The Teacher Development Center (TDC; a unit within IEAD) supports development of curricula and instructional materials for all pre-service training programs in support of the new education system (5 + 4 + 3) and competency-based curricula.

MOES also introduced a Bachelor-level Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP) for lower and upper secondary education teachers, which places a greater focus on soft skills. Under the present system of teacher allocation to schools, MOES determines the number of candidates per province to attend teacher education. After they have completed their education program, they usually return to their home province, take a provincial examination, and are allocated by the provincial and the district authorities to schools (RIES, 2007, p. 64).

Teachers and Teaching/Learning Practices

Primary Teachers' Characteristics and Their Work Situation

Teaching and Learning Standards. The aim of the NCTC is to support good teaching methods through pre-service teacher education programs, practical teaching experience, and in-service teacher education programs. The main categories used for assessment of teacher performance and to guide teachers' professional development include teachers':

- Personal characteristics and professional ethics;
- Knowledge and understanding of children;
- Subject matter knowledge; and
- Pedagogical knowledge.

Teachers can be promoted to higher positions with a salary increment (Sect. 5 below) based on performance assessment.

Table 11.5 Assessments of student learning outcomes (ASLO)

ASLO	Year	Grade	Subjects	Sample size
I	2006	5	Lao language, Mathematics, World around us (WAU)	7450
II	2009	5	Lao language, Mathematics, World around us (WAU)	6188
III	2011	3	Lao language, Mathematics	5860
IV	2017	3	Lao language, Mathematics	17,535

Sources RIES (2007, 2010, 2014, 2018)

Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES). The main research unit under MOES is the Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES),² which regularly conducts curriculum-based nationally representative sample surveys of student achievement. The results of these surveys are reported under the collective title Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO).

These surveys also include information about characteristics of teachers and classroom teaching and learning practice (see Table 11.5). The main findings from these surveys are reported below.

The teacher characteristics reported here are based on the findings of the ASLO national surveys shown in Table 11.5 above and other sources as noted.

Basic Characteristics and Conditions of Teachers. At Grade 3 level, approximately 52% of teachers are female, but at Grade 5 level approximately 60% of teachers are male. The mean age of teachers is around 35 years. Primary school teachers have on average about 10–15 years of teaching experience.

Teachers at Grade 3 level consider career advancement, perception of teacher status, and educational outcomes to be most important. Relationships with others are important, especially relationships with the school management and the community. The most important sources of satisfaction for teachers are salary, teaching techniques, and having teaching and learning materials. Very few teachers have a paid second job, although many teachers in rural and remote areas work in farming, and a few provide extra teaching outside school hours (ESQAC & Emblen, 2011).

Most teachers live in their own housing or with their parents, but 10% live in government housing. Living conditions are generally not seen as important sources of satisfaction.

Almost all classrooms have blackboards, a teacher's desk, and a table, but many schools in rural and remote areas do not have electricity or bookshelves. Nearly all students have sitting and writing places and are in non-shift classrooms, but there are too few books in classroom book corners—often not more than about 25.

Most teachers have access to teacher guides, but only half have access to extra reading materials, and less than 20% have access to a Lao dictionary.

Teaching Practices. The teaching load for Grade 3 teachers is approximately 30–35 h per week, typically around 4 h in the morning and 3 h in afternoon (ESQAC & Emblen, 2011). The Grade 5 teaching load is typically 35–36 h per week, and

² Formerly named National Research Institute for Educational Sciences (NRIES).

teachers spend approximately 7 h per week checking homework and preparing lessons. Teachers usually meet parents about four times per year.

For teaching the Lao language the most important pupil activities are “Working in pairs or groups to discuss”, followed by “quizzes, tests, examinations, etc.”, and “learning by heart, reciting tables”. “Individual teaching” and teaching in small groups are uncommon approaches.

As goals, “thinking skills” and “basic reading skills” are considered very important, while “enjoy doing an exercise in Lao” or “writing a story” are considered less important.

Almost all Grade 3 and Grade 5 teachers assign homework in Lao Language and Math at least once or twice per week, sometimes as often as 3–4 times per week, and they almost always correct the homework.

Visits by School Principals and Pedagogical Advisors. Pedagogical Advisors (PAs) are selected from among the professional personnel at the provincial and district education offices. The provincial education offices then organize the training of the advisors. The Heads of the District Education Offices decide which schools are to be visited by the PA. According to the regulations, each teacher should be visited by a PA three times per year, but many report that they are visited by a PA less than twice per year. Most teachers view the PA’s role as giving advice, but many feel that the PAs contribute little to improving the classroom teaching. Most teachers report that they are visited by the school Principal at least once a term but are seldom observed by other teachers.

Lower Secondary Teachers’ Characteristics and Their Work Situation

Lower Secondary School Survey (LSSS). In 2006 the Lower Secondary School Survey (LSSS) was conducted at Grade 6 level and included classroom observation in Lao language classes and mathematics classes (Benveniste et al., 2007).³ Only about 75% of the teachers had prepared lesson plans, and only half of the teachers reported that they had frequent informal conversations with other teachers about teaching. Nearly half reported visiting another teacher’s classroom, but few did so on a regular basis. More than half reported that their lessons were observed monthly by the school Principal, and most reported that the visits were very helpful. Few teachers reported being visited by officials from MOES, the PESS, or the DESO (ibid., pp. 83–84).

Students were usually assigned homework approximately three times per week. Students usually worked individually, rather than in groups. Teachers often gave praise or encouragement but rarely scolded. They often asked students to give opinions. Both teachers and students used the blackboard. Almost 90% of teachers copied lessons from the textbook onto the blackboard. Most teachers reported that they

³ The LSSS was not based on a nationally representative sample.

emphasized the importance of developing *thinking skills and problem-solving*, but in practice the most common method of instruction was *frontal lecturing, copying lessons on the board, recitation, and memorizing* (ibid., pp. 85–86).

Teacher Recruitment, Employment, Deployment, and Management

Categories of Teachers. There are several categories of teachers:

- “Quota teachers” are civil servants, whose salary is based on a long-term commitment established by the National Assembly and the Ministry of Finance—the “government quota”;
- “Contract teachers” are usually employed on a one-year contract, and their salary is determined on the basis of non-binding recommendations by MOES and agreed by the both parties—usually the teacher and the DESO or the PESS;
- “Community teachers” or “village teachers” are employed by the local community. Their remuneration is based on negotiations between the teacher and school or the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC).

These employment categories do not always reflect formal qualifications. There are quota teachers who are underqualified (especially by current standards), and volunteer teachers who are qualified recent TEI graduates seeking a “quota assignment”. Such contract and volunteer teachers typically constitute some 8–10% of primary school teachers and 12–16% of secondary school teachers.

Pay Conditions. Teacher pay scales in public schools are nationally standardized. Salary supplement are provided to attract qualified teachers to serve in some areas:

- 30% for remote and isolated area;
- 40% for remote and mountainous areas; and
- 50% for especially difficult areas.

There are also pay supplements for multi-grade teaching: an increment of 25% for two-grade classes and 50% for three-grade classes.

Teachers are allowed to have some kinds of other paid employment outside the regular working hours. Many teachers tutor students or use their skills in other areas than education. For example, some English teachers work as tourist guides, and some technology teachers provide ICT or other technical support. In rural areas, many teachers receive payment in kind in the form of rice from parents’ associations. In some places they may receive land or wood when the community builds a school (Barma & Orac, 2014, *passim*).

Even with salary supplements, there is often a supply and demand imbalance between urban, rural, and remote areas. This is due in part to lack of qualified teachers applying for positions in rural and remote areas (MOES 2019b). More qualified teachers tend to prefer to teach in urban areas, so positions in urban areas are often

“over-subscribed” (Barma & Orac, 2014, p. 18). See also Gender, Ethnicity, and Geography below.

In principle, the main determinant of teacher allocation is the official Student/Teacher Ratio (STR) targets, as shown in Table 11.6. It is sometimes suggested that the teacher shortage in rural and remote areas is due to the small class size in such areas, but the evidence is mixed, as shown in Table 11.7. However, it is inherently difficult to control the actual STR in communities with a small number of children of primary school age. For primary school the STR target is 34:1, but in small schools this can be difficult to achieve. For example, consider a community with 46 children at Grade 3 level. If there is only one Grade 3 teacher, the STR is 46:1, which is too high by 12; if there are two Grade 3 teachers, the STR is 23:1, which is too low by 11.

The conditions in many small rural and remote communities cannot support complete schools (primary schools with all five grades) with one teacher per grade.

Table 11.6 Student/teacher ratios targets by level of educational institution

Type of institution	Education sector development plan 2011	Teacher education action plan 2011	PMO decree 2012
Pre-school	20:1	20:1	15:1
Primary school	31:1	30:1	34:1
Lower secondary school	25:1	25:1	30:1
Upper secondary school	20:1	20:1	25:1
Vocational school	–	–	20:1
Teacher education institutions	–	25:1	–
University	–	30:1	30:1

Sources “Education Sector Development Plan”. (MOES 2011a)

“Teacher Education Action Plan 2011-2015”. (MOES 2011b)

“Decree on Teacher Civil Servants”. (Prime Minister’s Office 2012)

Note The PMO Decree covers only public institutions

Table 11.7 Mean class size for remote, rural, and urban primary schools

Location	ASLO I, 2006		ASLO II, 2009		ASLO III, 2011	
	Grades 1–5	Grade 5	Grades 1–5	Grade 5	Grades 1–5	Grade 3
Remote	33.8	26.2	35.7	28.9	25.3	26.6
Rural	31.1	27.7	31.6	26.9	38.2	26.0
Urban	33.5	33.2	27.0	27.6	30.8	29.1
National	32.6	30.5	30.5	27.3	34.4	29.6

Sources RIES (2007, p. 101; 2010, p. 142; 2014, p. 120)

Note These figures are estimates based on large-scale national sample surveys

The two most common solutions to managing STRs so that all children can attend school are *multi-grade teaching* and *shifting* (see Fig. 11.1). Approximately 26–28% of primary classrooms nationwide conduct multi-grade instruction, but the figures vary considerably, from 5% in Vientiane Capital to over 50% in the most sparsely populated provinces (MOES 2020a, p. 11). Shifting (*i.e.* students attend only the morning shift or only the afternoon shift) is much less common. At Grade 3 approximately 8% of students attend shifted classes; at Grade 5 level approximately 3% of students attend shifted classes (RIES, 2014, p. 79; 2010, p.88).

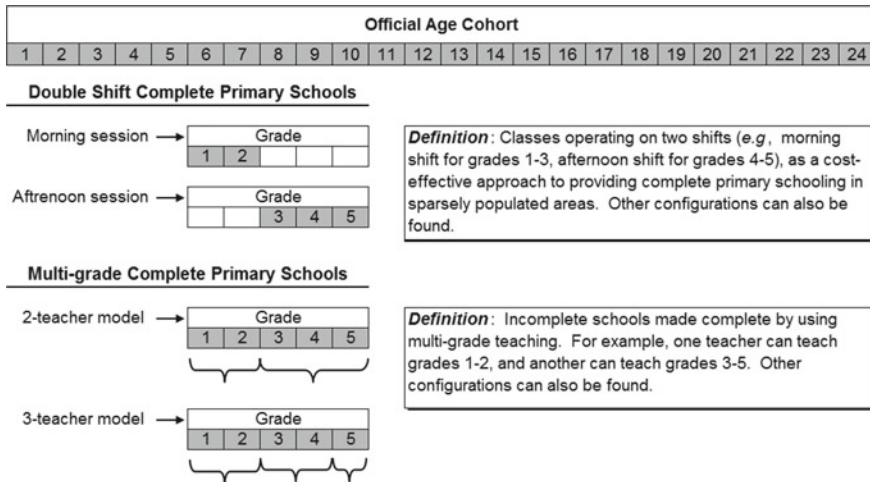


Fig. 11.1 Shifting and multi-grade classrooms

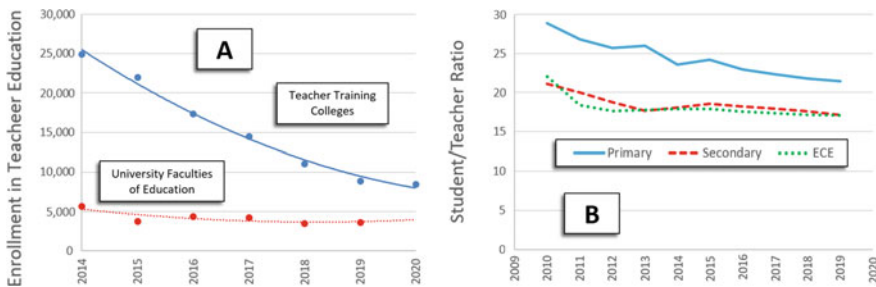


Fig. 11.2 TEI enrolments and student/teacher ratios. Source MOES Annual School Census 2013/14 to 2019/2020; LAOSIS 2021

Issues and Challenges

Quality: Pre-service and In-service Education and Training

Practice Teaching. The time allocated to TEI students for actual classroom teaching practice is quite short. The two-year Diploma program for primary school teachers provides only one week of classroom observation in each of first three semesters and 10 weeks of practice teaching in the final semester.

The 2016–2020 ESDP recommends one demonstration school be attached to each TEI, with defined missions and duties for the professional development of teachers (MOES 2015, p. 57). Practice teaching is typically conducted in complete schools (*i.e.* schools with all five primary school grades) and only single-grade classrooms. The conditions thus model “best practices”, but some student teachers (“teacher trainees”) never experience the kind of multi-grade classrooms and shifting context in which they ultimately will teach.

Facilities. The facilities and resources available to TEIs are often inadequate and outdated. Often they do not allow for practical exercises, they lack science laboratories and ICT facilities, and they have limited access to reading and reference materials. The 2016–2020 ESDP strategy for increasing the quality of teaching in TEIs includes improvement of laboratories, IT facilities, libraries, and student dormitories (MOES 2015, p. 60).

In-service Programs. In-service teacher education is typically based on a cascade approach involving lecture and theory-oriented content that often does not reflect the individual teacher’s real conditions and needs.

It is suggested that the approach of internal supervision should involve more school-based professional development. That would provide more effective support for existing school-based teacher professional development, managed by principals and supervised by PAs. Principals’ monthly meetings should be coordinated with a TEI in-service planning at district and province level, supported by a professional development network (PDN).

Capacity of TEI Faculties

Inclusive Education and Special Needs. The National Strategy and Action Plan on Inclusive Education was an important step towards Education for All (MOES 2011a), but the number of teacher educators with expertise in “special needs” education is very limited. As a result, the integration of special needs and disability into the pre-service teacher education programs is quite limited. The ESDP 2016–2020 strategy includes developing TEI lecturers’ skills for teaching learners with diverse learning needs, such as those whose mother tongue is non-Lao Tai and children with special needs (MOES 2015, p. 58).

Important development goals for TEI lecturers include:

- Improvement of pedagogical knowledge of TEI lecturers for teaching Lao language reading and writing, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences;
- Development of skill in the use of laboratories for teaching biology, chemistry, and physics;
- Development of the capacity for classroom-based research and encouraging study for Master's and Ph.D. degrees;
- Improvement of proficiency in the English language and ICT; and
- Development of the capacity of TEI lecturers and encouragement to be active in speaking and writing about education, and provision of consulting services.

Recruitment and Deployment

The Common Lao Perception of School Teachers. In Laos, teaching is regarded as a “noble profession”, and teachers are often influential members of their communities. In remote communities they often hold leadership positions and have a significant influence on the social and political development. Nevertheless, teaching is not generally regarded as a “fully fledged profession”. In addition, low salaries and minimal power and authority result in the relatively low status of school teaching compared with other professions (MacKinnon & Thepphasoulithone 2014, p. 21).

Gender, Ethnicity, and Geography. Inclusiveness is an integral feature of Lao education policy, and it is thus also a feature of teacher education. The 2011–2015 Teacher Education Action Plan emphasizes “gender balance, geographic, and ethnic distribution”, although no specific targets are given for the gender distribution of teachers (MOES 2011b, *passim*). Table 11.8 shows the distribution and the Gender

Table 11.8 Gender distribution of students in TTCs and FOEs

Program	Female	Male	% Fem	GPIA
<i>TTCs</i>				
Pre-school	1884	0	100	2.00
Primary	931	599	61	1.36
Secondary	2262	1754	56	1.22
Secondary Secular Specialist TTCs*	428	479	47	0.89
Sum of Secular TTCs	5505	2832	66	1.49
<i>FOEs</i>				
Bachelor level	2205	1597	58	1.28
Master's level	67	110	38	0.61
Sum TTCs and FOEs	7777	4539	63	1.42

Source MOES (2019a, pp. 58–65, 69–74)

* Includes Music and Arts TTC and Physical Education TTC but does not include the two Buddhist monk TTCs

Table 11.9 Distribution of ethnic groups in Laos

Ethnic group	%
Lao Tai	62.4
Mon-Khmer	23.7
Hmong–Yao	9.7
Tibeto-Burman	2.9
Other	1.2

Source MOPI (2016. Table P2.7, pp. 121–122), author summation

Parity Index Adjusted (GPIA)⁴ by teaching program level for TTCs and FOEs. The most significant gender imbalance at TEIs is at the Pre-school level, where all of the teachers are female. Geography is another source of imbalance, and secondary schools in rural and remote areas often lack qualified teachers (MOES 2019b, p. 3).

Laos is a multi-ethnic society, as shown in Table 11.9. In some areas—typically small towns, rural, and remote areas—language barriers present a significant challenge affecting education participation and quality, especially for very young children. Where children and their teachers are members of the same ethnic group, there is a visibly close relationship between the teachers and children. Where the children and their teachers are members of different ethnic groups, “the children tend to play among themselves rather than demand the attention of the teacher” (MOES 2020b, p. 4).

Financing the Civil Servant Quota. New TEI graduates cannot always be recruited as teachers due to the limited civil servant quota (see Categories of Teachers above), and as a result new admissions into TEIs are sometimes reduced by the authorities. Nevertheless, many TEI graduates are not recruited. The shortage of teachers in rural and remote areas often leads to oversize classes, multi-grade classes, or shifting. These conditions are among the factors causing high repetition rates at primary level (MOES, 2019b, *passim*). In late 2020, according to a Prime Ministerial decision, the largest number of new civil servants were to be allocated to MOES, almost all of whom were to be teachers (Vientiane Times, 31 December 2020, p. 3).

Statistical Trends

The Data Set and the Projections

This section provides statistical information on development trends, in some cases with author estimates to 2020. The source of the data set used for most of the tables below is the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), but the original source of the

⁴ Gender parity is indicated when GPIA = 1.0. GPIA < 1.0 shows that the indicator in question for is lower for females than for males. GPIA > 1.0 shows that the indicator for females is higher than that for males.

data used here is the MOES Statistics and Information Technology Center (SITC), unless otherwise noted. The SITC data are used annually to produce the MOES Annual School Census. The advantage of using the UIS data set is that the data are conveniently structured for time series analysis and are based on standardized definitions that facilitate cross-national comparisons. The tables below cover both public and private institutions.

Teacher Deployment and Characteristics

Over the past decade there has been a significant decline in TEI enrolments, raising concern about TEI policies and practices. The decline is due in part to the issues discussed above in Financing the Civil Servant Quota. A closer examination, however, suggests two other developments leading to this decline. First, Laos experienced rising economic growth rate from the early 1990s, accompanied by declining fertility rates, leading in turn to a slight decline in the higher education population cohort from 2012. This same decline in enrolments has also been seen in the whole higher education subsector at large (Moxom & Noonan, 2021).

Second, the rapid growth of employment opportunities in the industrial sector has tended to attract many youth who do not see teacher education as a path to attractive employment opportunities. Despite the decline in TEI enrolments, however, Student/Teacher ratios have also declined at all levels, from pre-school through secondary, as shown in Fig. 11.2 and Table 11.10.

Table 11.11 displays the gender distribution of teachers at each level. At pre-primary level, almost all teachers were women throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, although a small number of men entered the profession. At all other levels the distribution was more balanced, but the trend has been towards an increasing proportion of female teachers, approaching gender parity by the end of the second decade.

Table 11.10 Actual and projected student/teacher ratios, by level

	Actual				Estimated
	1999/00	2004/05	2009/10	2014/15	2019/20
Pre-primary	17	15	19	19	18
Primary	30	31	29	24	20
Lower secondary	22	23	20	18	16
Upper secondary	21	28	21	19	18

Source <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, accessed 30 November 2018

Table 11.11 Gender distribution of teachers, by level (% female) from 2000

	Actual				Estimated
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Pre-primary	100	99	97	98	99
Primary	43	45	51	51	52
Lower secondary	41	41	47	52	51
Upper secondary	39	44	47	46	51

Source <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, accessed 23 February 2021

Table 11.12 Proportion teachers with required qualifications, by level (%)

	Actual				Estimated
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Pre-primary	81.3	81.8	97.5	91.5	90
Primary	76.7	83.4	95.4	98.4	97
Lower secondary	98.5	91.0	99.3	99.5	98
Upper secondary	95.6	89.8	99.4	99.0	98

Source <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>, accessed 23 February 2021

Teacher Qualifications

At the pre-school and primary levels the proportion of trained teachers has risen considerably since the beginning of the twenty-first century, as shown in Table 11.12. At the secondary level the proportion of trained teachers has remained relatively stable but may have declined very slightly from 2015 to 2020. This possible decline may be a reflection of two factors. First, due to rising qualification standards, some teachers who were classified as “Trained” in 2000 were classified as “Untrained” in the later statistics. Second, with of the education system reform (see National Education System Reform above) and the rapid expansion of enrolment at the secondary level, some teachers who were qualified at a lower level were “promoted” to teach at a level for which they were not formally qualified.

Conclusions

Although faced with considerable challenges, the teacher education system has developed favourably from the beginning of the century. Student/Teacher ratios have improved and the proportion of qualified school teachers has risen even as the number of TEI students has declined. Significant challenges remain, however. One of the most difficult challenges is to provide quality schooling in rural and remote communities,

especially where many children come from homes and communities where the Lao language is not spoken.

Appendix

Appendix: Selected Policy Aims for Teacher Education in ESSDP 2016–2020

By 2020

- 70% of all new trainees are selected by passing entrance examinations, and 30% are quota students awarded scholarships after selection by provinces
 - 95% of all contracted teacher trainees are recruited as teachers
 - 3 to 5 TEIs prepare teachers for pre-school teacher education
 - 5 to 6 TEIs train primary teachers at Bachelor's level
 - 6 to 7 TEIs train secondary education teachers at Bachelor's level in selected subjects based on the strength and readiness of each TEI to teach these subjects
 - Each TEI has a demonstration school annex, with defined missions and duties in detail for implementation; and
 - Each TEI has the capacity to support continuing professional development for general education teachers through in-service training programs
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Source MOES (2015, pp. 56–57)

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