

Laos was given nominal independence by France on March 11, 1947 and full independence in 1954 when France signed a peace treaty with the Ho Chi Minh forces. While France had control of Indo-China which included areas now designated as Cambodia, North and South Vietnam and Laos, the school system was centrally administered from the headquarters in Hanoi.

Although Laos was given a state Education Department in 1948, which was charged with developing the schools, little real progress was made until the first French sponsored four-year teacher-training school class was graduated in 1951.

France continued its interest in Lao education and pursuant to an agreement arrived at between the two countries in 1954 (and revised several times since) provides assistance to schools. The major part of this assistance is in the form of instructors for secondary and teacher-training schools although she also provides some construction of educational institutions and technical services outside the educational field.

Teacher training in Laos has had a long and varied existence with a gradual evolution toward developing Lao nationalism. In 1927, a four-year teacher-training school was opened in Vientiane with an enrollment of twenty-two students. The first secondary school was also opened in the fall of 1944, Lycee Pavie in Vientiane. This largely French operated teacher-training school continued to be the only one of its kind in Laos until 1959. By Royal Ordinance in 1958, the Sisavang Vong University was established in Vientiane and by Presidential Decree in 1959 teacher-training was added to the University and the objectives for the school formalized. Thus, the Ecole Supérieure de Pédagogie (ESP and also referred to as the National Education Center, Km-9, Dong Saphaxmek or the College of Education,) was added to the list of schools already enumerated for the University the School of Law and Administration, School of Agriculture and School of Medicine.

The United States started assisting Lao teacher education in 1956 when it undertook the development of buildings for the ESP. The building site, nine kilometers from Vientiane, was first occupied by the English Section in 1960 and the five-year school in the city was moved to the new site and the former buildings were converted to an elementary school. To the four-year program conducted by the French was added an English teaching section in 1959. This section was sponsored by the USAID program through a contract with the University of Michigan.

The seven-year program was initiated at the ESP in 1961 so that students would have the equivalent education to that being received in the Lycee (13 years of education). Since the four-year program previously conducted at the school, and increased to seven-years, was directed by the French, the English Section admitted students at the equivalent level of grade nine and operated an "accelerated" five-year program. Thus, the first graduates from the accelerated five-year English Section and seven-Year French Section graduated in 1964. All these graduates were given scholarships for one or more years to study abroad.

In 1962, for the first time, a plan had been written and adopted to give direction to the educational program in the country. "The National Reform Act for Education" outlined what should be taught in the schools, how teachers should be prepared, and generally outlined ages and capability standards for all levels of education.

As a result of the Reform Act, three one-year teacher-training institutions were established. These schools, called Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs (ENI), were started in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse. The graduates from the one-year schools were being prepared to teach in village elementary schools where children were enrolled for the first three years of primary education. The graduates of the four-year training program were to teach in any of the first six years of primary schools.

There are now seven teacher-training institutions in Laos with another one planned for opening during the 1968-1969 school year. The school in Vientiane (ESP) conducts four-, seven- and nine-year programs with three sections; four-year program in Lao with Lao instruction; a four- and seven-year program is in French and the seven- and nine-year program is in English and French. Luang Prabang and Pakse (ENI) each has a two and four-year program. Nam Thong and Vang Vieng (ENI) each has a two-year program. Savannakhet opened its doors for a two- and four-year program in the fall of 1968. And another two-year program started at Ban Keun in 1968 while in 1970 a two-year program will have started at Xene Thon.

A gradual change in the quality and quantity of education in Laos can be noted during the last twenty years. The number of Lao with college degrees working in education has been decidedly limited. In 1965, there were only four Lao with college degrees teaching in the schools, three were teaching education courses and the other was the Director of the ESP. As students return from their studies abroad they are added to the teacher-training and secondary school staffs. With a larger number of educated Lao being added to the staffs, the quality of instruction is steadily improving and the program changing. In time, it is hoped that the minimum for entrance to teacher-training will be changed from six years to ten years of previous education. In

this way, more students will get two years (present nine year program) of college work in Laos and four years of higher education. In 1970 this will be the requirement for the English language students at the National Education Center (NEC) in Vientiane.

It is essential for understanding teacher-training that an understanding of the total educational structure in Laos be secured. Village schools usually contain one, two or three grades. These are taught by graduates of the one and two year ENI programs or by CRAC (Centre Rural de l'Education Communautaire) teachers with less than the required (6 years plus one or two additional years) education. Some of these teachers are bonzes or monks. Many villages, though not all of them, have an elementary or pagoda school (P. 1-3). All towns and cities have elementary (P. 1-6) schools. Elementary schools with six grades are generally called Groupes Scolaires and are staffed by two-year or four-year ENI graduates (grades 4, 5 and 6).

After passing the "CEP Examination" from a Groupe Scolaire a student can apply to enter an ENI or ESP, technical-vocational school, College, Lycee or two-year craft school. If he fails the entrance examination to one of these schools twice his education is terminated. The craft school is a two-year vocational school and is terminal. The vocational-technical schools are four-year programs except for one which has a seven-year program, and are terminal. The one-, two- and four-year ENI programs are terminal. Graduates of a college (grades 7, 8, 9, 10) can take the examination for entrance to a Lycee (grades 11, 12 or 11, 12, 13). These public lycées (Savannakhet, Pakse and Luang Prabang) are grades 11 and 12. A limited number of these graduates can gain entrance to the thirteenth year at the Vientiane Lycee. At present, there are fourteen public secondary schools and fourteen private secondary schools in the country. French is the medium of instruction in all lycées and most public Colleges. Thus, a student wanting to advance on the educational ladder must begin acquiring and ability in French during the fourth year of school. A recent innovation has been the establishment of an American style comprehensive high school in Vientiane. Named after a Lao King, Phoungum, it is the first of several to be built in the kingdom, the second will open in late 1969 at Phone Hong.

The present situation in teacher education is encouraging even though less than adequate for preparing sufficient qualified teachers for the schools in the nation. The ESP will have new laboratory buildings and is prepared to handle 1500-1600 enrollees. Construction at Luang Prabang and Pakse ENI's is close to completion and will eventually enroll 500-600 students each institution. The Savannakhet ENI will also enroll 500-600 students. The Vang Vieng ENI will enroll 250-300 students (two-year program) and the Sar Thong ENI will house 80-100 students. The ESP is gradually changing to an advanced teacher-training institution and will eventually enroll students having completed ten years of education. Thus, the five-year program will give two years and the seven-year program four years of college work.

To arrive at these ends, studies are under way to develop more comprehensive programs of instruction. IVS team members play a vital role in this development. A curriculum and course of study has been in the process of development during the 1966-1967 school year which will give direction to the program for years to come. English teaching materials have been re-evaluated for the LIT.

The future of teacher-training in Laos looks promising. Thus, the demand for teachers, particularly in newly built village schools, is and will continue to be far greater than the number of teachers graduated annually from the teacher-training institutions. The upgrading of teachers and providing them with additional years of training in academic and professional courses should gradually have an effect upon the population as a whole. Temporary teachers, who teach by the month and are not regular government employees, are necessary to fill the gap while Laos waits for an increased production of comparatively well-trained teachers.

More attention is being paid to methodology in teaching at the training schools and the many in-service education workshops for teachers. More laboratory work is being introduced to teacher-trainees and practical arts now are an integral part of the training curriculum. Participants with Bachelor and Master degrees are returning to assume positions of importance. Improved methods of maintenance and repair have been taught and improved bookkeeping methods are becoming evident. All of these are indicators of progress and change for the better educational system to come.

The history of teacher education is linked closely with IVS in Laos. IVS started functioning in 1959 and has had an ever-increasing role in program development and implementation. Staff positions are eliminated as counterparts are trained to assume responsibilities and new responsibilities are assumed when needed until a Lao can fully handle the intricacies involved. Until the teacher-training schools can be fully manned by Lao personnel, IVS will continue to have a key role in the educational system of the country.

Other countries have also supplied nationals to assist in the teacher-training program. Australia has furnished one to three; Great Britain five; Canada four; Japan three; France fifty-five; India one; Thailand three;

An additional note should be added here as to the relationship among all foreign nationals and their contribution to teacher-training and the responsibility of each to the schools. The schools for training teachers are Lao schools and exist for the purpose of better training teachers to teach in the Lao schools. All foreign nationals in the future will leave the scene and the Lao will staff all of their schools. This means that all teachers will have to be trained, in Laos and abroad, to take over all schools including the teacher-training schools.

Decisions relative to the number and responsibility of French instructors are arrived at in conferences between the governments of Laos and France, meeting in Vientiane and in Paris in alternate years. At these meetings the Lao government describes how far it can go in meeting their needs. The Lao government anticipates that France will continue to furnish between 250 and 300 teachers in the schools until 1975 when, it is expected, most teachers from France will be withdrawn.

Decisions relative to assistance AID offers are finalized in budget reports prepared by AID each summer, usually in June. This budget report contains all the ideas developed during the year in countless discussions between Americans and Laotians. That is, the Teacher Education Advisor discusses possibilities with the ministry of education and with the French, UNESCO, Australia, Great Britain, India, New Zealand, Thailand, etc. Thus, everyone sharing in the American effort contributes to the content of the annual budget report.

The ultimate responsibility for deciding the quantity and extent of assistance for Laos belongs to the Teacher Education Advisor, in consultation with the Chief Advisor of the Education Division, the Director of the Program Office, and finally the Director of the AID Mission. Teacher-training has been assigned a priority consistent with the realization that the true measure of any society is the education its members receive.

USAID describes the job to be done, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, and then recruits personnel to do the work, or contracts such work to organizations like IVS, or universities. Included are direct-hire AID personnel, members of the IVS team and individuals hired on personal services contract. After AID has described the job to be done, and recruited staff, it then supervises the process and evaluates the results. Finally, it adjusts the program according to results obtained and progress desired.

All Americans working at the NHC in teacher-training are under the leadership of the IVS Chief of Party. Professionally, all persons are under the leadership of the Teacher Education Advisor, who in turn reports to the Chief of Advisor of the Education Division. These two AID staff members share responsibility for all that happens, good or bad, in teacher-training.

The final evaluation of the contribution made by each and every American and third country national will be the quality of the performance of the Lao who take over after the American or other national departs. The over-all measure of our work is the quality of teacher-training in general after we have left and the Lao are carrying on alone. Any individual who leaves nothing behind or leaves a program which is poorly used after he departs has not made his contribution to the needs of the Lao.

For this reason, it is a firmly established policy that we will do anything which is not sincerely desired by the Lao officials. We will not build a building which is not desired by the Lao officials nor will we send a participant abroad for study who has not been chosen by the Lao officials.

Each individual in the American team is a specialist in some field. It is each person's responsibility to explore means and to plan accomplishment. It is each person's responsibility to develop ideas and discuss them with the rest. However, in the end, after every individual has shared in the planning and in the decision-making, we then must join together in working within the policy arrived at.

The total process of joint planning and decision-making is not an easy one. It requires that we take time to share ideas. It requires that each person respect the other's integrity and specialty. Patience and tolerance are never easily exercised, but we must try.

#### Special problems in teaching at the College of Education, Vientiane

There are several special factors, cultural and academic, which are necessary to mention in relation to foreign nationals teaching there.

1. A student comes to the school to study in a second language, French or English. (only a small percentage study in Lao) This, of course, has a braking effect on the speed with which the student performs.

2. A student cannot enter the school until he has finished the eighth year of education. At this time the teachers usually expect him to be able to absorb material equivalent to that in an American high school or junior high school. This cannot be done. A Lao student does not have the background or frame of reference to start using such materials with understanding. Many of the references we take for granted are just not in the Lao student's experience. In connection with this many examples can be given. Vocabulary, for example, does not usually include many of the "modern" day terms such as locomotive, supermarket, orchestra, elevator, etc. Thus, using textbooks which contain such words, and other foreign concepts, do pose a problem to the student and to the teacher. Though the Lao language may have a word for these terms, the concept is often totally foreign to the student. Indeed, the most basic concepts of world geography can be extremely remote and difficult to a student whose boundaries have been measured in visual distance from his own village and paddies.

From our experience, we also take for granted certain skills which we feel these students have begun to gain because they completed six years of school. Among these are basic skills of studying, using libraries, a curiosity about subject matter, and some ability to express oneself in speaking and writing a foreign language. These things cannot be taken for granted at the College of Education. We must always work at viewing the student in terms of his own background experience, frame of reference and language facility.

3. We assume generally that 7th graders will be 12 or 13 years old. In Laos this is usually not true. Most of the students at the College of Education are in their middle teens or older.

Because of the Lao system of education, it is possible for a person to keep taking tests or continuing school until he is able to pass a test into the school he wants to enter or until he settles for a second test and goes to any school that will take him. Even at this, less than 10% of those applying for admission to schools that go beyond the 6th grade are accepted.

4. Many students at the College are there on scholarship. This in itself is not bad except that in many cases it tends to put the emphasis of education on the wrong thing. Students tend to study, not to gain knowledge, but to keep their scholarships for another free year of life and for the chance of going to another country to study. Learning another language also facilitates them in getting a job with a much higher pay scale than they could expect with only Lao. Therefore, much of a teacher's job will be to motivate the students to see the need for education and the real practical value of the subjects.

The practical arts and agriculture have an especially hard time in this respect. Although the Royal Lao Government has said that an increasing emphasis shall be put on practical subjects, the system of education seems to induce the philosophy that education precludes any need to do manual labor or gain manual skills.

### 5. Study Halls

All students at the College have regular study halls at night throughout the week. According to our standards they should study during these periods and we should be able to give them homework to do during this time. The study halls, however, are supervised only by older students. The pupils cannot get help from them and often the homework is more confusing than helpful.

To help them, we have been supervising study halls in the evening on a rotating basis. We serve as a source from which to obtain help only and do not act as disciplinarians. ?

If you want to give homework assignments make them specific and use material which has already been discussed and explained. In giving reading assignments, decide the most important points which you wish the student to gain and discuss them as you give the assignment.

### 6. Copying

In our school system a student who helps or is helped by a friend gets a black mark. In Laos there is no stigma attached to this kind of help given among friends. This philosophy of the students almost negates any type of objective testing unless handled carefully. A teacher cannot

tell or explain to a student why he should not help his friends in tests, it is so foreign to the student's ideas that he doesn't comprehend. Therefore, to implement the philosophy, if a teacher wants to give an objective test he should explain but also he should also remove as many factors as possible that are inductive to copying. This can be done by spacing desks carefully, roving around the room, and/or making two different copies of the tests with different order for alternate students. Continued explanation of the reasons for a true test of his knowledge along with physical reminders eventually help the student along with giving a few zeros to those caught cheating.

#### 7. Spitting

Don't be shocked when during one of your most interesting class lectures or discussions from one to half of the class clear their throats loudly and then dash to the window to spit. It's a habit as acceptable to them as a handkerchief is to us. It is your prerogative as a teacher to request them not to spit during class. An explanation of the hygienic reasons for this and the social aspects of it will help your morale but won't faze them much. Continued reminders can eliminate the practice during your class period but the habit will probably remain.

#### 8. Cultural Taboos

- Don't pat a good student on the head. Heads are sacred.
- Don't touch students, especially of the opposite sex.
- Don't lose your temper and raise your voice.
- When sitting don't point your feet at anyone.
- Don't be too critical with a student in the presence of his peers

#### The Observant

In small matters they respect your ability to adjust. You are not, however, a Lao teacher and no matter how you try you won't be accepted as one. It's much better to be accepted as a courteous American teacher who knows and accepts Lao ways, but not to the detriment of his own culture and physical and mental health.

#### The grading system

The grading system at NEC follows the French system of grading in which the basis is 20. There are several reasons for using this system. All progress given are determined from grades given on the French system. All school procedures are based on this system. It facilitates the school records if all grading systems are alike.

#### How does it work?

A student is graded in each subject every trimester. Each subject is assigned a coefficient. This is a number which shows the relative importance of a subject. Usually, the academic subjects and the language of instruction have the highest coefficients and the industrial arts and minor subjects have lower coefficients. Coefficients are assigned from 5 to 1, the coefficient of 5 being assigned to the most important subjects.

As an example, Wath, a third-year student in the English Section, has 8 subjects.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Total</u>
English (primary language of instruction)	6 x	13	<del>72</del> 78
French (secondary language of instruction)	2	12	24
Social Studies	4	12	<del>48</del> 48
Science	4	15	<del>60</del> 60
Math	4	11	<del>44</del> 44
Art, physical Education	2	10	20
Practical Arts (Woodshop Art)	1	15	15
Totals	23		289

In this grading system, Wath's grades (given on the basis of 20) are multiplied by the coefficient. In English  $6 \times 13 = 78$ . In Math  $4 \times 11 = 44$ . The total of the combined grades, each multiplied by its coefficient is then divided by the total number of coefficients. Thus, 289 divided by 23 equals 12.56 is Wath's grade for the trimester. By comparing his grade with those of the rest of the class, his standing in the class for the trimester is also determined.

#### Some problems involved:

According to school procedures, in order for a student to receive an unconditional pass, the average of all his grades for one complete year must be 12 or above 12. In other words, his grades must be averaged for all three trimesters and the average must be 12 or above 12. Averages below 12, but above 10, are conditional passes and require various improvement procedures for promotion.

An average below 10 is failing.

If a student is graded too high in one subject, he can pass the trimester or year even though his whole academic background indicates that he would benefit by being held back a grade. In non-academic subjects, it is especially important not to grade too high. A very poor student academically can keep getting through because of his high grades in non-academic subjects. Among other problems this causes, it is not fair to the student who needs the academic work. Therefore great care should be taken to give a student a fair grade.

#### Explanation of number grades

(Grades below 10)

- 0 - 7.9 Automatic failure and exclusion from continuing.
- 8 - 9.0 Automatic right to repeat the year failed or he may retake the examination if the "July" recommends it. If second examination is passed, he advances; if not, he repeats.

- 10 - 11.9 May retake major subjects examinations or pass if Jury recommends without exam.
- Minimum to pass.
- 12 - 13.9 Fair enough - average.
- 14 - 15.9 Good
- 16 - 17.9 Very good
- 18 - 20 Excellent with congratulations of the "Jury".

Student Discipline - point system

In the discipline area, each student begins the academic year with 600 points. For each infraction of the rules of discipline he is judged by a committee on discipline, which includes his peers, and assigned a point penalty. This penalty is subtracted from his 600 points and if a student loses all his points he is expelled from the College. Gambling & fighting - automatic 600 points stealing - 400 points.

Infractions include such items as exceeding the prescribed length of hair for boys, not adhering to school dress regulations, violation of attendance, study requirements and so forth.

Considering the overall academic atmosphere in Laos, it is also helpful for foreign teachers to be prepared for sudden, and often not understandable, changes in administrative policy, class scheduling, holiday assignments, and other operating procedures. It is true that each year's experience has improved this situation, but education institutions in Laos are still in an early stage of development and time is still required to perfect the transition from the so recent absence of such institutions to a viable national education system.

As with students throughout the world, institutions also demand considerable patience and understanding in their development. It is the responsibility, and so often the true task, of the foreign teacher to permit such development to find its way in its own manner and not to feel that force of logic and western experience alone will always be the answer.

IWS/ELH:Woodson:skp