

OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION

IN LAOS

1. Almost all of the problems that exist in the Kingdom of Laos are related to education.
 - 1.1. In the way of health, we have problems in controlling intestinal parasites, malaria, eye-sores, wounds and infections, ailments after childbirth, infant mortality, and hunger, which are all caused by the lack of hygienic practices. These problems are, therefore, counted as educational rather than problems that can be solved by medicines, hospitals, and individual treatment.
 - 1.2. In terms of production, our problems involve agricultural improvement (use of fertilizer, knowledge in agriculture and livestock relations, using seeds, reforestation, irrigation in the village and between villages, gardening, planting industrial crops), establishment of small industries (food and commodities produced from crops), as well as its maintenance and expansion. These are educational problems rather than problems of materials or large construction projects.
 - 1.3. Our economic problems involve the establishment of co-op's; exchanges within the country; reducing luxury type imports or those that we can make in the country, and exporting artistic products. These are also considered educational problems rather than problems of investments and transportation.
 - 1.4. Our social, political, and cultural problems consist of eliminating corruption; maintaining justice, unity, faith, and confidence to consolidate the people of the nation; preserving culture and customs so that they are not washed away by the influences of those from foreign countries. These problems are educational rather than administrative or legal.
 - 1.5. We also have problems of individuals adjusting socially, developing their attitudes, in terms of their ideas and their actions, and their loyalty and respect toward others. These are also educational problems.

2. Therefore, in our country, we must give high priority to education. In this view, all government organizations such as Ministries of Information, Cults, Public Health, and Economy must realize that their important operations are concerned with education and that they must provide frequent and intensive cooperation just as if they are in the role of the Ministry of Education itself. It would be even better if another Ministry could be established to control the cooperation among ministries with its major functions related to education. Finance is not the biggest problem; the real problem lies in the proper and full use of resources. The one who would attempt to solve this problem must have good understanding of the overall situations and must really try to get the work done, not be the type who does things only halfway.

3. When we admit that country development concerns mainly education, we must also realize that education in school, no matter what kind and what level, is the tool for development.

- 3.1. The Royal Order of July 1962, concerning the Education Reform Act, clearly declares that education must relate itself to the development of the economy and society. The new primary school curriculum aims to get the students to observe and improve the conditions of the community. The curriculum outlines school gardening and co-ops. All these are principles; however, there are still many education officials who still think that Hygiene, Agriculture, School Gardening, and school co-ops are only minor supplementary activities which are not important. Most teachers still misunderstand that the best and most important subjects to study are the same old ones: Reading, Arithmetic, History, and Science, which provide only knowledge -- not related to its use in daily living.

- 3.2. Such misunderstanding was caused by the improper adaptation of the methods of foreign countries, whose conditions and needs were different from those of Laos. When we learn how to read and how to count, we do not wish just to know how and that's all; we want to use these skills as tools for developing the country; otherwise, the efforts we have invested would be wasted.

With the urgent need for development (Health, Agriculture, Crafts, Commerce, Society, Government, and Culture), if officials who are responsible for education do not understand clearly what their functions are and do not want to make full use of resources available, education, then, will be meaningless and will undoubtedly disintegrate eventually.

4. The subject matter taught might be the means for us to reach our objective in economic and social development; the subject matter itself is not the real objective.
 - 4.1. In the Teacher Training Schools, the lesson plans in pedagogy, as well as speeches and official orders to all types of teachers should emphasize our conditions realistically, which are:
 - 4.1.1. We produce the lowest rate of rice in the world (700 kilograms per hectare).
 - 4.1.2. The value of imports is ten times greater than the value of exports.
 - 4.1.3. Many children die at an early age (fifty percent die before the age of four).
 - 4.1.4. The Government and all of its levels of administrative structures are in disorder and confusion.
 - 4.1.5. The national culture is heavily threatened by foreign influence.
 - 4.2. Under the conditions stated, educational objectives must be designed to increase production, economize on living costs, maintain health, improve community culture. Any teacher, no matter how high the education level he has achieved, who is not aware of the importance of these problems, is of no use. On the contrary any teacher who realizes the importance of these problems, though he has no kind of certificate, is the type the country needs.

5. Many people agreed upon the principles outlined, but the implementation of those principles has involved various kinds of difficulties, such as the reluctance to change, as is obvious when subject matter content and methods being used are outdated; the habit of doing things the easy way, which will keep one on the wrong track rather than on the right one; favoritism to support the work of a specific group, selfishness of a community, favoritism of people in different social categories; misconceptions (giving too much importance to examinations and certificates, too much emphasis on ceremonies in schools, aversion to handicraft); lack of self-confidence and other discouragements; and eventually to blame each other, leading to improper practices or even the abandonment of the Reform Act, which has been recognized as necessary by all concerned.

In the practice phase, the thing more important than anything else and the best idea is to decide mainly to do something that is considered good and useful. Responsible officials must realize that if education is cut in half, it means we also cut up the future of the children into parts. At the same time, if we are too lenient or show clemency to benefit an individual or a group, it means we intentionally block development and accept the outdated and old-fashioned methods.

All teachers who know the functions of education in terms of country development must fight in every way to make schools real tools of development. Hygiene, agriculture, and livestock, establishment of co-ops, on-the-job training, good social habits and behavior must become the more important subject matter.

6. In conclusion, what needs to be done in the implementation stage are as follows:
 - 6.1. At the primary level, all efforts must be made to get the 1962 curriculum implemented. The important point of this curriculum is the use of "Centers of Interest," which emphasizes teaching by observing and improving the community -- this means to stress teaching through realities and activities. Teaching through centers of interest is not a method that follows the principles of regular pedagogy, but it is a technique that directs learning (observation, reading, arithmetic, science, geography,

handicrafts) toward the established objectives. Teaching through centers of interest is not a difficult teaching method, but it is a procedure which aims to change the teacher's monotonous way of teaching. Therefore we should assist teachers by developing manuals on how to teach through centers of interest and give them to the teachers. The writing, tryout, and revision of textbooks are new tasks which require cooperation of persons who are experienced in this field and pedagogy.

6.1.1. School gardening, youth movement activities, and school co-ops are not minor or detail educational activities; they are so important that without them we will not be able to achieve our objectives.

6.1.2. For a country that has economic conditions like Laos, the development of community and fundamental education must relate themselves closely with the schools. The expansion of agriculture, sanitation, and adult education must rely on schools as the centers to help the community to progress.

6.2. In Teacher Training, we should abandon the old curriculum or the foreign curriculum and, at the same time, prepare to train our teachers for development. Therefore, the training of teachers must emphasize the center of interest type teaching method. It should stress gardening, youth movement activities, and school co-ops. If the teacher training officials concerned do not recognize the reformed principles for implementation at the primary level, it means that the teachers they produce will not be able to utilize the reformed principles. Besides training the teachers, the personnel concerned also need to advise school principals and primary school inspectors on the type of teaching method described.

6.3. The same is true for Secondary Education; we must aim our education toward the development of the economy, society,

health, and ethics, which are very important to our country. The secondary education officials must assume the following responsibilities:

- 6.3.1. Teach the students to be aware of our realities, our needs, and the natural resources in the country.
- 6.3.2. Develop students' habits and behavior, which are essential for development (habits of orderliness, punctuality, getting work done, and successfully; being cooperative, thinking reasonably, initiating new economic and technical procedures, confidence in the country, self-control, and faith.
- 6.3.3. Teach the students basic knowledge (language, arithmetic, science--skills--economic geography) and technical knowledge (agriculture, health, industrial, and commercial techniques appropriate to Laos).

7. In higher education, the objectives are not just to teach higher general knowledge; the real importance is to have higher education and also an awareness of the conditions and needs of Laos. Therefore we must encourage higher education first here in our country. Then we can help those who are outstanding to have an opportunity to train abroad.
8. It is a fact that in order to expand education, we need funds and supplies, but more than that we need teachers and professors who are highly qualified. It would be better if teachers and professors were well-educated but, more important than that, those who teach must have proper attitudes and behavior. Briefly, the problem of education is a problem related to the quality of teachers, professors, and leaders. Therefore the Government, leaders from Ministry of Education, teachers, professors, students, and their parents must:
 - 8.1. Understand better the educational problems and seek solutions;

8. 2. Accept without hesitation the new methods of improvement, which might be contrary to one's ideas and practices;
8. 3. Discard old ideas in order to unite in the implementation of the Reform to assure success; and
8. 4. If there is mutual understanding, with united strength and courage, everything will be facilitated.

Educational problems, together with problems of country development, are our problems. Therefore, everyone in the country must share in the responsibility together.

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