

Mori Grant Report

Thesis Title: Dropout issue in Lao primary education

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Research Content:

Primary school dropout is one of the persistent issues in Lao PDR. Although Laos is committed to achieve the goal of universal primary education and bring the dropout rate down to 0% by 2015 (Millennium Development Goal 2, the goal of universal primary education). The country is still facing a remarkable high rate of dropout (7.8% of the total student enrollment), wherein the issue concentrates in primary students (6-10 years old), the most important formative phase for children. Suffice it to say that promoting primary education is one of the greatest challenges for the Lao government. This research, to serve that purpose, to examine reasons leading students to dropout from school and to explore how the key holders (who are students, parents, teachers and policy makers) perceive the role of primary school. This will help to spot their unmet needs regarding what they expect from the primary school.

Activity Conducted:

The research mainly relies on in-depth interviews and onsite observations.
Venue: Parkngeum District, Vientiane, Laos.
Date: 1st round, 09 Aug 2013 – 09 Sep 2013.
2nd round, 23 Oct 2013 - 02 Nov 2013.

I have interviewed 30 students (from 8-18 years old), 20 parents (mechants farmers and office workers), 20 local teachers and a number of governmental officers.

Research Outcomes:

Findings from the research are presented as follows. One surprising finding from my fieldwork is that schooling is not important to everyone. Each stakeholder perceives the role of schooling differently. Another surprise finding is that there are actually returnees from the dropouts. Surprisingly, prior to this study, they have never been mentioned in any educational report before. Under of the progressive promotion, the returnees are placed based on their age not their knowledge. As a consequence, many of

them failed to catch up with the class. This led the returnees to quit again and this time they do not return.

Conclusion and Further Consideration:

The pressure to achieve the Millennium Development Goal tends to lead the government to pay more attention to show the improvement only in statistics. And introduced the progressive promotion system. However, the progressive promotion system failed to solve the dropout issue. More importantly, the policy has also damaged the primary school system's credibility, thus also affects the overall educational reform efforts. This will be damaging to Lao education system in a long run.