

## Mori Grant Report

Thesis Title: Dropout issue in Lao primary education

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### Research Content:

The primary school dropout issue has been the major issue in Laos as shown in the low survival rate at the primary school level. It stayed above 50% from 2000 to 2007 and reached to 67% in 2008). To address the problem, in 2009 the education ministry introduced a “progressive promotion” to allow students to proceed to higher grades automatically. To offset the concern of students performances in the new class, remedial class will be provided during the vacation period. Initially the survival rate increased to 85 per cent (2009) but later fell to 70 per cent (2012). One finding shows that half of the dropouts return to school but are placed in more advanced classes. This creates an environment where students cannot master new concepts and are discouraged to quit again. This fieldwork concludes that the progressive promotion may have damaged the interaction of students in education and the school system credibility.

### Activity Conducted:

- **Methodology:** In-depth interviews and participatory observation.
- **Venue:** Parkngeum District, Vientiane, Laos.
- **Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> round, 09e Aug 2013 – 09 Sep 2013.
- **Informants:** 20 respondents (education ministry officials, teachers, parents and students).

### Research Outcomes:

Approximately 80 per cent of students return to school after dropping out for the first time. When the students come back to school, they were placed based on their age not their ability. Remedial as a tool to support the weak students to catch up with the lesson, in reality it is not operating. Due to the lack of support from the school, returnees are discouraged from studying and as a result 60 per cent of returnees quit school again. The most serious problem is that when they quit the second time they do not intend to return to school again.

**Conclusion:**

Progressive promotion, as the key solution was believed that the policy would increase the survival rate, needed to achieve the educational development goal. While for teachers progressive promotion is a way to solve school problems such as large number of overage students, as well as high repetition and dropout rates. This will help to keep a high performance of the school (Amanda Seel, 2013). On the other hand, for parents the policy assures their kids graduate from primary school within 5 years. Moreover, the returnees can resume school without repeating the previous grade, thus they could finish school easily, in less school years. For any student, to be placed in a class that does not correspond to their abilities, makes it harder for them to handle the new lesson. If this is difficult for the regular students, it is even more difficult for the returnees. Regardless of the different perspectives towards progressive promotion, they lead to the same negative impact, students have to struggle by themselves in the new class with minimum help from teachers.

Therefore, dropout problem cannot be solved simply by allowing the students to proceed automatically to higher grades. The idea borrowed from outside does not fit to the real situation because of the lack of understanding of the situation at local level. The policy pays attention more at the overall performance of school, not individuals and as a result instead of helping to reduce the rate of dropout it ends up urging the *returnees* to drop out from school again.

Moreover, *Progressive Promotion* not only fails to help students learning, also damages the credibility of primary school system. A system encourages students to make less of an effort to study coursework, knowing that they will advance to the higher classes. At the same time, their parents find it easier to take their children in and out of school, which is resulted in irregular attendance and disruption for students and school system, discouraging the returnees to stay on at school. Dropout becomes their only choice.