

Mori Grant Report

- **Thesis Title:** “Progressive Promotion”: - Dropout Issue in Lao Primary Education and the Misplaced Policy
- **Student Name:** Gnanngouvong Itthida, 81449265
2nd year doctoral student, Human Security and Communication Program
- **Thesis Adviser:** Michio Umegaki, PhD

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 67% in 2008. To address the problem, in 2009 the Ministry of Education and Sport of Laos (MOES) introduced “Progressive Promotion” Policy (PPP), which allows students to proceed to higher grades automatically regardless of their class performance. As a result, the survival rate at the primary school level did improve from 67% in 2008 to 85% in 2009. However, it fell to 75% in 2012. In other words, the drop in the survival rate is a puzzle. One reason that has been found during the research is that the students have difficult time at the higher grades because they are not prepared to be upgraded and consequently not motivated to stay on at school. For that reason, the research aims at uncovering neglected issues regarding the dropout issue, in order to provide new insights to the policy making process in solving the dropout issue in Lao PDR.

Activity Conducted:

- **Methodology:** In-depth interviews and participatory observation.
- **Venue:** A comparative study (1. Pakngum, 2. Naxaithong and 3. Sisatanak in Vientiane, Laos, where having primary dropout rate of 13.6%, 12% and 4.8% respectively).
 - **Date:** 06 Aug 2015 – 31 Aug 2015.
 - **Informants:** 34 respondents (education ministry officials, teachers, parents and students).

Research Outcomes:

1. Pak Ngum, a rural agricultural area, the majority of the people relies on agricultural sector that requires labor intensive and they live in the self-subsistence level. In 2008, cassava was introduced as an industrial crop for higher return by the foreign cassava company. With the same size of land, they promise that the farmers earn 5 times higher in income. Approximately, 30% of rice farmers changed their crop to cassava. There was no problem in the first 3 years but in the following years the company could not pay for the products and the debt has been accumulating up to \$13 million. The farmers rely even more on earning extra income from elsewhere, for example to across the border to work in the factories in Thailand.

Therefore, by being preoccupied with how to secure the basic needs for the family is the main reason for the students to dropout here. What is surprising is that When they are not preoccupied, they do return to school (returnees) this has never been mentioned before, thus there is no assistance to support these students.

Because of PPP, they were put in higher class despite the interval of their absence. In reality, remedial classes cannot be implement due to the lack of budget. As a result, they fail to catch up

with the classes, and dropout again. This time is more problematic as they are not coming back to school again.

2. Haisaifong, a rural area where people rely on agricultural sector but jobs from many factories are also available here. In 2010 non-chemical vegetable project was introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture with the donation from Helvetas, Switzerland. As a result, farmers with small land have more option to earn money. With this project, farmers could sell their products more expensive. Because of the available jobs at the factories and new technology in agriculture. The people do not need to look for job elsewhere.

Reason for dropouts is because the students prefer to either work in farm or in factories to study. Problem of the lack of teachers, because some teachers prefer to do other jobs to teach due to the low salary (\$100/month). And the principal has to do teaching when needed.

PPP allows weak students to proceed to higher grades. In order to help them to catch up with the class, due to the lack of teachers, the teachers mainly give them homework. Teachers said that this has to rely on the parents to make sure the students do their homework, if the parents are too busy, the students will remain weak. Because PPP, the students do not have to do the final exam. The teachers said that monthly tests are not accurate because the students can always rely their friends just to have high score. This makes it more difficult to spot who are the one who needs more help in the class. Thus discourage them to stay on at school.

3. Sisattanak is one of the main town in Vientiane, where concentrates with offices building and many countries' embassy. 80% of the population are office workers (both Private and Public). ODOP (One District One Product) was introduced to enhance the economic development in the area, making the economy here even more lively. From this district only, there are 5 products in the markets, while in many areas have only one product. Therefore, there is no high records of the mobility from this area.

The main reason of high dropout is Sisattanak is actually not because the students quit school for good. But it is because the parents transfer them to private schools. According to the evaluation of education quality of RIES (Research Institute Education Sciences) in 2007. It was found that Grade 5 students could perform only like Grade 3 students in Mathematic. And Grade 1-3 students have average score below the standard, which is 42/100 in public school. Moreover, the image of public school teachers have the parents have is that they are not realizable, as they don't pay enough attention to their students.

After PPP, the image of public primary school becomes even worse. Teachers admitted that the performance of students are not improving and as the students tend to not trying hard in learning. Therefore, if parents have enough resources, they tend to send their children to private school. There are less and less students in the public school, during the past 2 years, 5 schools got closed down because they were very little students.

Conclusion:

These findings explain the drop in the survival rate and unpacks of how a policy fails to address the issue for not taking into consideration of the local context. PPP affects primary education system in different aspects in different area, which depends on each area's condition. However, what it shares in common is that PPP gives a negative impact on the quality of students' learning. And therefore, PPP instead of helping to solve the dropout issue, it is a misplaced policy damaging the school credibility.