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LAO PDR[1]

Overview

Education system

In 2009-2010, Lao PDR reformed its education system from an 11-year schooling to a 12-year schooling structure, comprised of five years of primary, four years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary schooling. The national education system has four components[2]:

1. Early Childhood Education: crèches and kindergartens;
2. General Education: primary education, lower and upper secondary;
3. Vocational Education at three levels (first, middle and high level); and
4. Higher Education, described as the level next to upper secondary and middle and high levels of vocational education, including three stages from undergraduate to doctoral level.

Education can be attained through the formal school system or non-formally; each described as different approaches of similar content and equal value. Informal education is described as a sub-form of non-formal education that has no limits regarding time, content or learning institution.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training

TVET is managed through the Ministry of Education and Sports (Department of Technical, Vocational Education and Training). The technical and vocational education comprises:

1. Skilled workers, with training divided into 4 levels:
   - Certificates 1 and 2 for basic skill training;
   - Certificate 3 for semi-skilled worker training;
   - Certificate 4 for skilled worker training.
2. Vocational education: 1–3 years for lower secondary school leavers, graduates receive a Certificate for Vocational Education;
3. Technical and Vocational Education: 2–3 years for the regular course and 1-2 years for continuing study, graduate as Technician or Vocational Diploma.
4. Technical and vocational education: 2–3 years for the regular course and 1-2 years for continuing study graduate as High Technician or Vocational Diploma.
5. Bachelor level: ≤1.5 years for continuing study.

Skills Development sector

The Skills Development sector is managed through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Skills Development refers to upgrading skills and attitudes of the portion of the Lao workforce that has acquired basic vocational-level training from previous experiences to gain more expertise and to upgrade technical and technological skills in preparation for participating in skills competition or

[1] This overview is based on the Lao PDR Report on Standards and Qualifications (2015) prepared by a team of Lao PDR experts with support from the World Bank. The Report and its overview expand on the original submission by Lao PDR for the East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework Project managed by Australia Commonwealth Government in 2012.

[2] Lao PDR, Education Law, promulgated 17 July 2007, Articles 14-22

skills assessment and certification according to skilled trades standards at regional, national, and international levels[3]. The structure of skills development consists of:

1. Basic skill level: the learning period is six months or less and is designed for individuals who have never obtained any vocational training courses;
2. Skill level 1: semi-skilled vocational courses and programs with a learning period of six months, for general target groups;
3. Skill level 2: skilled vocational courses and programs with a training period of 6 months, for those who have passed the skills testing or assessment on level 1 with one year experience in relevant work;
4. Skill Level 3: mechanics/engineer/tradesman courses and programs with a training period of six months, for those who have passed the skills testing or assessment on level 2 with one year experience in relevant work;
5. Skill level 4: supervisor courses and programs with a training period of six months, for those who have passed the skills testing or assessment on level 3 with a minimum of two years experience in relevant work.

There is general and consistent professional acceptance across providers and authorities in Laos, and from sampled major employers of skills, that the continued absence of national skills standards (or of any scheme of stated standards) acts as a major constraint on the development of national skills.

National Qualification Framework

Status of Lao National Qualification Framework

There is currently **no overall** national qualifications framework (NQF) that relates all levels of education, training and qualifications and identifies the pathways between them. A NQF is in the initial stages with the most recent draft proposing an 8 level structure.

At the present time, there are a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal curricula, certificates and diplomas available from many institutions and organizations. Some are for short courses varying from one week to one year. Others are for skills development courses with testing in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW), Dual Cooperative Training (DCT) and other vocational and technical courses. Employers, training institutions, students, and parents do not have any reliable way of assessing the value of any given certificate for instance their value in terms of personal ability to do the job or proceed to further levels of education.

Quality Assurance Mechanisms - Qualifications

Accreditation of Qualification

Lao PDR doesn't yet have a unified qualification accreditation system. In 2001 and 2004, the department of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education developed the curriculum standards from certificate level to masters degree, including a credit-based system. Recently, the TVE department and the department of higher education have initiated revision of its education and training system.

[3]PM decree on TVET and Skills Development no. 036, January 2010, Article 3

Approval

Under TVET law, the MOES is to approve and promulgate (as well as abolish) national curricula. Curricula can be abolished if it is considered irrelevant to QF, occupational standards or not meeting labour market needs. Vocational qualifications are accredited against the Vocational Qualification Framework (of which there are 5 levels; basic, semi-skilled, skilled, technician, high technician). The curriculum standard for each trade is determined in specific regulations.

There are no quality standards or criteria to apply as of yet. There is no defined process for accreditation, or any national qualifications. There is no accrediting agency to manage and monitor accreditation processes. At this stage, there is no monitoring of quality or currency of qualifications.

For public providers, a list of qualifications is available on the TVET department website.

Assessment

The current ADB project has developed knowledge and a practical item bank, but this is only for priority areas. Currently providers develop their own assessment tools and undertake their own assessment. It is proposed that the assessment will be separated from training.

It is further proposed in the ADB project that TVET programs are modular based and therefore students that drop out will be provided with a statement of the attained competencies.

Under TVET law (No 42/National Assembly 2013) the TVET institution issues the certificate/diploma. It notes that diploma and higher level shall be registered for control in the relevant ministry and that for certificates and lower attestation shall be registered for control in concerned offices at provincial and Vientiane levels.

The provider established/registered by the Ministry of Education and Sport issues the qualification but the provider is to provide the details and certificates to the Ministry for the formal seal to be added before being provided to the graduate.

Competency standards

Within the ADB funded project, competency standards have been developed for four Occupation sectors: (1) Machinery Mechanics and Repairers, (2) Furniture Trade, (3) Construction, and (4) Basic Business Service.

Competency standards are the specification of competencies required for effective performance in the workplace expressed in a consistent format. The competency standards are based on the ILO regional model but use a common (generic competencies) and core construction.

The vocational competency standards are based on the notion of competence. Competency is the relevant knowledge, skills and attitude applied to the standards of performance expected in the workplace. Competencies describe job tasks within a specific job role.

The competency standards (complete package of qualifications and units of competency) relate to an occupation but the competencies outline specific job tasks. The units of competency are grouped into common (which are common tasks that appear is different jobs) and core (which are tasks that appear necessary and mandatory for the accomplishment of a given job) and basic (which are tasks related to a wide range of jobs [generic]).

The ADB project has developed draft regulations that outline the process for development, including development of the competencies and packaging rules (completion rules for qualifications). Developers of the competency standards are to be a tripartite body composed of representatives from the labor group, training providers, and employers of the specified industry sector.

Currently the management of the development and monitoring of competency standards is managed through the ADB project; however it is anticipated that the role will be for the NVCSDC.

The development and format of the competency standards are outlined in draft regulations. The ILO regional model is used as the basis for the development of competencies. The units of competency are made up of: unit title, unit descriptor, elements, performance criteria, range of variables and evidence guide.

There is no curriculum body that develops curriculum or training materials/assessment tools. However the ADB project has developed curriculum and training materials (and some standardized assessment tools) for the identified occupational areas. Curriculum manual/handbook, learning guides and teacher guides, module of instruction booklets and 'learning elements' (instructional materials for competency based trainers), have been developed.

For government providers, the Vocational Education Institute develops curriculum. For private providers, there is no such facility and they are required to develop their own curriculum.

Quality Assurance Approach - Provider

Quality assurance (QA) is still relatively new for all educational sectors and institutions in Lao PDR. The Educational Quality Assurance Centre is a current initiative under the Deputy Prime Minister, which has been commissioned with the quality assurance of basic education, TVET and higher education and to develop testing and evaluation. It also has responsibility for the development of the proposed NQF.

Educational Standards and Quality Centre are piloting a quality assurance monitoring process utilizing an external assessment process against the quality standards. The Centre has selected 87 assessors (auditors) of which 30 external assessors have been trained.

The quality assurance manual of the education sector was recently developed for TVET by the collaboration between the TVE department, EQAC and UNESCO-Bangkok. The Minister of Education approved this in April of 2011.

The QA mechanisms were established in all 22 TVET institutions under the MOE. The TVET quality standard consists of 10 components and 32 indicators, as follows: [4]

- Vision, mission and objectives
- Curriculum and teaching-learning delivery
- Learner focus and support
- Staff management and development
- Budget and funding sources
- Facilities and Environment
- Management of information system
- Public relations and marketing
- Quality assurance system
- Enhancement of invention and innovation; and promotion of community services

To ensure quality in higher education, a set of quality standards and quality assessment guidelines or manual (quality inspection) are required as a tool. Internal and external assessment methods and measures used for both public and private are essentially needed for the following:[5]

[4] Ministry of Education: Quality Assurance Manual for TVET Institutions, Lao PDR , 2011

- Quality standard used for higher education institutions – both college and university levels
- Higher education's standardised curriculum used for regular, continuing and bridging programs applicably practiced
- Standardised teacher recruitment program for college and university
- Standardised materials and resources used for higher educational institutions.

In September 2014, EQAC and TVET Department reviewed the Standards and added more indicators.

In June 2013, the Minister of Education signed approval for the Higher Education Standard; including 10 standards and 50 indicators. The standards relate to:

1. Vision, mission and goals
2. Governance and management
3. Human resource and development
4. Curriculum
5. Teaching-Learning effectiveness
6. Student and support services
7. Environment and learning resources
8. Management information systems
9. Internal quality assurance
10. Scientific research and consultancy services.

Under TVET law (No 42/National Assembly 2013) the following quality assurance mechanisms have been outlined:

- Self-assessment: providers are to conduct self-assessment at least once a year comprising a technical team of institution representatives, other organizations and students.
- Internal assessment: is to be conducted by the Department of Inspection, professional department of concern and a technical team of institution representatives, other organizations and students.
- External assessment: is to be conducted every 5 years by an international and independent agency.

Registration of Providers/ Awarding Bodies and Education Providers

The broader TVET sector is varied:

- The Department of Non-formal Education (DNFE) is in charge of providing non- formal education focusing on literacy but also provides some basic vocational education skills.
- One of the main TVET providers is the technical and vocational education department (TVED), which supervises 22 TVET institutions under MOE.
- One important training provider is the Department of Skills Development (DSE) of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, which has one division in charge of skills development and skills assessment through four training centres. The centres organize and provide generally short courses in IT, automotive, furniture, garment, electronics, electricity, hospitality and construction, depending on the local context and demand.
- High Education Department (DHE) has the role to supervise all universities and higher education institutions (4 universities under MOE).
- The department of private education administration (DPEA) is also responsible for supervising all private TVET and High Educations by the establishment and registration.

[5] Master Plan for Higher Education Development 2011-2020, final draft, 2011

- In addition, there are also education and training providers of the other public sector under various line ministries.

In terms of the registration as well as TVET standards and curriculum, the TVED has the following duties/responsibilities:[6] (1) supervise for the registration of all public TVET colleges and schools all over the country, including TVET in the line ministries, (2) approve all TVET curriculum, including private TVET institutions, (3) supervise the pre- and in-service training of TVET teachers/ instructors to serve all TVET institutions, including technical teachers for secondary education and instructors for basic vocational training in none formal education.

The PM decree on TVET and Skills Development 2010, article 58 "Management and Inspection agencies" indicates that the MOE supervises all kinds of TVET management and inspection, while the MOLSW (department of skills development and employment) is in charge for all registration, management and monitoring of the skills development of both public and private institutions.[7]

Under TVET law (No 42/National Assembly 2013) there are 4 types of TVET institutions: training centre, schools, colleges and institutes. A training centre is an education institution (including labour unit) to conduct vocational training to meet labour market needs. Schools provide training for skilled labour at the certificate and diploma levels. Colleges provide training from certificate, diploma and higher diploma levels.

Under TVET law (No 42/National Assembly 2013) providers are to meet standards set by the MOES. Prospective providers submit an application, which includes:

- Plan for establishment
- Economic status (financial)
- Proposed course of training
- Qualification of trainers (required to have the Diploma and Associate Diploma in the technical area)

Application is submitted to the Ministry of Education approval.

Under the 2014 TVET law, all registration of TVET providers is being moved under the Department of TVET, MOES. This includes public and private providers.

Educator Requirements

TVET teachers are under the Department of TVET, and there are two types:

- Practical teachers in workshops
- Theory teachers

There are two standards for TVET trainers/assessors:

- Those developed by GIZ – for theory teachers and trained by university
- Those developed ADB – for practical trainers and those trained by the Vocational Education Institute

The ADB funded project has developed four levels of training/assessing qualifications for vocational trainers.

[6] MOE Decision on the role and responsibilities of TVE department, 2008

[7] PM decree on TVET and Skills Development, 2010, article 57 and 58

Transnational/ Cross Border Education

Laos still belongs to the least developed counties. There is no education providers from Laos delivering education and training in other countries.

Quality indicators/data

The Ministry collects TVET data from both public and private providers. There are 23 public institutes and 96 private TVET providers. For example:

- Student Background Characteristics (e.g. in terms of religion, ethnicity, age, gender, disabilities, prior qualifications)
- Type and range of pathways into your programs, including uptake rates
- Budget allocation for students with disabilities
- Retention and completion rates and patterns
- Stakeholder satisfaction (at provider level).

Barriers and Obstacles

General Issues for Lao PDR include:

1. There is currently no overall national qualifications framework (NQF) to identify the pathways and no effective established processes for recognition of prior learning (RPL).
2. There is also no operational public skills testing system, thus no procedures for the recognition of informal and\or non-formal education despite their recognition under the Education Law as equal but alternative modalities to formal education.
3. Quality assurance (QA) is relatively new for all educational sectors and institutions in Lao PDR, therefore, there is still a lack of experience and insufficient qualified personnel for its implementation. There are not yet quality assurance mechanisms at the provincial and district levels nor are there in the vast majority of education institutions;
4. The practice of accreditation of staff qualifications is new and unfamiliar; the quality of teaching and learning at all educational institutions remains weak. Currently, there is no standardised credit system applied to education and training. There is a lack of legislative regulations and law issued on public and private education management; meanwhile the use of existing regulations is not fully enforced and progress is slow;
5. There is a lack of coordination between line-ministries, departments and parties concerned with different education levels to ensure education quality;
6. Lack of a management information system and annual report system on TVET and higher education, which is used as reference for overall planning and management.
7. The budget allocated for education as part of its quality improvement is comparatively low and insufficient.
8. Vocational training is not yet accessible for all target groups, especially in rural and remote areas.
9. The education system in general, and the TVET system in particular, does not match the socio-economic development demands, particularly labor market needs.
10. TVET's image remains poor, most prefer higher education and white-collar jobs. There are few applicants for traditional jobs.
11. Training quality remains still low due to many factors, including poor infrastructure, machines and equipment, and low qualified teaching staff.

Additional information

The personnel involved in the development of this overview.

Name	Role	Organisation
Phouvieng Phoumilay		Department of Technical Vocational Education, MOES
Joe Wagner	ADB Project Officer	Department of Technical Vocational Education, MOES
VannalekLeuang		Department of Technical Vocational Education, MOES
Panya Chanthavong	Deputy Director	Education Quality Assurance Center, MoES
SisakdaBoulom	Technical Staff	Education Quality Assurance Center, MoES