The background of the cover is a photograph of a lush green rice field in the foreground, with a line of trees and misty mountains in the distance. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm glow and reflecting on a body of water in the lower part of the image. In the bottom right corner, there is a red outline map of Laos.

# Minority Education and Development in Contemporary Laos

Miki Inui

Laos

# **Minority Education and Development in Contemporary Laos**



# **Minority Education and Development in Contemporary Laos**

Miki Inui



Union Press

First published in 2009

by Union Press

(a division of Union Services Co.,Ltd.)

1-6, Uehommachi-Nishi 5 chome, Chuo-ku, Osaka, 542-0062 Japan

© 2009 Miki Inui

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publishers. Enquiries should be directed to the publisher at the address above.

DTP by Design International

Printed and bound in Japan by Shinano Co.,Ltd.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-4-946428-39-5

---

Ms. Kako Richards for assistance with the translation,  
and Dr. Ian Richards for this help.

---

Printed in Japan

The government of Lao PDR adopted the agreement that they will not use the words of “majority” or “minority” in the sixth ordinary session of the National Assembly (Sixth Legislature) held in November 2008. The author recognizes the change; however, as this research was conducted and completed before the agreement, these words are used in this book.



Laos and neighboring countries

# Contents

Prologue .....	1
1 Laos preface .....	1
2 Poverty and education .....	2
3 Defining problems .....	4
4 The purpose and methods of this research .....	6
5 Significances of this research .....	9
Notes .....	16
Chapter 1: History of education and the current educational system in Laos .....	19
1.1 Education before the socialist regime was established .....	19
1.2 Education after the establishment of the socialist regime ..	23
1.3 Educational administration and the school system today ...	27
1.4 General education and curriculum .....	29
1.5 Education-related constitution and budget .....	44
Notes .....	52
Chapter 2: Ethnic minorities in Laos and the recent situation of educational disparity among ethnic groups .....	53
2.1 Ethnic minorities in Laos .....	53
2.2 Educational disparities which pervade among ethnic groups .....	64
Notes .....	77
Chapter 3: Educational problems among ethnic minorities in developing countries and Laos .....	89
3.1 Educational problems in developing countries and	

ethnic minorities .....	89
3.2 Discussion of the education disparity among ethnic minorities in Laos .....	93
3.3 The viewpoint of this study .....	105
Notes .....	108
 Chapter 4: Educational problems among the Hmong ethnic minority ....	109
4.1 Qualitative research into problems related to primary education for the Hmong .....	109
4.2 Problems which are held by the demand-side of education .....	114
4.3 Points which were suggested by the supplier-side of education .....	121
4.4 Gap between actual life and the curriculum .....	125
Notes .....	133
 Chapter 5: Educational disparity among ethnic groups in the classrooms .....	139
5.1 Meanings of conducting participatory observation in schools .....	139
5.2 Educational disparity seen in classrooms .....	147
5.3 Current educational disparities found out by questionnaires research .....	155
5.4 Misunderstanding and ethnocentrism among Lao students .....	157
5.5 Coexistence of ethnic groups from the teachers' view .....	163
5.6 Educational disparity caused by unequal processes .....	168
Notes .....	169
 Chapter 6: Factors of educational disparity – for solving the problems .....	173
6.1 Relatively organized school infrastructure .....	173

6.2	Well-endowed budget allocation and the economic situation at home .....	176
6.3	Importance of designing the curriculum .....	180
6.4	The role of education and acceptance of diversity .....	181
6.5	What makes the coexistence of ethnic groups possible? ..	183
6.6	Closing .....	185
	Notes .....	187
	Postscript .....	189
	References.....	193
	Index .....	199



# Prologue

## 1 Laos preface

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (hereinafter, Laos) is located in South-east Asia. Laos is an inland state surrounded by Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, and Myanmar, and it is the only country in Southeast Asia which does not face the sea. The area is 240,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and it is about half the dimension of Thailand, or almost the same as the area of mainland Japan. The population is about 6,520,000 (2007), and nearly 10.0 % of the population is concentrated in the Vientiane Capital. According to the census (2005), there are 16 provinces, one capital (Vientiane), 142 districts and 10,500 villages in the country.

The average density of population of Laos is 27.54 people/km<sup>2</sup> (2007). The population density of Vientiane Capital is as high as 177 people/km<sup>2</sup> according to the national census. Vientiane Capital has the highest proportion among urban areas, at about 82.0 %. The population density was 15 people/km<sup>2</sup> in 1985, 19 people/km<sup>2</sup> in 1995, and 24 people/km<sup>2</sup> in 2005, and it is increasing gradually.

Laos is an inland state; thus 90.0 % of the land is occupied by mountains, hillsides and high plains, and the level ground opens onto the Mekong Basin. On the lowland of the Mekong Basin, the main agriculture is wet-paddy rice cultivation which uses the flat landscape, and traditional, self-sufficient agriculture is conducted in most of the area. An irrigation system has been employed in recent years.

The service industry is growing mainly in the urban areas, but still agriculture, the forest industry, the mining industry and hydro-electric generation are the main industries. Since the country has no oil resource, it depends mostly on hydro power. The main agricultural products are coffee, tea, rice, and vegeta-

bles, and the main export products are electric power, tin, lumber artifacts, and coffee. Because of its mountainous land features, only a small quantity of land is good as dry fields, especially in the mountainous northern area, and thus upland rice cultivation by slash-and-burn shifting cultivation is mainly conducted. The roadway infrastructure of the country is poor, especially in the mountainous area in the north, where the infrastructure of the roads has not progressed yet.

Access to safe water and electricity differs greatly between cities and villages. According to the 2005 census, 67.0 % of urban households had safe water compared to 27.0 % and 13.0 % in rural areas with and without roads, respectively. Regarding access to electricity, it was noted that only 35.0 % of villages have such access. Provinces with a rate lower than the 10.0 % of the villages' access to electricity were Phongsaly, and Oudomxay.

The climate of Laos is tropical monsoon, and the temperature and humidity are high for most of the year. Seasons are divided into a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season lasts from the beginning of May until September, and the dry season lasts from October till April. The annual average temperature is about 28 °C, and the temperature becomes highest at 38 °C from April to May. In mountainous areas the temperature drops and there is frost in December and January in some places. During this season, people in mountainous areas who are living in poverty have difficulty even preparing suitable clothing.

## **2 Poverty and education**

The GDP in Laos is 678 US dollars per head (2007). Laos achieved more than five percent of actual GDP growth rate in the last decade (it was estimated as seven percent in 2007) and GDP in Laos is ranked globally at around 130th in recent years. Laos is a developing country, and it is still considered a Least among Less Developed Country (LLDC). According to the Human Development Index (HDI), which consists of three variables, including health concerns such as life expectancy at birth, educational achievement (enrollment rates), and GDP per head, Laos is ranked at 130th (2007) and also classed as a low-ranking country. Myanmar and Cambodia, the neighboring countries of Laos,

are the same in terms of HDI. The rankings of Thailand and Vietnam are 78th and 105th respectively, and this also indicates that Laos' ranking is low even among Southeast Asian countries.

The poverty line for Laos is as shown below. A socio-economic survey called the Laos Expenditure and Consumption Survey has been conducted three times in Laos. The Surveys are named LECSI (1992/93), LECSII (1997/98), and LECSIII (2002/03). Food expenditure and non-food expenditure are summed up in order to define the poverty line based on the survey outcomes above. Regarding the food expenditure, currency conversion is made as the daily minimum calories-per-head is 2,100 kcal, according to the definition of international organizations and to the examples of other Asian countries. Then, food expenditure which is equal to 2,100 kcal is estimated by region (Vientiane Capital, the north, the middle, and south) as well as by city and village, and this estimation is considered as a poverty line. According to LECSII (1997/98), the regional disparities of poverty are: 13.5 % in Vientiane Capital, 47.3 % in the north, 39.4 % in the midland, and 39.8 % in the south; and according to LECSIII (2002/03), 16.9 % in Vientiane Capital, 37.0 % in the north, 35.4 % in the midland, and 32.6 % in the south. This shows that the degree of poverty is especially high in the north (Kakwani et al., 2002; Andersson, Engvall, & Kokko, 2006).

Poverty in Laos is caused by factors that include, for example: the economy of Laos being in transition; many ethnic minorities being scattered on mountainous land features; problems related to natural disasters or the environment; and an insufficient labor force. In 2003, the National Assembly of the Lao PDR authorized the country's government to implement the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), which constitutes the government's overall development framework. In the NGPES (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: PRSP), education is considered as one of the major sectors, together with agriculture and forestry, health and transportation infrastructure, for poverty reduction.

Naturally, poverty eradication has been an issue in Laos for many years, but the reason why such eradication has been ventured on specifically as a prior-

ity issue of the country relates deeply to the dissemination of education. The government of Laos has aimed for universal primary education after the government’s participation in the conference, “Education for All” held in Thailand in 1990, but the government was still facing difficulties in achieving the goal even after 2000. EFA is one of the targets for poverty reduction in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, the government broke down the theme into a phrase – that is, “Education is necessary in order to reduce poverty” – so that the people of Laos could understand why EFA was aimed at. This is a message to the people of Laos that to end the poverty which has become chronic in Laos, it is necessary to start with education for everybody. Today, some plans have been in progress with the goal of achieving EFA under the slogan of poverty eradication <sup>(1)</sup>.



**Photo 1:** Lao and Hmong boys living on a farm in Xieng Khouang Province



**Photo 2:** A Lao girl wearing make up on the “girl’s day”

### **3 Defining problems**

We can say that Laos is a country where it is difficult to develop the education system, and this is partly caused by Laos’ geographical situation, its poor economic situation, and the fact that Laos was under the influence of French rule and suffered civil wars. About 6.52 million people are scattered in an area similar to half the size of Thailand, and this low density of population creates diffi-

culty in the transmission of information. About 87.0 % of Laos is mountainous and the roads are not maintained and improved; thus building schools outside arterial roads is difficult. In addition, 49 ethnic minority groups reside in Laos, and their rate of the population accounts for about 34.0 %. Most of them live on the sides of mountains or highlands, and their languages, living habits, and cultures are different from the ethnic majority Lao, who live in the lowland.

During the French regime (1954-), France did not attach importance to Laos, a small and inland country, and chose not to rule directly. But instead, the French government chose to rule it indirectly by using Vietnamese to control Laotians. In addition, the French government did not try to establish an education system in Laos under a policy of not creating an educated class of Laotians. Even after the beginning of the 20th century, educational reforms or improvements in the education system were not conducted under the influence of French rule and during the civil wars, and this situation lasted till 1975 when the socialist regime was established.

When educational reform was conducted at the beginning of 1975, the Laotian government set Laotian, the national language, as the language of instruction at all educational levels, and it implemented a policy of assimilation which obliged the ethnic minorities, which are scattered throughout the country, to study in Laotian and to study according to the same study curriculum as the ethnic majority. This was “a national policy in order to unify the country and to increase the consciousness of people as Laotians among ethnic minorities” conducted by Laos, a developing country. The government had no alternative but to assimilate ethnic minorities so that national unification was achieved as soon as possible (Vientiane International Consultants, 1991).

The education sector in Laos reached a turning point in the latter half of the 1980s. A policy of “New Economy Mechanism (NEM)” was adopted and a transition to a market economy was being launched in full swing by 1987. Since then, the amount of foreign investment has been hiked and this has provided opportunities to energize not only political and economic sectors but also the education sector, which had not been much developed till then <sup>(2)</sup>. Developing a human resource that could tackle the market economy was urgently need-

ed. Since then, the rate of the education budget in the governmental budget has increased every year, and the government has moved ahead with education reforms in response to increases of the budget.

Along with the transition to a new economic system, the budget for education was expanded and this has improved the numeric values of educational data. For example, the number of enrollments at all educational levels increased by about 7.5 times in the period between 1975 and 1995, and the real number of teachers also increased by 17,000. After “Education for All” (EFA) in 1990, the recognition of the importance of primary education, Laos has made efforts to improve the education sector. As a result, the net enrollment rate for primary education increased from 63.0 % to 84.2 % in 15 years, before 2005.

However, we should consider, when we examine the development of the education sector in Laos, that the benefits from the increase in educational opportunities are disproportional and that the receivers are mainly the children of the ethnic majority. Thus educational disparity still exists between ethnic groups today.

#### **4 The purpose and methods of this research**

The purpose of this study is to illustrate, by reviewing previous studies and field studies, what kind of educational disparity is occurring in Laos, which is a multi-ethnic country, and what the causes are of the disparity among ethnic groups. Educational disparity in this study means the children of ethnic minorities being under a peripheral situation in comparison to the children of the Thai-Kadai (Lowland Lao) ethnic majority in terms of the enrollment rate, the repetitions of grades, and dropouts from school.

Two methods shown below are used in order to demonstrate the purpose already described in this study. Foremost, in the first half of this study, we will look at the reality of educational disparity among ethnic groups in Laos in various aspects by reviewing previous studies and statistical data. Secondly, in the latter half the study, the causes of educational disparity will be analyzed from the micro point of view by mainly using outcomes from field studies.

The methods applied in field studies are characteristically the use of qualitative research, which makes it possible to find the views of research subjects profoundly and specifically. As a qualitative research, interviews and participatory observations were conducted so that appropriate approaches are made to what is happening in reality. Qualitative research is a method in which, by analyzing relatively few cases in detail, the relations between causes in research topics can be analyzed and described as much as possible.

For analysis of complicated phenomena, such as educational disparities among ethnic groups as included in the theme of this study, it is very important to clarify the subjective situations obtained from those people who are related to education in the country. Thus qualitative research makes it possible to demonstrate problems which cannot be analyzed or handled by statistical data or literature research. In this study, quantitative research, in which numeric data and statistical analysis are used along with the citing of various educational data, was also conducted to complement the qualitative research.

The structure and methods used in this study are as follows.

Chapter 1 examines, based mainly on existing studies and papers, how the history, political situation and educational policies of Laos have changed so far, and what kind of impact the changes have made on educational disparities among ethnic groups. This examination provides hints as to the interpretation of why improvement in providing ethnic minorities with educational opportunities is still lagging behind, though the situation for providing educational opportunities to the ethnic majority has improved. The current education administration and education systems will be also reviewed in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, the classification of ethnic minorities will be explained, and this chapter will also clarify the current situation in detail as to what kind of educational disparities are occurring between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities in Laos. Furthermore, this chapter will look at how the disadvantageous educational environment in which the children of ethnic minorities are placed is, in reality, based on the facts of literacy and on those aspects of educational disparity (in enrollment rates, repetition and dropout rate) which are the focal points of this study. Analysis is made based on data and reports which

are published by the National Statistic Center, Ministry of Education, and international organizations in Laos.

To clarify the reasons why educational disparity is spreading among ethnic groups, those factors which have been considered as causes in developing countries and Laos are examined together in Chapter 3. Then, hypothetical views and the position of this study will be defined. For this purpose, previous researches and statistical materials, including studies, papers, reports from the Ministry of Education and reports from international organizations and NGOs will be utilized and analyzed, and then the previous researches will be aligned together.

As a hypothetical aspect of this study, the view that the language policy and curriculum structure – they are a part of those educational policies still conducted by the Laotian government – are having some influence on educational disparity among ethnic groups is presented in Chapter 3. The hypothesis will be analyzed and examined in detail in the following chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the outcomes of interviews, participatory observations, and other qualitative research conducted on this study's theme of "educational disparity." Chapter 4 shows the results of interviews with some Hmong people in Xieng Khouang Province. The Hmong people are one of the ethnic minorities who mainly reside in northern Laos. The results are shown in order to clarify what kinds of educational problems the ethnic minorities in Laos actually have, and what kinds of factors are causing educational disparities among ethnic groups. The reason why the Hmong were adopted as research subjects is because their access to education has been extremely limited. They live in mountainous areas and their educational disparity with the ethnic majority is very wide. The Hmong people also have a complicated history compared to other ethnic minorities, as many of their number have migrated to America or other developed countries as refugees, due to their conflict with the former Laotian government. Because of this background, some Hmong people have been influenced by the Hmong living overseas and recognize the importance of education.

As a start of this research, interviews were begun with a preliminary survey

which was conducted for about a month in March, 1998. Then, between November 1998 and January 1999, other interviews were conducted by means of visiting schools and families in order to hear and find out about current conditions from teachers and students in villages around Phonsavan. Phonsavan is the capital of Xieng Khouang Province located in the north of Laos.

In Chapter 5, the results of participatory observations were reported in order to illustrate what kind of processes education disparity has gone through. In particular, this chapter shows results obtained from participatory observations which were conducted while the author was teaching English classes at a primary school in P village, nearby to Phonsavan village. There, the author conducted participatory observations while joining in school life with the children of ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority from March to May in 1999. Interview research was also conducted to demonstrate how educational disparity occurs in primary schools and what kind of influence the current curriculum structure has on educational disparity and mutual cognition among students. The results of this research will be included in the chapter.

For reference's sake, almost every year after 2000, the author visited Laos for additional research, though each visit was short one.

Chapter 6 discusses the hypothesis shown in Chapter 2 of this study, in order to illustrate how we can apprehend the causes of educational disparity among ethnic groups in Xieng Khouang as a case study. Assessments for the budget allocation by the government for education in Xieng Khouang are discussed, as are the quality of school infrastructure in Xieng Khouang, and overall data, including the income of each family.

## **5 Significances of this research**

This study takes up problems which are suffered by Laos on its way to development, but this study especially focuses on educational problems of Laos as a theme. Thus, the meaning of exploring education will be described a little here. This will also help in finding answers related to why the role of education is being realized once again, and why its importance has been focused on recently in developing countries like Laos.

Lockheed and Vespoor explain about the importance of education in developing countries based on effects directed at two aspects: “economic development” and “social development” (Lockheed & Vespoor, 1991).

The first effect is that education is connected to economic development in developing countries. That is, individual incomes will increase as people receive education, and as occupational production-power increases, poverty will be reduced.

Lockheed and Vespoor point out that those adults who have a high level of education get jobs with higher payment in developing countries. In addition, those people with a high level of education have a higher productivity in agriculture compared to those who have no education. Many people in particular earn a living from agriculture in developing countries, and taking this into account, the importance of education in developing countries is obvious. Naturally, an increase in agricultural production leads to an increase in individual incomes; thus this holds out promise that economic effects can ease poverty.

Looking at the indicators of “poverty and education” in Laos, how do education levels differ between the poor and the non-poor? According to LECSII, as previously described, the literacy rate of the poor (15 years-old and above) is 57.1 %, while that of the non-poor is 74.5 %. The average years of school attendance are 3.0 years for the poor, while it is 4.8 for the non-poor. Access to complete schools (schools which can teach all the school grades) is 55.6 % for the non-poor, while it is lower for the poor at 43.0 %. Besides, the 2005 Census shows that higher education can obviously explain a higher rate of employment than lower levels of education. This clearly shows that being poor (or being non-poor) is deeply connected to education levels.

As mentioned at the opening, Laos is viewed as a least developing country. GNP in Laos is ranked around 130th in the world. Thus, effects from education can be expected in the future.

The second effect that education is connected to social development and will provide a key to solving various problems which are suffered by developing countries. Here, social development includes controlling the birth rates and mortality rates of children, maternal health, and improvement in child nutrition

and health. The average health level in Laos has improved greatly in the last two decades, but it is still low compared to that of its neighboring countries. In particular, indexes such as the infant-mortality rate per 1,000, the mortality rate for children aged under 5 per 1,000, and the mortality rate of pregnant women per 100,000, are as high as 70 infants in 2005 (82.2 infants), 97.6 children in 2005 (106.9 children), and 405 women in 2005 (530 women), respectively (the numbers in brackets are the figures for 2000).

Because fertility is encouraged in developing countries generally, there is a tendency for pregnancy to cause women's illnesses or a high mortality rate among children. But these problems can be solved by educating parents (especially mothers). The infant mortality rate is high in Laos. A woman gives birth to an average 4.6 children (in her lifetime) according to the census in Laos (4.8 children in 2000), and thus it is difficult to say that infants and mothers are healthy <sup>(3)</sup>. Furthermore, Laos is ranked at 130th in the Human Development Index (HDI), and therefore Laos can develop further socially.

The first priority for social development is to find the meaning of receiving an education. Generally, educated women have the ability to maximize their longevity by controlling their health as well as by considering the number of children they have. Lockheed and Vespoor have reported that if mothers are educated for a year, the mortality rate of children can be reduced by 9.0 %. That is, the educational level of mothers can affect the existence of their children. The education of mothers also has a big connection to the nutrition status of their children. For example, as the educational level of mothers becomes higher, the choice of meal becomes important and mothers will show better judgment as to what kind of food their families should have.

Taking into consideration what has been described so far, we can acknowledge how importantly education plays a role and how absolutely necessary the meaning of education is in developing countries like Laos <sup>(4)</sup>.

Furthermore, the reasons why the role of education has been emphasized in recent years can be examined. An urgent need in developing countries is for people to escape from poverty. That is, economic development (even if it is a small development) is to be achieved while easing the excessive birth rate,

the mortality rate and malnutrition, so that people can have healthier lives in society. So long as it is thought that the role of education can contribute to that, exploring educational issues in this study will be meaningful.

Now, the reason why this study focuses on educational disparity among issues related to education in Laos will be described. In developing countries like Laos, there are various kinds of disparity, including gender disparity, regional disparity, hierarchical disparity, and ethnic disparity. Reviewing various kinds of educational data in Laos, ethnic disparity appeared to be most noticeable. The living environment was originally different between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minorities. For example, according to Andersson, Engvall, & Kokko (2006), almost 80.0 % of Thai-Kadai, the ethnic majority, lives in villages with all-season road access, and more than 60.0 % have electricity. On the other hand, the corresponding figures for Tibeto-Burman's, an ethnic minority, are 22.0 % for road access and less than 20.0 % having access to electricity.

Data about education is specialized here. Though the enrollment rate by ethnic group is not recorded in Laos, enrollment conformation of main ethnic groups is disclosed in the census of 2005. For example, the rates of children who have never been enrolled are 25.0 % (34.3 %) for Phuthai, the ethnic majority, but the rates are as high as 33.0 % (56.4 %) for Khmu, an ethnic minority, and 42.0 % (67.2 %) for Hmong, an ethnic minority (The numbers in brackets show rates from the census in 1995).

According to the ADB (2001), 31.0 % of the Mon-Khmer villages and 47.0 % of all villages in the south had no schools at all. Tibet-Burman villages had facilities for grade 2 or below.

A disparity can be found in the data which indicates enrollment rates for primary education by prefecture. As the data shows later, enrollment rates are high in places such as Vientiane Capital (the enrollment rate is 96.8 %) and Champassak (the rate is 92.9 %) where the residential rates of ethnic minorities are low (6.4 % and 13.9 %, respectively). Meanwhile, the enrollment rate is 52.0 % in Phongsaly, where the residential rate of ethnic minorities is high (95.7 %), and similarly, the enrollment rate is 64.2 % in Luangnamtha, where the

**Table 1:** Percentage of school levels available by ethnicity

Ethnicity	None	P2	P3	P4/5	PS
Mon-Khmer	31	29	30	10	0
Tibet-Burman	29	71	0	0	0
Hmong-Mien	25	25	0	38	12
Lao-Thai	0	25	50	25	0
All	26	33	15	25	1

Note: P = Primary school, S = Secondary school.

Source: ADB, 2001.

residential rate of ethnic minorities is high (97.7 %) <sup>(5)</sup>. Gender disparity with regard to the educational index is actually narrowing (as net enrollment rates in primary education in 2000 were 85.0 % for men and 78.0 % for women, while they became 88.1 % for men and 84.5 % for women in 2006).

Returning to the health index, the Asian Development Bank reported (2009) that the infant mortality rate of Thai-Kadai, the ethnic majority, is 115 out of 1,000 infants. Meanwhile, the average infant mortality rate among ethnic minorities is 147, and especially, the infant mortality rate of the Austro-Asia, who live among the mountains, is as high as 222 infants. The mortality rate of children under 5 years old is 161 for Thai-Kadai, while the average rate for ethnic minorities is 230 <sup>(6)</sup>. These disparities could be related to the fact that the people of ethnic minorities have less access to education. This is a problem which could be improved if the people of ethnic minorities are provided with opportunities for education. Further study in areas which relate to resolving educational disparities among ethnic groups could connect to the improvement of life for ethnic minorities.

However, there are only a few books which have systematically examined the information collected about educational disparity in Laos, and also there are not many theses books and other previous studies available. In fact, in around 1998 when the author started research in Laos, almost all of the previous studies regarding education in Laos were limited to statistical analysis and report-like literature, mainly produced by government or international organizations.

In recent years, the availability of such literature is gradually increasing.

Thus, it is important to collect previous studies as much as possible in order to understand education conditions in Laos, especially regarding disparity and ethnic minorities, as well as to indicate problems which exist through these issues. This can help to find a method for improving the educational environment and for considering the coexistence of ethnic groups in developing and multi-ethnic countries like Laos. Especially for Laos, in order to achieve national integration in the future, how to draw ethnic minorities that have been understood as leading a marginal existence into to economic and political activity is an important issue for development.

This study focuses on primary education in Laos. This is because the Lao government has been putting its greatest efforts into the development of primary education since “Education for All” in 1990. Since the independence of Laos as a socialist regime, the government has placed the highest importance on primary education as a means to develop human resources that can then contribute to the development of the country, and in recent years the government has been injecting about half of public expenditure on education into primary education.

A second reason is because all of the problems which have been occurring in school education (including the wide age differences of students in the same class, low enrollment rates, and high rate of early leavers of schools) happen in primary education. In addition, as the ADB (2001) reports, the reasons why children do not attend schools in many villages are the language and cultural barriers they encounter.

In particular, the problem whereby many students dropout from school and can not survive until the fifth grade of primary school is particular to Laos, and according to UNICEF (2005), the survival rate (the percentage of primary-school entrants reaching grade 5) was 62.0 % (1998-2001). The rates were 94.0 % in Thailand, 89.0 % in Vietnam, 70.0 % in Cambodia, and 89.0 % in Indonesia. Thus it is not an exaggeration to say that the figure in Laos is extremely low in comparison to the rates in other Southeast Asian countries. The average rate in 2000-2004 was 63.0 % in Laos according to the UNICEF (2007), and it

is not showing much change.

According to statistics from UNESCO, the rate of students who repeat the same grade is high in primary school (based on average figures in all grades) and it was 21.0 % in 1999. It has improved to 18.0 % according to recent data (2006), but the rate in Cambodia, for example, where the rate of those repeating grades was as high as 25.0 % in 1999, like Laos, has improved, and it became 13.0 % in 2006. Examinations for promotion are conducted in Vietnam, like Laos and Cambodia, but the rate of those repeating grades was 4.0 % (1999), and it was 1.0 % (2006) in Vietnam. This shows that the rate in Vietnam is very low among the neighboring countries of Laos.

As we have seen, there are many problems which exist at the level of primary education in Laos. Looking at demographic composition by national census, the population from 0 to 14 years old accounts for nearly half of the entire population of Laos (39.0 % in 2005, 45.0 % in 1995), and this indicates that education for children needs to be expanded.

Taking into consideration the tendencies described above, it is meaningful to take up educational disparity and primary education in Laos as study themes.



**Photo 3:** Vientiane Capital in 2008



**Photo 4:** Monks on the street in the capital

## **Notes**

- (1) International organizations and the government are advancing projects in education, health, agriculture and communications in 47 of the poorest areas, in order to eradicate poverty (UNESCO & Ministry of Education, 2005).
- (2) The essential features of New Economy Mechanism (NEM) are more specifically: determination of prices and allocation of resources are deferred to the determination of the market, foreign and domestic trade are to be liberalized and the distribution of goods is to be freed up and more freedom is to be provided to enterprises and provincial regulators.
- (3) In particular, the mortality rate of children under five years old is as high as 140 to 160 children (/1,000) among rural residents. This rate is more than twice the mortality rate in China and Vietnam, which are 49 and 59 respectively. Maternal mortality is also as high as 656 women (/1,000) in Laos, which is about twice the rate of Myanmar and about 5 times of Vietnam (Asian Development Bank, 2000).
- (4) How the educational level of mothers can affect the health status of children is obvious in Laos, too. For example, the mortality rate of infants given birth to by uneducated women is 147 infants in 1,000, while the rates are 104 for mothers who have graduated from primary school and 70 for high-school graduates. This shows a tendency in which, as a mother's educational level goes up, the mortality rate of infants decreases (Asian Development Bank, 2000).
- (5) Distributions of ethnic minorities in Laos differ depending on region, and each ethnic group also has a form of income according to ethnic and regional characteristics (the people of the ethnic majority who live in urban areas earn stable incomes from commerce and service industries, while ethnic minorities who live in farming areas tend to rely on agriculture). Thus, ethnic, regional, and hierarchical disparities have crossovers.
- (6) The infant mortality rate also differs depending on the region. The infant mortality rate is 17.9 infants out of 1,000 in Vientiane Capital, where many people of the ethnic majority reside. On the other hand, the infant mortal-

ity rates in northern Luangnamtha and Luangprabang, where the number of residents of ethnic minorities is high, are as severe as 88.3 and 124.8 infants respectively. Also, the rates are high in southern Champassak and Attapeu, as they are 77.8 and 93.8 infants respectively (Department of Statistics of the Lao PDR, 2000).



# Chapter 1:

## History of education and the current educational system in Laos

### 1.1 Education before the socialist regime was established

#### 1.1.1 Before the French regime – education at Wat (temple)

Dissemination of education in Laos is deeply connected to the penetration of Buddhism, and a school education had been given only to Buddhists, who were males, since the foundation of Laos as a kingdom of LanXang in the 14th century. Females were educated at home to be wives during this period. At Wat, as a place for education, Buddhist monks orally taught Buddhists the teachings of Buddhism, traditional values of villages (respect for elders and parents, etc.), manner, reading and writing of the Laotian language, arithmetic, geography, speech and more (Condominas, 1998; Dore, 1972). Pali and Sanskrit for reading Buddhist sutras, carving, painting and other artistic subjects were also taught (Dommen, 1985). Condominas has described how Wat, during this period, was more like a place for education than a religious institute, and that it was a kind of institute similar to church-schools in France.

Having neither an official system of registration nor curricula for study at



**Photo 1-1:** Mendicant priest-monks in the early morning



**Photo 1-2:** Taking alms to the neighborhood temple

Wat with its role as a school, Buddhist monks had every possible right in the management of schools. There was no obligation regarding the year of enrollment and the study period of students was decided based on their parents' intent or their family situation, and this implies that the study mode was relatively free (Roberts & Whitaker, 1967). However, according to Stuart-Fox (1986), both males and females of ethnic minorities who were animists and resided in mountainous areas could not receive even a primary-level education.

**Column 1: Relation between Buddhist monks and schools**

In Laos, the connection of "Buddhism = schools" still exists. During my visit to tourist attractions in Vientiane, students dressed as Buddhist monks came to talk to me. They were each wearing an orange-colored Buddhist monk's stole. They were all speaking in English and practicing their English with tourists. I talked with them in some curiosity and found out that they were studying every day in a school for Buddhist monks, which is located next to a temple.

Schools for Buddhist monks are run under a system similar to regular schools, except that all the teachers are Buddhist monks. Some large-size temples have primary, intermediate and high schools on their properties, and they take the children of Lowland Lao, who are the ethnic majority and are Buddhists mainly. In many cases, the children of a poor family which has many children will come to enter the schools. This is because almost all of the schools are boarding schools where food and sleeping places are guaranteed. The students whom I talked to were happy because they couldn't go to school in the villages where they were born. They began studying for the first time in their lives after they entered the schools for Buddhist monks. They said that their English had improved greatly because they studied English for two

hours every day, though the number of students per class was as many as 60. Some of the students said that they wanted to go somewhere else to continue their study after they graduated from high school in two years, and some said that they wanted to go back to their home villages to teach English. According to them, the learning opportunity had developed their desire to learn and broaden their horizons.

Unfortunately, schools for Buddhist monks are something of a story having no relation to the children of ethnic minorities (many of them are animists), but still schools for Buddhist monks are a part of a precious school system where families, which are too poor to send their children to school, can send their children for an education while assuring themselves of the child's life. The students whom I talked to seemed to find the boarding life lonely, but I could see their dreams for the future in their eyes while they were talking to me in English, and they strongly believed that their dreams would come true by having an education.



**Photo 1-3:** Monk students enrolled in boarding school



**Photo 1-4:** A Buddhist temple, That Luang (Golden Temple) in Vientiane

### *1.1.2 Education during the French regime*

Believing that Laos, which has five borders, was a strategically necessary place for forays into Indochina, France obtained the protectorate of Laos in 1893. But later on France saw Laos, a small landlocked country, as an unimportant country and took a stance towards keeping Laos as a colony (Chagnon & Rumpf, 1982). Because of this, France did not build railways, roads or other infrastructure, and they ruled Laos indirectly by using Vietnamese to control the Laotians. France used Laos's regional segmentation and ruled the Laotians by separating them territorially and ethnically, and this resulted in a delay in the unification of the country and the development of human resources.

Allegedly, the ethnic minorities in the mountainous areas were conducting school education in a place similar to a temple school at around that time. Chazee describes how the Hmong were conducting education in schools based on their own traditions so that they had a good access to education (Chazee, 1998).

It was in the early 1900s when a budget for education was allocated and primary education was founded in Laos. But, according to Tant and Vokes, an end-of-course examination had to be taken in Hanoi or Saigon to complete the third grade of primary education, that is, of compulsory education, during the period 1907 to 1925. In 1921, the first secondary school (Collage Pavie) was founded in Vientiane, but students had to study in Hanoi if they wanted to complete all subjects and go on to high school (Stuart-Fox, 1986; Brown & Zasoloff, 1986).

France made moves to expand primary education in Laos in the 1940s, and they increased the number of schools based on the French education system (Moore-Howard, 1992). But the number of teachers of the Lao people was small, while two-thirds of the teachers were Vietnamese.

In 1947, the secondary schools (Collage Pavie) were moved up to be high schools (Lycee), and 17.0 % of the national budget was allocated to education (Stuart-Fox, 1986). Primary education up to the third grade was made compulsory in 1951, while the illiteracy rate was the highest in Southeast Asia, at about 95.0 % around that time (Brown & Zasoloff, 1986).

### *1.1.3 Education after independence from France – an education split into two systems*

The year 1954, when Laos became independent from France, was a time of great opportunity for the Laotians to establish their own independent education system, but it did not happen. Laotian was a teaching language at that time, but French was widely used and the majority of the teachers were French (Dommen, 1985). The education system in Laos at that period can be characterized as split into two parts, according to the local political climates.

In Vientiane, where Lowland Lao, the ethnic minority, lived, inherited the influence of French governance, and the Royal Lao Government took a lead in attaching importance to maintaining the education system of the French regime. All of the school system followed French systems, and thus the teaching language was French, teachers were French, and the curriculum organized by subject was mainly French, with the geography of France and French literature (Roberts & Whitaker, 1967).

Meanwhile, in the northern area of Laos – the base of the Pathet Lao, who were recalcitrant about the French and American occupation of Indochina – the issue was to build a school system unlike that attained during the French regime.

In the harsh conditions of civil war, the traditional education system of Laos was maintained and education continued based on the traditions and ideas (Buddhism) of Laos. As a result, education, which was based on the traditions of Laos, gradually permeated among the ethnic minorities, and this became the first step for the ethnic minorities to receive an education.

## **1.2 Education after the establishment of the socialist regime**

### *1.2.1 Education policy and planning*

1975 was a turning point in Laos. The civil war, which had lasted for about 20 years, ended and a socialist regime was established.

The government attempted to reform the education system in 1975, but many staff who had been involved in educational fields had left for overseas at the establishment of the socialist regime, so the government decided to entrust

each prefectural bureau of education with improving education. This policy only helped to spread schools which did not satisfy the national standards. Thus, the government emphasized enforcing policies in centralized ways and decided to use Laotian as a teaching language in kindergartens through to universities as its main policy.

The educational plans which have been issued in Laos since the establishment of the socialist regime in 1975 till today are divided into three steps: quantitative expansion in education (1975-1985), quantitative repletion in education (1986-1990) and quality improvement in education (1990-today), as described later (Tant & Vokes, 1997).

In addition, the Ministry of Planning and Investment Cooperation lays out short-, medium- and long-term educational plans. Department of Planning and Co-operation of the Ministry of Education has other tasks including the adjustment of projects of international institutes – this adjustment is conducted by each bureau within the Ministry – and budget control of projects. Educational plans in Laos are divided into short-, medium- and long-term plans depending on the time for goals. A long-term plan is an educational vision over a 10-year cycle, a medium-term plan means a five-year plan, and a short-term plan is the annual objectives for education which are made based on the medium-term plans. Conferences on education are held every year in order to set annual objectives for education, and high officials participate from each bureau of the Ministry of Education as well as from prefectural education bureaus.

### *1.2.2 Quantitative expansion (1975-1985) and quantitative improvement in education (1981-1989)*

The educational policies which were laid out in 1975 were to generalize primary education and to spread education to the entire people (Tant & Vokes, 1997).

Specifically, a five-year plan (1981-1985) was drawn up, and it aimed to eradicate illiteracy and to increase the number of buildings for primary, intermediate and vocational schools (Tant & Vokes, 1997). As a result, the number of school facilities increased over the entire educational level by the latter half of the 1980s.

For promoting policies related to the exploitation of the educational sector and social and economic development, educational plans were created which included defining the role and function of education, improving the level of teachers, and contributing to the educational development of society as a whole (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Changes in educational policies in Laos took place after 1986 when a new economic system was introduced. The government referred to quality improvement in education, and proposed “Educational goals for 2000” in 1989.

In the section where it touched upon primary education, which is the focus of this study, “Educational goals for 2000” proposed goals for improving the educational environment: the first goal was to increase the net enrollment rate in primary education up to 80.0 % while reducing the number of school enrollments by those older than the age for school enrollment (from 6 years old to 11 years old and over); the second goal was to reduce the school repetition rate and dropout rate and increase the number of graduates of primary school to 80.0 %; and the third goal was to improve the quality of education and textbooks to remedy students’ school performance, while teaching subjects suited to local needs and training students so that students would gain necessary knowledge and skills (Vientiane International Consultants, 1991).

### *1.2.3 Quality improvement in primary education (1990-2000)*

Changes occurred to the third step of education policies after Laos participated in the conference, “Education For All,” held in Thailand in 1990. The government of Laos began improving their educational system aggressively after the conference and decided to place special emphasis on expanding primary education. In the same year, a national education conference was held in the capital, Vientiane, and proposals were made for: improvement of the generalization of primary education, the expansion of literacy, and the amplification of educational opportunities, especially for ethnic minorities, females and people with disabilities (Chamberlain, 1995). These proposals were approved in the fifth convention held in the following year, 1991, and seven educational policies were enacted as listed below.

1. Universalizing primary education by 2000.
2. Improving the quality of education.
3. Increasing the amount of teaching materials and aids.
4. Restructuring the curriculum.
5. Revising methods for teacher training and improving working conditions for teachers.
6. Increasing the number of educational facilities in cities.
7. Spreading education among ethnic minorities.

In this way, since the 1990s, expansion of educational opportunities for ethnic minorities was taken into consideration in addition to the emphasis on primary education, and education was guaranteed in the new constitution as described later. But, education in the Laotian language and a curriculum which was the same as for the ethnic majority were obligatory in the policies for ethnic minorities, as before.

#### *1.2.4 Recent educational planning*

Though the Laotian government had mainly suggested the slogan “Education for All” (EFA), today’s slogan is divided mainly into two themes. One is “poverty reduction.” This slogan was put up partly because the goal of EFA has been difficult to achieve and the government needed to rephrase into something whereby their people could easily understand why the goal was necessary. That is, “education is necessary to reduce poverty.” This is probably a message to the people that improvement of the inveterate problem of poverty will begin when everyone receives an education.

The second slogan is revival of “Marxism-Leninism.” In the seventh convention held in 2001, concerning the outgrowing of socialism in Laos caused by the inflow of foreign influences to the country, the government declared its adherence to Marxism-Leninism and the denial of liberalism and individualism. Patriotism and socialism were assumed to be included in this slogan.

The two slogans above are included in the “Educational Strategic Vision by 2010 and 2020.” A rough summary of the principles, purposes and policies of

the Vision is: to relate education and the development of the social economy while focusing on international standards, and to create good Laotians who have a strong sense of patriotism and a sense of socialism. The framework of the Vision relates to the development of the entire nation.

The recent medium-term plan (2006-2010) which was announced officially by the Ministry of Education sets targets that relate to compulsory education as listed below (Ministry of Education, 2006).

1. Making primary education compulsory for expanding basic education. Especially, raising the literacy rate among ethnic minorities and stepping up their educational level while providing them with vocational training.
2. Raising the net enrollment rate in primary education from 84.2 % (2005) to 89.0 % (2010). Reducing the rate of dropouts and repetition in primary schools by 2.3 % per year.
3. Setting the construction of primary schools as a top priority and building primary schools – which are not incomplete schools – especially in the residential areas of ethnic minorities and in remote country districts.
4. Aiming to improve the quality of education and reform the teaching methods of Laotian for students in ethnic minorities who do not understand Laotian. Training teachers who can teach each subject precisely.

In 2005, a major national policy and strategic framework “EFA-NPA (National Plan of Action 2003-2005)”, which aims at universal primary education by 2015, was established. It contains specific action policies and planning toward EFA (UNESCO & Ministry of Education, 2005).

### **1.3 Educational administration and the school system today**

#### *1.3.1 Educational administration*

The Ministry of Education controls educational administration and takes a pivotal role in educational activities in Laos. According to a Prime Minister’s Decree which was announced in 1993, the tasks of the Ministry of Education are to make plans for the educational system, to give advice and make recom-

mentations on educational policies, and to supervise educational activities throughout the country. Especially, the Ministry is involved in tasks such as the development of the curriculum, the compilation and publication of textbooks, teacher training, making a national educational budget and other educational finances, and human resource management (Asian Development Bank, 1999). National unified examinations and the monitoring of school levels are also done under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

A system for the decentralization of local government was launched in 2000, and it was decided that Provincial Educational Services (PES) and District Education Bureaus (DEB) which are established in each province should conduct local administration, and each service and bureau be responsible for making and controlling budgets as well as recruiting teachers.

Though PES is in charge of secondary education and vocational training, and while DEB is responsible for preschool education and primary education, local infrastructure is traditionally weak in Laos; thus, it will take time to realize this system.

At the micro level, the local community also contributes to educational administration, and the shortfall in the educational budget is compensated by, for example, contributions. Contributions are collected from students' parents and local companies, and the money is used to compensate for costs, including constructing classrooms and schools, maintenance of buildings and salaries for teachers.

### *1.3.2 Education system*

When the socialist regime was established in 1975, the educational system was to be improved in Laos, and in the following year a school education system was enacted, which included five-level education stages, as a part of educational reform. The five levels comprise: nursery schools for 0 to 2 year-old children (*honglien dek*), preschools including kindergartens (*anouban*) for 3 to 5 year-old children, five years of primary education (primary schools, *pathom*) for 6 to 10 year-old children, three years of lower secondary education (junior high schools, *mathayom*), three years of the upper secondary education (high

schools, oudom), and higher education including universities.

Since 1998 junior high schools and high schools have been considered as an educational unit, and their title has been changed (junior high schools, mathayom tonton; high schools, mathayom pai), and they have also been statistically amalgamated. Thus the current educational stage consists of four levels (see: Figure 1-1).

The five years of primary school are compulsory in the educational stages described above. The language of instruction in education between pre-school and higher education is Laotian and Laoscript, which is used by the Lowland Lao, ethnic majority. Basically, the school fee is free only for public schools.

The number of years of compulsory education (five years) is relatively short in comparison to other countries, and the total of five years in primary and three years in lower secondary education is too short on the whole. Thus, there is a plan to add one year to lower secondary education to make it up to four years, and officially to enact this in 2009. The Ministry of Education is also planning to extend compulsory education (5 years) to the lower secondary level (4 years) and make for a nine-year compulsory education system before 2015.

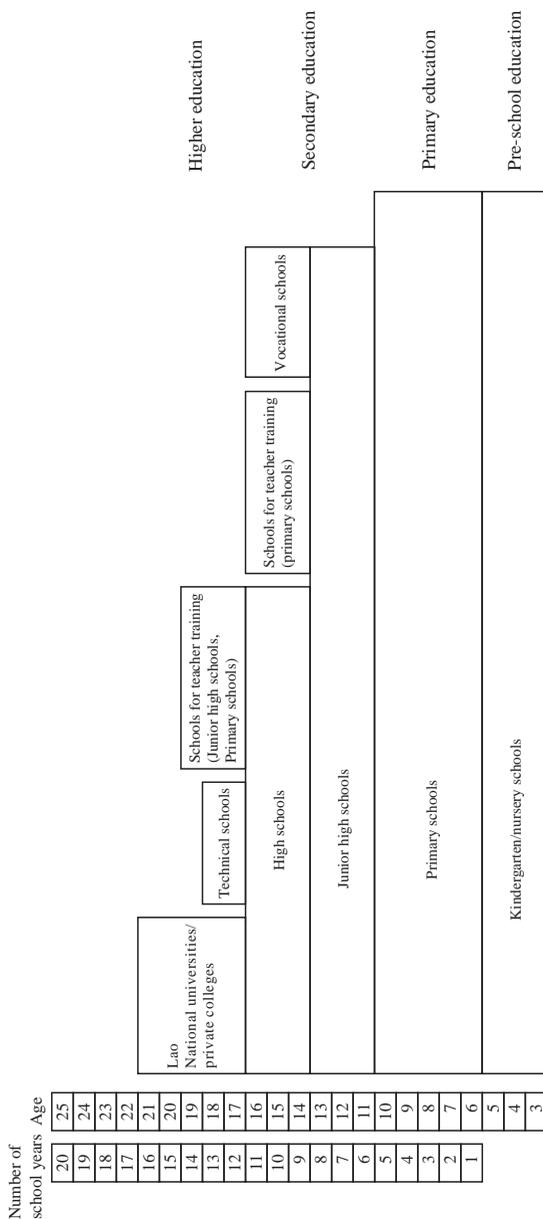
## **1.4 General education and curriculum**

According to the Ministry of Education, the education system in Laos is composed of: 1. General education (pre-school, primary, secondary education); 2. Vocational and technical education, including teacher training; and 3. Higher education (Ministry of Education, 2000). Next, each educational system will be reviewed here, though some years overlap, especially in 2 and 3.

### *1.4.1 General education*

#### *1.4.1.1 Pre-primary education*

Nursery school takes care of infants of 0 to 2 years old, and kindergarten takes care of children of 3-5 years old. Unlike Japanese kindergarten, the kindergartens in Laos open for as long a duration as 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and thus even a two-income family can use them.



**Figure 1-1:** Education system in Laos  
 Source: Created by the author based on data provided by Ministry of Education.

The goals for pre-school education, which are decided by the Ministry of Education of Laos, are to develop children's physical, emotional, social and spiritual capabilities. More specifically, children are to have high physical development, to follow instructions by teachers, and to develop their imagination and creativity, and schools are to create an environment where children can enjoy themselves. Some amount in school fees (some US dollars) is collected, unlike for other educational stages.

UNESCO reported that the net enrollment rate was 11.0 % for preschool education in 2006. The low enrollment rate is caused by the fact that a priority has been placed on primary education so far and the labor cost in preschool education is high. Low demand for preschool education is another factor. In Laos, generally, mothers bring up their children at home if mothers are staying at home, while children are also taken care of by grandparents or relatives if mothers are working.

However, the government has begun focusing on preschool education as well, according to National Planning Action (2003-2015). This is because development in preschool education can lead to developments in primary education. More specifically, government facilitates are organizing special classes, of which the targets are children of ethnic minorities, girls, and children in poor areas, to provide them with preparation for the first year of primary school. There is also an approach by communities in poor areas to build kindergartens with support from the Ministry of Education. The changes described above have increased the number of nursery schools and kindergartens, as the number of registered schools was 969 schools with about 45,000 people in 2005, compared with 754 with 38,000 people in 2001. The number of children's nurses in 2005 was 2,702.

#### *1.4.1.2 Primary education*

In Laos, only the five years in primary school are regarded as compulsory education. Village heads, school administration committees, and school principals are directly involved with the construction and maintenance of schools in villages throughout the country, and especially school construction is carried

out under the responsibility of each village. In recent years it has been permitted for villages to request companies to provide money to build schools. It is assumed that expansion of relations with companies increases the number of schools in the country, though the villages with mayors who have stronger relationships with companies may receive more support from companies.

Article 19 of the Constitution stipulates primary education and emphasizes



**Photo 1-5:** Visiting Sisavath preschool and primary school in Vientiane Capital



**Photo 1-6:** The first grade-Lao language class



**Photo 1-7:** The third grade class

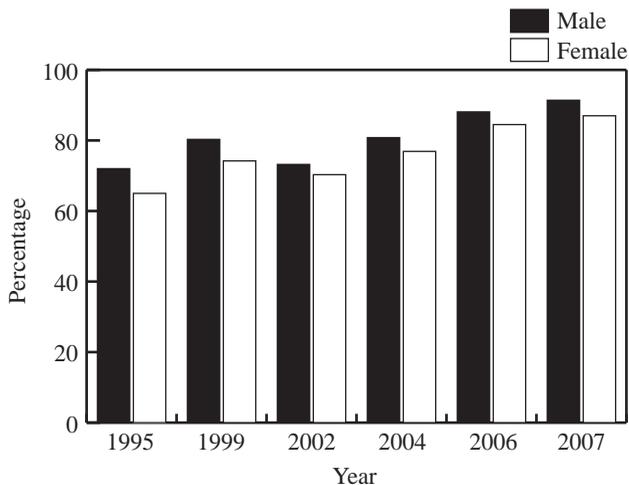


**Photo 1-8:** Students take their own lunch and water in a basket

that all people of age six or more have to receive a five-year compulsory primary education equally, and they must complete the education, without dropping out, before they reach age 14, except for students with physical and mental problems (the first, second, and third clauses).

The fourth clause of the same Article clearly specifies the aim of enhancing children’s capacities physically as well as mentally in accordance with the curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education, and regardless of whether private or public, schools must be able to conduct such educational activities. The fifth clause also expresses clearly that the government and people are responsible for the management and operation of public primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2000).

The Ministry of Education in Laos reports that the gross enrollment rate in primary education was 121.0 % and the net enrollment rate was 89.0 % in 2007. The gross enrollment rate is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of relevant school-age groups. In Laos, the numbers of students who repeat the same grade in primary school and the number of children who do not enter school at age six are large, and the number of



**Figure 1-2:** Improvement in the enrollment rate of primary education and gender disparities

students enrolled is increasing among the children whose age is over the public school age, and thus the figure is over 100 %. In contrast, the net enrollment rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who are relevant only to the school enrollment age group by the population of the relevant age, and this is considered effective to understand the school enrollment rate. The current situation is that the number of children who are enrolled in grades matching the official school enrollment age is small in mountainous areas <sup>(1)</sup>.

The net enrollment rate from 1995 to 2006 has been improved, as shown below, and the gender disparities have become smaller.

### *1.4.1.3 Secondary education*

In Laos, secondary education consists of a three-year lower secondary education (junior high school) and a three-year upper secondary education (high school). The students who complete their lower secondary education may choose to get a job, study at the three-year teacher training school (for obtaining teaching licenses for primary school and junior high school), or go on to later secondary education. The students who complete their upper secondary education may choose to get a job, go on to higher education, including the National University of Laos, go abroad to study, or go to teacher training school (for obtaining teaching licenses for kindergarten, primary school, and junior high school).



**Photo 1-9:** Junior high school located in mountain area in Xieng Khouang Province



**Photo 1-10:** Female students in the school yard



**Photo 1-11:** Class in the second year of the school



**Photo 1-12:** A school building made of wood

As to the gross enrollment rate in secondary education in 2006, it was 53.3 % for lower secondary education (male 58.9 %, female 47.5 %), and 34.6 % for upper secondary education (male 29.7 %, female 39.5 %). These enrollment rates show that more than half of the children of the relevant age group enrolled in lower secondary education, but the number decreases for upper secondary education to one in three children. The rates also indicate gender disparities.

In many cases, the upper secondary schools are built in the center of provinces, and almost no upper secondary schools have been built in villages or mountainous areas. Thus, there are many cases, especially in rural areas, of sending children to high schools by making children live in a relative's house in town. It can be said that the opportunities for upper secondary education are limited for the ethnic minorities, especially in mountainous areas.



**Photo 1-13:** Phonsavan high school in Xieng Khouang



**Photo 1-14:** The most popular class is English.

#### *1.4.2 Vocational education (vocational, technical schools) and teacher training*

The system related to vocational education is still in the process of adjustment, but the Department of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education classifies vocational education roughly into two categories of vocational schools and technical schools. The Prime Minister's Decree of 1998 stipulates that vocational schools (primary technical schools) mainly train graduates of junior high school for three years and technical schools (higher professional schools) train high-school graduates for two years.

The types of diploma given to graduates vary depending on the number of study-years. A certificate of vocational education is given to those students who complete vocational schooling while a certificate of technology is given to the graduates of technical schools. Some vocational schools provide the graduates of secondary schools with five or six years of education and then give them a diploma for completing their vocational education. The National University of Laos has a course to give a higher diploma.

Regarding teacher training, in Laos it is difficult to make living only from a teaching job so that teachers need to concentrate on their secondary-jobs, and this vicious cycle cannot be perpetuated. Today, the number of school buildings is certainly increasing in the country and EFA has been achieved little by little. This situation creates demand for further training of teachers. Because an inability to retain teachers means no accomplishment of EFA, the retaining of

teachers will be more necessary in the days ahead.

Changes have been seen in the system of teacher training, too. Teacher training in Laos is divided into two types of training of pre-service and in-service. For the pre-service training program, an increase in the years of study for obtaining a teacher's license has been attempted with project support from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) since 2002. More specifically, high school graduates are required to attend a program for two years (previously one year) in order to obtain a license for teaching at kindergarten, and two years of attending a program (previously one year) are also required for high school graduates to be teachers at primary schools. This aims to train students so that they become teachers of high quality. Incidentally, a three-year training program is necessary after graduating from high school in order to be a teacher of junior high school. Only graduates from the National University of Laos can become high school teachers.

### **Column 2: Teachers in Laos**

What kind of certificate is the teacher's license in Laos? I asked one of my friends who was teaching Lao literature in a high school to show me her certificate. In Laos there are still many unqualified teachers, and especially so in some mountainous areas where ethnic minorities live. It is common for graduates from primary schools to teach in primary schools and graduates of junior high schools to teach in junior high schools. But only graduates from the Faculty of Education in Laos National University are eligible to be high school teachers, according to the current teacher-training system in Laos. The teaching license shown by my friend was a diploma from Laos National University. I asked her if there was another certificate as a teacher's license, but she seemed to have no idea about "teacher's license" and kept showing me the diploma. The diploma specified her date of birth and other private

information, her degree (Bachelor of Education), her major (Lao language and Laotian literature), the faculty she graduated from (Faculty of Education), and the year of graduation. That is to say, diploma = teacher's license, and a teacher's license in itself doesn't exist. Very few students can go on to the National University of Laos anyway, and not so many high school teachers from remote areas have an official license like her.

Still, only a few people want to be teachers in Laos. A teacher has a status which is respected by students certainly, but the teachers' salary is so low that they cannot make a living from that job alone. Because of this, their social status is not high. In 1999, at the time of my research, the initial salary for primary school teachers was about 50,000 kip, that is, about 8 US dollars. The salary has improved and it has increased up to about 20 US dollars today.

Many teachers give themselves over to their secondary-jobs because their salary from teaching is very low. Teachers in farming areas do farming as their second job. They concentrate on farming during the busy seasons, and thus parents and students complained to me many times that their teachers did not come to school. Working hours for teachers are relatively short in school and few teachers work after classes. Teachers concentrated on working on their second jobs after school or at weekends. English teachers were, for example, running private classes or rented a place for a classroom and taught English there, so that they could earn money to add to their living expenses. Music teachers performed live music at weddings on weekends. Others also worked as, for example, *tuku-tuku* drivers, or owners of restaurants or clothing stores in a market, though they were teachers. Some teachers were engaged in their secondary-jobs in school, too. I used to see a teacher who changed into the owner of a store

at the corner of the school between classes. There used be a female teacher who was concentrating on doing embroidery between classes. I was told that she was doing embroidery on bags and small objects so that they could be sold in a market. Secondary-jobs became so important that teachers sometimes neglected their teaching job.

Today, teaching jobs come with economic difficulties, but if their living is guaranteed for the better and their incentives for becoming a teacher are increased, probably more people will want to be teachers and their morale will be uplifted. In addition, this will make an impact on the improvement of quality of education.



**Photo 1-15:** A female teacher showing her teaching license (graduation diploma)



**Photo 1-16:** High school students wearing the uniform (Phonsavan, Xieng Khouang)

### 1.4.3 Higher education

Higher education in Laos has just begun improving. In the past, higher educational institutes were decentralized in Laos and universities were not consolidated. Thus, there was a shortage of the necessary human resource towards a market economy. Under this circumstance, the Asian Development Bank formulated a “Post-Secondary Education Rationalization Project” based on the request by Lao government and established the National University of Laos

by issuing a Prime Minister's Decree in June, 1995. In Laos, higher education basically means the next educational steps after a total 11 years of education including the years at primary school (5 years), junior high school (3 years), and high school (3 years). Though some parts overlap with vocational educational schools or teacher training schools, besides these schools the National University of Laos and private colleges are considered as higher education. Today, the number of universities (*mahavithayalai*) is only one, that is, the National University of Laos, and this was founded with support from the Asian Development Bank and has campuses in three cities of Vientiane, Champassak and Luangprabang.

It was in 1996 that the National University of Laos was founded, and at that time the number of faculties was eight and the number of students was about 8,000. The numbers increased to 12 and 26,673, respectively, in 2002. Champassak has four faculties and Luangprabang has five faculties, and they opened in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Graduate schools have steadily been established, and institutionalization started around in 2005. Today, master's courses are offered in only seven faculties.

UNESCO reported that the gross enrollment rate for higher education was 9.0 % in 2006, and this shows that enrollment opportunities are extremely limited. According to student data provided by the website of the National University of Laos, the ratio is low among ethnic minorities and females, and this indicates that enrollment opportunities for higher education are extremely limited for ethnic minorities and females. For example, according to the ratio in data for the financial year of 2005 to 2006, which show the number of students in ethnic groups and their gender, among 26,079 students in 12 faculties, 94.0 % (24,343) are the ethnic majority Thai-Kadai, while Austro-Asia is 0.02 % (523) and Hmong-Yao is 0.04 % (1,313). In short, most students are of the ethnic majority and the number of students from ethnic minorities is negligible.

As to private colleges, the government recommended expansion of private colleges through a Prime Minister's Decree in 1995, and since then the number of higher educational institutes has increased and the number of colleges (business, English etc.) has been increasing almost year by year. This is because the



**Photo 1-17:** Faculty of Economics and Business Management, National University of Laos established by international aid



**Photo 1-18:** In a business class (Faculty of Economics and Business Management)



**Photo 1-19:** A private college (Lao – American College)



**Photo 1-20:** A private college (Rattana Business College)

number of people who are in the age group eligible for higher education has surged and the National University of Laos alone cannot supply the demand for higher education. According to the official document from Department of Private Education in Ministry of Education, the number of these private universities, called vithayalai in Laos, was 12 in 2003, but it increased to 72 by 2008. Today, higher education is being privatized in Laos in the same way as in East Asia and Southeast Asian countries.

The Ministry of Education reported on the number of private schools in 2008 and found that schools for preschool education are 191, primary schools are 120, junior high schools are 26, schools which continue from junior high school through high school are 15, and vocational and technical schools are 15. The numbers are increasing in the area outside of higher education.

General education in Laos has been described above, and now the types of curricula used in general education will be shown.

#### *1.4.4 Study subjects and examinations for promotion*

The school curriculum is centralized and it has the force of law for schools regardless of their being public or private. The curriculum is drawn up by the National Research Institute for Educational Science (NRIES) and the curriculum committee under the control of the Ministry of Education adopts it after providing a close investigation and making necessary modifications.

The curricula of primary education, which are the focal point of this study, are mainly the three subjects of Laotian, arithmetic, and a subject named “the world around us,” which is an integrated teaching of arithmetic, science and social studies. Art, physical education, music and crafts are also added as sub-subjects.

Among these seven subjects, textbooks are published only for Laotian, arithmetic and “the world around us” (which is used from the fourth grade), and textbooks for art, music and crafts do not exist. Textbooks for sub-subjects have also not been published yet.

#### **Column 3: Shortage of textbooks, and school efforts**

When I visited schools in Vientiane Capital, almost all of the students had textbooks. This situation was the same in lower secondary schools (junior high schools). Students wrote their names on their own textbooks for each subject and they carried their textbooks in bags to school. The NRIES (National Research Insti-

tute for Educational Science), which compiles and publishes textbooks, has made some effort in delivering textbooks to schools throughout the country in accordance with the number of children in Laos.

But the situation was different in schools in mountainous areas where I visited. Textbooks were not distributed in a satisfactory way and only one of three or four students had textbooks. One textbook was shared by a few students during classes. In a junior high school – which I eventually arrived at covered in dust after about a half-hour drive on the mountain road by motorbike from Phonsavan, the center of Xieng Khouang Province – almost no students had textbooks. The school was located on the mountainside, and some of the students walked about two hours to get school every day. Thus, even just coming to school was a great effort for them.

In the case of schools where textbooks have not been delivered sufficiently, students bought textbooks in the market. But each textbook cost about 1 US dollar and it was financially difficult for students to have all the textbooks. Educational advisors at the Department of Education had their special ways to deal with the shortage of textbooks. According to this system, students could rent textbooks at a very cheap price. In a junior high school, all of the textbooks for all subjects (13 subjects) were owned by the school and they were rented to the students for a very small amount of money. Two-thirds of the textbooks were provided by the Department of the Ministry of Education, and one-third of them were left at school when students graduated. The textbooks were shared by all students. But some students still could not even pay the amount of the rental fee. These students had no choice but asking their friends to see their textbooks together or to rely on what the teachers wrote on the blackboard.

In order to gain funds, the junior high school was providing students with special lessons and these lessons were not seen in the cities. For example, the teachers taught their students how to grow crops on farms, and the students also learned how to sell the crops in the market. The money obtained from selling the crops was used to buy textbooks. The lessons were very practical, and the students were, in a sense, learning science, mathematics and distribution through real experience. I realized that even though the children in severely mountainous areas were placed in a disadvantageous educational situation, they were being taught something they could never learn from their textbooks.

The Ministry of Education allows local department of education to modify and add to the current curricula up to 20.0 % according to local contents, but almost no local bureaus of education run curricula independently today. Thus, the ethnic minorities with their different cultural backgrounds are studying the same curricula as the ethnic majority.

As to examinations for promotion, students have to pass a nationally standardized final examination held at the end of the year, which is in May <sup>(2)</sup>. If students fail this test, they have to repeat the grade. If students complete their primary education and they want to go on to lower secondary education, they are required to pass the final examination of the fifth grade. This condition of passing final examinations at the prior stage of education as a requirement for proceeding also applies to upper secondary education.

## **1.5 Education-related constitution and budget**

### *1.5.1 Constitution and education laws*

The existence of ethnic minorities was identified clearly in the new constitution of Laos which was formulated in 1991. Article 19 of the constitution emphasizes the importance of compulsory education and the development of educa-

tion in the residential areas of ethnic minorities, and it may be summarized as: “It is important to enhance education so that the new generations become better citizens. It is important for the government and people to enhance compulsory education especially. Mountainous areas and remote locations where ethnic minorities reside should also be taken into consideration.” In the same article preservation of culture is mentioned, and it focuses on how: “The nation attaches an importance to the facilitation of culture within the country, and for that purpose the nation is to preserve local culture and art, which includes that in mountainous areas, as sovereign property.” (Derarck, 1997)

Laos’ education laws, which were issued in 2001, have been revised and currently comprise 12 chapters and 78 articles (12 chapters and 54 articles in 2001). Article 3 of Chapter 1 (citizens’ rights and education) and Article 22 of Chapter 5 (students and education) therein mention “ethnic minorities and education.” More specifically, both articles contain the message that “students are entitled to receive equal education regardless of their ethnic background and religion” and the law guarantees the rights of all students to receive an education. Thus, in Article 47 of Chapter 9, parents’ obligations for education are defined as: “parents are obliged to send their children to school.”

Article 17 of Chapter 4 mentions “subjects’ curricula,” saying that “subjects’ curricula at each educational level are decided by the government according to the purpose of their contribution to the development of the nation and human resources,” and Article 18 of the same chapter mentions that “education is to be conducted by using the same curriculum throughout the country, and especially private and public schools throughout the country are obliged to provide lessons equally and to use the same curriculum.” Article 20 also states that if any changes are made to the contents of subjects which are decided by the government, these have to be reported to the local department of education (Honkan Kotmai, Kasuang Suksa: Department of Law, Ministry of Education, 2000). In addition, a Prime Minister’s Decree is announced in Laos if required.

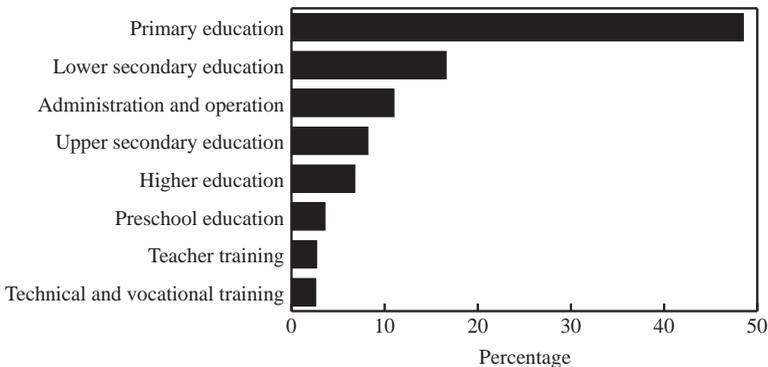
### *1.5.2 Transition of budget for education*

The budget for education surged in the 90s, and this situation happened under

the influence of the promotion of foreign investment in the new economic system and the acceptance of structural accommodation facilities since 1989. The budget for education was 46.6 billion kip in 1995 and it increased to 198.5 billion kip in 1999. In 2004, the budget was 688.7 billion kip, and it was about 1,288.8 billion kip (about 10,000 USD) in 2008, which included an investment budget (foreign aid). See the supporting data at the end of the chapter for the budget for education in recent years.

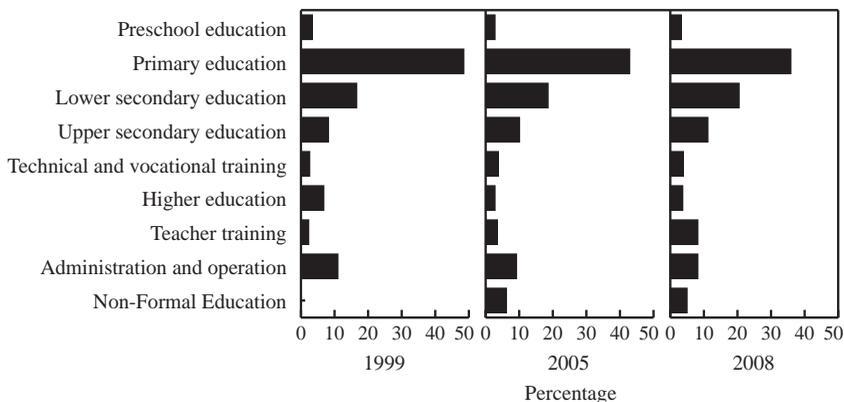
The use of the budget for education inside Laos is notable for the fact that it is mainly used for primary and secondary education (see: Figure 1-3). As to the budget for education in the year 1999, which was investigated as an example for this study, 48.5 % was allocated to primary education and 16.6 % to lower secondary education. This was followed by 11.0 % to administration and operation, 8.2 % to upper secondary education, 6.8 % to higher education, 3.6 % to preschool education, 2.7 % to teacher training, and 2.6 % to technical and vocational education. The budget for education was mainly used for primary and secondary education. This is partly because most students do not go on to higher education, but also this is a result of placing a high priority on basic education after the national education conference was organized as a response to “Education For All” in 1990.

However, as Figure 1-4 shows, the budget has been allocated differently in



**Figure 1-3:** Budget allocation for education in 1999-2000

Source: Document provided by Ministry of Education.



**Figure 1-4:** Changes in budget allocation for education

recent years, and as we can see, through comparison with the budget allocations in 2005, the budget allocated for primary education slightly decreased while it increased for secondary and higher education. As we also can see in the budget allocation plans for 2008, the budget for primary education is further reduced and the plan is to increase the budget allocation for secondary education and teacher training. A feature in the figures is the new allocation of a budget for Non-Formal Education, which was not seen in 1999. The budget allocation for Non-Formal Education began in the year 2004.

### 1.5.3 Development of Non-Formal Education

The government has conducted Non-Formal Education, with the lead of the Department of Non-Formal Education of the Ministry of Education, in order to complement the functions of school education, where the infrastructure was obviously inadequate. In a Formal Proclamation in 1998, the government declared, as goals for Non-Formal Education: the overcoming of illiteracy among ethnic minorities and women in the country and an improvement in the quality of primary and secondary education (Asian Development Bank, 1999). Non-Formal Education in Laos targeted the following groups: children aged between 6 and 14 without experience of school attendance, illiterates aged between 15 and 40 with an interest in literacy education, and people aged be-

tween 15 and 24 without regular jobs and with an interest in basic vocational training.

In the current situation for conducting Non-Formal Education, securing a budget is difficult, and thus cooperation from NGOs international bodies and is being obtained. The number of targets for Non-Formal Education is, partly as outcomes of these actions, gradually decreasing today.

Therefore, the National Plan of Action (2003-2015) currently proposes improvements in the design of Non-Formal Education vocational and rural skills training programs to reach target groups (Ministry of Education, 2005).

#### *1.5.4 International cooperation in educational sectors*

Foreign aid agencies are currently operating throughout Laos, in addition to providing assistance towards Non-Formal Education. Today, development in educational fields is impossible without initiatives by international organizations or NGOs, and foreign aid accounts for more than 70.0 % of educational expenditure. According to Foreign Aid Report (2005/2006), the total amount of ODA assistance is 468.39 million USD and of that 10.96 % (51.3 million USD) is allocated for education and human resource development. Currently, the major scheme aims at poverty reduction both in bilateral aid and multilateral aid.

Back to the 90's, the top donor to Laos was ADB and Japan, but the orga-



**Photo 1-21:** Children learn dancing on weekends in the Children's Education Development Center



**Photo 1-22:** Portable book shelf distributed by NGO (Action with Lao Children)



**Photo 1-23:** Children read books distributed by NGO (Action with Lao Children)  
Source: Action with Lao Children.

nization is gradually changing and increasing. As in bilateral aid next to Japan, Korea, France, Australia, German are major donors respectively. The current aid organizations in Laos by educational levels are mainly UNICEF and UNESCO for pre-primary education, ADB, Aus AID, SIDA, WB, UNESCO and UNICEF for primary education. The secondary education is limited to ADB or UNESCO.

Also numbers of NGO, such as Action with Lao Children (ALC, Japan), Save the Children (Norway, U.K.), Catholic Relief Service (U.S.A.), Church World Service (U.S.A.), Room to Read, Big Brother Mouse (Australia) and private companies from overseas are providing support in various kinds of areas.

Today, many projects are related to the assistance of domestic education in Laos, and this book will look at two aspects – “sufficiency of (school) buildings” and “promotion of school attendance” – among the primary education-related projects, since primary education is the focus of this book.

Styles of projects for school construction are different, depending on the types of projects, like, for example, projects which only provide money in relation to building schools, projects involving grant aid as well as the building of schools, and projects to provide construction materials and to have local residents undertake construction work.

Efforts at improving “incomplete schools,” which do not cater to all school

years, have been attempted by taking the line of not building extra schools. This is a cluster system which has been promoted by the Ministry of Education with UNICEF as the core. It is a system in which a group of incomplete schools is arranged around a complete school, and the schools within the same group cooperate among themselves. Because this system can ease problems related to incomplete schools, reform measures have been promoted. However, according to a collaborative research report by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education (UNESCO & Ministry of Education, 2004), 64.2 % of the schools in all of Laos are still incomplete.

An official system to monitor the situation related to school-attendance among ethnic minorities and girls, which is the most important issue today, does not exist yet, but actions to promote their attendance in school have been conducted with support from overseas aid organizations.

Today, one of the main projects for supporting basic education in Laos is the ABEL (Access to Basic Education in Lao Program). This is a collaborative project among the Ministry of Education, AusAID, UNICEF, and WFP, and the aim is to achieve universal primary education, especially among ethnic minorities and girls, by 2015. In mountainous areas in Laos, schools are located in very far places and children have to walk on mountain roads to reach them; thus, they fall away from attending schools. UNICEF, therefore, is managing programs, of which strategies have been developed through the lead of AusAid, to raise incentives for attending schools in the northern provinces where the school attendance rate among ethnic minorities and girls is low. In addition, a project to provide lunch in schools has been conducted by WFP. In mountainous areas in Laos, for example, because parents cannot send children with a lunch, they do not send their children to school, or it takes too long for children to go back home for lunch, and therefore, providing meals in school is deeply related to attendance at school by children. Thus, providing lunch has greatly contributed to the promotion of school attendance. At the same time, hygiene control and teacher training have been conducted within the same project (Ministry of Education et al., 2006). Educational enlightenment activities have also been conducted for parents. These activities have been conducted in each vil-

lage with village heads or school principals as leaders, and besides their activities aiming to plead the importance of education to parents, they are promoting school attendance by placing posters and pictures to plead the importance of education in village offices.

When foreign organizations carry out activities in Laos, they are required to make a written memorandum with the government. Then, if it relates to education, for example, they will have discussions with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Information and Culture, based on the contents of projects.

Many organizations (donors) are operating in Laos, as already described, and it has been difficult even to grasp the nationwide situation. However, recently, two features of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAps) regarding donors' activities have been initiated. One SWAps is that some sort of coordination has been established among donors. This is a new movement in the educational sector in Laos, since projects were scattered and conducted everywhere in the country. More specifically, meetings of the Education and Sector Working Group, of which the chairman is the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education, are to be held about twice a month. The donors organize Education Donor Working Group, including officials of the Ministry of Education, to challenge effective aid coordination in accordance with educational planning and reform in Laos based on the country's needs. These movements have become more accelerated mainly by UNICEF and AUSAID and "10 Year Education Sector Framework (ESDF 2008-2018), a strategic paper for development program of educational sector, were formulated in the winter and officially approved in the National Education Reform Committee in early 2009.

The second features of SWAps in recent years are that, like the ABEL (Access to Basic Education in Laos) program, aid coordination has been made so that each organization can take action in its special field. Further, they do not take action by simply specializing in the educational sector, but rather, they embrace the sector and include the field of food planning or public health in educational projects in order to act effectively. Movements towards the SWAps began after 2001, and the "Declaration on the impact of support in Vientiane" was announced in 2006.

## **Notes**

- (1) The causes for this are: there is no official family register system in Laos and administrative institutions send their officials to villages to conduct family surveys; there are some people who do not know their own age in mountain areas where officials can not visit; and children are needed as labor in mountain areas so that some parents do not send their children to school at the relevant age.
- (2) School is under a semester system (September to December, January to May), and so starts in September and ends in May. Final exams are also held in December.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Ethnic minorities in Laos and the recent situation of educational disparity among ethnic groups**

Chapter 2 outlines the case of ethnic minorities in Laos and describes the development of policies toward minority peoples. Then the current situation regarding educational disparities between the ethnic majority and minorities will be looked at by referring to information such as statistical data.

## **2.1 Ethnic minorities in Laos**

### *2.1.1 Complicated distribution of ethnic minorities*

The current Lao government often speaks of a multi-ethnic Lao nation, but the term “minorities” refers to non-Thai-Lao (non-Thai-Kadai) groups (Evans, 2003). As it was explained in the beginning of this book, the government of Laos determined not to use the words of “majority” or “minority” in 2008. Considering the ethnic composition, there are provinces where Thai-Lao are very few, in other words, ethnic minorities are the “majority” in the provinces (see: Appendix 2) and these facts might have affected their decision. However, in the explanation of this chapter, the words of “majority” or “minority” or other information regarding ethnicity discussed before will be used.

This chapter will discuss the variety of ethnic minorities in the country, what kinds of policies the government has implemented towards them, and specifically what kinds of educational disparity are occurring among the ethnic groups inside the country.

Methods for classifying ethnolinguistic superstocks in Laos are still at an early stage, and thus crucial reports have not been made yet. But one of the characteristics of ethnic composition in Laos is that all of the groups straddle neighboring territories (Turton, 2000). As to checking ethnolinguistic superstocks, government officials and researchers have reported the number as in

the range of 30 to 70. According to Chazee, the Laotian government conducted the first investigation into ethnic groups in the latter half of the 1960s. The methods for classifying ethnolinguistic superstocks at that time were not based on ethnicity and the main language group, but were determined according to the topography where each group lives (as high or low residential areas). More specifically, it was to classify people in groups as: people who live at areas of 200 m to 400 m above sea level as Lao Loum (Lowland Lao), people at areas of 300 m to 900 m above sea level as Lao Thueng (Upland Lao), and people at areas of 800 m to 1,600 m above sea level as Lao Soung (Highland Lao). This classification method was certainly valid even in its cultural aspect, and thus it spread rapidly also in public, but it was insufficient to grasp the diverseness of ethnic groups in the whole of Laos <sup>(1)</sup> (Chazee, 1995).

Because of this situation, the government organized a Social Science Committee in 1989 and it studied the villages throughout the country for two years. As a result, it was announced that a total of 68 ethnic groups were identified. But detailed methods for checking ethnolinguistic superstocks were still uncertain, and thus, the former method of classification into three groups was widespread (Chazee, 1995).

In the census of 1995, the government conducted a more detailed investigation. Based on the results, the Laotian nation was divided into 47 groups ethnically and linguistically. According to the Ministry of Education (2000), the 47 ethnic groups are broken into four ethnic superstocks as shown in Table 2-1. Lao Loum (Lowland Lao) were renamed as of Thai-Kadai, Lao Thueng (Mountainside Lao) were renamed as of Austroasiatic group, and Lao Soung (Highland Lao) were classified into Hmong-Yao and Sino-Tibetan. Thai-Kadai, which accounts for 66.2 % among these groups, is called the ethnic majority while others are called ethnic minorities.

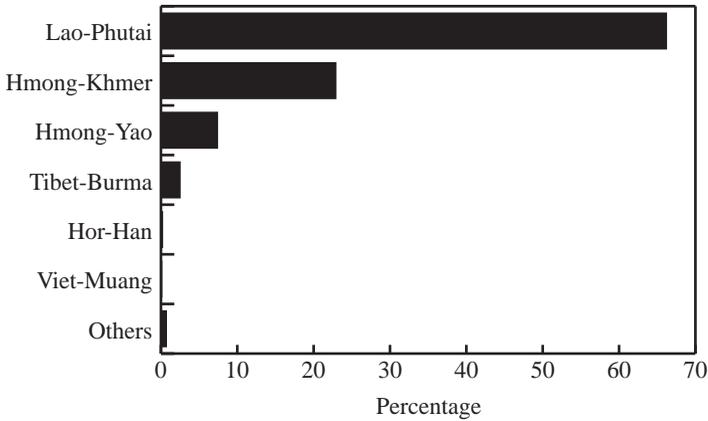
The four ethnic superstocks above are further broken into six linguistic families (Lao-Phutai, Hmong-Khmer, Viet-Muang, Hmong-Yao, Tibet-Burman, and Hor-han), as shown in Figure 2-1.

As far as I have observed, the people in Laos do not seem to recognize the four ethnic superstocks and use these names. People are using the three names

**Table 2-1:** Ethnic minority groups among minority peoples in Laos

Ethnic lineages	Linguistic families	Names of ethnic groups	Ratio <sup>2</sup>
Tai-Kadai (Ex-Lao Loum)	Lao-Phutai	Lao, Leu, Phoutai, etc.	66.2 %
Austroasiatic (Ex- Lao Thueng)	Hmong-Khmer, Viet-Muang	Kamou, Katang, Makong, etc.	22.9 %
Hmong-Yao (Ex-Lao Soung)	Hmong-Yao	Hmong-Yao	7.4 %
Sino-Tibetan (Ex- Lao Soung)	Tibet-Burma, Hor-Han	Kor, Phounoy, etc.	2.7 %

Source: Ministry of Education, 2000 and documents composed by the author based on materials supplied by Ministry of Education



**Figure 2-1:** Ratio of the six linguistic-family groups in the population  
Source: Created by the author based on Ministry of Education, 2001.

which they are familiar with, and they still use terms such as, for example, “I am Lao Loum (Lowland Lao)” or “I am Lao Soung (Highland Lao).”

According to Pholsena (2002), the number of ethnic minorities is 49 and this indicates that there has been a change sometime after 2000. When the Ministry of Education makes some announcement today, the number is also used. Thus, the number of ethnic minorities in Laos is expected to change as more research and investigations are conducted in the future.

Now the four ethnic superstocks will be examined. First, Tai-Kadai (ex-Lai Loum) is the main ethnic sperstock of which the main group is Lao and Phutai, and many of them live on hills along the Mekong and engage in the production of rice. Tai-Kadai is the ethnic majority (it makes up 66.2 %). They speak the national language, Laotian, and they have been traditionally engaged in the politics and culture of Laos. Most of the Tai-Kadai are Buddhists, and because they had an easy access to school education, they are very much interested in education and they are very religious. The name Tai-Kadai is not yet widely used among Laotians, so the terms of Lowland Lao (Lao Loum) or Lao, which are commonly used in Laos, will be used in this study, except in the case of citation of references.



**Photo 2-1:** Streetscapes in Vientiane Capital



**Photo 2-2:** Children of Lowland Lao (Thai-Kadai) in the capital

Secondly, Austroasiatic (ex-Lao Thueng) are considered as the natives in Laos, and it is said that they were driven to the mountainsides because Lowland Lao migrated from the north. Lao Thueng were once called Lao Kah. According to Evans (1998), Kah means slaves in the Laotian language. Because (Austroasiatic) Hmong Khmer were put into slave traffic in the past, this term was used for their name. But it is not used today.

The Austroasiatic's are a group of small ethnic superstocks, and each group, except the Khmu, has a population rate of less than 1.0 %, as shown in the attached data 1. They have their own languages and cultures, and they live in mountainside areas. They conduct agriculture, of which the main part is rice cropping, and some people are engaged in slash and burn farming. Religions are Buddhism, animism, or other religions depending on ethnic groups.

Thirdly, Hmong-Yao, which consists of 7.4 % of the domestic population, are allegedly immigrants who migrated from southern China about 200 years ago. The current population is, it is said, about 250,000.



**Photo 2-3:** The Hmong enjoy New Year Festival with traditional clothes.



**Photo 2-4:** A Hmong village with a water tank



**Photo 2-5:** A Hmong woman with needle work at home

According to Ireson (1995), the Hmong first appeared in Chinese history in 2000 B.C.. Still 5,000,000 Hmong people live in China and they live across borders in mountainous areas of South-east Asia. They live in mountainous areas at 1,000 m above sea level, and they have traditionally been engaged in poppy farming and slash and burn farming. The Hmong have a history of fighting for both pro-government groups and anti-government groups during the civil war in Laos, and they are characterized by their independence, bonds of solidarity, and adaptive powers. But about 200,000 Hmong people flowed out-

side of Laos after being involved with the US military during the Vietnam War, and they live overseas as refugees. Because of this, their population in Laos allegedly decreased down to one-third after the socialist regime was established.

Lastly, Sino-Tibetan people once lived in mountainous areas almost without



**Photo 2-6:** Hmong females selling their needle work



**Photo 2-7:** Hmong girls helping with their mothers' work



**Photo 2-8:** "It takes almost a month to finish" she said.



**Photo 2-9:** Sisters in a Hmong village in Luang Prabang

any contact with other ethnic groups, and they kept their own languages and cultures. Many of them have languages and cultures similar to China's, because they live on the borderline with China. The population of the Sino-Tibetan's is as small as 2.7 % of the domestic population, and this indicates that they have built their ethnic distinction at the village level (UNICEF, 1992).

According to Evans (2003), in many provinces, Lao are the minority, such as in Oudomxay or Sekong. One ethnic superstocks dominates in some districts, such as Nong Het district in Xieng Khouang, where the Hmong are over

four-fifths of the population.

The Hmong of Hmong-Yao are addressed as a research subject for field investigation in this study because of their problems, especially with the insufficient infrastructure of their educational environment and their low rate of enrollment. In addition, the Hmong have the characteristics listed below and these are other reasons for selecting the Hmong as a research subject.

1. Geographically, the habitation of the Hmong covers the mountainous areas of the whole of Laos, and since the Hmong are the biggest ethnic minority group in Laos, they easily influence other ethnic minorities.
2. The Hmong originally lived in China, but they refused to be under the control of the Han and moved to the south. The Hmong moved about for a long time. They are traditionally very particular about their ethnic identity, and they have conducted their own unique education even in places where there is no access to school education and no opportunities to attend school.
3. Historically, the Hmong were divided into two groups under the rule of France, and they repeatedly rebelled against the heavy tax burden of France. They have a complicated history of becoming refugees after Laos' independence. But some of them now have contacts with overseas and they receive financial support from their relatives in such places as the U.S.A.,



**Photo 2-10:** Hmong's traditional clothes sold in the market



**Photo 2-11:** Hmong family at night market in Luan Prabang

and this has created more interest in education among the Hmong.

**Column 4: Hmong children who migrated to the United States**

It is a little known fact that around 200,000 Hmong from Laos live in the U.S.A. today. Because Hmong people acted as mercenary forces for U.S.A. troops during the Vietnam War, they immigrated as refugees after the socialist regime was established in Laos.

When I was teaching in Wisconsin State as a Japanese teacher in 1992, the number of Hmong children increased almost every week, and classrooms where English (ESL) was taught became too small to take all the children.

The Hmong who had just arrived in the U.S.A. could not speak English at all. Because they had spent some time in refugee camps in Thailand, they understood some Thai language, and thus they used Thai-English dictionaries in classes. In the high school where I practiced teaching, I met many Hmong students. Some had hearing disabilities caused by aerial bombings, some were in wheelchairs because of disabilities caused by severe injuries while running away in the jungle, and some had visual impediments. Assistant teachers accompanied them according to their different types of disabilities.

In Laos, many women get married at the age between 15 and 18. In the U.S.A, too, almost all of the female Hmong students were married and some of them had children. Almost always you would find husband-and-wife couples in each class. Women who gave birth to children while being a student stopped coming to school because of the Hmong custom whereby mothers are not allowed to leave home for a month after giving birth. Raising children is hard enough, and raising children while attending school

without understanding English is virtually an impossible task. Thus they refused to come to school in many cases. Classes in home economics, which were relatively easy school units to earn, were full of female Hmong students, and the school was mainly teaching them how to raise children and family planning. In classes in the second language, a significant number of Hmong students gained excellent scores, and the teachers were forced to think anew about the link between the Hmong and China (allegedly, the Hmong have their roots in China).

Those schools in the U.S.A. which suddenly accepted refugees from Laos were obviously confused in the beginning. But now Hmong students are accepted by local communities and schools, not as refugees but as permanent residents (Inui, 1998).

**2.1.2 Policy development for ethnic minorities**

How has the Laotian government dealt with diversified ethnicity? And how have the policies influenced educational disparity today?

Since the end of World War II, the government of the kingdom had treated



**Photo 2-12:** Hmong-American family runs an Asian restaurant (Wisconsin, U.S.A.).



**Photo 2-13:** Hmong high students who have almost completed high school



**Photo 2-14:** Hmongs studying English together with a native volunteer teacher



**Photo 2-15:** Hmong children study their mother tongue (Hmong) at church

their ethnic minorities as disadvantaged people who had existed since ancient times, rather than treating them equally with the ethnic majority (Wekkin, 1982). Though no official policy was decided on for ethnic minorities, the government gradually began to make efforts towards assimilation after the end of the 1960s and implemented policies to unify all ethnic minorities who do not share religions and customs as one Laotian nation (Chazee, 1995).

The new regime from 1975 had no Constitution, and therefore, minority rights or any other basic rights were not legally enshrined. Policies were elaborated primarily through speeches of leaders and statements from the party (Evans, 2003).

As shown above, the government did not provide any special consideration for ethnic minorities. But after the latter half of the 1970s when the socialist regime was established, the government began taking the existence of ethnic minorities into consideration. This started as the government began in earnest with an integration policy in 1976 and ordered the ethnic minorities to stop slash and burn shifting farming, which destroys forest resources, and to start rice cropping on collective farms in the lowlands. The government also ordered them to stop animal sacrifices for animism, which was causing serious problems with shortages of domestic animals. Some Hmong and other ethnic minorities migrated to the lowlands by following the government order, but there were problems; for example, that it was easy to develop malaria in the lowlands and that those who migrated did not get used to labor on collective farms.

As a result, the Laotian government accepted the insistence on their rights of the ethnic minorities, and the government introduced policies which included giving them citizenship and rights as equals with the ethnic majority. That is, the government changed its policies to unify the ethnic minorities through equalization, so that they would develop Laos as an independent nation (Asian Development Bank, 1993).

After that, the government officially revised its policies for ethnic minorities in 1979 and set up four pillars for treating ethnic minorities equally: respecting the rights and religions of ethnic minorities, improving the living environment of ethnic minorities, and improving education and public hygiene in the residential areas of ethnic minorities. The government directed the improvement of residential areas of ethnic minorities based on this. After the 1990s, the system to protect the rights of ethnic minorities was guaranteed by the new constitution, and the policies for ethnic minorities continued to be crystallized in the Diet gradually. For example, the government advocated in 1995 the promotion of the human development of ethnic minorities and to stop addressing them as, for example, Lao Thueng or Lao Soung, in order to eliminate discriminative forms of address. In 1996, the government advocated the expansion of educational opportunities among ethnic minorities and to promote studies into their cultural heritage. In this way, the government gradually implemented permissive policies for ethnic minorities (Chagnon & Rumpf, 1982).

Meanwhile, the Education for All National Plan of Action 2003-2015 (Ministry of Education, 2005) calls for the introduction of “bilingual teaching processes, especially for the first grade of primary schooling.”

## **2.2 Educational disparities which pervade among ethnic groups**

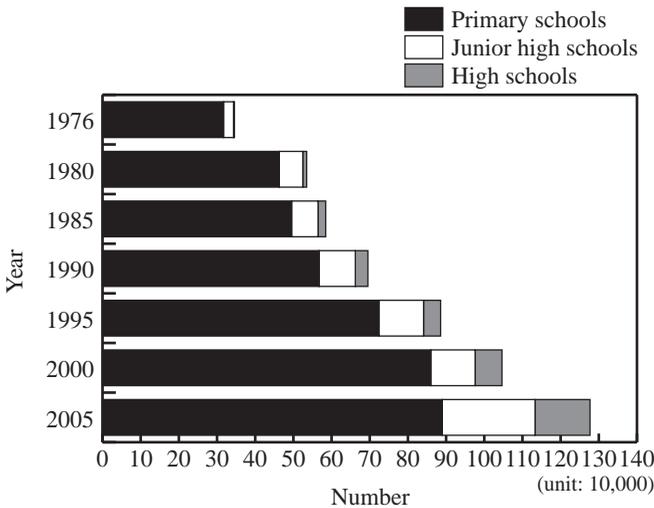
### *2.2.1 Improved domestic educational environment*

The government has attempted to improve the domestic educational environment and to expand educational opportunities among ethnic minorities as well. These attempts have increased the number of students who attend schools as well as the number of teachers and schools after the establishment of the so-

cialist regime. Ever since its establishment, numerical statistics including the enrollment rate for the entire education levels and the number of school students have been gradually increasing year by year. This chapter includes data from the newest census (2005), in addition to data based on a field investigation conducted around 2000 for this study.

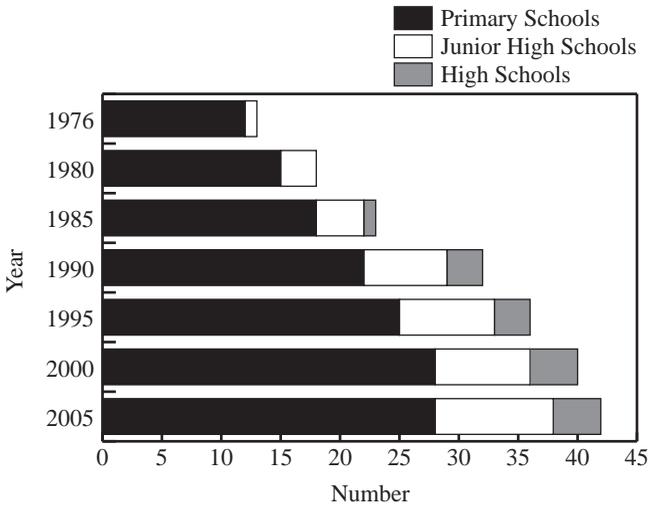
Figure 2-2 shows the number of enrollments between 1976 and 2005 for all educational levels, and we can see that the number of enrollments increased by three times over 30 years. The number of primary students increased most, from 300,000 to 890,000 over 30 years. The number of junior high school students and high school students increased significantly from 20,000 to 240,000 and 2,500 to 140,000, respectively.

The number of teachers has increased every year since 1975. As shown in Figure 2-3, the absolute number increased over 30 years, and the number of teachers at primary schools increased by more than 2.5 times for all educational levels. As educational levels go up, the number of teachers increases, and the number of teachers at junior high schools and high schools increased greatly



**Figure 2-2:** Changes in the number of enrollments (1976-2005)

Source: Created by the author based on “Sounsathiti Hengsad: National Statistical Center 1995, 2005”.



**Figure 2-3:** Changes in the number of teachers (1976-2005)

Source: Created by the author based on “Sounsathiti Hengsad: National Statistical Center, 1995, 2005”.

between 1976 and 2005: from 1,100 to 9,918 and from 100 to 4,748, respectively.

As the following Table 2-2 shows, comparing the 2005 census data with that of 1995, the proportion of the population listed as “Never been to school” has dropped considerably for both genders. However, the drop has actually been greater for women than for men.

Those who have “left school” can be divided into four categories: (1) those who are above school age (more than 16 for basic education) and have left without completing all grades; (2) those of the same ages that have left school on completion; (3) those who are still at school age and have left school with a completed basic education; and finally (4) those who at the same ages have left school with an incomplete basic education. Categories (1) and (4) are “drop outs” (National Statistics Center, 2005).

**Table 2-2: Enrollments in 1995-2005**

Sex	1995 census				2005 census				
	Never been to school	At school	Left school	Never been to school	At school	Left school	Never been to school	At school	Left school
Female	47.1 %	21.4 %	31.5 %	29.5 %	25.6 %	42.4 %			
Male	27.7 %	28.9 %	43.4 %	16.1 %	31.3 %	51.1 %			
Total	37.6 %	25.1 %	37.3 %	22.8 %	28.4 %	46.7 %			

Source: National Statistics Center, 2005

### ***2.2.2 Education for ethnic minorities who are left behind – the reality of educational disparity***

As the data above indicates, the educational environment has improved steadily, since the numbers of enrollments and teachers have increased at all educational levels over the 30 years after the establishment of the socialist regime.

However, those who benefited from the improvement of the educational environment and who saw their rate of enrollment increased (that is, those who received the blessing of development) are the Lowland Lao – the ethnic majority – and it is still difficult to provide an education to the children of ethnic minorities living in the mountainous areas.

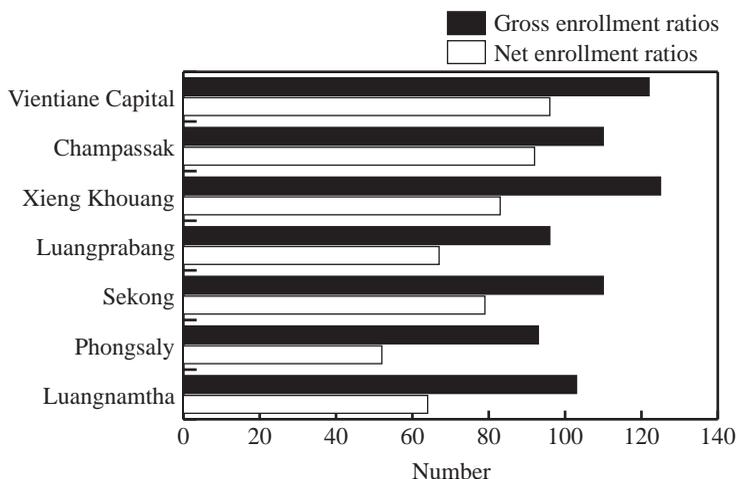
More specifically, what kind of educational disparities have increased among the ethnic groups? These points will be looked at carefully, based on various kinds of educational statistics.

#### ***2.2.2.1 Enrollment rate***

The enrollment situation throughout the country shows that the net enrollment rate for men and women was 81.0 % in 2000 (85.0 % for men and 78.0 % for women). This situation further improved in 2006, when the rate increased to 86.4 % (88.1 % for men and 85.5 % for women).

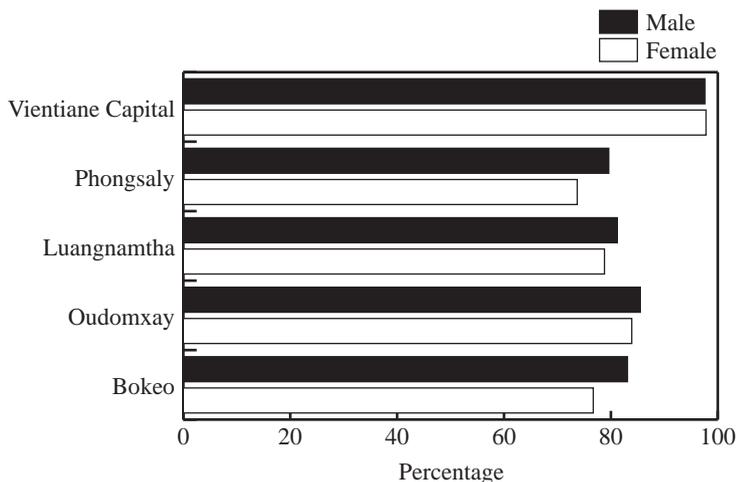
An educational disparity among ethnicity is obvious in the data below. The following shows data which indicate the enrollment rates for primary education in 2000 by prefecture (Figure 2-4), and shows that the enrollment rate is high in Vientiane Capital and in Champassak Province (96.8 % and 92.9 %, respectively), where the number of residences of ethnic minorities is low (6.4 % and 13.9 %, respectively), while in Phongsaly and Luang Namtha Provinces, where the rate of residences of ethnic minorities is high (95.7 % and 97.7 %, respectively), the enrollment rates are 52.0 % and 64.2 %, respectively.

The data shown above was the data available around the time of this study, and, according to the newest data obtained today, the enrollment rate has also gradually increased in those provinces where the rate of residences of ethnic minorities is high. For example, Figure 2-5 shows the enrollment rates in primary education by prefecture (2006, see: Appendix 3). The net enrollment rate



**Figure 2-4:** Enrollment rates in primary education related to the rate of residences of ethnic minorities (2000)

Source: Created by the author based on documents supplied by the Ministry of Education in Laos.



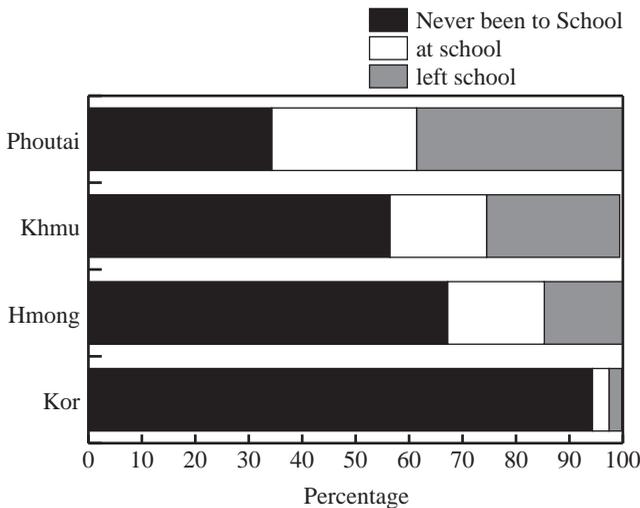
**Figure 2-5:** Disparities in enrollment rates by prefecture in primary education

Source: Created by the author based on the statistics from the Ministry of Education.

in Vientiane Capital is 97.6 %, which is almost 100 %. In addition, though there are still some disparities in enrollment rates depending on provinces, the net enrollment rate increased from 52.0 % in 2000 to 79.6 % in Phongsaly Province and from 64.0 % in 2000 to 81.2 % in Luang Namtha Province. In addition, there is almost no disparity between the genders in Vientiane Capital and this disparity is also disappearing in other provinces. However, the difference in enrollment rates between the genders is more than 10.0 % in Bokeo Province, where many ethnic minorities reside, as the enrollment rates for men and women are 89.3 % and 76.7 %, respectively.

Further educational disparity is seen in the data regarding enrollment patterns by ethnic group. Since a large-sized census is conducted every 10 years, the following data is the closest data to the time when the field survey was carried out (1999).

Figure 2-6 shows the enrollment patterns for children of age 6 or more in the main ethnic group. There is a large disparity in educational patterns between the major ethnic group (Phoutai) and ethnic minorities (Khmu: Austro-



**Figure 2-6:** Enrollment patterns for main ethnic groups  
 Source: Created by the author based on State Planning Committee National Statistics Center, 1997.

Asian, Hmong: Mon-Yao, Kor: Sino-Tibetan), and the enrollment rate among ethnic minorities is low in comparison to the ratio for the majority ethnic group.

Enrollment patterns for ethnic groups became obvious also in the census conducted in 2005, which shows that the rate regarding children who had never been school improved. For example, the rate changed to 25.0 % for Phoutai (34.4 %), 33.0 % for Khmu (56.4 %), and 42.0 % for Hmong (67.2 %) (The figures in square brackets are the rates of the census in 1995).

Regarding other ethnic minorities, for Tri, Akha and Lolo the percentages of those who have never been to school are as high as 75 percent or more. However, there have been improvements for all ethnic groups, though females are behind in all groups. There are small differences among some groups, such as Lao, Ngouan, Thaineua, Thaen and Moy, with large differences for groups like Lamed, Katang, Ta-oy, Cheng, Sdang, Pacoh and Hmong (National Statistics Center, 2005).

#### *2.2.2.2 Proceeding to secondary education and higher education*

In addition to the enrollment rate, a disparity among ethnic groups is also seen in advancement rates. Chazee describes that a big disparity exists in the rate of advancement from primary to junior high schools between cities (Vientiane), where the population rate of Lowland Lao is high, and the farming areas, where ethnic minorities reside (Chazee, 1998). According to a report by the Asian Development Bank (2000), for example, about 45.0 % of the primary students of ethnic majority Thai-Kadai enrolled for junior high school. On the contrary, though, the advancement rate for ethnic minority Hmong-Yao and Sino-Tibetan is as low as 17.8 %, and the rate for Austroasiatic's is also as low as 10.6 %. It is obvious that only a few students among ethnic minorities go on to junior high school. This is caused by the fact that ethnic minorities are limited through such situations as, for example, only primary schools being located in the mountainous areas where ethnic minorities reside in many cases. If they want to go on to junior high school, the distance is too far to walk, and thus they need to ride on a bicycle. In addition, getting access to high school is very

difficult for students who live in the mountainous areas because high schools are built only in big towns. There are cases, sometimes, in which students who live in villages which are far away from a town with a high school stay at their relative's house in the town only on weekdays and then go back to the village on weekends. But the burden caused by this is so great that in many cases the students give up going on to high school.

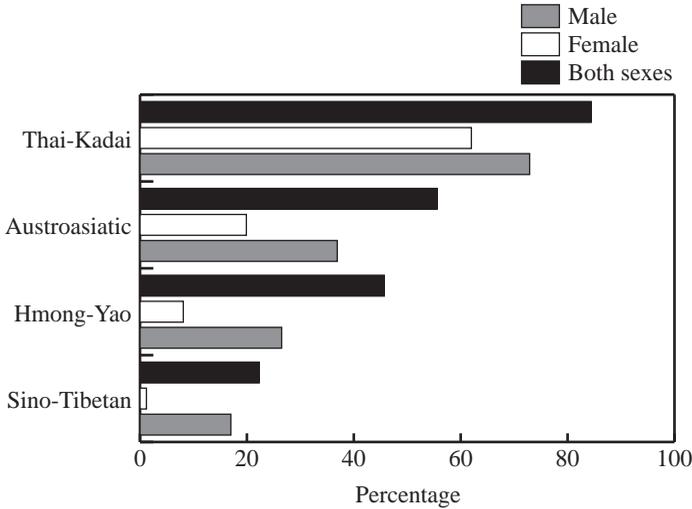
This tendency becomes more significant in the case of higher education. The Asian Development Bank reports that, out of the 614 students in literature and social-science faculties in 1998, 9 students (1.5 %) are Hmong-Yao and Sino-Tibetan and 6 (1.0 %) are Austroasiatic (extracted from statistics of the National University of Laos). That is, only a very small number of students among ethnic minorities go on to university (Asian Development Bank, 2000). These numbers are hardly changed in the data for 2005, where 24,343 students (92.0 %) out of 26,179 students in 12 faculties are Thai-Kadai.

### **2.2.2.3 Literacy rates**

Disparity among ethnic groups is also found in literacy rates. According to a study by UNICEF (1992), the literacy rate in 1987 was 56.0 %. This increased up to 60.2 % according to the census of 1995 and it also increased to as high as 73.0 % according to the census conducted in 2005 <sup>(2)</sup>.

As shown in Figure 2-7, literacy rates vary depending on ethnic groups, and the literacy rate among the ethnic majority Thai-Kadai (73.0 %) is extremely high in comparison to the rates among other ethnic groups. For example, the literacy rate of male Hmong-Yao (45.0 %) is not much different from the literacy rate of male Austroasiatic's (56.0 %), but the literacy rate for female Hmong-Yao is as low as 8 % and this is less than one-fifth of the male literacy rate. Furthermore, it is obvious that the literacy rate is low for both male and female Sino-Tibetan's in comparison with other ethnic groups (Asian Development Bank, 2000).

It was found in the census conducted in 2005 that the disparity between the genders was being reduced. In 1995, literacy rates were 74 % for men and 48 % for women, but the disparity was reduced and these rates became 83.0 %



**Figure 2-7:** Literacy rates related to ethnic groups

Source: Created by the author based on Asian Development Bank, 2000.

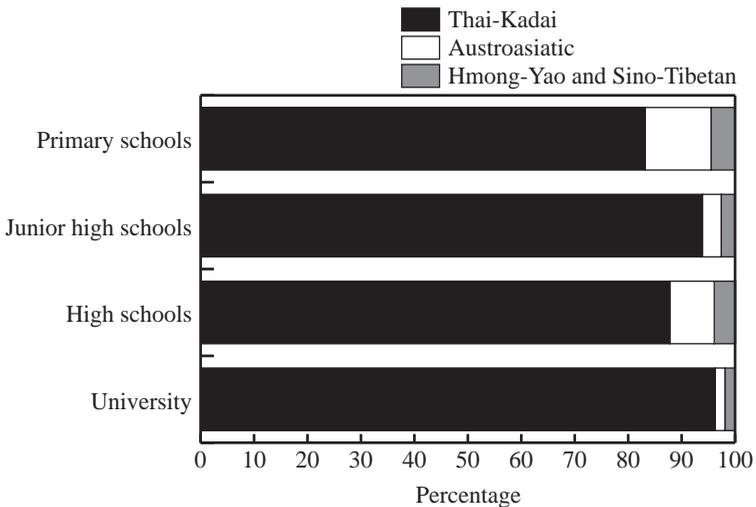
for men and 63.0 % for women in 2005. However, the disparity among ethnic groups has not been reduced yet. The rate was higher than the national average for the Lao ethnic group at 85 percent, Moy 84 percent, Ngouan 81 percent, Thainuea 80 percent, and Tai 77 percent. The rate was particularly low for Lahoo, Akha, Lolo and Tri. With the exception of Lao, the literacy rate for the minorities was 55 percent. This is relatively low compared to the Lao ethnic group: for female minorities 41 percent (Lao females 79 percent), and for male minorities 70 percent (Lao males 91 percent). Thus women in particular are lagging behind men among minorities (National Statistics Center, 2005).

Improving literacy rates in Laos has faced many difficulties. With Laotian prevailing – which the government ordained the national language – throughout the country, the government has paid much attention to literacy education since the beginning of the 1980s as a part of Non-Formal education. Also since 1983, the government has conducted literacy campaigns, and literacy classes were set up to target approximately 760,000 adults. The government had also put much effort into the development of literacy study materials. Consequently,

the number of adults who received literacy education reached 1,600,000 between 1983 and 1988. But ethnic minorities were not included as targets for the campaigns, and, as a result, the campaigns did not end with success. For example, 76,000 public officials were allocated for literacy education, but only 2,503 (3.2 %) of the officials were of ethnic minorities. This caused difficulties in language communication and in making people understand the importance of literacy (UNICEF, 1992). It is also reported that the failure of the campaigns arose from the fact that Laotian was an unknown language for ethnic minorities, and because the literacy study materials were not distributed to villages in mountainous areas where ethnic minorities reside (Chamberlain, 1995).

#### 2.2.2.4 Ratio of ethnic minorities among teachers

The ethnic composition among teachers also shows how disadvantageous the current educational environment is for students from ethnic minorities. Figure 2-8 shows the ratios of teachers of each ethnic group who exist at each educational level.



**Figure 2-8:** Ratios of ethnic groups among teachers at each educational level

Source: Created by the author based on Asian Development Bank, 2000.

tional level, and it indicates that the majority of the teachers are of Thai-Kadai at every level <sup>(3)</sup>. Quality of education cannot be achieved without teachers (Asian Development Bank, 2000), and thus, as to the quality of study too, the students of ethnic minorities are in a disadvantageous situation.

The fact that the number of teachers from ethnic minorities is small becomes a cause of educational disparity among ethnic groups; but the situation whereby many of the teachers who teach at villages where ethnic minorities reside are unqualified is also a major factor in the low quality of education. An unqualified teacher means teachers who did not receive training at a teacher training university. The ratio of unqualified teachers was 35.0 % of all teachers in 1998, and it decreased to 22.5 % in 2002.

The education level of unqualified teachers is generally low. For example, in 1998, 7.5 % of unqualified teachers were not graduates of primary school. According to the academic records of unqualified teachers, 35.5 % were graduates of primary school, 43.9 % were graduates of junior high school, and 13.2 % were graduates of high school (Asian Development Bank, 2000). As the data shows clearly, the fact that many unqualified teachers teach at provinces where ethnic minorities reside can influence the school grades of the children of ethnic minorities.

#### *2.2.2.5 Rates of school dropouts and repetition*

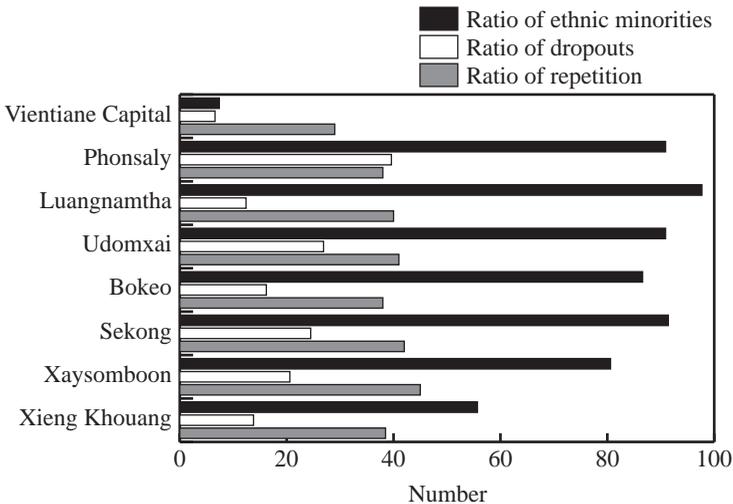
The disparity of school dropouts and repetitions, which is one of the focal points of this study, will now be discussed here. According to documents provided by the Ministry of Education (1999), the average rate of dropouts from primary schools between the first and fifth grades in Laos was 19.3 % at the time when the field study was conducted (1999), and large disparities were observed among ethnic groups. For example, in the north of Phongsaly city, where many Sino-Tibetan's, an ethnic minority, reside, the average rate of dropouts from primary school was 27.3 % in 1998, while the rate was only 4.8 % in Vientiane Capital (Ministry of Education, 1999).

According to the same documents, the average rate of school repetitions between the first and fifth grades was 16.1 % in 1998, but in Oudomxay and

Phongsaly Provinces, where many ethnic minorities live, the rates were as high as 24.0 % and 39.6 %, respectively.

Figure 2-9 includes data based on research which was conducted by the Asian Development Bank (1999, 2000) into the rates of ethnic minorities by province and data from the Ministry of Education on rates of school dropouts and repetitions.

As Figure 2-9 indicates, the more the number of residents who are of ethnic minorities in provinces like Phongsaly, Sekong, Xaysomboun, and Luang Namtha, the larger the rates of school dropouts and repetitions (see the attached document 2 at the end of this chapter for more detailed rates on ethnic groups by prefecture).



**Figure 2-9:** Rates of dropouts and repetition of school in proportion to residence by ethnic minorities (by province)

Source: Created by the author based on Asian Development Bank 1999 and Asian Development Bank, 2000.

The data shown above was obtained at the time when investigations for this study were conducted. Since the situations for school repetition, advancement and dropping out are changed today, some related documents (document 3) are attached at the end of this chapter. For example, the average rates of

school dropouts (2006) have improved, since it decreased to 9.4 %. In Phongsaly Province, where the dropout rate was once 27.3 %, the rate has reduced to 10.6 %, and the same rate has decreased gradually from 4.8 % to 3.8 % in Vientiane Capital. However, repetition rates have not improved in comparison to the dropout rates, and the country's average repetition rate (2006) was 16.9 %, which is at about the same level as for data in 1998 (16.1 %). Among the provinces where many ethnic minorities reside, the rate improved from 24.0 % to 11.7 % in Oudomxay and 39.4 % to 21.7 % in Phongsaly, but the nationwide disparity is still clear.

It can be now appreciated that educational disparity is widening among ethnic groups in Laos, according to the data shown above, but what are the causes of such educational disparity? In the next chapter, this question will be looked at in detail while considering the more general situation in developing countries.

## Notes

- (1) For example, some minority groups live in the lowland, while Lowland Lao live on high land.
- (2) Research into literacy rates is conducted only according to the question “can you write in Laotian?” with the answer “yes or no,” and this is hardly reliable data. If tests on writing and reading are included in the research, the literacy rate is likely to decrease (Ministry of Education, 2000).
- (3) The major reason for the low rate of teachers of ethnic minority is due to their low academic achievement and insufficient school education, as it was pointed out by Gordon (2002) mentioning about Latino teachers in the U.S.A.

**Appendix 1:** Ethnic groups and subgroups by ethnic superstocks

I. Tai-Kadai (Ex-Lao Loum)  
 (1) Lao-Phutai (Lao-Thay)

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Lao	Phuan, Kaloeng, Yoy and Nho	2,403,891	1,215,748	52.5
2	Phoutai	Thay Dam, Thay Deng, Thay Khao, Thay Neua, Thay Et, Thay Moey, Thay Lat, Thay Men, Thay Vang, Thay Ka, Thay Ko, Thay Xam, Thay Pao, Thay E, Thay, O, Thay Kouan, Thay Heo, Thay Yai, Thay Theng, Thay Ang Kham, Thay Pahak, Thay Same Kau, Thay Xiang Di, Thay Nheuung, Thay Ka Tam, Thay Kap Ke, Thay Ka Pong, Thay Soy	472,458	240,002	10.3
3	Leu	Kheun	119,191	60,475	2.6
4	Nhouan	Ngeo and Kalom	26,239	13,312	0.6
5	Yang		4,630	2,284	0.6
6	Xaek		2,745	1,416	0.1
	Total		3,029,154	1,533,237	66.2

II. Austroasiatic (Ex-Lao Thueng)  
(1) Mon-Khmer

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	No.	Population	Females	%
1	Khmu (Kammou)	Kammou Rok, Kammou Khrong, Kammou Khveni, Kammou Ou, Kammou Leu, Kammou Me, Kammou Then, Kammou Kasak, Kammou Nhouan	500,957	253,517	11.0	
2	Katang		95,440	48,575	2.1	
3	Makong	Truy, Pho, Xo, Ma, Roy, Trong	92,321	47,285	2.0	
4	Xuay	Xuay, Khaphakeo and Lavak	45,498	23,219	1.0	
5	Laven	Yru Krong, Xu or Yru Dak	40,519	20,497	0.9	
6	Taocy	Tong, In and Ong	30,876	15,358	0.7	
7	Thin	Pray, Pharayy, Phay, La Va	23,193	11,925	0.5	
8	Taiteng		23,091	11,800	0.5	
9	Phong	Phen, Lane, Pouang, Hat	21,395	10,841	0.5	
10	Tri	O, Cha Let	21,395	10,636	0.5	
11	Lavae	Ka Vet, Me ha Long, Paty, Me Pla, Me Ha, Bong, Me Trak, Me Ka Yeung, Me Krun, La Mam	17,544	8,842	0.4	
12	Katu	Tritu and Dak Kang	17,024	8,653	0.4	
13	Laimed		16,740	8,872	0.4	
14	Alack	A Lak, Ra Tou, Ra Kong, Ra Miang, Ta Pong, Ka Len	16,594	8,542	0.4	
15	Oey	Sa pouan, Xok, The, In Thy, La Nhao or Reu Yao	14,947	7,682	0.3	
16	Pako	Ka Noy, Ka Do	13,224	6,693	0.3	
17	Ngae	Ko, Kriang and Chia Tong	12,189	6,175	0.3	
18	Yea		8,013	4,109	0.2	
19	Jeng	Cheng Ho, Cheng Phok, Cheng Tha Lane	6,511	3,342	0.1	
20	Xingmoon	Phouak, Pouak, Lao May	5,834	2,900	0.1	
21	Nhahuen		5,152	2,607	0.1	
22	Kmer	Khe	3,902	2,051	0.1	
23	Samtao	Doy	2,213	1,153	0.0	
24	Bid		1,509	747	0.0	
25	Sading	Sa Dang Douan and Ka Yong	786	393	0.0	
26	Lavy		538	252	0.0	
	Mlabri	TongLueang	24	5	0.0	
	Total		1,036,940	526,671	22.9	

(2) Viet-Muang

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Toum		2,510	1,250	0.1
2	Nhguane		1,344	687	0.0
3	Mone	Muang or Moy	217	113	0.0
4	Kree (Bolikhamsay)	Tong Lueang, Arem	487	241	0.0
	Kree (Khammuane)		228	122	0.0
	Total		4,786	2,413	0.1

III. Hmon-Yao (Hmong-Mien) (Ex-Lao Soung)

(1) Hmong-Yao

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Hmong	Mong Dam, Mong Khao, Mong Kiav, Mong Deng	315,465	157,410	6.9
2	Yao	Len Ten or Lao Houay, Yu Mian	22,665	11,374	0.5
	Total		338,130	168,784	7.4

IV. Sino-Tibetan (Ex-Lao Soung)  
(1) Timeto-Burman

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Kor	Akha, Ko Phen, Ko Chi Cho, Pou Ly, Pa Na, Phou Khoua, Lou Ma, Oe Pa, Chy Piau, Mou Chy, Mou, Toe, Py Xo, Py Lou, O Ma, Ma Mouang, Kong Sat	66,108	33,000	1.4
2	Phounoy	Xeng, Phay, Lao Pane, Phong Xet, Phong Kau, Phou Nhot, Ban Tang, Ta Pat, Cho Ho	35,363	17,988	0.8
3	Musir	Musir Dam, Musir Khao, Musir Deng or Chafee	8,702	4,360	0.2
4	Kui	Kui Suong and Kui Luang	6,268	3,196	0.1
5	Sila	Si Da	1,772	882	0.1
6	Khu		1,639	847	0.0
7	Lo Lo	A Lou	1,407	711	0.0
8	Hayi		1,112	528	0.0
	Total		112,653	61,512	2.5

(2) Hor-Han

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Hor		8,900	4,475	0.2
	Total		8,900	4,475	0.2

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
1	Others	In process of clarification	10,201	5,193	0.2

No.	Ethnic group	Subgroups	Population	Females	%
2	N.S.	In process of clarification	24,084	11,577	0.5
47	Ethnic groups	Overall Total	4,574,848	2,313,862	100.0

Source: Asian Development Bank, 2000.

Appendix 2: Percentage of ethnic superstocks by province

	Tai-Kadai	Austroasiatic	Hmong-Yao	Sino-Tibetan	Others
Vientiane Capital	95.9 (94.7)	1.0 (0.9)	1.4 (2.9)	0.2 (0.1)	1.5 (1.1)
Champassack	86.1 (86.1)	12.4 (11.6)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	1.5 (1.5)
Khammouane	81.8 (83.1)	16.0 (14.9)	0.2 (0.1)	0.0 (0.1)	2.0 (1.7)
Borikhamxay	81.3 (74.1)	8.0 (8.5)	9.2 (14.6)	0.0 (0.0)	1.5 (1.4)
Vientiane Province	78.5 (65.6)	12.3 (14.2)	8.4 (17.6)	0.0 (0.0)	0.3 (1.1)
Savannakhet	76.4 (77.3)	22.6 (21.3)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	1.0 (0.8)
Saravanh	61.7 (61.5)	37.8 (36.2)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.5 (0.7)
Huaphanh	61.5 (55.7)	16.7 (18.0)	21.1 (24.3)	0.0 (0.0)	0.7 (0.9)
Sayaboury	58.2 (73.7)	26.5 (16.6)	14.8 (7.9)	0.1 (0.1)	0.4 (0.9)
Xieng Khouang	58.2 (49.9)	9.9 (10.7)	34.2 (38.4)	0.0 (0.0)	1.1 (0.0)
Bokeo	40.8 (37.7)	35.6 (35.9)	13.2 (13.5)	10.1 (8.8)	0.3 (1.5)
Luang Prabang	37.4 (35.4)	46.0 (47.0)	15.7 (16.1)	0.2 (0.2)	0.7 (0.9)
Attapeu	37.2 (36.9)	62.3 (61.5)	0 (0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.5 (0.2)
Luang Namtha	32.1 (35.4)	29.6 (28.7)	7.7 (5.0)	30.1 (31.1)	6.5 (0.9)
Xaysomboun	26.0 (NA)	17.2 (NA)	55.7 (NA)	0 (NA)	0.5 (NA)
Oudomxay	25.0 (21.8)	57.9 (59.0)	13.3 (13.9)	3.5 (3.3)	0.3 (0.9)
Phongsaly	20.1 (18.8)	24.9 (22.1)	5.7 (2.8)	47.6 (47.4)	1.7 (0.7)
Sekong	8.9 (12.1)	90.8 (86.7)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.3 (1.3)

Source: Ministry of Education, 2000.

Population and Housing Census, 2005.

Note: The numbers in brackets are the rate from the census 2005.

There is no data available in Xaysomboun (Special District) at 2005 since the District was united with other provinces.

In the table data, some provinces do not total 100 %, however, the numbers are in accordance to the original data.

**Appendix 3: School enrollment rate & province, school year 2006-07**

**A. Primary flow rate**

**(1) Repetition rate by grade & province, school year 2006-07**

No	Province	Repetition rate grade 1			Repetition rate grade 2			Repetition rate grade 3			Repetition rate grade 4			Repetition rate grade 5			Repetition rate grade 1-5		
		Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male												
01	Vientiane Capital	19.1	17.9	20.2	14.2	12.2	15.9	10.9	8.9	12.6	7.9	6.1	9.6	1.4	1.0	1.8	11.3	9.8	12.7
02	Phongsavaly	36.8	36.2	37.2	19.3	18.2	20.0	12.8	12.8	12.8	7.6	6.5	8.4	9.8	9.9	9.7	21.7	21.3	22.0
03	Luangnamtha	36.8	38.4	35.4	17.9	16.2	19.2	8.6	6.9	9.8	5.0	4.1	5.7	3.6	3.4	3.7	19.5	19.8	19.2
04	Oudomxay	18.3	18.3	18.2	12.8	12.6	12.9	8.0	7.4	8.5	4.8	4.0	5.4	3.1	3.1	3.0	11.7	11.9	11.6
05	Bokao	36.7	33.6	39.4	23.3	21.7	24.7	15.3	14.2	16.2	9.7	7.8	11.1	8.6	6.7	10.1	22.6	20.8	23.9
06	Luangphabang	30.4	30.6	30.3	16.1	16.4	15.8	9.8	9.3	10.2	5.4	4.8	5.9	2.6	2.1	2.9	16.4	16.6	16.2
07	Huaphanh	37.0	36.3	37.6	16.2	15.5	16.8	9.6	8.4	10.6	5.1	3.5	6.4	1.0	0.6	1.3	19.5	19.1	19.9
08	Sayabury	28.6	27.8	29.2	18.8	16.7	20.6	14.2	12.7	15.5	9.5	8.0	10.8	4.0	3.1	4.8	15.9	14.6	17.0
09	Xiang Khouang	29.7	28.6	30.7	15.2	14.1	16.2	10.3	9.4	11.1	6.6	5.3	7.7	6.0	4.8	7.0	15.7	14.6	16.6
10	Vientiane Province	28.5	27.4	29.4	19.2	18.2	20.1	14.0	11.9	15.8	9.5	7.8	10.9	3.6	2.6	4.3	16.6	15.3	17.7
11	Borikhamxay	32.3	31.5	33.0	20.3	19.2	21.2	11.9	10.0	13.6	8.1	6.8	9.3	5.7	4.4	6.8	17.8	16.5	18.8
12	Khammuane	31.3	31.2	31.4	17.6	15.4	19.5	11.7	9.2	14.0	8.3	6.2	10.1	8.3	6.0	10.2	17.9	16.4	19.2
13	Savannakhet	40.7	39.3	41.9	20.8	17.4	23.6	13.7	10.7	16.3	7.0	4.8	9.0	3.0	1.9	4.1	22.2	19.8	24.3
14	Salavan	30.7	30.2	31.1	17.4	16.6	18.1	11.1	9.4	12.6	6.6	5.1	7.7	2.8	1.6	3.6	18.3	17.5	18.9
15	Sekong	39.5	41.0	38.1	15.6	14.4	16.7	8.3	8.1	8.4	4.3	2.9	5.4	8.2	6.0	9.8	21.8	22.0	21.6
16	Champassak	19.3	18.2	20.3	12.1	11.1	12.9	9.5	8.4	10.5	6.7	5.4	7.9	3.2	2.3	4.0	11.2	10.2	12.2
17	Attapeu	29.8	29.2	30.2	17.8	18.1	17.5	10.8	11.1	10.5	6.0	6.0	6.0	9.1	6.2	11.3	18.9	18.6	19.1
	Lao PDR	30.7	29.8	31.4	17.1	15.7	18.3	11.4	9.8	12.8	7.2	5.7	8.5	4.0	3.0	4.8	16.9	15.8	17.9

## (2) Promotion rate by grade &amp; province, school year 2006-07

No	Province	Promotion rate grade1		Promotion rate grade2		Promotion rate grade3		Promotion rate grade4		Promotion rate grade5		Promotion rate grade1 -5								
		Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male							
01	Vientiane Capital	74.0	76.2	72.1	84.3	86.4	82.5	86.4	88.7	84.5	89.4	91.3	87.8	94.7	96.5	93.0	85.0	87.1	83.2	
02	Phongsavay	52.2	51.5	52.8	70.4	73.8	68.1	78.5	78.5	78.5	84.4	86.2	83.1	73.9	76.9	71.9	67.7	68.6	67.1	
03	Luangnamtha	52.7	50.6	54.6	77.3	76.4	77.9	85.8	88.8	83.6	90.5	90.4	90.5	90.6	92.6	89.1	73.5	72.6	74.2	
04	Oudomxay	47.8	45.5	50.2	72.9	71.6	74.1	84.0	81.2	86.5	81.6	77.7	84.7	83.6	84.3	83.1	67.9	65.0	70.5	
05	Bokeo	52.0	51.6	52.3	67.3	68.0	66.7	73.4	73.3	73.5	83.8	82.1	85.0	88.6	83.3	75.1	67.1	67.0	67.1	
06	Luangphabang	53.8	54.1	53.5	74.6	74.6	74.6	81.6	82.0	81.3	88.5	86.5	90.1	88.7	91.0	87.0	72.8	72.6	73.0	
07	Huaphanh	48.4	48.7	48.2	77.7	78.1	77.3	83.2	83.0	83.3	87.8	87.9	87.7	96.9	97.7	96.3	71.3	71.1	71.5	
08	Sayabury	65.5	66.3	64.8	78.4	78.4	79.7	77.2	82.6	83.9	81.4	87.2	88.7	86.0	94.1	93.4	94.8	80.5	81.4	79.8
09	Xiang Khouang	58.1	59.4	56.9	80.2	81.8	78.9	83.6	84.9	82.5	88.5	88.9	88.1	87.9	86.9	88.7	77.0	77.7	76.3	
10	Vientiane Province	61.4	61.8	61.1	77.9	79.0	76.8	81.6	83.3	80.0	87.5	87.2	87.8	91.3	92.5	90.3	77.9	78.6	77.2	
11	Borikhetxay	58.8	60.0	57.8	76.3	78.6	74.4	82.9	83.8	82.0	86.5	86.8	86.3	88.7	90.0	87.6	76.3	77.5	75.2	
12	Khammuane	54.4	55.9	53.0	76.0	78.1	74.1	79.3	82.2	76.8	82.0	83.4	80.7	83.5	88.7	79.0	72.0	74.3	70.0	
13	Savannakhet	48.5	50.4	46.9	71.3	74.6	68.5	75.5	79.9	71.7	80.7	83.5	78.2	86.0	88.4	83.7	67.3	70.4	64.7	
14	Salavan	49.3	49.2	49.5	69.6	71.3	68.2	74.5	75.2	73.9	78.6	77.2	79.7	82.6	86.9	79.5	65.5	66.0	65.1	
15	Sekong	45.6	44.5	46.7	76.0	76.4	75.6	81.7	79.7	83.4	86.5	86.4	86.7	81.0	84.6	78.2	66.6	66.0	67.1	
16	Champassak	70.2	72.6	68.1	81.7	82.8	80.8	80.7	81.6	80.0	82.4	83.0	81.7	91.1	92.4	90.0	80.0	81.3	78.8	
17	Attapeu	48.4	47.4	49.4	71.7	69.2	73.9	78.8	78.6	79.0	84.1	82.5	85.5	70.2	80.2	62.8	65.1	64.9	65.4	
	Lao PDR	55.7	56.3	55.1	76.1	77.5	74.9	80.8	82.2	79.6	85.1	85.6	84.8	88.5	90.5	86.8	73.7	74.7	72.9	

(3) Drop out rate by grade & province

No	Province	Drop out rate grade1			Drop out rate grade2			Drop out rate grade3			Drop out rate grade4			Drop out rate grade5			Drop out rate grade1 -5			
		Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male													
01	Vientiane/Capital	6.8	5.9	7.6	1.5	1.4	1.6	2.7	2.4	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.7	3.9	2.5	5.2	3.6	3.1	4.1
02	Phongsavay	11.0	12.3	10.0	10.3	8.0	11.9	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.0	7.3	8.5	16.3	13.3	18.4	10.6	10.2	11.0	11.0
03	Luangnamtha	10.5	11.0	10.0	4.9	7.4	2.9	5.6	4.3	6.5	4.5	5.5	3.8	5.9	4.0	7.3	7.1	7.6	6.6	6.6
04	Outomxay	33.9	36.2	31.6	14.3	15.8	12.9	8.0	11.5	5.0	13.7	18.3	10.0	13.3	12.6	13.9	20.4	23.2	17.9	17.9
05	Bokoe	11.3	14.8	8.3	9.4	10.4	8.6	11.3	12.5	10.3	6.5	10.1	3.9	12.8	10.1	14.8	10.4	12.2	8.9	8.9
06	Luangprabang	15.8	15.3	16.2	9.3	9.0	9.6	8.6	8.7	8.5	6.1	8.7	4.0	8.8	6.9	10.1	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8
07	Huaphanh	14.6	15.0	14.3	6.1	6.4	5.9	7.3	8.6	6.2	7.1	8.7	5.9	2.1	1.7	2.4	9.2	9.9	8.6	8.6
08	Sayabury	6.0	5.9	6.0	2.9	3.7	2.1	3.2	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	1.9	3.5	0.4	3.6	4.1	3.2	3.2
09	Xiang Khouang	12.2	12.0	12.4	4.5	4.1	4.9	6.1	5.7	6.3	5.0	5.8	4.2	6.1	8.3	4.3	7.3	7.6	7.1	7.1
10	Vientiane Province	10.1	10.7	9.5	2.9	2.7	3.1	4.5	4.8	4.2	3.0	5.0	1.3	5.1	4.9	5.3	5.5	6.0	5.1	5.1
11	Borikhamxay	8.9	8.5	9.2	3.4	2.2	4.5	5.2	6.2	4.4	5.4	6.4	4.4	5.6	5.6	6.0	5.9	6.0	6.0	6.0
12	Khammouane	14.3	12.9	15.6	6.4	6.5	6.4	9.0	8.6	9.3	9.8	10.4	9.2	8.2	5.3	10.7	10.1	9.3	10.8	10.8
13	Savannakhet	10.8	10.3	11.1	7.9	8.0	7.9	10.8	9.4	12.1	12.3	11.7	12.8	11.0	9.7	12.2	10.4	9.8	11.0	11.0
14	Salavan	20.0	20.6	19.4	13.0	12.1	13.8	14.4	15.4	13.5	14.8	17.7	12.6	14.6	11.4	16.9	16.2	16.5	16.0	16.0
15	Sekeang	14.9	14.5	15.2	8.4	9.2	7.8	10.0	12.2	8.2	9.2	10.7	7.9	10.9	9.3	12.1	11.7	12.1	11.3	11.3
16	Champassak	10.5	9.2	11.6	6.2	6.1	6.3	9.8	10.0	9.5	10.9	11.5	10.4	5.7	5.3	5.9	8.8	8.5	9.0	9.0
17	Attapeu	21.8	23.4	20.4	10.5	12.7	8.6	10.4	10.3	10.4	9.9	11.5	8.5	20.6	13.6	25.9	16.0	16.5	15.5	15.5
	Lao PDR	13.7	13.8	13.5	6.8	6.8	6.8	7.7	7.9	7.6	7.7	8.7	6.8	7.5	6.5	8.4	9.4	9.5	9.2	9.2

## B. Primary school enrolment rate (public &amp; private), school year 2006-07

No	Province	Students Enrolment						Students 6-10 y						GER (%)						NER (%)			
		Total		Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	Female	Male	
		Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	
01	Vientiane Capital	77,777	36,857	40,920	64,390	31,309	33,081	62,867	30,616	32,251	32,251	120.8	117.7	123.7	97.6	97.8	97.5						
02	Phongsaly	27,268	11,420	15,848	22,378	10,718	11,660	17,824	7,895	9,929	121.9	106.5	135.9	79.6	73.7	85.2							
03	Luangnamtha	24,366	10,965	13,401	19,325	9,480	9,845	15,692	7,471	8,221	126.1	115.7	156.1	81.2	78.8	83.5							
04	Oudomxay	49,690	23,402	26,288	41,927	20,857	21,070	35,834	17,498	18,336	118.5	112.2	124.8	85.5	83.9	87.0							
05	Bokeo	24,300	10,612	13,688	20,385	10,073	10,312	16,937	7,724	9,213	119.2	105.4	132.7	83.1	76.7	89.3							
06	Luangprabang	71,616	33,381	38,235	52,323	25,547	26,776	47,213	22,704	24,509	136.9	130.7	142.8	90.2	88.9	91.5							
07	Huaphanh	57,740	26,242	31,498	47,075	22,607	24,468	38,980	18,188	20,792	122.7	116.1	128.7	82.8	80.5	85.0							
08	Sayabury	51,819	23,943	27,876	43,257	21,144	22,113	38,505	18,405	19,900	119.8	113.2	126.1	88.6	87.0	90.0							
09	Xeang Khouang	47,558	22,095	25,463	37,292	17,789	19,503	33,670	16,040	17,630	127.5	124.2	130.6	90.3	90.2	90.4							
10	Vientiane Province	69,170	32,541	36,629	55,813	27,550	28,263	53,484	25,809	27,675	123.9	118.1	129.6	95.8	93.7	97.9							
11	Borikhamxay	42,371	19,799	22,572	34,066	16,608	17,458	31,570	15,199	16,371	124.4	119.2	129.3	92.7	91.5	93.8							
12	Khammouane	54,720	25,984	28,736	50,132	24,997	25,135	41,787	20,363	21,424	109.2	103.9	114.3	83.4	81.5	85.2							
13	Savannakhet	123,811	57,200	66,611	118,165	58,627	59,538	90,895	43,139	47,756	104.8	97.6	111.9	76.9	73.6	80.2							
14	Salavan	49,795	22,276	27,519	43,806	20,325	23,481	35,898	16,683	19,215	113.7	109.6	117.2	81.9	82.1	81.8							
15	Sekong	15,872	7,393	8,479	12,717	6,292	6,425	9,440	4,562	4,878	124.8	117.5	132.0	74.2	72.5	75.9							
16	Champassak	85,107	40,651	44,456	76,874	37,650	39,224	71,849	34,959	36,890	110.7	108.0	115.3	95.5	92.9	94.0							
17	Attapeu	18,827	8,691	10,136	17,127	8,427	8,700	11,612	5,572	6,040	109.9	103.1	116.5	67.8	66.1	69.4							
	Lao PDR	891,807	413,452	478,355	757,052	370,000	387,052	653,857	312,827	341,030	117.8	111.7	123.6	86.4	84.5	88.1							



## **Chapter 3:**

# **Educational problems among ethnic minorities in developing countries and Laos**

### **3.1 Educational problems in developing countries and ethnic minorities**

Before discussing the causes of the education disparity in Laos, this chapter will introduce major examples of theories which explain the causes of the education disparity in developing countries.

Burger indicated that indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, who live in various places in the world, have poor access to education and the availability of their education is not satisfactory. He describes how their educational level is extremely low compared to that of the majority groups. This situation is not limited to Laos and other mountainous areas; the same situation is occurring on islands. For example, almost no primary education is conducted yet for indigenous people in isolated areas in Indonesia. In the mountainous areas of the Philippines, where the ethnic minority live, the number of teachers per person is extremely limited in comparison to other areas (Burger, 1992). As we see, an education disparity is obviously occurring among the ethnic minorities in neighboring countries in Asia as well as in Laos, but the issue is how to point out the causes or factors of this situation.

Bloch isolates “the ethnic minorities in rural villages” as a subject group among which an education disparity easily occurs. Bloch classifies the main causes of the education disparity into: “factors of residence and infrastructure,” “factors of poverty-related problems in the family,” and “problems in organizing the curriculum” (Bloch, 1992). Bloch examines each factor while applying the factors to cases in Vietnam, Thailand and Burma, where a similar background of ethnic minorities is shared with Laos.

Bloch at first pointed out the problems of “residence and infrastructure.”

Schools are generally built in urban areas, where the building of schools is easy and accessibility via transportation is good. This makes it easier for children in urban areas to have access to schools, and have better educational opportunities, in comparison to children in rural villages.

The problems which derive from the condition of residence are more obvious in the countries of Indochina. Many ethnic minorities live in mountainous areas in Vietnam, Thailand and Burma, which are located around Laos, and, it is difficult to organize infrastructure in the places where they live. Especially, the inadequate infrastructure of the traffic base causes difficulty in bringing building materials to these places, and thus schools are not satisfactory built.

For example, in the demographic structure of Vietnam about 13.0 % are ethnic minorities, and most of them live in the northern mountain areas or the midland high plains. The land condition of such high plains and other mountainous areas is severe in comparison to the lowlands. Even traffic networks are not built in some cases, and this has a great effect on school construction.

But, even if roads are improved and schools are built, it does not necessarily mean that schools can be managed. One of the problems is that insufficient teachers are employed. For example, in the mountainous areas in Thailand, where hygiene status is poor and economic activities are limited, the number of teachers was constantly in shortfall because people generally did not want to take up such teaching posts (Ministry of Education, Thailand, 1986). Textbooks, teaching materials, stationery, and appurtenances were always insufficient, and this prevents the study environment from improving.

In Burma, the education disparity has widened, because their ethnic minorities also live in mountainous areas. For example, the Chin are an ethnic minority group who live on a vast mountain range, where transportation of materials to and communication with the residences of the minority group are difficult, because the area is underdeveloped. Smith reported that even now “only one main artery goes across Chin Province – the autonomous province of Chin – which connects two main towns. The Chin’s educational level is the lowest in Burma because the infrastructure is not sufficiently developed” (Smith, 1997).

One cause of the education disparity is the fact that most of the ethnic

minorities live in mountainous areas, as described above, but the following factors could also be understood as problems deriving from the condition of residence.

Bloch pointed out that a second factor for uneven education among ethnic minorities exists in “poverty-related problems in the family” (Bloch, 1991). Certainly, the problems of non-attendance at school by children in a small-income family or their quitting school are not limited to developing countries, and this is a common trend in all countries. Many families in poverty do not send their children to school because they tend to avoid the indirect cost (the labor power which can be lost by sending children to school), in addition to the fact that they cannot afford to pay direct-opportunity costs for education (academic fees, examination fees, stationery, uniforms, transportation fees, lunch money).

Poverty is a serious issue among ethnic minorities in mountainous areas in Burma, too. According to Smith, in a village of the Akha, an ethnic minority who live in a mountainous area of the south Shan Province, some parents sell their children to pay off their debt and these incidents happen because their economic activities are limited. Almost all of the Wa, another ethnic minority who live in a mountainous area, are reported as having no education because of poverty. Even if schools were built, these people would have to work to eat. In villages where securing financial sources is difficult, in addition to having almost no livelihood protection, no financial assistance is made to children who have lost their parents in wars (Smith, 1997). People in villages and families where they work every day to make a living cannot accord to give their children’s education priority over earning their living, and parents’ expectations regarding the labor of children are inescapable.

Bloch, in the last instance, pointed out unfair treatment by “organization of the curriculum” as a cause of an education disparity among ethnic groups; that is, children of ethnic minorities are treated unfairly in the “organization of the curriculum” (Bloch, 1992).

The political systems and historical backgrounds of countries greatly influence factors related to their educational policies and concepts. For example, in

Burma after independence, ethnic minorities have been perceived as marginalized people, and thus a minimum budget has been allocated to their education. Smith describes this situation as “problems deriving from historical development between Burmese, the majority ethnic group, and the ethnic minorities” (Smith, 1997). This giving of unfair educational opportunities to the children of ethnic minorities and of causing an education disparity among groups relates to unfair treatment driven by political and historical causes. These factors greatly influence educational policies as well as the organization of educational curriculum <sup>(1)</sup>.

Therefore, under what kinds of situations are ethnic minorities treated unfairly in terms of educational curriculum? Bloch describes how the problem becomes significant when a language of instruction is selected that is disproportionately suited to one group (Bloch, 1991). Children who speak a different language from the teaching language face a severe barrier in learning. Especially, the teaching language influences children greatly while they are at the stage of getting used to their new school life and are starting to learn to read and write. Selection of the language of instruction is so important that it becomes a direct cause of whether children will proceed to higher education or drop out from school, as Bloch has pointed out.

According to Gould, the policy of establishing the language of the ethnic majority or the language of the former colonial power as the national language is a problem in developing countries generally. Schools tend to place more importance on education in order to build identity as a nation than on preserving the languages of ethnic minorities and their traditional cultures, and this also creates an education disparity. Developing countries are required to improve their educational systems in a short period of time so that they can catch up with the development of advanced countries, and they are likely to be pressed with assimilation policies which aim to unify teaching languages and studies of culture in order to develop human capital immediately. As a result, the children of ethnic minorities are put in a disadvantageous position (Gould, 1993).

As described above, recently, many people point out that the children of ethnic minorities are treated unfairly and affected by assimilation policies.

Smith describes the unification of teaching languages: “Burma is a country with various kinds of ethnic groups. Their constitution approved school education using the languages of ethnic minorities in 1974, but today education using the first language of ethnic minorities is not officially conducted at both secondary and higher education levels. Similarly, research into cultures and religions of ethnic minorities is being suppressed. This situation not only has a great effect on the manifestation and continuation of languages and cultures of ethnic minorities, but it also weighs further on the children of ethnic minorities who have to begin to learn by first studying Burmese, the only official language” (Smith, 1997). That is to say, at the core of the problem is the reality that ethnic minorities have to conduct studies by following the curriculum established for the ethnic majority, and this is carried out in this way only because these people are ethnic minorities, despite the fact that they have their own languages and cultures.

In this section, descriptions have been given of the causes for the widening of an education disparity among ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic countries lying next to Laos, and some examples are offered. In the following section, the questions of whether the same causes shown above will be found in the case of Laos, or whether Laos has its own set of causes, will be examined.

## **3.2 Discussion of the education disparity among ethnic minorities in Laos**

### *3.2.1 Remarks by donor agencies and researchers*

Chazee points out that there is a considerable gap in the literacy rate between the major ethnic group in the lowland and ethnic minorities in mountainous areas, and indicates that there is no improvement in the actual condition of the education disparity among ethnic groups (Chazee, 1998).

Reasons why the education disparity is widening among the ethnic groups in Laos have been presented, and these theories can be summarized in four main groups: “educational resource and infrastructure,” “teacher-related problems,” “social and cultural factors,” and “problems in the curriculum provided by the government.”

As UNICEF has commented on the first problem, “educational resource and infrastructure,” the education disparity has widened among ethnic groups in Laos mainly because the number of schools which have been built is not in balance with the number of students (UNICEF, 1993). For example, the budget allocated for villages in mountainous areas is insufficient and this stops proper construction and limits the building of schools. In such cases, children have to walk to schools in neighboring villages which are several kilometers away from their homes, or they have to go to villages in the lowland, and this causes the problem of there being only a limited number of students who attend schools.

As of 2000, there are 11,640 villages in Laos. Primary schools have been built in about 70 % of these villages, and 64.2 % of the schools are incom-



**Photo 3-1:** A school with a thatched roof



**Photo 3-2:** The school is closed when it rains because of the roof.



**Photo 3-3:** A Hmong village in Luang Prabang



**Photo 3-4:** There is only one school in a village (only for first and second grades).



**Photo 3-5:** The blackboard is too old to write on.



**Photo 3-6:** Students' work was hanging from the ceiling because of no walls in the room.

plete schools where classes are not necessarily taught up to the 5th grade. The number of incomplete schools has not changed, even though several years have since passed (UNESCO & Ministry of Education, 2004). This is because schools having classes up to the 5th grade are constructed only in big villages close to main roads. Each of the remote villages of the ethnic minorities has only one teacher, and it is not uncommon that schools have a class suited only for the first grade (Ministry of Education, 2000). The Asia Development Bank also reports that no primary school has been built in 4,000 villages where ethnic minorities live, and that the problem of the shortage of schools is serious especially in the areas far from Vientiane (Asian Development Bank, 1999).

These examples are, specifically, Phongsaly and Luang Namutha Provinces in northern Laos, where many from ethnic minorities reside. According to profiles by province published by UNDP (1998), the following problems have been occurring, especially in mountainous areas far away from the central areas in the two provinces. The first problem is that the ratio of teachers to schools, as well as to students, is unbalanced, and many schools have more than 70 students in combined classes of three grades, so that study by the students cannot be conducted smoothly. A shortfall in budgets is also a big problem, and also the budget allows only for the building of incomplete schools, in which classes are conducted only up to the third grade of primary education. Schools have no choice other than carrying their teaching in a double-shifted system (of morn-

ing and night) because of shortages in the budget. This limits study time for the students. In Xieng Khouang and other mountainous areas, where relatively many ethnic minorities live, small villages are scattered and schools are built in mountain ravines where children in early elementary school years find it physically impossible to commute to their schools. In such cases, students give up their education for physical reasons (UNDP, 1998). As described above, the combination of harsh geographical conditions and budget shortfalls widens the education disparity among ethnic groups further.

The second problem is “issues with teachers.”<sup>(2)</sup> UNICEF has conducted various kinds of teacher training projects domestically because they believe that problems related to teachers have, similarly to the problems of lack of school infrastructure, created an education disparity among ethnic groups (UNICEF, 1996). Teacher training among ethnic minorities has been given importance because the absolute number of teachers is small, especially in villages of ethnic minorities. As a result, many unqualified teachers take teaching positions and the majority of them are in charge of classes for early school years, in which special aid is required and the dropping out of children is a problem. This serious problem of the low number of teachers is caused by the fact that many teachers do not wish to take a teaching post in the villages where ethnic minorities live, because teachers of Lowland Lao background are usually troubled by cultural differences and a shortage of economical incentives (UNESCO, 1993).

In Laos, even if teachers are qualified, many of them are not accustomed to teach the children of ethnic minorities who speak languages other than Lao-tian, and in many cases, the teachers are not trained to teach them. Teachers who are sent to the residential areas of ethnic minorities usually do not have any contact with other teachers and their salary is usually delivered late; thus, in many cases, teachers leave their jobs. This situation causes a further reduction in the number of teachers in the villages of ethnic minorities, as well as in remote areas, and it also causes the widening of educational disparities among ethnic groups. Chazee saw the lack of improvement in teachers’ treatment as a problem, and he described how the incentive for teaching is weakened by the

fact that salaries are not paid to teachers properly, especially in those villages of ethnic minorities with shortfalls in their educational budget. This delays the generalization of education (Chazee, 1998).

Such problems regarding teachers relate to financial problems, the inadequacy of infrastructure, geographical conditions, cultural differences, and other various kinds of problems, and these problems have caused a widening of the educational disparity among the children of ethnic minorities.

Thirdly, suggestions that “social and cultural factors” are widening the educational disparity among ethnic minorities will be examined.

As has been the case since ancient times, education is thought unnecessary for girls in Laos, and this cultural notion is one of the causes for educational disparity. Because girls’ labor is especially needed for domestic and agricultural work in villages where agriculture is the main source of livelihood, the importance of education for girls is considered lightly. In particular, it is suggested that the traditional viewpoint of opposing the idea of girls and women receiving an education exists in the cultures of ethnic minorities and this creates an educational disparity. Girls are considered an important labor force, especially in villages of ethnic minorities, where tradition is respected, and it is thought that helping one’s family is the proper thing. It is also considered more important for girls to prepare for having families of their own than to receive an education, and thus not very many girls are encouraged to enroll for school. Generally, the parents among ethnic minorities expect very little as a return from education, and also, they tend to feel that there is no meaning to education because they themselves did not receive any education (Asian Development Bank, 2000).

More specifically, in the village of Khmu, which belongs to the Austroasiatic ethnic group, many children do not go to school for reasons of custom. For example, because of the custom whereby helping one’s family by taking care of the younger brothers and sisters is a child’s job, children become more alienated from school naturally. This case is not limited to Khmu, and the enrollment rate for girls among the Hmong, who belong to Hmong-Yao, is also extremely low. This happens because of a custom of parents not being taken

care of by their daughters when the parents get older, by which the view is widely spread that putting money into the education of girls will be of no benefit to their parents (Chamberlain, 1995). Children are thought of as important labor in villages, and this can closely relate to educational disparity.

For example, in Sekong Province, children usually do not go to school during the farming season, because almost all children are expected to help their families. The season sometimes lasts three to four months, but children are to give priority to helping their families because agriculture is the sole income for the villages of ethnic minorities (Chamberlain, 1995). A similar situation is occurring in the villages of other ethnic minorities. According to UNICEF, Lavae has the custom of changing houses in both the farming season and the agricultural-off season.

During the agricultural-off season, they live in houses in places not very close to their fields, and thus children can attend school actively, but as a custom, during the farming season the family moves to a house near to its fields and the children's help is relied on. Because of this, children naturally stop going to school during the farming season. Parents of Lavae think: "if possible, the school schedule should be made according to agricultural cycles" (UNICEF, 1996). If the government takes ethnic minorities' culture, agricultural methods and agricultural cycles, which form the basis of their lives, into consideration and adopt these points into the school schedule and curriculum (including teaching agricultural techniques and changing the school schedule during the farming season), this could help improve educational disparities among ethnic groups.

Evans also offers a view on the discrepancy between agricultural cycles and the school system. Evans says that if the government concerns itself about the enrollment rate of children, it needs to provide the children with a school schedule which considers the lifestyle of ethnic minorities in villages where children's labor is required (Evans, 1990). A discrepancy is occurring between the social life and culture of ethnic groups and policies provided by the government, and this gap infects the educational disparity among ethnic minorities.

Finally, in the fourth theory, "problems related to the curriculum" provided

by the government has been pointed to in reports, or by researchers, in recent years.

At first, the Asian Development Bank (2000) points out that a special priority has to be put on matching the curriculum to skills of living in primary education. The problem with the current situation is that the school curriculum is the same throughout the country, and both geographical and ethnic differences are hardly considered at all.

The policy of using only Laotian as the language of instruction is in fact creating a handicap for the children of ethnic minorities, because many children of ethnic minorities see and hear Laotian, the instruction language, for the first time when they enter their first year of primary school. Chamberlain argues that through the unification of the instruction language a disparity is occurring in school results among the children of ethnic minorities, because not enough time is spent on their shift of language from their mother tongues to Laotian (Chamberlain, 1995).

CARE International, a NGO (Non Governmental Organization) which supports educational activities in the country, also shows concern regarding the traditional educational policies of the Laotian government. In a report to the World Bank, CARE International asks whether ethnic minorities are perceived as “problems” rather than as “resources” in Laos. More specifically, this question is about the unification of the language of instruction, and CARE International points out that using only Laotian in primary education has become an obstacle to study among the children of ethnic minorities, because Laotian is a second language for ethnic minorities. It also reports that the reading and writing of Laotian has become the first goal of primary education (CARE International, 1995). Using Laotian as the language of instruction is certainly natural for those children and their parents who speak Laotian, and it is very interesting for them to study the reading and writing of Laotian. But the children of ethnic minorities, who do not speak Laotian in their daily life at all, will face problems because they cannot understand what their teacher says when they enter primary school, and thus they cannot keep up with their classes.

This fourth theory of problems in curriculum design, which has been

pointed out by researchers and aid groups, is characterized by the view that the causes of educational disparity exist within the providers of the policies rather than within ethnic minorities.

Opinions regarding educational inequality among ethnic minorities stated by international organizations and private researchers are summed up in the four factors as described so far. Figure 3-1 is a flowchart of the relation of factors, in order to observe relations among the four factors systematically. Figure 3-1 shows that the four factors are related in a complex way, and it shows that the educational problems of ethnic minorities in Laos are more complicated than Bloch has indicated.

According to the flowchart, it is understood that, for example, “lack of educational resources and infrastructure” sets off various kinds of inequalities (inequalities of budget allocation, facilities, and educational opportunity). In addition, “lack of budget” also sets off “problems related to teachers,” such as feelings of dissatisfaction about their salary among teachers (the salary is usually provided late) and their quitting teaching jobs because of maladjustment to a bad school environment.

As for the problems relating to teachers, the problems of unqualified teachers and the shortage of qualified teachers are deeply related to “social and cultural factors,” as well as to “factors of the curriculum,” as shown in Figure 3-1. Teachers do not have enough understanding of the religions and customs of ethnic minorities, their life styles, and other “social and cultural factors.” Because of this, some teachers cannot adjust to life in the villages of ethnic minorities and they quit their teaching jobs. As to the contents of study in classes, the main concern in the “curriculum” is for the children of the ethnic majority, and the needs and existence of the children of ethnic minorities are thought of only lightly. This situation causes an inequality in the study process. That is, Laotian is spoken and Lao culture is taught in classes, and this creates problems. Consequently, the children of ethnic minorities dropout from or repeat school. Furthermore, the mismatch between the society and culture of ethnic minorities and the school curriculum is an important problem, as it creates a discrepancy among the needs of ethnic minorities.

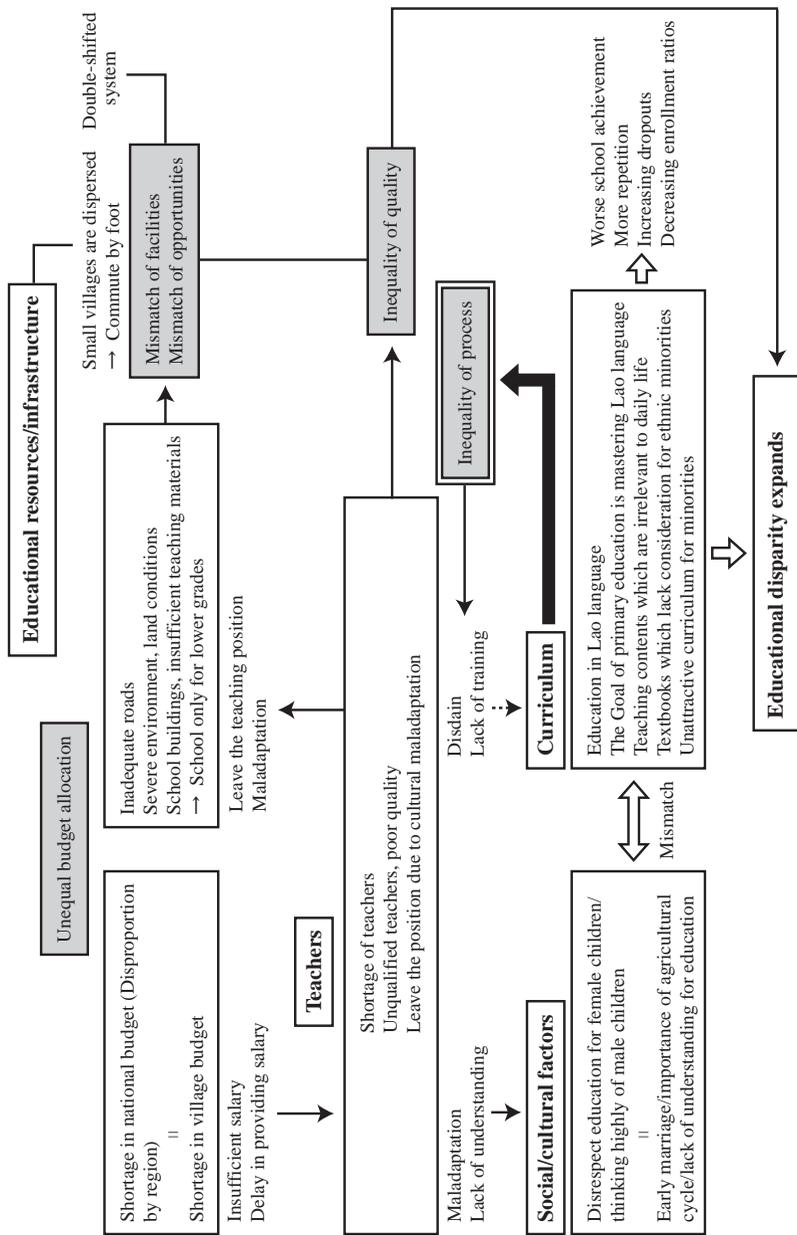


Figure 3-1: Correlation diagram on educational issues of ethnic minorities in Laos

As is obvious from Figure 3-1, “factors related to the curriculum” is widening the educational disparity among ethnic minorities. For example, “education conducted only in Lao language” affects the school results of children of ethnic minorities, and “learning Laotian is a goal of primary education” is one of the causes of the increase in rates of repetition and dropping out from school (because of failure in promotion tests). “The contents of teaching and textbooks do not match the daily life of ethnic minorities” and an “unattractive (unsuited to needs) curriculum” makes students bored with classes, and this becomes a cause for them to draw apart from school. As a result, this lowers their enrollment rate.

Problems related to educational disparities in Laos obviously contain complex factors, unlike Bloch’s theory, in which the relation of the factors to the disparity is simple. Various kinds of factors exist in problems in a country, and these factors are related in a complex way and create educational disparities.

### *3.2.2 Research results by the officials of the Ministry*

The four factors, “factors related to educational resources and infrastructure,” “factors related to teachers,” “social and cultural factors,” and “factors related to the curriculum,” are interrelated in a complex way, as clearly shown so far. Nevertheless, how does the government view problems related to education in the country? What kinds of factors are pointed out in research conducted by the Ministry of Education, which is the actual supplier of education? In addition, how much has this revealed about the current situation regarding educational disparity among ethnic groups in Laos, and how much does the Laotian government understand the problem?

Research conducted into education with respect to ethnic minorities is represented by the research conducted by a Ministry of Education group (National Task Force Unit) in 1996. The results were reported on by Lee. The research was conducted as the Ministry of Education took serious regard of the current situation in which the enrollment rate among the children of ethnic minorities is low, and it was decided that solving these problems would their future goal (Lee, 1998). The research was carried out in a total of 79 villages in 12 prov-

inces, including LuangNamtha, Bokeo, and Sayabouty in the form of interviews.

The subjects for research consisted of four groups: teachers, village mayors, children who drop out from school, and their parents. The research group from the Ministry of Education asked questions to the subjects about “disincentives in gaining access to school” and “reasons for not going to school,” and the following three factors are reported roughly as replies in the interviews.

The first factor is “educational factors” which related to the entire school, and this involves problems of school infrastructure, the shortage of teaching materials, the shortage of teachers, the low quality of teachers, the unsuitable curriculum and the contents of the subjects taught. The central problems in this are the shortage of school buildings and the poor quality of the buildings, in spite of an increase in the number of students.

The fact that children of ethnic minorities in their early school years can hardly understand Laotian – the language of instruction-and that the contents of subjects and time schedules do not fit local needs are suggested as problems related to the educational curriculum. The fact that local administrative institutions are not involved in building the local educational environment, and the fact that there is no systematized rule for making children attend compulsory education are involved in various other kinds of educational factors.

Secondly, poverty in the family, the necessity of child labor, and the deficiency of the national education budget are pointed to as “economic factors.” Ms. Lee, who was in charge of ethnic minorities and girls education (Department of Basic Education) in the Ministry of Education, at that time, says in the “Report by the Ministry of Education” (1998) that the low interest in education and the custom to quit school to marry at an early age have an effect on why the enrollment rates for ethnic minorities and girls have not improved yet. Lee points out that it is important to increase incentives for education among ethnic minorities, but it is also necessary for the government to understand the customs and cultures of ethnic minorities and to include these in the educational system more willingly.

The economic situation of the family is also a factor in deciding whether

children can enroll for school. In families with no cash to buy stationery and uniforms to send their children to school, the chances for children to attend school are limited. The Ministry of Education points out that customs of prolificacy in the families of ethnic minorities and their tendency to migrate to make living out of slash and burn shifting cultivation make it difficult for them to establish their economic independence, and these factors have acted as disincentives for getting access to school. It is also reported that children (especially girls) are an important labor force for families of farmers in the villages of ethnic minorities. Thus girls tend to dropout from school more than boys.

The third point is “social and cultural factors.” More specifically, this is an indication that the unique cultures and customs of ethnic minorities, including, for example, the parents’ view that education is not necessary, early marriage, and a greater encouragement for boys to enroll in school than for girls, are all blocking access to education. The Ministry of Education also describes how parents’ view that education is not necessary has an especially great impact on the school enrollment of children. Uneducated parents do not notice educational merits, that the ability to learn and skills will improve quality of life, and that their children are more likely to be given employment opportunities with better conditions. Thus, changing this notion is difficult.

The social situation in which employment opportunities are limited, even if children are educated, is also deeply related to low school enrollment. The government aims to increase educational opportunities in agricultural areas, but the belief that better employment opportunities are limited to urban areas is deeply rooted in agricultural villages. As UNICEF points out, because of extremely low employment opportunities in agricultural areas, even if people receive an education, they still cannot get a job (UNICEF, 1996). As a result, it may be no exaggeration to say that the idea that education counts for nothing is widespread in these societies.

The Ministry of Education of Laos has classified the problems related to educational disparity among ethnic minorities into three factors. Among the factors, including these and the factors pointed out in previous studies, which have the most influence on the core of the problem?

### 3.3 The viewpoint of this study

Certainly, the factors pointed out in previous studies have had effects on educational disparity among ethnic groups, though the strength of their influence has varied. Various factors have been pointed out, but we have not even yet reached the level of discussion for finding out which of these viewpoints are key points to solving problems. The problems which have been pointed out have not been even reviewed in order to deliver improvements or to find solutions. Now, the issue is to search the fundamental factors which link together in order to dissolve educational disparity.

Which of the factors that have been discussed so far are likely to have the most influence on educational disparities among ethnic groups? According to Bloch, “factors of residence and infrastructure,” “factors of poverty-related problems in family,” and “problems in organizing the curriculum” are the three main factors in educational disparity as described earlier. But which are the important points that have to be improved in Laos and in other developing multi-ethnic countries in the future?

This study takes the view that “problems in organizing the curriculum,” or the fact that the existence of ethnic minorities is considered lightly when contents of study are organized, is the most important issue in educational disparity. That is, as according to Figure 3-1, “inequality in process” – that is, teachers teach based on a curriculum which is organized with the main concern being for the language and culture of the ethnic majority rather than minority – causes educational disparity.

This is because, even if the problems related to residence and poverty are solved, the content of the curriculum and the methods of how to conduct lessons – which are the basis of educational activities – can always be at the core of problems in multi-ethnic countries. Straightening out the educational field and dissolving poverty are definitely the first priority issues when educational disparity among ethnic groups is to be dissolved. It is true that well-prepared school facilities and affluent circumstances at home will certainly make people understand the value of education. But even if such problems are resolved, educational disparity among ethnic groups will not be dissolved without review-

ing the contents of the curriculum.

This is obvious if we look at developing countries where problems of infrastructure and poverty have been resolved for now. The problems which were faced at first by developed multi-ethnic countries, for example, U.S.A., England and Australia, were related to educational policies, which happened because they are multi-ethnic countries. Singapore is, too, though it is not a developing country anymore, repeating a trial-and-error process of organizing its curriculum (language of instruction and subject contents), and this happens because Singapore is a multi-ethnic country.

This study employs the following methods in order to demonstrate that “organizing the curriculum” is the most important key in resolving disparity of education. At first, field investigations are conducted in order to explicate the points of argument based on problems pointed out by “the receivers of education.” Though the needs of the recipients of education have to be met when the curriculum is organized, the points of argument by “suppliers of education,” which are rooted in the educational policies of the state, were mainly focused on in previous studies. Because of this, when the causes for disparity of education were sought, the points of view held by ethnic minorities, who are the recipients of education, were not focused upon, and thus the needs of ethnic minorities were not investigated.

As Tant and Vokes point out, “both receivers and suppliers of education connect to the causes of educational disparity among ethnic groups in Laos” (Tant & Vokes, 1997). In light of this view, opinions from both sides have to be taken into account when educational disparity is looked at.

Obviously, when the suppliers of education look at the educational policies of the state (here, this refers to organizing the curriculum), these suppliers have to take into account the opinions of the receivers and have to study their problems. Shedding light on the opinions of the receivers of education will lead to searching for strategies in order to reduce educational disparity. For this reason, this study employed the method of conducting qualitative research which includes interviews and participatory observations, so that the problems of research subjects can be found and demonstrated effectively. Deep involvement

with each of the research subjects who are connected to education on-site also makes it possible to find out their needs, as well as their problems.

Therefore, why is “organizing the curriculum” of importance for ethnic minorities? Sutherland (1979) points out that schools have to be places where knowledge and the skills of ethnic groups that society wants to preserve forever can be handed on, and they also have to be places where social culture can be handed on. But Sutherland also points out that, not only in developing countries but in every country, the communication of knowledge, including the culture and lifestyle of ethnic minorities, is in conflict with the sense of value of the majority group, and this is causing educational problems for ethnic minorities. In particular, when the majority group regards education based on their values as a way of developing patriotism or as an initiation into an absolutely necessary ideology, the problems become more serious. When the majority group is in a favorable position in terms of the curriculum, it neglects the demands of ethnic minorities, and the majority group imposes on ethnic minorities a standardized education, and this causes dissatisfaction among ethnic minorities.

As to the importance of organizing the curriculum in relation to the causes of educational disparity among ethnic groups, Burger also points out that even if ethnic minorities can receive an education, public education opposes the traditions of ethnic minorities in many cases. For example, local cultures will not be transmitted through school education even if the school curriculum is unified, and efforts at reorganizing school education according to the needs of ethnic minorities are seldom attempted. Teachers also enter the community of minority groups with the prejudice that their own culture is better than that of the minority groups in many cases (Burger, 1990). Isn't it possible that this kind of teacher's attitude, as well as educational policies formed without consideration for the children of ethnic minorities, will deprive the children of ethnic minorities of the incentives for education?

The points made by Sutherland and Burger, of which the focal point is inequality towards ethnic minorities caused by the content of the curriculum, also suggests that inappropriate treatment in school, that is, in terms of the lan-

guage of instruction and organizing the curriculum, is the most important factor among those three factors pointed out by Bloch.

As described so far, this study is based on the hypothesis that the curriculum provided by the government influences educational disparities among ethnic groups and causes a disparity of education. Therefore, what kinds of educational problems do the ethnic minorities in Laos actually have, and what kinds of factors are causes of educational disparity among ethnic groups? These problems will be demonstrated through field investigations in the following chapter.

### **Notes**

- (1) “Curriculum” in this research means textbooks composed according to educational guidelines and their detailed contents. The curriculum in Laos is being established by the Research Institute of Educational Science, which belongs to the Ministry of Education.
- (2) In the author’s view, teachers are respected by their students; but their social status is relatively low, and teaching is not a popular occupation since the salary is low and it is difficult to make a living out of it.

## **Chapter 4:**

# **Educational problems among the Hmong ethnic minority**

### **4.1 Qualitative research into problems related to primary education for the Hmong**

#### *4.1.1 Location and subjects of the research*

What kinds of educational problems do the ethnic minorities in Laos actually have, and what are the causes of educational disparities between the minorities? Will the problems which were pointed out in previous studies be also found in field research? Do the findings in the research support the hypothesis in this study? To examine these concerns, the following two points will become the purpose of this field research.

At first, research will be conducted by giving interviews, of which the focus is primary education, in order to find out about situations where the educational environment for ethnic minorities is actually placed, and the problems which then relate to education for minorities.

Secondly, is the supplier-side of education (the Ministry of Education and teachers) providing the demand-sides for education (students and their parents) with an educational curriculum which responds to their demands? If a mismatch is occurring between the two sides, how this has happened will be examined.

The research was conducted in the period between November 1998 and January 1999 in four neighboring villages of Pek District in Xieng Khouang Province, which is located at approximately 120 km north of Vientiane Capital and nearly 1,000 m above sea level (Table 4-1). The research was conducted after one month of preliminary investigation was completed.

Many mountain dwellers inhabit Xieng Khouang Province, the population was about 220,000 (256,000 in 2004), and about 40.0 % of the population

is made up of the Hmong-Yao superstock. During the civil war from 1960 to 1973, Xieng Khouang was a place where armies battled. U.S.A. and Royal Government armies bombed Xieng Khouang intensively and towns and farms in Xieng Khouang were destroyed (Ireson, 1995). Allegedly, 7,500 tons of bombs were dropped by the two armies during the war, and unexploded bombs still remain in Xieng Khouang today, by means of which we can see traces of the war.

The largest and closest village to the research areas is Phonsavan, which is the capital of Xieng Khouang Province, with a population of 7,635 in 2000. The reasons for selecting Xieng Khouang as a research region were: not only ethnic minorities but also the majority ethnic group, Lowland Lao, live in this prefecture; and the ratio of the population is close to the ethnic composition of



**Photo 4-1:** “Plains of Jars” – mysterious cultural sites containing thousands of stone jars, in Xieng Khouang



**Photo 4-2:** Landscape outside of Phonsavan



**Photo 4-3:** A typical household in Phonsavan

**Table 4-1:** Outline of four villages as research areas

Names of village	Distance from Phonsavan	Population	The no. of primary schools	Ratio of Hmong
Village P	Approx. 3 km	Approx. 2,500	1 (double-shifted system)	Approx. 70 %
Village G	Approx. 5 km	Approx. 1,300	1 (triple-shifted system)	Approx. 60 %
Village H	Approx. 15 km	Approx. 1,500	1 (double-shifted system)	Approx. 90 %
Village T	Approx. 35 km	Approx. 2,500	1 (double-shifted system)	Approx. 100 %

Note: Except for Hmong, the villagers are Lowland Lao and Yao.

**Table 4-2:** Outline of subjects for the research

Names of groups	The number of people
I. Children in a higher-grade at primary school	11
II. Parents (includes six parents of the children in I)	11
III. Teachers and education-related people (office staff of the Ministry of Education and others)	12
IV. Minorities-related people outside the field of education (Staff of NGO/International organization, researchers and others)	12
Total of 46 people	

Note: Refer to the data at the end of the chapter for details.

Laos as a whole. Thus an ethnic composition close to an epitome of the entire country would be possible to be observed there <sup>(1)</sup>. In addition, many Hmong people, the biggest ethnic minority group in Laos, live in Xieng Khouang, and thus it would be possible to compare the educational disparity between the majority ethnic group and ethnic minorities in detail.

The subjects of the research were Hmong people of the mountain-dwellers Hmong-Yao ethnic group, as described earlier. An outline of the research subjects is shown in Table 4-2. In addition, the research subjects were categorized into four groups as shown below, and interviews were conducted with a total of 44 people so that the opinions of both the demand- and supply-sides of education could be investigated.

#### *4.1.2 Method and analysis of qualitative research*

As described in Chapter 1, this research employed the qualitative research method. Three types of data, as follows, are generally mixed together in assembling data for qualitative research.

1. Analysis of records: quoting responses to surveys and questions as well as information obtained from preceding researches and publications.
2. Interviews: quoting the contents of direct interviews with the research subjects about their experiences, consciousness and feelings.
3. Participatory observation: observing subjects' behavior by participating at schools and meetings which they attend, and keeping field notes depending on situations which are observed. (Patton, 1993).

Research subjects in group II included illiterate people, and the subjects' awareness of the problem would improve if more time were allotted to subjects individually in order to listen to what they say. Considering these points, the method of the open-ended interview was selected for this research. The open-ended interview is a kind of research conducted through interviewing subjects where the questions and their order change as occasion may demand. The hypothesis of the research is not set in advance and may be looked for during

research. In this research, questions which were asked during the interviews varied depending on the subjects, and the interviews were conducted, accompanied by a Hmong person who acted both as an interpreter and a guide, based on research notes (cf. the supporting data 2 at the end of this chapter). Each interview was for about 30 to 45 minutes. The following three questions were asked to all research subjects except the subjects in group I <sup>(2)</sup>.

1. What kind of education-related problems do ethnic minorities (or as ethnic minorities do you) currently have?
2. What are the educational problems which are unique to the Hmong? (How the problems differ in comparison to the problems of the majority ethnic group?)
3. How can the current problems be solved? (cf. the supporting data 2 at the end of this chapter for the questions which were given to each research subject)

The contents of the interviews were recorded, with the subjects' consent, to analyze the results. According to Merriam (1998), one method of analyzing an interview is comparing data and searching for regularity which is repeatedly shown. In this research, the interview data were coded after the data-results obtained were classified into different causes. Determination of the relationship between the causes would make it possible to read problem structures. In



**Photo 4-4:** A Hmong family visited for the interview (Village P)



**Photo 4-5:** Interview research at village G



**Photo 4-6:** Open market at village H



**Photo 4-7:** Double-shifted primary school at village T

addition, a theory could be produced from the database, as well as a process of interpreting the literature and information of the past (Sato, 1996). As a result of interviewing 46 subjects, various kinds of opinions were obtained, and the results of each subject are described as follows.

## **4.2 Problems which are held by the demand-side of education**

### *4.2.1 Children of the Hmong and Lao Language – high language barrier*

Very few Hmong children pointed out problems about their schools in detail. Their answers to questions were positive and they repeatedly said, “There is no problem and school is fun.” Thus, analysis based on the answers to the questions and classification of the causes turned out to be unsuccessful. Given this factor, questions which related to the problems of overall education – What do you dislike about school? What are you unsatisfied with about school? – were asked again to the subjects who included early leavers of schools. Consequently, the following replies were obtained from eight subjects.

Lao language is difficult. (4): (b), (c), (e), (i)

Can not learn English. (2): (f), (h)

Classmates behave badly. (2): (g), (j)

The number in brackets ( ) is the number of the subjects who replied. This

includes students who dropped out of schools. The alphabet letters on the right are the subjects who pointed out the causes (see: Appendix 1).

First of all, the difficulty of reading and writing Lao Language was pointed to by the subjects, because children do not learn Lao Language until they reach the first grade of primary school <sup>(3)</sup>. “nyak” which means “difficult” in Lao Language, and which is often used in study scenarios, as well as one of the Laotian expressions “Pasa Lao Nyak”, which means, “Lao Language is difficult,” were frequently heard during the interviews with three subjects. For instance, two out of eleven subjects were early leavers of school and one of them – a boy in subject group I-(i) (at village G, 13 years old) – responded that he stopped going to school because studying was difficult (nyak).

**Extract from the interview with subject group I-(i)**

Author: Everyone goes to school, so why are you not going to school?

Boy: I hated studying and that’s why I quit school. It was nyak (= difficult).

Author: What are you doing now? Do you find it inconvenient not to be able to read and write?

Boy: Yes. I couldn’t understand Lao Language at all so I didn’t like it either. Lao Language is difficult (Pasa Lao nyak). I can’t write Hmong either. I am looking for a girl-friend now. If I find her, I’d like to marry soon.

Author: When did you leave school?

Boy: I have not been back to school since I quit at the first grade. When I entered school, I immediately found that studying was difficult (nyak) and I couldn’t understand it. I thought that I would fail the examination for promotion.

A girl, study group I-(c), was still in the first grade although she was already 10 years old. The reason for this was asked to her through the interpreter, and it was found that she was repeating the first grade for the third time be-

cause she could not pass the examination for promotion (she failed the test for Lao Language twice). In another case, a boy, study group I-(e), was in the second grade although he was 10 years old. He responded to a question in the interview by stating that he entered school at the age of eight but failed the examination for promotion and so repeated the first year. Only three out of eleven children could read and write Hmong.

Two students replied to questions by saying that they were unsatisfied with the fact that in Xieng Khouang there is no English education, which is conducted in the capital.

**Extract from the interview with subject group I-(f)**

Author: Do you have anything you dislike or are unsatisfied with about school?

Student: Well, I didn't like Lao Language from the beginning. I don't like the fact that we can't study English. Peenong (a relative) in Vientiane has been studying English from primary school. We don't have English teachers in this primary school.

Author: Why do you want to study English?

Student: Because I can make a lot of money if I can speak English. I'd like to have a lot of money in the future.

English education was not being conducted in Xieng Khouang, and the reasons for this seem to be that English education in Vientiane is still at a trial level, and also that English teachers who have been educated in Vientiane do not want to take a post in Xieng Khouang or other remote areas.

Through the interviews with children, it was revealed that the curriculum which is provided by the government (especially the language policy) is creating a difficult study environment for ethnic minorities and unequal education opportunities.

#### 4.2.2 *Parents' dissatisfaction with schools*

The keywords from the topics to which the subject group II (parents) referred intentionally as regards educational problems were classified into categories. The five causes are as listed below.

Dissatisfaction with the shortage of school buildings and study materials (8): (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (h), (i)

Dissatisfaction with teachers (5): (d), (e), (h), (i), (j)

Difficulties with learning Lao Language (4): (e), (f), (j), (k)

Dissatisfaction with the curriculum (3): (a), (e), (i)

Inadequate financial resources (2): (f), (g)

The problem most commonly referred to was the fact that “even though school buildings exist, they are very old, and study materials are in shortage.” This tendency became more serious as the locations of schools moved further from Phonsavan, and the problem was especially significant in village T, which is located in a mountainous area.

#### **Extract from the conversation with subject group II-(e) (male)**

Author: What are the problems with education in T village?

Man: There are many problems. Our teacher and village mayor have just submitted our demands to the local education office. That building for the primary school is very old, as you can see. Come again on Monday to have a look. The building is too small to house all the students.

Author: Your school runs double-shifted, doesn't it?

Man: That means having classes either only in the morning or at night, and the number of classes will be fewer. Children cannot study enough.

Author: What else have you requested from the education authority?

Man: One is to have an English teacher sent down. If children can speak English, they can go to any country and look for a job. Even if they can speak Laotian they can't go to any other countries. So I am against the current system. We want English teachers in all schools.

The second most frequent keyword used by parents among the research subjects was problems related to teachers, and thereafter in frequency came the difficulty of learning Lao Language, dissatisfaction with the curriculum, and inadequate financial resources. For example, subject group II-(k) (who originally came from Nonghed Village which is 100 km east of the place where the research was conducted and who now resides in village P) talked about the seriousness of the problems related to teachers.

**Extract from the conversation with subject group II-(k) (female)**

“Phonsavan is a town so it has good teachers, but the situation is terrible in Nonghed All the teachers are Lao people. A teacher's salary is very low, so their second job is more important for the teachers. They sometimes do not come to school and they have no motivation. So, children don't want to study either. The teachers only know Lao Language, so they can't have conversations anyway. After all, Lao and Hmong are not peenong (relatives), and they are not kind to Hmong people anyway. My youngest daughter is only 11 years old and she is a first grade at school. She can't speak Laotian yet. I prefer to have teachers who are peenong. We have almost no teachers who are peenong (here this means: Hmong), so I hope that the number increases. In comparison to the situation of the Lao, everything is unfair (bor-samerparb).

In this way, she described the situation where the shortage of teachers was causing no progress in children's learning by using the word “unfair” (bor-

samerparb). Other parents also described a situation where more unqualified teachers were taking the post of teacher in mountainous areas in comparison to urban areas and that this was unfair. Problems with teachers are closely related to the problems of language and curriculum.

A flow chart was made to examine the relations among the five factors which were pointed out by the parents, and the problems were demonstrated in two categories as having hard and soft sides, as shown in Figure 4-1. The first issue belonged to the hard side, as the parents pointed out that “school infrastructure” was not built properly and that the “budget and financial resources” for education were lacking both from the government and from families. In the four villages under research, these problems were more serious as the village location moved further from Phonsavan.

Secondly, the problems on the soft side can be classified into two factors: “teachers” and “language.” In particular, dissatisfaction towards teachers varies as indicated in Figure 4-1, and some serious problems were that in villages the absolute number of teachers was small and the teachers spoke no Hmong, as mentioned in the conversation with the woman above. The parents in T village and other villages which were far from Phonsavan also shared a tendency to show dissatisfaction at the shortage of teachers. As shown in Figure 3-1, “school infrastructure,” “teachers,” and “budget” are the three reasons why the double-shifted (or triple-shifted system) had to be implemented in primary schools.

Similar to the case with subject group I, the expression “Hian pasa Lao nyak” (learning Lao Language is difficult) was heard as regards the issue of “languages.” This expression implies that it is difficult to switch language at entry to primary school where education is conducted only in Lao Language (this is difficult because children speak only in Hmong in their family and villages before they enter primary school). Many teachers who take teaching posts are Lowland Lao and this causes problems, including the situation where teachers cannot communicate with their Hmong students. When asked what kind of strategies might improve the situation, some parents responded by “wishing to increase the number of Hmong teachers” (II-(d)), by “wishing teachers would give explanations in Hmong before they teach Lao Language in classes” (II-(e)),

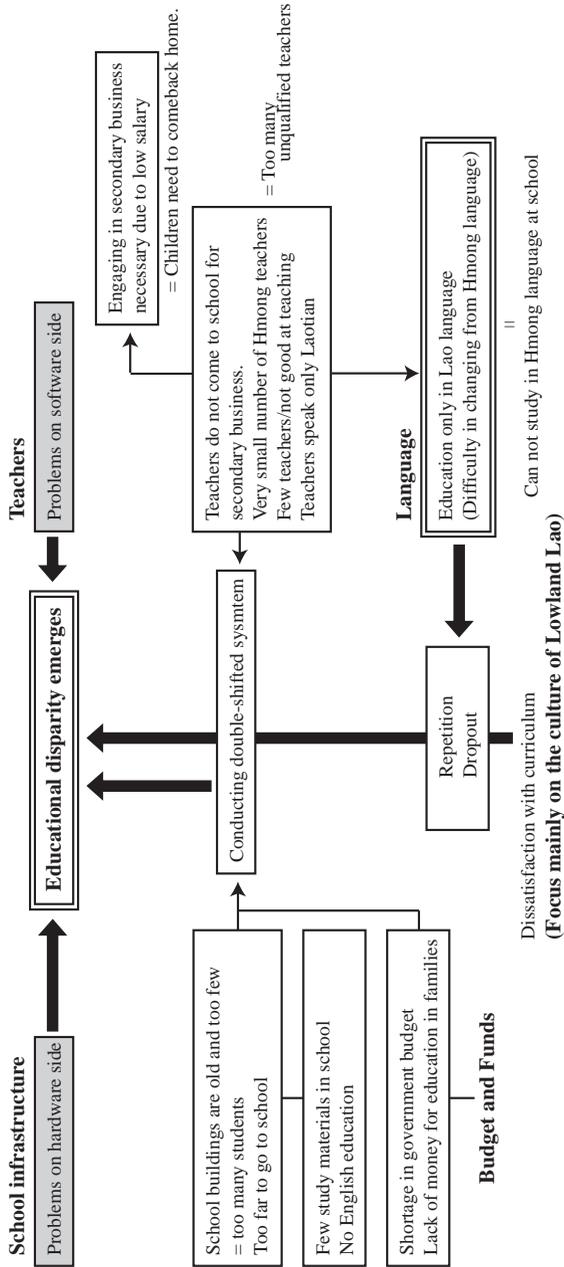


Figure 4-1: Problems in school from the view of Research Subject II (parents)

and by “wishing children could learn Laotian while learning Hmong” (II-(h)).

Other problems on the soft side relate to textbooks and the content of learning; in short, there are problems of “curriculum” too. Because the teaching language is unified into Lao Language, the curriculum is mainly about the culture, folk tales, and lifestyle of the majority ethnic group, the Lowland Lao, which is not like the culture belonging to the ethnic minorities who live in villages <sup>(4)</sup>. The culture of ethnic groups in Xieng Khouang and other local areas are introduced neither in textbooks nor in lessons, and thus the children need to be educated by imagining life in urban areas only from pictures. When the parents who expressed dissatisfaction towards the curriculum were asked how to improve the situation, they responded by stating that they hoped the schools would introduce subjects that suited local needs (methods of agriculture and poultry raising, reading and writing in the mother tongue, an introduction to local religions and ethnic groups) as well as the study of how to increase cash earnings (including cultivation of cash crops and stitch work). That is to say, the demand-side of education is not satisfied with the curriculum which is provided by the government, the supplier of education. The cause for this mismatch seems to be the integration policy of steering ethnic minorities towards the value judgments and lifestyle of the majority group in Laos.

### **4.3 Points which were suggested by the supplier-side of education**

The following six factors were obtained from responses in interviews with education-related people.

Language differences (9): (a), (b), (c), (e), (f), (g), (i), (j), (k)

Cultural and customary differences (8): (a), (b), (c), (e), (f), (h), (i), (j)

A lack of understanding about education (6): (a), (b), (c), (e), (f), (j)

Severe economic situation in families (5): (a), (b), (c), (e), (j)

Shortage of teachers (3): (a), (e), (g)

Insufficient infrastructure of schools (3): (a), (b), (f)

The problems which were pointed out by people related to education cov-

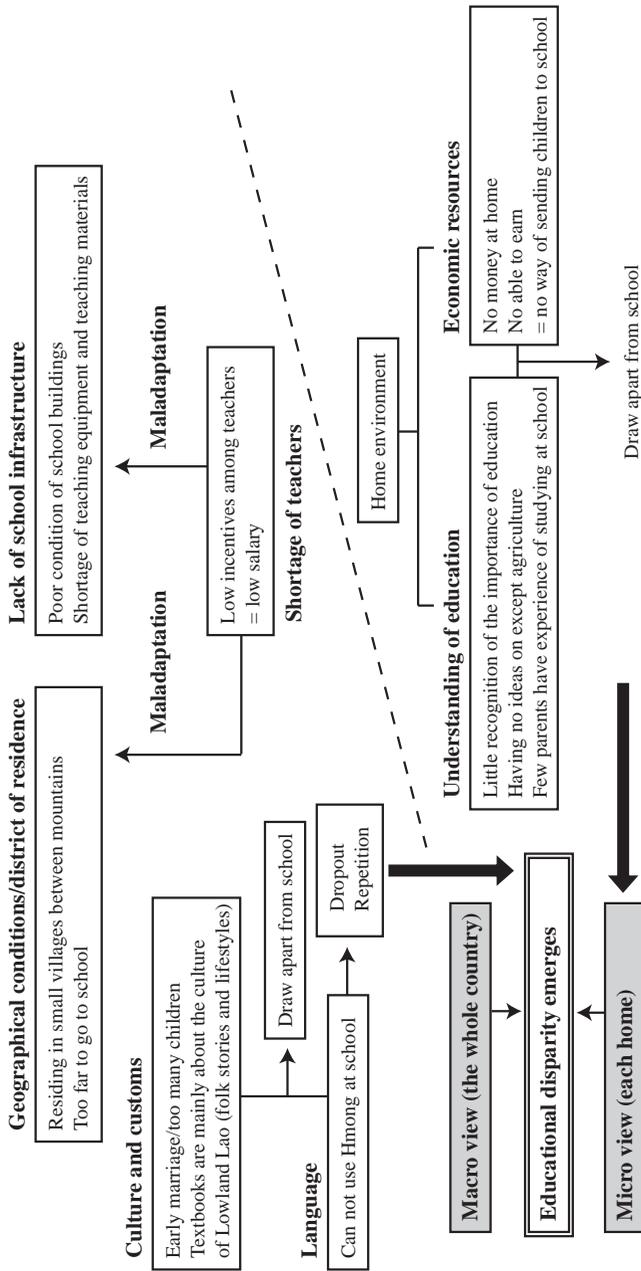


Figure 4-2: Educational problems from the view of Research Subjects III

ered six factors, including the problem of “language,” problems existing in the families of students, and problems related to teachers. The six factors are represented in the flow chart in Figure 4-2, and the problems became clear both at macro-level and micro-level. The upper-half on the left side of the chart shows the macro-level aspect of problems, and many of them are opinions which were given about the ethnic minority Hmong from the perspective of the whole country.

The problem of “language” was brought up by the majority of the research subjects. They described how children found it difficult to switch their language to Lao Language, which they had to do as soon as they entered school. It was also pointed out that children were not allowed to speak their mother tongue Hmong while receiving an education at school. As shown in an extract of an interview below, every teacher took up the problem of “language” at the beginning of the interview. This indicates that “language” is the biggest handicap for ethnic minorities, and this is causing educational differences among ethnic groups.

The problem relating to “culture and customs,” which was pointed out the second most often by the subjects, represents a problem existing uniquely among the Hmong. It was suggested that the Hmong custom to marry and bear children young did not fit the school system in Laos. Characteristically, this problem was pointed out mainly by the education-related staff.

Teachers in schools, on the other hand, implicitly complained about the curriculum which they were provided. They pointed out that the contents of textbooks focused on a world that the children of ethnic minorities could not understand or imagine because the contents focused on the Lowland Lao. In other words, opinions were divided in half between the education-related staff and the teachers.

In addition, teachers in schools described how they had questions about, and had a lot of troubles with, teaching Lao Language as well as the culture of the Lowland Lao to children of the Hmong.

**Extract from the interview with subject group III-(i)**

Author: What are the differences between Lao and Hmong children?

Teacher: Lao children understand Lao Language easily, but Hmong children are... they seem to find it difficult. Instead, they are studying arithmetic hard. I think the current curriculum and school system are tough for ethnic minorities. The life here (in Xieng Khouang) is not easily understood by officials in Vientiane.

Author: Can you give me any examples?

Teacher: Classes should be cancelled during busy farming seasons. The students and I myself, too, are busy during the busy farming seasons <sup>(5)</sup>. And, of course, textbooks and language are problems. It is impossible to make children understand science. Teaching Lao Language in the Hmong language is also difficult. I wish the curriculum could be made in foreign countries.

The “residence” of the Hmong was also touched upon in the interviews. Teachers explained problems in the difficulty of improving “school infrastructure” and the difficulty of having enough textbooks, which were caused by geographical conditions, in addition to the problem of how the school was located far from home for the children of minority groups in mountainous areas. Thus, they have disadvantages in their educational environment compared to the majority ethnic group in the lowland area. In the villages where the Hmong and other ethnic minorities live, despite the problem of a shortage of teachers, teachers do not want to take on a teaching position in a village because the living conditions there are severe and the school buildings are not in good condition. For example, a male teacher, research subject III-(d), applied for a teaching job in Xieng Khouang after he graduated from a university though he is originally from Vientiane Capital. He said that he was dissatisfied with a living environment where he has no access to electricity and water and he was

also dissatisfied with a work situation where he had to teach classes in which no textbooks, nor even pieces of paper, were prepared.

**Comment from teacher III-(d)**

“Because my girlfriend originally came from Xieng Khouang, I applied for a job and came here just after I graduated from university. But I was surprised by the difference in the living situation here compared to Vientiane. For example, I wanted to use recorded tapes so that the students can listen to the English of native speakers in classes, but I cannot do that because there is no recorder and electricity in the school. It is too expensive to buy batteries from my salary, too. In addition there is no water and electricity in the house I live in, so I have to go get water by myself. At night, I prepare classes under the light of a lamp, and this is also hard. Food and the language are different, and I have thought of going back to Vientiane many times.”

The lower right of the flow chart in Figure 4-2 shows the problems from a micro perspective, and the two factors are ascribed to domestic settings. Most research subjects pointed out that the problem with the Hmong is that “they don’t understand the importance of education.” As regards this point, the subjects shared negative opinions on how the parents were not educated, so that they could not teach their children the importance of education, and how they had no interest in education because they placed importance only on farming. The subjects also pointed out problems with the Hmong’s “economic situation in domestic settings,” and they said that generally the families of the Hmong were living in bad economic conditions.

**4.4 Gap between actual life and the curriculum**

Research subject IV (parties relevant to ethnic minorities in fields outside of education) also stated their opinions with their different views and positions. The points referred to by these research subjects were classified into six factors

listed below.

- Problems related to teachers (7): (b), (e), (g), (h), (i), (j), (k)
- Problems related to languages (7) (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (g), (h)
- Curriculum (7): (b), (c), (d), (e), (g), (h), (j)
- Residence/ living environment (5): (a), (d), (e), (f), (i)
- Culture/customs (5): (a), (f), (i), (k), (l)
- Budget management (3): (d), (e), (g)

The issues most commonly pointed out were issues about teachers and “Lao Language.” A flow chart has been made which consists of six factors, so that the relations among the factors can be observed. Similarly to Figure 4-3, problems can be described from two viewpoints. The first issue was the factor of “culture and customs,” and this was also emphasized by research subject III. For example, the fact that people get married young and the custom of women to stay at home are actual causes for the lower female enrollment rate. The large number of children in each family is also a cause of the cost burden of education, and thus many children (especially girls) grow apart from school. A Hmong American (which means a Hmong refugee who has immigrated to the U.S.A.), temporarily returning and staying in Laos, made a comment mainly on “culture and customs,” as shown below.

**Research subject IV-(I) Comments by a Hmong American**

“Though the Hmong in Laos believe that if they have children, the children will help them, the truth is “more kids, more suffering.” The Hmong living in the U.S.A. do not believe in that anymore. And the Hmong in Laos are still animists, and this is why they have doubts about chemistry, physics and other school subjects. They should think of education separately, as the Hmong in America do. If you are obsessed with customs and culture, you can’t even have an idea of what it is like to receive an education.”

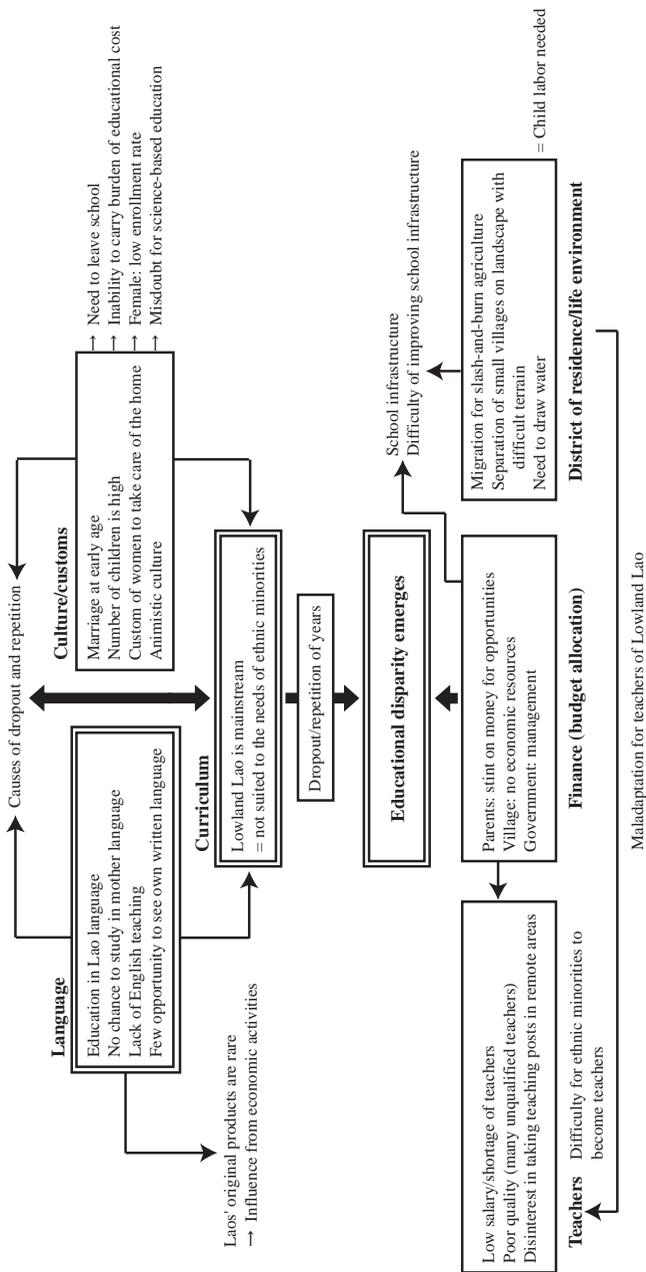


Figure 4-3: Educational problems through the view of Research Subject IV

The factor of “culture and customs” develops into the problem of “curriculum.” The mainstream of the contents for study is made for the Lowland Lao, who speak Laotian (the main body of the textbooks is also about the folk tales and the lifestyle of Lowland Lao), and thus the contents of study, that is, the curriculum, does not meet the needs of ethnic minorities. Certainly, this also invites a risk regarding the accession of culture and language among ethnic minorities.

For example, research subject IV-(c), female, said, “the current textbooks for students, including the Hmong, contain stories about some far place in the world, and Lao Language is taught as if is a kind of foreign language.” Research subject IV-(d) said similarly, “the textbook is very easy for Lowland Lao, but for the Hmong and other ethnic minorities it is something beyond their imaginations.” She showed us the textbook for Lao language used in the first year of primary school. Examples are shown in Figures 4-4 and 4-5 below.

The title of the drawing in the textbook (Figure 4-4) is “The tone of the khaen is pleasant”, but the khaen is a traditional musical instrument of the Lowland Lao, the ethnic majority, and thus, it is not very easy for the children of ethnic minorities to recognize the instrument (Hmong’s khaen is showed in the pictures below). The stilt house in the drawing is a depiction of the lifestyle and styles of architecture of the Lowland Lao. The drawing in Figure 4-5



**Figure 4-4:** The tone of the khaen is pleasant

Source: Kasuan Suksa Sathaban Konkua Vithayasad Kansuksa: Ministry of Education Research Institute, 1999.



**Figure 4-5:** Bathing in water before going to school

Source: Kasuan Suksa Sathaban Konkua Vithayasad Kansuksa: Ministry of Education Research Institute, 1999.



**Photo 4-8:** A Hmong man with Hmong's Khaen

is titled “Bathing in water before going to school”. This is also a depiction of the lifestyle of Lowland Lao, and it is different from the lifestyle of the ethnic groups in mountainous areas, who basically bathe in water outside (or do not like bathing). Research subject IV-(d) believes that such contents of textbooks are causes of students finding it difficult to understand their lessons and feeling the lessons boring.

Research subject IV-(b) had the opinion that “unless the languages of ethnic minorities are included in the school education, their languages will disappear with their cultures. Thus, it is necessary to create an educational environment in which each culture and language is restored.” The subject also suggested a better way of building the curriculum which suited the production activities and environment of ethnic minorities <sup>(6)</sup>. Subject IV-(c) made an interesting comment, as shown below.

#### **Research subject IV-(c)**

“If you want to increase the school enrollment rate of the Hmong, they should be taught Lao Language by using the Hmong way of life and by mixing the Hmong language with Lao Language. Children lose their motivation to study if the textbooks contain only stories about something far from their lives or beyond their imaginations. When children cannot learn Lao Language well in the second or third grade, they think that there will be no improvement even if they continue studying. So they

tend to quit school. This probably links to the low enrollment rate among the children of ethnic minorities.”

Research subject IV-(e) pointed to “budget/funds” by saying, “there are problems with financial management by the government and the Ministry of Education, and the shortfall in the allocated budget for education creates a deterioration of quality in education and a decrease of incentives for teachers.” The following comment was also made in relation to the issue of “budget/funds.”

**Comment by research subject IV-(d)**

“Though it is good that primary schools are built through support from various countries, I think that it is necessary to review how to manage schools. You hear everyone saying “no money, no money” everywhere you go, but it is not that we don’t have money. Personally, I think that this is an issue of how the government manages the money, that is, how money is allocated. I think that it is time to review how to manage the budget.”

The living environment is bad and transportation means are not sufficient in addition to the budget shortfall. These factors are making the building of school infrastructure difficult. The number of teachers is still small because it is difficult for people from ethnic minorities to become public servants, including teachers. This tendency still pervades the country and teachers from the Lowland Lao do not like taking teaching posts in rural areas. In other words, “the living environment” of the Hmong is relevant to the problems of teachers. Many unqualified teachers teach in villages where ethnic minorities live because of the shortage of teachers generally, and this causes a further deterioration in educational quality and another vicious cycle in problems relating to teachers.

As for the study of “language,” the method of teaching Lao Language as if it were a foreign language (concentrating on reading, writing and memorizing)

is a problem, but another serious problem is that students have little chance of using Lao Language at home, so that they easily forget the letters. This is naturally caused by the fact that there are few publications in Lao Language in the countryside, and another cause is that Laos does not produce many daily commodities, and thus there is hardly any opportunity for people to find the Lao language spontaneously in daily life.

A Hmong man (IV-(k)), who currently runs a travel company for tourists visiting Xieng Khouang, reflected on his time at primary school and commented as shown below.

**Interview with research subject IV-(k)**

Author: Do you remember anything of when you were at primary school?

Man: Of course. It was during a war, but students stayed nights together and studied. We made a fire with gasoline in a place like a grotto in order to avoid bombs. It is unthinkable now, but we carried food there from home and we studied by the fire. My parents are education-minded, so I was, almost like, forced to attend school. In the end, I graduated from high school in Russia.

Author: Was there anything you found hard then?

Man: We have our own language (Hmong) but we learned Laotian as a language of communication. Of course, the curriculum was supposedly the same throughout the country, so I hated to fall behind because of the language. In schools, we write and read in Lao Language as a person from Laos, but nobody speaks in Laotian at home. When I went back from the grotto to my village, I immediately spoke in Hmong, so sometimes I couldn't remember Lao Language when I got back to the grotto with food. We were students of Lao, so I thought that I was at a disadvantage.

From this comment, we can guess that the research subject (IV-(k)) had a hard time as a person from an ethnic minority, in addition to his hard school life under severe conditions.

As described in this chapter, the interviews conducted for this research have made it clear how educational problems and educational differences are occurring among ethnic minorities. The research subjects were classified into four groups as students, parents, teachers, and people related to ethnic minorities, and the problems were examined from various points of view. As a result, it became clear that the supply-side of education is not providing an educational curriculum which matches the requirements of the demand-side of education.

Common keywords were picked up, and these words relate to educational problems among ethnic minorities. It became clear that “language,” “curriculum,” and “cultural features” are the common factors among them. Other problems are, for example, school infrastructure and teachers, as factors which derive from the schools’ condition on site. It is difficult raise this as a problem occurring only among ethnic minorities, since the condition is the same for Lao people in Xieng Khouang.

For this reason, it is possible to say that “the organization of the curriculum” relates to educational differences among ethnic groups, as already pointed out in section 3-3.

As Sutherland indicates, when all schools use the same language, curriculum, and textbooks in teaching, education will be simple and unified. Under such an educational system, a similar phenomenon happens with the recruitment of teachers and in the process of teaching the curriculum. Sutherland points out that discrimination against ethnic minorities by these processes keeps them shut away from educational opportunities and widens the education disparity. The research findings here agree with Sutherland’s remarks (Sutherland, 1979).

In examining the findings above, observations were conducted while teaching in a primary school in Xieng Khouang (P School) as a part of qualitative research. The results of the observations will be reported on in the following chapter.

## Notes

- (1) The ratio of the majority ethnic group is 66.2 % in all Laos, while it is 55.7 % in Xieng Khouang Province at 2000.
- (2) The questions were prepared in Lao language, and the author asked questions in Lao language based on the prepared questions. But the author's ability of Laotian was at daily conversation level, and thus the interviews were accompanied by an interpreter who was fluent in Hmong, Laotian and English. The language in use changed depending on subjects' emotions and language ability.
- (3) Hmong allegedly originated in China. Thus Lao and Hmong languages are greatly different in range, from linguistic orthography to pronunciation. It is said that the Hmong did not have a written language originally, but a French missionary introduced alphabetical orthography in 1950 and the style has been widespread since then.
- (4) For example, the words (nouns) used in textbooks, "going to a hospital, or going to a market," or "work in a factory," are often not understandable or unimaginable by Hmong children who come from farming families in the very remote mountain area.
- (5) Rice planting begins in May when the rainy season starts. But that is also the time for the final examinations for students. It is difficult to arrange the school schedule. Generally, late October to mid November is the busy farming season, and this is the harvest time for rice (in the areas where double cropping is conducted, rice is planted in January again).
- (6) The subject said that it was necessary to teach something useful for their lives, such as knowledge of sanitation, the sickness of barn animals and problems with drinking water.

Appendix 1: Research subjects' attribution

I. Children at the level of higher grades at primary school

Gender	Age	Grades (school attendance)	did not go through	Reading & writing in Hmong	Subject villages
(a) Female	13	Completed primary school, but secondary level	×	×	Village H
(b) Male	11	2nd grade of primary school (delayed enrollment)	×		Village H
(c) Female	10	1st grade of primary school	×	×	Village P
(d) Female	11	5th grade of primary school		○	Village T
(e) Male	10	2nd grade of primary school	×	×	Village T
(f) Male	10	4th grade of primary school		×	Village T
(g) Male	9	4th grade of primary school		×	Village G
(h) Female	13	Dropped out at 4th grade		×	Village G
(i) Male	13	Dropped out at 1st grade		×	Village H
(j) Female	10	5th grade of primary school		○	Village P
(k) Female	11	4th grade of primary school		○	Village P

Note: Reasons for not going to school: Research subject (1) to help her family after her father's death; (8) to help her parents, especially her mother; (9) because he disliked studying.

## II. Parents

Gender	Age	Number of children	Occupation	Final academic qualification	Reading & writing	Subject villages
(a)' Female	36	6 (Husband's death from sickness)	Farming/housewife	Primary school	Laotian	
(b)' Male	40	6	Farming	Primary school	×	
(c)' Male	30	5	Village deputy head/farming	Primary school	Laotian & Hmong	From (a)' to (f)' are the same as the children of I
(d)' Female	50	11	Farming	Primary school	×	
(e)' Male	44	10	Farming	Lower secondary school	Laotian	
(f)' Male	69	11 (2 wives)	Farming	Nil	×	
(g)' Female	48	13	Housewife	Nil	×	Village P
(h)' Male	29	3	Tour guide	Higher secondary school	Laotian & Hmong	Village G
(i)' Male	53	18 (3 wives)	No job	Nil	Laotian & Hmong	Village G
(j)' Female	76	10	Housewife/farming	Nil	×	Village P, but from Nonghed
(k)' Female	50	16	Farming	2nd grade of primary school	×	

Note: Nonghed is a residential area about 100 km away to the north of Phonsavan.

III. Teachers and people related to education

Ethnic groups (Nationalities)	Gender	Occupation: people with teaching license are marked with ○
(a) Lowland Lao	Male	Manager of the Department of Education in Vientiane Capital ○
(b) Lowland Lao	Female	NGO (education-related) coordinator
(c) Lowland Lao	Male	English teacher/Department of Education in Xieng Khouang/Tour guide ○
(d) Lowland Lao	Male	English teacher (primary, secondary and high schools) ○
(e) Lowland Lao	Male	Former teacher at primary and secondary schools ○
(f) Lowland Lao	Female	Teacher of Laoitian and Laoitian literature (high school) ○
(g) Lowland Lao	Female	Principal of a primary school
(h) Hmong	Female	Teacher of 1st and 2nd grades of primary school ○
(i) Hmong	Male	Teacher of Laoitian (primary and secondary schools)/Principal of a secondary school
(j) Hmong	Male	Director of the Department of Education in Xieng Khouang ○
(k) Hmong	Male	English teacher/Tour guide
(l) Japan	Female	NGO (education-related) representative

Note: New names such as Thai-Kadai and Hmong-Yao are supposed to be used here, but such names are not used when people are referred to individually when interviewed. Thus, the traditional names are used here.

## IV. People other than education-related (researchers and people related to ethnic minorities)

Gender	Occupation
(a) Female	UNHCR staff, specializing in the settlement of Hmong returned refugees
(b) Female	UNDP staff, specializing in the development of residential areas for ethnic minorities
(c) Female	Former-NGO staff, specializing in the cultural inheritance of ethnic minorities.
(d) Female	Staff of international volunteer, specializing in the development of residential areas for ethnic minorities
(e) Male	Researcher of ethnic groups in Laos
(f) Female	Staff of international volunteer specializing in nursing
(g) Male	Staff of the Ministry of Information and Culture in Laos (Laotian)
(h) Female	NGO (supporting children) representative (Laotian)
(i) Female	NGO staff (land-mines removal, health, etc.) (Hmong)
(j) Male	Director of the of Agriculture and Forestry in Xieng Khouang (Hmong)
(k) Male	Manager of tourist company/mainly hiring Hmong (Hmong)
(l) Male	Manager of real-estate company/mainly hiring Hmong (Hmong-American, living in the U.S.A.)

Note: (a)-(f) are foreigners (non-Lao) involved in international aid or research. (l) is a male who immigrated to the U.S.A. as a refugee 15 years ago, but has returned Laos temporarily.

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

I. Questions for children

- (1) Do you like to go to school?  
ເຈົ້າ ມັກໄປ ໂຮງຮຽນບໍ່ ?
- (2) What do you like the best at school?  
ເຈົ້າ ມັກຫຍັງ ຫລາຍກວ່າໝູ່ ຢູ່ໂຮງຮຽນ?
- (3) What don't you like about school? (problems you have as a minority member)  
ເຈົ້າ ບໍ່ມັກ ອັນໃດ ຢູ່ໂຮງຮຽນ? (ກ່ຽວກັບ ບັນຫາ ຈຳແນກ ຊົນຊາດຊົນເຜົ່າ)
- (4) Do you think you need to study?  
ເຈົ້າຄິດວ່າ ການຮຽນ ຈຳເປັນ ສຳລັບ ເຈົ້າບໍ່ ?

II. Questions for parents

- (1) Do your children go to school?  
ລູກໆ ຂອງເຈົ້າ ໄປຮຽນ ໝັ້ງສີ ຢູ່ບໍ່?
- (2) Why or why not?  
ດ້ວຍສາຍເຫດໃດ ຈຶ່ງໄປ ຫລື ບໍ່ໄປ ?
- (3) Do you think they need education?  
ເຈົ້າ ຄິດວ່າ ການສຶກສາ ຈຳເປັນ ສຳລັບ ເຂົາເຈົ້າບໍ່ ?
- (4) Does the school have any problems?  
ໂຮງຮຽນ ມີຂໍ້ຫຍຸ້ງຍາກ ອັນໃດບໍ່ ?
- (5) How does the school need to be improved?  
ໂຮງຮຽນ ຄວນຈະືກ ປັບປຸງ ຄືແນວໃດ ?
- (6) What do you think are “special problems” for Hmong people, especially in education?  
ເຈົ້າຄິດວ່າ ບັນຫາພິເສດ ສຳລັບ ມື້ງ ຄືອັນໃດ, ໂດຍສະເພາະ ບັນຫາຢູ່ໃນ ການສຶກສາ ?

III. & IV. Questions for teachers, school-related people, researchers and workers related to ethnic minorities

- (1) What kind of problems/disadvantages do minority students have?  
ອັນໃດແດ່ ທີ່ເປັນ ບັນຫາ / ຈຸດດ້ອຍປຽບ ສຳລັບ ຜູ້ຮຽນ ຊົນເຜົ່າສ່ວນນ້ອຍ ?
- (2) How do you compare “access to education” between Lao and other minorities?  
ເຈົ້າ ໄດ້ມີການປຽບທຽບ ຄືແນວໃດ ກ່ຽວກັບ ໂອກາດ ການເຂົ້າເຖິງ ການສຶກສາ ລະຫວ່າງ ລາວລຸ່ມ ກັບ ຊົນເຜົ່າ ສ່ວນນ້ອຍ ອື່ນໆ ?
- (3) What do you think are “special problems” for Hmong people, especially in education?  
ເຈົ້າ ມີຫ້ດຊະນະ ແນວໃດ ກ່ຽວກັບ ບັນຫາພິເສດ ສຳລັບ ມື້ງ, ໂດຍສະເພາະ ບັນຫາ ຢູ່ໃນ ການສຶກສາ ?
- (4) How can these problems/ differences be improved?  
ເຈົ້າຄິດວ່າ ບັນຫາ / ການຈຳ ແນກຊົນຊາດ ຊົນເຜົ່າ ເຫລົ່ານີ້ ຄວນຈະືກ ປັບປຸງ ແກ້ໄຂ ຄືແນວໃດ ?

## **Chapter 5:**

# **Educational disparity among ethnic groups in the classrooms**

### **5.1 Meanings of conducting participatory observation in schools**

#### *5.1.1 Purposes and methods of participatory observation*

Chapter 5 describes the results of participatory observations which were conducted by the author between March and May 1999 in P village, where the author was teaching as a tentative teacher. P village is one of four villages where the author conducted research by interviewing people as already described in Chapter 4. The purpose of the participatory observation shown in this chapter is to demonstrate what kinds of processes take place when educational disparity occurs among ethnic groups.

Participatory observation, which is used as a research method in this chapter, is an activity which is considered to be a basis of ethnography. Participatory observation is one part of qualitative research and it aims to observe the actions, experiences, and behaviors of people who are available for observation. It also observes the relationships between those people and others <sup>(1)</sup> (Patton, 1990). Methods involved in collecting data for participatory observation are varied, and include participation and observations and activities in different situations, daily conversations with those concerned, formal and informal interviews with those concerned, and collecting written documents and statistical information related to the research subjects (Shimizu, 1998). Researchers are required to work or to live with the research subjects for a certain period of time. One of the merits of participatory observation is that the behavior, as well as emotions, of the research subjects can be understood very well by the sharing of experiences (Bell, 1993). Conducting direct observations of the phenomena that relate to the themes of this study and understanding them well make it possible to discover facts which are not to be seen in written documents.

So far, the method by which education-related problems of ethnic minorities in schools are examined by means of participatory observation (school ethnography) has been used, especially in the US, from the 1960s. For example, Ogbu worked as a bilingual teacher in a school in an area in San Francisco where the population of African Americans was high, and Ogbu conducted participatory observations in order to find out the causes of the academic failure which was continuously occurring among ethnic minorities. Around the time, a genetics theory was put forward as one of the factors for academic failure among students. However, based on results obtained from a two-year participatory observation, Ogbu showed that the problems exist in a “social structure” in which being African American means that success at school does not lead to success in society after school years are over (Ogbu, 1974).

Rist also conducted participatory observations in schools. He conducted participatory observations in a school located in an area where the population of African Americans was high. The observations were conducted in order to find factors which define educational effects in classrooms. He paid attention to this method in order to analyze what actually happens in school and he also paid attention to Labeling Theory. This was contrary to the situation which had existed earlier, that is, the view that educational effects were decided by heredity, culture and other factors existing outside of schools. Labeling Theory argues that we should not think that the causes of deviance exist within the deviants, but we should pay attention mainly to the process by which the deviants are labeled with deviance by regulators. That is, it focuses on how students change their choices and their direction of their futures after being labeled with a certain evaluation by their teachers (Rist, 1980).

As a result of participatory observation, Rist reported that evaluation and expectation, which are prospectively held by teachers towards their students, and information, which is shared by students and teachers when they spend time together in classrooms, affect study achievements among students. For example, low expectations towards African American students held by their teachers cause poor performance among African American students (Rist, 1980). Thus, this study also uses the method of participatory observation so

that the process of how educational disparity occurs can be assessed in detail.

The author taught English in fifth-grade classes (121 students) in P Primary School. P Primary School is located in P village, in the Pek District of Xieng Khouang Province. Observations were conducted not only during classes but also during breaks (10 minutes), breaks after the second period (20 minutes), and during morning assemblies (flag raising). The author also spent time after school with students, including students who are not in the fifth grade, and classes outside of the fifth grade were observed between the author's teaching periods.

Questionnaire research was also conducted in order to help examine what kind of processes will have taken place before an educational disparity occurs at primary school, and what kinds of impact the organization of the current curriculum has on educational disparity as well as on mutual recognition among students. The results will be described later.



**Photo 5-1:** Both teachers and students wear traditional Lao skirt “Sin.”



**Photo 5-2:** Students at P primary school

### *5.1.2 Social background of P Primary School*

P village is located in a place about 2 to 4 km away from Phonsavan – the capital of Xieng Khouang Province, population 7,635 – and about 180 households (2,486 people) exist in the village. Xieng Khouang is located in a mountainous area and has a high population of Hmong-Yao, the ethnic minority, while Phonsavan village and P village (that is, the neighboring village of Phonsavan) are located on lowlands which are surrounded by hillsides. Access to markets

and to administrative institutions is relatively convenient. Thus many Lowland Lao, the ethnic majority, also live there.

P village is divided into two Kum (groups). Kum 1 has a mixed population of Thai-Kadai and Hmong-Yao, while Kum 2 has only Hmong-Yao. This book focuses on Kum 1.

Official documents about the ethnic composition of P village do not exist. But according to the Department of Education in Xieng Khouang, about 60.0 % of the population of Xieng Khouang is Thai-Kadai (Lowland Lao) and about 40.0 % is Hmong-Yao. The population of other ethnic minorities is very small, and few Yao of the Hmong-Yao live there. The author chose P Primary School for conducting participatory observations partly because the author was requested, during earlier interviews with the school principal, to teach English there even temporarily, but also because detailed observations of educational disparity among ethnic groups, which is the theme of this study, were possible there because Lao and Hmong are mixed together in the school.

P Primary School is the only primary school existing in the village (Kum 1). The number of students is 655 in total (320 female students) and it has classes up to the fifth grade. The total number of teachers is 21 (3 males and 18 females), and only 10 teachers work on a full-time basis. The ethnic composition among the students consists of 360 (about 56.0 %) Thai-Kadai (hereinafter, Lao) and 295 (about 44.0 %) Yao of Hmong-Yao. All of the teachers speak in Laotian and only one teacher can speak the Hmong language. In 1996, the World Bank made a loan to construct new school buildings, and thus there are two schoolhouses with six classrooms in the school. There are so many students that the school runs a double-shifted system. The morning part has six classes consisting of the first grade (one of two classes), the third year (a total of 2 classes), and the fifth grade (a total of 3 classes), and the students come to school between 8 a.m. and around 11 a.m. The afternoon part consists of the first year (the other classes), the second grade (a total of 2 classes), and the fourth year (a total of 3 classes), and the students come to school between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

There is no play equipment on the school property, and two toilets have

been built with a concrete wall around them at the corner of the schoolhouses. But the school has neither a well nor a plumbing system, and thus the toilets have no function as equipment and is not used at all. Electricity also cannot be used all day in the school.

P Primary School is located on flat land on a gentle hill, and thus access to the school is relatively easy. The majority of the students can commute to school on foot within 20 minutes. Only a small number of students own bicycles, and they are owned by the higher-grade students. Most of the children of the village go to school partly for the reasons that: access to the school is easy because the village is located about only 2 km away from Phonsavan, which is the center of the province, and the roads are relatively well maintained though they are not paved; the demand for labor is not high, so that the parents of children do not need to rely on the children <sup>(2)</sup>; and, classes are conducted in double-shifted system, so that students are required to attend school only for about four hours a day. However, the age range of the first-year students is wide because some children start school later than usual, and some repeat school because they had to help their parents during school year, or they had some family situation occurring earlier <sup>(3)</sup>.

Timetables and the study curriculum of the school are to be described next. Primary schools which are located in provinces like P Primary School's are characterized by the fact that the curriculum, which is supposed to be the same throughout the country (as shown in Table 1-2 in Chapter 1), is not often taught there. Seven subjects are expected to be taught in primary schools but some subjects are not taught in P Primary School. For example, classes in physical education and music, which are taught in primary schools in Vientiane Capital, are not taught in P Primary School, and the four hours used for lessons per day are mostly taken up by lessons in Lao language or arithmetic. The subject called "the world around us," which is a combined subject of science and social studies, is taught for about two hours a week. Physical education is not taught as a part of regular classes, but instead, all of the fifth-grade students do exercises during the break between classes, and the exercise is watched by lower-grade students. When the school principal was asked about teaching art

subjects (crafts) and subjects other than Lao language and arithmetic, the principal explained that the subjects were hardly taught in the school because the teachers were not good at teaching those subjects, since they were not trained in them, and also because there were no textbooks or teaching materials available (such as experimental tools for science subjects).

The principal said that day-to-day timetables were relayed from the Department of Education every Monday, but the timetables were not given consistently. According to the principal, when directions were not given by the Department, the principal and teachers decided on the content of classes and put the schedule up in the room for teachers (in a space of about 4.8 m<sup>2</sup>). But even this seldom happened, and usually teachers decided on the contents of classes by themselves every morning.

A part of the classes for teaching the Lao language to the fifth grade was changed to English classes at around the time when the author started teaching in the school. But there seemed to be no obligation to hold make-up classes for Lao language at all during the time when the author was teaching. The schedule for when to start classes, have breaks, and when to end classes was set and the timetable was put up in the teacher's room. But there was no clock in the school, and thus, based on teachers' discretion, a meeting at the end of the day was held when four classes (about 40 minutes for each class) ended, and then students went home. Classes started at eight every morning, except Monday mornings when the national anthem was sung and the national flag was



**Photo 5-3:** A daughter of the teacher was sitting in the front and taking class together.



**Photo 5-4:** Most female teachers take their children to school.



**Photo 5-5:** Morning assembly is held every Monday.

raised, which took about 30 minutes. There was a 10-minute break between the first and second periods, and a 20-minute mid-break between the second and third periods. There is also a 10-minute break between the third and fourth periods, and at 11, when the fourth class ended, the students went home. Full-time teachers went home to have lunch or take a break, and they came back to school at one.

#### **Column 5: Schools regardless of age**

During my stay at P Primary School, I saw very many age differences among the children in the school. The youngest child looked about 3 years old, and one tall student looked about 15 years old. Generally, the age for the first grade is six in Laos, so the children in the school should be between six and eleven years old.

In a room where teachers gathered, about three children were always playing, and I sometimes saw a child of three or four years old girl who was sitting at the front row of the classes. None of these children were quite old enough for school enrollment yet in any case. I asked a female teacher about this, and she said that the child was her daughter. In Laos, kindergartens exist as

a part of pre-school education and private day-nurseries also exist. But the fee was very high (6,000 kip) and this made it difficult for parents to put their children in those places. According to the female teacher mentioned above, her monthly salary was 50,000 kip (about 6-7 USD according to the exchange rate at that time), and the salary was not enough for her to pay the fee for a nursery. The principle of P Primary School (female) said that if children of teachers could behave well and would sit quietly with other students in classes, the teachers were allowed to bring their own children to school. It is a very permissive story. Because of this, apparently, teachers could continue their work in a relaxed state.

I asked the tall male student about his age and found out that he was 14 years old. He wanted to start school at six years old, but he could not start at six because he had to take care of his younger sister and brother for his parents. The situation of his family had settled, and thus he entered school. But he was already nine years old by then. He repeated school for one year, and so he was 14 years old in the fifth grade. Quite a few students kept repeating school, and thus they were older than their usual school ages.

In mountainous areas, not many children usually enter primary school at the age of six. This is because, in addition to their family situations, many children do not know how old they actually are. In Laos, there is no register system, especially in remote villages. In order to decide their level of development, children are asked to raise their right hand upward first and then lower the hand across their head. If they can pinch their ear with the hand, it is decided that they are six years old. In some villages, this is a criterion for deciding whether children are old enough to enter primary school. I was told that a child of my friend could do this at

age of five, so fortunately the child could enroll for primary school at five years of age. Though the situations everyone faces are complicated, this is a typically Laotian relaxed and warm story.

## 5.2 Educational disparity seen in classrooms

### 5.2.1 *Disadvantages still remained in the fifth grade students*

The number of fifth-graders whom the author taught in P Primary School was 121. The ethnic composition among them was 75 Laotian and 46 Hmong students, that is, 62.0 % Lao and 38.0 % Hmong. The fifth grade had the lowest ratio of Hmong students among all grades in the school. The 121 students were divided into three classes (classes 1, 2 and 3). As a general rule, the ethnic backgrounds of the students were not a concern for class composition. Thus the ethnic composition was different depending on the class, and that seemed to be creating a different atmosphere in each class.

For example, in class 2 the number of Hmong students accounted for only for 20.0 % of the class (8 out of 40 students), and thus their presence seemed to lack visibility. Their teacher presumably had arranged their seats without considering ethnic backgrounds, so the Hmong students were not sitting together. Because of this, the Hmong language was hardly heard during classes. When two female students, one of whom was sitting behind the other, were helping each other by whispering in Hmong when they had some questions during a



**Photo 5-6:** Boys in the fifth grade



**Photo 5-7:** Girls were playing “London bridge is falling down.”



**Photo 5-8:** Only fifth graders exercise during recess (No physical education as curriculum).



**Photo 5-9:** During the English class taught by the author (Class 1)

class, their teacher continued the lesson normally without welcoming or stopping what the students were doing. Lao students also appeared not to worry about these two female students who were talking in Hmong. When the author was teaching, too, the eight Hmong students seemed to be buried completely among the Lao students, and their existence was not apparent unless by checking their names or looking at their faces carefully.

In class 1, where 38.0 % of students were Hmong, their teacher arranged the students' seats in such a way that the Hmong students could sit together. Facing the blackboard, long desks were placed in three rows on the right, middle, and left, with five columns of desks in the classroom. The desks on the right side of the classroom were occupied mostly by male Hmong students, and four female Hmong students were sitting side by side in the front and central row of desks. They whispered in Hmong all the time, even during classes. The desks in the left columns were occupied mostly by female Lao students. The difference from class 2 was that the male Hmong students on the right side of the classroom were always talking in Hmong, and if Hmong friends had difficulties in answering questions during class, they helped their friends by passing on the answer in a loud voice in Hmong, without any hesitation. Their

teacher didn't give any special warning to them. Male and female Lao students seemed not to worry too much about this situation, probably because they were accustomed to this. But every now then, when a Hmong student's voice was very loud, the Lao students gave strange looks, as if they wanted to say, "they are noisy, though I don't understand what they are saying."

When the author spoke in simple Hmong language during classes, the Hmong students were excited, and after the class they came to the author to show the Hmong language which they wrote on the corners of their notebooks. They were familiar with the Hmong language which uses alphabetic literation, and they wrote in this literation when they communicated with their friends. Thus their progress in learning English was very fast. On the whole, the Hmong students were more noticeable in comparison to the situation in class 2, and there was no impression that the Hmong students were buried among the Lao students.

In class 3 in which the number of Hmong students was more than half of the class (56.0 %, 22 out of 39 students), the ethnic ratio was the reverse of what was normally the case in schools. Because of this, observing the situation of how the Hmong students took initiatives in the classroom became possible. Their teacher said that their seats were arranged strictly by their height. But because some long desks and chairs were broken, students moved to sit together with their friends anyway, and during lessons the tall male Hmong students gathered together at the back of the classroom and talked in Hmong.

In principle, only Laotian was to be spoken in school, but the majority of the students in class 3 were Hmong, and thus the Hmong language was flying about in the classroom. During the author's lessons, when the Laotian which was used in classes was not clear or when the Hmong students could not answer questions, male Hmong students in the back of the classroom gave help to other Hmong students in loud voices in Hmong. When this happened, the students who only spoke Laotian seemed to be wondering, "what are they saying?" for a second. But this situation was not unusual, and thus the Lao students were concentrating on lessons most of the time without worrying too much about what was going on. The teacher of class 3 did not understand the

Hmong language at all, and the teacher did not show any intention of trying to understand Hmong either.

In class 3, both male and female students were lively. Many students were keen to put up their hands during lessons and they were taking part in lessons very actively. In the author's lessons, use of the Hmong language was allowed, and when the Hmong and Lao languages were written on the blackboard for the purpose of making comparison to English, the Hmong students in particular seemed to enjoy the atmosphere, which was different from the usual classes. Some students approached the blackboard pointedly and proudly to correct the author's Hmong language. Lao students also appeared as if they were enjoying the unusual atmosphere of the lessons.

In the author's lessons, the Hmong students mainly raised their hands. The Hmong students had a mastery of the Hmong language which uses alphabetic literacy. The author conducted lessons titled "my family" in the school, in which students drew their family and briefly explained about their family in English. Class 3 was notable for the fact that both English and Hmong were written on the drawings made by the students.

As described above, participatory observations were conducted in the three classes with different ethnic compositions, and one tendency became apparent. A cheerful and freer atmosphere seemed to appear among the Hmong students as restrictions on the use of Hmong were relaxed. This was especially clear in the comparison between the Hmong students in class 3, where the students could communicate in their mother tongue, and in class 1, where communication in their own language was restrained. During the author's lessons, too, the Hmong language was often heard. One day, students were asked, in mixture of Laotian and English, what they said, and the following is what the students replied.

**A part of the class: During a lesson reviewing "time and verbs" which was taught in a recent class**

Author: "What time did you get up this morning?"

Student A: ... (nothing)

Author: “Do you know what I meant? Kauchi bor?” (Do you understand?)

Student A: “Bo kauchay.” (I don’t understand.)

Student B: “XXXXX...” (Whispered in Hmong by the student sitting behind. The author couldn’t catch what was said.)

Student A: U...! Seven o’clock.”

Author: (to B) “Pennnyan jao wao pasa Hmong? Pasa Lao wao neodai?” (Why did you speak in Hmong just now? Tell me what was said.)

Student B: “Bok hai lao su-su. Bopu lao su-su. Pasa Hmong gai samurap Hmong.” (I just helped a little. We are helping each other. It is simple if there is help in Hmong.)

As seen during the lessons, one of the reasons why the Hmong students spoke in Hmong was because it was more effective and more understandable if they studied in their mother tongue, Hmong, than when they spoke in Laotian. The Hmong students were already fifth graders and, according to the interview with their teacher, these students had not mastered Laotian completely and there was a disparity in their school achievement in comparison to the Lao students. In particular, the three teachers of the fifth grade were all Laotian and they did not understand Hmong at all. Thus the Hmong students could not receive any explanations in Hmong, even if they had something they didn’t understand during lessons. If there were teachers from ethnic minorities, they could help and encourage the students so that they would understand. But the teacher for the first grade was the only teacher who spoke Hmong, and the teacher would not help the students of other grades on principle. Thus, in classes speaking freely with friends in Hmong, helping each other, and gaining further understanding, were important for the Hmong students. The teachers had no choice but allowing them to do so.

As a result of participatory observations in the fifth-grade classes, it was clearly observed that problems caused by the unification of teaching languages continued even if the students reached the fifth grade, which is the highest



**Photo 5-10:** During the English class

grade in primary schools. What kinds of influential factors exist as background to the reasons for the handicap of language still remaining even after the students enter the fifth grade? These reasons will be pursued by conducting participatory observations in first-grade classes, in which the educational disparity was presumed to be most apparent.

### *5.2.2 Educational disparity observed in the first grade*

The first grade consisted of two classes (morning and afternoon classes) in P Primary School, and their teacher was a female Laotian who was the only teacher who could speak Hmong in the school. Lao and Hmong people are mixed and live together in P village, and the village is close to Phonsavan market, a natural place for people's intercommunication, and thus children have the opportunity to hear Laotian before they enter school in many cases. But the female teacher complained that every year about 40.0 % of the Hmong students entered school without understanding Lao language at all and this made it very difficult to teach and run classes. She understood that because the Hmong students were given neither enough time to study their mother tongue nor to change their language to Laotian, a sense of anxiety could be detected on their faces. Thus she felt a sense of obligation in that she was only one who could help the students. Compared to the other teachers in P Primary School, she had a better understanding of the Hmong students and she was taking their disadvantages seriously.

Observing lessons for the first grade from the back of their classroom, it

was found that the Hmong students occupied the front row of the room and that the Hmong students were trying not to miss what the teacher said. A big difference between the Hmong and Lao students was especially noticeable during the lessons concerning Laotian. The Lao students, whose mother tongue is Laotian, copied what was written on the blackboard into their notebooks quickly and started reading what they had copied. But, for most of the Hmong students, copying what was on the blackboard was the best they could do. Their teacher found it unbearable to watch, and so she explained it to them in Hmong up to a certain degree. Once she checked how much understanding the students had, she continued the lesson. When the teacher made explanations about some words, she used some pictures which were cut out from calendars or some such and she drew on the blackboard as supplementary material and this was to help the understanding of the Hmong students. During that time, the Laotian children appeared as if they wanted to say, “we understand the words, of course.” However, they were just looking at their teacher and the Hmong students, though they looked bored.

The following is a conversation between the female teacher and the author in an interview through an interpreter.

Author: The Hmong students seem as if they do not understand the lessons. There is a disparity between the two ethnic groups, isn't there?

Teacher: Yes, there is. The students who obtain high marks are all Lao students. Most of the Hmong students fail in the examinations for promotion at the end of the year and they repeat school. Last year, 40 % of the first graders couldn't go on to the next grade, and almost all of them were Hmong students.

Author: What do you think causes the disparity?

Teacher: The Hmong students learn Lao language from scratch in school, so naturally it takes a long time for them to learn Laotian. I sometimes explain to them in Hmong,

and even that is difficult in comparison to teaching the Lao students.

**Author:** What do you do when the Hmong students cannot understand lessons?

**Teacher:** I can understand the Hmong language because I taught in a Hmong village for 11 years in the past. So, I teach the Hmong students in Hmong what they need to learn.

In Laos, an automatic promotion system is not adopted in school, and examinations for promotion are conducted at the end of the school year (in June).



**Photo 5-11:** First graders are taught how to brush their teeth.



**Photo 5-12:** Students (at the back) did not have textbooks or notebooks.



**Photo 5-13:** Teacher begins the class with copying the textbook on the blackboard.



**Photo 5-14:** Classroom in the winter is cold.

The results of the examinations decide whether students will repeat the same grade or go on to the next stage. The rate of repetition for the first grade after failing the examination and the rate of dropouts from school because of the lack of incentive caused by an inability to understanding lessons, accounts for, in total, according to the principal, 40.0 % in P Primary School, though this is not uncommon in Laos. Almost all of the 40.0 % consists of Hmong students, as the first-grade teacher mentioned in my interview with her. That is, an educational disparity between the Laotian and Hmong students is occurring in P Primary School too, and the study environment is extremely disadvantageous for the Hmong students.

### **5.3 Current educational disparities found out by questionnaires research**

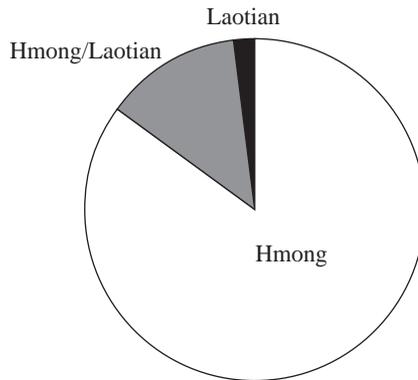
#### **5.3.1 *Difficulty of switching to Lao language***

Research was conducted by giving questionnaires – anonymous and written (partially selected) in style – to 121 fifth-grade students who were also the subjects of participatory observation. This was done in order to investigate: what kind of process educational disparity goes through before it occurs; and, what kind of impact the current assimilative educational curriculum has on the reciprocal recognition of Laotian and Hmong students in P Primary School. The results of the questionnaire are explained below.

Quantitative research by means of questionnaires was conducted mainly as a supplement to the qualitative research which was described in Chapter 4. But also, since students were shy on the whole, it was assumed that obtaining brief answers from many students by using survey slips would be more successful than trying to find out their opinions through long conversations. This method was also used because it would be possible to conduct a survey with 121 subjects, which is an adequate number of subjects for quantitative research.

The surveys were conducted on April 30, 1999 (for class 1 and 2) and May 1, 1999 (for class 3). The subjects were 114 students (69 Lao, 45 Hmong), who were in the school on those days. All questions were given in Laotian. The first question was to ask the Hmong students, “What language are you using at home?” This was to find out the status of use of languages.

As seen in Figure 5-1, most of the Hmong students spoke the Hmong language at home. It was also found in the research results that the parents of 37 (82.0 %) of the Hmong students did not speak Laotian fluently and that only the Hmong language was used when they talked with Hmong people. Thirty nine (86.0 %) of the students answered that they learned reading and writing in Hmong outside of school, because they could not learn Hmong at school.



**Figure 5-1:** Language spoken at home by the Hmong students

The second question was about reading and writing in Hmong, which students could not learn at school. They were asked the question, “Who do you learn Hmong from?” Sixty percent of the students answered that they learned it from their parents, older brothers and sisters. Thirty-three percent of the students answered that they learned it in private lessons, and 7.0 % answered that they learned it by themselves. The teachers of private lessons meant their English teachers. In the village, private English lessons which were run by Hmong people were popular, and the Hmong language was also taught there.

The third question was, “What was your impression when you first came across Laotian?” Ninety-five percent of the students answered that they found the study of Lao language difficult when they were in the first grade. That is, most of the Hmong students already faced difficulties in learning the language in the first grade of primary school.

As the previous studies have pointed out, it is also obvious in P Primary

School that the discrepancy in the use of language between home and school provides the Hmong students with difficult study conditions. Furthermore, because they cannot study their mother tongue in school, they are forced to carry the burden of studying their mother tongue in their homes or in private lessons after school.

In order to find an answer to the question of whether the Hmong students can learn and maintain their mother tongue without studying it at school, the question – “Can Hmong students write, read and maintain their mother language?” – was asked to 10 full-time teachers. All of them answered, “The students love the Hmong language and they are maintaining it without being taught it at school.” In general, schools do not have any plans to give supplementary support in the Hmong language to Hmong students who do not understand Laotian, and also they do not have any plans to review the curriculum so that Hmong students might be able to maintain their mother tongue.

## **5.4 Misunderstanding and ethnocentrism among Lao students**

### *5.4.1 Lao students and ethnocentrism*

Lao students’ awareness of Laotian and Hmong culture was studied in order to investigate how the assimilated curriculum could influence the awareness of the students. The first two questions on the Lao language, “Do you think you should speak Laotian as long as you live in Laos?” and “Do you think Laotian is useful for your future?” were asked in a “yes or no” format. The latter question was also asked to the Hmong students, so that their responses could be compared to those made by the Lao students.

As a result, it was learned that 83% of the Lao students regarded speaking Laotian as an obligation for Lao students, and they thought that it was natural for the people in Laos to speak Laotian, the language used by the ethnic majority and the only language of instruction in Laos. It is assumed that this tendency is an ethnocentric view toward languages <sup>(4)</sup>.

As shown in Figure 5-2, the majority (60 out of 69) of the Lao students consider the Lao language as useful for their future. That is, from the answers given to the two questions above, it is possible to summarize as follows: they

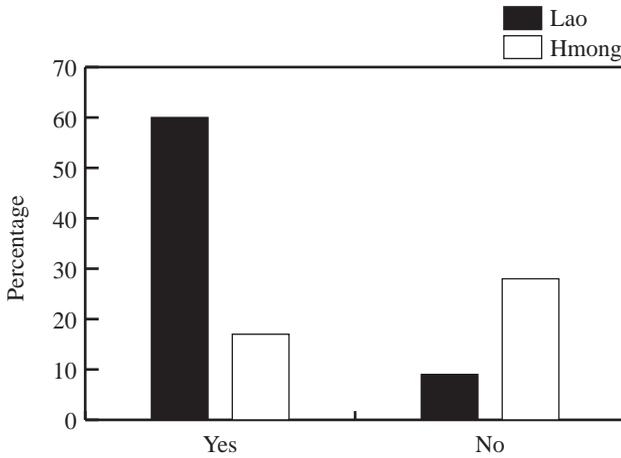


Figure 5-2: Future usefulness of the Lao language

were aware that “the Lao language was a language which had to be spoken inside Laos, and also that it was a language which was useful for their future.” However, a big difference was found when these answers were compared to the answers given by the Hmong students.

As seen in Figure 5-2, the Hmong students do not think that the Lao language is as important as the Lao students do. More Hmong students perceive Laotian as not a useful language for their future in comparison to the number of Hmong students who think that Laotian is a useful language for their future. This shows that there is a gap between the two ethnic groups in Laos in terms of views of the Lao language.

Following this, questions about Laotian were given to the Lao students who had finished filling in the questionnaire.

**An informal interview with a Lao student**

Author: So you think the Lao language is important.

Student: Of course, Lao people (meaning people who live in Laos) must speak the Lao language. It doesn't matter whether they are in school or somewhere else. Even

children can speak Laotian, you know.

Author: Is it the same with the Hmong children, too?

Student: It is proper to speak Laotian in school or everywhere else, isn't it?

Author: Do you want to learn the Hmong language?

Student: Yes, I really want to learn. It's because I don't understand it at all. But for my future, the Lao language is very important.

Then, why do the Hmong students not think that the Lao language is useful for their future, and why do they not stick with the Lao language, which is their national language as well as the language of instruction? Questions were put to a student informally after school.

Author: Do you not think that the Lao language is important?

Student: I think it is important in school. We are studying in Laotian.

Author: Then, why do you think it is not important for your future?

Student: My father and my uncle always say that I should study English more than Laotian. They say it will be more useful for both my family and me.

Author: Why is English more necessary than Laotian?

Student: I can make a lot of money by doing so. I hear that people who are working with the Americans and the English are given a lot of money. Thai is also good. I can work in Bangkok. We have a T.V. in my home, so I have learned Thai.

Author: Then, what will happen with Laotian?

Student: It is proper for me to understand it. But I want to study the Hmong language more, and when I think about my future, English is far more important.

It was found that Hmong children place more importance on learning English than on the Lao language, and children from families with more money take private lessons in English after school. The author was the first English

teacher in P Primary School, and the parents or brothers and sisters of the students who heard about the English lessons came to the outside of the classroom and listened to the lessons every day. It was very noticeable that almost all of the people were Hmong.

In Laos, there is still a trend whereby it is difficult for ethnic minorities to be public servants. Thus, they try to earn as high an income as possible by learning English. Especially, the Hmong have a history of migrating overseas as refugees, as described earlier, and thus the number of the Hmong who work for the government or who become public servants is very small even in comparison to the numbers of people from other ethnic groups who take such jobs<sup>(5)</sup>.

While conducting participatory observations, ethnocentrism was not sensed among the Lao students in classrooms, but the survey conducted by means of an anonymous questionnaire helped offer an understanding of the ethnic consciousness of the Lao students, though only in a small way. Then, what forms the ethnic consciousness among the Lao students?

Based on the results of participatory observations and surveys by means of questionnaires, it becomes clear that the ethnocentrism and misunderstanding among the Lao students are possibly caused by the assimilated curriculum, which is made without consideration of the backgrounds of ethnic minorities.

#### *5.4.2 Misunderstandings about cultural differences (neighbors who are close but far)*

Is the forced assimilation in education making children understand the diversity of their local community? And how much do Lao students understand about Hmong students who are different in terms of ethnic grouping but who are studying together with them at desks placed next to each other? A question about whether students are adequately studying “the differences of ethnic distinction” was asked to the principal of the school. The principal answered that the students only briefly studied about the ethnic groups inside Laos in the class called “the world around us” (only introducing the words “ethnic groups” and “ethnic minorities,” and geography and politically-related matters are not taught at all in the class), and the students studied things in more detail when

they entered the second grade of junior high school. However, the attendance rate at junior high school was 26.0 % in Laos (according to an investigation conducted in 1999), and this means that many students carry on their social life without knowing anything about ethnic backgrounds.

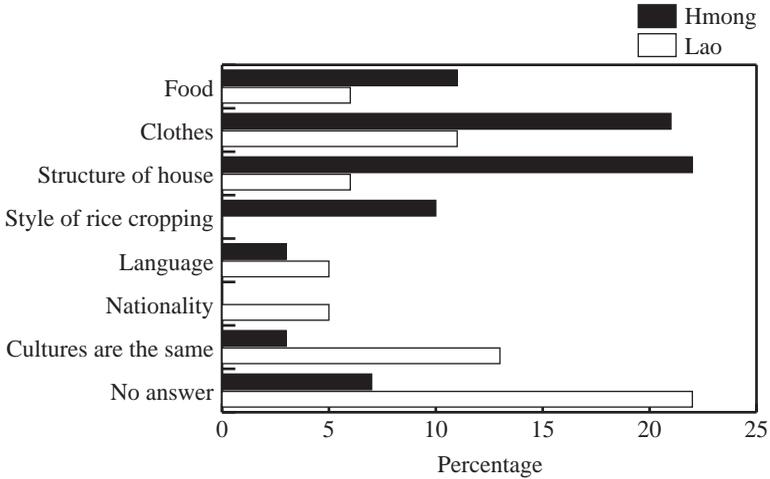
Questions on what the Hmong and Lao students of the fifth grade think of each other and how much understanding they have about each other were asked. A big difference between the two ethnic groups was found in their answers. As to the question “How are the cultures of the Hmong and Lao different?”(the question was given in a free-description style and with multiple answers), the Hmong students tended to list up cultural differences in detail, and many of them answered on the differences of how the houses are made (Lao people live in stilt houses, and Hmong people build houses directly on ground), ethnic costumes, food (Lao people eat dry rice, and Hmong people eat glutinous rice), and languages (the Hmong language and Laotian). Many of the Hmong students also wrote about the differences of rice-cropping methods (dry rice for Hmong people and paddy rice for Lao people) in detail. These answers given by the Hmong students were all correct.

As Figure 5-3 shows, some Lao students did not answer the question about cultural differences with the Hmong, and many students answered with misunderstanding that the cultures of the Hmong and Lao are the same.

Compared to the Hmong students, the Lao students are not sensitive to cultural differences and they have a misunderstanding that the cultures of the Hmong and Lao are the same. Furthermore, the Lao students have no interest in Hmong culture itself, according to Figure 5-3.

Five Lao students answered that the nationalities of the Hmong and Lao are different, and this shows that the Lao students lack an acknowledgement of the existence of Hmong people. Thus, it may be possible to think that curriculum organization is a cause of the misunderstanding and lack of interest of the Lao students towards other cultures.

The question “Who do you want to marry in the future?” was asked to the Lao students, and almost all of the students who answered the question (67 out of 69) wrote that they wanted to marry Lao people. The reasons for this re-



**Figure 5-3:** Cultural differences between the Lao and Hmong  
 Note: Multiple answers.

sponse are found in the following interview.

**Situation: Conversations were held with students who looked bored after they finished filling out the questionnaire. Finding a male Lao student who was answering “I don’t want to marry a Hmong” in his sheet, the following conversation was held.**

Author: “Pennyang jao bor yak tengan kap kon Hmong?” (Why do you not want to marry a Hmong?)

Student C: “Powa, koy bor kauchai pahsa Hmong. Ahan re heekon-papeni bor hu, bo kukan.” (It’s because I don’t understand the Hmong language. And I don’t know anything about their food and culture, and I think they are different from us.)

Author: “Mi iik bor?” (Do you have any other reasons?)

Student C: “Peetie tengann bo kuukan. Po me koy bo mak. (I think how the wedding is held is different, too, so I don’t think my parents would be pleased with it.)

In this way, the Lao students tend to emphasize the differences while imagining cultural differences. That is, as seen in Figure 5-3, Lao students cannot answer the questions about cultural differences correctly, and also they cannot show their understanding towards other ethnic groups nor take an open-minded attitude towards diversity. On the other hand, in the answers by the Hmong students (45) to the same question, more pliability is found compared to the Lao students. Thirty-eight Hmong students answered that they wanted to marry Hmong, while as many as seven students answered that people other than Hmong were also acceptable.

In the questionnaire research, the question “Do you want to know anything about other ethnic groups or their languages?” was asked to the Lao students. As a result, 98 % of the Lao students (67 out of 69 students) answered “Yes,” and this shows that they have a positive interest in learning about other ethnic groups and other cultures.

Studying the answers in the questionnaire research, it can be inferred that if the curriculum is organized in such a way that studying other ethnic groups and cultures is possible, the Lao students might become less ethnocentric and have less misunderstanding, while it could improve the confidence held by the Hmong students.

## **5.5 Coexistence of ethnic groups from the teachers' view**

### ***5.5.1 Inherited ethnocentrism***

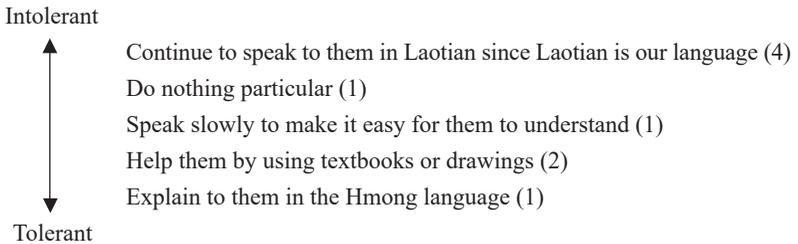
Now, what were the impressions and views held by the teachers in P Primary School about the Hmong and Lao students who use different languages and have different backgrounds? And how are the teachers dealing with students who are from ethnic minorities? As described earlier, 21 teachers including a principal (all of them are Laotians), were employed in P Primary School. Ten of them were full-time teachers and the rest were part-time teachers who taught in either the morning or afternoon classes.

Originally the teachers were asked questions informally which were prepared by the author during breaks between classes. But it had become obvious that the teachers had almost no breaks and they usually went home straight af-

ter the school, so questionnaires were given out (to be answered anonymously except for the grade they were teaching, and the questions were written in Laotian) and they were collected next day. As a result, nine full-time teachers returned the questionnaire with answers.

The first question asked was about the disparity of school performance between the Laotian and Hmong students. All of the respondents wrote, “Laotian students are better in their school performance.” They wrote that this was because the Hmong students were not good at Laotian. Categorizing the responses given to the question which asked how much the Hmong students understood Laotian in each of their school years, it was found that more positive views were exhibited as the school years became higher. But the teacher of the fifth grade, which is the highest year, wrote, “Still, Hmong students sometimes do not understand Laotian, and their school performance is not as good as Laotian students.” This shows that the teachers identified a language barrier which still existed even when their students became fifth graders.

The second question was, “How do you manage when the Hmong students do not understand Laotian?” The responses to the question were divided into tolerant and intolerant views as follows.



As shown above, some teachers were tolerant towards the handicap of the Hmong students and they were making various efforts to help them. This is because, as we saw in the research results in Chapter 4, unlike the drafters of policies (suppliers of education), the teachers in the actual teaching sites had a good understanding of the problems among the Hmong students. However, contrary to the views obtained in the interviews in Chapter 4 (where most of the teachers who were the subjects of the research were critical of government

policies towards the children of ethnic minorities), many teachers in P Primary School showed an intolerant attitude towards the Hmong students.

Among the intolerant views, the most noticeable answer occurred where the main concern was the Lao language. In particular, an ethnocentric nuance, which was also held by the Laotian students, was sensed from the teachers' attitude as they answered: "Continue to speak in Laotian because Laotian is our language." It may be that ethnocentrism is formed among the teachers from an ethnic-majority background which is then inherited unconsciously by students in educational sites <sup>(6)</sup>.

### *5.5.2 Skepticism towards "hukphaengkan" (respect, love and help each other)*

The third question was about intercommunion between the Hmong and Lao students. Because the Lao students had no interest in or had misunderstandings about Hmong culture, the questions – "Is there any conflict between the Lao and Hmong students? Are the two ethnic groups studying and having a good time together?" – were asked to the teachers. As a result, all of the nine teachers answered with the words "hukphaengkan" or "hukphaengserngkanlaekan" (they are respecting and helping each other). Some answered, "they are playing the role of a bridge for coexistence between ethnic groups."

The word "hukphaengkan" which was used by all the teachers was an expression often heard both in formal conversations and informal conversations in local society. For example, the word is used to express an ideal human relationship in villages (among neighbors), which is especially so in P village because the Hmong and Lao people live together in the village, and this word is also used as a norm for expressing human relations in places of work. The teachers quoted this word, which is an ideal and a norm and which pervades Lao society, probably as a proactive and positive answer regarding the coexistence of the Hmong and Lao people. The unified word "hukphaengkan" even implies a tendency to dispel the ethnocentric ideas and negative understandings which were seen among the students, but this may also imply that they were trying to cover up the conflicts, misunderstandings, and inequality which were

occurring between the two ethnic groups by using the words “hukphaengkan” and “hukphaengserngkanlaekan” which in fact suggest a lack of interest.

Certainly, the two ethnic groups were not separated into groups on the exercise area during breaks, and also nobody teased the ethnic minority Hmong during classes. But as seen in the results of the questionnaire, there is a gap in understanding between the Lao and Hmong students, and the Lao students tend towards an ethnocentric view.

### **Column 6: School environment of P Primary School**

I realized the severity of teaching in developing countries through staying at P Primary School.

Foremost, there was no toilet in the school. As I described, there was a building with toilets, but because there was no well the toilets were not working. Naturally, the school had no running water and teachers brought drinking water in pots. Students did their business behind the school buildings, but teachers were waiting till they went home during the lunch break.

Secondly, there was no electricity in the school. Xieng Khouang was located in a mountainous area, and the temperature drops in certain seasons. In January the temperature drops lower than 10 °C. It was very cold inside the buildings, and the buildings were open to the wind. I wanted to close the windows to prevent the chill, but because the windows were made of wood, the classrooms became dark if windows were closed. Students sitting by the windows were keeping their heads low in order to avoid the wind. Generally teachers and students were having lessons while enduring the draft in coats, with windows opened a little.

In developing countries, lessons are often conducted using printed materials. But no electricity means no copying. There is no paper for copying in school, too. There was no textbook for the

English classes I taught, so I sometimes bought paper with my pocket money. But other teachers had no such money to spare and thus I felt very bad and regretted that I should not show off my affluence. The school provided no paper, so the important thing was how to make teaching materials from nothing. The blackboards in the classrooms were old and it was hard to draw letters. So it was necessary to explain verbally while writing on the blackboard.

Teachers from Vientiane often complained about such unbearable conditions. No electricity was running even at night, so preparation for the following days was done under candlelight. Water was drawn from a well, and there was no gas running so you kindled a fire by yourself. I understood the reason why many teachers do not wish to teach in mountainous areas in my bones, but at the same time, I felt the importance of producing “education” by educing curiosity and motivation from nothingness.



**Photo 5-15:** Students need to stand the coldness and darkness due to the lack of windows and electricity.

While engaging in both participatory observations and teaching, it was thought that if the teachers gave profound consideration to the variety of their students' backgrounds and if they deepened exchanges with their students, the teachers could raise their own awareness of the problem in a way which would be different from "hukphaengkan." In order to achieve a genuine "hukphaengkan," it is necessary to have teachers who can understand the mother tongues of the students of ethnic minorities, similar to the case with the ethnic majority Lao, and also it is necessary for teachers to be more sensitive to the diversity of their students' background. Furthermore, it requires a policy whereby Laotian students, who are of the ethnic majority, come to understand students who have different backgrounds and to understand them rightly.

### **5.6 Educational disparity caused by unequal processes**

Examining the results of participatory observations and questionnaire methods, we can see that a student being unequally treated during classes in school is closely related to the issue of educational disparity. That is, the educational disparity among ethnic groups can be understood as a problem of "unequal process," in which an educational disparity among ethnic groups is generated and regenerated in classes conducted by teachers while placing an importance on a curriculum of which the main concern is the values of the ethnic majority, as was described in Figure 3-1 of Chapter 3, and as was proposed as a hypothesis in this study.

In this chapter, Rist's method of analyzing what was actually happening at school was employed, and this led to new views which could not be obtained in interviews. Especially, the fact that the teachers had no high expectations from the students of ethnic minorities (that is, teachers were labeling the Hmong students because their school results were bad) affected educational disparity among ethnic groups, and this shares the view propounded in Labeling theory by Rist.

In classes, teachers were not capable of helping the students of ethnic minorities who suffered the handicap of being unable to understand Laotian, and this was also a cause of teachers not being able to reduce the number of stu-

dents who leave or repeat school.

Having teachers who can understand the mother tongues of the students of ethnic minorities in classes, and a sensitivity from teachers in understanding the variety of backgrounds of their students, are important for reducing educational disparity among ethnic minorities. Motivation for study by the students of ethnic minorities will possibly be increased if classes are conducted according to a curriculum suited to the needs of ethnic minorities. In conclusion, it can be expected that if an understanding of the variety of backgrounds of the students of ethnic minorities is included as part of educational policies, the school repetition rate and dropout rate may decrease among the children of ethnic minorities, and this may contribute to closing the educational disparity among ethnic groups.

The hypothesis made in Chapter 3 about the causes of educational disparity – this is also a theme of this study – will be examined in the next chapter.



**Photo 16:** Boys working at their parents' shop



**Photo 17:** Brothers in the yard of P Primary school

## Notes

- <sup>(1)</sup> In participatory observation, researchers are required to engage in the same work, and to live in the same environment, as the group or individuals under research for a certain period of time (Bell, 1993). In this case, it is also important that the researchers participate in the subjects' lives without showing their role as observers (Flinder, 1989). In the case of the author of this book, the details and purposes of participatory observation were not

told to people other than to the school principle, and the students were told only, “I am teaching English on a temporary basis.”

- (2) Not many parents of students are farmers, and many of them engage in farming as a secondary business. There is no official data on parents' occupations, but a relatively large number of parents engage in work at markets, hospitals, in tourism, or in places related to the village office, and many families have double incomes.
- (3) For example, the age ranges for the second and fourth grades are between 6 and 12 and between 8 and 15, respectively (according to data from P Primary School).
- (4) Ethnocentrism indicates an attitude by people of judging and evaluating cultures of other ethnic groups according to their own criteria, which are formed based on their own ethnic cultures, views, norms, value judgments, etc. Often people judge unilaterally as well as negatively that other cultures are wrong, inferior and irrational and they foment their disdain, discrimination and prejudice about other ethnic groups (Matsubara and others, 1995). Farley describes ethnocentrism as a phenomenon which appears when people belonging to an ethnic majority have a sense of prejudice and discrimination towards people who belong to ethnic minorities, with ethnic backgrounds that are different from those of the ethnic majority (Farley, 1988).
- (5) Today, more than 200,000 Hmong live in the U.S.A. as refugees. In Wisconsin, the situation of Hmong refugees returning home was investigated, and it was found that the majority of the Hmong people replied they did not intend to return home because there were no suitable jobs for them in Laos and because their children, who were educated in the U.S.A., wanted to settle in the U.S.A. (Inui, 1998).
- (6) In P village, where the Hmong and Lao people coexist and the market, restaurants and other labor markets in Phonsavan are shared, it is difficult to think that ethnocentrism is fomented at home. On the other hand, in Vientiane Capital, discriminative opinions towards ethnic minorities are heard, as seen in the interviews with education-related officials (Research

subjects III-(a)) in Chapter 4, and this gives us an impression that this ethnocentrism is inherited at home.



## **Chapter 6:**

# **Factors of educational disparity – for solving the problems**

As described in Chapters 4 and 5, regarding results of field surveys, new findings were obtained through examining “what kinds of educational disparity are occurring among ethnic groups in Laos” and “what are the causes of the disparities,” which are the purposes of this study.

In this chapter, to illustrate the findings by means of various kinds of statistical data, the factors “district of residence: infrastructure” and “poverty at home” – which were pointed out by Bloch (1991) – and the conditions in Pek District, Xieng Khouang Province (where the surveys held) were referred to and examined. The data used here is a little old, and information about provinces which have been integrated is also used here, because this chapter is based on the situation as seen in 1999, when the author conducted the survey in Xieng Khouang Province. This task focuses on Xieng Khouang as an example and makes it possible to probe those factors which widened educational disparity among ethnic groups. P village, where the participatory observations were conducted, is located close to the center of Xieng Khouang. Thus it is worth making reference to conditions in P village as a representative place in Xieng Khouang.

### **6.1 Relatively organized school infrastructure**

“District of residence: infrastructure” is to be examined first. In P Primary School, which is located on the flat part of a hillside in a mountainous area, school buildings were constructed with support from the World Bank, and a double-shifted system schedule was conducted, and this makes it possible to accommodate all students in the classroom. Statistical data tell how well the infrastructure of schools in Pek District and Xieng Khouang Province, which

includes P village, has been promoted in comparison to other provinces.

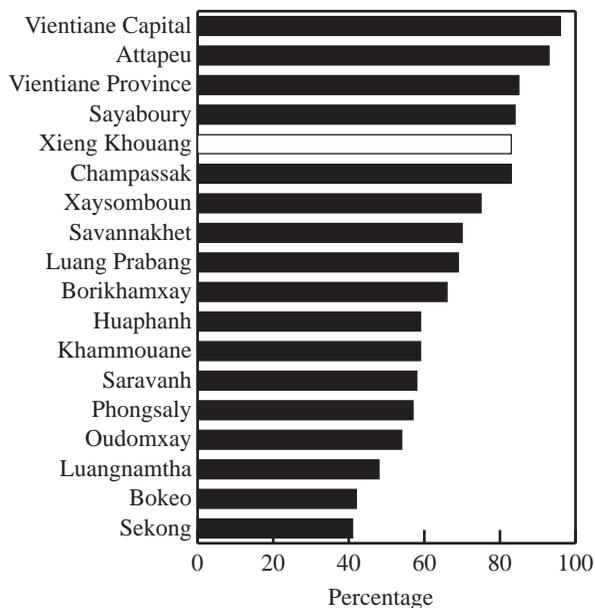
The Asian Development Bank conducted research in schools in Laos and investigated the number of classrooms in each school. According to the report (1999), Pek District in Xieng Khouang Province, where P village is located, is one of the districts where the number of school buildings based on population (per 1,000) is high, and it is ranked at 5th among 141 districts in the country. This shows that the school infrastructure is very satisfactory. Thus it is difficult to think that the shortage of schools is a cause of any educational disparity.

According to statistical data (Honkan Suka: Department of Education, 1999a) reported by the Education Bureau of Xieng Khouang, 99.0 % of the children (ages from 6 to 10) in Pek District attend school, and the gross attendant rate is almost 100 %. This shows that Pek District has enough schools for almost all of the children to attend school in the district and the children have good educational opportunities.

Based on data from the Asian Development Bank (1999) on the number of schools built with foreign aid, many schools in Xieng Khouang are built with loans from international organizations or through bilateral aid. As shown in Figure 6-1, about 350 schools were built in Laos in the decade between 1990 and 2000 with support from international organizations, bilateral aid, and the NGOs of individual countries. Forty-three schools, that is, about one-eighth of about 350 schools, were built in Xieng Khouang, and this number is at the medium-to-top (the fourth) among 18 provinces and cities in Laos

There is a big gap between the provinces with aid and without aid in terms of school construction. The capital, Vientiane, and Vientiane Province clearly find it easy to receive foreign aid, and the reason why Xieng Khouang Province can receive much aid is related to the fact that much foreign aid supports the ethnic minority Hmong. One-third of the Hmong population became refugees overseas in the past and many of them live outside of Laos; thus foreign groups, including NGOs, tend to be very active in supporting the Hmong.

Figure 6-1 shows data reported by the Ministry of Education about the ratios of villages which have schools according to province and city. Xieng Khouang Province is ranked at 5th among 18 provinces and cities after Vien-

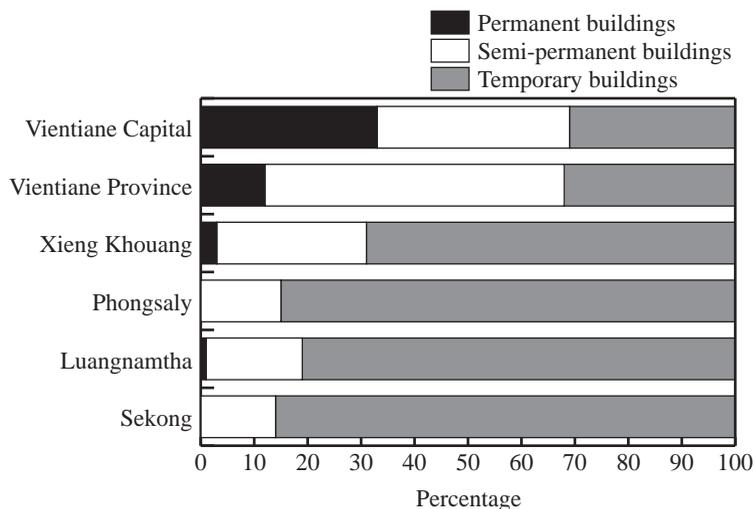


**Figure 6-1:** Ratios of villages where schools are built by province and city

Source: Ministry of Education, 2000.

tiane Capital, Attapeu Province, Vientiane Province and Sayabury Province; and 85.0 % of the villages in the province have schools. As the figure shows, the ratio for Xieng Khouang is extremely high in comparison to the ratios for Phongsaly Province (57.0 %), Luang Namtha (48.0 %), and Sekong (40.0 %), where ethnic minorities reside.

The condition of construction of school buildings is extremely good in Xieng Khouang Province compared to other provinces where ethnic minorities live, as shown in Figure 6-2. For example, compared to Phongsaly, Luang-Namtha and Sekong Provinces, in Xieng Khouang Province there are many permanent buildings and less temporary buildings, of which the condition of construction is usually poor. These data also show that school infrastructure is relatively well maintained in Xieng Khouang Province.

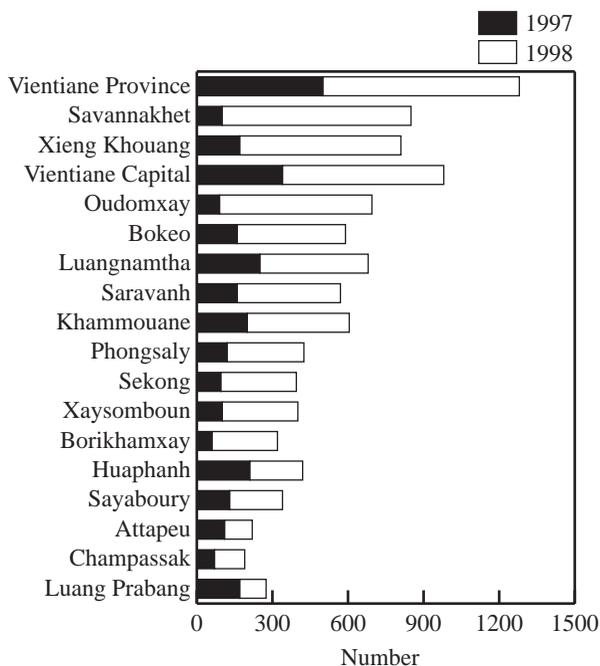


**Figure 6-2:** Condition of construction of primary school buildings  
 Source: Excerpted again from PES Annual Report: Asian Development Bank, 1999, Appendix 2, Table 9).

## 6.2 Well-endowed budget allocation and the economic situation at home

Secondly, an analysis is made based on fiscal aspects in Xieng Khouang Province. The Ministry of Education has disclosed the amount for education by province and city, as shown in Figure 6-3. According to Figure 6-3, the education budget in Xieng Khouang Province is 6 billion kips (about 86 million yen: 75 hundred thousand USD), and it accounts for about 13.0 % of the total amount in the education budget of the country. The education budget for Xieng Khouang is the third highest in the country after Vientiane Province and Savannakhet Province, and this shows that the budget for Xieng Khouang is nearly twice as much as the budget for other provinces and cities which have a high occupancy ratio of ethnic minorities. This is partly caused by the government, which allocates more budgets to provinces, such as Xieng Khouang, where ethnic minorities reside.

A report by the UN Development Program (UNDP) indicates that Xieng



**Figure 6-3:** Amount for education by province and city

Note: Unit/10,000,000 kips, 1 USD = 8,000 kip (2000).

Source: Ministry of Education, 2000.

Khouang receives a lot in the general budget allocation from the government on top of the education budget. According to “social and economic profiles in Xieng Khouang Province” issued by the UNDP, the budget allocated by the government to Xieng Khouang is 29,100 kips per head (in 1998), and this is more than the national average (approximately 20,000 kips) (UNDP, 1998).

Compared to other provinces, Xieng Khouang spends a big portion of its budget (about 45.0 %) on developing rural areas. According to the UNDP, the purpose of developing rural areas is mainly to improve infrastructure and develop human resources. Xieng Khouang Province injects 43.2 % into infrastructure and 21.0 % into the development of human resources – that is, education – from its budget for developing rural areas (UNDP, 1998). This shows a high interest in development of the field of education.

Bloch points out “factors involving poverty” as one of the causes of educational disparity. P village is situated next to Phonsavan village, which is the center of the province, and it has better employment opportunities in such areas as markets, factories, restaurants, and public offices, compared to employment opportunities in mountainous areas. Thus it is difficult to think that problems of poverty at home deprive children of educational opportunities, as well as being related to factors which cause educational disparity <sup>(1)</sup>.

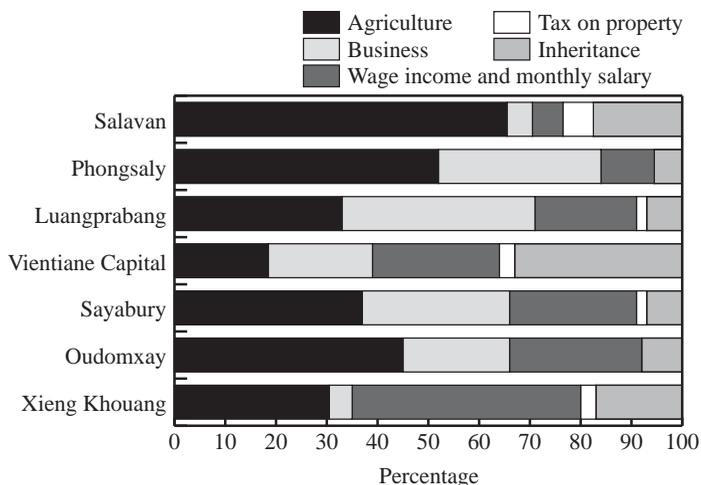
Based on participatory observations, only a few people depend on an income from agriculture in P village, and they do not require child labor or any particular type of labor force. Thus, it is difficult to think that poverty at home plays an important role in educational disparity. This is the same in Xieng Khouang, where people cannot depend so much on agricultural incomes because the province is located in a mountainous area.

Figure 6-4 shows a graph of ratios of cash-income sources by province and city which were compiled by the Asian Development Bank (1999). This shows that the ratio for the monthly or wage incomes of Xieng Khouang Province is high (45.0 % of the entire income) compared to that of other provinces, and this indicates that Xieng Khouang offers better chances of getting jobs. By contrast, in Phongsaly, Oudomxay and Salavan Provinces most of the cash income depends on agriculture, and the ratio of cash income from wages through employment is low.

Considering the fact that people in Xieng Khouang Province are endowed with job opportunities, it is difficult to think of “poverty at home” as a main cause of educational disparity.

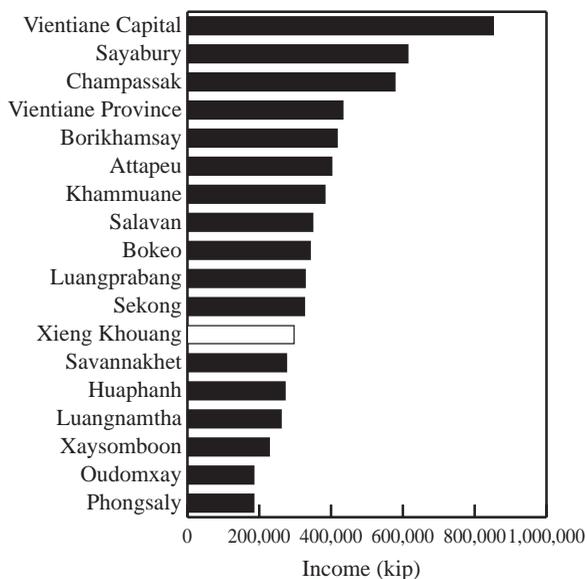
According to research conducted by the Asian Development Bank (1999) on household incomes by province and city, the household income per head in Xieng Khouang is 297,000 kips. This figure is certainly small in comparison to the 423,000 kips national average, and it ranks at 12th among the 18 provinces and cities. But still it is a high figure compared to other provinces.

In Laos, the school expense from primary school to university is free (except those who entered by quota), and thus there are almost no cases of children who cannot attend school because they cannot pay school fees. Certainly, petty



**Figure 6-4:** Main cash-income sources (by province and city)

Source: Extracted again from Lao PDR Expenditure and Consumption Survey; Asian Development Bank.



**Figure 6-5:** Household income per head by city and province

Source: Asian Development Bank, 1999.

expenses for such as uniforms and stationery are necessary to attend school. The Asian Development Bank (1999) reports that the cost of attending school for a year is 56,000 kips in Vientiane Capital, and more than half of the cost is for uniforms. But in P village in Xieng Khouang and other rural villages, where many ethnic minorities live, almost no students wear uniforms and wearing a uniform is not compulsory. Thus it is difficult to think that petty expenses are a burden for the parents and that this is a reason for them not sending their children to school.

### **6.3 Importance of designing the curriculum**

Given the situation described above, Bloch's factors of "district of residence: infrastructure" and "poverty at home" cannot be considered the biggest factors in terms of educational disparity among ethnic groups in Xieng Khouang. And these factors, if limited to the case of Xieng Khouang, may not be much related to the actual factors which cause educational disparity.

To resolve the problems of educational disparity among ethnic groups and to send all children to schools, school infrastructure and the untying of poverty at home are important. This is because without school buildings children cannot attend schools and that will result in a further widening of educational disparity. In addition, having money to spare at home can also greatly influence children's attendance of schools. Thus, "district of residence: infrastructure" and "poverty at home" are essential issues for whether children can attend school.

However, by analyzing the situation in Xieng Khouang in detail for the purpose of this study, it has become obvious that issues regarding school curriculum are related to educational disparity. In Xieng Khouang, where the survey was conducted, school infrastructure is maintained and family incomes are relatively stable. The teaching language as well as the educational curriculum is unified in P Primary School, where the participatory observations were conducted, and assimilated educational policies are pervasive and are making an impact on the attitude of the school and its teachers towards ethnic minorities. That is, "unequal process" – in which lessons are conducted based on a

curriculum of which the main concerns are the values of the ethnic majority – shown in Figure 3-1, is related to the problem of educational disparity.

It is possible to conclude that the biggest factor causing educational disparity among ethnic groups is the situation whereby lessons in schools are not conducted according to a curriculum suited to the needs of ethnic minorities, in accordance with the hypothesis made in Chapter 3 of this study.

#### **6.4 The role of education and acceptance of diversity**

Then, how should ethnic minorities be treated in the educational field? Today, many multi-ethnic countries, which have begun considering how ethnic groups should coexist together and what kind of policies should be implemented for ethnic minorities, have become more positive after adopting assimilation policies, and they have a tendency to adopt policies of multiculturalism which accept the diversity of ethnic groups. Especially, people have begun recognizing the importance of multicultural education, which adopts the concept of multiculturalism into the educational field.

Sakuma says that, given how education really ought to be, the importance of adopting multiculturalism can be acknowledged. He advocates, “education is the way students learn critically how to observe and how to think. Thus, education has original cultural elements,” and he supports the approval of diverseness. He also says, “the purposes of education are to place an importance on the individuality of each student and to respect differences, and thus leading all students in one direction or integrating all students based on ideas of assimilation are not desirable.” He criticizes assimilated educational policies. Furthermore, Sakuma says, “since individual characteristics are different one by one, education is supposed to be multicultural and should have many values. Especially, given today’s education in which a variety of ethnic groups exist in addition to a variety of individuality, education should be multicultural and it ought to be so” (Sakuma, 1996), and he acknowledges that diversity in educational fields is essential.

As to the introduction of multicultural education and equal educational opportunities, Hall points out, “by the introduction of multiculturalism into a

curriculum, the children of majority groups have a greater understanding about other cultures, and if they realize that they are treated preferentially because they belong to the majority group, this will help resolve their prejudice and misunderstandings.” In other words, this will resolve prejudices or ethnocentrism held by the children of the ethnic majority in Laos. Hall also says, “if the children of ethnic minorities can find something about themselves in the curriculum and if they can study their language or culture, they will have more motivation for studying and it will increase their school scores,” and he implies that the introduction of multicultural education will resolve educational disparity among children, and that children will have equal educational opportunities<sup>(2)</sup> (Hall, 1995).

The effect of improving academic achievement of minority groups by providing a multicultural education has been reported on in the U.S.A. and other advanced countries. In particular, bilingual education as a part of multicultural education has produced many successes. Conducting education in order to increase the development of intellectual facilities while using the mother tongue through bilingual education does not prevent students from developing their ability, but rather it has been favorably evaluated, as a bilingual education will produce occupationally advantageous results in addition to an understanding of two languages.

That is, provided that this is put into practice in Laos, the educational disparity between the children of the Hmong and other ethnic minorities and the children of the ethnic majority will possibly be reduced through an education which accepts diversity, such as bilingual education.

Around the same time as this study was conducted in Laos, the Lao-Australia Basic Education Project (LABEP), of which the purpose is to expand educational opportunities among ethnic minorities, was conducted with aid from AusAID and the Asian Development Bank. The project was conducted from 1999 to 2004 (concluded in 2007), and the content was: creating combined classes so that the students of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas can complete compulsory education; setting a curriculum with “Laotian as a second language” and training teachers so that the children of ethnic minorities can

learn Laotian smoothly; and, composing a curriculum and supplemental teaching materials which relate to the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities.

One of the main purposes of the project was to train teachers who specialize in local languages, so that the school attendance of the students of ethnic minorities could be promoted. More specifically, it employed a method by which 300 students from ethnic minorities who had completed secondary education were collected and they were encouraged to take up teaching positions in their own villages after four years of training in teacher-training schools (Illawarra Technology Corporation, 1999).

The supplemental teaching materials for the children of ethnic minorities were already distributed in 2002, and they have been used in public schools. According to interviews given to staff at the National Research Institute for Educational Science (NRIES), of Laos in August, 2003, the printed words in the completed supplemental teaching materials were bigger than usual for the children of ethnic minorities and the pages used for explanation in the textbooks were greatly increased. Because of this, the number of pages of a textbook is twice as much as for an ordinary textbook, and one textbook consists of two books of supplemental teaching materials. The size of the books was a little bigger than usual. According to a questionnaire survey conducted among teachers who used the supplemental teaching materials in their lessons, the children of ethnic minorities find the textbooks easier to use and teachers also find them easier to teach <sup>(3)</sup>.

Will such projects or policies, which take the existence of ethnic minorities into consideration, connect to the coexistence of ethnic groups and reduce educational disparity? It is difficult to make an estimation as to this point yet, but it can clearly be stated here that policies which recognize diversity are being adopted, though they are happening through help from foreign aid organizations.

### **6.5 What makes the coexistence of ethnic groups possible?**

Multiculturalism has been adopted mainly in developed countries so far as a remedy to enable the successful coexistence of ethnic groups. Then, why has multiculturalism, which is an ideal principle for multi-ethnic groups to coexist,

not been adopted in Laos and other developing countries? In addition, will it still be difficult for developing countries to adopt multiculturalism in the future? If it is impossible, then what kind of causes of this can be thought of? For these issues, this section will investigate what made it possible to adopt multicultural education in developed countries, and then by making a comparison with the situation in developing countries, it will also investigate the possibility of further adopting multicultural education.

First of all, adoption of multiculturalism and multicultural education is heavily influenced by economic factors. As Burayidi advocates, adoption of multiculturalism requires the assurance of a sufficient budget. More specifically, the study of history, the study of people from ethnic minorities, the implementation of nonracial education, the preservation of cultures, the study of ethnic groups, and the conducting of festivals of ethnic groups are all included for installation in multiculturalism, and a sufficient budget is necessary in order to carry them out (Burayidi, 1997).

Generally, economic infrastructure is maintained in developed countries, and thus an infrastructure to adopt multiculturalism in the education field is ready. In Australia, as an example among developed countries, a budget of five million dollars was allocated for three years so that multiculturalism could be expanded in the country. The budget was spent on such things as courses and bilingual education in which local languages and cultures were taught. This was not limited to schools. It was also extended to other parts of society, as multicultural education was systematized by conducting broadcasting in multi-cultures and multi-languages on T.V. and radio, by English education for adults, and by multicultural education in companies and public institutes (Bullivant, 1984). If securing a budget is needed in order to realize multiculturalism or multicultural education, developing countries such as Laos, which do not have enough money to spare, are placed in a disadvantageous position.

Secondly, the political background also has an impact when multiculturalism is to be adopted. Needless to say, the educational policies of a country are swayed largely by the political regime. Birzea made comparisons between conditions under a socialist regime and under liberalism in terms of educa-

tional policies, and he noted that there is a tendency to expect all students to study the same subject, with the same textbook, under the same curriculum, in the education of a socialist regime (Birzea, 1994). On the other hand, as for educational policies under a liberal ideology, it is ideal for students who have different backgrounds to be given equal educational opportunities. In addition, the purpose of education is to make the students aware of cultural, political and religious diversity and to create an environment in which the students can respect diversity (Birzea, 1994). This greatly shares the same point of view as the ideal of a multicultural education.

Multicultural education which includes such ideals guarantees everyone a right to equal education, without any discrimination, even in the third world or developing countries. Thus, it is important to achieve multicultural education in developing countries with multi ethnic-groups <sup>(4)</sup>.

## **6.6 Closing**

Certainly, developing countries tend to implement an assimilation policy which unifies the curriculum and teaching language in the field of education because they want to develop swiftly. Assimilation policies were actually adopted in Southeast Asian countries located around Laos. For example, in Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia, learning the national language was obligatory among ethnic minorities, similarly to the case in Laos. In Myanmar, a neighboring country of Laos, a robust integration policy against ethnic minorities is still in practice, as was described already in Chapter 3.

However, the Indonesian government has approved education in the mother tongue recently, and they have implemented Local curriculum in order to achieve the aim of conducting an education which is rooted in the regions. Their educational policy is to respect the diversity of ethnic groups as well as the needs of each region. In addition, for the purpose of harmonizing Indonesian society, which has a variety of cultures, and for the purpose of unifying the country's values, an ethical education called Pancasila Education has become a compulsory subject in all educational institutes from kindergarten to university in Indonesia. As a result, currently Indonesia is moving closer towards a multi-

cultural ideology, rather than a policy of integration.

In Thailand, ethnic minorities were integrated as an important means of national unification, but recently Thailand has adopted policies which lay importance on the connection between school education and local needs. For example, in national and public primary and secondary schools in southern Thailand, Islamic education is conducted in the Thai language, and education which relates to languages used by ethnic minorities has been tried in some mountainous settlements or in public primary schools.

In Vietnam, too, a new change is occurring, and “multiculturalism,” which aims to respect cultures and traditions of ethnic minorities, is being advocated. This has influences in the field of education, and the government has promoted primary education by conducting combined classes among ethnic minorities who reside in mountainous areas. The government has also conducted education in the mother tongues of ethnic minorities since 1991. In particular, textbooks are made in two languages – the language of ethnic minorities and the national language – and teachers, writers, and illustrators who can use local languages are employed by a literacy-teaching materials center which has been established. These activities are conducted with support from UNICEF (Japan Committee for UNICEF, 1999). The policies undertaken in Vietnam are worth drawing upon when we consider educational policies for ethnic minorities.

As the examples above show, in developing countries in Southeast Asia, too, curricula have been gradually changed according to the needs of ethnic minorities, and they are shifting in the direction of recognizing the diversity of ethnic minorities. Developed countries with liberal political systems and rich finances are certainly at an advantage in realizing multiculturalism in comparison to developing countries. However, developing countries which have been advocating integration or integrated policies are now shifting towards multiculturalism while still being in politically and economically disadvantageous conditions, or while receiving support from aid agencies.

Providing people with different backgrounds with equal opportunities in any area of their lives is a common goal, and it is ideal for any country with a multi-ethnic population. Developing countries will have numerous problems

that they have to overcome in the future, but still, an important issue for multi-ethnic countries is that people with different backgrounds can maintain their identities and can coexist in any situation. For this purpose, it is important for developing countries to take advantage of educational policies which have already been examined by developed countries and to consider the possibility of adopting multiculturalism and multicultural education according to national circumstances.

### Notes

- (1) In working conditions of Phonsavan, gaps of employment opportunity or income are not seen between the Laotian and Hmong people. Especially in Xieng Khouang, employing ethnic minorities is gaining momentum, and this is also shown in the fact the nearly half of 15 positions in the Department of Education are held by Hmong. Hmong people who have spent some time in refugee camps are running English schools, travel companies, or acting as interpreters for the U.N. agency or NGOs, and many of them earn high incomes from their jobs. The money (inheritance) sent by Hmong people who have immigrated overseas as refugees has become an important cash source of income (see: Figure 6-4).
- (2) In the U.S.A., there are cases in which the creativeness of teaching materials for multicultural education helped to reduce prejudice among students. For example, a lesson was conducted to make African American and white primary school students, who have strong prejudice against other races, read multicultural teaching materials (stories in which heroes from both groups appeared). After the lesson, an evaluation was made and it was reported that it succeeded in reducing prejudice among the children of both groups (Banks, 1999).
- (3) According to Geoff (2007), major outputs of LABEP are as follows; (1) The design and delivery of student learning materials supplementary to the standard curriculum materials for the needs of minority children and teachers guides on the use of these supplementary materials, prepared, (2) 260 trainers trained to deliver in-service training to 260 in the effective use

of these materials, (3) 4,000 teachers trained to make effective use of the materials, (4) pedagogical advisors recruited, trained and supported to supervise and advise teachers in multigrade schools, (5) 300 minority mainly female teachers trained, appointed and supported.

- (4) However, multiculturalism has been criticized since the 1990s. For example, Schleginger pointed out, as an anti-multiculturalist, in *The Disuniting of America* that multiculturalism would disunite America (Schleginger, 1992). The reason is because the differences among the people who emphasize multiculturalism will create differences among individual people, and this will destroy the common consciousness or values which are held by people. Belle also put questions forward about the adoption of multiculturalism and pointed out that multiculturalism or multicultural education presents a danger of eliminating a curriculum which was created mainly among western cultures and histories (Belle & Thomas, 1996).

## Postscript

It was back to early 1990's in the United States, when I became aware of the country, Laos, for the first time. After graduating from university, I joined a Japanese teaching internship program arranged by the Department of Public Instruction in Wisconsin, and was sent to a public high school in Menasha city. I met some Asians in the city, where the majority of the population appeared at first to be Europeans. Those Asian people often talked to me in their own language because we look like each other. They were, later I discovered, "Hmong" from Laos.

During that time, the number of Hmong family increased every day, however; nobody in the town seemed to know exactly who they were and where they came from. In the case of one school with an increased number of Hmong students, they accounted for about one-third of the entire students. As a result, Hmong students were sent other schools within the district so that the balance of ethnicities would be kept. Everything was new to me as a Japanese who is not familiar with the diversity of people.

With a curiosity, I asked a teacher of English as a Second Language about them and it turned out that they were refugees from Laos. Because they were involved with the US military during the Vietnam War, they became refugees after the socialist regime was established. By learning how they crossed the borders, I was sympathetic about their fate, and became interested in the world of the Hmong. It was back to the early 1990, but like what we see in a contemporary movie, "Gran Torino" produced and directed by Clint Eastwood, Hmong people, both first and second generation, have established their lives in new communities while maintaining their culture.

This opportunity gave me an idea of getting into a relatively small Hmong

community and starting research at the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. There, I acquired a lot of experience in a school with many Hmong students. Some of the experiences are recorded in my short thesis, “Assimilation and Repatriation Conflicts of the Hmong Refugee in a Wisconsin Community – A Qualitative Study of Five Local Groups.” *Migration World* 26 (4).

It was in 1998, when I made my first step into Laos. I was still fascinated with the world of the Hmong after returning to Japan and it made me continue the research in the Graduate School of International Collaboration Studies at Kobe University, Japan.

What always intrigued me was most of my Hmong friends in the US told me about Xiengkhouang Province as their home town, and finally I could not help visiting there. However, as I was anxious about going there alone, I returned to the U.S.A. at first and received a letter of introduction with some photos of Hmong men from the Hmong Association in Wisconsin. After I arrived in Xiengkhouang, I showed the photos to Hmong in front of a post office in Phonsavan, the capital of Xieng Khouang and immediately many people gathered around me. Then, on the following day, a man in the photos appeared before me. My research on Laos started from there, but I say the absolute beginning of my research started in the U.S.A. and my research linked with Laos has roots in the Hmong people in the U.S.A.

Taking this opportunity, I'd like to express my thanks to my Hmong friends and the Hmong Association in Wisconsin. I'd also like to thank the professors at the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse who inspired me for further research.

This book was completed through the research I made on education and ethnic minorities in Laos between 1998 and today. This book is based on my book *Laos-Minority and Educational Problems* (Akashi Shoten, Japan, 2004), which was published my Ph.D. dissertation at the Graduate School of International Collaboration Studies, Kobe University. Some additions and alternations were made on educational development and the current status of education for ethnic minorities today to the book, and then it was translated into English to

be this book.

The advice and help given by innumerable people made it possible to publish this book. First, I'd like to express my gratitude to professors who gave me precious academic advices in the Graduate School of International Collaboration Studies, Kobe University, at that time. Prof. Tatsuo Kawashima, Prof. Yasuo Uchida, Prof. Junko Tomaru and Prof. Kenshi Yamanouchi, who were in the thesis committee also are mentors for my life. I'd also like to thank for warm hearted cooperation to Prof. Motoki Takahashi, Prof. Keiichi Ogawa, Prof. Nobuyoshi Nishizawa and Prof. Toshihisa Toyoda in the graduate School, at that time. I also received meaningful advice from Prof. Katsumi Tamura at the National Museum of Ethnology and Prof. Hitoshi Sugimoto at Kyoto University.

Above all, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the people who helped me with field research in Laos. I'd also like to express my thanks to the people who welcomed me, a Japanese who could not speak much Laotian and a complete stranger, to their village and schools as a member of their community, and the officers at the Department of Education in Xiengkhouang who allowed me to conduct participant observations, and the people at P Primary School. They are the heart of this book.

Though I cannot name everybody, I was given huge support by the staff of the Ministry of Education in Laos, the JICA office in Laos, the member of JOCV, and other international organizations. In Laos, I also received cooperation from Mr. Yukio Kiuchi, Ms. Satomi Ueno (former JICA experts), Mr. Shuichi Takita (a former visiting fellow at the Ministry of Education) and Ms. Kiyoko Yasui (a Hmong specialist). In this book, data in Laotian was translated by Ms. Souphany Fankeo, who was in Kobe as an international student.

My accommodation in Laos was always arranged by the relatives of my Laotian friends who came to Japan as refugees. I have received a lot of help from Laotian and Hmon people beyond borders.

This book is to be published with a 2008 Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). I'd like to express my gratitude to Dr. Hajimu Ikeda and Dr. Hiroshi Ikeda of Union

Press, who have consulted with me from the time when I applied for the grant and who have helped me in the translation process with prompt and careful work. They have shown constant enthusiasm and effort in all tasks, including translation, editing and the designing for publication of this book. Without the help of Union Press, this book could not have been completed.

Finally, I'd like to thank my parents and my mother-in-law. My family is my lifelines. Please let me express my gratitude with my deepest affection to my husband (Minoru) and my first son (Jun), who accompanied me on the current survey in Laos, and my little son (Hibiki) who was waiting for our return from Laos. I hope Jun and Hibiki will learn something from human network beyond countries in this broad and diverse world.

Miki Inui, in the green of Kobe, May, 2009



In a village of Vientiane, Laos

## References

- Andersson, M., Engvall, A. & Kokko, A. 2006, *Determinants of Poverty in LAO PDR*. The European Institute of Japanese Studies in its series Working Paper 223, SIDA.
- Asian Development Bank. 1993, *Education and Development in Asia and the Pacific Series: Lao People's Democratic Republic*.
- Asian Development Bank. 1999, *Education Sector Development Plan: TA No. 3014-LAO*.
- Asian Development Bank. 2000, *Addressing the Health and Education Needs of Ethnic Minorities in the Mekong Sub-Region*. TA No. 5794-REG, Research Triangle Institute.
- Asian Development Bank. 2001, *Participatory Poverty Assessment: Lao People's Democratic Republic*.
- Bell, J. 1993, *Doing Your Research Project*, Open University Press.
- Belle, L. & Thomas, J. 1996, *Ethnic Studies and Multiculturalism*, State University of New York Press.
- Bloch, D. 1991, "Improving Equitable Access" in *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*. ed. by Lockheed, M. E., Verspoor, A. et. al., World Bank Publication.
- Brown, M. & Zasloff, J. 1986, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos: 1930-1985*, Hoover Institution Press.
- Burger, J. 1990, *Report from the Frontier: The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books.
- CARE International. 1995, *Indigenous Peoples Profile: Lao PDR*, ed. by Alton, J. C. & Crisfield, A., Care International.
- Chagnon, J. & Rumpf, R. 1982, "Education: The Prerequisite to Change in

- Laos” in *Contemporary Laos*, ed. by Stuart-Fox, M., St. Martin’s Press.
- Chamberlain, J. 1995, “Indigenous People and Education” in *Indigenous People Profile: Lao PDR*, ed. by Chamberlain, J., Alton, C. & Crisfield, A., Care International: Vientiane.
- Chazee, L. 1995, *Atlas des Ethnies de Sous-ethnies du Laos*, Imprimerie a Bangkok.
- Chazee, L. 1998, *Evolution des Systemes de Production Ruralux en Republique Democratique Populaire du Laos 1975-1995*, L’Harmattan.
- Cincotta, A. 2006, *Language Policy and Ethnic Minority Education in Lao PDR: Solidarity and power*, paper presented to the 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Wollongong 26 June - 29 June 2006.
- Condominas, G. 1998, *Le Bouddhisme Au Village*, Editions des Cahiers de France.
- Committee for Planning and Investment. 2006, *Foreign Report (2005/2006)* Monitoring Evaluation Division DIC, Committee for Planning and Investment.
- Department of Statistics of the Lao PDR. 2000, *Lao Reproductive Health Survey 2000*.
- Derarck, E. 1997, *Lao Law Report Volume1. Chapters 1-20*, Dirksen Flips Doran & Le.
- Dommen, A. J. 1985, *Laos: Keystone of Indochina*, Westview Press.
- Dore, P. 1972, *De l’ Hibiscus a la Frangipane: Essai de Sociologie Politique Sur la Notion d’Autorite Traditionnelle au Laos*, Unpublished Doctorate Dissertation.
- Evans, G. 1998, *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance Laos since 1975*, Silkworm Books.
- Evans, G. 2003, “Laos”, in *Ethnicity in Asia*, ed. by Mackerras, C., Routledge Curzon.
- Flinders, D. J. 1989, “Qualitative Research “in *Applying Educational Research*, ed. by Borg, W. R., Gall, J. P. & Gall, M. D., Longman.
- Geoff, B. 2007, *Laos-Australia Basic Education Project*AusAID Activity No.

- 987R08: *Independent Completion Report*.
- Gordon, J. 2000, *The Color of Teaching*, Routledge Falmer.
- Gould, W. 1993, *People and Education in the Third World*, Longman Scientific & Technical.
- Hall, P. M. 1995, *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism: Policy and Practice*, Garland Publish
- Honkan Kottomai, Kansan Sukusa: Department of Law, Ministry of Education. 2000, *Kot Waiduai Kansukusa : Educational Law*, Unpublished Government Official Report.
- Honkan Sukusa: Department of Education, Xieng Khouang. 1999a, *Bosalup Kampatibat Penkang Pachanpi 1997-1998 Re Penkang Pachanpi 1998-1999: Educational Assessment in 1997-1998 and Educational Planning in 1998-1999*. Unpublished statistics report.
- Honkan Sukusa: Department of Education, Xieng Khouang. 1999b, *Torek Laogham Kaisokiem: Statistical Report in 1998-1999*, Unpublished statistics report.
- Illawarra Technology Corporation. 1999, *Lao –Australia Basic Education Project Draft Concept Paper.: AusAID Project*, Department of Teacher Training, Ministry of Education.
- Inui, M. 1998, “Assimilation and Repatriation Conflicts of the Hmong Refugees in a Wisconsin Community-A Qualitative Research of Five Local Groups-” *Migration World*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 26-29, Center for Migration Studies.
- Ireson, R. W. 1995, “Hmong Demographic Changes in Laos: Causes and Ecological Consequence” *SOJOURN*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 198-232.
- Kakwani, N. et al. 2002. *Poverty in Lao PDR During the 1990s*, Vientiane, National Statistical Center.
- Kansuan Sukusa Sataban Konkuwa Vitayasato Kansukusa: Ministry of Education Research Institute 1994.
- Lee, Y. 1998, *Girl's Education Development in Lao PDR*. Unpublished Research Report in Ministry of Education, Lao PDR.
- Lockheed, M. E. & Verspoor, A. 1991, “Primary Education and Development”

- in *Improving Primary Education in Developing Countries*, ed. by Lockheed, M. E, Verspoor, A. et al., World Bank Publication.
- Matsubara, T. & NIRA (National Institute for Research Advancement) eds., 1996, *Sekai Minzoku Jiten* (Encyclopedia of World Ethnography), Heibon-sya.
- Merriam, S. B. 1998, *Research and Case Study Application in Education*, Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Education. 2007, *Summary Report on Implementation of Education Development Plan for 2006-2007 and Education Development Plan for 2007-2008*.
- Ministry of Education. 2008, *List of Private Institutions, collage that have been approved from Department of Private Education (2006-2007)*.
- Ministry of Education: Thailand. 1986, *The Hill Areas Education Model*, Department of Non-Formal Education, Thailand.
- Ministry of Education. 1998, *Lao People's Democratic Republic Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity, Prime Minister's Decree No237/ PM & No. 260/E.DP/99*, Unpublished Government Official Report.
- Ministry of Education. 1999, Unpublished Official Report: Indicator 12- Repetition Rate in Primary Education by Grade, Indicator 20-Dropout Rate in Primary Education by Grade.
- Ministry of Education. 2000, *Education For All: The Year 2000 Assessment, Final Country Report Lao PDR*.
- Ministry of Education. 2005, *Teacher Training Department Teacher Training Strategy Plan 2006-2015 and Action Plan 2006-2010*.
- Ministry of Education. 2006, *The 6th 5 Year Plan of Educational Development (2006-2010)*.
- Ministry of Education, AusAID, UNICEF, WFP. 2006, *Access to Basic Education Laos National EFA 2000 Assessment Group*, Ministry of Education.
- Moore-Howard, P. 1992, *The Ethnic Lao-Who are they?*, Sacramento Program.
- National Statistics Center. 2005, *Population and Housing Census 2005*.
- National Statistical Center. 2005, *Statistical Yearbook 2005 Committee for Planning and Investment*.

- National Statistical Center. 2007, *Statistical Yearbook 2007 Committee for Planning and Investment*.
- Ogbu, J. 1974, *The Next Generation: An Ethnography of Education in an Urban Neighborhood*, Academic Press.
- Pholsena, V. 2002, "Nation/Representation: Ethnic Classification and Mapping Nationhood in Contemporary Laos." in *Asian Ethnicity* 3 (2): 175-197.
- Patton, M. J. 1990, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Sage Publication.
- Rist, R. C. 1977, "On Understanding the Processes of Schooling: The Contributions of Labeling Theory." in *Power and Ideology in Education*, ed. by Karabel, J., Halsey, A. H, Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, T. & Whitaker, D. 1967, *Area Handbook for Laos*, US Government Printing Office.
- Sakuma, K., 1996, "Chiikisyakai no Tabunkaka to Tabunkasyugino tenkai (Multi-culturalization in local community and the Development of multicultural education)" in *Tabunkasyugi to Tabunkakyouiku (Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education)*, ed. by Hirota, Y., Akashi-shoten.
- Shimizu, K. ed. 1998, "Kyoiku no Ethnography (*Ethnography of Education*)", Sagano Shoin.
- Smith, M. 1994, *Ethnic Group in Burma- Development: Democracy and Human Development*, Anti-Slavery International.
- Stuart-Fox, M. 1986, *Laos: Politics, Economics and Society*, Frances Printer.
- Sunsatiti Hensado: National Statistical Center 1990. *Sumun Satiti Tonto- Tankan Patana Setakit re Sankkom hen Sopoporo Lao Nainanya sip-ha pi: Basic Statistics About the Soci-Economic Development in the Lao PDR*, The National Statistics Center.
- Sunsatiti Hensado: National Statistical Center 1995, *Sumun Satiti Tonto-Tankan Patana Setakit re Sankkom hen Sopoporo Lao Nainanya sip-ha pi: Basic Statistics About the Soci-Economic Development in the Lao PDR*, The National Statistics Center.
- Sutherland, M. 1979, "Comparative Perspectives on the Education of Cultural Minorities." in *The Future of Cultural Minorities*, ed. by Alock, E. J., Tay-

- lor, B. K. & Welton, J. M., The MacMillan Press.
- Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). 2005, *Harmonising External Support to the Education Sector in the Lao PDR: Report on the feasibility of a Sector-Wide Approach to education development in Lao PDR*.
- Thant, T. & Vokes, R. 1997, "Education in Laos: Progress and challenges" in *Laos' Dilemmas Options* ed. by Thant, T. & Tan, J. L. H., St. Martin's Press.
- Turton, A. ed. 2000, *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Thai States*. Routledge Curzon.
- UNDP. 1998, *Socio-economic Profile of Xieng Khouang Province: Rural Development Program Formulation*, UNDP.
- UNESCO. 1993, *Communication in Support of Education for All: The Lao People's Democratic Republic*, Office of the UNESCO Regional Communication Advisor for Asia.
- UNICEF. 1992, *Children and Woman in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: The Country and its People*, UNICEF: Vientiane.
- UNICEF. 1996, *A Situation Analysis: Children and their Families in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*.
- UNICEF. 2005, 2007, *The State of the World's Children*.
- UNESCO & Ministry of Education. 2004, *Gender and Equity in the Context of Equality and Access in Lao Education*.
- UNESCO & Ministry of Education. 2005, *Education for All: National Plan of Action 2003-2015*.
- Vientiane International Consultants. 1991, *Strategy for Education to Year 2000*.
- Wekkin, G. 1982, "The Rewards of Revolution: Pathet Lao Policy towards the Hill Tribes since 1975" in *Contemporary Laos*, ed. by Stuart-Fox, M., St. Martin's Press.

**Website:**

- National University of Laos, <http://www.canpub.com/nuol/>.
- UNESCO (Institute for Statistics), [http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=2867\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=2867_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC).

# Index

## A

- Access to Basic Education in Laos (ABEL) 51
- Action with Lao Children 49
- Asia Development Bank (ADB) 12, 14, 48
- agricultural cycles 98
- Akha 71, 91
- assimilated curriculum 157
- Attapeu map
- Australian Agency for International Development (Aus AID) 49, 50, 182
- Austro-Asia 13, 40
- Austroasiatic 54, 57, 71, 72
- automatic promotion system 154

## B

- bilateral aid 49, 174
- bilingual teaching 64
- Bloch 89, 100
- Bokeo map
- Borikhamxay map
- Buddhism 19, 23
- Buddhists 20

- budget 96
- budget allocations 47
- Burger 89, 107
- Burma 90, 93

## C

- Cambodia 15
- CARE International 99
- Chamberlain 99
- Champassack map, 39
- Chazee 71, 93
- Chin 90
- China 133
- compulsory education 29
- constitution 44
- cultural differences 161
- cultural features 132
- culture/customs 126
- curriculum 9, 106, 107, 108
- curriculum design 99

## D

- demand-side 109, 132
- developing country 2, 186
- District Education Bureaus (DEB)

28

diversity 163, 181

double-shifted 117

dropout rate 7, 25

## E

early marriage 104

educational disparity 6, 8

educational plans 24

educational strategic vision 26

education budget 177

Education For All (EFA) 4, 6, 14,  
26, 46

Education For All-National Plan of  
Action (EFA-NPA) 27

English 116, 160

enrollment rate 6, 7, 25

ethnic backgrounds 147

ethnic composition 147

ethnic disparity 12

ethnic minorities 7

ethnic superstock 54, 56

ethnocentrism 160, 170

ethnography 139

ethnolinguistic superstocks 53, 54

Evans 53, 59, 98

examination for promotion 116

expenditure 3

## F

farmers 170

field investigations 106

financial problems 97

financial resources 118

Foreign Aid Report 48

formal education 73

French regime 22

## G

gender disparity 12, 13, 34, 35

general education 29

geographical conditions 96

girls' labor 97

gross enrollment rate 33

## H

higher education 29, 39

Highland Lao 54, 56

Hmong 8, 58

Hmong American 126

Hmong-Khmer 54

Hmong language 149, 157

Hmong-Yao 40, 54, 58, 71, 72, 97

Hor-han 54

Huaphanh map

Human Development Index (HDI)  
2, 11

## I

illiteracy 24

incomplete schools 49, 95

indigenous peoples 89

infant-mortality rate 11, 13

infrastructure 2, 60, 89

interview 7, 8, 109

## K

khaen 128

Khammouane map

Khmu 57, 70, 71, 97

kindergartens 28

Kor 71

## L

Labeling Theory 140

language of instruction 29, 92, 99,  
103, 159

Lao-Australia Basic Education Proj-  
ect (LABEP) 182, 187

Lao culture 100

Lao-Phutai 54

Lao Soung 64

Laotian 29

Lao Thueng 57, 64

Lavae 98

Least among Less Developed Coun-  
ty (LLDC) 2

Laos Expenditure and Consumption  
Survey (LECS) 3

literacy rate 72, 73

local curriculum 185

Lockheed and Vespoor 10, 11

Lolo 71

lower secondary education 28, 29,  
35

Lowland Lao 20, 54, 56, 77, 110

Luang Namtha map, 68, 76, 175

Luang Prabang map

## M

majority 53

maladjustment 100

Merriam 113

Millennium Development Goals  
(MDGs) 4

minority 53

mismatch 109

Mon-Khmer 12

Monks 15

Mon-Yao 71

mortality rate 16

mother tongue 151

mountainous areas 94

multicultural education 181, 184,  
185

multiculturalism 181, 184, 186

## N

national language 5, 73

National Planning Action (2003-2015)  
31

National Research Institute for Edu-  
cational Science (NRIES) 183

National Statistic Center 8, 73

National University of Laos 34, 40,  
41

net enrollment rate 68

new economic system 6

- New Economy Mechanism (NEM) 5, 16
- Non Governmental Organization (NGO) 8, 48, 174
- National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) 3
- Non-Formal education 47, 48
- Nong Het district 59
- Nonghed Village 118
- National Research Institute for Educational Science (NRIES) 42
- nyak (difficult) 115
- O
- official language 93
- Ogbu 140
- Oudomxay map, 2, 77
- P
- participatory observation 7, 8, 9, 112, 139
- Peenong (a relative) 116
- Pek District 109
- Phongsaly map, 2, 68, 76, 77, 95
- Phonsavan 9, 118, 187
- Phoutai 71
- poverty 10, 91, 103, 178
- poverty reduction 26, 48
- poverty-related problems 89, 91, 105
- preschool education 31
- primary education 6, 28
- Prime Minister's Decree 27, 40
- private colleges 40
- Provincial Educational Services (PES) 28
- Q
- qualitative research 7, 109
- qualitative research 7
- quantitative research 7
- questionnaire 141, 164
- R
- recipients of education 106
- repetition rate 7, 25
- residence 124
- Rist 140, 168
- S
- Saravanh map
- Savannakhet map
- Sayaboury map
- school infrastructure 119, 124, 174, 175
- Sector Wide Approaches (SWAps) 51
- Sekong map, 76, 98
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) 37
- Sino-Tibetan 54, 59, 71, 72, 75
- slash-and-burn shifting cultivation 2
- social and cultural factors 97

socialist regime 23, 24, 64, 68, 185  
 Stuart-Fox 20, 22  
 supplier-side of education 109, 132  
 suppliers of education 106  
 surveys 160  
 survival rate 14  
 SWAps 51

## T

Tant and Vokes 22, 106  
 teacher's license 37  
 teacher training school 34, 36, 183  
 teaching materials 103  
 teaching post 96, 119  
 technical and vocational training 46  
 10 Year Education Sector Framework  
 51  
 textbook 28, 42, 102, 128  
 Thai 159  
 Thai-Kadai 6, 12, 13, 40, 54, 56,  
 71, 72, 142  
 Thailand 1, 3, 90  
 Tibet-Burman 12, 54  
 Tri 71

## U

unequal process 180  
 United Nations Development Pro-  
 gramme (UNDP) 95  
 United Nations Educational, Scien-  
 tific and Cultural Organization  
 (UNESCO) 31, 49

United Nations Children's Fund  
 (UNICEF) 14, 50, 72, 104  
 uniforms 180  
 unqualified teachers 96, 100  
 Upland Lao 54  
 upper secondary education 28, 35

## V

Vientiane Capital map, 1  
 Viet-Muang 54  
 Vietnam 3, 15, 89, 90, 186  
 vocational and technical education  
 29, 36  
 vocational schools 24

## W

WFP 50  
 World Bank 49, 99, 142  
 world around us, the 42, 143

## X

Xaysomboun map, 76  
 Xieng Khouang map, 9, 59, 69,  
 83, 173, 174



ISBN978-4-946428-39-5  
C3037 ¥6245E

Published by  
Union Press (a division of Union Services Co.,Ltd.)  
1-6, Uehommachi-Nishi 5 chome  
Chuo-ku, Osaka, 542-0062 Japan  
発行 ユニオンプレス/株式会社ユニオンサービス



Cover design  
Design International

## About the author

### Miki Inui

She received her Ph.D. from the Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University after receiving her master at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and teaching at schools in the U.S.A. for several years. She worked for the Department of Human Sciences at Osaka University as Assistant Professor before coming back to Kobe University. She is currently Project Associate Professor, Office for the Promotion of International Exchange, Kobe University.

## Aspect of this book

Laos is a multi-ethnic country with a variety of people. The purpose of this research is to illustrate what kind of educational disparity is occurring in Laos and what the causes are of the disparity among ethnic groups. In order to pursue the research purpose, qualitative research including interviews and participatory observation at Hmong-Lao mixed school were conducted at Xieng Khouang Province in Laos.

The research findings will lay the groundwork for improving the educational access of minorities and adapting multicultural education not only in Laos but also in other multi-ethnic countries.

This book is relevant to the academic disciplines of comparative education, educational anthropology, multicultural education and educational development and will have practical value to field research on Southeast Asia or other developing, multi-ethnic countries.