

Fifteenth National Annual Conference

Primary School Inspectors

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Address

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Directors of Departments
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I have been invited to talk to this conference today, on two topics.
(1) Schools are Centers of Education, Culture, and Society in Communities;
(2) Education Policy Toward Minority Groups. Please forgive me if I begin my talk on the second topic. What I am going to say, however, is not a new policy as we have the policy related to this subject already in Article 3. The PSIs, Houa Khong and Luang Prabang, mentioned this morning the same old problem of sending out teachers to remote areas, especially to teach in minority group villages. According to our established principle (Article 3), we want all minority groups to get a thorough education.

We want them to have respect for each other's culture, and not let one group bully another group.

Laos population consists of many different tribes. Sixty-six percent are Laos, Thai Phouane, and Thai Dam. Six percent are Meo, Yao, and the rest is Kha. It could be noted that in School Year 1968-69, there

* Article 3 of the 1962 Education Reform Act reads as follows:

"Education is at the service of the whole Lao community. It is not made to perpetuate privileges, but on the contrary its national role will be to let the most talented children, whatever their extraction, acquire, through their education, positions of responsibility which they can best fulfill for the development of the country.

A special effort will be made to assure a real equality of access to education for women, villagers, and ethnic groups. Whenever possible, ethnic minorities will receive their first instruction in their own language parallel to the national language."

was about three percent of Mao and Yao students in Lycee and College, six percent in ENIs, and two percent in Technical Schools. The percentage shown above would be considered too low if compared with general Lao tribes; however, if it is compared to Kha tribes studying in secondary schools or colleges, the percentage would be even lower-- 0.2% in secondary schools or colleges, 0.3% in technical schools, and 0.5% in ENIs.

How were they doing during the French era in Laos? Some of the older PSIs in this conference might know and have seen how. But what I am going to tell you is the information that I obtained from reference documents. That is, since 1944, before the Japanese came to Laos, the French used six mobile-school units to provide education to minority groups. There were 250 students at that time. Later when Laos became independent, we ignored that procedure. When our education system was reformed in 1962, we knew that we needed to extend education to reach minority groups; anyhow, as far as we are concerned now, the Mao is the group that received more education than others, while the group that is very little educated is the Lao Theung. Therefore, I think that we still need to send teachers out to educate these Lao people.

One way that might be possible to do it is to let them study their own language but use Lao script like the Mao readers that the Ministry authorized for printing recently. However, there will be a lot of problems involved in order to provide education to the Lao Theung group because these people keep moving from place to place continually. The Government, especially the ENIs, thus needs to consider this problem very carefully, whether we should establish a Teacher Training School for students of minority groups, or have them trained in our regular schools. So, I thereby request the Primary School Inspectors to help by submitting separate lists of minority group candidates to take examinations to enter Normal School; because, as you know, these tribal students cannot take the same type of examination as the regular Lao students. City students are in a better environment; they, therefore, can do better. When minority group students are very slow and need special or additional instruction, we should provide it. I am going to discuss this matter with Dr. Veo.

Personally, I think that tribal students can study along with regular Lao students beginning with the Two-Year Course. Then when we know which are good and can continue study, they can be put in the Four-Year Course. If we arrange it this way, we can more or less solve the problem that most teachers do not want to work in villages of the minority groups. I have heard that the Yao villagers even rode on horseback to pick up teachers to teach in their village schools; yet after a short time those teachers unofficially ran away. If we let things happen in this fashion, those people will become discouraged and what will follow? The Government will lose political relationship.

Please do present any opinion you have concerning this matter.

PSI/Attopen

Your statement is true that during the French era, there were mobile school units that went to villages and stayed in each place for about six months providing education to Lao children. I was one of the teachers ! But then when the Japanese came, the program was automatically cancelled. What we are doing now is having Lao Theung students studying with regular Lao students in the Normal School, studying Lao language, and taking the same tests, but they could not pass the examination. Consequently, there are no teachers from minority groups.

I suggest that we follow a similar procedure as they are doing in Chiang Rai, Thailand, where minority group students take short training and then go to teach.

Mr. Khamtanh

I think that we do not have to have the minority group students trained separately because according to my knowledge there are quite a number of them now studying in grades one through six in Luang Prabang.

You are hereby requested to inform the Groupe Scolaire Directors to make a proper list of those who are really from minority groups and then submit the list to the ENI, also with a covering letter of how many teachers you need.

PSI/Attopen

In my province, there were nine minority groups previously; however, there is only one now as others have become regular Lao.

Mr. Khamtanh

Those who are selected to study in ENIs must sign an agreement that upon completion of their study, they will teach in their minority group villages; because, as it has happened in the past, when the minority group students had lived in the city for a few years, they did not want to go back to their villages. If this happens in our project in the future, we will not be able to reach our objectives.

PSI/Houa Khong

There are over ten minority groups in Houa Khong. The ones who have been studying are Yao, Eko, Mou Seu, etc. In particular, there is now a Groupe Scolaire whose students are all Yao. Each year, at least

forty students pass the sixth grade final examination, and some were admitted to study in the college and the ENI. They were not given a special test; they tried to take the same tests as other regular Lao students.

Mr. Khamtanh

What are the teachers of the minority group students?

PSI/Houa Khong

They are regular Lao. One thing I would like to suggest about producing minority group teachers; that is, we should begin the program as soon as possible because if we don't, I am afraid that they will cross the border to study with the Thai as there are more facilities there. These people also claim that they have not been helped by the Government. Now that they are forbidden to grow opium, their living condition is getting worse. I will make a good list of minority group students to send to the ENI. Actually, I used to contact ENI/Luang Prabang to accept these students but the ENI official said that they could not make a decision to accept them.

Mr. Khamtanh

I request that when minority group students are selected to study in an ENI, they will not be informed that they will, in any case, pass the final examination. The reason is, if they know that they will eventually graduate, they will pay no attention to their studies.

PSI/Sedone

Under the present situation, I suggest that this program be commenced immediately. I have experience with this problem, that when Lao teachers were sent to teach in minority group villages, there were problems with the language.

PSI/Savannakhet

I think that in training minority group students to be teachers, they should take the two-year course because not all minority group villages have schools yet; and there are quite a few minority group students studying in Lao schools already now. In determining the number of graduates, the ENI authorities should consider the percent of the requirement of each area, not the percent of student-teachers from each minority group. I am very glad that the Government has taken more interest in this problem.

PSI/Khammouane

I used to send teachers to teach in a Minority Group Oh school but the villagers said that they wanted a teacher of their origin. I requested the ENI Savannkhet to train the minority group students; they said that permission must be obtained from Vientiane but there is no procedure so far.

Mr. Khamtanh

I am going to transfer these problems to Dr. Veo for his study and consideration.