

# Laos' Educational Transformation Towards Digital Learning

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## Abstract

Education in Laos has changed dramatically since the country's education system was established. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a rapid and dramatic shift in digital learning in Lao education. The government has long recognized the importance of digital technology, with the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society announcing the Lao Digital Development Plan to boost the country's economy and society, in collaboration with several major innovation companies. Digital technologies and devices such as 5G, Cloud, and AI will be leveraged to benefit the economy, healthcare, transportation, manufacturing, and education sectors.

**Keywords:** Educational Transformation, Digital Learning

## Introduction

Currently, education in Lao PDR is facing many difficulties. Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's economic and financial problems during the recession, the school attendance rate of Lao children and youth has dropped alarmingly. The Ministry of Education's education system has promoted local education to encourage parents to support their children to complete their education. If you live in the outskirts, there may be a little problem. It's because of the basics and economy. "He also said that in addition to the country's infrastructure still being difficult and unfavorable, the country's economic and financial problems have also caused parents and guardians to bear more expenses and indirectly forced those Lao people. Children and youth have to drop out of school early to find jobs to ease the burden of their families, according to a World Bank report in Laos.

The change of eras leads to development in various aspects, whether in the context of basic living, economics, innovation, or even in terms of social culture. It can be said that the transition from one era to another has a significant purpose. At present, we connect with people, society, and the country's infrastructure system more conveniently, easily, and quickly than before, such as sending messages, voice conversations with faces, or following news through the use of various social network applications without boundaries. We no longer have to waste time doing financial transactions at the bank because we can do them conveniently and quickly through Internet Banking applications. We do not have to travel to order food, wait in line at shops, or wait for a taxi because we can do them through various logistics applications without limitations. The context of the changing lifestyle in the public sector reflects that the

mechanism that has been placed to fill the gap between eras to create connections between each other is the digital system.

Importance Educational Changing, especially the new era of this world at this time, seems to have nothing that can surpass the development of digital technology. It has led to rapid changes in all aspects of humanity. No one can escape digital technology. It can be said that in this digital era, teachers must not only be teachers, but also learn with students, improve and change teaching styles, lesson plans, teaching methods, teaching techniques, or new teaching innovations that will develop teaching and learning to keep up with the rapidly changing social era (Disruption). Teachers should emphasize that students' study and research by themselves. Teachers have the duty to provide advice (Coaching), design teaching and learning according to the project-based learning model (Project-Based Learning), and integrate activities that help each student assess their own learning progress. In addition, teachers should integrate skills in adapting to society immediately in various situations because these things are not only in the subject content or textbooks, but are personal life skills that students must learn more to be useful in applying in Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well (Tanita Liwung and Yaupon Sangit, 2019, page 10)

Educational institutions in the digital age must adjust their organizations to keep up with changes in the environment that occurs both inside and outside the institution. The use of digital technology to help manage educational institutions is necessary because digital technology will be a tool to support the organization's management to be more efficient, develop work processes or work systems in the organization to be modern and most efficient. Educational institution administrators play an important role in changing and leading the organization to success. "If the organization does not adapt, it will be closed. Educational institution administrators, if they do nothing, are going backwards because the world is moving forward quickly. If you know first, you will have an advantage, especially in applying digital technology to manage educational institutions." This is an important issue for educational institution administrators to study in order to develop the organization. The transition must come with preparation, management of both human resources and preparation for entering the digital age. Therefore, it is a challenge for administrators to find a way to make the transition with the least problems and create an organizational vision to grow along with the nature of the organization.

In conclusion, accurate digital learning is important for life, for people, for educational institutions, for organizations, and for administrators of educational institutions because in this era, digital technology plays many roles. Helping to manage educational institutions is considered necessary because digital technology will be a tool to support organizational management to be more efficient, develop work processes, and lead to rapid changes for humanity in all aspects. No one can escape digital technology

## **Literature Review**

### **Digital Education Policy in Lao PDR**

Through the study of the implementation of the policy and plan for the development of education for young people according to the goals of sustainable development of the Lao PDR, the researcher found that during the 9th 5-year plan period (2025-2030), the Party and the government have set 3 main goals, which are the national economic goals, the human resource development goals, and the natural resources and environment goals. In the human resource development goals, these goals have become an important factor in deciding to develop by upgrading the capabilities of personnel. The hardships of the people should be solved

comprehensively and with quality and direction. Emphasis is placed on continuing education reform to be stronger than before by investing in agencies specified in the education strategy plan and the human resource development strategy. There are also goals to develop the school attendance rate of 5-year-old children to 80%, the remaining rate of primary school students to 90%, and the promotion rate of students who graduate from lower secondary school to vocational education to 5% of all students who graduate and enter school. High school education to reach 90%, and students who graduate from high school to continue their studies in vocational education to reach 60%, continue their studies in higher education institutions to reach 20%, the education rate of people aged 15-24 years to reach 99%, the education rate of people aged 15 years and above to reach 95%, encourage everyone in society to exercise and play sports to reach 30% of the total population. In addition, there is the Law on the Lao Revolutionary People's Youth (2017), Article 4 on the State's Policy towards the Lao Revolutionary People's Youth, which contains the following content: Related to the government sector in promoting young people to receive education in science and technology, have jobs, receive information, access public health practices, participate in state protection, protect the economy and society. Article 9 on rights and duties mentions the main rights of the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Committee to provide education to young people about political concepts and unity. At the same time, it also states the protection of the interests of young people and youth by planning strategies and development plans for young people and youth, which have been expressed in the past. The overall situation in the country has many basic and main facilities for the development of education for young people and youth, especially the policies, regulations, laws, attitudes and approaches of the Party and the government that consistently give importance to education, but are free from problems and challenges, especially in terms of budget, problems, hardships of the people, drug problems, religious problems and other problems related to the situation. It has also achieved success in many aspects in the past, namely, at present, there are 87,575 officers or agencies related to education and sports, 44,708 of whom are women. In the past 2 years, pre-school education has developed satisfactorily. The school attendance rate for 3-5 years in 2015 from 43.2% to 57.2% in 2018 and the school attendance rate for 5-year old increased from 66% to 77.1%. There are 8,858 primary schools nationwide, approximately 64% with 786,246 primary students. Secondary education in 2018, there were 1,758 schools, an increase of 107 compared to 2015, with a total of 671,064 students, an increase of 42,388 students. The total school attendance rate was 78.1% to 83.1%. Upper secondary education was 45.8% to 53.3%. The problem that the state provides. Secondary education is still challenging in adjusting the learning of students in these grades, especially Mat Hayom 1, Mat Hayom 2 and Mat Hayom 5. Non-formal education Teaching the secondary education upgrade model for the target group in 2018, with 111 cities, 3 provinces and 1 city announced the completion of lower secondary education, which exceeded expectations. Vocational education in 2017-2018 is in 4 universities under the Ministry of Education and Sports, with a total of 11,674 students, an increase of 2,422 people compared to the previous year. Education Teachers have taken care to organize the education upgrade model for kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers in various forms, both continuously during the end-of-year and regular periods, which will be located at the provincial development center. In addition, there is a project to upgrade the quality of education in rural areas, which has been implemented in 40 cities in 13 provinces. The purpose is to increase access and improve the quality of pre-school education services for children aged 3-5 years. In the target cities, the education quality improvement project has been implemented in 66 cities. The target of underprivileged education shows some success in developing education in Lao PDR to reach sustainable development.

In conclusion, the government's policy is to focus on developing human resources through good education, integrating the use of technology to develop education by setting strategic plans in stages by reforming the education system to be strong at each level, starting from kindergarten, primary, secondary and high school, with a systematic structure, enabling education to achieve its set goals.

### **Overall educational development direction to 2025**

For the overall direction of education development in 2025, the attendance rate of 5-year-old children should be higher than 80%, primary school should reach 99%, dropout rate of students still studying should be 5%, grade 1 repetition rate should be 7%, primary school repetition rate should be left at 3%, and the number of cities that achieve the new inclusive education rate up to grade 5 should be higher than 95% from 134 cities to 140 cities, lower secondary school repetition rate should be left at 8%, upper secondary school should be left at 6%, promote people of all ages to participate in physical exercise, exercise and sports to reach 24% of the population, and convene and publicize the resolution of the Central Party Executive Committee No. 037/KBSOP dated June 18, 2018 on improving the efficiency of state protection and social protection with the law.

### **Digital Education for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners**

Thongchai Kerkira (2010) said that in the era where everything is entering the digital world, whether it is marketing trends, social media, websites, smartphone applications of the business sector or the government sector, for the education sector itself, there is an awareness in applying a lot of technology and information to the learners. Learning comes in many forms, and we do not have to limit learning to the word "classroom" or the word "school" only. Because the arrival of the 4.0 era has changed the way knowledge is sought. Everyone, every age, not just students, can learn by themselves through education in the digital world.

Digital Education is a learning that results from a combination of learner-centered learning and application of various technologies. The teaching and learning focus on developing learners' thinking skills, whether it is creativity, analytical thinking, critical thinking, and systematic thinking. Another advantage of digital education, in addition to developing learners' thinking, is the freedom of learners to choose where and when to study, which can be applied to teaching via YouTube, teaching through playing games by using games to design questions for learners, creating blogs to share knowledge, or creating groups on Facebook or Line to bring teachers and learners closer. We can see that learning in the form of digital education is very interesting because it expands the scope of the word learning and also gives learners and teachers more freedom to create quality content than the current learning format.

### **Education system**

Since the change of government in 1975 (2568 AD), Laos has used a 12-year education system, which is a 5:4:3 system, divided into 3 types of education systems:

The general education system consists of:

- Preschool and Kindergarten 3 years
- Primary education is 5 years. The duration of education is 5 years. Children start school at the age of 6 years. Education at this level is compulsory. All children must complete this level of education. However, in practice, compulsory education is only beneficial to children in large cities because the country is large and the population is dispersed.

- The 4-year lower secondary school takes 4 years to complete and in the future children will be taught English, Chinese, Vietnamese and other languages.
- High school level is 3 years long and takes 3 years to study and in the future children will be able to study

### **Highlights of educational management in Laos**

Lao PDR has raised its status from being an underdeveloped country by maintaining a moderate and steady economic growth rate as the main goal of national development. The Vision 2020 on education focuses on providing universal compulsory education at the primary level while still allowing all sectors to participate more in education management so that all citizens have the opportunity to apply for education in a manner that responds to the country's economic situation. In addition, efforts are being made to eliminate illiteracy completely in order to improve the quality of life. In addition, vocational and higher education are being expanded in a manner that is in line with the needs of the labor market, with training for skilled labor, technical professionals, and intellectuals to be able to apply modern science and technology to meet the needs of economic and social development. National education is being raised to be close to international standards, with education being the core for human resource development based on the idea that developing human resources with appropriate knowledge and skills to help the country move beyond being an underdeveloped country. Lao PDR recognizes the need for human capital with skills in mathematics, reading and communication skills, and access to electronic knowledge sources will help promote social participation in national development.

### **Points for development in educational institution management**

After the political change to communist socialism, because Laos is a small country that cannot rely on itself, it depends mainly on foreign aid because the level of literacy and education is still low, making it difficult to realize the importance of using communication technology. In addition, most of the population lives in remote rural areas, making it difficult to provide basic educational services. Lao PDR still lacks personnel with knowledge and skills in this area. In addition to having to face natural disasters such as drought in the North and floods in the Central and South, the government still faces the problem of lacking budget and sources of funds for national development and still has a lower standard of living in both education and public health.

## **Conclusion**

At present, the change in education to digital technology with new innovations as tools to help teaching and learning more effectively than before is inevitable. Learners, teachers and educational institutions must integrate together to adjust themselves to coordinate all parties appropriately, quickly and in time with events in the country and other countries. They must also always be in line with digital technology and new digital devices. At the same time, this article suggests that all parties use digital technology and digital devices with social responsibility. There is meditation training for people to have appropriate and correct behaviors, a mind that is eager to learn, along with morality for the benefit of people in the nation and the world. In education, digital technology is integrated with skill development using innovation to promote learning, resulting in educational changes in the area of a thirst for knowledge and lifelong learning skills to keep up with the digital age. Having a good career

leads to a good quality of life for oneself, family and society. In terms of teaching and learning management, it will help reduce the time spent answering questions, submitting homework, reducing the gap in accessing knowledge from learning sources and sharing knowledge. However, the learning conditions must take into account morality and ethics in terms of social responsibility.

From the above conclusion, the transformation of Lao education to digital learning is very important at present because learning is something that everyone must have. At present, society has advanced and developed far. Technology plays many roles. In order to respond to the needs of the digital age quickly, accurately, and in line with human society, education must be more modern and efficient. Therefore, humans must have as much knowledge as technology in order to create a better quality of life and work in organizations quickly and efficiently. Teachers and administrators are important elements in driving the education system to change in the future.

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