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# **THE ROLE OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA, LAO PDR, VIETNAM AND THAILAND - COUNTRY STUDIES**

BY

DVV INTERNATIONAL

AND DEPARTMENT OF LIFELONG EDUCATION  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

**2019**

With financial support from the



Federal Ministry  
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*Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies. Adult learning and education involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term “adult” denotes all those who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity.*

(UNESCO, 2015)



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Vientiane and Bangkok, April 2020, Suwithida Charunkaittikul and Johann Heilmann

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

**By Suwithida Charungkaittikul and Sok Soth**

Lifelong learning promotion is on the agenda of many countries. It meets the rising demand for continuous learning and for keeping up with changes and fast developments aiming at improving people's lives. Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults can play their role in society and in the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those are defined as adults who are regarded as adults by the society in which they live in and in which they develop and enrich their capacities for living and working, both in their own interest and in the interest of their communities, organizations and societies. Although the concept of ALE is widely known in many developed countries, it has yet to receive an official status in the legal framework of the majority of Southeast Asian countries.

The present research aims at re-starting the debate around the concept of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in mainland Southeast-Asia, embarking from the question: What role does ALE play in LLL in the region? This seems to be necessary, as two tendencies can be witnessed at the moment: On the one hand, many ministries and other stakeholders still use the terminology around non-formal education, which bears a bad reputation of being a kind of second-class education for the marginalised. On the other hand, the LLL concept is coming up, with the tendency to replace ALE/ NFE (non-formal education) and make the sector somehow invisible. However, it should be possible to reverse this tendency by asking how ALE in Southeast Asia can benefit from the prominence of LLL in the development agenda.

As a basic foundation for making ALE benefit from this, the present research which was implemented in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, aims at looking at the role of ALE in these four countries. The present country studies are the main output of a one-year project which started in March 2019 and which included two workshops with the National University of Laos, the Royal University Phnom Penh, SEAMEO Center for Lifelong Learning and Chulalongkorn University Bangkok. The research is based on the

definitions and concepts outlined in UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation on ALE (RALE, <http://uil.unesco.org/adult-education/unesco-recommendation>), as defined in the table below.

The recommendation points out that learning is a lifelong endeavour that can occur in formal, non-formal and informal settings. The ultimate goal is to ensure that adults can fully participate in social and work-related life. By taking stock of the situation, the participating organizations would like to further draw attention on this debate.

### Key Terms

For the matter of length, conciseness and originality, the key terms, their sources and definitions are illustrated in the manner of excerpts in the table below. The first column illustrates the key terms whose definitions and sources are displayed in the second column respectively.

Key Terms	Definitions
Education	<p>Peters (1966), in one of his more accessible works, identified three criteria for education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) that 'education' implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it;</li> <li>(ii) that 'education' must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert;</li> <li>(iii) that 'education' at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner.</li> </ul> <p>Organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life.</p>
General education	<p>General education shall be the education that allows the learners to progress their knowledge of morality and good characteristics by enhancing their personal, intellectual and physical capacity by assuring their use of knowledge and fundamental skills.</p>

Key Terms	Definitions
	General Education is the fundamental education for learners to continue their studies and receive other training.
Formal Education	Processes of an education, which is systematic and proper in structure and hierarchy. Formal education is provided by educational institutions with appropriate educational licenses or educational accreditation in accordance with the legal criteria and procedures stipulated in this law.
	Formal education that is that provided by the education and training system set up or sponsored by the state for those expressed purposes' (Groombridge 1983, p. 6).
Non-Formal Education (NFE)	Educational activities, which are systematically prepared and conducted outside of the framework of formal education programs to offer a number of selected studies. Non-formal education covers a wide range of education programs such as literacy, life and professional skills and basic education for learners who do not attend schools delivering formal education. Non-formal education consists of continuous and equivalent studies that are integrating into formal education or life-long education. Learners in non-formal education have the right to request to be assessed and to take tests for assessing the equivalent levels of their education by education authorities as stipulated in this law.
	Non-formal education, which encompasses all organized educational or training activity outside of the formal education system, may offer a cheaper and more accessible means for delivering needed learning. Non-formal education, while not constituting a parallel system, covers:  any organised, systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children. Thus, defined non-formal education includes, for example, agricultural extension and farmer training programmes, adult literacy programmes, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial educational purposes, and various community programmes of instruction in

Key Terms	Definitions
	<p>health, nutrition, family planning, cooperatives, and the like. (Coombs and Ahmed 1974, p. 8)</p> <p>An official education system, which contributes to achieving Education for All and gives people access to lifelong education and helps build a learning society with equity, justice and social development.</p>
Informal Education	<p>Informal education may then be seen to cover all forms of learning not included in formal and non-formal education.</p> <p>Thus, it refers to:</p> <p>The life-long process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment—at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganised, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning—including that of even a highly 'schooled' person. (Coombs and Ahmed 1974, p. 8)</p>
Lifelong Education	<p>The development of coherent strategies to provide education and training opportunities for all individuals during their entire life. (Jallade and Mora 2001, p. 362).</p> <p>Lifelong education...is a set of organizational and procedural guidelines for educational practice. Its goal is lifelong learning—learning carried out throughout life. It is important to define this term of 'learning' which is not spontaneous, day-to-day learning. The kind of lifelong learning that is the object of lifelong education...has the following four definitive characteristics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is intentional—learners are aware that they are learning.</li> <li>2. It has specific goals, and is not aimed at vague generalizations such as 'developing the mind'.</li> <li>3. These goals are the reason why the learning is undertaken (i.e. it is not motivated simply by factors like boredom).</li> </ol>

Key Terms	Definitions
	4. The learner intends to retain and use what has been learnt for a considerable period of time. (Knapper and Cropley 2000, pp. 11–12)
Lifelong Learning	Lifelong Learning is “[r]ooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. Education systems which promote lifelong learning adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub-sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals”
Adult	<p>The idea of an ‘adult’ is not, therefore, directly connected to age, but is related to what generally happens as we grow older. That is, we achieve physical maturity, become capable of providing for ourselves, move away (at least in most western societies) from our parents, have children of our own, and exercise a much greater role in the making of our own choices. This then affects not just how we see ourselves, but how others see us as well. In other words, we may see the difference between being and not being an adult as chiefly being about status and self-image.</p> <p>Adulthood may thus be considered as a state of being that both accords rights to individuals and simultaneously confers duties or responsibilities upon them. We might then define adulthood as: ‘an ethical status resting on the presumption of various moral and personal qualities’ (Paterson 1979, p. 31). Having said that, however, we also have to recognize what a heterogeneous group of people adults are. It is this amorphous group which forms the customer base or audience for adult education and training.</p>
Adult Learning and Education	Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim at ensuring that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those are regarded as adults who are recognised as adultly by the society in which

Key Terms	Definitions
	<p>they live in and in which they develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies. Adult learning and education involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognising, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term “adult” denotes all those who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity.</p> <p>According to UNESCO (2016), “the 2015 Recommendation takes a comprehensive and systematic approach to ALE, defining three key domains of learning and skills: literacy and basic skills; continuing education and vocational skills; as well as liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills. It also describes five transversal areas of action: policy; governance; financing; participation, inclusion and equity; and quality” (p. 3).</p>

### Conceptual Framework

In this study, adult learning and education is framed by the domains of RALE, literacy and basic skills, continuing education and vocational skills, and liberal, popular and community education and citizen skills. The effectiveness of these domains is influenced by five areas of action as can be seen from the sketch below:



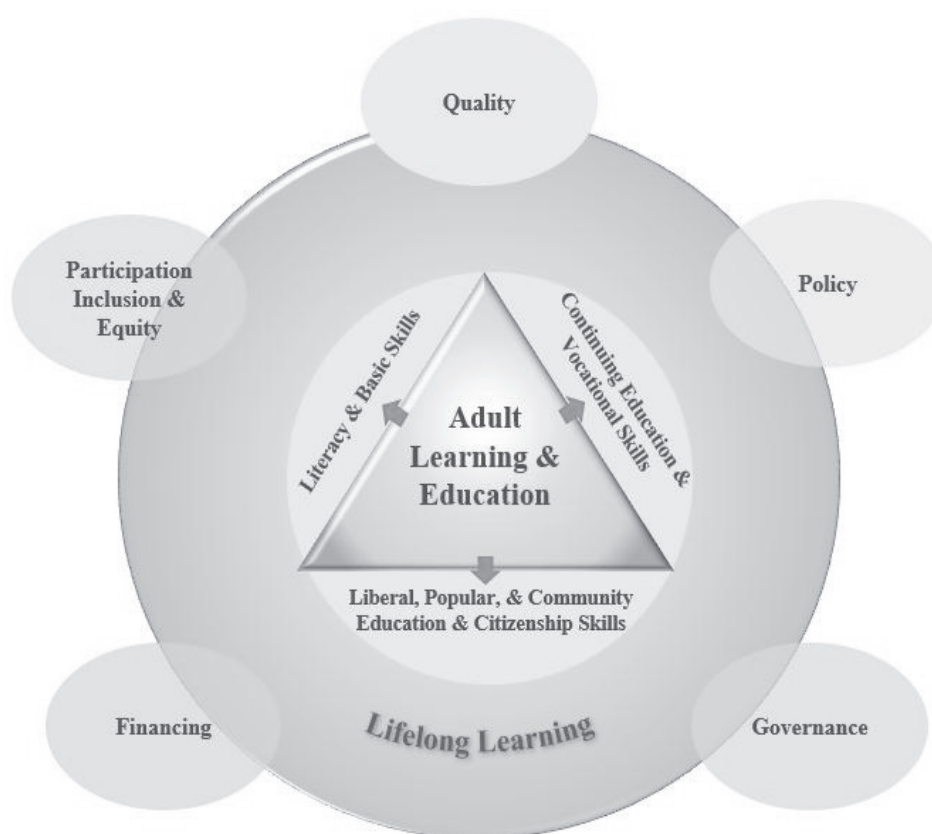



Figure 1: Conceptual framework for investigating concept of Adult Learning and Education

For these different categories, the research reflects on the following questions: What activities/structures exist in terms of ALE? Are they sufficient towards the identified needs? What are the reasons for possible shortcomings?

We hope that the recommendations given in the country reports will provide valuable recommendations in developing the related frameworks and delivery mechanisms in their respective countries in order to emphasise the development of adult learning and education. By sharing promising policies and practices in implementing integrated adult learning and education in lifelong learning from different perspectives, countries can learn from one another and put their visions for lifelong learning throughout society fully into practice.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**THE UNDERSTANDING OF ALE IN CAMBODIA,**  
**LAO PDR, VIETNAM, AND THAILAND**



# **ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA**

**BY**  
**ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF PHNOM PENH**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
**CAMBODIA**



## Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations

ALE	Adult Education and Learning
AOP	Annual Operational Plan
CLC	Community Learning Center
DNFE	Department of Non-Formal Education
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
FLP	Functional Literacy Program
IGP	Income-Generation Program
ITC	Institute of Technology of Cambodia
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoLVT	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
NEP	NGO Education Partnership (a non-governmental organization)
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
STEM	Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training

## Introduction

### Traditional Education

Before France introduced their “modern education system” to Cambodia, which later became known as Cambodia’s formal education system, Cambodia used to have its own education system. Boys were sent to *wat* (temple, pagoda) schools when they were ready to become novices, to learn everything that the monks had to teach. Their studies focused on morals, basic literacy, numeracy and Buddhism.

When these boys finished their initial studies and came of age, they would eventually become monks and deepen their sacred knowledge. The ultimate purpose of their learning was to understand the reasons for their existence in this world and ways to do better in the next lives. After several years as a monk, these young men would quit their monkhood and settle down to live a life governed by *chbabp proh*, the code of conduct for men. Smith-Hefner (1999, pp. 106) writes that

“[j]ust as there are *chbab srey*, ‘rules for girls’, there are corresponding *chbab proh*, ‘rules for boys’, which focus on proper behavior for boys. *Chbab proh* were also a part of the curriculum in both Cambodian public schools and temples. These rules place particular emphasis on physical strength, knowledge, and discipline.”

Girls, however, were educated at home by their parents and particularly women relatives. Besides basic literacy and numeracy, they learned how to manage the household, administer their husband’s income, the arts of raising children and taking care of their husband, parents and parents-in-law. Girls learned all necessary for them to be *srey krup leakkhana*, virtuous women (Derks, 2008, p. 44). He further claims (p. 44) that

“*srey krub leakkhana* is ideally a shy, ignorant, vulnerable, industrious young woman. She is devoted to her parents, follows their advice and helps her mother at work. Proper speech, proper behavior and proper appearance are of utmost importance.”

*Chhap srey*, the code of conduct for women, was the least they were expected to learn. He added (p. 43) that “*chhap srey* is part of a whole series of *chhap*: moral codes or normative poems [...]. These *chhap*, written according to a rhythm or melodic line, were composed between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries and passed down from generation to generation as moral advice for different categories of people [...]. The *chhap srey* specifies women’s place in and responsibility for maintaining order and peace within the family and broader society.”

Traditionally, the pre-modern education system groomed men and women to co-exist in balance within their small families and society. This system was non-formal as there were no formally designed curricula or assessments.

### **Modern Education**

After France had colonized Cambodia in 1863, the French eventually introduced modern formal education and schools (cf. Table 1). For the first time, girls and boys were allowed to study together. Formal education reached its peak after Cambodia had achieved independence from France on 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1953. By then, Cambodia had built its own comprehensive universities and many of its scholars had been sent to advance their studies overseas.

Sadly, the Khmer Rouge did not believe in modern education. Through the regime, most educated people were killed. The few who remained did their best to restore the country’s knowledge in all areas after the Khmer Rouge’s defeat. A formal education system of 4+3+3 was introduced. In 1986, 5+3+3 replaced the old system and the most recent reforms in 1996 changed the education system to 6+3+3, as is still the case today (Hagai, et. al, 2017, p. 54).

Presently, after high school, students may study for two more years and graduate as skilled workers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics at E2STEM School<sup>1</sup>, or study for two more years at the Institute of Technology of Cambodia or the

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<sup>1</sup> E2STEM: A technology-focused school, bringing the best modern teaching practices in Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), English and E-learning (E2) into Cambodian education.

Royal University of Phnom Penh and receive a bachelor's degree. Another option is to complete a four-year bachelor's program before commencing a two-year master's program at a university of their choosing. Students then may further graduate from a four-year PhD program.

*Table 1: Educational situation prior to 1953*

<i>Educational levels</i>	<i>Years of schooling</i>	<i>Foreign language</i>
A French-based education system: 6+4+2+1		French
	Postgraduates	
	Graduates	
Higher education	Undergraduates	
Upper secondary schools (2 years + 1 year)	1 (Another 1 year for faculties preparation)	
Lower secondary schools (4 years)	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
Primary schools (6 years)	6	
	7	
	8	
	9	
	10	
	11	
	12	
Kindergarten	Not obligatory	

*Source: Neau (2003)*

## Formal Education

This section briefly describes the purpose, content and study hours of the current basic formal education system in Cambodia, comprising primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education. The information and tables were extracted and reproduced from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport's (MoEYS) 2014 Curriculum Framework for General Education and Technical Education.

### Primary Education

Within the existing system of basic education, the purpose of primary education is to

- ☐ strengthen basic skills such as reading and writing;
- ☐ raise students' awareness and appreciation of the value of arts and entertainment;



- ❑ provide students with opportunities to develop their interests in and understanding of their traditional culture.

*Table 2: The content and number of hours to study at primary education level*

No.	Subjects	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
1	Khmer	14	12	12	11	8	8
2	Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5	5
3	Sciences	2	3	3	3	3	3
4	Social Studies	6	7	7	8	8	8
5	Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2
6	Special Activities	1	1	1	1	1	1
7	Foreign Languages	0	0	0	0	3	3
	TOTAL	30	30	30	30	30	30

#### *Lower Secondary Education*

In addition to subjects such as Mathematics, Sciences, and Foreign Languages, the purpose of lower secondary education is to

- ❑ educate students on the value of Khmer arts and beauty/esthetics;
- ❑ develop students' creativity, performance skills and their interest in artistic activities for entertainment purposes.

*Table 3: The content and number of hours to study at lower secondary education level*

No	Subjects	G7	G8	G9
1	Khmer	6	5	5
2	Mathematics	4	5	5
3	Sciences			
	○ Earth Science	5	5	6
	○ Physics	1	1	1
	○ Chemistry	2	2	3
	○ Biology	2	2	2
4	Social Studies			
	○ History	5	5	5
	○ Geography	3	3	3

No	Subjects	G7	G8	G9
	○ Moral Civics	2	2	2
5	Foreign Languages	5	5	5
6	Physical Education	2	2	
7	Technology/Home Economics	3	3	3
8	Arts Education	2	2	2
9	Special Activities	1	1	1
	TOTAL	33	33	33

#### *Upper Secondary Education*

Similarly, as for upper secondary school, the purposes of education are to

- ☐ raise students' awareness and appreciation of the basic theories and practice of arts;
- ☐ foster students' creativity and imagination.

*Table 4: The content and the number of hours at upper secondary school level*

No	Subjects	G10	G11	G12
1	Khmer		4	
2	Mathematics		5	
3	Foreign Languages		3	
4	Physics		3	
5	Chemistry		2	
6	Biology		2	
7	Earth Science		1	
8	Moral Civics		2	
9	History		1.5	
10	Geography		1.5	
11	Technology/Home Economics		3	
12	Arts Education		2	
13	Special Activities		1	
14	Physical Education		2	
	TOTAL		34	

## **Non-Formal Education**

In the Cambodian education system, non-formal education (NFE) is one of seven sub-sectors. Based on the website of MoEYS's Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE), this sub-sector has two primary goals: (1) ensuring that all children, youths, adults, poor people and those with disabilities are able to realize their rights to basic education and lifelong learning (LLL); and (2) providing opportunities for youths and adults to access life skills and literacy. To realize these goals, DNFE focuses on eight main programs/activities:

Expanding re-entry into the formal system and equivalency programs

1. Expanding literacy and life-skills programs
2. Strengthening and expanding Community Learning Centers (CLCs) and Reading Centers to enhance the knowledge of and provide support to newly literate learners
3. Upgrading the capacities of NFE staff
4. Strengthening the NFE information system as a basis for analyzing learning needs, alleviating poverty, assessing cost-effectiveness, program monitoring and improving coordination of non-governmental initiatives
5. Strengthening the NFE system from central to local levels, facilitating program support for process monitoring of DNFE result reports for provincial and district level NFE officers
6. In cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other development partners, providing out-of-school youths with peer-to-peer education, life skills and awareness about and knowledge on disease prevention
7. Expanding promotional activities through state and private media.

DNFE goals, programs and activities utilize many NFE key terms such as LLL, youths, adults, life skills, those with disabilities and literacy. Yet, adult learning and education (ALE) remains unmentioned.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Key Informants

To meet the study's aims and objectives to explore how ALE is understood among key stakeholders in Cambodia, particularly within the context of LLL, this study uses a qualitative design. Golafshani (2003, p. 600) writes that:

“Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as ‘real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2001, p. 39).”

Qualitative research broadly refers to "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Instead, qualitative research produces findings derived from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

Given this study's scope, time and budget, only eight participants were selected for interviews in this study. Six of these people come from government sectors, the other two from NGOs. The sampling methods used in this study include purposive and snowball sampling. According to Tongco (2007, p. 147), purposive or judgment sampling is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not require underlying theories or any set number of informants. The researcher decides what is to be known and finds people able and willing to provide the information through knowledge or experience (Bernard 2002, Lewis & Sheppard 2006).

The first interview participant from the government sector was an DNFE official. From the non-government side, the first purposively selected sample was an official from the NGO Education Partnership (NEP). Starting from these two early informants, further informants were identified and interviewed. The table below summarizes the participants'

personal data:

*Table 5: Interview Participants*

No.	Participants	Sex	Affiliation
1	P1	M	Department of Non-formal Education, MoEYS
2	P2	M	Department of Non-formal Education, MoEYS
3	P3	M	Education Quality Assurance Department, MoEYS
4	P4	M	Education Quality Assurance Department, MoEYS
5	P5	M	National Technical Assistant of World Bank to MoEYS
6	P6	M	Directorate General of Higher Education, MoEYS
7	P7	M	NGO Education Partnership (NGO)
8	P8	M	VVOB Education for Development (NGO) <sup>2</sup>

### **Data Collection**

This research utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data are the interviews with concerned stakeholders working in NFE and LLL in Cambodia. These stakeholders were both government and non-government officials. Although this study had also intended to select members of communities, due to time constraints and resources limitations, this group was excluded from this study. Future study shall also include this group.

The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews and guiding questions (cf. Conclusion). These guiding questions were framed by the terms of reference of the Regional Office of DVV International in Southeast Asia. The participants had received the guiding questions before they were interviewed. Secondary data used in this research comprise reports, research articles, policy papers, media files and education laws concerning NFE and LLL. Special attention in these secondary sources was given to ALE.

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<sup>2</sup> VVOB is a Flemish abbreviation which stands for "Vlaamse Vereniging voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en technische Bijstand". Translated to English it means "Flemish Association For Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance".

## Findings

### Policies

Cambodia has adopted many key policies related to ALE (cf. Table 6):

*Table 6: Education policies*

No.	Policies	Year Approved
1	Policy of Non-Formal Education	2002
2	Education Strategic Plan (2014-2018)	2004
3	Education Law	2007
4	Policy on Non-Formal Education Equivalency Program	2008
5	Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action – Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All	2015
6	Policy on Inclusive Education	2018
7	Education Strategic Plan (2019-2023)	2019
8	National Policy on Lifelong Learning	2019

There is no single policy which explicitly mentions ALE. However, the existing policies cover ALE activities in the form of NFE such as literacy classes and CLC activities. These activities are summarized in Table 7:

*Table 7: Number of provinces implementing different education programs for adults*

Program	Provinces	
	2016-2017	2017-2018
Functional literacy	25	25
Post-literacy	18	17
Re-entry	22	22
Income generating	24	24
Primary equivalency	22	24
Lower secondary equivalency	0	8
Complementary	21	21

*Source: 2019 Education Congress Report*

MoEYS's efforts and collaboration with ministries such as Ministry of Women's Affairs,

Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) and UNESCO have reduced the adult illiteracy rate over the past years. Table 8 illustrates this trend:

*Table 8: Adult literacy rate (15 years and older)*



*Source: 2019 Education Congress Report*

The 2019 Education Congress Report revealed that as of 2018, there were 356 CLCs. 335 CLCs were managed by MoEYS and 21 CLCs by development partners including DVV International. All of them operated and implemented ALE activities. A total of 10,199 students attended vocational training courses in 2017/2018. Examples of such courses include agricultural skills, weaving, construction, motorcycle repair and playing traditional musical instruments.

Overall, the report states that “50% of the NFE sub-sector’s outcome indicators were achieved, and 50% were almost achieved against the AOP [annual operational plan] 2018” (2019 Education Congress Report, p. 86). Table 9 summarizes all the progresses of outcome indicators as presented in the 2019 Education Congress Report:

Table 9: Progress of outcome indicators

No.	Non-Formal Education	Actual	Target	Actual	Status
		2017	2018	2018	
Policy Area 1: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all					
1	No. of illiterate completing literacy classes	17,678	20,000	16,850	↓
2	No. of learners in equivalency program	5,275	6,409	6,914	↑
3	No. of CLCs	350	367	356	→
4	No. of children completing re-entry program and referred to formal education	10,016	11,000	10,099	→
5	No. of learners completing skill training courses	8,002	7,784	9,170	↑
Policy Area 2: Ensure effective leadership and management of education staff at all levels					
6	POEs with NFE MIS	25	25	25	↑

**Note:** ↑ Achieved → Likely to Achieve ↓ Unlikely to Achieve

Source: 2019 Education Congress Report

As can be seen in Table 9, fewer people attended literacy courses in 2018 compared to 2017. Simultaneously, learners in equivalency programs have grown by around 31 percent. A previous study on the impacts of LLL on different socio-economic groups found that UNESCO's ALE definition is known and used by educational key players in Cambodia (Sok, Peou, and Sok 2018). Nevertheless, many participants that were interviewed were more familiar with NFE than with ALE activities. This lack of awareness calls for a separate ALE policy to avoid confusion between the concepts, and to better address adult learners' needs.

### Governance

As ALE has not yet been formalized through a dedicated policy framework, it does not have a separate governance structure. The main de-facto ALE governance lies within MoEYS as part of its NFE governance. Thus, this study selected interview partners from MoEYS and aims to understand NFE governance to grasp the nature of ALE governance. However, ALE does not concern MoEYS exclusively. Other ministries are also working on ALE. Moreover, key players extend beyond MoEYS. For instance, MoLVT and the Ministry of Women's Affairs work on addressing ALE needs. Table 10 summarizes these findings on concerned NFE stakeholders and their ALE activities.



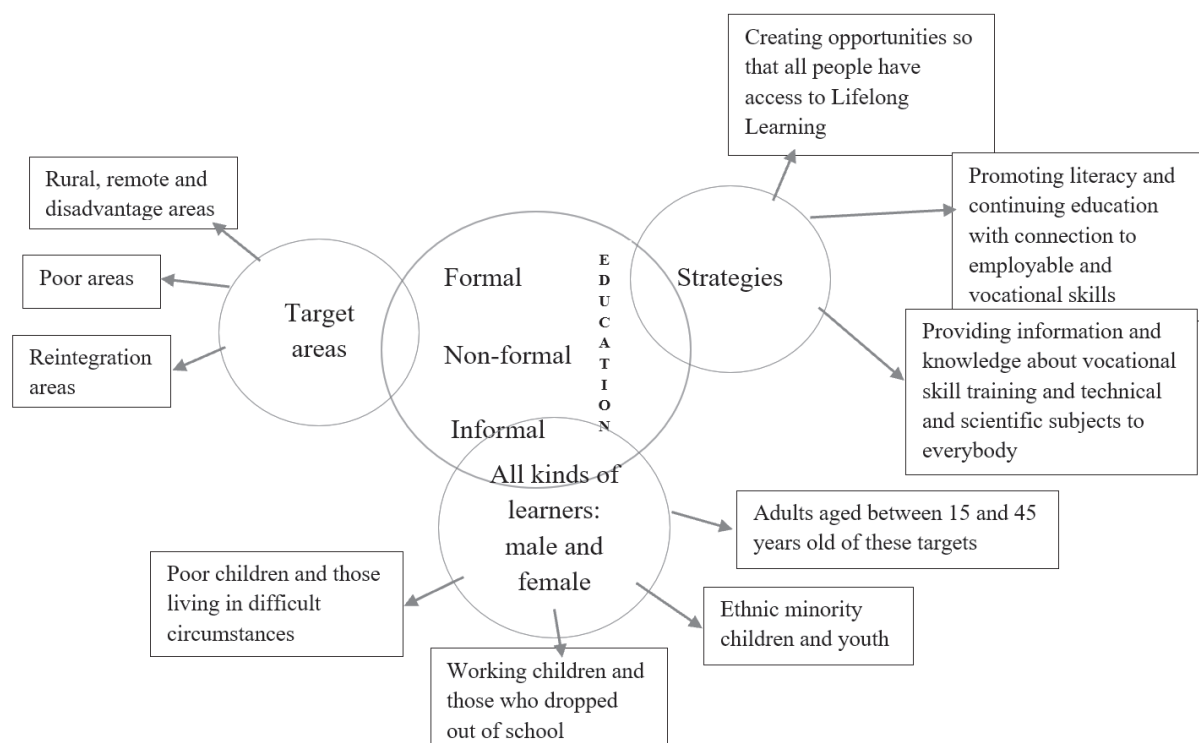
*Table 10: Stakeholders concerned with NFE*

No.	Concerned Stakeholder	Task
1	Ministry of the Interior	Guide and encourage local authorities at all levels to increase efforts to sustain NFE classes, especially literacy classes.
2	Ministry of Religion	Cooperate with Buddhist leaders, lay monks, nuns and priests to involve them in educating people through religious ceremonies and customs such as preaching and campaigns, at pagodas and religious festivals; raise awareness of the importance of study and help them organize libraries, reading rooms, classrooms and CLCs according to their respective capacities.
3	MoEYS	Provide opportunities for communities to participate in establishing literacy classes, post-literacy classes, complementary classes, training courses on vocational skills, CLCs, reading rooms and libraries; advise on, facilitate and expand teachers' capacities.
4	Ministry of Information	Promote information dissemination via radio, television, newspapers and other media networks to advocate for continuing education for all across the country.
5	Private sector (factory managers, businesses)	Offer literacy classes or training courses on vocational skills compliant with Cambodian labor laws to workers, for their own and their employers' benefits.

The 2008 MoEYS Country Report outlines that the state must provide a complete education system including formal, non-formal and informal education (Im et al., 2008). This is in line with the Law on Education (Chapter 4, Article 15). The report adds that ministries and institutions who are members of the National Education for All Committee and other concerned stakeholders must support NFE. To achieve positive results, they shall cooperate on NFE implementation and promotion. NFE stakeholders shall guide and encourage other concerned parties, especially local authorities at all levels, village development committees, communes, pagodas, religious institutions and the private

sector, to mobilize resources for NFE development and establishment in communities. Figure 1 illustrates the three components of the complete and uniform education system.

*Figure 1: Components of complete and uniform education*



As illustrated, education exists in different formats—formal, non-formal and informal. As such, ALE does not merely happen in the shadow of NFE as is the case in Cambodia. ALE exists and is practised in formal, non-formal and informal education.

## Financing

As ALE has not been officially established in Cambodia, this study could not gather data on a dedicated ALE budget from its interviewees. Information on the ALE budget could only be deducted from MoEYS' 2019 NFE and technical education budgets, which together amounted to only 0.8 percent of MoEYS's annual budget. Except for this, the study had no access to information on the allocated budget of stakeholders working on other ALE projects.

According to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the overall 2019 education budget accounted for KHR285 million (approximately US\$70 million). NFE budget came to \$705,019, while technical education budget was \$589,220.

Sok, Peou, and Sok (2018) highlight that with such a limited budget and a lack of supporting policies and action plans, ALE implementation is inhibited. Even if different educational key players have their own agendas regarding their budgets, DNFE shall formulate specific policies and clear action plans to engage their partners and realize LLL, NFE and ALE activities.

### **Participation, Inclusion and Equity**

In the absence of ALE as an official education sub-sector in Cambodia, there is no ALE-specific data on participation and inclusion. Thus, the following data is gathered from sources such as MoEYS and MoLVT. In general, even in the case of data availability, it often appears to be outdated and inaccessible. Data on ALE-relevant groups such as ethnic minorities is also difficult to obtain.

In 2015, DNFE published the enrollment numbers for non-formal functional literacy programs (FLPs) by age and province (cf. Table 11). Most adult learners between 25 and 45 years old (3,300) came from Kandal Province, including 2,236 women. The keenest literacy learners were 594 individuals over the age of 45 from Banteay Meanchey Province, including 479 women. In total, 42,097 people between the ages of 25 and 45 years old participated in FLPs in 2015.

The data shows that DNFE was working diligently to address functional literacy as Cambodia is developing. This literacy program acknowledges the potentials adults hold in developing their country and shows that many adults are interested in the program. Still, the actual number of adults who could benefit from such a program could exceed the total number of participants as presented in Table 11. This calls for more determined actions and funding to tackle such needs.

Table 11: Enrollment in FLPs by age group

N°	Province	Total		Under 15		15-24		25-45		45+	
		Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
1	Banteay Meanchey	3,053	2227	127	70	905	557	1628	1266	393	334
2	Battambang	2,465	1859	233	156	1191	860	972	782	69	61
3	Kampong Cham	1,654	1267	89	63	416	252	1076	892	73	60
4	Kampong Chhnang	3,953	2717	127	68	1102	650	2433	1776	291	223
5	Kampong Speu	3,206	2485	86	64	644	445	2217	1757	259	219
6	Kampong Thom	2,195	1446	137	55	724	381	1253	948	81	62
7	Kampot	2,895	2288	46	22	577	371	1992	1656	280	239
8	Kandal	4,713	3158	74	39	1364	856	3,088	2121	187	142
9	Koh Kong	1,529	1136	29	9	382	247	995	779	123	101
10	Kraties	1,079	733	119	67	362	220	545	406	53	40
11	Mondul Kiri	321	229	23	14	196	148	91	61	11	6
12	Phnom Penh	1,298	786	674	354	252	143	287	228	85	61
13	Preah Vihear	1,276	989	80	49	552	410	601	490	43	40
14	Prey Veng	3,885	2968	208	109	874	580	2467	2003	336	276
15	Pusat	2,525	1685	717	361	812	525	956	759	40	40
16	Rattanak Kiri	1,904	1117	172	101	931	572	783	439	18	5
17	Siem Reap	2,885	2233	111	71	884	599	1768	1463	122	100
18	Preah Sihanouk	642	455	94	45	130	81	312	237	106	92
19	Stung Treng	161	113	13	8	96	64	52	41	0	0
20	Svay Rieng	3,591	2859	22	7	530	358	2830	2306	209	188
21	Takeo	2,464	1973	36	28	574	437	1,777	1445	77	63
22	Utdar Meanchey	1,426	964	183	100	521	341	619	449	103	74
23	Kep	551	378	3	1	144	86	384	278	20	13
24	Pailin	523	333	46	24	192	117	223	147	62	45
25	Thbaung Khmum	2,754	1769	244	119	936	599	1488	990	86	61
PoEYS		52,948	38,167	3,693	2,004	15,291	9,899	30,837	23,719	3,127	2,545
DP		1,048	717	283	137	276	182	420	349	69	49
Total		53,996	38,884	3,976	2,141	15,567	10,081	31,257	24,068	3,196	2,594

Source: Non-Formal Education Statistics & Indicators (2015), p. 5

Not only DNFE but also MoLVT are ALE stakeholders in Cambodia. As per the academic year of 2016/2017, the total number of enrolled technical and vocational education training (TVET) learners was 35,454. Formal TVET programs accounted for 10,232 participants between 20 and 65+ years old, and 7,257 learners participated in non-formal TVET courses. Short courses attracted more people from ethnic minority groups (26 percent), while the participation rate of long courses amounted to 17 percent. This data shows that many programs provided by different stakeholders address the needs of adults in different ways. It also indicates that adults as young as 20 years and as old as 65 years and beyond are interested in further education to develop their capacities and contribute to societal development. This calls for the systematization of ALE across all disciplines and ministries

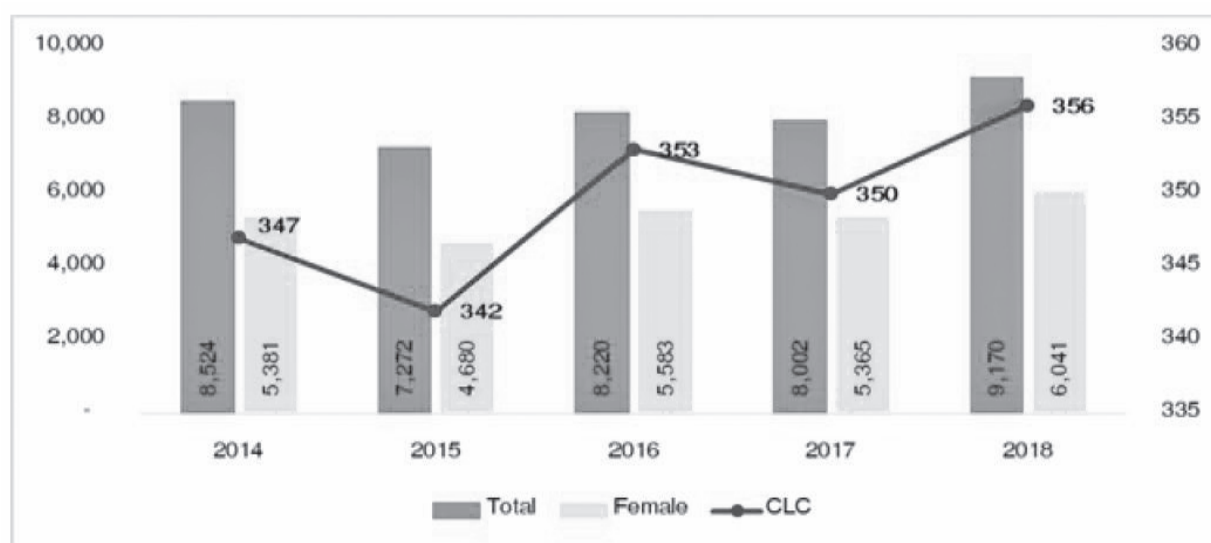
to allocate budget most efficiently. Given this study's scope and limitations, it was difficult to understand the true nature of short and long courses. Only by visiting the site and reviewing the program syllabi will one be able to tell whether technical education fully endorses ALE.

The 2019-2023 Education Strategic Plan (ESP) includes data on successful participation in ALE programs between 2017 and 2018, but it is not disaggregated by gender, age or ethnicity. In total, 17,678 illiterate persons completed a literacy program and 5,275 students participated in an equivalency program. The re-entry program was completed by 10,006 students. Vocational training was attended by 8,002 persons.

Based on the 2019 Education Congress Report, DNFE has implemented many ALE activities. The latest available data from 2018 show that 38 different vocational skills programs were offered, for instance on sewing, accounting or administration. That year, 10,199 adult learners were enrolled, including 6,638 women. The FLP enrollment numbers provided by DNFE, the numbers on TVET provided by MoLVT, and the numbers on the literacy and re-entry programs and skills training courses as written in the ESP, show an increase in participation. This indicates that needs for ALE exist and that there is a demand for programs to fulfil them. Different stakeholders (NGOs, ministries, private sector, etc.) are providing trainings to address those needs. However, there appears to be a lack of alignment between these stakeholders for ALE, needs, trainings and budget.

The following figure illustrates an example of increased participation in vocational skills training courses as part of DNFE's Income-Generation Programs (IGPs). The figure shows the numbers of participants attending these training courses from 2014 to 2018. Across the country, the number of trainees grew from 8,524 in 2014 to 9,170 in 2018, with an increase in women trainees. This constitutes progress towards gender inclusion.

Figure 2: Increased participation rates in vocational skills training in DNFE's IGPs.



Source: 2019 Education Congress Report

Interviews additionally concluded that ALE stakeholders are enhancing efforts to ensure equity among all training participants. Hence, women, men and those with disabilities are increasingly being given opportunities to equally engage in ALE.

Nevertheless, one of this study's findings was that the number of participants could be even further increased if funding was released on time. Outreach to target groups would then be more effective and more people could be informed of available training courses. This study's analysis suggests that participation, inclusion and equity in ALE and LLL, both commonly referred to as NFE, is still limited.

## Quality

As far as this study is concerned, ALE in Cambodia is mainly conducted through different NFE activities by different stakeholders. NFE covers many upskilling activities such as vocational and income-generation programs. According to the interviews, each program has its own mechanism for ensuring quality, starting from needs assessments, curriculum development, trainers' recruitment, program implementation, and learners' examination. Still, a specific quality assurance mechanism did not exist at the time the interviews and research were conducted.

Apart from DNFE, there are at least six stakeholders working on ALE in Cambodia. Each has their unique mechanism for quality assurance ensuring that participation in ALE programs is in accordance with their non-standardized measurements and proves of qualification.

### **Key Informants' Perceptions of NFE, ALE and LLL**

Analysis was conducted along the five focal areas of policies, governance, financing, participation and quality. From the interviews, this study additionally gathered the stakeholders' perceptions of NFE, ALE and LLL. The analysis shows that most participants had varying views of the key concepts.

#### **NFE**

Participants P1 and P2 stated that NFE and ALE apply to learners who did not complete primary education or who dropped out before finishing lower secondary education. P8 expressed his view that NFE and ALE serve to link these learners with the formal education system.

P3 viewed NFE as part of the official education system, providing opportunities to those unable to access formal education. P1 and P7 underlined that some children are unable to attend school because they keep moving along with their parents migrating for work. Others drop out of school after commencing. P3 and P7 added that thanks to CLCs, NFE programs also cover early childhood development and educate mothers on how to take care of and raise their children.

#### **ALE**

The study participants had different views on ALE. Regarding UNESCO's ALE concept, the participants revealed that they knew of ALE's introduction to Cambodia, yet some interviewees were unaware of the approach's details. P3 mentioned that NFE includes ALE in the form of education that helps those outside the formal education system to re-enter. P5 argued that ALE is a method or approach to provide adults with opportunities to learn inside and outside of school. P7 specified that ALE's target group are exclusively adults, whereas NFE also addresses youths and children. P4 further emphasized that NFE and ALE



differed in their approaches and in how they assess needs in adult learning. For him, ALE utilizes participatory learning approaches which convey knowledge related to adult people's everyday life: "For example, we have to work with the community, and we help adults to learn without them being aware that they are learning, meaning they learn from real-life practices" (P4). P8 added that "active learning should be the way for ALE."

P1, P2 and P8 agreed that ALE's role lies in its utility for learners. The participants explained that "ALE must focus on being functional". That is, ALE shall address students' needs of improving their livelihoods and generating income. ALE provides learners with skills to become employable, which are demanded on the labor market. P1 especially highlighted the role of CLCs in this context as they focus on ALE and provide skills training courses addressing the learners' immediate needs. In this way, P1 argued, ALE contributes to the societal development and advancement of the country. In the words of P8, "programs for adults should be applicable to their lives. Credits<sup>3</sup> are a plus. But linkage to the learners' livelihoods is a must". P2 and P3 also highlighted ALE's potential for developing sustainable livelihoods, and connected ALE with UNESCO's concept of Education for Sustainable Development.

In terms of ALE's scope, substance, goals or learning outcomes, P6 reflected that these factors are rarely focused on. He stated that in the Cambodian context, ALE is merely explored in terms of learners' age. Some interviewees emphasized that MoEYS should prioritize NFE development over ALE as Cambodia's context and situation differs from other countries such as Germany, where ALE is currently being promoted. All interviewees, however, agreed that UNESCO's ALE concept will be useful for developing Cambodia's education system. P1, who studied UNESCO's ALE concept, stressed that it is essential for a developing country such as Cambodia. He said that ALE needs to be developed and strengthened before the country can move towards LLL. P1 additionally emphasized that ALE does not only apply to the education sector, but that is also relevant for other ministries (cf. Table 11).

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<sup>3</sup> "Credits" refers to the formal recognition of successful course completion to be used as documentation to apply for further education.



Thus, according to P2, ALE's establishment will require active participation from all concerned ministries. P3 said that ALE may develop in Cambodia if a carefully considered strategy will be implemented that applies to the whole country.

### LLL

The study participants had different views on the LLL concept. P1, P3, and P7 thought that LLL covers NFE, ALE and informal and formal education. P3 explained that for him, LLL comprises education from birth until the end of life. He emphasized that LLL should become officially recognized and that accreditation must be available to learners in such programs. P1 argued that for LLL to be managed and successfully achieved, all concerned stakeholders shall be actively involved in the process. P1 mentioned that early childhood education involves up to 14 different ministries. P1 also highlighted that MoEYS officials working on LLL must develop a clearer understanding of the LLL concept to design programs and curricula more effectively.

P4 and P5 considered NFE, ALE and LLL as different approaches but with NFE encompassing ALE and LLL. P4 said that ALE is the approach to achieve the goal of LLL, while NFE including informal education is the program through which learning is conducted. P4 defined LLL as a form of education providing knowledge about people's livelihoods, from their childhood onwards. In this way, LLL fulfils communities' needs and develops people's capacity to explore and do research. P5 included LLL in his NFE definition, pointing to the transformation of CLCs into centers of LLL.

However, P2 and P8 had a different view on LLL. P2 stated that LLL should assist people with continuous learning. P2 and P8 argued that LLL should be offered as a flexible program addressing people's needs, which does not require attending fixed CLC courses over a certain period.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

*Research Question 1: How are ALE, NFE and LLL understood in Cambodian education?*

The study participants demonstrated uncertainty in distinguishing NFE, LLL and ALE, and in how the differences relate to policies. P2 and P8 explained that differences between the concepts lie in the learners' age and background. P1, P3, and P7 claimed that LLL includes NFE, ALE and informal and formal education. P4 and P5 found ALE and LLL to be part of NFE. On the other hand, interviewees correctly agreed that ALE aims to provide adults with opportunities to learn inside and outside school. P3 explained that LLL offers education from birth to death. P4 pointed out that "NFE, ALE and LLL [...] are interconnected".

Thus, it has become evident that educational stakeholders had varying perceptions of ALE. They tend to equate the concept with NFE and generally blend characteristics of ALE, NFE and LLL. Looking at the five transversal action areas of policies, governance, financing, participation and quality, it has become clear that many NFE and LLL activities exist but not many refer to ALE specifically. NFE is seen as education outside the formal education system, focusing on continuing and equivalency education. NFE includes all people and aims to enable everyone to access basic education and LLL. With the 2019 National Lifelong Learning Policy, the education sector is working towards enabling every Cambodian to have access and opportunities to learn and gain skills anywhere and anytime. ALE, on the other hand, is only specifically mentioned in MoEYS's 2008 Country Report on New Trends and the Present Situation of Adult Learning and Education. In this report, programs such as FLPs are explicitly listed as ALE programs. However, ALE has since only been included indirectly in different policies and programs that aim at giving opportunities to "all" and "everyone".

*Research Question 2: How does the Cambodian ALE concept compare to that of UNESCO's 2015 recommendations?*

This study shows that the participants' perceptions of ALE differ from UNESCO's definition. They view ALE and LLL as part of NFE, while UNESCO considers all forms of learning (NFE, formal and informal education) as a part of ALE and ALE as a core component of LLL.

UNESCO's ALE concept includes all forms of education and sees adults as people who engage in ALE. The three key domains are (1) literacy and basic skills; (2) continuing education and vocational skills; and (3) liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills. Thus, when closely examining Cambodia's ALE concept, it becomes clear that several aspects of UNESCO's notion are present but in a different context. The NFE sector provides the programs "Functional- and Post-Literacy", "Re-Entry", "Equivalency", "Income-Generation", and "Quality of Life Improvement", most of which are key domains of ALE.

Furthermore, existing programs often not only target adults but also youths, which resembles the UNESCO's definition of participants. Besides, many CLCs provide classes on vocational skills such as sewing, computer technology, farming and construction, which are skills related to people's everyday lives. Despite DNFE being a key actor in ALE, ALE also takes place in terms of formal education or activities implemented by other stakeholders outside of MoEYS. MoLVT conducts its own TVET programs, while other stakeholders are operating private vocational training centers.

All in all, Cambodia's current ALE conception focuses more on NFE than on seeing ALE as a concept that includes all forms of education, as UNESCO recommends.

*Research Question 3: What roles does ALE play in LLL in Cambodia?*

MoEYS's 2008 Country Report on New Trends and the Present Situation of Adult Learning and Education (p. 7) clearly states that ALE plays a vital role in LLL in Cambodia. To reiterate,

"ALE plays a key role in developing a learning society and for the creation of learning communities, cities, and regions. It fosters a culture of learning throughout life and revitalizes learning in families, communities, and other learning spaces, and in the workplace."

Also, two of DNFE's goals are to (1) ensure that all children, youths, adults, poor people and those with disabilities are able to realize their rights to receiving basic education and LLL; and (2) provide opportunities for youths and adults to access life skills and literacy.

Hence, ALE's role in LLL in Cambodia becomes visible. Further, with the implementation of the 2019 National Policy on Lifelong Learning, Cambodia is taking a significant step towards promoting ALE as a core component of LLL.

*With regards to the five action areas, this study found:*

**Policy:** ALE is embedded in multiple educational policies. However, ALE does not have its own policy yet.

**Governance:** Different ministries are involved in the governance of ALE but mostly work independently. ALE governance is particularly connected to NFE governance.

**Finance:** Information on financing has proven difficult to access. However, MoEYS has little budget for NFE activities. Thus, the same potentially applies to ALE. ALE budgets provided by other stakeholders such as NGOs or private companies exists, but it is not transparent how much budget is exactly allocated for ALE.

**Participation:** The overall trend shows increased participation, although data is unclear due to the multiple stakeholders involved. This situation also limits analysis on ALE's inclusiveness and equity in Cambodia.

**Quality:** There are mechanisms in place for ensuring quality of activities in the framework of ALE such as examinations and certificates. Yet, due to multiple ALE stakeholders involved, there is no standard for mechanisms of quality assurance.

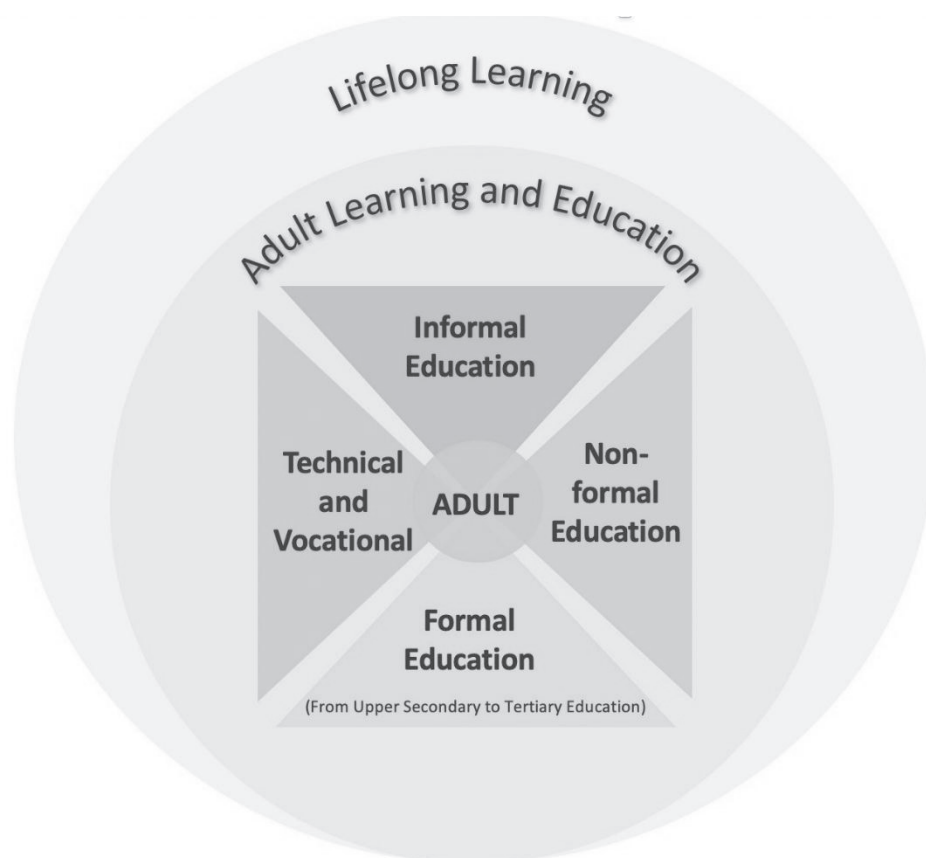
## **Recommendations**

*Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations are put forward:*

1. ALE should not merely be embedded in MoEYS's NFE policies or in MoLVT's TVET policies. Instead, a specific ALE policy shall be established across all sectors of education.
2. Closer collaboration between concerned ministries and all other stakeholders shall be fostered to emphasize the role of ALE within Cambodia's education system.
3. A roadmap with clear responsibilities of each ALE stakeholder shall be designed.

4. More transparency regarding the ALE budget shall be achieved and strategies to increase the budget and its targeted allocation shall be developed.
5. There shall be national standards for different ALE programs to ensure quality and continuous monitoring and evaluation.
6. Comprehensive data on participation and inclusion in all ALE programs shall be collected to meet the needs of target groups and to expand ALE opportunities more effectively.

*Figure 3: Suggestion for integrating ALE into Cambodia's existing educational system*



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# **ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN LAOS**

**BY  
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## Abbreviations

ALE	Adult and Learning Education
CLC	Community Learning Center
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
DNFE	Department of Non-Formal Education
EFA	Education For All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
FED	Faculty of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Indicator
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NFE	Non-Formal Education
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Service
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

## 1. Background of Lao PDR

Lifelong Learning (LLL) promotion is on the agenda of many countries to meet the rising need of keeping abreast of global changes and to develop populations' quality of life. Adult Learning and Education (ALE) is a core component of Lifelong Learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning which aim to ensure that adults participate in their societies and the workforce. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, in their own interests and in those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO 2016). Although the concept of ALE is widely known in many developed countries, it has yet to receive an official status in the legal framework of several Southeast Asian countries.

This paper is based on the definitions and concepts outlined in UNESCO's 2015 Recommendations on ALE, including the broad definition of ALE used there. It describes the results of the study on ALE in Lao PDR by reviewing documents and interviewing key actors and stakeholders in the sector.

### 1. Country context Economic context

During the past two decades, Lao PDR has recorded a very high growth rate. Over the last decade in particular, it has been one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia, recording growth of about 8 percent annually. As a result, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita steadily increased from USD 1,088 in 2010 to USD 2,408 in 2016 (LSB, 2018). The key development goals of the Government are to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2020 and to consolidate middle-income country status by 2030. To do so, economic growth must continue at a high rate. At the same time, the country needs to ensure that its development momentum will not be stalled by a lack of infrastructure, lack of an educated and trained labor force, an ineffective public administration, or inappropriate institutional and governance frameworks (MPI, 2016, p. 22).

## **Socio-cultural and demographic context**

The country had a population of approximately 6.5 million people at the time of the 2015 National Census (LSB, 2015, p. 33). Lao PDR is one of the youngest countries in the world; more than one-third of its population is below the age of 15. It is also a very diverse country with 49 officially recognized ethnic groups (although some studies find that there are over 60 ethnic groups) that fall under four broad language families: the Lao-Tai, the Mon Khmer, the Hmong-Lu Mien and the Chine-Tibet. Such a large pool of ethnic groups brings with it a plethora of cultures, underscoring the importance of culture in the analysis of gender roles and relations (MPI, 2016, p. 19). Ethnic groups, which make up less than half of the population, mainly live in highland areas. Lao PDR has been addressing infrastructure and social gaps between the lowlands and highlands, but the differences are still significant, especially in terms of access to basic public services.

Overall, the social development of Lao PDR has progressed significantly. Life expectancy increased by 19 years between 1985 and 2013; now it is around 66 years. Most of the Human Development Indicators (HDIs) have improved over time, especially those related to education. Literacy rates have also improved over time and continued to rise from 72.70 percent in 2005 to 84.66 percent in 2015 (World Bank, 2020). In recent years, figures have especially increased for women and slightly for men. The primary school enrollment rate has also increased significantly and was 97.3 percent in 2013. Challenges remain, however, at the secondary and higher education levels, as places are limited, especially at university level.

### **1.1 History of education**

It is necessary to examine the historical education context of Lao PDR in order to comprehend the system as an entirety.

**Education within families:** The family is the fundamental unit of the Lao society. Even though it is a small unit, it is very important because it is the starting point of every child's development and education. In the old days, "education" was very different from what we might perceive as education today as there were no schools in Laos. However, learning and teaching processes were still taking place. According to Keophouthong & Ngouay, (2011), education within families can be classified as informal education. It was centered on life skills in response to needs of the family.

For example, parents would take their children to the fields from a young age. When the children grew into adults, they had accumulated skills based on their childhood experiences.

**Education in the temple:** Buddhism arrived in the Lane Xang Kingdom of Laos (Land of a Million Elephants), in the 14th century. From then on, monks' education took place. It reached all regions from the capital city to rural areas inhabited by ethnic minority groups. The strategies of learning from monks were divided into two types: (1) learning from scripts, especially palm leaf manuscripts on traditional self-made paper, wooden boards or bamboo bottles; (2) learning orally in Pali language through ceremonies performed by the monks. Leading monks organized for documents to be translated from Pali to Lao and to be transcribed for general education purposes. Education was targeted at monks and the general public (Keophouthong & Ngouay, 2011).

**Colonial education period:** In 1893, Laos became a French colony. This caused the traditional Buddhist educational system to become less important than the education system introduced by the French, which was targeted at the Lao elite and conducted in French language. The aim of this education system was to 'civilize' the population according to the colonial power's worldview. However, in 1946, only 2 percent of all children over 6 years of age attended school as the French were reluctant to provide education services in rural areas. Kongsy & Bounchanh (2011) state that the French did not intend to support education of the Lao population at large. It was, however, important to the colonialists to develop a Western-influenced identity for Indochinese people. Lao youth from privileged families were sent to France to study in order to build support for the colonial system in Laos. In 1954, the French colonials decided that all Lao people should have access to the educational system to develop themselves and the country. However, this did not benefit the Lao population at large because the implemented education system only focused on a small amount of people who belonged to the royal family or other influential families (Keophouthong Bounyasone & Ngouay Keosada, 2011).

The educational system was offered by the colonial rulers in Laos in two different strands: (1) They maintained the traditional temple schools in modified form by combining the traditions of Buddhist education focusing on moral values and religious teachings with Western science and math. This integration of traditional and Western education was necessary due to monks' resistance towards colonial influence. (2) The other strand was the development of French-Lao

schools in the whole of Indochina. The educational system consisted of primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school (5-4-3 years) (Keophouthong Bounyasone & Ngouay Keosada, 2011). Both lower and upper secondary levels offered were to match the French system; curriculum and textbooks were the same as used in France. Even though the primary schools were slightly different from the French system in terms of content, Lao students began to learn French on their first day of school (Kongsy & Bounchanh, 2011).

**Lao Education after 1975:** Lao PDR gained its independence and declared the country as the Lao People's Democratic Republic on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1975. The Lao government has always had the policy of supporting the rights and benefits of all Lao people. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party established a new educational system following the introduction of the New Economic Model in 1986 which opened the country to international markets and Western donors. This new era of education occurred at the same time as the "World Declaration on Education for All", which evolved into "Education for All" (EFA) and became a global slogan for education (Keophouthong & Ngouay, 2011). Under EFA, investments in education were emphasized and countries were encouraged to increase them to benefit socio-economic development. Specifically, education was put forward as a main intervention to combat poverty. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the general purpose of education is to ensure Lao people are good persons who are loyal to the country and the citizen's democratic regime. The national education system also aims to progress students' learning outcomes and train a skilled labour force (UNESCO, 2011).

## **1.2 Legislation relevant to education**

Article 22 of the **Constitution**, promulgated in 1991 and amended in 2003, states that the education system's purpose is to create good citizens with revolutionary competencies, knowledge and abilities. Primary education is compulsory. The system is meant to develop high quality national education, create opportunities and favorable conditions in education for all people throughout the country, especially people in remote areas, ethnic groups, women and disadvantaged children. Private sector investment is promoted to develop national education in accordance with the laws.

The **Education Law No. 133/AN** was enacted on 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2015 in order to meet the requirements of national socio-economic development. The Education Law reiterates that all

Lao citizens have the right to education without discrimination based on their ethnicity, origin, religion, gender, or social status. The amended version specifies that all individuals and organizations have an obligation to invest in and contribute to education. It also changed the duration of lower secondary education from three to four years. The Law established that (1) the government has the duty to expand secondary education to create conditions for the development of Lao citizens' knowledge and capacity for their occupation or further study; (2) the government has the duty to expand vocational education according to the needs of the labor market and individuals; and (3) the development of vocational education is to be supported by all concerned sectors of the government as well as state-owned and private enterprises (MoES, 2015).

On the basis of the Education Law 2015, the functions of the MoES include, among others:

- Studying and developing the relevant policy framework, strategic plans, action plans, educational development projects, and submitting them to the government for approval
- Drafting laws and regulations related to education
- Elaborating and developing curricula, teaching aids and teaching-learning materials for all grades
- Leading literacy activities
- Teacher training and management
- Leading, monitoring, encouraging, supervising and evaluating all work related to education (MoES, 2015).

The Government of Lao PDR sees education and sports development as well as human resources development as key priorities for national socio-economic development to enable Lao PDR to graduate from its LDC status by 2020 (MoES, 2015, p. 9). With the aim of achieving this goal, reform of the national education system is urgently required for the improvement of educational quality and standards (MoES, 2008, p. 2).

In order to improve the quality of human resource development in Lao PDR and integrate the country into regional and international markets, MoES has the following vision: “By 2030, the whole of the Lao population has equal and equitable access to quality education in order to become good citizens, be disciplined, healthy, knowledgeable, high-skilled and professional,

so they can develop the country sustainably and align with the region and the world” (MoES, 2015). To achieve this vision, MoES needs to focus on several objectives:

- Achieve implementation of compulsory primary education and expand it to include the lower secondary level by ensuring everyone has access to education and can become ready to contribute to socio-economic development.
- Completely eradicate illiteracy across all ethnic groups to improve their living conditions by promoting LLL.
- Promote learning and teaching of basic vocational skills in secondary education, and improve the quality of technical, vocational and higher education for students to attain skills which meet the needs of the labor market.
- Training skilled labor, technicians, professionals and officials in science and modern information technology to meet the needs of socio-economic development.
- Provide skills and basic knowledge to enable people to run family businesses, particularly in remote areas.
- Use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a tool for education, sports management and administration, teaching and learning and improving the quality of education.
- Expand policies and strategies of research and evaluation from central to local levels and use the results of research and evaluation in developing education and sports planning.
- Expand arts and physical education from central to local levels by focusing on training arts and physical education teachers, referees, trainers and sportsmen and provide sports equipment to local communities (MoES, 2015, p. 7).

### **1.3 The contemporary education system**

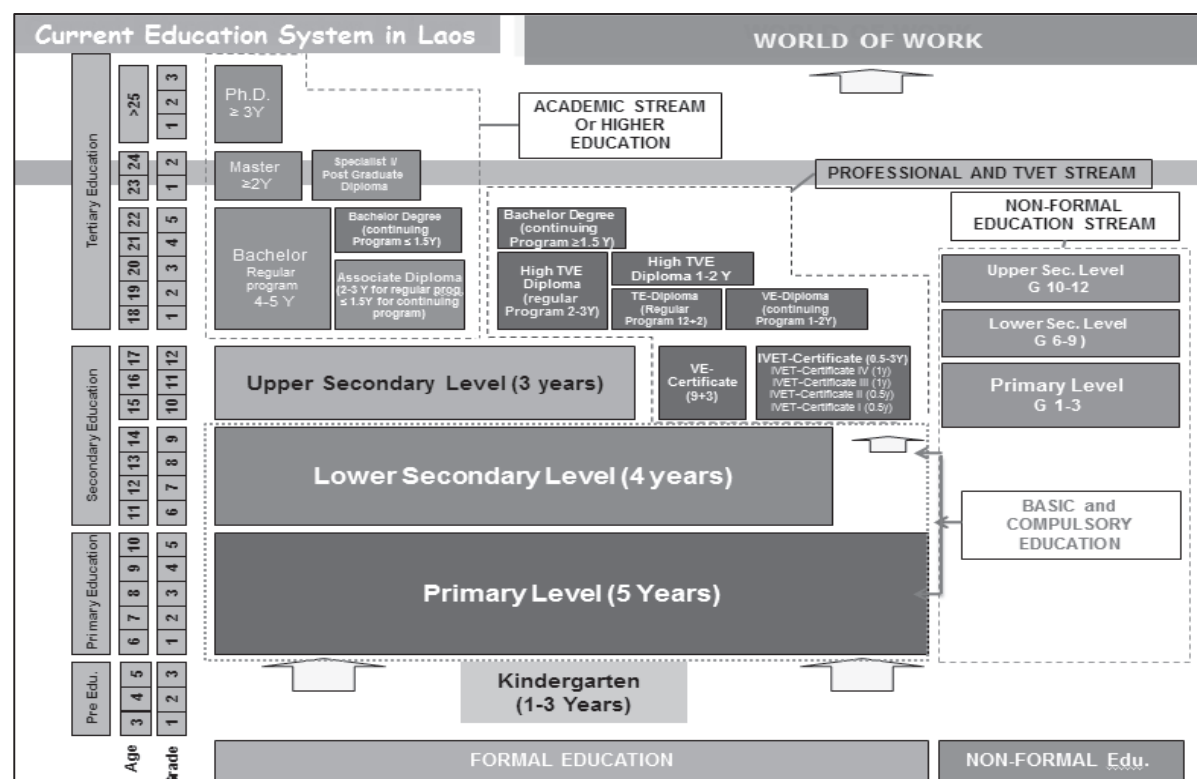
According to the Education Law, the education system is comprised of two systems: formal education and non-formal (including informal) education. Formal education can be categorized as early childhood education, general education, vocational and technical education and higher education.



Early childhood education includes nurseries and kindergartens and receives children from the age of 3 months up to 5 years. The general education system comprises primary and secondary (lower and upper) levels. Primary education consists of 5 years (for children aged 6 to 10 years), 4 years for lower secondary education (children aged 11 to 14 years) and 3 years for upper secondary (children aged 15 to 17 years). The government announced in 2015 that grades 1 to 9 (primary and lower secondary levels) are basic education and compulsory (MoES, 2016).

All vocational programs at the upper secondary level last 3 years. The certificate awarded to those who graduate is a Vocational Certificate (or Lower Diploma). For those who complete the upper secondary level, they can continue in either: (i) Technical College with a duration of 2 or 3 years to receive a Middle Diploma certificate; or (ii) Higher Diploma (2 or 3 years); or (iii) Bachelor's degree which takes 4 or 5 years to attain. The Lao education system also provides Master's and doctorate levels which are only available at Universities at present (MoES, 2016).

Figure 1: Education system in Lao PDR



#### **1.4 Educational finance**

Public financing mechanisms of the Government of Lao PDR are guided by the Amended Law of the State Budget that was adopted by the National Assembly on 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2006. The Budget Law categorizes expenditure into sectors and programs and provides a mandate to the National Assembly to approve the national budget for expenditures. Once the education budget is approved by the National Assembly, the Ministry of Finance is responsible for providing the funds allocated to the education sector for implementation according to the financial law and regulations (MoES, 2016, pp. 18-19).

According to the Education and Sports Sector Performance Annual Report and Development Plan, in 2018, the Ministry of Finance approved the total budget for the education sector at 14.02 percent of total government expenditure, equivalent to 2.7 percent of GDP. In the total approved education budget, salaries and allowances cover 62 percent, while the non-wage recurrent budget covers 20 percent and investment constitutes 18 percent (MoES, 2018).

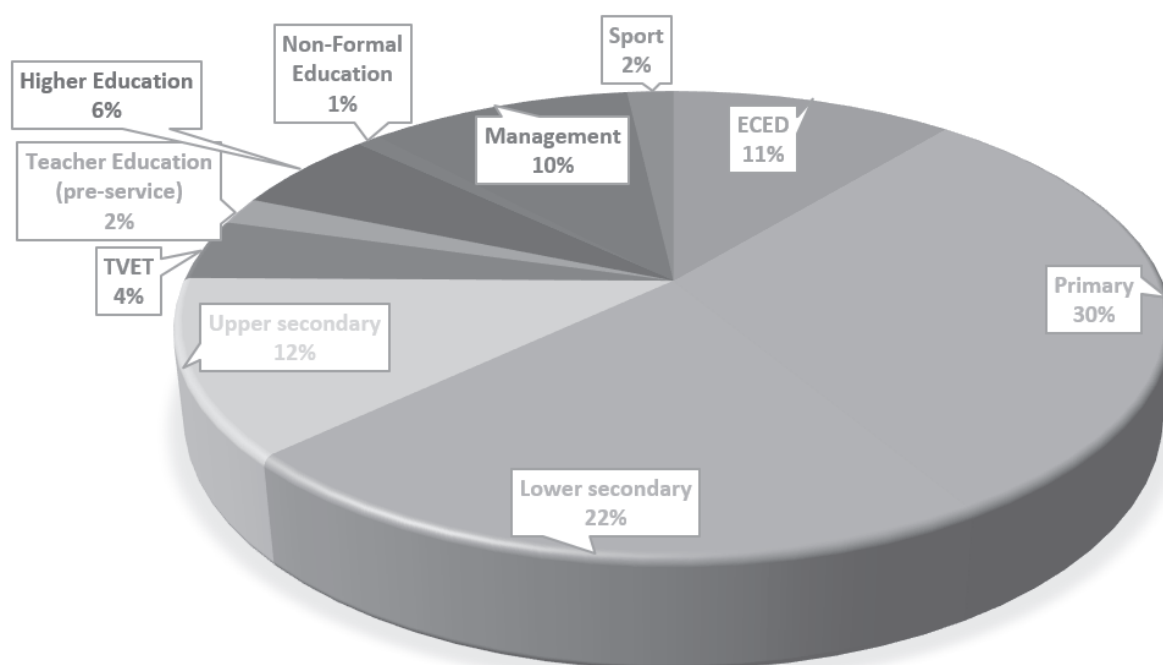
The financing mechanisms are very important for an effective and efficient development of the education sector. Financing mechanisms determine how the resources will reach the financing units. The financing mechanisms of the education sector in Lao PDR can be classified in three types: (1) public financing mechanisms; (2) external financing mechanisms; and (3) private financing mechanisms (MoES, 2016, p. 18).

All public finance in the education sector is spent by education institutions, i.e. pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, teacher training, vocational and technical training, higher education and Non-Formal Education (NFE) institutions. In addition, a significant amount of public funding is spent on administration. Government decides allocation of resources to education levels (pre-education, primary education, lower secondary, upper secondary, teacher training, vocational and technical, higher and Non-Formal Education) depending on enrollment rates and existing challenges within education levels. Thus, primary and lower secondary education levels receive a large portion of the education budget, and the smallest share is allocated to NFE. Detailed reasons for NFE's low budget are unclear. It can be assumed that with rising basic education levels NFE enrollment rates are decreasing. Further explanations for a low NFE enrollment rate are related to culture, traditions and livelihoods. The high rate of dropping out of the formal system after lower secondary level, and the related

decreased enrollment rate in subsequent levels, may partly explain funding allocation decisions. Numbers of enrollment in the non-formal education sub-sector are not transparent. Systematic and quality statistical information on non-formal education does not exist (MoES, 2018, p. 28). It can be assumed, however, that the numbers of enrollment are far lower than those from the formal education sub-sector.

In addition to sub-sector specific budget allocation, the government also spends on general administration costs cutting across all sectors (UNESCO/IIEP, 2016). Figure 2 shows that NFE in Laos, in comparison to other education sub-sectors has not been fully accepted by the government and society yet. The concept is still developing and until now there is little understanding for non-formal education. Furthermore, the focus of development partners is mostly directed towards the primary and secondary education levels. NFE is generally not regarded as very important.

Figure 2: Sub-sector shares of financing requirements (percent) in 2019/2020 as per Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (2016-2020) data (MoES, 2015)



## 2. The role of Non-Formal Education in Adult Learning and Education

In Lao PDR, all educational activities of adults who have already finished their general education, who are mature-age students, who previously lacked the opportunity to study or could not continue their studies in formal education, or who prefer to train professional skills, are considered NFE activities. This study, however, focuses on ALE. Therefore, the differences between ALE and NFE need to be defined. In the Lao context, **Non-Formal Education** is defined as educational activities which are conducted outside of formal school, and which focus on target groups such as drop-out or out-of-school youth in rural and remote areas where there are no primary schools, or adults who did not complete their formal education. The NFE system also offers learning opportunities for adults to obtain knowledge and skills for improving their income generation activities (Bounkhong, 2003). **Adult Learning and Education** is a core component of Lifelong Learning. ALE comprises all forms of education and learning which aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. Adult learning and education incorporates all kinds of educational activities, including formal, non-formal and informal education for those who are 15 years and older. With regards to the terminology, Non-Formal Education is commonly used in Lao PDR while ALE is fairly unknown as a concept.

### 2.1 Non-Formal Education in Lao PDR

The NFE system in Lao PDR offers literacy programs and formal education equivalency programs for the following target groups, including people with disabilities: (1) Out-of-school and drop-out children aged 6 to 14 years in rural and remote areas where there are no primary schools; (2) youth and adults aged 15 to 45 years; and (3) youth and adults aged 15 to 35 years who have not completed lower and/or upper secondary education (MoES, 2000). NFE also provides basic vocational training for the disadvantaged and people with low incomes.

The NFE system has a specific focus on vulnerable target groups such as the poor, women, and ethnic minorities. Lao PDR is still suffering from the legacies of the civil war (1962 to 1975) and the Secret War (1964 to 1975). During and in the years following the war, many people lacked the opportunity to access education, particularly women and ethnic minorities in remote areas, government employees, military personnel and police (MoES, 2000).

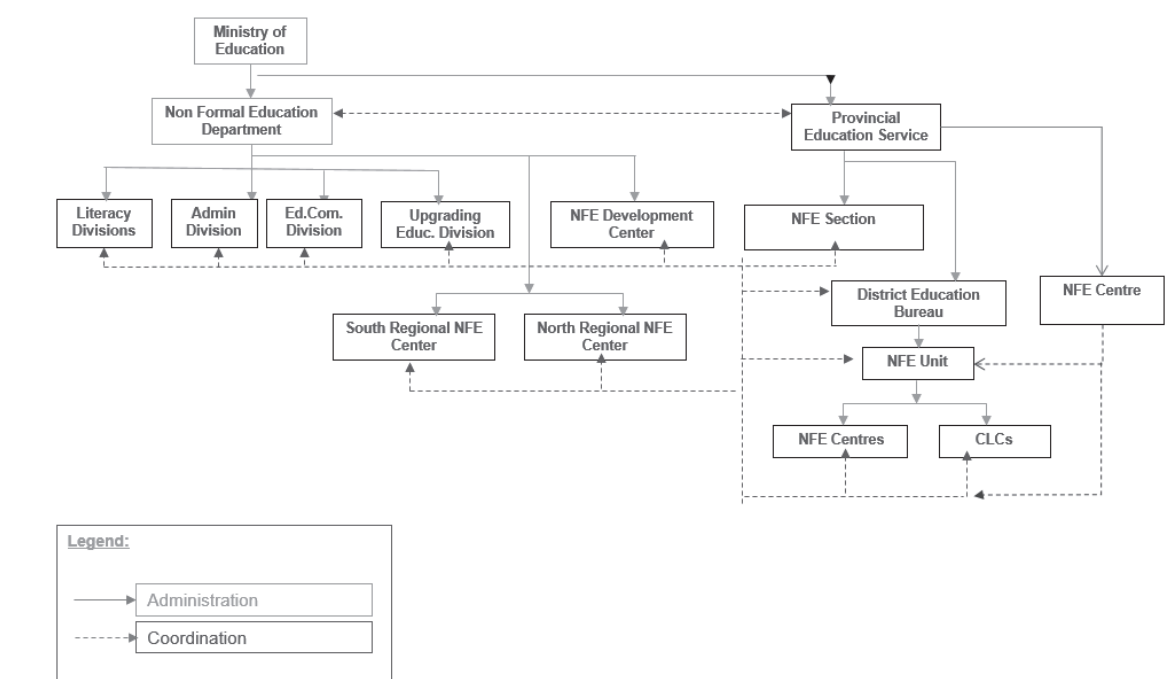
One of Non-Formal Education's objectives is to create opportunities for the target groups mentioned above to receive and complete primary education and continue their studies at

secondary education level within the formal education system. During the implementation of the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2011 to 2015, Non-Formal Education resulted in many achievements such as the increase of the literacy rate in several age groups. MoES prioritises reintegrating dropouts into the formal education system and increased the budget for curriculum development, textbook production and financial support to volunteer teachers. Besides, MoES has provided mobile teachers to teach 6 to 14-year-old children in remote areas. Providing lower secondary and upper secondary equivalency programs is also on the agenda. MoES further offered basic vocational skills trainings to youths and adults in remote areas in fields such as chicken raising, fish cultivation, mushroom growing, cooking, carpentry, etc.

With regards to the actors in Non-Formal Education (Figure 3), MoES is situated at the macro level and supervises the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE). The department consists of four divisions with their own roles and mandates, and the administrative lines connect to the provincial services and district bureaus. There are also two regional NFE centers, one in the south (Pakse) and one in the north of the country (Luang Prabang). At the micro level, there are NFE sections within the Province Education and Sports Services (PESS), and NFE units in the District Education and Sports Bureaus (DESB). NFE units in DESBs support Community Learning Centers (CLC) at village level in coordinating and implementing activities, literacy programs, equivalency programs and vocational education.

Figure 3: Administrative structure of Non-Formal Education in Lao PDR

### Administrative Structure of NFE



Regarding financing, the Non-Formal Education sub-sector was allocated only 1 percent of the total education budget in 2014. The main drivers of non-formal expenditure were allowances for volunteers, training, teaching and learning materials and investment. The budget requirements to implement the targets and strategies for Non-Formal Education activities from 2016 to 2020 are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Budget requirements for Non-Formal Education activities, 2016 to 2020 (million kip)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Allowances for volunteers	9,658	9,948	10,246	10,554	10,870
Training	906	906	906	906	906
Teaching and learning materials	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
<b>Total recurrent</b>	<b>11,564</b>	<b>11,854</b>	<b>12,153</b>	<b>12,460</b>	<b>12,777</b>
Construction	8,446	8,555	8,665	8,774	8,884
<b>Total investment</b>	<b>8,446</b>	<b>8,555</b>	<b>8,665</b>	<b>8,774</b>	<b>8,884</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>20,010</b>	<b>20,409</b>	<b>20,817</b>	<b>21,234</b>	<b>21,661</b>

## **2.2 Non-Formal Education as a component of ALE**

As stated by the Department of Non-Formal Education in an interview conducted for this study, their understanding of ALE is that all educational activities within formal, non-formal and informal education are aimed at promoting Lifelong Learning. Even though they are not yet referred to as ALE explicitly in Lao PDR, all these activities are indeed ALE-related. This includes trainings by organizations in the public, private and non-governmental sectors for human resource development. DNFE strongly emphasizes that all learning and education activities of people who are 15 years old and above are Adult Learning and Education activities.

Adult Learning and Education is regularly and continuously implemented in Lao PDR, but most people are not familiar with the concepts of ALE or LLL and thus do not recognize activities as ALE-relevant. Most people associate NFE activities with income generation as NFE trainings are practically oriented and not taught in schools. People, though, recognize Lenin's slogan "learnt, learn again and learn forever". However, in Lao PDR, "learning" is still commonly associated with formal education and learning in school. Yet, people learn and improve their skills in their daily lives, for example when doing farm work. In school, teachers also do not convey a meaningful sense of learning or Lifelong Learning to their students as they mainly focus on teaching textbook contents.

Another point raised in the DNFE interview concluded that ALE creates opportunities encouraging adults to improve their skills and obtain education. Through better education and skill development, they can gain more prestige, responsibility and status in social, familial and work-related areas. Adults can use various sources to learn and do so in different ways, whereas children in the current formal education system are a lot more limited in their learning possibilities. Therefore, it is essential to provide adults with awareness for and opportunities to learn. Generally, in Lao PDR, the promotion of Adult Learning and Education has its limitations. The methods and the equipment to teach adults do not meet the qualitative needs. The whole didactic for teaching adults is nearly identically adapted from the structures of teaching children and teenagers, even though adults need different methods and stimuli to learn.

In conclusion, NFE is one component of Adult Learning and Education as it offers learning opportunities – literacy, vocational skills and equivalency programs – to adults. ALE should

be widely recognized as encompassing all learning and education activities including formal, non-formal and informal education towards Lifelong Learning for people who are 15 years old and above.

### **2.3 Concept of Lifelong Learning in Lao PDR**

In contrast to ALE, LLL is an established concept in Lao PDR. The Education Law 2015 states that Lifelong Learning encompasses formal, non-formal and informal education activities which shape the knowledge economy and are relevant to development needs. LLL includes all target groups, men and women (Chapter 2, Section 2, Article 26). However, in terms of language, both non-formal and informal education are translated to Lao language as “learning outside of school”. Consequently, the understanding of Lifelong Learning is not clear for society as well as educators.

Currently, MoES is developing a decree on Lifelong Learning. The decree’s objective is to define the regulations on administration and organization of Lifelong Learning in Laos. The decree aims to ensure quality and efficiency of teaching and learning as well as research and academic services in formal and Non-Formal Educational institutes and public and private institutes. These activities should meet the country’s socio-economic development needs.

The government’s existing policy on Lifelong Learning states that government has the duty to promote Lifelong Learning to all Lao people. They should be able to access Lifelong Learning through formal and Non-Formal Education based on their individual capacities and conditions. Lifelong Learning is further mentioned in the 8<sup>th</sup> Socio-Economic Development Plan, the Higher Education Act, the Technology and Vocational Professional Law and the ESDP.

In summary, LLL and ALE include a vast array of educational and learning activities, and both concepts are already actively implemented in Lao PDR. However, especially ALE as a concept is not known. Educational stakeholders’ and the general public’s awareness need to be raised on ALE including all forms of education and learning, rather than solely focusing on formal education and learning in school.



### **3. Key Domains of Adult Learning and Education in Lao PDR**

This study examined the current state of ALE in Lao PDR within three key domains: (1) literacy and basic skills; (2) continuing education and vocational skills; and (3) liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills. Relevant key domains of ALE in Lao PDR are mainly literacy and basic education as well as continuing education and vocational skills while liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills are less relevant in the Lao context. Available information and data on the latter domains are limited. Therefore, the following analysis focuses mainly on literacy, basic education, continuing education and vocational skills. Analysis is structured along five transversal areas: policy, governance, financing, participation and quality.

#### **3.1 Policies**

The Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the Government of Lao operate according to their "Three Builds" (Sam Sang) policy: (1) Build provinces as strategic units; (2) Build districts as comprehensive and strong units; and (3) Build villages as development units. The Sam Sang policy is the government's administrative mechanism for decentralization from central to local level and ensuring leadership of the Party at all stages. Following the idea of Sam Sang, the district development fund mechanism helps to build the capacities of local authorities for better public administration and service delivery. Therefore, the policy assists to make services and governance smoother and allows capacity building as well as integrated rural development. Through investment grants, a variety of projects were implemented in 53 of 148 districts in Laos, as of 2017 (UNCDF 2017).

The Sam Sang policy aims to lead local socio-economic development towards improving all Lao people's living conditions and eliminating poverty, especially in remote areas. The Sam Sang mechanism offers opportunities for all development partners and entrepreneurs to participate in and contribute to the local community, district, province and national development, by giving them a framework for action. Adult Learning and Education aligns with the Sam Sang policy as their goals overlap. ALE supports the education of adults on basic and continuing education as well as community education, vocational and citizenship skills, with the goal of improving people's opportunities and giving them a chance to enhance their living conditions.

Regarding **literacy and basic education** in Laos, the Education Law (Chapter 2, Section 2, Articles 19ff) manifests details of ALE activities in its section on NFE. It states that NFE, similar to formal education, is an educational instruction with contents and curriculum, yet learning times and methods are adapted to the learners' needs and capacities. Further articles position illiteracy eradication and equivalency programs within NFE, with different levels and duration. NFE courses are conducted at NFE Regional Centers, NFE Provincial or District Centers and CLCs. Focus groups of NFE are out-of-school students from 6 to 14 years of age and mature age students between 15 and 40 years of age.

Policies on **continuing education and vocational skills** aim to provide basic vocational skills trainings to communities in order to improve their quality of life, promote community development and LLL, and contribute to poverty reduction. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have influenced the Lao Government in policymaking which has particularly manifested in the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025. The plan emphasizes the importance of improving the quality of continuing education and vocational skills trainings in all forms of Adult Learning and Education activities (formal, non-formal and informal education). This is in line with SDG 4: "To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote Lifelong Learning opportunities for all", and particularly sub-goals 4.4 and 4.5: "By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship" and "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations".

In relation to **liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills**, Lao's policies on mass organizations such as the Lao Women's Union, Lao Youth Union and Lao Labor Union touch upon this domain. Firstly, the Lao Women's Union defines the roles and responsibilities of women of 15 years and older. They are to be good citizens, raise good families, and participate in the Women Union's activities. Secondly, the Lao Youth Union prescribes the role of youth as upholding moral values, patriotism, preserving and enhancing culture and driving forward the socio-economic development of the country. Lastly, the Labor Union is to contribute to the nation's productivity and development.

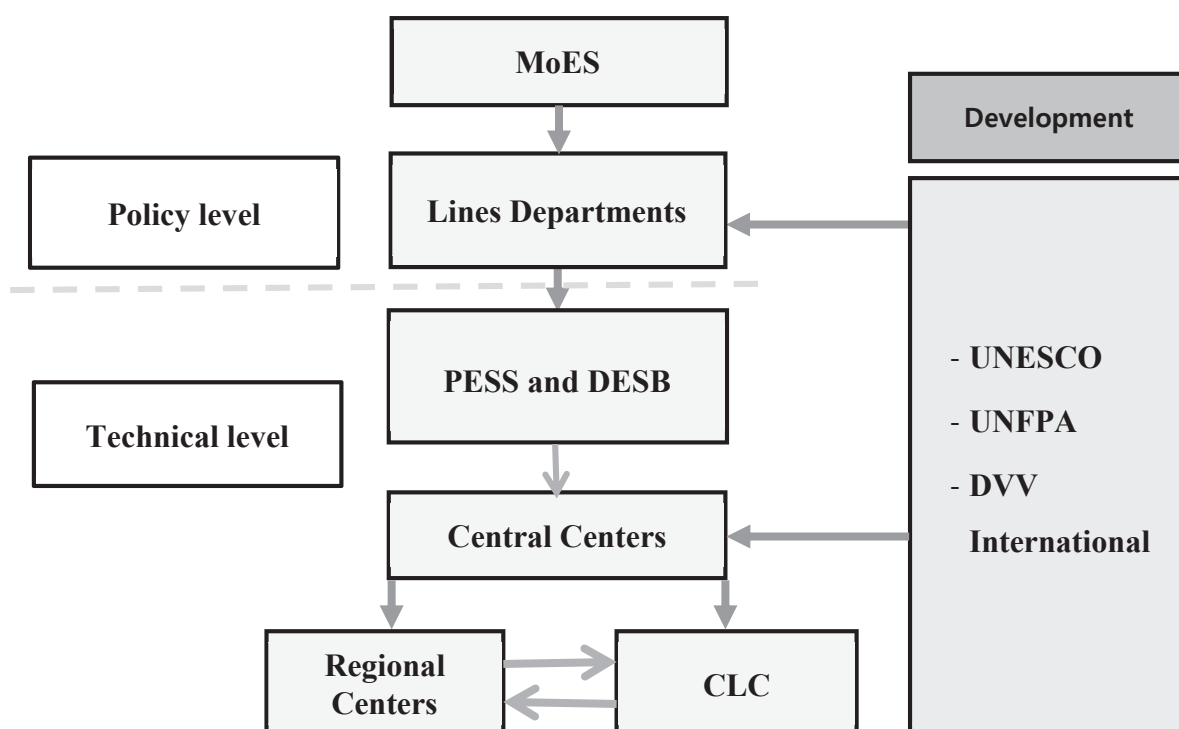
### 3.2 Governance

In the domains of literacy and basic education and continuing education and vocational skills, NFE, technical and vocational education and higher education play key roles to increase adult literacy rates and promote skill development, self-employment and participation in income-generating activities. With the purpose of implementing **literacy and basic education** programs, DNFE at the central level bears the main responsibility for governance in NFE. Other actors are international organizations such as UNESCO, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and DVV International who work with counterparts from local, district, provincial, national, and regional levels as well as universities. They focus on projects in youth and adult education for fostering Lifelong Learning, literacy and basic education. At the sub-national level, the Non-Formal Education Development Center (NFEDC) presents many opportunities for ALE and NFE. It is responsible for the preparation of curricula and the creation of teaching and learning materials in the non-formal sector. At community level, CLCs are local educational institutions outside the formal education system which are usually set up and managed by local people. They provide various learning opportunities for community development and the improvement of people's quality of life.

Actors within **continuing education and vocational skills** have a lot of overlap with the NFE sector. NFE, mass organizations, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Vocational Development Institute) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes provide governance in this domain.

Overall, ALE governance regarding the domains of literacy and basic education, and continuing education and vocational skills is conducted through a decentralized system in which the policy level supervises the technical level (see Figure 4). This process is relatively transparent: Actors at technical level regularly report to the policy level against a range of indicators. Development partners produce publications such as newsletters and reports. However, governance related to **liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills** lies with mass organizations, and information here is difficult to access.

Figure 4: Structure of Non-Formal Education actors



### 3.3 Financing

The Government of Lao and development partners have high expectations with regards to improvements in literacy rates and basic education outcomes, and continuing and vocational skills activities. However, financial constraints are a barrier to implementing education activities. For example, in 2018, the Ministry of Finance approved the total budget for the education and sports sector at 14.02 percent of total government expenditure, equivalent to 2.7 percent of GDP (see 1.5 Educational finance). The government distributes these financial resources to education levels (pre-education, primary education, lower secondary, upper secondary, teacher training, vocational and technical education, higher and Non-Formal Education) dependent on enrollment numbers and existing challenges. In addition, the government spends on general administration costs which cut across all sectors.

The NFE, higher education and TVET sub-sectors respectively received only 1.3 percent, 4 percent and 6 percent of the total education budget (2019/2020; see Figure 2). The authors analyzed how sub-sector education spending turned out with relation to the domain of literacy, basic education, continuing education and vocational skills (NFE, higher education and TVET). In 2014, these sub-sectors spent 71.40 percent of the total expenditure on teaching staff. Capital investment and teaching and learning materials expenditure was 15.50 percent

and 8.96 percent, respectively. No significant expenditure was incurred by non-teaching staff, scholarships and support to families, and boarding, meals, health and transport.

Due to their low shares within the total education budget, the allocation to the NFE, higher education and TVET sub-sectors – the ALE-relevant sub-sectors – should be increased in order to achieve targets related to literacy and basic education, and continuing education and vocational skills. Data on financial details with regards to the liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills domain is not available.

### 3.4 Participation

With regards to **literacy and basic education**, the Education and Sports Sector Performance Annual Report 2017-2018 and Development Plan for 2018-2019 reports on the achievements of providing equitable access to the equivalency program for primary education. In 15 provinces, equivalency opportunities for 6 to 14-year-old children in remote areas were provided. They would otherwise not have the opportunity to go to school due to a lack of institutions in their locations. From a total of 15,000 children targeted by the Development Plan, 4,819 participated in equivalency programs, including a total of 2,131 girls. Thus, only 32 percent of the targeted number was achieved, which was significantly less than expected. One reason for this low participation number could lie in the target group's remote locations and related difficulties of accessing equivalency program venues (MoES, 2016). Equivalency programs are also provided to youth and adults in the 15 to 40 years old bracket. This target group is either illiterate, dropped out from school before completion or is otherwise educationally disadvantaged. In this group, 27,597 people participated in programs of which 14,884 were women and girls (54 percent of the participants), therefore achieving 92% of the Development Plan's original target of 30,000 people.

In **continuing education** and the lower secondary education equivalency program, the target group are the 15 to 30-year-olds, with 19,425 people participating in 2018/2019, of which 8,966 were women. The Development Plan targeted 30,000 people, but only 65 percent (19,425) were reached. Reasons for failing the goal are manifold. For instance, not everyone in the targeted group wanted to participate in the learning program due to their limited financial resources and opportunity costs related to spending their time learning instead of working. Furthermore, the local authorities in some districts could not promote non-formal education sufficiently, and therefore they were unable to motivate the target group to participate (MoES, 2018, p. 28).

The upper secondary equivalency program was also provided to government staff, soldiers, and police officers. In total, 4,600 people enrolled, including 1,391 women, which constitutes 30 percent, precisely meeting the Development Plan's target. There were 2,926 people who enrolled in **vocational trainings** of which 1,360 were women, overall constituting 46 percent of the target. The Development Plan had set a target of 73 percent, however. For vocational training, the most popular courses were in the areas of agriculture and cooking, for which 995 and 466 people enrolled, respectively. Basic vocational training is also provided to people with disabilities, but data here is unavailable.

In the academic year 2017 to 2018, MoES provided scholarships to talented, marginalized university students at 20 percent of the total enrollment rate. The other 80 percent of students had to pass the entrance exam and pay tuition fees. There were 11,674 students enrolled at the four public universities under MoES. This accounts for a total of 46,696 students studying at the universities.

With regards to vocational skills, in the academic year 2017/2018, there were 90 public and private educational institutions under the supervision of the Department of TVET. These institutions were attended by 62,793 students (29,430 women) who were instructed by 4,628 teachers. These numbers show an increase in enrollment rates of 18.5 percent. Most private TVET institutions provide business administration, foreign language and IT courses. In terms of **liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills**, no data on participation is available.

### Quality

There are several actors involved in quality assurance and improvement of **literacy and basic education** in Laos. Non-Formal Education Centers, DNFE, the Research Institute for Education Sciences, and the Education Standards and Quality Assurance Center have improved curricula, edited and revised textbooks and teachers' guidebooks for illiteracy eradication and the equivalency program (Levels 1 to 3). At the same time, textbooks and teachers' guidebooks for the upper secondary equivalent program (up to Grade 12), have been developed in accordance with a new curriculum approved by MoES in 2015.

Regarding **continuing education**, universities have also focused on curriculum development, scientific research, technical services and quality assurance. They have developed a national higher education qualification framework and guidelines for teachers' recruitment, and commenced the introduction of ICT in learning and education management systems. Some first degrees in English language have also been approved and introduced.

Regarding **vocational skills**, TVET curriculums at different levels have been developed for electronics, mechanical engineering and civil engineering. A training guideline for directors of TVET institutions has also been developed. The Education Quality Assurance Center, an office under MoES' oversight which is responsible for assessing quality assurance in each department, is directly supervised by ministers. It is conducting external assessments of 8 technical and vocational schools in Khammouane, Savannakhet, Champasak, Luang Prabang, Xayaboury, Saravane, Sekong and Attapeu Provinces. Each sub-sector has their own Education Quality Assurance unit. The TVET Quality Assurance units train TVET staff on module development and develop professional standards as well as national curriculum standards. For basic vocational training, the curricula on cooking and carpentry have been developed for certificate levels

1 and 2. Information on quality of liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills is inaccessible.

### Roles of universities in promoting ALE

The universities' role is to support Laos' development in a suitable, efficient and equitable manner. It includes to create and provide training and thus contribute to the development of the country's human resources. Students are to receive training to become academics, administrators or researchers equipped with in-depth knowledge, skills, expertise, and an ability to innovate. Universities also have the mandate to conduct and promote research alongside the regular curriculum to support the country's economic and social development. Lastly, they are expected to disseminate research findings and provide academic and technical services to society, and to preserve and expand the arts, culture and traditions.

Laos has five universities which are all public education institutes. Four of them, National University of Laos, Suphanuvong, Savannakhet and Champasak University, belong to MoES,



and the University of Health Sciences is supervised by the Ministry of Health. They provide both formal and Non-Formal Education. Students who graduated from the academic stream in general education can access formal education degrees at universities. NFE in universities refers to short and long-term professional training as well as dissemination of research in seminars, workshops and symposiums. Both formal and Non-Formal Education at university level are provided for adult learners. For instance, the Faculty of Education (FED) at the National University of Laos in Vientiane provides teacher training for those who would like to learn about methodologies of pedagogy.

FED is one of Laos' institutes promoting Adult Learning and Education. The department is cooperating with DVV International on a variety of activities. Firstly, FED has integrated the concept of Lifelong Learning into the curriculum of future teachers. Students are introduced to the concept of LLL and learn about adult learning theory, communication and teamwork, andragogy and planning as well as implementation and evaluation. Moreover, FED is evaluating students' satisfaction with the new Lifelong Learning curriculum content and is conducting needs analyses at other public universities on LLL promotion. Further ALE activities with DVV International support at FED are the provision of soft skills trainings for FED staff and external lecturers in order to reinforce teaching personnel's skills in and knowledge of interpersonal and intrapersonal working. FED is also cooperating with Chulalongkorn University's Department of Lifelong Education. The departments exchange their research results and conduct joint trainings on LLL. Lastly, FED students are encouraged to join an internship program with DVV International-supported CLCs in remote areas. Recommendations to strengthen the role of Adult Learning and Education in Lao PDR

## Policy

The Government of Laos should invest in efforts to promote LLL and to improve literacy skills through CLCs. CLCs are also a suitable venue for equivalency programs. The mobile teachers program should also receive stronger support as it provides LLL opportunities for remote out-of-school or drop-out children and mature age students.

In policy design, the Government of Laos should consider the needs of adults who have family and work responsibilities, i.e. policies should accommodate these needs and promote continuing and lifelong education among those target groups.



The Government of Laos should continue to provide basic vocational skills trainings for people in Sam Sang villages and in other rural areas to enhance ALE opportunities.

### Governance

The government should consider and make use of bottom-up and cross-sector approaches in educational governance, i.e. create synergies between policies on education, science and technology, family, employment, industrial and economic development, migration and integration, citizenship, social welfare and public finance. For instance, in providing vocational skills, Lao Youth Union, Lao Women's Union and CLCs (under MoES) should collaborate to conduct training courses.

### Finance

Increased financial means are needed to address the needs of adult learners and of the large number of children, youth and adults who remain illiterate. All youth and adults, especially girls and women, should be provided with opportunities to achieve relevant literacy and numeracy proficiency levels as well as life skills to be able to access decent work. Allocation of budgets across education sub-sectors should be more balanced. Budgets should also match planned activities in order to meet identified needs.

### Participation

All age groups, including adults, should have opportunities to learn and continue learning. Starting from birth, Lifelong Learning for all should be embedded in educational systems in all settings and at all levels of education through institutional strategies and policies, adequately resourced programs, and robust partnerships at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Databases regarding integration of life skills and LLL into educational programs should be updated. Some information in the Education Management Information System (EMIS) is insufficient and incomplete. EMIS is an education data source for international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF. EMIS is under MoES management. Especially data on NFE, e.g. percentage of NFE students who complete their courses, or number of former NFE students enrolling in the formal system, is unclear. Only a few indicators can currently be

used to measure the achievements of NFE and the success of CLCs. According to the ESDP 2021-2025, EMIS will be used for NFE in the near future.

### Quality

To ensure the quality of ALE, it is key to provide multiple and flexible learning pathways as well as entry and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels. Links between formal and non-formal structures such as recognition, validation and accreditation of competencies acquired through NFE and informal education need to be strengthened. Equitable access to ALE should also be ensured by encouraging learners to make use of quality technical and vocational education and training as well as of higher education and research opportunities. Due attention needs to be paid to ensure the quality of these courses.

ALE quality indicators should be equivalent to formal education indicators. Literacy and basic education programs should improve their quality by focusing on skills that can be used in daily life.

Learning courses are needed to continue to provide secondary education upgrading programs focusing on quality.

Learning courses are needed to improve the quality of teaching through improving and developing curriculum and teaching-learning materials to meet target groups' real needs. Teachers and administrators of NFE Centers need to be supported to improve their skills. The NFE M&E system at provincial and district level, as well as for NFE Centers, needs to be improved.

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# **ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN VIETNAM**

**BY  
SEAMEO REGIONAL CENTRE  
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
VIETNAM**



## Abbreviations

ALE	Adult Learning and Education
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEC	Continuing Education Centre
CELLL	Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning
CEMA	Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs
CLC	Community Learning Centre
DOCE	Department of Continuing Education, Ministry of Education and Training
DOET	Department of Education and Training, Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam
FLIC	Foreign Languages and Informatics Centre
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRALE	Global Report on Adult Learning and Education
GSO	Vietnam General Statistics Office
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NFE	Non-Formal Education
OER	Open Education Resources
RVA	Recognition, Validation and Accreditation
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VALP	Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion
VETA	Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Agency
VFF	Vietnam Fatherland Front
VGCL	Vietnam General Confederation of Labour
VGCL	Vietnam General Confederation of Labour
VOV	Voice of Vietnam
VTV	Vietnam Television

## **1. Background on Vietnam**

### **1.1. General information**

Vietnam is a medium-sized country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community, with an area of 331,000 km<sup>2</sup>, bordered by China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, and the East Sea to the east and south. The country regained independence in 1945 but then experienced warfare and division until it was unified in 1975. The country has remained politically stable since, but only took a significant socio-economic leap after the Reform in 1986, which aimed to transition the economic system from a centrally planned to a socialist-oriented market economy. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate averaged 6.28 per cent from 2000 to 2018 (Trading Economics). Year 2018 marked a record GDP growth of 7.08 per cent since 2008 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam).

Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups, of which 53 are minorities with a total population of 13.4 million people, accounting for 14.6 per cent of the country's population (Tin Tức). The ethnic majority group are the Kinh who speak Vietnamese, the country's official language.

Vietnam has made remarkable progress in terms of human development. In 2007, the Human Capital Index<sup>4</sup> value for Vietnam ranked 105 out of 177 countries. Ten years later, the country rose to rank 48 out of 157 countries measured (World Bank, 2018a).

### **1.2. Vietnam's education system**

The role of education for national development was recognised early. President Ho Chi Minh, after the country regained independence in 1945, immediately initiated learning movements among all Vietnamese to fight illiteracy. Ninety-five per cent of the population was illiterate at the time, which was then conceptualised as them not being able to read and write.

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<sup>4</sup> The World Economic Forum Human Capital Index is a set of indicators and measures that track the state of human capital development in countries around the world. It is based on four pillars: education, health, employment, and those factors that facilitate development of the first three.

Ever since, a large number of policies, laws, government decrees, prime ministerial decisions, and ministry circulars have been issued, with the common aim of raising people's intellectual levels and ensuring equal access to education. The constitution of 1946 stipulates that primary education is compulsory and free (Vietnam National Assembly, 1946, Article 15). The 2005 Education Law provides in Article 10 that "all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, sex, family background and social standing should have equal access to learning opportunities" (Vietnam National Assembly, 2005).

The current Vietnamese education system follows a 5-4-3 structure, with five years of primary, four years of lower secondary and three years of higher secondary school. Students can choose to continue their studies in higher education upon successful completion of upper secondary school. The country is striving to achieve universalisation of primary and lower secondary education, and to increase national literacy rates to 98% for the age bracket of 15 to 60 years, and to 99% for the 15 to 35-year-olds by 2020 (Prime Minister, 2013).

Education is governed primarily by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Other responsible government bodies are the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Information and Communication and the Ministry of Planning and Investment. Among these other bodies, MOLISA has the most significant role as it is responsible for vocational training.

Another key stakeholder is the government-established Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion (VALP) based on the Prime Minister Decision 122/TTg in 1996 to counteract the alarming deterioration of educational quality and quantity at the time. Over the years, the association has promoted learning among Vietnamese through various activities. Their most remarkable achievements are raising funds for learning and education activities, and disseminating knowledge via VALP's newspaper (Knowledge-for-the-People Newspaper, *Dân Trí*) and journal (Teaching and Learning Today Journal, *Đạy và học Ngày nay*). The association also collaborates with the Vietnam Women's Union, the Communist Youth Union, the Farmers' Union and other organisations established by the government, organising learning activities that raise people's awareness of good health, gender equality, environmental preservation, and good farming techniques.



VALP is the founder of Community Learning Centres in Vietnam, adopting the model put forward by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and modifying it to suit the cultural and social context of Vietnam. Fig. 1 illustrates the current Vietnamese education system as approved by the Prime Minister in 2016. The black arrows indicate upward transition and the grey ones show horizontal transition while dotted arrows designate students' entry points into the workforce.

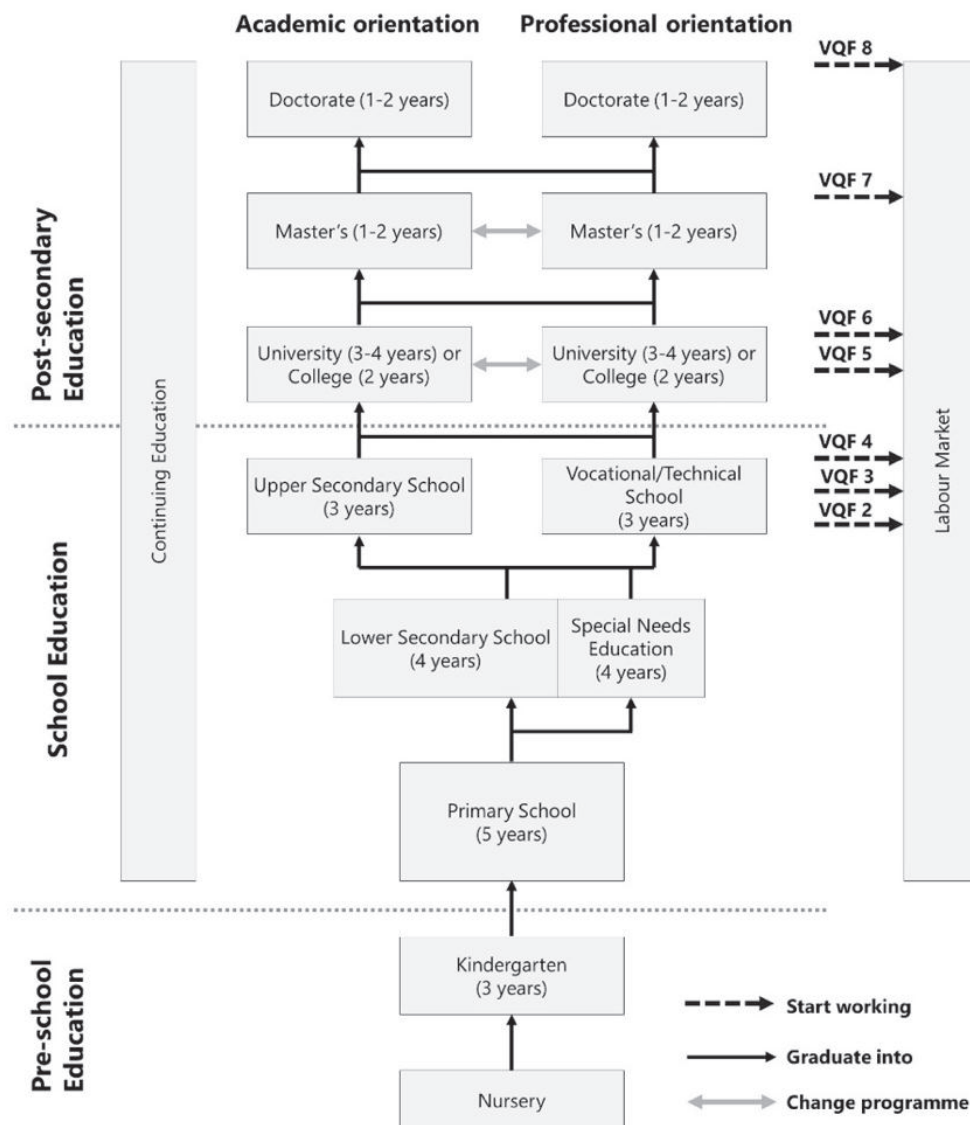


Fig. 1: Vietnam's education system since Oct 2016 (from Prime Minister 1981/QĐ-TTg)

The Vietnamese education system comprises eight levels. It starts at nursery level and after lower secondary school splits into two separate pathways, namely (1) academic and (2) professional/vocational. Institutions providing academic programmes are managed by MOET while those providing professional programmes are managed by MOLISA. The two ministries, however, are yet to develop coherent coordination mechanisms for managing the education system. Currently, they lack consensus on Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA). As a consequence, while possible in theory, it is difficult for students to transition from one pathway to another.

Two most important changes reflected in this education system are (1) its' stratification into eight levels which is nearly equivalent to the International Standard Certification of Education (ISCED) 2011, and (2) vocational education being an integral part of the whole education system, not an existing path from the national education system as previously.

On average, children in Vietnam can expect to have completed 12.3 years of schooling by age 18. However, when adjusted for quality of learning, this is only equivalent to 10.2 years, as a learning gap of 2.1 years compared with the worldwide average exists (World Bank, 2018b). The World Bank suggests that this learning gap results in lower lifetime productivity: "A child born in Vietnam [in 2018] will be 67 per cent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health".

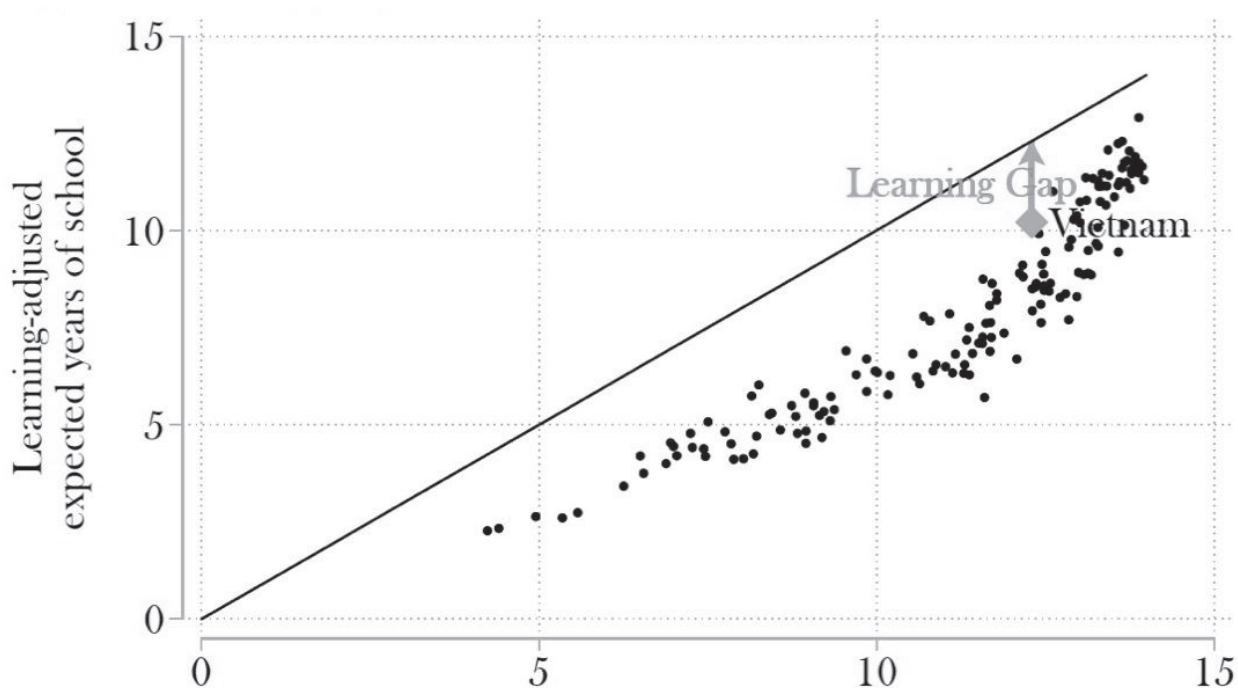


Fig. 2: Expected years of school

## Continuing education

The national education system (Fig. 1) consists of two sub-systems: formal education and continuing education. Formal education comprises eight levels from nursery to doctorate. From the upper secondary level, it splits into academic and professional orientation. Parallel to formal education, continuing education provides equivalency programmes for those who cannot attend formal education, and lifelong learning opportunities for those who have finished formal education. Therefore, it can be inferred that the term 'continuing education' in Vietnam is used to describe the concept internationally known as 'non-formal education'. The term 'non-formal education' is absent from most government documents written in Vietnamese, and the term 'continuing education' is often used instead.

Interestingly, the term 'non-formal education' was used in the 1998 Education Law, which was the first education law of Vietnam. Yet, it was replaced by 'continuing education' in the subsequent 2005 Education Law. The 2019 Education Law includes definitions of *formal* and *continuing* education but **not** of *non-formal* education. This substitution of the term 'non-formal education' by 'continuing education' in many documents written in Vietnamese is confirmed by

documents composed in English. The 'Education for All 2015 National Review Report' written in English by MOET for the World Education Forum describes Vietnam's education system as comprising two strands: *formal* and *non-formal*. It also explicitly equates non-formal education with continuing education.

The change from the term 'non-formal education' to 'continuing education' reflects a paradigm shift in the Vietnamese education system. While 'non-formal' appears secondary to 'formal' education, 'continuing education' conveys the notion of learning throughout life. Care should be taken to avoid confusion between the notion of 'continuing education' in Vietnam and UNESCO's definition (1993, p. iv) which states that continuing education "promotes lifelong learning everywhere in the society through *formal* [emphasis added] and non-formal channels and through informal learning." There is no definition of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in the 2019 Education Law, but it is referred to in Article 43 on continuing education which stipulates that the government shall have policies that encourage adult learning, and that teacher training institutions shall be responsible for researching andragogy, and for training and retraining teachers of continuing education institutions. In this light, ALE is situated within the domain of continuing education in Vietnam. It is worth noting that according to the 2017 Law on Children, adults are people aged 16 and above. Continuing education starts at a level equivalent to primary school and caters to two major groups of learners: (1) youth who are not studying in the formal education strand and would like to attain a degree, and (2) youth and adults who would like to upskill for their lives or jobs. The first group study in Continuing Education Centres (CECs) while the latter study in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and Foreign Languages Centres and Informatics Centres (FLICs). At present, youth non-enrolment and drop-out rates in the formal education strand are shrinking through the development of the formal education system as well as parents' desire that their children attain formal qualifications. As a result, adults constitute the main target group of learners in continuing education institutions.

Continuing education is provided for by MOET and it contributes to ALE. Other stakeholders in ALE include MOLISA, and government-established associations like the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), VALP, the Vietnam Women's Union, and the Communist Youth Union. Fig. 3 situates ALE within the overall Vietnamese education context and points out key stakeholders.

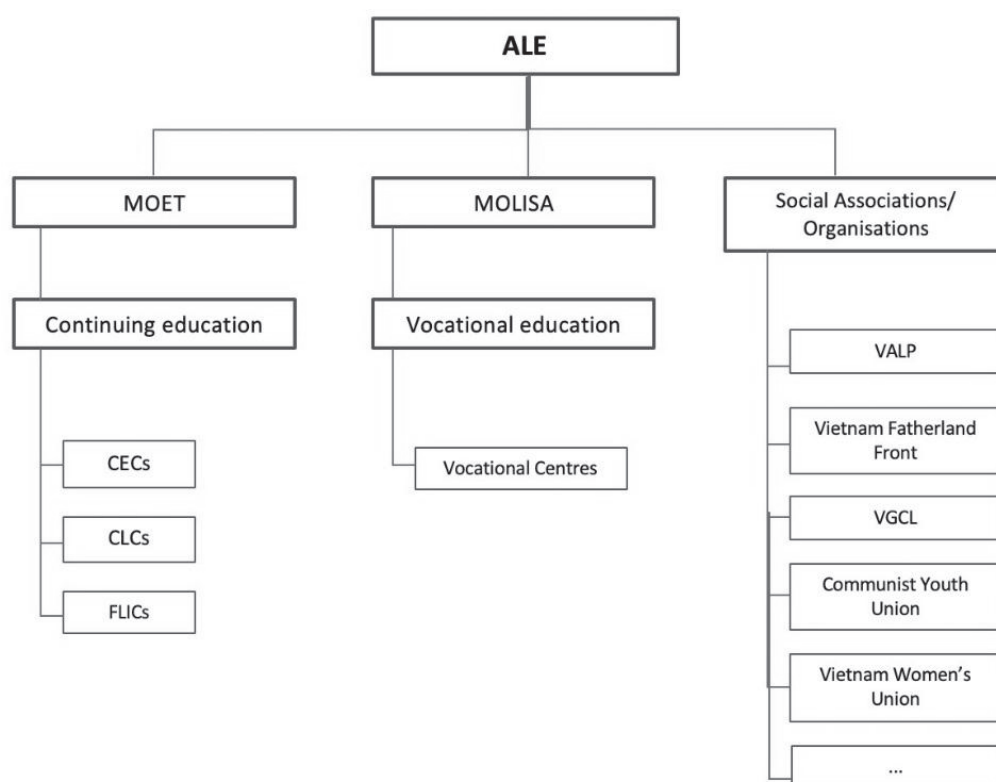


Fig. 3 ALE within the Vietnamese education context

Continuing education provided by MOET also includes distance online courses, and degree programmes. These are offered by the two biggest open universities, Ho Chi Minh Open University and Hanoi Open University, along with other universities which are in the process of developing online courses. These programmes cover a wide range of disciplines offered in the formal system by other universities. Examples are Accounting and Auditing, Biotechnology, Civil and Electrical Engineering, Economics and Public Management, Information Technology, and Law.

MOLISA offers vocational training through two systems: the Vocational Centres system, and the Vocational School and College system. The latter belongs to formal education, thus it is not within the defined domain of ALE in Vietnam although the Vocational School and College system also provides in-service programmes which are classified as continuing education (see 2.2 for a definition of ALE in Vietnam). Short vocational training courses aim to provide young learners with practical skills in jobs such as refrigeration and air-conditioning, electrical repair, and cooking, to enable learners to find a job in the service sector.

In Vietnam, Party resolutions are of utmost importance. They guide the country's development in all areas. The most significant recent document concerning education is Resolution 29-NQ/TU' (Vietnam Communist Party, 2013), issued in 2013. The resolution outlines a fundamental restructuring of the education sector in order to account for industrialisation and modernisation in a socialist-oriented market economy during international integration. The document is the foundation for the development of the Framework on Building a Learning Society for 2012-2020, aiming at improving (1) the outcomes of the literacy movement and universalisation of education, (2) computer and foreign language skills among office workers, (3) professional and vocational skills among labourers, and (4) life and soft skills among all citizens (Prime Minister, 2013). As programmes driving forward progress in all four of these areas mostly fall within the scope of continuing education, it can be said that the Framework on Building a Learning Society is a launching pad for continuing education in Vietnam.

Continuing education and ALE have not received the attention they deserve. This is evident in the very limited discourse on the two concepts. A quick search through the 100 most recent articles in the online version of Education Vietnam<sup>5</sup> returned only one article specifically about continuing education. The same search resulted in zero results found in the online version of Dan Tri<sup>6</sup>. The Ho Chi Minh Department of Education and Training's website, accessed on 26 June 2019, listed only five headlines containing 'continuing education' or 'ALE', and they were all merely news articles published over the course of nearly one year.

## **2. ALE in Vietnam**

### **2.1. Concept of Lifelong Learning in Vietnam**

Though there is no concrete definition of Lifelong Learning (LLL) in Vietnam, LLL is conceptualised as encompassing and transcending formal, non-formal and informal education administered through all modes of learning, and thus the concept falls under the remit of all institutions. The term is widely used throughout formats such as education events, the media,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://giaoduc.net.vn>

<sup>6</sup> <https://dantri.com.vn>

The two websites belong to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Vietnam, and the Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion (VALP), respectively.

and government public relations channels (banners, posters). Thus, it appears that the UNESCO concepts of LLL and Learning Society have been adopted in Vietnam.

Lifelong Learning, according to its definition by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), is

*“[R]ooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. Education systems which promote lifelong learning adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub-sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals.”*

In current practice, however, LLL is more associated with non-formal education, especially ALE, as most young people attend formal schooling and Vietnam has achieved universalisation of primary and lower secondary education.

Government Resolution 44/NQ-CP of June 9<sup>th</sup> 2014 also highlighted that the national education system should be improved toward more openness, flexibility and continuity between levels and models of education and training to meet the needs for LLL and international integration (Government of Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014).

The concepts of Learning Society and LLL have been rooted in Vietnam since the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 with the afore-mentioned movement of Education Universalization launched by President Ho Chi Minh. At that time, when most people were illiterate, the aim of a Learning Society, though in an early stage, was illiteracy eradication and improving the general knowledge of people. This notion was at the core of the movement:

*“Encourage all citizens to learn; the literate teach the illiterate, the well-learnt teach the less well-learnt; create all favourable conditions to organize classes; all idle time must be spent on learning toward illiteracy eradication and a gradual increase in the knowledge and understanding of people for a better life.”* (Hanoi Open University 2017, p. 3)

In the reform period, from 1986 onwards, the need for LLL towards a knowledge economy has been urgent. The aims of the construction of a Learning Society and the promotion of LLL are now to create favourable conditions for people of all ages to learn continuously anywhere, any time and at any level.

Currently, Vietnam is continuing its project for building a Learning Society for the period 2012 to 2020. A review of the task was made in 2015, and it showed promising results in engendering a culture of learning throughout life and fostering learning for all. This is reflected in the following net enrolment rates:

- Kindergarten: 90.6%
- Primary school: 99.35%
- Lower secondary school: 92.27%
- Upper secondary school: 63.26%

Further, it is demonstrated in the 11,019 CLCs that exist in 98.71% of the wards and villages of Vietnam (DOCE 2018, p. 1).

## 2.2. Definition of ALE in the Vietnamese context

Though a definition of ALE is missing in the Education Law, the unpublished report for the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III) prepared by the Department of Continuing Education, Ministry of Education and Training, presents a definition.

*“ALE is continuing education which provides lifelong learning opportunities for all (even people who have already finished their formal education)” (DOCE, p.1).*

This definition of ALE is narrower than others (see Introduction to this publication) as it involves only **continuing** education, which according to Pham Tat Dong, Former President of VALP, is **non-formal education** catering to all people who have or have not completed initial education. At the same time, it does not limit ALE to adult learners only, but accepts all people who study outside the domain of formal education. This is in line with Jarvis's argument that "adult education might also be understood as an educational process conducted *in an adult*



*manner* [emphasis added]" because there is no specific biological age beyond which a child suddenly becomes an adult (p. 45).

As of the end of 2018, Vietnam had a population of 72.67 million people aged 15+, of whom 55.64 million were in the labour force. However, only 22.22% of this number were labourers with relevant certificates (MOLISA 2018, p. 2).

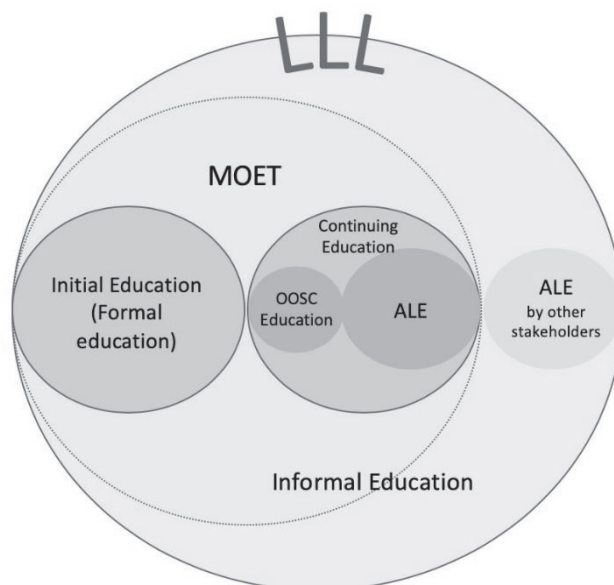
*Table 1: 15+ year-old population in labour force by gender and location*

	2017	2018			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
15+ year-old population (in million)					
Total	72.20	72.37	72.51	72.52	72.67
Male	35.28	35.39	35.50	35.55	35.76
Female	36.91	36.98	37.02	36.97	36.91
Urban	25.23	26.17	26.07	26.15	26.78
Rural	46.96	46.21	46.44	46.36	45.89
Labour force (in million)					
Total	55.16	55.10	55.12	55.41	55.64
Male	28.71	28.78	28.83	29.00	29.10
Female	26.45	26.32	26.29	26.41	26.54
Urban	17.75	17.74	17.75	17.78	18.40
Rural	37.42	37.36	37.38	37.62	37.24
Per centage of 15+ year-old population in labour force					
	76.90	76.71	76.55	76.94	77.21

Source: *Thống kê thị trường lao động Việt Nam, quý 4, 2018* [Statistics of Vietnam Labour Market, quarter 4, 2018]. MOLISA, p. 2.

Vietnam is yet to have a government agency in charge of ALE, though ALE could be within the scope of responsibility of the Department of Continuing Education (DOCE) of the Ministry of Education and Training.

As ALE is presently not an established part of the national education system, and as a definition of LLL is lacking, ALE and LLL can only be generally conceptualised in the minds of policy makers, law makers and educators. The diagram below visualises how ALE is positioned in the Vietnamese education system.



*Fig. 4: How ALE is positioned in the Vietnamese education system*

According to the 2019 Education Law, continuing education caters for learning needs of all those who are not studying in the formal education system regardless of their age. However, in reality, the majority of learners in the continuing education system are adults because almost all young people attend school through formal education.

The main target groups of ALE in Vietnam according to Vietnam's country profile in the GRALE III are (1) individuals seeking personal growth and broadening of knowledge horizons, (2) individuals seeking to update work-relevant knowledge and skills, (3) adults with low-level literacy or basic skills, (4) adults living with disabilities, and (5) ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities and indigenous peoples.

However, as ALE is not institutionalised, it lacks a legal status, and therefore no statistics are systematically reported by the Vietnam General Statistics Office (GSO).

## **ALE in the Framework of Building a Learning Society in Vietnam**

The Framework of Building a Learning Society in Vietnam for 2012 to 2020 established many goals directly and indirectly relying on the contribution of ALE. Some of them are:

### **Illiteracy eradication and universal education**

- 98% of people aged 15 to 60 and 99% people aged 15 to 35 are literate.
- 90% of literate people will continue learning and not relapse into illiteracy.

### **IT and foreign language competencies**

- 100% of civil servants and officials will participate in short computer skill programmes.
- 40% of civil servants and officials will reach level 2<sup>7</sup> and 20% will reach level 3 for foreign language qualifications.
- Increasing numbers of hired workers attend classes in computer skills and foreign languages.

### **Professional and technical qualifications and skills**

For civil servants and officials from central to communal levels:

- 100% of civil servants and officials from central to communal levels will train to meet required standards of leadership and management corresponding with their positions.
- 90% (85% at communal level) will take compulsory minimum in-service trainings on an annual basis<sup>8</sup>.

For rural labourers:

- 70% of rural labourers will have participated in learning to update their knowledge and skills on production sciences and technology at Community Learning Centres.

For hired workers:

- 90% of hired workers in processing and industrial zones will have obtained upper secondary qualifications or higher.

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<sup>7</sup> Vietnam currently applies a 6-level framework of reference for foreign languages.

<sup>8</sup> In Vietnam, in-service training belongs to the realm of continuing education.

The 2012-2020 project aims to build a Learning Society; however, it does not target life skills, personal welfare or community development.

### **2.3. Governance**

Present-day Vietnam is a one-party state led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (henceforth Party). Of top authority in all national matters are the Party's resolutions. For education, the resolution currently in effect is "Comprehensive and Fundamental Renovation of Education" of 2013.

This resolution was translated into Government Decree 44/NQ-CP as an action plan, which was then followed by 128 Education and Training Minister Circulars for implementation. DOCE has the key role in governance of ALE though several other ministries and government-established organisations are involved in designing and implementing ALE programmes. Currently, DOCE is preparing the index of continuing education to be submitted to the Minister of Education and Training by the end of this year.

### **2.4. Legislation and Policies**

Vietnam has a comprehensive body of legislation and policies supporting the development of continuing education. In 1998, Vietnam issued the first education law after independence in 1975. In 2005, this law was revised to institutionalise continuing education. Article 44 covers continuing education, stipulating the purpose of continuing education:

*“Continuing education enables people to learn while in-service, to learn continuously and throughout their lives for refinement of their personality, broadening their understanding, and for educational, professional, and operational enhancement with a view to improving their quality of life, employability, self-employability, and adaptation to the social life. The State shall make policies to develop continuing education, to implement education for all, and to build a learning society”* (Vietnam National Assembly, 2005).

According to this law, continuing educational programmes leading to degrees of the national educational system include in-service learning, distance learning, and guided self-learning.

However, in practice there is no mechanism for recognition of guided self-learning.

The 2019 Education Law enables a more open system which accepts more forms of continuing education institutions and facilitates transfer between formal and continuing education. The new law reflects the directive of the Communist Party Resolution 29. Education is to be restructured to be more open, flexible, with transferability between grades, levels, and forms of education and training; education and training are to be standardised and modernised.

The 2019 Education Law also includes a chapter on continuing education development, part of which reads:

*“The Government shall have policies for developing continuing education, providing education for all, promoting adult learning and education, building a learning society; the Government encourages organisations, and individuals to provide quality continuing education services that meet people's lifelong learning needs.*  
*Agencies and organisations shall provide favourable conditions for their employees to continue learning, learning for life for the improvement of self and life quality.*  
*Vocational training institutions and higher education institutions shall provide such learning material sources for continuing education centres that meet the learners' needs; teacher-training establishments shall research andragogy and train and re-train teaching staff of continuing education institutions.”*

Following the enactment of the 2019 Education Law passed by the National Assembly in mid-2019, government decrees and ministry circulars will entail direct specific operations and activities. However, the issuance of these documents will take years.

At the moment, the following ALE-*relevant* government documents are in effect. None of them are *specifically* dedicated to ALE.

- Decision 09/2008/QĐ-BGĐT issued by MOET in 2008, revised in 2010, on regulating the establishment of CLCs. It stipulates that the functions of CLCs are to provide lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages, to teach life-improvement knowledge, and to

disseminate information on law and policies. Though CLCs cater for the learning needs of all, most CLC programme participants are adults.

- The 2013 Prime Minister Decision 89/QĐ-TTg approving the Framework for Building a Learning Society for 2012-2020. The Decision's goal is to create environments that facilitate learning for all through all modes of learning in different contexts. All governmental institutions, economic and social organisations, communities and families have the responsibility to provide these learning opportunities.
- Resolution 29 issued by the Communist Party in 2013 on Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation of Education stipulates that continuing education shall provide learning opportunities for all, especially for those in rural and disadvantaged areas. It also maintains that the network of continuing education institutions be developed and perfected, providing all modes of learning in flexible manners.
- Most recent is the Decision QĐ 1981/QĐ-TTg issued by the Prime Minister, approving the Vietnamese education system, which stipulates that the purpose of continuing education is to provide learning opportunities for all people of all ages and education levels. Everyone should be able to improve their knowledge, and develop professional skills, thus contributing to an improved quality of human resources which meet the developing socio-economic situation, leading to a learning society. Of special importance is the transferability between formal and continuing education.
- Besides, ALE caters for a portion of the adult population who seek to learn and upgrade their vocational and professional skills. This is regulated by the 2014 Law on Vocational and Professional Education (Vietnam National Assembly, 2014).

## **2.5. Financing**

In Vietnam, public spending on education has grown significantly in both absolute terms and as a proportion of GDP. Since 2007, the education budget has always been kept at 20% of the national budget (Vietnam Communist Party, 2013). Due to economic growth, each year's absolute figure budgeted for education has been higher than in the previous year (MOET, 2014). However, because as much as 82% of the budget is spent on recurrent expenditures, little is left for development (Nguyễn T.M.H., 2018)

The 2018 education budget was maintained at 5.8% of GDP as in many other recent years. When factored in the contribution of families paying for tuition, fees for facility maintenance and a contribution to a teacher-parent association fund, the 2018 number stood at 8% (Phùng, 2019). In the absence of a defined ALE segment in law and a government agency in charge of ALE, there is no specified budget allocation for ALE. The calculation of the total ALE budget from different ministries is rendered virtually impossible as there is very little intersectoral coordination. As a result, no official information of the exact amount of funding for ALE is available (SEAMEO CELLL, 2015). However, it can be deducted that, as formal education generally receives over 90% of the total education budget, not much is left for ALE and continuing education. The total state budget in 2007 for continuing education was 3.3% of the total education expenditure, and there was a four-fold variation across provinces (Carlsen 2010, p. 61)<sup>9</sup>. In the afore-mentioned report for GRALE III, DOCE suggested that the per centage of public education spending for ALE sits at 1 to 1.9%, and that the government plans to keep the same level of spending for ALE in the years to come. It should be noted that these numbers are from MOET only as figures from other stakeholders are unavailable or inaccessible. Further complicating the issue of calculating ALE's exact funding allocation is the existence of three different continuing education institutions (CLCs, CECs and FLICs, see 3.1) which are governed by different government agencies and all have their own frameworks and mechanisms.

Vietnam is encouraging education institutions to become financially self-sufficient. The shifting process is taking place gradually. Therefore, it is impossible to obtain the exact dimension of financial supports on national scale.

### **3. ALE provided by MOET**

As shown in Fig. 4, MOET-governed ALE is part of continuing education. Historically, the practice was introduced after 1945 in the anti-illiteracy movement called 'Bình dân học vụ' (People's Learning) when 95% of adults were illiterate due to the lack of learning opportunities during the war. The subsequent learning movement, 'Bổ túc văn hoá' (Complementary Education) started in 1954 with a shift of focus to provide post-literacy education. Both

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<sup>9</sup> More recent data is not available, but it is assumed to be similar.

movements have now been replaced by continuing education to accommodate advanced learning needs.

Today, continuing education still offers literacy programmes. The approach's priorities, however, lie with (1) equivalency programmes for youth and adults who have no access to formal education or who have not completed formal education, and (2) life-related programmes like knitting classes for young women to improve their income generation possibilities, or pig-raising classes for people living in rural settings.

The term 'adult learning and education' is gradually gaining popularity in the media and in education conferences. Despite this, ALE has not received the attention it deserves. It cannot compete with formal education which has always been under scrutiny of the public and policy-makers with regards to its quality. Therefore, formal education is most present in societal debate, and ALE faces a lack of specific supporting policies, directives/directions, solutions, and organisations to represent the interests of education institutions serving adult learners. In essence, continuing education in Vietnam today comprises of the following (Nguyen, Q.K., 2008):

- Literacy and post-literacy programs;
- Tailor-made programs for updating knowledge and skills, and technology transfer;
- Programs for in-service training, retraining and upgrading professional qualifications;
- Educational degree granting programs in the national education system.

It is mostly adults who participate in these programmes, both employed and unemployed, because younger people are engaged in formal education.

### 3.1. Continuing education institutions governed by MOET

DOCE manages three types of continuing education institutions:

- Continuing Education Centres (CECs)
- Community Learning Centres (CLCs)
- Foreign Languages and Informatics Centres (FLICs)



All continuing education institutions are governed by the local government and the local department of education and training. Continuing higher education delivered in the form of in-service programmes, and open and distant learning programmes are under the management of universities which are governed by not only MOET but many other ministries. For example, the University of Medicine belongs to the Ministry of Health, the University of Agriculture and Forestry is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture.

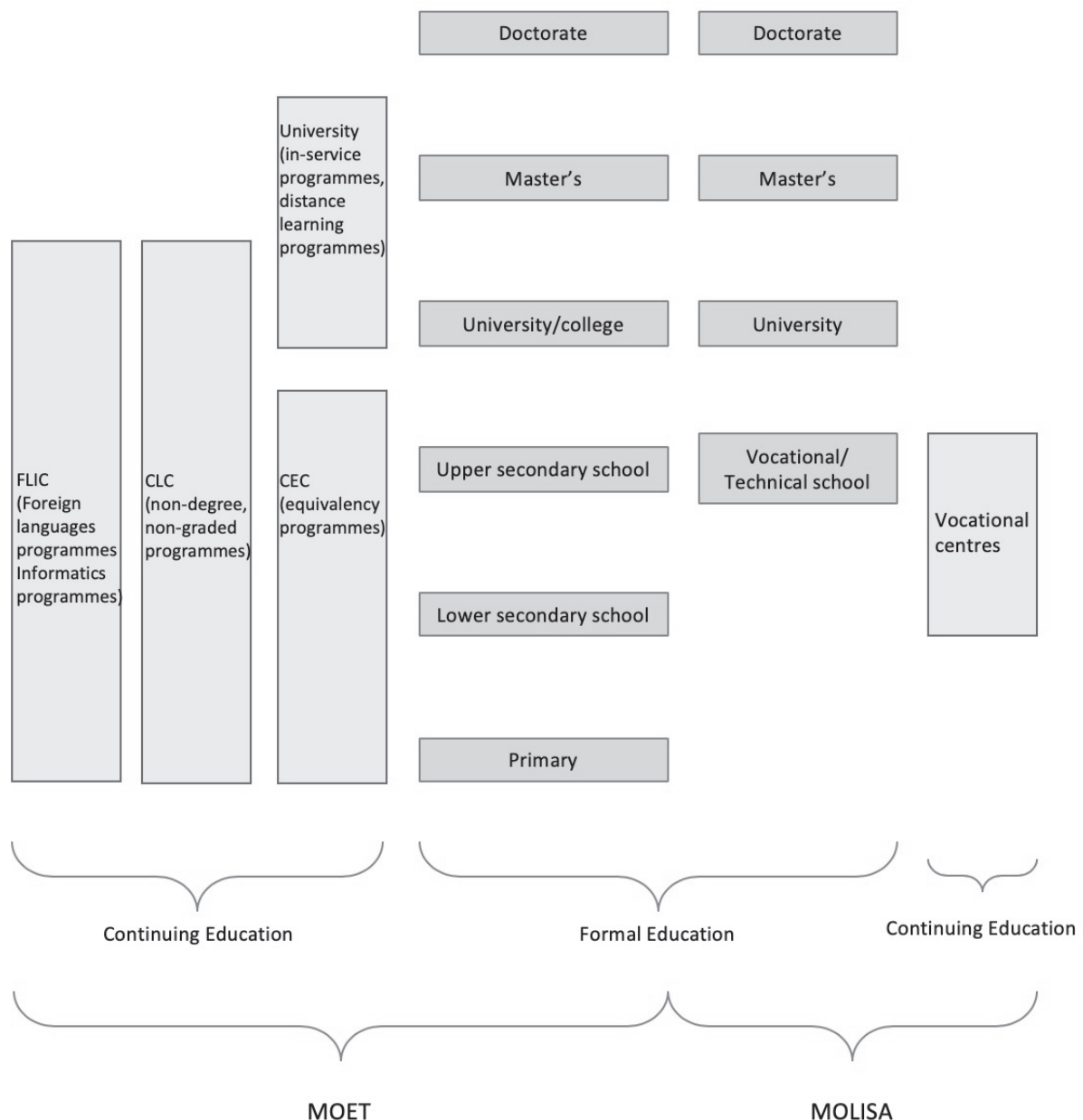


Fig. 5: Continuing education institutions Community Learning Centres

A CLC is a commune-/ward-level education and training institution under direct administrative management of its commune's People's Committee and professionally directed by its district Department of Education and Training. Through the "Decision on the Establishment of CLCs" issued by MOET, CLCs are not directly managed by MOET but by local authorities, although they fall under the governance of MOET (MOET, 2008). Every CLC is provided with 20-25 million VND (approximately 800-1100 USD) a year for operation and has a minimal staff of one director and two deputy directors, who work part-time and simultaneously hold high positions in their Commune's or Ward's People's Committee, local schools and VALP. They are paid by the organisation they work for, not by the CLC. They only receive a small fee for their CLC-related work which is set by the respective head of the City/Provincial People's Committee.

Teachers are seconded from high schools or invited by the CLCs. In the former case, they are paid by the school where they work, while in the latter they receive payment as agreed between the centre and themselves; some will work on a voluntary basis. The CLCs' annual budget is barely enough for year-round operation of the centres. Therefore, those with pro-active management resort to social financial support from local businesses in order to remain active and to be able to develop.

While vocational centres as well as vocational and professional schools, offer courses that provide learners with skills for employment and self-employment (see "Continuing Education Centres" below), CLCs' programmes are geared towards a wider learners' audience, including residents in the local area, and principally serve to improve local people's knowledge of health, the environment, life skills and new government policies.

From 2009 to 2014, 50% of CLC learners who participated in different programmes were 15 to 60 years old. Although the number of literacy and equivalency programmes' participants has decreased due to universal primary education, the number of CLC learners has significantly increased.

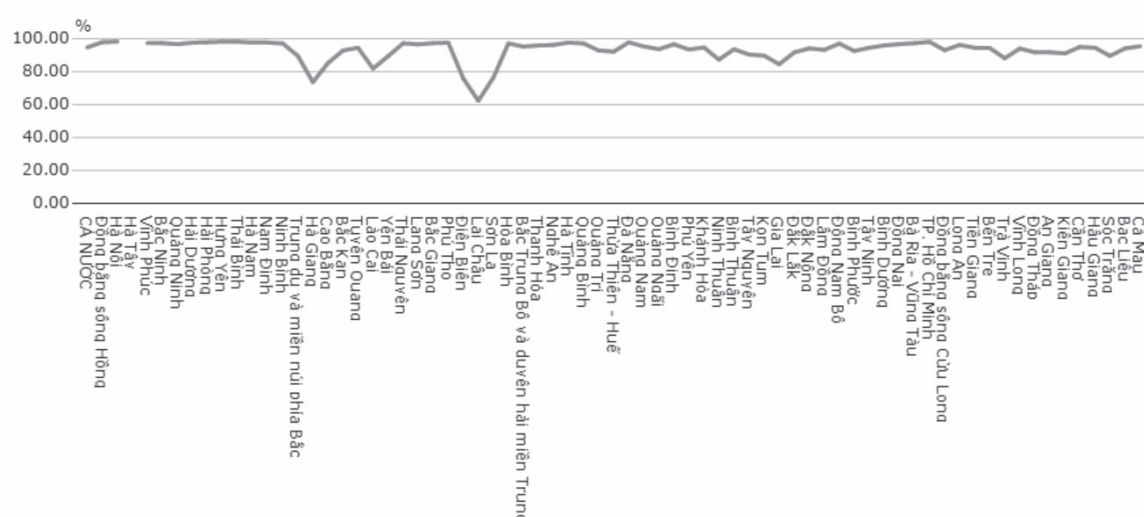
## **Literacy**

According to figures released by GSO for 2017, Vietnam's literacy rates are 96.7% for men aged 15 years and older, and 93.6% for women in the same age category. For the age bracket of

15 to 24 years, there is no sex-discrepancy, with literacy rates of nearly 98% for both men and women. Thus, Vietnam has achieved gender equity in access to literacy education of young people.

Table 2: Literacy rate of people aged 15 years and above in Vietnam (GSO, 2017)

	Total	Male	Female	Urban	Rural
Literacy Rate	95.1%	96.7%	93.6%	97.8%	93.6%



In 2017, there were 11,081 CLCs in the country, with 21 million enrolments in various courses (DOCE 2017, p. 3). CLCs provide short non-certificate programmes geared towards specific needs of learners. With their low barrier programmes, CLCs have made education more accessible and affordable for everyone.

### *Continuing Education Centres*

CECs are district and provincial-level education and training institutions with 10 or more full-time staff members each. They offer two major types of programmes: equivalency programmes for young people who are not studying in the formal system, and other learning programmes including literacy and vocational skills. Learning materials of the former are shortened versions of materials used in formal education.

In 2017, there were 700 CECs in Vietnam, with 22 million enrolments in different courses (Nguyễn, C.H., 2019). At present, there is much difference among CECs in terms of efficiency. Some are almost completely inactive while others organise many activities. The latter are usually establishments in areas with large migrant communities who struggle to access formal education due to schools' limited capacity. Vocational courses at CECs usually cannot compete with vocational centres and schools under MOLISA in terms of their facilities and instructors' expertise.

Unlike CLCs, CEC staff are paid from the national education budget, depending on the paygrade of the employees (their qualification, seniority, and position). CECs were encouraged to become financially self-sufficient in 2015 but progress is slow. As CECs struggle to attract new learners, many districts and provinces have recently merged CECs with vocational centres, which are under MOLISA's governance, to improve overall efficiency and create synergies. However, this policy has raised the question whether MOET or MOLISA should oversee the new vocational-continuing education centres. The question is yet to be settled.

### *Foreign Languages and Informatics Centres*

Of the three types of continuing education institutions governed by MOET, FLICs are the most sought-after in big cities because of the strong demand for foreign language proficiency and informatics skills among adults.

ASEAN integration and globalisation plus the market economy have had a strong impact on the demand for foreign language learning. Beginning in 1988 with the Doi Moi Policy, English has risen to the number one position among foreign languages studied by the Vietnamese, especially adults. English language proficiency offers the possibility of finding a job with an international company. The trend peaked in about 2010 and has since levelled out. In recent years, in the wake of new century competencies, adults have begun to look for soft skills courses to enhance their work efficiency and further their opportunities on the labour market. Figures released by MOLISA in 2017 revealed an increase in unemployment among university graduates from 3.63% in quarter 2 to 4.51% in quarter 3 of the year, which according to experts was attributed to a lack of soft skills.

FLICs are established by educational institutions and social organisations. Though bearing one name, FLICs are usually two separate entities: foreign languages centres and informatics centres, the former of which are sometimes established by foreign-owned educational institutions. In 2017, the number of FLICs soared to 2,854 from 1,882 in 2013, serving a total of nearly 2 million learners (MOET, 2015, Báo Mới, 2018b). In the absence of data, it is not possible to analyse learners' backgrounds with regards to gender, socio-economic context and ethnicity.

The main task of foreign languages centres is to provide language training, previously for the National English Proficiency Certificates A, B and C, and currently for standardised English proficiency tests like TOEFL, IELTS and tests for the national framework of reference for foreign languages. Informatics Centres teach primary and secondary information technology. Just like CECs and CLCs, FLICs are managed by two government bodies: The City/Provincial People's Committee and City/Provincial Department of Education and Training. In the case of a university-established FLIC, the university is also involved in the FLIC's management. Learning materials are developed by FLICs and need to be approved by the local authorities before they can be used.

While FLICs are educational institutions belonging to continuing education, they are different from CECs and CLCs in that they are self-sufficient. Some were established by a state-run school, college or university, but many by Vietnamese or foreign educational institutions/organisations. State establishments will be provided with budgets and operational

funding at the beginning, but they will gradually become self-sufficient as they develop. Learners pay a fee for their courses.

### 3.2. Quality (including recognition, validation, and accreditation)

With the exception of CLC programmes which are developed by the CLC itself or provided by different stakeholders for implementation, other education institutions like CECs, vocational centres and FLICs must have their training programmes reviewed and approved by the responsible government agency. Thus, for example, an English programme that a centre develops must be submitted to DOET for approval before it can be used. The programme therefore is developed in response to learners' needs, as identified by the centre, and it is critically reviewed by a second party to ensure its quality.

The certification process works differently in each continuing education institution. A CEC recognises a learner's successful completion of a programme, and the responsible DOET awards the learner with their certificate. A FLIC can certify a learner's successful completion of a programme, but to receive a certification, learners need to successfully complete standardised tests such as IELTS or TOEFL. CLCs do not award certificates. They only offer short courses of practical value.

While in theory, diplomas and degrees attained in continuing education institutions bear the same value as ones earned through formal education, in reality, training outputs from the former are of a lower quality. Therefore, degrees from the formal education sub-system provide a higher chance of finding employment.

In terms of teaching quality, CECs and FLICs teachers are certified and hold degrees in education. The majority of them have been trained in colleges and universities of education. Informatics teachers can be technicians with certificates in teaching methodology. However, most teachers are not trained in andragogy and lack knowledge on pedagogic processes. This is a particular problem in ALE where classes are usually composed of learners from different ages and education levels, and who are used to different learning styles.

#### **4. ALE provided by MOLISA**

Starting in 2016, Vietnam shifted the governing responsibility of vocational education and training to MOLISA while keeping other ministries in management of education and training in related professions. Thus, the Ministry of Health remains the responsible agency for the University of Medicine, the Ministry of Agriculture manages the University of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Education and Training oversees the University of Education. This division of governance, however, is not clearly defined and in practice there is a lot of overlap. For instance, three of Vietnam's six Universities of Technology and Education are managed by MOET while the other three are under MOLISA.

A third party in ALE governance is the People's Committee of the city/province where the institution is located. This party assumes an overall responsibility of ensuring that centre operation is in line with government direction and related policies.

Vietnam is currently undergoing a restructure of education towards a more open system of education where transfer between formal and continuing education is possible. The country also recognises its shortage of skilled workers and a surplus of academic graduates. Therefore, it is promoting a paradigm shift from focusing on academia to highlighting the vocational system, aiming to overturn the 70/30 ratio of academic to professional/vocational students to achieve a 30/70 ratio.

##### **4.1. Continuing education institutions governed by MOLISA**

MOLISA offers both formal and continuing education and training in vocation, the latter of which serves the particular needs of learners by organising short courses (normally three months in length, totalling 100 to 300 hours of learning) that provide, update and upgrade skills. Besides, coaching by experienced arts and handicraft masters in workshops is offered. Other available courses upgrade learners' knowledge on sciences and technology in order for them to keep abreast of advancements in their respective fields.

In 2017, there were nearly 1,000 vocational centres, with over 300,000 youth and adults taking intensive vocational courses (Bao Moi, 2018a). A total of over 28,000 people attended literacy classes and post-literacy classes in these centres. The vocational programme for rural areas has

trained 800,000 labourers and 19,800 physically disadvantaged people (Prime Minister, 2009). MOLISA also provides job-seeking services through job fairs. In quarter 4 of 2018, it organised 341 job fairs, consulting 782,804 turns of people, of whom 250,769 successfully received work through this service (MOLISA 2018, p. 6).

If theoretical lessons account for the majority of hours spent in-class in formal education, the opposite is true of vocational classes where practice and on-the-site lessons are the main activities. Examinations are conducted in written and practical forms with results given on a bipolar scale: either pass or fail. Participants who pass are awarded certificates.

Participating in vocational courses are people of 15+ years of age. In general, learning schedules are flexible in time and venue. Some courses are provided at training institutions, while others are conducted at business sites or production sites (MOLISA, 2015). Fig. 7 presents the number of vocational institutions in 2015 and 2016. Apart from vocational education centres, the other two categories (2-year college and vocational school) offer both formal and non-formal education and training.



*Fig. 7: Number of vocational education and training centres*

Source: National Institute for Vocational Education and Training. 2017.

The rate of skilled labour is steadily increasing. In 2000, the rate stood at 10.3 per cent and it had doubled by 2016. According to GSO, in 2017 alone, 2.69 million people received vocational



training, including 600,000 rural labourers. Training, however, has not covered the entire labour force.

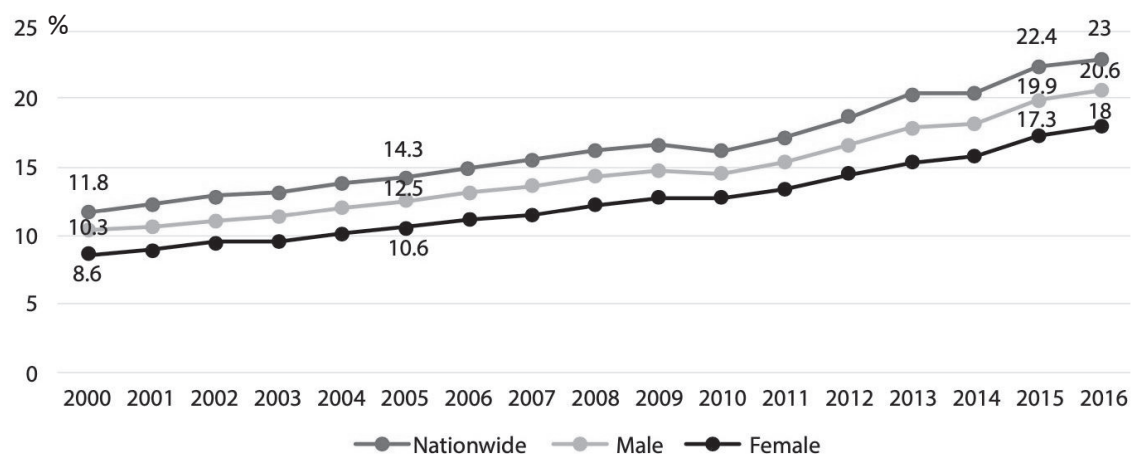


Fig. 8: Proportion of labourers to the labour force

Source: GSO cited in Vietnam Voluntary National Review on Implementation of SDGs

## 4.2. Funding and quality

Vietnam is encouraging businesses to provide their employees with continuing vocational training opportunities to increase productivity and efficiency. In such cases, no funding is provided by the government except classes organised by state-run enterprises. This practice of corporate employee training is already common in large, foreign-owned enterprises operating in Vietnam.

As continuing education offered by MOLISA is geared towards vocational education, it is regulated by the 2014 Law on Vocational and Professional Education. A person who has finished a course will receive a certificate signed by the head of the training institution. As part of the quality assurance process, Article 54 of the Law prescribes the minimum requirements of trainers at different levels and according to what they teach: theory or practice. Teaching at vocational centres and schools are experts, engineers, technicians, and those who hold vocational certificates of level 2 and above on a scale of 5, workers certified at level 3 or above on a scale of 7, province-certified artists, district-certified "good farmers"<sup>10</sup>, and people with at least five years of work experience and who have a certificate in pedagogy.

<sup>10</sup> "Good farmers" are those successful in making their products a profitable business by applying new farming and aquacultural technologies and IT. These farmers are also expected to disseminate their experience and create jobs for others to work on their farms. Source: Farmers Association of Vietnam. (2014). Quyết định 944-QĐ/HNDTU' Tiêu chí gia đình nông dân giỏi [Criteria of farming families doing good business. Document 944-QĐ/HNDTU']. p.1.

In addition, Chapter VI of the 2014 Law on Vocational and Professional Education regulates accreditation of training institutions. It stipulates that a training institution and national key programmes offered shall be accredited prior to operation. Accreditation is managed by the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Agency (VETA). Despite these processes, quality of vocational training is not uniform among institutions, especially at high levels of training where the trainees find that programmes do not match demands in reality.

## **5. Roles of universities in promoting ALE**

By definition (see 2.2), ALE in Vietnam constitutes continuing education (non-formal education) for adult learners.

Universities in Vietnam offer both formal and non-formal education. The latter is realised through distance learning programmes, and in-service programmes. As of 2017, there were 21 universities offering distance learning programmes, with a total of 161,047 graduates - the biggest ones being Hanoi Open University and Open University of Ho Chi Minh City. Programs and courses offered vary, including those in Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Business, Engineering and Education. However, many other universities have been developing their Open Education Resources (OER), where adults of any age can access resources and learn at their own pace, for their own self-development or for a degree in a registered programme. The Vietnam Open Education Resources database at <https://voer.edu.vn>, first established in 2005, has more than 20,000 modules. It is a teaching tool for many teachers. Considering the number of universities (currently totalling 235), and the outcomes of programmes, universities play a significant role in providing ALE for upskilling the population to meet new job requirements.

The new Education Law will leverage universities in promoting ALE even more via three realisations:

- ALE will become a subject of study at tertiary level.
- Andragogy will be taught at universities of education.
- Universities will be responsible for providing CLCs with appropriate learning materials.

## 6. ALE provided by social organisations

Other than MOET and MOLISA, ALE is also provided by many government-established social organisations. This is stipulated in the 2013 Decision 89/QĐ-TTg on the endorsement of the Project “Building a Learning Society 2012-2020”:

*“All governmental institutions, economic organisations, social organisations, people’s armed forces units, residential communities and families have the responsibility to provide learning opportunities and favourable conditions for everyone to learn all life long.”*

Following are some typical social and political agencies among many that have been taking active parts in introducing and promoting LLL and ALE in Vietnam.

*Table 3: Major stakeholders in ALE in Vietnam*

<b>Ministries</b>	<b>Social organisations</b>	<b>Regional, local authorities</b>
The Ministry of Education and Training	Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion	Provincial People’s Committees
The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs	Vietnam Fatherland Front	
The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Vietnam General Confederation of Labour	
The Ministry of Information and Communications	Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union	
The Ministry of Planning and Investment	Vietnam Women’s Union	
The Ministry of Finance	Vietnam Veterans’ Association	
The Ministry of Home Affairs	Vietnam Farmers’ Association	

<b>Ministries</b>	<b>Social organisations</b>	<b>Regional, local authorities</b>
The Ministry of Health	Vietnam Elderly's Association	
The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Former Teachers' Association	
The Ministry of Science and Technology		

## 6.1 Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion (VALP)

VALP was established following the Prime Minister Decision 122/TTg in 1996. Over more than 20 years of operation, the association has promoted learning among Vietnamese through various activities, mainly through raising funds for learning and education activities at high schools, and disseminating knowledge via its newspaper (Dan Tri, 2018a) and journal (Teaching and Learning Today Journal). In addition to maintaining a close connection with MOET and MOLISA, the association also collaborates with the Vietnam Women's Union, the Communist Youth Union, the Farmers' Union, the Vietnam Farmers' Association and other government-established social organisations. It organises learning activities to raise people's awareness and practice of good health, gender equality, environmental preservation, and good farming techniques. VALP was one of the founders and nurturers of CLCs in Vietnam (Ngo, 2009, p. 15), using the model suggested by UNESCO and modifying it to suit the cultural and social context of Vietnam.

Remarkable achievements by VALP in recent years are reflected by funds raised: 3,833 billion VND (164.2 million USD) in 2018 (Dan Tri, 2018b), part of which is set aside for programmes that support ALE in CLCs, though details are not publicly known.

As stipulated in the Framework on Building a Learning Society 2012-2020, the role of VALP in ALE is further reflected in VALP's following key missions:

- Cooperate with social organisations and resources in spreading educational and political information, aiding to achieve LLL for all, and building a Learning Society;
- Cooperate with MOET in maintaining, bolstering and improving the quality and efficiency of CLCs; building and implementing an assessment framework of building a Learning Society nationwide;

- Chair the evaluation and recognition of “learning units”<sup>11</sup> and “learning communities”;
- Promote Lifelong Learning movements in families, clans, residential communities and recommend suitable learning models. Chair the spreading of information regarding building a Learning Society through the network of VALP branches at all levels, VALP’s websites, Khuyen hoc and Dan Tri newspapers, and Dan Tri e-newspaper.

## **6.2 Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF)**

The Vietnam Fatherland Front (see Fig. 3), a constituent of the Vietnamese political system, is a political alliance organisation. It is a voluntary federation of political organisations, social organisations and outstanding individuals representing various social classes and strata, ethnic groups, religions, and overseas Vietnamese (Law of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, 2015). Therefore, the VFF by law has a very significant and profound influence on Vietnam’s society. The organisation has yet to take an active role in developing ALE, however.

In the project for building a Learning Society from 2012-2020, the VFF in general and in particular its Central Committee, the executive body of the VFF at the national level, is requested to participate in spreading information and motivating people to actively take part in learning as well as integrating the process of building a Learning Society into the movement “All united for the building of a cultivated society”.

## **6.3 Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL)**

VGCL is the national trade union in Vietnam, and also an affiliate of the World Federation of Trade Unions. As a mass political-social organisation of the working class, VGCL represents labourers in all areas, thus caring for the right to education of all people who are at work (Law of the Trade Union, 2012).

The tasks for VGCL in “Building a Learning Society 2012-2020” are:

- Cooperate with relevant agencies in guiding, encouraging, and monitoring the training and upskilling for the workforce in enterprises;

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<sup>11</sup> These are learning groups established in business entities (both government-run and private businesses).

- Chair a project of which the purpose is to boost LLL activities for workers in enterprises (with priority to processing zones and industrial zones).

#### **6.4 Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union**

The Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union is the largest social-political organisation of Vietnamese youths between 16 and 30 years of age. The Union's aim is to unite young people to strive for the cause of a democratic, just, and civilised society with wealthy citizens in a strong country.

As the most important organisation representing Vietnamese youth, the Union has been assigned the tasks of:

- Chairing, coordinating and integrating information-spreading activities on building a Learning Society for the Union members and youths;
- Collaborating with MOET in building movements of voluntary and talented youths;
- Raising funds to support the learning of disadvantaged youths.

#### **6.5 Vietnam Women's Union**

The Vietnam Women's Union is a social-political organisation which represents and defends the legal and legitimate rights and interests of Vietnamese women. With a sizable membership of over 13 million women, and 10,472 local women's unions in communes and towns nationwide (Vietnam Women's Union, 2005), it is the largest organisation of Vietnamese women.

The tasks of the Vietnam Women's Union in terms of LLL and ALE are:

- Coordinating and integrating information-spreading activities on building a Learning Society within Women's Union movements;
- Collaborating with MOET on spreading information to and encouraging illiterate women in disadvantaged areas to participate in literacy classes.

#### **6.6 Other agencies**

Other agencies, including the Vietnam Veterans' Association, Vietnam Farmers' Association, Vietnam Elderly's Association, and the Former Teachers' Association are also mentioned in the Project "Building a Learning Society 2012-2020" with the tasks of collaborating with relevant

agencies in implementing suitable solutions to building a Learning Society in accordance with their functions and missions.

### **The media**

By definition of ALE in Vietnam (see 2.2), what the media offers is not within the scope of ALE. However, considering media actors' functionality in society, it is worth including them in this study as sources of knowledge dissemination for adults.

There are more than 800 media agencies with over 300 channels in operation in Vietnam (Thanh Niên News, 2015). Mass media plays an important role in LLL and ALE, especially through the programmes that aim at knowledge and information dissemination. Those media channels, most importantly Vietnam Television (VTV) and the Voice of Vietnam (VOV), have established various educational programmes in their channels in response to the learning needs of the people (MOET, 2016).

VTV, the national, multi-channelled and also the largest broadcaster in Vietnam, for instance has set aside one separate channel for education (VTV7) since 2016. Other examples are:

- The soft skills programme on VTV3, the Daily Life programme on VTV1 providing people with knowledge on agriculture, laws, environmental protection, health care, etc.
- The interactive radio program “I am a driver” on the National Traffic Channel of VOV to promote traffic culture by creating a community of professional drivers as well as giving answers to questions of drivers and helping them to overcome difficulties at work and in life.
- The National Education Channel of Vietnam on VTV7, with the goal of “Creating a Learning Society” and the motto of “Inspiring Learning”, broadcasts 18 hours a day to provide knowledge and skills to different audiences, effectively serving to promote Lifelong Learning.

## **7. Private sector**

While the private sector has recently been encouraged to engage in vocational training and education activities, the exact contribution of this sector is still unknown due to the lack of a national data management system in relation to continuing education in general and ALE in particular.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Continuing education in Vietnam, even though ALE is not explicitly named as a major component, is provided by a wide range of institutions under the governance of not only MOET but also MOLISA and other ministries. As defined by DOCE, ALE caters for education and training in the non-formal section of the national education system.

In terms of policy, ALE is "embedded" in the Education Law, in regulations on the establishment and operation of various institutions, and in policies on education provision. Yet, there is no government policy or legal document written especially on ALE.

In practice, ALE is principally geared towards vocational skills and soft skills for learners who wish to gain access to better employment, or promotion. Literacy and basic skills learning takes place mostly in CLCs and CECs, though the demand for literacy classes is decreasing due to a higher percentage of children going to primary and secondary schools.

Finally, liberal, popular and community education and citizenship education are not explicitly named in curricula. There has been media reference to global citizenship but the concept is understood in a very narrow way, or as a modest component of the global citizenship spectrum. The merge of CECs and vocational centres has not brought about positive outcomes nationwide because of the lack of new appropriate directives and guidance. Combined teaching staff of the newly formed centres are still governed by two different, outdated sets of policies, and the newly established centres have come under the control of more governing bodies. In fact, many local authorities are object to the decision to merge the two types of centres. No official report on the efficacy, whether in terms of management, operation, or learning outcomes, is available.



In the light of lacking policies appropriate to the new model of vocational centre, variations in application and practice are inevitable. This makes it difficult to study the results of the merge.

The demand for ALE is increasing, in terms of fields of study, skills and levels. This trend is reflected in growing numbers of learners at vocational education institutions. The new Education Law has introduced, through Article 43, that the government shall have policies to encourage adult learning, and that teacher-training institutions shall be responsible for research study into andragogy as well as for training and retraining teachers of continuing education institutions.

Promising aspects of ALE development in Vietnam have been identified. Yet, for them to translate into reality, five areas for ALE need to improve<sup>12</sup>.

### **Legislation and policies:**

ALE should be institutionalised through ALE-specific policies and legislation. With an official status in Vietnamese education, ALE will be given the appropriate priority, and will thus receive proper support from the government at all levels as well as from the private sector.

### **Governance:**

A government office in charge of ALE should be established within DOCE. With a dedicated agency, issues in ALE can be easily addressed before they might deteriorate, and directions for ALE development will be accounted for.

Intersectoral coordination, especially between ministries, should be enhanced through clearly established mechanisms to maximise synergies for the development of ALE.

An Association for Adult Learning and Education Development should be established to coordinate ALE activities across the private and public sectors, to protect the legal rights of its members, and to provide support to its members' operation<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The recommendations were written in consultation with Associate Professor, **Dr Vu Thi Tu Anh**, and **Dr Nguyen Hong Son**, both Deputy Directors of the Department of Continuing Education, Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, and **Dr Nguyen Duc Minh**, Vice President, Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences. All three have reviewed the report.

<sup>13</sup> The Minister of Education and Training, in November 2018, signed a Decision that approves a lobbying team for the establishment of this association.

Step-by-step decentralization of the direct management of CLCs should be carried out to transfer the autonomy of CLCs' management from government officials to experts with the necessary capacity and experience to manage and build learning movements (Nguyễn, D.M, 2017).

**Financing:**

Besides national budgets allocated to continuing education, different financial resources should be tapped into, and the role of the private sector should be recognised and encouraged through facilitating policies.

**Programmes:**

Awareness of the role of ALE should be raised through various activities and programmes so that all people, including responsible education officials, will see ALE as an integral part of the overarching process of LLL promotion and building Learning Societies, thus giving it more support and participation.

A valid and reliable national database to help identify gaps between the current context of ALE and the expected outcomes of ALE programmes in five years, ten years, and beyond, is needed. This will help align the new policies with the expected outcomes for realistic implementation.

**Capacity building:**

Exchange of experiences should be fostered through international collaboration for the increasing development of ALE. Andragogy should *soon* be taught and researched at universities for rapid establishment of ALE in Vietnam.

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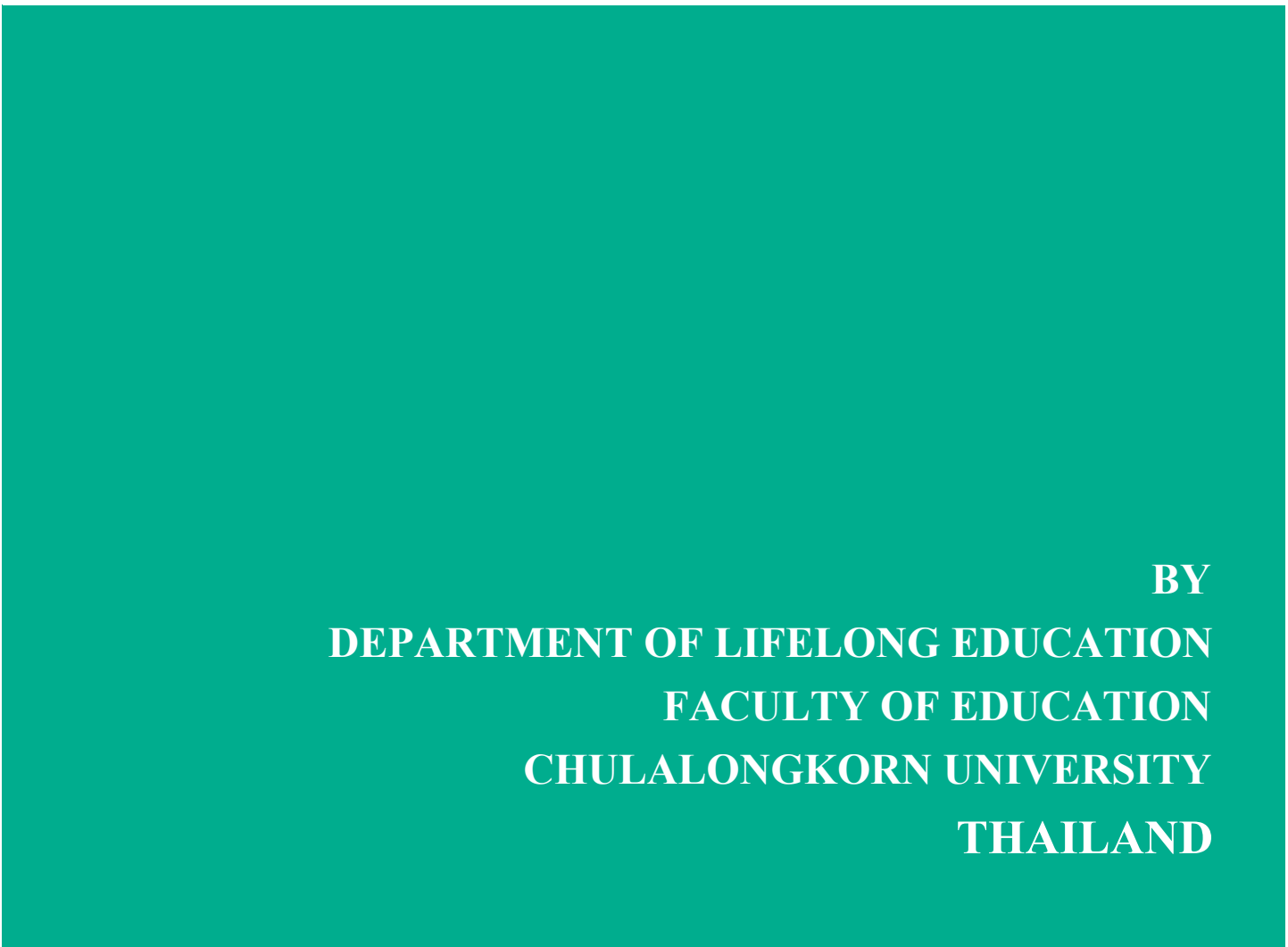






# **ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN THAILAND**

**BY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LIFELONG EDUCATION**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
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**THAILAND**



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## Abbreviations

AEC	ASEAN Economics Community
ALE	Adult Learning and Education
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBE	Competency-Based approach of Education
CLC	Community Learning Center
DNFE	Department of Non-Formal Education
DVT	Dual Vocational Training
EEC	Eastern Economic Corridor
EP	Equivalency Program
ETV	Educational Television Station
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
ICAE	International Council on Adult Education
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KM	Knowledge Management
LCB	Learning-Center Based
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MOE	Ministry of Education
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONFEC	Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission
ONIE	Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education
OVEC	Office of the Vocational Education Commission
RALE	Recommendations on Adult Learning and Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
ThaiMOOCs	Thailand Massive Open Online Courses
TK Park	Technological Knowledge Park
TVQ	Thai Vocational Qualification

## **Background on Thailand**

### Country context

Thailand, or the Kingdom of Thailand as its formal name, is situated in the heart of the Southeast Asian mainland. The country has a population of approximately 69.7 million (UN, 2019), making it the 20<sup>th</sup> most populous country on earth, with 55 million adults. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia to have escaped colonial rule. Buddhist religion, the monarchy and the military have helped to shape its society and politics.

There is a diverse range of ethnic groups within the country, but officially, they are categorized into three main groups: 75% are Ethnic Thai, 14% Thai Chinese, and 3% are ethnically Malay. The remainder of the population falls into small minority groups including hill tribes, Khmers and Mons. The official language of Thailand is Thai, with over 90% of the population using the language daily in their home and work lives. A 2005 survey of the literacy rate, undertaken by the Office of the National Statistics Bureau, found that the literate population of 15 years and older constituted 93.5 per cent (Office of The Education Council, 2006; UIS, 2008).

Thailand's economy depends on agriculture, with 70 per cent of the work force in the agriculture sector and 60 per cent of all export products being agricultural (International Trade Center, 2015). The country therefore places a particular focus on the development of agriculture, while it also aims to develop the country's industry, telecommunications, commerce and tourism sectors, respectively. A middle-income country, Thailand is the third largest and fourth most populous in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In December 2015, Thailand and its ASEAN neighbors began to form a new economic community, creating a single competitive market of free-flowing labor, trade and investment across the region. Domestically, Thailand has experienced recent political instability, slower economic growth and demographic shifts that will shrink the size of its labor force. A strong education system will be critical to help Thailand respond to these challenges, move beyond middle-income status and achieve inclusive sustainable growth.

## The Thai education system

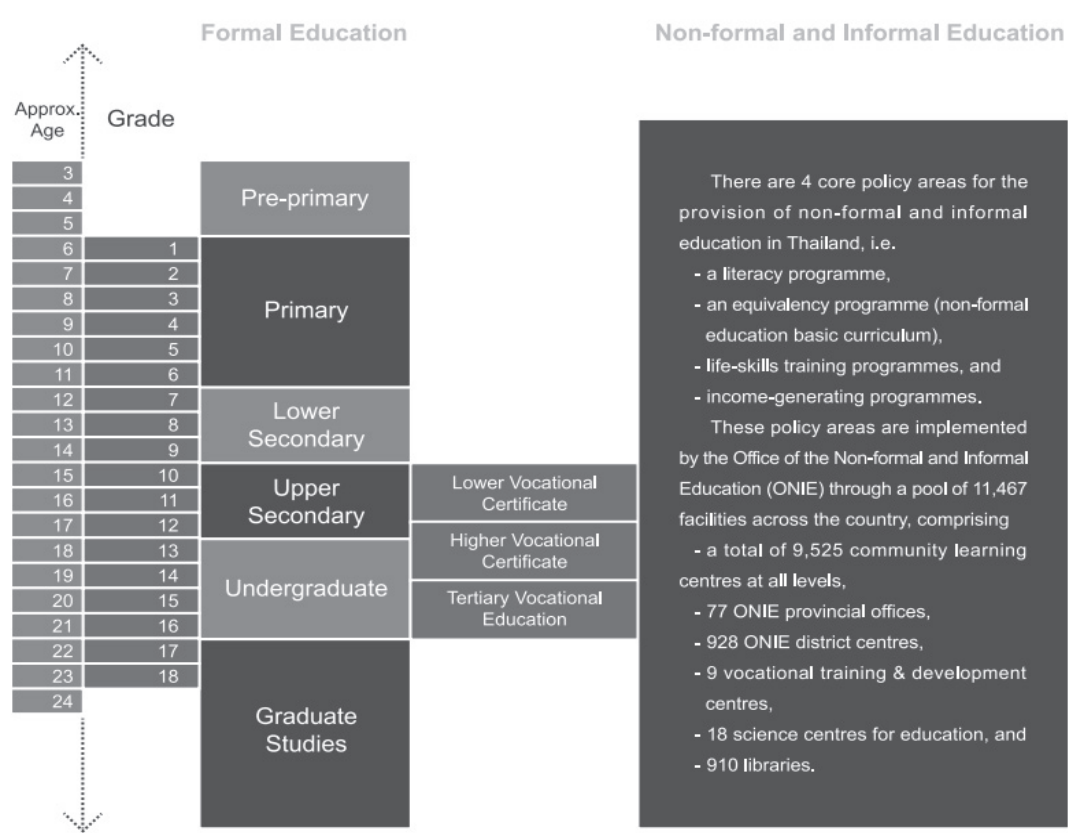
The government of Thailand has long promoted various forms of lifelong learning which include non-formal education, informal education, continuing education, and training of life skills, by both government and private sector actors. These programs intend to address the learning needs of disadvantaged people who lack the opportunity to access formal schooling. It is mainly people of working age and the elderly who comprise this group of disadvantaged learners today as population growth in Thailand is declining. Population aging makes lifelong learning ever more vital for developing Thailand to become a knowledge-based economy. This will enable people to use their knowledge for improving their quality of life in a rapidly changing world.

There are presently 759 vocational institutions and 892 higher education institutions of which 516 are under government administration while 376 institutions belong to the private sector. In terms of non-formal and informal education, there are several institutions under government administration: 964 centers for the promotion of non-formal and informal education, 849 public libraries, 8,697 Community Learning Centers (CLCs), and 4,280 private institutions. There are also other forms of non-formal and informal education such as educational radio and television programs, IT media and science centers.

As stipulated in the 1999 National Education Act, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is the main agency responsible for promoting and overseeing the provision of education at all levels, including basic and higher education, and of all types, including formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal education is divided into two levels: basic and higher education. Basic education in Thailand refers to six years of primary education (G1-G6), three years of lower secondary (G7-G9) and three years of upper secondary education (G10-G12). The National Education Act provides that compulsory education shall be extended from six to nine years, covering six years of primary education and three years of lower secondary education (G1-G9). Those having completed the compulsory education are eligible to choose between two parallel tracks: general or academic education, and vocational education. The 1999 National Education Act also specifies that not less than twelve years of education shall be provided free of charge. In addition, an initiative to provide 3 years pre-primary up to the completion of upper secondary education free of charge was initiated in 2009. Therefore, the Thai education system has provided 15 years of free basic education ever since.

Vocational education is offered in three tiers: upper secondary level, leading to lower vocational certificates; post-secondary level, leading to higher vocational certificates; and tertiary vocational education, leading to bachelor’s degrees. Higher education is provided at a diploma or associate degree level, and degree levels, ranging from bachelor’s degrees to doctoral degrees (Bureau of Information and Communication Technology Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, 2017).

Figure 1: The Thai Education System



### Early Year Education

Over 74% of children, aged 3 to 5 receive early childhood education. While the majority of Early Year Education is provided by government primary schools, the Ministry of Education has actively encouraged private schools and local government to take a more significant role at this level. As a result, there has been a marked expansion in the provision of Early Year Education by

the private sector. This is particularly evident in the Bangkok Metropolitan area where the private sector provides 59 per cent of total Early Year Education, compared with the national average of 28 per cent.

### *Basic Education*

As mentioned, basic education in Thailand follows a 6-3-3 model. Eight core subjects form the national curriculum: Thai language, mathematics, science, social studies, religion and culture, health and physical education, arts, careers and technology, and foreign languages. Flexibility is built into the curriculum in order to integrate local wisdom and culture, so that it is consistent with set learning standards in each of the core subject groups. The promotion of thinking skills, self-learning strategies and moral development is at the heart of teaching and learning in the Thai national curriculum.

### *Non-Formal Education*

Thailand has long given priority to adult and non-formal education as a means of providing lifelong learning opportunities to the out-of-school population. Initially aimed at literacy and primary levels, non-formal education services have expanded significantly into secondary and vocational levels. Strategies include developing a range of life skills through distance learning, establishing workplace and CLCs and promoting the joint sharing of resources with the formal school sector. In order to support the promotion of a lifelong learning culture in the non-formal education sector, Internet connections have been made increasingly accessible in rural areas and system improvements have been implemented to provide recognition of prior learning and facilitate credit transfer.

### *Informal Education*

The vision of developing a learning society includes a clear need to promote the idea that learning can also take place outside the formal space of the classroom. Support for informal learning is reinforced by a network of over 800 libraries, at district and provincial levels, together with a network of 15 science museums. Educational television and radio programs providing direct teaching as well as enrichment activities are broadcast nationwide through seven satellite

transmitted channels from the Royal Sponsored Project and the Ministry of Education. In addition, every school is connected to the Internet, with the aim of serving their local communities, and computer to student ratios are targeted to fall from 1:46 to 1:20 (Bureau of International, 2008).

### *Vocational and Technical Education*

Formal Vocational and Technical Education is conducted at three levels: upper secondary (leading to the Lower Certificate of Vocational Education), post-secondary (leading to a Diploma or Vocational Associate Degree) and university level (leading to a Degree). There are currently over 1 million students enrolled in the various vocational study pathways. Eight fields of study are undertaken as majors: trade and industry, agriculture, home economics, fisheries, business and tourism, arts and crafts, textiles and commerce. The move toward lifelong learning and a learning society has been embodied in a credit transfer system to facilitate mobility between institutions; in the recognition of different types of qualifications from various institutions offering vocational training; and in the evaluation of prior learning and work experience from within the formal, non-formal and informal sectors. Reforms are currently being implemented to remodel the system towards a Thai Vocational Qualification (TVQ) based upon industrial practices and needs.

### *Higher Education*

The means for student admission to the higher education sector is the High School Entrance Examination taken at the end of *Mattayom* 6 (Grade 12). Also, students who graduated from vocational certificate and formal education tracks can apply to study at higher education. Recent reforms have increased the importance placed on Grade Point Averages (GPA) for final university entry. Higher education is predominantly provided at universities and colleges. The two distinct levels of educational attainment are the diploma level and graduate degrees. Over 2.2 million students are currently enrolled in the higher education sector and participation rates of university age students has increased significantly over the last few years from an average of 26% to the current average of 40%. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in higher education opportunities with 78 public universities and 89 private higher education institutions (Bureau of International, 2008).



## *Challenges and opportunities for growth*

According to UNESCO's 2017/18 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, there remain substantial challenges to the quality of education in Thailand:

- 99% complete primary education, but only 85% complete lower secondary education
- 50% are not taught in the language spoken at home
- 12% do not achieve a minimum proficiency level in mathematics at the end of primary school
- 62% of out-of-school adolescents at lower secondary level are girls
- At the end of lower secondary education, only 50% have a minimum proficiency level in reading, and only 46% in mathematics
- Only 45% of schools have basic sanitation facilities; only 60% have access to drinking water
- 80 of the poorest complete lower secondary education compared to 100 of the richest
- There are 3.9 million adults unable to read a simple sentence

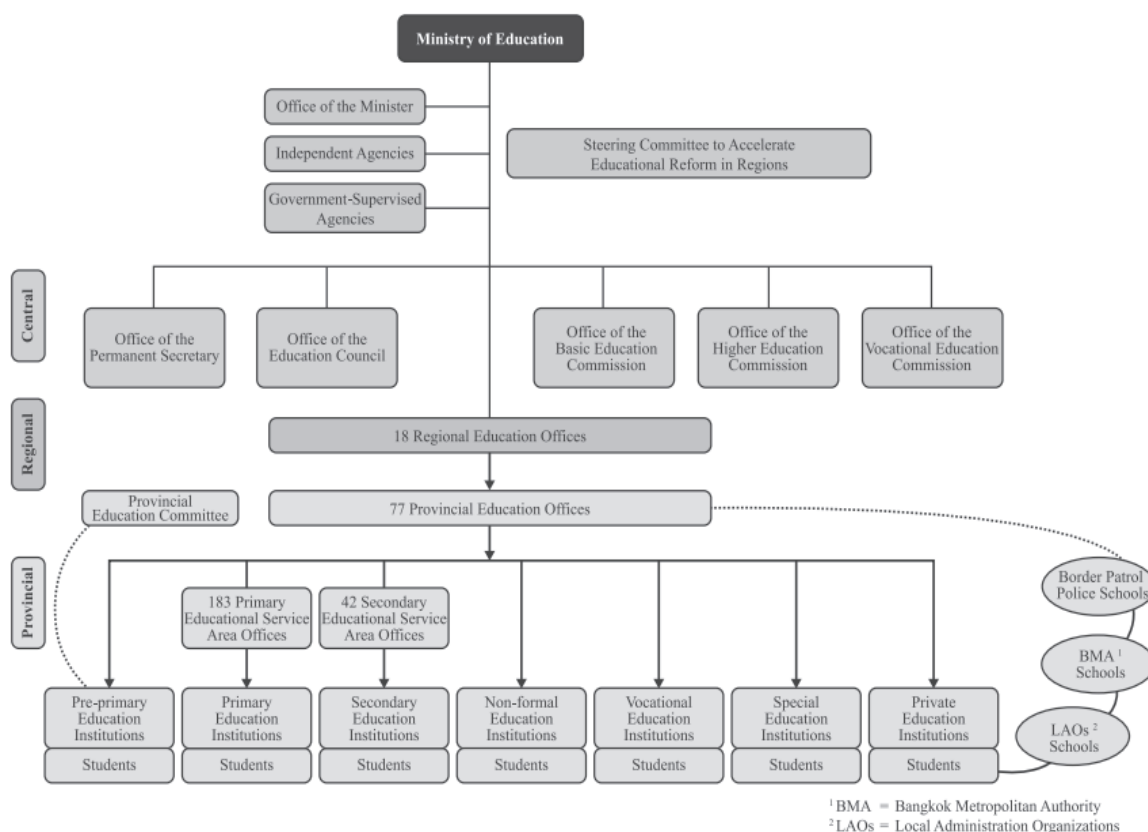
Nowadays, innovation and technological advances are constantly changing the ways we communicate, work, and live together and education systems which reflect this dynamic will be most capable of responding effectively to the current and changing needs of young people, society and indeed the labor market. Education policy makers and practitioners are rightly concerned that the education which young people experience should equip them with the kinds of skills that prepare them to live in and shape the society of the future. Yet, too many students in Thailand are still not attaining expected foundational skills, as evidenced by national examinations and international assessment results. Drop-out rates remain high at the secondary school level, which leaves too many young people exposed to the harsh realities of the labor market without the necessary skills to thrive.

Improvements in education and skills will be important to drive the achievement of Thailand's 20-year National Strategy and to boost economic potential and inclusiveness. The challenge for Thailand, however, is how to effectively bring about the change we want to see in classrooms around the country. How to transform teaching and learning so that the development of student competencies and the application of learning and skills, especially in literacy and basic skills, are the primary focus of education. This requires a renewed focus on a whole range of skills including

adaptability, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and collaboration, to name some of the most prominent. These skills are often referred to as transferrable skills as they can be used in different scenarios and across different domains.

### *Administrative and organizational structures of the Thai education system*

The 1999 National Education Act initiated an overall reformation of the Thai Education System. Considerable changes in the structure of management and administration have taken place in order to support the key teaching and learning changes stipulated by the 1999 National Education Act. Emphasis is on the decentralization of administrative responsibilities to local level with the consolidation of education planning at the central level. The reformation process of the Thai Education System led to the establishment of 175 Education Service Areas in 2003, and this number has increased to 185 in 2008. A new structure for the organization of the Ministry of Education at Central Level (Figure 2) has been implemented since 2002.



*Figure 2: The Administrative Structure of Education in Thailand (MOE's Organizational Structure)*

Recently, Thailand's new Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation has been set up under the concept of research and innovation integration. The new ministry will focus on promoting research work for commercial purposes, producing human resources in response to future needs, and developing innovation on a full-cycle basis.

## **Research Findings**

### **PART 1: Defining Terminology: ALE between NFE and LLL in Thailand**

#### **History of ALE in Thailand**

From the structured interviews with different ALE experts for the purpose of this study, the authors deducted that adult education was officially introduced to Thailand in 1940 when the Adult Education Division, Department of General Education, Ministry of Education was established. Work on adult education has been conducted since then with changes along the way to respond to altering contexts of Thai society. Since its introduction to Thailand, ALE can be divided into four phases, with each era representing different definitions, concepts and emphases. Details of each era are discussed below.

**Phase 1 )1940 to 1945(:** According to the 1937 census, 47 per cent of the population were illiterate which was recognized as a major challenge for society to fully grasp the concept of democracy. In order to enhance people's literacy levels, the government established the Adult Education Division to teach disadvantaged groups how to read and write and to provide civic education.

Definition of ALE during Phase 1: ALE's purpose was to educate people of compulsory education age or older than 15 years who remain illiterate or have relapsed into illiteracy. The government provided systematic adult education management, including curriculum, personnel, textbooks, etc.

ALE activities during Phase 1: The government launched literacy campaigns aimed at adults. The campaigns included information on roles and duties of Thai citizens and aimed at unity of the nation. They were underpinned by a mechanism of force: Illiterate people were subject to fines if they could not spell their own names, for instance, and the government formulated a

literacy promotion decree (Announcement of the Prime Minister Office No. 9; Announcement of Adult Education Policy B.E. 2483 and Literacy Promotion Decree).

**Phase 2 (1942 to 1960):** UNESCO's concepts were introduced to Thailand which was poverty-stricken after World War II. At that time, the UNESCO was promoting the Fundamental Education Plan to eradicate illiteracy as it was seen to obstruct democratization, thus leading to inequity and threatening global peace. The Thai government expanded the scope of its adult education programs to be in line with UNESCO's recommendations as well as the country's social problems.

Definition of ALE during Phase 2: Adult education aimed to educate people aged above compulsory education age (15 years and older), who remained illiterate or relapsed into illiteracy, and supported them to become literate through a one-year curriculum. Completing this curriculum was deemed as fulfilling the requirement of basic education necessary to pursue studies at secondary education level.

ALE activities during Phase 2: Promoting literacy and improve professional skills; encouraging people to become good citizens in a democratic state; enhancing people's standard of living; encouraging people to spend their free time with useful activities.

**Phase 3 (1961 to 1996):** This was the golden age for adult education, with a focus on general education and vocational education. During this era, adult education focused on developing the labor force as outlined in the Nation Economic and Social Development Plans Volumes 1 – 7. It also focused on advancing the thinking-ability philosophy (*Khit-Pen* Concept) coined by Dr. Kovit Vorapipat<sup>14</sup>. The philosophy was applied to an integrated adult education project for the first time.

Definition of ALE during Phase 3: Adult education had the purpose of providing literacy to people aged 15 years and older who were outside of the formal education system. It also aimed

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<sup>14</sup> *Khit-Pen* was the guiding philosophy behind the reform of adult education in Thailand. It denotes the ability to think. The process starts with three types of information: information of oneself, community/society and environment, and academic information. To solve a problem, one must consider the three types of information, and on this basis, make a decision and take action. If this action does not solve the problem, the steps need to be repeated until satisfaction is reached.

to foster their thinking abilities through the *Khit-Pen* philosophy. Knowledge was provided both in the general and vocational education systems and in accordance with learners' problems and needs.

ALE activities during Phase 3: During this time, adult education focused on basic and continuous general education. Integrated adult education included, based on the thinking-ability concept, content related to people's lives in the agricultural sector. This education management proved very successful. Vocational curricula were developed to serve the country's economic development. Towards the end of Phase 3, the Adult Education Division was promoted to become its own Department of Informal Education which demonstrates that adult education had become well-defined with regards to its content, management and target groups. Adult education activities were extended to link to informal education.

**Phase 4 ) 1997 to present(:** The concepts of LLL and sustainable development were introduced to Thailand. The government enforced the 1999 National Education Act, which led to educational reforms. Further relevant ALE legislation were the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Promotion of Non-Formal and Informal Education Act (2008), the National Strategies (2018 to 2037), and the Master Plans Volume 11 and 12. They led to changes in the definition, concept and activities of adult education as discussed below.

Definition of ALE during Phase 4: Adult education is a form of informal education with basic education management for learners aged above the compulsory education age, i.e. 15 years and older, within the informal education system. Education management aims to enable people to pursue their careers, become self-reliant, instill creativity and a desire to learn continuously throughout life. Adult education focuses mainly on the thinking-ability philosophy, the LLL concept, learner-centered learning, self-directed learning and the concept of Education for All.

ALE activities during Phase 4: ALE has become needs-centered and thus activities depend on learners' age: For those between 15 and 39 years, learning is aimed at higher education and better career opportunities; for those between 40 to 59 years, learning prepares them to become good senior citizens in society.

## Contemporary ALE

Thailand has been promoting and developing ALE, both in terms of educational opportunities and improving the quality of education, for more than a decade. ALE in Thailand has been developed through collaborative efforts of various government organizations, NGOs and development actors in the private sector. These ALE actors work in coalition with one of them coordinating programs and activities at national, regional, provincial, district, village and community levels. The activities are mainly literacy promotion, upskilling the workforce, professional development, and educational programs in support of His Majesty the King's philosophy on the Sufficiency Economy (see more detail below). ALE programs and activities apply a variety of appropriate technologies relevant to the lives of different target groups. The teachers or facilitators are key to mobilizing communities and implementing learning programs to meet sustainable development goals. They empower communities through knowledge to become autonomous which enables them to implement their own visions of development.

Adult learning and education in Thailand has been integrated into non-formal education curricula at some higher education institutions, such as King Pradjadhipok's Institute, Top Governance Training (*Nor-Por-Sor*), and continuing education curricula conducted by universities. At community level, CLCs are a local educational institution set up and managed by communities themselves to provide various adult learning opportunities with the support of the government, NGOs, and the private sector. Literacy, post-literacy, income generation, life skill programmes and basic education are provided at CLCs. The learning programmes as well as the size of CLCs vary according to local needs and contexts. In Thailand, there are various types of CLCs located in numerous different places, such as district administration offices, temples, schools, community halls, local elders' houses, factories, and prisons. In 2013, there was a total of 8,764 CLCs all over the country (Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education, 2013). Thailand has been expanding the number of CLCs, in order to reach out to more people in an effort to provide better literacy, vocational and life skills (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). In addition, the Ministry of Education has initiated a new literacy promotion project to develop 40,000 "Smart Book Houses" to assist people throughout the country in the pursuit of lifelong learning (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013). There are CLCs established in particular target areas, including ones for ethnic minorities such as the Mlabri people (Phi Tong Luang), the Mogan (Surin Islands) as well as Pondok schools in southern border areas populated by ethnic Malays (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013).

### *Management of adult learning and education*

The responsibility of managing, administrating and coordinating ALE has been carried by different stakeholders within MOE over time:

- From 1997 to 2003: Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE)
- From 2003 to 2007: Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)
- From 2008 to the present time: In 2008, ONFEC became the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE). This constitutes a promotion for both the office as well as the role of informal education in Thailand, and was done according to the country's educational and bureaucratic reform at the time (Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act).

### *Legislation on non-formal and informal education*

The 2008 Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act declares education to be a lifelong process. Participants of lifelong learning are from a wide range of backgrounds, such as individuals, families, communities, local organizations, NGOs, private sector actors, vocational organizations, religious institutions, entrepreneurs and other social sectors. The non-formal and informal education system aims to translate the principle of lifelong learning into effective practices, to enable people to continuously improve their quality of life. In this way, Thailand strives to develop a learning society promoting local wisdom, which in turn will make the country internationally competitive. The Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act guarantees the right of disadvantaged people to equally access lifelong education. In its essence, the Act aims to:

- Provide opportunities to those who have or have not completed basic education to participate in non-formal and informal education
- Guarantee the right of accessing wide varieties of quality education, according to people's living conditions and needs
- Decentralize education management in order for all educational institutions and networks to participate in the management of learning activities
- Develop a variety of learning resources based on local wisdom and information technology
- Identify appropriate frameworks and learning guidelines which benefit learners

- Assign ONIE as the leading office for setting policies and implementing NFE and informal education activities as well as conducting monitoring and evaluation

The National Education Act and the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act are the two most important pieces of educational legislation to ensure access to quality education for Thai people. Further, they support the promotion of making education management and implementation more effective, and they incorporate ALE to prepare all kinds of learning opportunities to benefit adult learners.

According to ONIE's evaluation report on education quality and opportunity of Thai people to access quality education, the average number of academic years which people attended is an indicator of people's opportunity to education. The study concentrated on two age groups – adults of 15 years and older, and the working-age population at 15 to 59 years.

#### *Accreditation of achievement*

Accreditation of educational achievement is the evaluation of learners' acquired knowledge and skills. Accreditation of achievement is conducted in accordance with the learning standard of basic education (primary and secondary levels). As stated in the 1999 National Education Act and the Amended Act (2002), Thai education comprises three forms –formal education, non-formal education and informal education. Educational institutions can arrange to conduct one of those three forms, or they may organize activities from all three systems and offer the opportunity for learners to transfer their credits across. This includes knowledge attained from informal education or from vocational training as well as from work experiences. Accreditation of educational achievements encompasses basic knowledge, vocational development, quality of life improvement as well as social and community development.

- **Basic knowledge:** To evaluate academic knowledge such as Thai language, mathematics, sciences and English
- **Vocational development:** To evaluate knowledge and abilities in vocational/occupational skills, abilities in problem solving, occupational administration, IT skills, and morals/values in vocation



- **Quality of life improvement:** To evaluate the perception of family life values, skills in leading one's life happily, skills in promoting good physical and mental health, and religious/ethical practices
- **Social and community development:** To evaluate the individual's ability to apply their own potential, having a happy and functioning family, participating in and supporting activities which benefit the community and society

Applicants who are to be evaluated for accreditation of achievement must have appropriate qualifications in accordance with ONIE criteria. They have to be Thai by nationality and need to have completed an educational level lower than the level for which they have requested to be evaluated. They are required to have work experience or be currently occupationally engaged; they cannot be students in formal school. The tools used for evaluation comprise test sheets, interview questionnaires, personal portfolios and practical demonstration. In order to be successful, applicants have to pass each component at a score of at least 50%.

#### *Non-formal and informal education coupon system for LLL promotion*

As part of the Non-Formal and Informal Education reform in 2003, the government introduced a budget allocation strategy for decentralizing financial support of disadvantaged learners. A system of education coupons or credit cards was established to promote LLL for those who have not yet finished basic education. This coupon system supports equal access of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. ONIE oversees promoting and organizing the coupon learning system.

The benefits of demand-oriented financing include higher enrolment as well as attendance and completion rates. Relating resources to the students and their families, and close monitoring of those resources, could lead to considerable efficiency gains to the system, thus increasing the cost-effectiveness of education programs. According to the National Institute of Educational Testing Service, students of private institutions have better academic achievements which indicates the effectiveness and efficiency of private schooling (Wiruchai, Nongluch, 2000).

### *Higher educational opportunities for adults*

ONIE's efforts to develop equivalency programs for the working population has resulted in increased numbers of adult upper secondary education graduates in rural communities. Some of these graduates wish to continue their education at college/university level and are prevented to do so by a lack of financial resources, time and subjects of interest. In response, some educational institutions have developed more appropriate curricula and teaching-learning processes to meet rural communities' needs. One best practice example is the University for Life project. The University for Life uses already available CLCs as the bases for teaching/learning activities (Learning-Center Based (LCB)). In this way, the University for Life program constitutes a semi-distance education system. Learning activities mainly take place in local communities with occasional modules conducted at provincial level. Teachers are recruited from universities or enterprises and are assigned by educational institutions as teaching facilitators and evaluators of students' accomplishments. The core idea of the University for Life is to foster cooperation between communities and local organizations. The latter, in the form of organizing committees, develop learning programs by seeking support from higher education institutions in terms of academic knowledge, curriculum development, teaching methods, follow-up and quality assurance. This project provides an opportunity for people in rural areas to improve their skills and knowledge, and to attain a degree from an educational institution, enabling them to develop themselves and their communities.

### *Poverty eradication through the Sufficiency Economy philosophy*

As mentioned earlier, the Sufficiency Economy philosophy has been graciously developed by His Majesty the King of Thailand who wishes for every Thai citizen to apply the method as an appropriate way for leading a happy life. This philosophy has been translated into practice since the 8<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997 – 2001) until the present plan, the 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021). The Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy based on the fundamental principles of Thai culture, encompassing moderation, prudence, and “social immunity”<sup>15</sup>. It uses knowledge and virtues as guidelines for living. This

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<sup>15</sup> Social protection

Sufficiency Economy philosophy has been applied to all walks of life – from the family level to community and state levels. It is a locally appropriate method of bringing happiness to individuals' lives and turning the country into a grateful and happy society. In terms of promoting learning processes to eradicate poverty, the philosophy's most significant principles and practices are:

- Taking the Sufficiency Economy philosophy as the guideline for any development. Through this philosophy, one should understand the concepts of “sufficient”, “reasonable” and “good immunity” which are regarded as the bases of knowledge
- Learning programs should be conducted collaboratively by communities, non-formal education facilitators and other personnel of development organizations
- Participatory problem solving
- Learning is based on people's life experiences and thus related to everyday life

#### *Making use of local wisdom in implementing educational programs*

During the economic downturn in 1997, many community learning institutions were established by community members themselves, such as Universities for Life, councils, associations, networks, CLCs and learning groups. These learning institutions have since provided an opportunity of learning together by establishing a platform through which community members can share their own experiences and skills and engage in mutual teaching and learning. Community learning institutions thus are key to preserving and developing local wisdom. After communities' initiative, government organizations, especially ONIE, NGOs and private sector actors, commenced integrating local wisdom/indigenous knowledge into their curricula and programs based on academic and technological knowledge. Thus, both internal and external community resources are mobilized for the community learning process and collaborative problem solving.

#### *Development of lifelong learning resources and learning channels*

As mentioned earlier, the national education legislative framework has established Thai education as a lifelong process, including all forms of learning. Resources and learning channels for lifelong learning are, for example, public libraries, museums, arts galleries, zoos, public parks, botanic gardens, science and technology/knowledge parks, sports and recreation centers,

and resource centers. The development of these sources of knowledge has strengthened the informal education system and has enabled people to learn according to their own interests, potential and readiness. In the following, two specific learning channels are described in more detail as they have strongly and successfully contributed to Thailand's development of LLL.

**Thailand Knowledge Parks (TK Parks):** The concept of TK Parks is based on preparing Thailand for becoming a knowledge-based society, and to promote reading habits among Thai people ("living library"). Approved in 2004, there are currently 29 TK Parks in 24 provinces. TK Parks are considered one of the most successful learning promotion projects that the Thai government has undertaken. TK Park are meant to have a stimulating environment for learning, be easily accessible and offer self-study opportunities to young people and adults. These institutions include living libraries, virtual media rooms, music libraries, IT libraries, theatres, and multi-purpose learning centers. Besides, TK Parks also provide e-Library services ([www.tkpark.or.th](http://www.tkpark.or.th)).

**Educational Television Station (ETV):** In the mid to late 1990s, MOE assigned DNFE (now ONIE) to launch a pilot project for developing distance education. The aim of this project was to reach remote populations with educational opportunities. After the pilot's completion, ETV was born under DNFE administration. ETV targets various groups and broadcasts five different programs to promote family-related knowledge, formal education, non-formal education, to develop teachers' capacities, and to improve people's quality of life. ETV broadcasts for 16 hours daily and programs can be accessed via satellite disk signal, online, via UBC station or True Vision channel 96, and via local cable. Some CLCs have thus installed satellite systems to provide ETV to their communities.

## Analysis of ALE in Thailand

Analysis of ALE in Thailand is structured along the **three key domains of learning and skills, and five transversal areas** as outlined in RALE (UNESCO, 2015).

The key domains are:

- Literacy and basic skills
- Continuing education and vocational skills
- Liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills

Each key domain is analysed via the five transversal areas:

- Policy
- Governance
- Financing
- Participation (including providers and learners), inclusion and equity
- Quality (including recognition, validation and accreditation)

### Literacy and basic skills

The adult literacy rate is the percentage of people aged 15 and above who can both read and write, i.e. understand a short, simple statement about their everyday life. Thailand's literacy rate in 2015 was 92.87% (World Bank, 2020). Thus, the literacy rate in Thailand is quite high, and in recent years there has been an increased emphasis on education in other areas. The development of the Kingdom's human resources is its highest priority.

Literacy is becoming more and more important through the development of today's information communication technology (ICT). Therefore, literacy of the future world is the ability to read and write more than one single language, i.e. the ability of understanding three groups of languages: (1) Major languages of the world today: English, Chinese, Japanese; (2) Languages of neighboring countries in the same region such as Thai language, Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese and Malay; (3) Local languages such as languages of the southern, northern, or northeastern part of Thailand, and the old Lanna language. (1) and (2) are the groups of languages used for business relationships while language group (3) applies to maintaining and fostering culture. This kind of literacy education will also support the deepening of cross-

cultural and cross-regional relationships in which differences between societies, lifestyles, religions and cultures are respected.

ICT today is present in the entire country, and it has brought development to regional and rural towns. In the future, literacy may entail the knowledge and ability to use technologies in everyday life. *Khit-Pen* (the ability to think critically) should be considered in this new form of literacy education in order for the technology to be used appropriately. The Internet and digital technology provide the infrastructure of business processes and the primary communication channel in the daily lives of people. Digital literacy is a term popularly used today in Thailand.

However, very little of the literature has discussed the definition and competencies of digital literacy. Some of the competencies can be described as technology, critical thinking, collaborative working, and social awareness skills (Techataweewan and Prasertsin, 2018). In addition, a research paper by Jongsermtrakoon and Nasongkhla (2015) defined digital literacy as the ability to use digital materials including the skills to define, access, evaluate, manage, integrate, create, and communicate. More recently, a research paper by Phuapan, Viriyavejakul, and Pimdee (2016) defined six factors of digital literacy for Thai students, being the ability to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate. Increasing digital technology has changed the way people communicate, collaborate, create, solve problems, make decisions, and consume information. Present day education needs to shift from traditional teaching and learning methods based on printed materials toward digital formats. In addition, by increasing the quantity of learning resources on websites, the Internet provides a wide range of disciplines and lifelong learning opportunities.

A new concept of literacy should also consider the need for people to administer and manage their lives appropriately in order to successfully develop themselves, their families, the society and nation. Based on the interviews conducted for this study, ALE has been identified as the key concept to enhance the literacy rate and basic skills of different target groups.

## Continuing education and vocational skills

In the past, in Thailand, knowledge and skills were mainly gained through community education offered in temple schools, and “on the job” training within close-knit family relationships, such as farming skills or domestic work. With the introduction of modern education in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the reign of Phra Bat Somdet Phra Poramintharamaha Chulalongkorn Phra Chunla Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua, also known as King Rama V (1853–1910), ways in which education was delivered underwent dramatic changes. In support of the country’s development and to catch up with modernity, the centralized government asked for qualified personnel to manage and deal with the newly established national and central administration system, adopted mainly from France and England.

Chalamwong (2019) mentions new challenges in education and society with the demand for certain knowledge and skills required by the labor market to upgrade Thailand’s economic and production systems. If Thailand's income per capita reaches US\$15,000 in 2035 (up from \$6,900 in 2017), it will have escaped the "middle-income trap" - the term economists use to describe what happens to a country when its growth slows after reaching middle-income levels. To make this happen, the priority for Thailand is to increase the nation's productive capacity and focus on human resources by raising the level of its skilled labor. However, over the past 10 years, Thailand has relied on low and medium-skilled labor, which together account for around 84 per cent of total employment. Technician-level and professional workers make up the remaining 16 per cent. In developed countries, the high-skilled workforce is around 60 to 70 per cent of total employment (Chalamwong, 2019). It has soon appeared necessary to develop technical and vocational education to support industrial development as well as continuing education for upskilling and reskilling of the Thai workforce.

### *Vocational education in Thailand*

The Vocational Education Act was voted for by the Thai Parliament in 2008. This emphasis on vocational education is not a surprise and can be linked with the industrial development path Thailand has followed since the 1950s. The Vocational Education Act has restructured Thai vocational education, and lots of hope has been put on it to foster human resource development and economic growth in the country. Importantly, the National Education Act and then the



Vocational Education Act of 2008 were designed to help Thai vocational and technical education overcome its difficulties and boost the Thai economic base (Office of the Vocational Education Commission, 2008). The Vocational Education Act put the focus on *vocational colleges and vocational training courses* to develop the knowledge and skills required by target groups. This Act also points out the need for collaboration between the NESDB (National Economic and Social Development Board) and the MOE. The National and Economic Development Plan shall arise from this collaboration with the aim to produce and upgrade Thai workers' potentials and skills (Office of the Vocational Education Commission, 2008). The organizational chart of Thai vocational education (2008) can be seen in Figure 3.

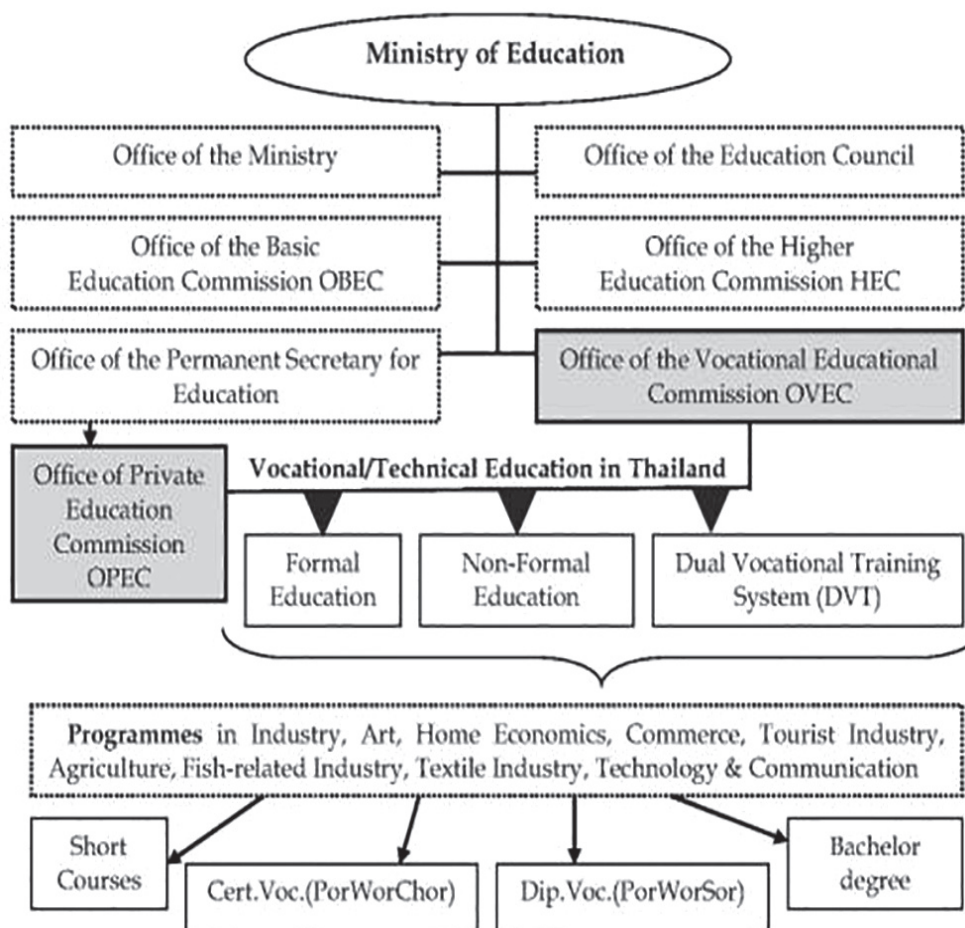


Figure 3: Organizational chart of Thai vocational education (2008)

Chart adapted from “Vocational Education Structure” and information available on [www.moe.go.th](http://www.moe.go.th) and [www.vec.go.th](http://www.vec.go.th)



The 8<sup>th</sup> section of the Vocational Educational Law of 2008 states that vocational training can be acquired in three ways: formal education, non-formal education, and dual vocational training (DVT). In formal education, programs are taught in colleges. The curricula, length and course evaluation are set to meet specific conditions. In non-formal education, programs aim to be flexible. The curricula, length and course evaluation are set according to the needs of targeted groups. The willingness to develop this kind of education is in line with the strategy to promote lifelong learning, and therefore the training of the needed labor force along the changes faced by the industry and the economy, and also with the trend towards more community-based development.

DVT is a new concept in Thai vocational and technical education. It was made concrete by the Vocational Education Act with the aim to allow better transition from school to work. This was done with the German dual education system in mind. The objective is to link theory and practice in the syllabus, courses in colleges and internship in the workplace. Agreements are signed between the colleges and the workplace, whether private companies, public organizations, academic institutes or governmental offices. This is a cooperative education program at technical certificate and diploma level.

Technical and vocational training in Thailand is organized around different programs. The Certificate of Vocational Education Program (*PorWorChor*) is the academic program which is available for students who finished lower secondary school (at Mo3 level) and applied to attend vocational college. Students need three years of studies to get it. The Diploma of Vocational Education Program (*PorWorSor*) is the academic program which is available for students coming from *PorWorChor* or from Mo6 (general education stream). It is a less-than-a-degree diploma. The aim of this program is to develop technicians with higher potential. The curriculum has set a minimum of two years to get this diploma. The Bachelor of Technology is the academic program available for students who received their Certificate or Diploma of Vocational Education. This degree has newly been established and is not available for general education students. It is taught in colleges in continuity with *PorWorSor*. But other institutions have been interested in this degree, for instance, Rajamangala and Rajabhat Universities. They have set up a Bachelor of Industry to attract technical students. The curriculum in all these bachelors spans four years for *PoWorChor* students and two years for *PorWorSor* students. Short courses are also delivered by colleges to respond to the demand for middle-range or higher

technical skills. The programs are meant to support local needs in training. Below is some data regarding the students in vocational and technical institutions.

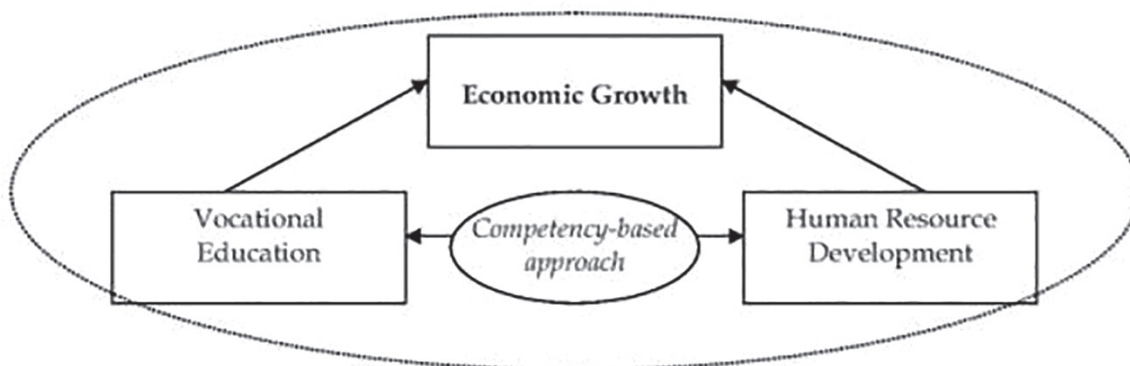
Level	Year	Number of students			Proportion OVEC/OPEC**	
PorWorChor	1	201,009	112,878	313,887	64%	36%
	2	150,611	88,786	239,397	63%	37%
	3	126,147	73,066	199,213	63%	37%
	Total	477,767	274,730	752,497	63%	37%
PorWorSor	1	110,121	65,766	175,887	63%	37%
	2 (or more)*	100,745	62,579	163,324	62%	38%
	Total	210,866	128,345	339,211	62%	38%
Grand Total		688,633	403,075	1,091,708	63%	37%

Figure 4: Number of students in public and private vocational colleges in academic year 2007

\*Some students may have to study more than two years, so this figure includes students in their second year or more. \*\*OVEC (Office of Vocational Education Commission); OPEC (Office of the Private Education Commission). Source: [www.vec.go.th](http://www.vec.go.th)

#### *The role of vocational education in economic development*

There is a gap between the needs created by the technological changes and the level of education of the Thai workforce. The majority of workers have, at best, finished primary education. This is far too limited in an economy that requires more and more engineers and middle-range technicians. Therefore, the development of a quality technical and vocational training system has been seen as a solution to fill the gap. This is in line with a competency-based approach of education and training (CBE) that moves education away from a teacher-focused approach to a student and/or workplace focus (Velde, 1999): “In competence-based VET, academic disciplines are no longer the starting point for curriculum development” (Wesselink, Biemans et al. 2005). The outcomes of this kind of education should be directly linked to the development of human resources (Gasipaa, 2006). Vocational education providing needed competencies and skills required for human resource development can contribute to economic growth (Sawaaengdee, Wohngsaaycheuua, et al., 2005), as shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5: Competency-based approach: the role of vocational education in economic growth*

Some studies listed the skills needed by Thai students (Wohnngboonsin and Suwaanee, 2004) to fill current requirements of employers: operational, technical, social, communication and organizational skills. As a consequence, the training includes the following subjects: Thai language, English language, business administration, mathematics and technology. In order to fit the competency-based approach, students should also be aware of their learning environment. Current technical students in Thailand appear to have a low potential, and solutions should be developed to attract talented students away from the general education stream. This would allow vocational education to match the demands of the labor market. Another option seen as essential is to develop collaboration between the different ministries (Ministry of Education, Labor, and Industry) and partnerships between educational institutions and entrepreneurs. Recently, the share of manpower with vocational qualifications in the industrial sector gradually increased, but at a slower rate than the government's expectation. The Thai government is promoting the idea that "vocation creates the nation". Under the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) Development Plan, part of Thailand 4.0 is aimed at revitalising and enhancing the well-known Eastern Seaboard development programme that has underpinned Thailand's status as an industrial powerhouse for more than three decades (Chalamwong, 2019).

#### *Activities enhancing continuing education and vocational skills*

**Professional testing and standards certification centers:** The Office of the Vocational Education Commission has set up professional testing and standards certification centers at educational institutions under its supervision and at various universities nationwide, in preparation for the ASEAN Community, to increase job opportunities for entrepreneurs and

skilled personnel, so that their skills and standards would be recognized in the ASEAN labour market (Foreign Office, 2013). These fields are involved with information technology and communication, construction, beauty and spas, gems and jewellery, logistics, automobiles and automotive parts, fashion, Thai cuisine, and retail business. The centers are located across the country for the convenience of those who wish to apply for professional testing. Related government agencies and private organizations join forces in conducting testing and certifying professional standards. Each center focusses on only one particular field of profession, and those who pass the testing receive certificates. The introduction of the new courses is seen as a significant step toward producing engineering personnel to cope with the ASEAN labour market demand in the future.

### **Using information and communication technology to foster lifelong learning opportunities**

**for all:** Network linkages to sources of learning and to develop existing learning resources should be available for everyone as a potential learning sources service. ICT networks, web technologies in e-learning, mobile learning tools and virtual worlds as facilitators of knowledge sharing in all types of learning settings have brought new opportunities for lifelong learning for all. With the Thailand 4.0 initiative (more details see below), the nation has been making considerable efforts to transform Thailand, and to maximize the use of digital technologies in all socio-economic activities in order to develop infrastructure, innovation, data, human capital, and other digital resources that will ultimately drive the country towards wealth, stability, and sustainability. One of the mega projects is to develop ICTs for education through an open access learning system, “Thailand Massive Open Online Courses (ThaiMOOCs)” with the full support from the Thai government. ThaiMOOCs, a national strategy for lifelong learning spaces for all, was officially launched in 2016, targeting higher education and lifelong learners. Courses are often cheap or offered for free, and learners follow them whenever and wherever they want (Thailand Cyber University, 2017). Information and communication technologies are having a profound influence on the reach and influence of learning in Thai society, as learning is now accessible to a wider range of learners. This has enormous potential for building a more cohesive and robust learning society (Charunkaittikul, 2018).

### **Equivalency Programs (EPs) for promoting lifelong learning:** Charunkaittikul (2018)

pointed out that Thailand gives high priority to education and recognizes its importance for human and social development. As a result, NFE programs of various kinds have been offered

over the years. A large number of organizations have supported NFE and their numbers have steadily risen. This support culminated in the National Education Act of 1999, which states in Article 10 that people will have equal rights and opportunities to receive at least 12 years of basic education (plus three years of pre-primary). Because of this Act, the government has the mandate to cover all areas and target groups and to provide quality basic education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2016). Equivalency programs currently in operation are based on the non-formal basic education curriculum that is the core curriculum and similar to that of the formal school system. The system of EP includes accrediting and/or certifying levels of learning of individuals as comparable to the formal education system; based on clearly defined procedures and methods of assessment, measurement and evaluation of learning; in reference to national education standards. In Thailand, there is no separate organizational structure for EPs. The government uses CLCs created for literacy and continuing education, as well as formal schools, Non-Government Organizations' (NGOs) venues, and vocational centers.

Finally, organizations in Thailand have gone through transformations due to the development of high technologies/biotechnology, nanotechnology, and ICT, to name a few. Thai organizations are struggling to keep up the pace with market demands in the form of market competitiveness and the innovation of new products. Pressure is put on educational institutions both formal and non-formal to produce qualified graduates who are equipped with higher levels of responsibility and the ability to use logical-critical thinking, to diagnose problems, research and apply knowledge, propose solutions, and design and implement those solutions, often as a team member. Such abilities can only be developed through individual learning and development, and the processes that encourage this must begin in educational institutions, especially at the undergraduate level. Therefore, it is essential for all networks to create a dynamic learning program to support the industrial requirements and strengthen Thai national innovative systems by an enhanced cooperation between the universities, enterprises, the labor market and the local community. However, these efforts have been facing major issues, not the least being the rigidity of the educational system and the difficulty for educational staff to adapt and train themselves to suit the new requirements. Liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills

## *Education in Thailand 4.0*

Education is one of the key sectors in the move to Thailand 4.0. Thailand 4.0, as set out by the National Strategic Reform for Thailand 4.0, aims to, by 2036, develop the country's citizens to have skills to develop the country, possess critical thinking skills and the ability to deal with change, endorse lifelong learning, and be good citizens overall (Office of National Education Council, 2016). MOE has concentrated very much on educating Thai people in accordance with the National Education Act. Section 6 states that “[e]ducation shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: Physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity; and desirable way of life as to be able to live in harmony with other people” (Office of National Education Commission, 1999). The National Education Act further sets three outcomes for Thai students: (1) to be smart, (2) to be good, and (3) to be happy (Office of National Education Commission, 1999).

Currently, all roads of development are heading to 4.0 as a code of the global destination of all fields and countries, especially Thailand. One of the concerned tools enabling the country to reach the destination smoothly is human capital, or citizens who are invested in driving forward their nation. Moreover, the ultimate goal is to develop Thai active citizens who are becoming global citizens. A global citizen is an individual who has the responsibility to preserve and protect the world's environment and every living being on earth. Characteristics of a global citizen encompass a drive to contribute to the world community, taking responsibility for one's own actions, committing to social justice, and a willingness to act for the world's harmony. Hence, it has become the mission of many countries to develop their citizens as global citizens.

## *Learning from international best practice*

Thailand's efforts to achieve goals set out in the National Education Act and the national strategic plan are informed by international best practice from all over the world. Educational organizations and institutions in Thailand have studied best practice from Finland, Singapore, and South Korea – countries with remarkable achievements in the education sector.

Synthesizing learnings from other countries, the global context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, UNESCO recommendations, and the current practices of Thailand, the vision of education in the year 2036



has been announced as follows: (1) A clearly structured system of education administration; (2) Dynamic, innovation-driven education management of international quality; (3) Pre-school education as the strong foundation for the country's development, (4) Basic foundation education (K-12) should reach the quality of international level; and (5) Teacher training of high quality to attract talented citizens (Office of National Education Council, 2016).

At the same time, Thailand has been working on its ASEAN integration, especially since the establishment of the ASEAN Economics Community (AEC) in 2015. Citizens of ASEAN countries are now easily able to transfer labor, goods, technology, services, and culture to other member countries (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). This opportunity is motivating all member countries to put forward their best quality in terms of people, goods, services, and any other items.

#### *Areas for improvement and growth*

For the education sector, the context of Thailand 4.0, ASEAN and globalization compel action to prepare for current and future needs. Education institutions must provide resources and facilities to create enabling learning environments for global citizens. A review of National Policies for Education by OECD and UNESCO (2016) found that with regards to education, Thailand has made significant investments in the sector and performs well compared to its regional neighbors. However, benefits are not shared with all children, and there are still regions in which children struggle to access education, and achievements are lower than the minimum standard. The study encourages Thailand to focus on four priority areas: (1) Review curricula and set common standards for students; (2) Build the capacity of students at all levels; (3) Prepare teachers and school leaders, and (4) Improve teachers' skills in technology and improve rural Internet access.

Current young and adult learners can be classified by age and generation. The current generation is young learners who were born after the year 2001, and who are the so called "Generation Z", "Post-Millennials", "Builders" or "Centennials", while adult learners who were born between 1981 and 2000 belong to "Generation Y", "Millennials", "digital citizens", "global citizens", "Internet generation", "iGen" and/or the "Net generation" (Bump, 2014; Marx, 2014; Novak, 2016). All these groups of learners will be the main focus of training to become quality citizens

of Thailand and global citizens of the world. These groups of generations are modern in the eyes of the previous generations and are very active online and on digital devices. With their special experience and skills in relation to technology, they can create, produce, and develop new products and services. They should be supported to be good citizens to foster the development of their nation with their special digital skills.

Thailand needs collaborative efforts from all sectors to achieve the country's goal, according to the recent "Stability, Prosperity and Sustainability" policy (2020). The development of Thai citizens to become global citizens can be promoted both in class and in practice outside of the classroom through participatory teaching and learning methods. Likewise, global citizenship education core elements, such as knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes, and social and cognitive skills should be part of the curriculum in order to foster Thai learners' critical thinking, creativity as well as communication and innovation skills (Sinlarat 2016). Consequently, the 2019 vision of ONIE indicates that all Thai people should have the opportunity to access quality education and lifelong learning suitable to their age, and which is in line with the Sufficiency Economy philosophy.



## Findings and Discussion

Lifelong learning practiced in Thailand today has become a holistic form of education and embraces all forms of learning, including formal and informal, and of people of all ages. It is delivered and undertaken through and at a variety of providers and facilities to meet a wide range of learning needs. LLL in Thailand aims to focus on the triangle of knowledge, skills, and mindset that enhances employability, personal development, active citizenship, and social inclusion. ALE still exists in the Thai education system, yet the terminology and its notion have increasingly been incorporated into LLL. Importantly, ALE quality depends on various factors, such as the effectiveness of administration and management of educational organizations, coordination of their programs and activities, and the way in which these meet present problems and needs. Implementation of programs should be done in a participatory way, involving learners and concerned organizations as well as communities themselves. The follow-up and evaluation systems should identify the achievements of learners. The development of information technology has led to progressive legislation and policy development.

ALE has a pivotal role in lifelong learning of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG4 (Education 2030: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”). To strengthen the role of ALE in Thailand, this study puts forward the following recommendations:

**Building up understanding internationally:** The International Council on Adult Education (ICAE) aims to create an open stage for international opinions where policy makers and implementers of adult education can exchange their experiences and learnings as well as build up common interest and understanding on ALE. Thailand, as a member country, should do more to move forward the creation of policies and putting efforts on implementation of these policies in order to meet the goal of education for sustainability.

**Extending of definition, target group and dimension of adult education:** Science and technology development have been part of the drivers of globalization in which they not only impact the changes of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental structures, but also stimulate the changes of educational administration and management in Thailand. In order to respond to the learning and skills training needs of the Thai adult population, the definitions and

meanings of adult education as well as the extent of adult education programs should be reviewed and redefined. Besides, flexible adult learning and education systems that enable learners to move within and across education, training and employment, and informal learning should be applied to provide learning opportunities for all people.

**Sharing and strengthening good practice lessons:** Various countries, in the context of an economic-based society and for the purpose of promoting LLL for adults, have paid special attention to motivating adults to continuously participate in learning programs, without withdrawal or dropping out. Other significant learnings are related to the designing of learning programs through the application of innovative/technological media, promoting learning effectiveness among adults who have different social backgrounds, creating associate networks, participating in adult learning by various sectors of society, managing basic and administrative structures in promoting lifelong learning for adults, application of legislative measures for promoting effective participations among associate networks, supporting the promotion of adult learning and education or lifelong learning for adults, etc.

**Training and development of adult education teachers and facilitators:** The lack of high-quality teachers and other education personnel remains an important limitation to the quality of education, especially regarding educational achievements of learners. Therefore, adult education development should put more emphasis on the training of teachers and concerned facilitators. For instance, actors in other sectors such as the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of the Interior, foundations and NGOs have put more efforts into the trainings of concerned personnel to help develop the country.

**Applying research outcomes:** Although there have been many studies focused on the access of educational opportunities, the efficiency and achievement of strategies on educational services or on the quality of the delivery approach system, several units in the Ministry of Education still lack a good system of synthesizing research findings. Collaboration as well as unity among agencies could also be improved.

**Developing ALE policies and programs:** In development of education today, Thailand has realized the necessity of making services more accessible to the people by means of coverage, equality, equity and quality under efficient management and administration. The country needs

to put more efforts into developing appropriate adult learning and education policies and programs. Globally, governments have expressed their strong commitment to continue support for adult learning and education initiatives, improve governance of ALE, increase ALE funding, promote participation, inclusion and equity, and improve the quality of ALE. Although the Thai government is finding new and innovative ways of engaging individuals to learn, the country needs to enhance the participation of learners through different networks, innovative grants and contribution projects, innovative funding arrangements, awareness-building activities, and elaborating new strategies by developing or implementing new, comprehensive, strategic adult-literacy plans and frameworks.

## Summary

Throughout the past decade, Thailand has continued to develop research on best and innovative measures and good practices for promoting development of lifelong education among people as well as supporting participation of all concerned sectors in society. The research, development and innovation of ALE has aimed for two important issues: Firstly, to find a system of promoting development of the quality of education to enable all target groups to gain enhanced access to appropriate educational opportunities, particularly disadvantaged groups. Secondly, to find an effective way of developing the quality of education and learning as education or learning opportunities which help people to lead a decent life, in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality and in all other ways that contribute to personal development and dignity. Moreover, it is important to develop a monitoring system including international cooperation for both national and international data collection on ALE.

During the next five years, Thailand needs to be transformed extensively due to prevailing conditions and the development environment. Fundamental problems, persistent weaknesses and restrictions can be overcome by reform and change. In the meantime, a proactive strategy of risk management and building resilience is needed in order to utilize the strengths of the country for long term development. However, the main emphases and development issues of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) focus on interconnected and integrated issues which will provide the basis for budget allocation, plan implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The development issues are as follows:

- Promotion of science, technology and innovation development
- Preparation of the workforce and capacity enhancement of people of all ages
- Creating a just society and reducing inequality
- Public sector management improvement, corruption prevention and good governance encouragement
- Infrastructure and logistics development to extend the country's competitiveness, to improve its service quality, to support the expansion of cities and core economic areas, and to raise living standards
- Enhancing international cooperation to ensure full development benefits

Many aspects must be considered including prerequisites for policymaking, educational tradition, demographic structure, educational content, economic parameters, and not least, individual choices, preferences and needs. The challenge is to ensure that an incremental approach is planted and implemented within an agreed framework for the long-term realization of lifelong learning opportunity for all. While still advocating an integrated approach to adult learning policies, a stronger emphasis on financial incentive mechanisms is needed, as well as on policies to increase the participation of low-skilled adults through appropriate delivery methods and creation of a learning environment for all. While the journey towards the establishment of a lifelong learning society will continue, Thailand has more to do in order to proclaim the achievement of education for all by 2030. This report offered fresh insights into the current state of ALE in Thailand and assessed its contribution to sustainable development. It recommended actions to be taken in order to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', as defined by SDG 4.

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**Further Information: Related Websites**

Ministry of Education <http://www.moe.go.th>

Office of the Basic Education Commission <http://www.obec.go.th>

Office of the Education Council <http://www.onec.go.th>

The Commission on Higher Education <http://www.mua.go.th>

Office of the Permanent Secretary [http://www.moe.go.th/OPS\\_Page/](http://www.moe.go.th/OPS_Page/)

Office of the Vocational Education Commission <http://www.vec.go.th/>

Office of the Private Education Commission <http://www.opec.go.th>

Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education <http://www.nfe.go.th>



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

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**By Johann Heilmann**

Getting recognition for ALE is a challenge – even in those countries that should have the financial means to easily support it. Based on the assumption that this challenge is even greater in developing and emerging nations in mainland Southeast Asia, the research whose findings have been presented in this publication has been carried out. And it is therefore to no surprise that there is still room for improvement in all four analysed countries with regard to the recommendations on ALE brought forward by UNESCO in 2015. Yet it is also interesting to see the different levels of understanding and commitment of the respective governments and education actors in the four countries and the respective focus on adult education areas.

As could be assumed before, the two power houses of mainland Southeast Asia, Vietnam and Thailand, generally fare much better in terms of governance, policies and financing, so it can be easily argued that ALE in these countries benefits from generally higher budgets, better infrastructure and greater awareness of education needs. At the same time, it is remarkable that the actual term “adult education” is not used in any of the four countries. While three of the four countries tend to talk about “non-formal education”, the common term in Vietnam is “continuing education”. Yet, it has become evident that this obscurity about terminology posed the central challenge in all researches. How do you approach a subject that is hardly known, that peoples’ perceptions are not clear about and that can only be analysed by using auxiliary means such as non- formal education?

As can be seen, the various researchers have chosen different approaches to address this challenge without moving away from the concept laid out in the UNSESCO RALE document. It is striking that from the three key domains identified in RALE, there is relatively little attention on the third one: liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills. Looking at the political systems of the four involved countries this should not surprise as obviously this category has a stronger political character than providing literacy, basic skills and vocational skills. Furthermore, especially in the cases of Laos and Cambodia, it looks like

there are more pressing needs for the government as well as for the communities – the impact of literacy, basic and vocational skills on

increased livelihoods and a higher income just seems to be more imminent and direct. On the other hand, there are inroads into the third domain, be it when talking about soft skills or about any other type of education that helps to contribute to making participants more responsible citizens aware of their role in society and their potential for change.

Insofar, the research has helped substantially in showing what is happening in terms of ALE – and in terms of what is still missing. And when talking about gaps in reaching ALE standards and the UNESCO Recommendation it should be well understood that we are talking about ideals which we should always strive for but about which we should not get frustrated in case we do not achieve them immediately – room for improvement will remain everywhere and it should be continuous motivation for all actors involved to fight for a stronger recognition of ALE and more efficient and effective functioning of the system.

Having said this, it is time to look at the lessons we can draw from the four country studies and the recommendations they ended their findings with. If we stick to the general framework of RALE and base our recommendations on the five areas of action, we can easily identify a number of aspects in each area where action should take place and where improvements are needed and should be advocated for. On the policy level, it is evident that the rare use of the term ALE results in a lack of understanding and a lack of legal frameworks for ALE in general. This is why the concept of Lifelong Learning is so valuable to ALE – because it presents a framework where ALE can find its place and can receive increased attention. Yet, it should be envisaged that with the final launch of the Adult Education “brand” which will take place in the middle of 2020 by an international working group steered by DVV International, this brand should be actively communicated to all stakeholders even beyond the education system. This might then lay the foundation for ALE policy frameworks as well. In the meantime, it should be ensured that policies are in place that ensure efficient and effective services that could broadly be named adult education. This means that on all levels, not only central government, but on sub-national level as well, provisions should be made that enable education and training in the respective fields.

This, of course, coincides with efforts that should be made in other areas of action, namely governance and financing. In terms of governance it has become evident in all reports that there is need for stronger intra- and inter-ministerial dialogue and cooperation. ALE, especially in the framework of Lifelong Learning, is not the sole responsibility of one ministry or even one department. It is the task of society as a whole and this means that mechanisms for exchange and cooperation have to be created to facilitate this cooperation.

An argument that is almost certain to pop up when talking about adult education is the lack of financing. Yes, we can observe this in the four country studies, especially in the cases of Lao PDR and Cambodia. Of course, there are creative solutions of how a lack of budget can be addressed successfully – some examples have been provided in the country studies as well. While this lack of budget has structural reasons, it is also due to the lack of awareness – on ALE but also on non- formal education and its importance. And in some cases, it is often about deficits in the formal system that eventually new needs in the non-formal system arise. But it is not only about the size of budgets, it is also about budget transparency. This is, of course, a challenge that goes beyond the education system, but greater transparency and accountability can certainly play their part in contributing to more efficiently used finances.

Participation, inclusion and equity is another area of action that should receive special attention when looking at the way forward for ALE in an integrated Lifelong Learning system. The provision of education services, some of them particularly directed at the most vulnerable and marginalized, should be the prime tool to ensure inclusion. This is mainly what is meant by non-formal education in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. At the same time, we have learnt that the reputation of non-formal education as a kind of “second chance education” is not the best. Again, the increased use of the term ALE can mitigate this problem, while at the same time an increase in quality and quantity of education services could also help to liberate non-formal education from this unwarranted reputation. At the same time, one should not forget that adult learning and education is meant for everyone, therefore in an ideal scenario there should be offers for all parts of society. And these should be provided publicly, not by the private sector. Yet, as has been shown by the Vietnamese case, the inclusion of aspects of solidarity could also help strengthen inclusion, participation and public acceptance. Even in developed countries participation fees in adult education classes often depend on the level of income of the participants.

Finally, all of this has no meaning if the quality of the provided education services is not sufficient. As has been shown, in many countries of the region the quality of the so-called formal system is very poor in a lot of instances – how then even ensure quality in non-formal, alternative or continuing education? From our point of view, there are many contributions to an increase in quality and many of them have been outlined in the country studies: We certainly need more exchange between all levels and systems of education. Most importantly, we need to create greater permeability between formal and non-formal education and informal learning. A Lifelong Learning Decree as in the cases of Laos and Cambodia can be an important driver for this and can ensure a system of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of prior learning outcomes. Furthermore, we need to define standards for all areas of education and we should be able to measure them. In many countries it is still hard to obtain and access any relevant data in the non-formal sector – needs of target groups and results of trainings therefore remain largely unknown. Furthermore, activities should be accompanied by solid monitoring and evaluation – capacities in this regard have to be built in order for this to be effective. And finally: We need to ensure that what we call adult education actually contains adult education. In other words: Understanding and capacities in terms of andragogy have to be built and extended. This refers to the management level and most importantly to teacher level. The importance of the quality of teachers cannot be underestimated and this can always be a starting point to make a difference.

So, what kind of picture did we draw now? Does it look pessimistic? Does it look like there are too many challenges we simply cannot address? It might look like that, but when having a closer look, it is also quite remarkable what has been achieved in the four participating countries already. Room for improvement should always be there and it should not be neglected that a lot of structures and competences are already in place. It is certainly one insight from this project that we can see that peer-learning between countries can be very efficient and produce valuable results. Hence, through enhanced collaboration between the four main partners and others such as UNESCO or ASPBAE, it should not be a mere dream to further bring adult education forward in an education system which is geared by the objective of learning lifelong – from cradle to grave.

*Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies. Adult learning and education involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities. Given that the boundaries of youth and adulthood are shifting in most cultures, in this text the term “adult” denotes all those who engage in adult learning and education, even if they have not reached the legal age of maturity.*

*(UNESCO, 2015)*