

Teacher Education Curriculum: A Comparison Between Laos, Thailand and Sweden

Athithouthay Chatouphonexay¹

ABSTRACT

In the new era of education, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to speed up the process of national development. In many countries, the quality of education is heavily based on teacher education since teacher plays a major role in the process of teaching and learning in the new light of learner-centered pedagogy. As a result, teacher education is now a hot issue and many great achievements have been scored in many countries but there are still many things to be done for the promotion of knowledge-based society.

My paper deals with teacher education in 3 countries: Laos, Thailand and Sweden. The 3 educational institutions are Faculty of Education, National University of Laos (NUOL), Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University (MSU) and Stockholm Institute of Education (SIE).

The focal point of analysis is to compare the 3 curriculum of teacher education, Bachelor program in terms of concept behind curriculum, mission, organizational structure, and program offered as well as the future task of FOE, NUOL. The paper also includes some theoretical approaches namely:

- *Philosophy of Curriculum and Curriculum Development*
- *Social Constructivism*
- *Instructional Objectives*
- *Democracy/Individualization*
- *Classification and Framing*

¹Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, The National of Laos University.



The main objective of the thesis is to find out similarities and differences among the 3 curriculums in the arena of formulation rather than the arena of implementation. This also includes the policy of teacher education and best teaching practices.

The expected outcome is to standardize and internationalize the teacher education curriculum of Faculty of Education, National University of Laos since there is an urgent need to develop the existing curriculum in the light of best practices from Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University, Thailand and Stockholm Institute of Education, Sweden.

BACKGROUND and INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development is considered as the task of priority at the Faculty of Education as the very young faculty of NUOL (FOE was established in 1996). Due to the Open Door Policy, the Ministry of Education had to do its utmost to gradually standardize and internationalize the educational system in both general education and teacher education as well as other sectors. Therefore, regarding teacher education, MOE especially the Teacher Training Department had to undertake radical changes in all teacher training systems. As a result, all teacher education institutions including FOE were on the process of standardization and internationalization. Huge amount of money had been invested in all fields namely, infra-structure, curriculum development, instructional material development, professional development, necessary equipment as well as pre-service and in-service training. As part of FOE, the curriculum of FOE needs to be standardized and internationalized since the existing one has 'too many subjects' and 'too much content'. FOE has produced many generations of graduates teaching at upper-secondary school level but the quality of teaching is very limited. In other

words, there is a strong need to reconsider the curriculum in the light of adoption and adaptation.

Secondly, there is a new trend in teacher education in Asia in general and South East Asia in particular. The teacher education in Asia is in the new mainstream which is the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered teacher education. There is an emphasis on learning rather than teaching and the notion of professionalism is in the mindset of all educators and educational administrators. As a result, teacher education in Asia has to set up standards in the fields of educational policies, curriculum development, curriculum management, assessment, teacher's competencies and practicum. The expected outcome of teacher education is to produce highly qualified teachers that are ready to teach the new generation that can enter labor market.

Finally, the world of today is undoubtedly in the era of globalization. Globalization affects all countries whether rich or poor, big or small, highly developed or least developed. Globalization enormously affects the education in all countries. Recently, there were so many international conferences organized in



many parts of the world with the topic of teacher education and research. All outstanding educators and teachers from America, Europe, Africa, Asia and other regions were invited to attend the conferences. Hot issues were raised with the discussion in all aspects of teacher education.

In the international conference held in Bangkok from 11-14 July 2004, the two well-known concepts were raised such as '**University Without Walls**' and '**Borderless Teacher Education**' which are examples of globalization. By using computer and the net, all teachers can easily communicate and work together. This is the same case as with students. As a result, the experience of teaching and learning can be shared and exchanged and developed in the same direction. It is not surprising that there has been a movement of internationalization of curriculum in many parts of the world.

PURPOSE and RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Purpose

To improve and find a model of curriculum reform of teacher education at bachelor level of FOE, NUOL in comparison with the best practices of Thailand and Sweden

2.General Research Question

What are the similarities and differences of the 3 Curriculum?

(The focus is on the arena of formulation rather than the arena of implementation)

CONTEXTUALIZATION

1. Physical Situation

My study deals with 3 educational institutions namely, Faculty of Education, National University of Laos (NUOL), Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand and Stockholm Institute of Education (SIE), Sweden.

1.1. The Faculty of Education

National University of Laos (NUOL) was formerly called Dong Dok Pedagogical Institute with a very long teaching tradition in terms of higher teacher education of the country. FOE was established in 1996 the same time as NUOL. NUOL is a multi-campus university and FOE is in the main campus of the National University of Laos sharing with Faculty of Letters, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences and School of Foundation Studies.

FOE is mainly responsible for producing qualified graduates who will become teachers at Upper Secondary level and Teacher Training Colleges/ Schools and it offers today only the Bachelor degree (1 year at SFS + 4 years at FOE) with 10 majors such as:

- Mathematics 5 years, 180 credits
- Physics 5 years, 180 credits
- Chemistry 5 years, 180 credits
- Biology 5 years, 180 credits
- Geography 5 years, 180 credits
- History 5 years, 180 credits
- Lao language 5 years, 180 credits
- Political science 5 years, 180 credits
- English 5 years, 180 credits
- French 5 years, 180 credits

Future programs:

1. Bachelor Program



- Educational Management 5 years
(to be started in AY 2006-2007)

- Continuing Program (9 majors) 2 years
(to be started in AY 2006-2007)

-Psychology-Pedagogy 5 years (to be
started in AY 2007-2008)

2. Master program

-Educational Management 2 years (to
be started in AY 2007-2008)

The proportion between subject studies and pedagogy is roughly 70% and 30% respectively. There are in all 201 staff in which 139 are female. For teaching staff, there are 162 in which 117 are female. For administrative staff, there are 18 in which 13 are female. The rest is semi-teaching staff. Most of the staff has a Bachelor degree since there are only 4 PhD and 15 Masters. About 150 students graduate from the Faculty per year.

At the time being, the Faculty has three Departments: the Department of Pedagogy, the Department of Curriculum and the Department of Psychology and one center, TEADC. Recently, the Faculty has established the Department of Education Administration and Management (DEAM) and is on the process of doing the curriculum of educational administration for a bachelor program under EDP II project. In addition to this, the Faculty in collaboration with SIE and Umea University, Sweden is offering a master program of teacher education and educational administration under TTEST project.

Start from AY 2006-2007, FOE will consist of 5 departments namely, Department of Psychology-Pedagogy, Department of Natural

Sciences, Department of Social Sciences, Department of Languages and Department of Education Administration and Management. The motto of FOE is KNOWLEDGE, *MORALE* AND *RESEARCH*.

In summary, Faculty of Education has worked very hard and played a leading role in the whole system of teacher education in collaboration with NUOL and the Ministry of Education. In the near future, FOE will open more Bachelor programs in the field of nursery and kindergarten teacher education, primary teacher education, lower-secondary teacher education and upper-secondary teacher education. Besides, it will open a Master program on educational management and curriculum design.

FOE and future tasks

In the concept of **teacher education for excellence**, FOE has to play a key role in the whole system of teacher education in Laos and to do its utmost for the following tasks:

Quality Improvement at faculty level
with the emphasis on Professionalism

Improved Relevance in terms of curriculum and real teaching-learning

Strengthening Planning and Management

Human Resource Development

Curriculum and Materials Development

Cooperation with relevant organizations
in both private and public sector, universities
and educational institutions inside and outside the country

Networking within regional and international arena



Research and Development in teacher education

Open more programs in teacher education and education management

In the concept of **gender issues**, FOE has done its utmost to encourage women staff to get a higher degree in teacher education abroad. The language training to women staff is also provided in order to have opportunity for short-term and long-term training abroad. In addition to this, FOE always cares for newly recruited women staff that are very young and with high determination. For example, academic year 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, FOE has 14 quotas of employment and we agreed to recruit 8 young women to become the new staff of FOE.

1.2. Mahasarakham University (MSU), Thailand has a very long tradition and was established on 27 March 2511 (Buddhist calendar which is 1968 AD). It is also a multi-campus university and provides a variety of programs namely, Bachelor, Master and PhD. MSU is the 22nd university of Thailand and covers more than 1300 rays (about 216 hectares) in Mahasarakham province. With the policy of Thai Government, it is considered that MSU is expanding education opportunities to all as the center of development in Indochina.

The vision of MSU is to conduct a variety of programs focusing on independent learning using educational technology and modern management based on research. Besides, MSU has a task to preserve arts, culture and Thai indigenous knowledge.

Faculty of Education of MSU also has a long tradition of teacher education. The faculty was established on March 27, 1968. When the college became Mahasarakham University, the faculty was in turn granted its current status. The responsibilities of the faculty are to produce qualified teachers and educators with expertise in various fields for the development of education at both local and national levels under the motto **"Education is growth"**. The faculty also puts emphasis on research as well as the provision of academic services to working units and people in general.

The faculty has 54 lecturers with high qualifications in which 70% have a PhD degree. There are also professors, associate professors and assistant professors.

FOE, MSU comprises 6 Departments:

1. Department of Curriculum and Instruction
2. Department of Educational Administration
3. Department of Educational Psychology and Guidance
4. Department of Educational Research and Development
5. Department of Educational Technology and Instructional Media
6. Department of Health Science and Sports

FOE of MSU is outside the main campus of MSU and provides a variety of programs regarding Bachelor, Master and PhD. Regarding the Bachelor program, FOE of MSU provides courses as follows:

Early Childhood Education 5 years with



no less than 166 credits

Special education 5 years with no less than 166 credits

Mathematics 5 years with no less than 168 credits

Thai Language 5 years with no less than 166 credits

English 5 years with no less than 166 credits

General Sciences 5 years with no less than 166 credits

Social Studies 5 years with no less than 167 credits

Science in Physical Education (2-year Continuing Program)

1.3. **SIE, Sweden** was established in mid-1950s and is the only specialist university for knowledge on teaching and learning in Sweden. The campus covers an area of 40,000 m² in the center of Stockholm. There are in all 14 252 students (2004) including full-time and part-time. A good number of SIE students are already active teachers or involved on other activities, which require teaching skills. There are many programs provided namely, Teacher Education program, Special Education Teachers, Study and Vocational Counselors, Advanced Education in Caring and Nursing, Single Subject Courses and Educational Research.

There are 3 Departments with the total of 700 employees (2005) namely,

1. Department of Human Development Learning and Special Education

2. Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education and

3. Department of Curriculum Studies and Communication.

Regarding degrees offered, SIE conducts the courses of teacher profiles as follows:

Pre-school, Pre-school class, Leisure-time Center for school children, Compulsory School-earlier years (140 credits)

Compulsory School-later years (180 credits)

Special Schools (160 credits)

Upper Secondary School or Adult Education (180-220 credits)

Vocational subjects for Upper Secondary School or Adult Education (120 credits)

The mission of SIE is *Education and research in collaboration with the field and with the international arena. Furthermore, teacher education should be both academic and professional.*

2. Social Situation

2.1. **FOE of NUOL** is in the main campus called Dong Dok, which belongs to Xaythany district, Vientiane the Capital. The campus and nearby is considered as the 'National Brain' of the whole country. Students are from all parts of Laos. Students enrolled at FOE are mainly from Lao Lum and Lao Soung. Very few are from Lao Theung. Besides, most teaching staff is from Lao Lum, which is the majority of all Lao ethnic groups.

2.2. **FOE, MSU** is in Mahasarakham province, Northern Thailand. It can be said that the whole province is the province of education and culture. It is no wonder that many people call Mahasarakham province 'University City'. Besides, the province is in the heart of Northern Thailand. All students throughout



the country enroll at MSU as well as the students from Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. The surrounding of the university is very favorable in terms of environment, infra-structure, water supply, electricity and communication. There is a strong relationship between the university and the whole community.

2.3. **SIE** is located near the center of Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. SIE has a long tradition of teacher education in the region with close communication with the community as well as close contact with the world outside. Therefore, besides Swedish students and scholars, there are also international students from many parts of the world.

3. Policy Context

3.1. Laos is a developing country located in South East Asia. It is a landlocked country with the population of 6 million. According to the policy of Lao Government, the education in Laos is free start from primary level to university level. At present, there are 3 universities in which NUOL is the biggest and the most popular.

According to the National Strategic Plan, Laos will be no longer the least developed country by the year 2020. Thus education is considered as a tool to eliminate the poverty of Lao people. Teacher education is also playing an important role in this movement. In this regard, standardization and internationalization of both general education and teacher education are the strategic planning of the Ministry of Education. As a result, the curriculum development of teacher education in Laos is highly top-down which is considered

as a national curriculum. In other words, curriculum writers are mostly from central level. Curriculum is not a product of a collaboration between central and local level.

3.2. To start with, in Thai universities, the education is not free. At present, the mainstream of Thai teacher education is moving towards academic excellence including teacher education. The policy of Thai Ministry of Education is to put emphasis on Quality Assurance in 4 main areas stated as follows:

- The management of curriculum
- Human capital for teaching-learning
- Guidance and counseling to students and
- The requirement of labor market, society/ the satisfaction of employers

It is considered that the curriculum development of teacher education in Thailand is both nationalized and localized.

3.3. In the book '*Reforming Higher Education in the Nordic Countries*' by Fagerlind and Stromqvist (2004), it is stated that all Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), have had a tradition of strict centralization. This means that in order to create new professorships in the universities, decisions were made at central level which means at ministerial level. Following recent decentralization reforms of higher education, the control of state is no longer exercised through legislation. In other words, there was a shift from bureaucratic state controlled models of university governance to supervisory models.

Regarding teacher education in Sweden, it can be noted that the curriculum develop-



ment is steering by objectives or management by objectives which is an example of decentralization. It means that educational institutions as well as teacher educational institutions take full responsibility in curriculum design as well as the management of teaching and learning and research within given limits and guidelines (goals and subject matter).

PERSPECTIVES (Theoretical Approach)

1. Philosophy of curriculum and Curriculum development

First of all, in the book *'Curriculum, Construction and Critique'* by Ross (2000), it is stated that:

A curriculum is a definition of what is to be learned. The origins of the words are from the Latin curriculum, a racing chariot, from which is derived a racetrack, or a course to be run, and from this, a course of study. The term is often confined to formal definitions of what is to be taught in specific institutions- perhaps even as narrow as the notion of a National Curriculum (ibid. p.8).

In the book *'The language of learning, A Guide To Education Terms'* by McBrien and Brandt (1997), the definition of curriculum is Curriculum usually refers to a written plan that outlines what students will be taught. Curriculum may refer to all the courses offered at a given school, or all the courses offered at a school in a particular area of study. For example, the English curriculum might include English literature, U.S. literature, world literature, essay styles, creative writing, business writing, Shakespeare, modern poetry, and the

novel (ibid.p.27).

In theory, it can be said that all curriculum development is aiming at serving the interest of the nation. The ultimate objective is to teach students to be loyal to the nation and good citizenship as well as personal development. Most curriculum deals with 3Hs namely, Head, Heart and Hand. 'Head' means knowledge, 'Heart' means good morale and 'Hand' means skills.

However, according to Palme (2002), there are three major curriculum codes proposed by Ulf P. Lundgren as follows:

- a moralistic code
- a classical code
- a naturalistic or rationalistic code

A moralistic curriculum code can be best described as curriculum expressing moral values or political values. As the case of Laos, a moralistic curriculum code is expressed in the emphasis on national unity and independence.

A classical curriculum code put emphasis on the importance of the historical heritage and of good traditions. This code tends to be elitist since it is monopolized by the small number of people whom we called 'the elites'.

A naturalistic or rationalistic curriculum code is, according to Palme (2002):

We seek knowledge that is useful for us. This idea is a basic one in the pedagogical and philosophical thinking of John Dewey [...].Democracy, then, is an important element in this curriculum code.

From what has been mentioned above, in Laos, the curriculum might be both a mor-



alistic curriculum code and a naturalistic curriculum code. In other words, the Lao curriculum is national. It means that the Lao Government shapes the policy of national education. Consequently, curriculum development starts from central level which is highly centralized in terms of 'what to teach' and 'how to teach'. In one word, the national curriculum is highly top-down.

In contrast, in western countries, the curriculum development reflects the naturalistic curriculum code which means useful knowledge for personal development and one of the examples is a market model or market-oriented curriculum.

2. Social Constructivism

According to McBrien and Brandt (1997), the authors gave a definition as

Constructivism is an approach to teaching based on research about how people learn. Many researchers say that each individual 'constructs' knowledge rather than receiving it from others (ibid. p.24).

Similarly, according to CHEN (2001) , the paper said

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge and knowing [...].It is generally based on the assumption that knowledge is constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences" (ibid. p.262)

The paper continued by saying that

There are 2 major approaches applied in educational studies which are radical constructivism and social constructivism (Phillips, 2000; Steff & Gale, 1995). While radical constructivism focuses on the individual meaning-making

process of knowledge construction, social constructivism places emphasis on the shared cultural meaning-making process in social interaction of knowledge construction (Richardson 1997, p.262)

According to the theory, constructivists believe that learners approach learning tasks "with a set of personal beliefs, motivations and conceptions about knowledge itself".

In the light of this theory, I can say that the curriculum of FOE as well as of NUOL is not expressed or not fully in line with the new concept of constructivism in real teaching. The mainstream is the absorption of knowledge rather than the construction of meanings.

3. Instructional objectives/Behavioral Objectives

Regarding curriculum development, the writer needs to be aware of the identification of objectives. It is not enough to say "At the end of this lesson, students will be able to know and understand the main content of the lesson" or "At the end of the year; the student will become familiar with important literary insights". By saying so, it is nothing wrong but it is very difficult to evaluate the outcome of students' learning. In other words, there is no specific indicator for determining whether or not the objective has been achieved.

The new concept of instructional objectives is behavioral objectives or performance objectives, which can be measured and evaluated. In the book '**THE CURRICULUM STUDIES READER**' by Flinders & . Thornton (1997), it is stated that

Because a well formed instructional ob-



jective describes the type of learner behavior which is to be produced by the instructional treatment, such statements have often been referred to as behavioral objectives or performance objectives (ibid.p.57)

In the same book, Eisner (1997) wrote:

Educational objectives, it is argued need to be clearly specified for at least three reasons: First, because they provide the goals toward which the curriculum is aimed; second, because once clearly stated they facilitate the selection and organization of content; third, because when specified in both behavioral and content terms they make it possible to evaluate the outcomes of the curriculum" (ibid. p.69)

Another important element of a well stated instructional objective is that it refers to the learner's behavior not of teacher's. Besides, by saying "At the end of the lesson, students will be able to..." it refers to the learner's post-instruction behavior not his behavior during instruction.

Components of an instructional objective are as follows:

- Performance (ability to do)
- Conditions (under what conditions will a teacher expect the behavior to occur)
- Criterion/ Standards (How well the learner must perform in order to be considered acceptable. It may involve speed, accuracy or quality of performance)

It can be said that the curriculum of FOE, NUOL stresses behavioral objectives but there is no identification of conditions and standards. On the other side of the story, in real teach-

ing, many teachers of FOE used and still use most of the time the questions like 'Do you understand?' or 'Do you know what I meant?'

4. Democracy/Individualization

The concept of democracy is defined differently in comparison between Laos and capitalist countries like Thailand and Sweden. As a socialist country, Lao way of thinking is *ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE*. As a result, all assignments done by Lao university students have to be politically correct while plagiarism is only a serious matter in western universities. Different political points of view are acceptable in Western Europe due to the multi-party system.

It is no wonder that in Sweden as in Western Europe, the promotion of student success is firmly related to the concept of individualization. It means that each student is strongly encouraged to participate in the process of teaching-learning. Each student can freely express his/her opinion on all matters in the classroom. Each student can even challenge the ideas of the lecturer. In one word, each student is truly individual. The success of each individual is the main concern of the teaching staff.

In contrast, the emphasis is on collectivism in Lao universities. It means that the lecturer has to do his/her utmost to ensure the success of all students in the classroom. All students are considered as 'one' in terms of political values, national values and cultural values.

5. Classification and Framing

According to Palme (2002) , many aspects



had been raised on classification and framing. The author said,

In teaching, the content or subject matter, i.e. what is being taught, could be surrounded by very clearly defined borders, so that you are well aware of what content is not valid and what content is valid (ibid.p.16)

Now let's move on to the concept of **classification and framing** manifested in classroom teaching level. According to Palme (2002), referring to Bernstein, a famous English sociologist of education, classification can be strong or weak

Strong classification means that the teacher's focus is on the textbook and manual. In Lao school teaching, when he or she teaches politics, he/she has to rely mainly on the content of the syllabus and he/she cannot explain beyond what has been written in the book. In this sense, the borders are clearly and strongly classified. From this kind of teaching, most Lao teachers feel "safe" and they assume that they fulfill their teaching duty. In simple words, Lao school teaching is strongly classified. It is quite similar to the teaching-learning at university level. It is highly subject-focused and content-based. As an educator, I will do my best to open up for weak classification, which allows Lao teachers to widen the border making classroom teaching more effective. In my opinion, teachers have to be aware that the textbooks and manuals are considered as helping tools or references that teachers can refer to or rely on in accordance with the real situation of locality.

The concept of "framing" is related to the

degree of supervision and control of the teaching and learning process. Strong framing echoes with strong classification and the product of the strong framing is authoritarian teacher who always performs strict classroom management. Strong framing is about the detailed regulation of time and space.

For my own experience as a student, I still remember when my French teacher of Mathematics said to me: "I know and you don't know. So listen to me and remember what I say if you want to have success".

According to Bernstein as understood by Palme (2002), traditional teaching is best described as strong classification and strong framing, for modern teaching on the other hand, weak classification and weak framing. To its fullest meaning, in modern teaching, weak framing means teacher is no longer "man of power" but facilitator and helper and trainer. In this sense, there is a need to attain a certain level of negotiation which allows students show more openly what they think and feel. Students' experience should be drawn in the real classroom teaching. They should have a say instead of sitting and listening most of the time.

To sum up, traditional teaching is teacher-centered and it can be best described as strong classification and strong framing. Modern teaching, which is student-centered, tends to be of weak classification and weak framing. By so doing, teachers have more freedom to act and students have more opportunities to learn.

The following points are of my interest in



relation to classification and framing:

- The physical arrangement of classroom might perhaps be loosely controlled. Highly controlled space is pointless. Students can have more freedom to move so to enhance classroom interaction.

- The conduct of classroom activities has to be loosely structured. Students can have possible freedom of choice of activities.

- The teaching has to provide rich communication. The communication between teacher-student and student-student has to be open and sincere. Communication also means representational speech.

- The teaching has to be highly supportive. Teachers have to give very good feed-

back to each student and care for personal improvement instead of comparison and competition.

- The teaching has to promote good and rich in cooperation. Cooperation means the cooperation between teachers and students, between teachers themselves, between students themselves and cooperation between teachers and students' parents/guardians

- The teaching-learning process has to be in a good friendly atmosphere. Teachers are no longer the figure of power in the class. Also, the love for the profession and the love for students are highly valued.

- Assignments have to be more open and develop critical thinking

REFERENCES

- Black, Paul J (1998). Testing : friend or foe ? *Theory and practice of assessment and testing*. London : Falmer.
- Briseid Ole & Caillods Francoise (2004) *Trends in Secondary Education in Industrialized Countries*. UNESCO : IIEP's printshop.
- Carlgen, I (1998). OP-ED. Where did black board writing go ? *Journal of Curriculum Studies* vol 30,6.
- Dewey, John (2004) . *Democracy and Education* : DOVER PUBLICATION,INC.*Educational Course for Bachelor Degree*. Mahasarakham University (2004) Thailand : Aphisath Press.
- Norris Minick (1993). Teacher's directives : The social construction of " literal meanings" and "real worlds" in classroom discourse. In S. Chaiklin & J. Lave (Eds.) : *Understanding practice. Perspectives on activity and context*. Cambridge University Press.