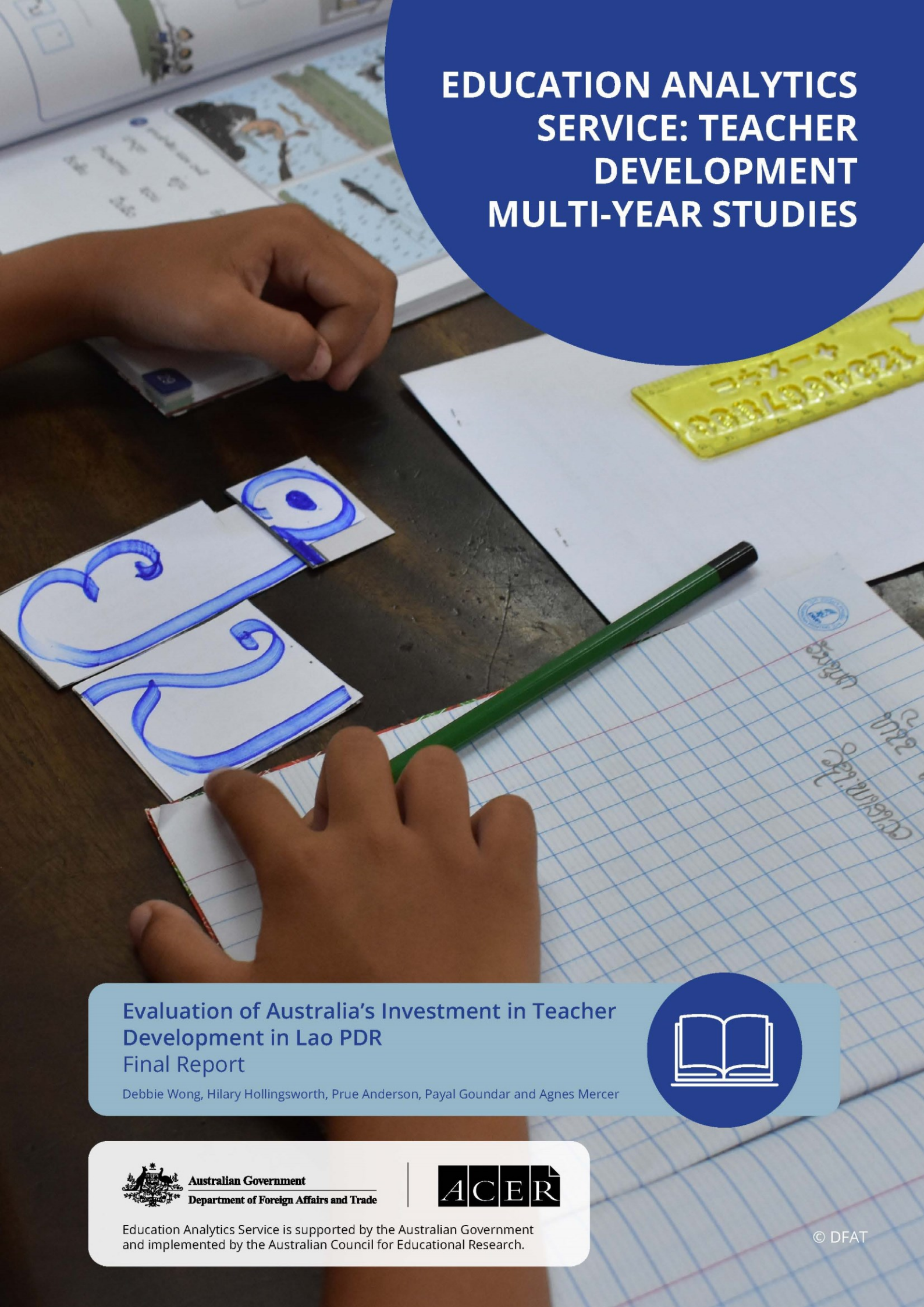

EDUCATION ANALYTICS SERVICE: TEACHER DEVELOPMENT MULTI-YEAR STUDIES

Evaluation of Australia's Investment in Teacher Development in Lao PDR
Final Report

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Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

ACER

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Teacher Development Multi-Year Study Series. Evaluation of Australia's investment in teacher development in Lao PDR: Final Report

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ASLO	Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
BEQUAL	Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR
C1, C2, C3	cycle 1, cycle 2, cycle 3
COP	communities of practice
CPD	continuing professional development
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
EAS	Education Analytics Services
EOPO	end of programme outcome
G1, G2	Grade 1, Grade 2
GEDSI	gender equality, disability and social inclusion
ICT	information and communication technology
IPS	internal pedagogical support
IRL	Indochina Research Laos
IRT	item response theory
LADLF	Laos-Australia Development Learning Facility
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MEL	monitoring, evaluation and learning
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
PA	pedagogical adviser
PEPI	Primary Education Performance Index
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Service

SAL	self-access learning
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
SLP	Spoken Lao Program
TTC	Teacher Training College
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Australian Government is supporting the Government of Lao PDR to undertake significant primary education reforms through its flagship Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR program (BEQUAL). A key focus of these reforms is the rollout of a new national primary curriculum intended to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes for students. As part of a multi-year study series, the Education Analytics Service (EAS) investigated how the BEQUAL program made a difference to improving these teaching and learning outcomes. The study series was commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to investigate teaching and learning development initiatives in three countries: Lao PDR, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.

Phase 1 of BEQUAL (2015-22) supported the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to rollout the new primary curriculum to schools in stages by grade level, starting with Grade 1 (G1) in 2019. Teachers were provided with teacher guides and other teaching and learning resources. Specific teaching practices, including active learning, student-centred learning approaches, formative and summative assessment of student learning progress, and a phonics approach to teaching reading, were introduced. These represent a substantial change to the former curriculum. These practices were complemented by an in-service teacher professional development program to support Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS) to deliver face-to-face orientation training. Additional in-service support was provided to teachers, principals and schools in most of the original 32 BEQUAL-targeted districts – some of the country's most disadvantaged districts – through strengthening communities of practice (COP), self-access learning (SAL), monitoring visits, teacher cluster meetings and district level education support grants.

This Study provided an opportunity to investigate teaching quality and student literacy outcomes in Lao PDR linked to the rollout of the new G1 Lao language curriculum. The purpose of this summary is to provide a brief overview of findings and recommendations over the three years of the Study (2019, 2021, 2022). This final report will contribute to a multi-country report for the study series, which will explore lessons learnt and recommendations for teacher development in other contexts.

Study questions

The EAS Teacher Development Multi-Year Study for Lao PDR (the Study) seeks to answer the question: ***To what extent does BEQUAL support improve teaching quality and student literacy in Lao PDR?***

Two specific questions related to this broad question were investigated:

1) To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?
2) To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?

The Study adopted a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The Study followed teachers and principals over three cycles of data collection in the 32 BEQUAL target

districts while the new G1 Lao language curriculum was rolled out nationally. The second round of data collection scheduled for 2020 was delayed until 2021 due to COVID-19.

The quantitative data collection involved two rounds of collection across 362 schools in the target districts. G1 teacher and principal questionnaires, a G1 student test, and a student questionnaire were administered in 2019 and 2021. Caution needs to be used when interpreting the quantitative results in this report. Quantitative data was not collected in 2022.

The qualitative data collection involved three rounds of case study data collection in the same 12 schools in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Case studies included interview data from G1 teachers, principals and pedagogical advisers (PAs), as well as classroom observations of Lao language lessons. In the final round, interviews were also conducted with national education stakeholders.

In considering the findings, it is important to take into account two issues. First, the impact of COVID-19 disruptions on both G1 teaching continuity as well as the pre-school/kindergarten experience of the G1 student cohort tested in 2021. Second, the higher than anticipated turnover of teachers across the Study period.

Summary of findings

This final report provides insights into the extent to which teaching quality and student learning outcomes have changed with BEQUAL's support of the implementation of the new Lao language curriculum. Results from the three cycles of data collection suggest that the BEQUAL program has strengthened elements of teaching quality. However, the new curriculum represents significant change to both teaching and assessment practices. The complexity of this process means more time, encouragement and support for teachers is needed to continue to build their understanding and for them to fully and consistently incorporate these new approaches into their teaching practice.

The G1 student literacy results show some improvement after the introduction of the new curriculum, but students need a great deal more time and the right support to meet the Lao language curriculum expectations. This was expected at this early stage in the reform process, particularly with COVID-19 disruptions to schooling. However, it is important to recognise that there have been positive changes to student attitudes and dispositions towards learning. Study participants observed higher levels of student participation, interest, engagement, and wellbeing, and attributed this to the new curriculum. It is critical for teachers and students to be supported to translate these initial gains in engagement into better learning.

To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?

To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program?

The BEQUAL-supported orientation training, together with the new curriculum resources led to G1 teachers' increased knowledge and confidence regarding the content of Lao language teaching and an expanded repertoire of strategies used for Lao language teaching.

There was evidence of a high level of participation in the orientation training, and that teachers and principals valued the training as an introduction to the new curriculum. While the BEQUAL Phase 1 approach was a logical starting point to support teachers to implement the new curriculum, Study

participants consistently highlighted the limitations associated with this orientation training, and the need for teachers to have further comprehensive and ongoing professional learning for continued learning, motivation and sustained change. The 2022 data suggested this as critical, particularly given the impact of COVID-19 disruptions on both teaching continuity and opportunities for professional learning and support. With the BEQUAL Phase 2 program underway and the final phase of the curriculum rollout scheduled for completion in 2023, the sharper focus on teacher professional development as part of the BEQUAL Phase 2 design should help MoES to meet some of the professional learning needs identified in this Study.

Table 1 summarises the overall study findings for this first research sub-question related to teacher knowledge, attitudes and practices.

Table 1: Overall study key findings for research question A1 (teacher knowledge, attitudes and practices)

A. TEACHING QUALITY: To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?			
A1. To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Teacher knowledge and attitudes	BEQUAL-supported orientation training and new curriculum resources built teacher professional knowledge about Lao language teaching content and student-centred pedagogies used in the new curriculum. Teachers need ongoing support to build and consolidate their skills.	The new curriculum resources were a significant support for teachers and contributed to increased teacher confidence. The teacher guide was particularly helpful given its detailed and clear instructions about techniques, activities, materials and time.	While most teachers were perceived to be engaging with the new curriculum, some showed resistance or were reverting to former practices. Possible issues reported included the mindset of teachers (which contributed to a lack of motivation for self-development and adaptability), the need for more knowledge about Lao language teaching, and limited support and encouragement for teachers to make changes.
Teaching practice	Data indicated teachers commonly prepared lessons. The new curriculum resources (teacher guide, student textbook) provided strong support to teachers to do this. Teachers requested further training, good lesson plan examples (particularly for multigrade classes), and clearer requirements on lesson planning from MoES.	Teachers reported the use of a wider range of student-centred strategies such as pair/group work, active learning activities, and a greater range of resources. But, data indicated that some limited understanding of these methods persisted.	Classroom observations indicated the extent of take-up of new practices was inconsistent. In 2021, observations suggested teachers were exploring new curriculum strategies, but the 2022 observation data was more variable. This was possibly due to a range of reasons, including COVID-19 disruptions, limited professional learning opportunities and support, and timing of the final round of data collection.

A. TEACHING QUALITY: To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?			
A1. To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Assessment	Data indicated a shift towards more ongoing checks for learning (formative assessment). There was a move away from whole-class monthly tests towards more frequent assessments using different methods.	There was an increasing awareness and use of learning guides (rubrics). Some participants reported they used assessment information to monitor student performance and make plans for teaching and learning.	Teachers need further support on the new assessment methods, rubrics and how to interpret and use data to target teaching to students' needs.
Inclusive education	The Study explored changes to attitudes relating to inclusion, and how gender equality, disability inclusion and the inclusion of ethnic minority groups is part of teachers' practice. While there was a policy shift to strengthen inclusive education awareness, understanding and classroom practice, there was not a significant shift in classroom practices.	Data indicated the range of strategies teachers used to encourage the equitable participation of girls and boys, and students with disabilities, during Lao language lessons was limited. No children with physical disabilities were reported in case study schools.	For classes where most students had a non-Lao-Tai home language, nearly three-quarters of teachers used a local language in Lao language lessons to provide explanations and connections for non-Lao-Tai speakers. The provision of extra instruction to non-Lao-Tai speakers, as recommended in the new curriculum guidance, varied.

What factors enable or impede teachers aligning their practice to the new curriculum?

The Study provided an opportunity to understand the factors that enabled and impeded G1 teachers to align their Lao language teaching practice to the new curriculum. Enabling factors included engagement in teacher professional learning, provision of technical support from principals and teacher colleagues, and support from PAs. Impediments were broadly categorised as pertaining to school, teacher and student characteristics.

Table 2 summarises the overall study findings for the second research sub-question related to the factors enabling or impeding teachers from aligning their practice to the new curriculum.

Table 2: Overall study key findings for research question A2 (factors enabling or impeding alignment to curriculum)

A2. What factors enable or impede teachers aligning their practice to the new curriculum?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Teacher professional learning	BEQUAL-supported orientation training provided crucial introductory information and support for teachers and principals about the new curriculum content and strategies. However, participants reported	Professional learning opportunities including COP and SAL were highly valued by those who engaged in them. However, opportunities to participate in these were inconsistent.	Participants suggested that for COP and SAL to be effective, they need to involve colleagues with expertise and experience to support teaching improvement, information and communication technology (ICT) tools and

A2. What factors enable or impede teachers aligning their practice to the new curriculum?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
	these trainings were limited, and that ongoing professional learning is needed.		knowledge and skills to use ICT.
Support from principals, teacher colleagues and PAs	Technical support provided by principals, teacher colleagues and PAs was greatly valued by G1 teachers, and in some cases access to this support increased.	Data indicated the increase in PA support to case study schools between 2019 and 2021 was sustained. Participants in 2022 identified a more extensive range of support provided by PAs.	Participants noted that support is more effective when coupled with appropriate expertise and adequate infrastructure (such as budget, tools, ICT, time).
Impediments	School impediments identified by participants included a shortage or inadequacy of materials, but this was less of an issue after new curriculum materials were distributed.	Teacher impediments included teachers' limited knowledge and experience of Lao language teaching, including their understanding of key elements of the new curriculum.	Student impediments included students' low Lao language skills, low readiness for transition to school, absenteeism, and a lack of parental involvement in supporting student learning.

To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?

To what extent do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?

Results from the 2021 G1 student Lao language literacy test indicated that all G1 students need a great deal more time and support to meet the G1 literacy expectations as set out in the new Lao language curriculum. The 2021 results indicated slight improvement in overall G1 student performance after the introduction of the new curriculum, with more students able to demonstrate more complex skills. However, the wide variation in results – both nationally, by province, and between girls and boys – demonstrated the significant challenges to Lao language literacy.

The results also confirmed some findings already known in the Lao PDR context, such as the links between ethnic minority groups, poverty and lower student performance levels. The challenge of student absenteeism was also confirmed by the high numbers of students absent on the day of testing in both 2019 and 2021. While reasons for this level of absence were not collected, other research suggests absenteeism can be for a range of reasons including teacher absence, residence, parental engagement, and family's socioeconomic background. Non-Lao-Tai student absence was reported to be due to poverty more than ethnicity (UNICEF, 2020). International research shows the risk of disadvantaged children falling further behind is magnified along the education pathway. Students who fall behind in the early years of schooling find it increasingly difficult to catch up. Table 3 summarises the overall study findings for the third research sub-question related to student literacy outcomes. For the purposes of this reporting, proficiency levels were grouped into 'high', 'mid' and 'low' performing levels. Students in the top band of 'high' were able to meet the G1 Lao language curriculum expectations.

Table 3: Overall study key findings for research question B1 (student literacy outcomes)

B. LITERACY OUTCOMES: To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?			
B1. To what extent do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Literacy outcomes	Between 2019 and 2021, the proportion of 'high' performing students increased from 12 to 21 per cent, reflecting a shift in proportion of students from 'mid' to 'high' performing levels. Of these G1 students in the 'high' level, less than one per cent met the expectations of the new Lao language curriculum Around one-quarter of G1 students were assessed in the 'low' level across both years. They demonstrated very low or no literacy skills.	Phongsali had the highest proportion of students in the 'low' performing levels and Sekong had the highest proportion in the 'high' performing levels, and between 2019 and 2021 this disparity widened. There were positive shifts in the proportion of students into 'high' performing levels from Khammouane and Savannakhet.	Case study participants shared a range of perspectives about how students were performing in the new curriculum, but most were positive. Some observed improvements in students' understanding of lessons and attributed these improvements to changes in content and pedagogies.
GEDSI	While there were no gender differences in 2019, in 2021 female students performed better than male students, both overall and across half of the provinces (Sekong, Saravane and Savannakhet). Male students slightly outperformed female students in Luangnamtha and Khammouane. There were no gender differences in Phongali. Students in 'high' levels were more likely to be female. There were higher proportions of female students in 'high' levels in 2021 compared to 2019.	Based on teacher/principal reported data, three per cent of students had some physical difficulty, and 23 per cent some cognitive difficulties (mostly remembering or concentrating). On average, students with no difficulties performed better in the test than those with some difficulties.	Students who spoke Lao-Tai at home performed better in the testing. The gap in performance between student language groups widened between 2019 and 2021. Students who shared Lao-Tai as the same home language as their teachers had a stronger test performance. Students from higher wealth backgrounds were more likely to be 'high' performing than students from poorer backgrounds.

How does the new curriculum influence students' attitudes and disposition towards learning?

Data from 2021 and 2022 indicated that there have been positive shifts in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning with the introduction of the new curriculum. Study participants reported improved levels of student participation, interest, engagement, and wellbeing, and attributed this to the new curriculum.

While the G1 assessments provided preliminary information on students' Lao language literacy, given the early stage in the reform, it is important to recognise these changes to student interaction

and engagement. Student learning is not only about academic outcomes. There is a significant body of research in the international literature that explores the relationship between student engagement and student outcomes. Engagement has consistently been associated with a range of desirable outcomes, including achievement, academic success and wellbeing (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Christenson, et al, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Table 4 summarises the overall study findings for the fourth research sub-question related to student attitudes and disposition towards learning.

Table 4: Overall study key findings for research question B2 (student attitudes and disposition)

B2. How does the new curriculum influence students' attitudes and disposition towards learning?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Student attitudes and dispositions	Case study participants made connections between student enjoyment of Lao language lessons and the new curriculum, including introducing more fun and practical activities, attractive resources, and greater student interaction.	Case study participants linked improved levels of student participation, interest, engagement, and wellbeing to the new pedagogies, including the use of pair/group work, connections to local contexts, and active learning activities.	The data suggested an awareness of inclusive education and associated strategies has contributed to greater student participation and wellbeing for a wider group of learners, including girls and boys, low achieving students and non-Lao speakers.

Given the challenges of high absenteeism and dropout, and the need to improve learning outcomes in Lao PDR, these results on student engagement are promising and need to be fostered. Context plays an important part in shaping engagement. Engagement is highly influenced by the ability of schools, families and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning (Reschly & Christenson, 2006, in Christenson, et al, 2012). The country's economic constraints (World Bank & UNICEF, 2023) places further pressures on the education system. As an example, the growing number of multigrade classrooms will create additional challenges for teachers as they attempt to meet the needs of all students and support each one to actively engage in learning within the new curriculum.

The Study data suggested that the new curriculum supported more students to engage in school, but more needs to be done to support students to engage in learning (Pietarinen, Soini, & Pyhalto, 2014). Case study participants reported that since the new curriculum was introduced, students have enjoyed Lao language lessons, paid more attention in class, interacted more with their teachers and peers, and participated in more activities. When considering student engagement as a continuum, passive forms of engagement (such as paying attention, doing a planned task and working with others if directed) needs to be distinguished from more active forms of engagement, where students are actively thinking about what they are learning and taking steps to help themselves learn (such as sharing ideas, seeking feedback, taking risks) (Berry, 2023).

The classroom observations indicated that while few classroom environments were 'unruly' (disrupted), most were 'compliant' (students do what the teacher says, activity is focused on procedures and completing tasks). Very few classrooms were assessed as 'cooperative and supportive' (joyful, focused on learning), which suggests that teachers need to focus on supporting greater engagement in learning. A key part of this is supporting teachers along their own learning pathway towards using evidence to target their teaching to the needs of learners. Teachers will need

to have the skills, knowledge and tools to be able to do this. Student engagement requires a collaborative and targeted approach involving education systems, schools, parents and community.

Do changes in teaching quality correlate with changes in students' literacy outcomes?

Results from the 2021 data collection indicate certain student, teacher and school factors were associated with G1 student performance levels. The findings confirmed known links between student background factors and student performance.

Unlike in 2019, more hours spent per week teaching Lao language were positively associated with higher G1 test performance in 2021. However, the findings also showed that correlations between teaching practices and student performance were weak in 2021, which suggested more time and support for teachers was needed. Table 5 summarises the overall study findings for the fifth research sub-question exploring the relationship between teaching quality and student literacy outcomes.

Table 5: Overall study key findings for research question B3 (relationship between teaching quality and student literacy)

B3. Do changes in teaching quality correlate with changes in students' literacy outcomes?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Student, teacher and school factors	Student factors that were positively associated with higher levels of G1 test performance included students' participation in kindergarten or pre-school, students' home language if Lao-Tai, more exposure to stories and Lao language resources at home and in the community, higher family wealth, and lower absenteeism levels.	Teachers who were female, older, more experienced and had permanent teaching status tended to have students who performed better in G1 tests. Alignment between the student and teachers' home language, if Lao-Tai, was also associated with stronger test performance. Weak but positive associations were found with some teaching practices, including teachers' greater use of a range of Lao language resources and teacher confidence in using different Lao language teaching methods.	Students at schools with either no multi-grade G1 class or two multi-grade G1 classes tended to perform better than students at schools with only one multi-grade G1 class. There was a weak, but positive association, between test performance and the number of school facilities. There was no relationship between principals' perceived hindrances (such as lack of qualified teachers, absenteeism, teacher turnover, inadequate facilities or resources) and student achievement.

Overall study recommendations

The findings from this Study indicate three areas of potential policy and program consideration: design of curriculum implementation supports; investment in professional learning; and investment in collecting and using student learning data.

Design of curriculum implementation supports

Programs that aim to transform teaching and learning need long-term commitment and resourcing and to be sustainable and scalable. One-off investments in teacher professional development are unlikely to be effective in supporting such significant changes. Community engagement and outreach needs to be part of reform processes.

A long-term professional learning design needs to reflect a systematic approach to continuous professional learning. Such an approach would start with initial teacher education and extend through the professional pathway for teachers, school leaders and education support personnel, such as internal pedagogical support teams. The sharper focus on teacher professional development in BEQUAL Phase 2 should help MoES to meet some of those professional learning needs identified in the Study. It needs to be supported by ongoing policy dialogue, and greater policy and practice coherence across systems players, including within MoES, and with teacher training colleges (TTCs) and development partners. Study participants signalled the need for greater national capacity related to curriculum design, Lao language and professional learning.

The low performance of G1 students in the test for the Study confirmed the significant challenges related to Lao language learning and points to a need to support opportunities that can build students' oral language and school readiness skills in both education and home settings. The Study indicated that students are likely to need intensive oral Lao language instruction (for example, 3 to 4 hours per day for 6 to 9 months at least) and intensive stimulation to improve their general cognitive abilities (short-term memory and executive function) before they are ready for the G1 curriculum. Also, home plays an important role in building the foundations for language learning (for example, through family members engaging children in conversation, reading and telling stories).

<u>Recommendations:</u>

1. Continue to engage in policy areas related to long-term professional learning design.
    a. DFAT and BEQUAL to continue to engage with MoES, relevant ministries and departments, and development partners in policy dialogue on areas related to teacher workforce management (such as teacher deployment, teacher turnover, career pathways and teacher wellbeing) and professional learning resources and supports (including teaching materials, infrastructure, expertise and budget).
2. Continue to build opportunities for coordination with different stakeholders to maximise policy and practice coherence.
    a. DFAT and BEQUAL to continue to engage with stakeholders at different points of design and implementation of investments and activities, to enhance buy-in, alignment and sustainability. The current mechanisms include the Teacher Education Focal Group and Education Sector Working Group.
    b. MoES, DFAT and BEQUAL to identify or create opportunities to maximise engagement across different parts of MoES, TTCs, and relevant ministries and

departments. The current formal points of engagement include the BEQUAL Technical Meeting and TTC Conferences.

3. Support opportunities and partnerships that can build students' oral language skills and school readiness, in both education and home settings.
    a. MoES to consider how students, particularly those from low-literacy backgrounds, can be provided with more intensive support.
    b. MoES to consider how early childhood education provision can focus on strengthening oral language and school readiness skills.
    c. MoES to consider building parent-school partnerships to promote oral language and school readiness. This would include helping parents understand the critical importance of their role in supporting the development of children's early language skills before they start school and showing them how they can do this.

4. Support further communications strategies that focus on building parental and community knowledge of the new curriculum and the importance of education.
    a. MoES to consider a government-run advocacy campaign on the new curriculum and to encourage parental engagement in schools and learning. This campaign could also address the importance of children's participation in kindergarten or pre-school programs, and the importance of minimising absenteeism.

5. Identify priority areas for capacity building and ways to support this.
    a. DFAT and MoES to work together to identify or create opportunities for building national capacity in priority areas related to curriculum development and professional learning, such as through the Australia Awards program and Laos-Australia Human Resource Development Program.
    b. DFAT and MoES to consider opportunities for study tours and exchanges in the region that are relevant to curriculum development and professional learning.

Investment in professional learning – a system for continuous professional learning

Support of teacher professional learning is a high value investment in ensuring the ongoing support of teaching quality. Effective professional development programs are documented as being sustained, collaborative, subject-specific, practice-based, draw on external expertise, and have buy-in from teachers (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2018). However, questions remain as to how to deploy many of these features in practice.

The findings of this Study together with BEQUAL's ongoing program of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) provide rich data related to what is and is not working with respect to implementation of the new curriculum. MEL data can support a targeted program of professional learning that responds to identified needs. For example, data from the Study suggested potential foci should include: pronunciation; alphabet, consonants and vowels; teaching activities/techniques; producing and using materials; lesson planning; student assessment methods including rubrics; and using ICT. Understanding learning progressions is also important to consider for teacher professional learning. Learning progressions describe what it typically looks like for learners to move from early knowledge and skills to more advanced understandings.

Technical support for teachers as they are learning to implement the new curriculum needs to be systematic and systemic. All teachers across targeted districts need to be given opportunities for

quality technical support through principals, teacher colleagues, new Internal Pedagogical Support (IPS) teams, and via COP and SAL opportunities. These opportunities need to be supported with appropriate expertise and adequate infrastructure (e.g. budget, tools, ICT).

The Study data indicated inclusive education as an ongoing challenge, with a limited shift in classroom practice. Further, the absence of children with physical disabilities in case study schools suggested children with disabilities were mostly kept at home, and possibly capacity issues associated with identifying disabilities. Disability-inclusion is an area that requires close collaboration between schools, parents and communities, as well as MoES and the Ministry of Health.

Recommendations:

6. Support the collection and use of evidence to inform continuous professional learning design.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to use data from this Study, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Subnational Mapping Study and ongoing MEL to identify areas for professional learning support of content and pedagogy.

7. Design a program of technical support for teachers that is systematic, systemic and well resourced.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to ensure those responsible for providing support to teachers (Teacher Development Units at DESBs, IPS teams, principals, cluster/network leaders, TTC educators) have specialised training on new curriculum content and pedagogies, as well as specialised training on how to lead and implement effective professional learning opportunities for teachers.
    b. BEQUAL and MoES find ways to enhance COP and SAL.
    c. MoES to put in place appropriate infrastructure, including time and budget, for those providing support to ensure effective implementation and sustained support over time. Policies related to school based management, continuous assessment, school block grants and the Fundamental Quality Standards should facilitate and reinforce sustained support for ongoing professional learning.

8. Continue to build knowledge and understanding of inclusive education to embed positive practices within the education system.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to consider more focused professional learning for teachers to develop greater understanding of inclusive education as well as practical strategies to support inclusion. This includes gender equality, disability inclusion, ethnic minority groups, and well-performing students.
    b. The delivery of disability-inclusion training for teachers and principals could assist them with identifying disabilities and developing classroom strategies and teaching aids to more effectively support children with disabilities. A possibility could be to support the certification of a number of teachers, principals and IPS members in disability-inclusive practices to help school clusters.
    c. BEQUAL and MoES to consider how to support teachers and principals in efforts to encourage parents to send children with disabilities to school. This could include explicit training for teachers and principals, and the production of resources to communicate the benefits of schooling for these children.

d. Parents and carers to be provided with coaching on approaches that can support children with disabilities and provided with the resources needed to do this at home.
e. BEQUAL and MoES to conduct further research that investigates student learning using an approach that focuses on GEDSI.

Investment in collecting and using student learning data

Student learning outcomes data is an important source of evidence for understanding the impact of investments in teacher professional learning. Understanding what students know and can do is also an important source of evidence for teachers, principals and IPS teams as they support ongoing student learning.

The G1 test provided important insights regarding student Lao language learning. This is a valuable resource that was prepared specifically for the Study, however its continued use can support understanding of how the new curriculum is impacting learning of G1 students. It is particularly useful given the timing gap between cycles of the national Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO3) and because the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is targeted at end of primary (G5).

The new curriculum includes new approaches to assessing student learning, emphasising formative assessment strategies and use of rubrics. Many study participants reported the need for additional training regarding new assessment approaches, signalling they may not fully understand these. Teachers need support to develop understandings of how to interpret different data sources so that they can teach at the level of students' learning needs. Teachers need to spend time and effort focussing on skills that are below the G1 curriculum expectations to meet the learning needs of these students. Teachers need flexibility that allows them to adjust teaching programs to respond to student needs.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

9. Conduct regular assessments to measure and understand student learning outcomes in early grades.
    a. Development partners to continue to support MoES in ASLO3 administrations. There are plans for the Global Partnership for Education III to support further rounds of ASLO3.
    b. DFAT and MoES to consider the continued use of the Study G1 test to expand the range of assessments available in Lao PDR to measure student learning in early grades. Consider exploring ways to link this assessment to the national ASLO3 and SEA-PLM, as well as international work being conducted around learning progressions (Adams et al., 2018; Waters, 2019).

10. Support the interpretation and use of Study assessment data.
    a. DFAT to support MoES to interpret and use the Study assessment data to help make informed decisions about where to direct investment or change aspects of interventions.
    b. BEQUAL and MoES to use evidence from the Study assessment data on disparities to inform targeting of resources and professional learning.

11. Conduct further investigations to understand factors associated with low and high performance, and disparities in student learning.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to consider further research to understand the factors associated with low and high performance as a precursor to designing specific interventions. This is also what is needed to understand boys' underperformance, why students in Phongsali are lagging behind and those in Sekong are doing better, and factors related to ethnic minority groups and poverty. The analysis in this report provides a starting point, but further research is recommended.
12. Examine the implementation of formative assessment strategies.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to conduct further investigation to examine implementation of formative assessment strategies by teachers, including the quality of data teachers are collecting and how they use it.
13. Provide support to teachers and principals on how to interpret data and use data to inform practice.
    a. MoES to consider how to support teachers and principals to understand student assessment data, how to use it to inform practice, and importantly how it supports monitoring of skills outlined in the curriculum.
14. Consider how policy can provide teachers with flexibility to adjust teaching program and pace to meet students' learning needs.
    a. MoES to consider providing policy advice which supports teachers to tailor curriculum resources (teacher guides and student textbooks) to the needs of their students. This will enable teachers to target content to where individual students are at in their learning.

1. Introduction

The Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is supporting long-term education reforms in Vanuatu, Lao PDR and Timor-Leste. Through the Education Analytics Service (EAS), DFAT is investigating teaching and learning development initiatives in a study series known as the Teacher Development Multi-Year Study Series.

In the context of Lao PDR, the Australian Government is supporting the Government of Lao PDR to undertake significant primary education reforms through its flagship Basic Education Quality and Access in Laos program (BEQUAL). A key focus of these reforms is the rollout of a new national primary curriculum intended to improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes for students. The EAS investigated how the BEQUAL program through its support of the Government of Laos' ongoing primary education reforms made a difference to improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes. The study was focused on the original 32 Phase 1 BEQUAL-target districts (2015-22) – some of the country's most disadvantaged.

Three reports presented the findings at certain points on the Study's timeline.

The Baseline Report presented quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2019 which captured 'state of play' information on primary school teaching practice and student learning outcomes just before the implementation of a new primary education curriculum and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Baseline Report identified the need for intensive action on Lao language literacy, targeted teacher training on the new curriculum with a special emphasis on second language learners, and deepened engagement with school communities to reduce student absenteeism and improve student readiness for school.

The Interim Report 1 presented quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2021, following two years of implementation of BEQUAL support for the curriculum rollout from Grade 1. The report provided insights into the extent to which teaching practices were changing with the implementation of the new G1 Lao language curriculum, the level of support available to teachers and principals, and progress in student learning outcomes. Although there were examples of positive progress towards improved teaching quality, the findings emphasised the continued need for intensive action on Lao language literacy, ongoing professional learning focused on Lao language teaching, and deepened engagement with school communities to promote student readiness for school.

This report constitutes the Final Report. It presents findings from qualitative data collection in 2022. It aims to identify the outcomes of BEQUAL by reflecting on the three cycles of data collection and contribute to analysis across the three countries in the Study series. The Final Report also presents lessons learnt and recommendations related to teacher development for Lao PDR and other contexts.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The EAS Teacher Development Multi-Year Study for Lao PDR (the Study) sought to answer the question:

> ***To what extent does BEQUAL support improve teaching quality and student literacy in Lao PDR?***

This question was answered by focusing on changes in the areas of teaching quality (EOPO 1) and student literacy outcomes (a component of the BEQUAL Phase 1 goal).

The Study evaluated teaching quality and student literacy outcomes by researching the questions and sub-questions in Table 1.

Table 1: Study questions

Key questions	Sub-questions
A) Teaching Quality To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?	**A1.** To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program? **A2.** What factors enable or impede teachers aligning their practice to the new curriculum?
B) Literacy Outcomes To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?	**B1.** To what extent do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation? **B2.** How does the new curriculum influence students' attitudes and disposition towards learning? **B3.** Do changes in teaching quality correlate with changes in students' literacy outcomes?

2. Country and investment context

2.1 Lao PDR's new curriculum and the BEQUAL program

The Australian Government has been supporting the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) since 2018 with the development and nationwide implementation of a new primary curriculum. The support, which originally started during BEQUAL Phase 1 (2015-2022), is being continued with BEQUAL Phase 2 (2022- 2026).

The new curriculum for Lao language and other subjects was introduced in the 2019-20 school year and is being phased-in across all five primary grades. The rollout began with Grade 1 (G1) in September 2019 and Grade 2 (G2) in September 2020. BEQUAL's in-service teacher development program commenced with nationwide orientation workshops on the new curriculum for G1 teachers in July 2019. Follow-up intensive support for in-service teacher development was only provided in BEQUAL target districts.

As part of the new curriculum, teachers were provided with teacher guides and other teaching and learning resources (including to support Lao language teaching). Specific teaching practices, including active learning, student-centred learning approaches, formative and summative assessment of student learning progress, and a phonics approach to teaching reading, were also introduced. These represent a substantial change to the former curriculum. These practices were complemented by an in-service teacher professional development program to support Provincial Education and Sports Services (PESS) to deliver face-to-face teacher orientation training. This orientation comprises of up to six days of face-to-face training, of which a portion was dedicated to Lao language. Additional in-service support was provided to teachers, principals and schools in most of the original 32 BEQUAL-targeted districts – some of the country's most disadvantaged districts – through strengthening communities of practice (COP), self-access learning (SAL), monitoring visits, teacher cluster meetings and district level education support grants.

The specific focus of BEQUAL in Phase 1 was to support the MoES to implement Lao PDR's new primary education curriculum and align teaching practice. The goal of BEQUAL Phase 1 was: 'more girls and boys of primary school age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional literacy and numeracy and acquire life skills'[1]. This was to be achieved through 'more effective teaching' and 'better governance', which were both End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs). More effective teaching was understood as the alignment of teaching practice with the new curriculum. Better governance referred to the expected increased capacity of government line agencies in target districts to support teachers to implement the new curriculum.

BEQUAL Phase 2 supports MoES to complete the national rollout of the curriculum for the full five grades of primary education and will increasingly focus on strengthening systems for teacher professional development through a continuing professional development (CPD) system. BEQUAL's EOPOs have been updated to: (1) Improved teaching – by 2030, primary teachers in targeted districts demonstrate inclusive teaching practices responsive to students' needs; and (2) Improved learning – by 2030, primary students in targeted districts demonstrate increased engagement in learning and improved learning outcomes. Phase 2 targets 30 districts within the catchment areas of selected Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) in Lao PDR.

3. Study design and methodology

The *Evaluation of Australia's Investment in Teacher Development in Lao PDR – Evaluation Design* (LADLF & ACER, 2019) and *EAS: Teacher Development Multi-Year Studies – Conceptual Framework* (ACER, 2017) provided the rationale and overall approach for this Lao PDR study.

The Study, designed in 2019 (LADLF & ACER, 2019), adopted a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods (refer to Table 2). The Study followed teachers and principals in the original 32 BEQUAL target districts over three cycles of data collection while the new G1 Lao language curriculum was rolled out nationally.

Table 2: Study data sources

Key research questions	Data sources
A) Teaching Quality To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?	Survey of teachers and principals (2019, 2021) Case studies at school level (2019, 2021, 2022) and system level (2022) – interviews with teachers, principals, PAs, national stakeholders; classroom observations
B) Literacy Outcomes To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?	G1 Lao language literacy test (2019, 2021) Survey of teachers and principals (2019, 2021) Case studies at school level (2019, 2021, 2022) and system level (2022)

The Study design was updated in late 2020 due to the global impact of COVID-19 on schools and governments, its associated border closures and travel restrictions, and changes to funding priorities of the Australian aid program. While the original purpose and intent of the Study were retained, there were some changes to methodology. In summary these were:

[1] The goal was amended for the 2020-2022 period to 'more girls and boys of primary school age, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, achieve functional literacy'.

- Timing for the three points of data collection changed given the planned 2020 data collection could not proceed: baseline (cycle 1, 2019), two years after the rollout of the new G1 curriculum (cycle 2, 2021) and three years after (cycle 3, 2022). Given further school closures in 2022 due to the pandemic, the timing of data collection in 2022 was also delayed from April to October.
- Quantitative data collection reduced from three to two points and was completed in 2019 and 2021. To maintain the representativeness of the sample across the 32 BEQUAL target districts, the full sample of 362 schools used for the baseline was maintained.
- G2 teachers and students no longer part of the Study given the planned 2020 data collection could not go ahead.
- Teachers and principals tracked within schools longitudinally, but G1 students by cohort.
- Case studies were retained across the three data collection points, with the final data collection in 2022. The full sample of 12 case study schools used for the baseline was maintained.

3.1 Quantitative data

The quantitative data collected in 2019 and 2021 comprised of the G1 teacher questionnaire, principal questionnaire, G1 test, student questionnaire and student background questionnaire.

The teacher and principal questionnaires were designed to be administered one-to-one in Lao language, with the administrator asking teachers and principals each question and recording the response on a tablet.

The G1 test was specifically designed for this Study to assess Lao language skills. The test was designed to be administered one-to-one with the administrator asking the student each question and recording the response on a tablet. Hard copies of any material students needed to see, such as letters, words or pictures were created to enable the student to hold and point to their answers. Accompanying the test was a student questionnaire and a student background questionnaire. The student questionnaire was administered to each tested G1 student, requesting information about their background. The student background questionnaire was a more comprehensive questionnaire about each tested G1 student, to be completed by either the students' G1 teacher or the school principal.

The sample was designed to be representative of the public primary schools in BEQUAL's targeted 32 districts. A target sample size of 362 schools was established. The achieved sample was 355 schools each year, which covered public primary schools in Khammouane(60 schools in 2021), Luangnamtha (35), Phongsali (43), Saravane (62), Savannakhet (129) and Sekong (26).

Data was collected each year, prior to the end of each school year (completed May in 2019; April in 2021) by Indochina Research Laos, a Vientiane based research organisation.

The quantitative analysis for the questionnaire data focused on comparing the 2019 and 2021 results. Therefore, the range of analysis methods reflected those undertaken for the baseline study: descriptive statistics; correlational analysis to determine the relationship between two factors or variables; and item response theory (IRT) to construct a metric for expressing teacher- and principal-level factors measured by the questionnaires.

Table 3 provides an overview of the sample of principals, G1 teachers and G1 students from the 2019 and 2021 data collections.

Summary of teacher and principal sample:

- There was a high proportion of G1 teacher turnover between 2019 and 2021, with only 60 per cent of the original G1 teachers retained. The main reasons reported were that the previous G1 teacher was posted to a new school or class.
- In 2019 and 2021 just over half of the G1 teachers were female, while nearly 80 per cent of principals were male.
- In both years, most teachers (84% in 2021) were government permanent employees. Khammouane had a higher percentage of volunteer G1 teachers, while all teachers in Sekong were government permanent employees.
- In 2021 nearly all G1 teachers and principals had completed at least mid-level teacher training. Half of the principals had completed high-level training compared to one-third of G1 teachers.
- In both 2019 and 2021, years of overall teaching experience for G1 teachers ranged from three to 38 years, with an average of 16 years.
- In 2021, just over half of teachers indicated Lao-Tai was their mother-tongue. Most other teachers indicated they could speak Lao-Tai fluently. More than half of all teachers spoke a second language, but this differed by language group with non-Lao-Tai speakers much more likely to speak a second language.

Summary of student sample:

- The number of G1 students tested in both 2019 and 2021 was lower than targeted (around 2,200), mostly due to high levels of absenteeism. However, background data was collected from teachers/principals on the target student sample.
- In 2021, 58 per cent of G1 students sampled were aged six or below (51% male), 40 per cent between seven and nine years (54% male), and two per cent aged 10 or over (60% male).
- Almost two thirds (60%) of the 2021 sample had attended kindergarten or pre-school compared to around half in 2019 (52%). In 2021, 14 per cent of students were repeating G1.
- Teacher/principal reports on disability indicated three per cent of students had some level of physical difficulty, while 23 per cent had cognitive difficulties (most common difficulty was 'remembering or concentrating').
- In 2021, the most common languages spoken at home by students was Mon-Khmer (44%) and Lao-Tai (42%).

Further description of the sampling, instruments and analytic approach can be found in both the Baseline Report and Interim Report 1.

Table 3: Principal, G1 teacher and G1 student sample for cycle 1 (2019) and cycle 2 (2021)

Cycle 1 (2019)	Cycle 2 (2021)
355 schools	355 schools
348 principals (23% female; 77% male)	345 principals (21% female; 79% male) • 335 original + 10 replacement
347 G1 teachers (55% female; 45% male)	363 G1 teachers (54% female; 46% male) • 205 original + 158 replacement

Cycle 1 (2019)	Cycle 2 (2021)
3,367 G1 students (47% female; 53% male)	3,120 G1 students (47% female; 53% male)
2,269 G1 students tested (49% female; 51% male)	2,212 G1 students tested (51% female; 49% male)

3.2 Qualitative data

Case study data was collected in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Case study methodology enables rich descriptions of programs and stakeholder insights and is ideal for the multi-perspective analysis required for the Study. Data were collected from the same 12 case study schools in all three cycles to allow for changes in the areas of teaching quality and student literacy to be investigated over several years, and to understand differences by location. These schools were purposively sampled in six districts in three BEQUAL-targeted provinces located across Lao PDR (refer Table 4). The six districts were selected to include a mix of high and low education performing districts, applying the Primary Education Performing Index (PEPI). Schools were then selected based on being in the same 'cluster'. Advice was provided by DESB on other criteria, to ensure inclusion of schools that are ethnically diverse and represent a diversity of contexts.

Table 4: Case studies sample

Region	Province	District Name	PEPI [2] District Rank
North	Luangnamtha	Nalae	9
	Luangnamtha	Nalae	9
	Luangnamtha	Long	105
	Luangnamtha	Long	105
Central	Khammouane	Xebangfay	26
	Khammouane	Xebangfay	26
	Khammouane	Nakai	142
	Khammouane	Nakai	142
South	Sekong	Thateng	136
	Sekong	Thateng	136
	Sekong	Dakcheung	147
	Sekong	Dakcheung	147

Stakeholder interviews and classroom observations were the primary data collection methods for the case studies. The case studies are comprised of individual semi-structured interviews with G1 teachers, their principals and pedagogical advisers (PAs), and classroom observations of G1 Lao language lessons. The classroom observation tool was purposefully designed to capture information about teaching practice relevant to the new Lao language curriculum and the Teacher Development Multi-Year Studies[3]. Two Lao language lessons were observed for each G1 teacher.

[2] PEPI is the Primary Education Performance Index developed by LADLF using 2017 data. This is a measure of primary education performance at the district level using net enrolment, drop-out, repetition, survival and completion rates. Number 1 is the highest performing district, and 148 the lowest.

[3] It included four main sections: 1) Background information (details including school, teacher, grade, lesson time); 2) Pre-lesson tasks (details including lesson number, lesson plan, notes related to lesson preparation); 3) Lesson observation template (details of direct observations during the lesson, including items in three foci areas – student-centred activity, formative assessment, inclusiveness); 4) Post-lesson tasks (details including resources for Lao Language teaching and learning, classroom set up, classroom environment, additional notes to inform understanding of the lesson).

The ACER team worked in partnership with in-country research partners to refine and translate the case study interview guides and classroom observation instruments.

For each cycle, a team of researchers (working in pairs) collected the data from schools (completed May in 2019; April in 2021; and October in 2022). There was continuity of some of these researchers over the three cycles, which benefited the Study through additional in-depth contextual knowledge and insights, and quality data collection.

As an addition, in 2022 individual semi-structured interviews were also conducted with national representatives from MoES, DFAT and BEQUAL. ACER conducted these interviews remotely, with the support of IRL where needed.

Over the course of the Study, 118 interviews were conducted with 90 classroom observations. Table 5 sets out the number of participants and classroom observations per cycle.

Summary of case study participants:

To be expected, it was not possible to retain all the initial G1 teachers, principals and PAs that were involved in the 2019 data collection due to attrition.

- Nine of the original 15 teachers and seven of the 12 principals participated in cycles 1, 2 and 3. Four teachers and two principals participated in cycles 2 and 3. Two teachers and three principals were new to the Study in cycle 3.
- Of the PAs interviewed in cycle 3, two had participated in all three cycles of data collection, two in cycles 2 and 3, and two in cycle 3 only.

The following section summarises the background of case study participants interviewed in 2022:

- The majority of G1 teachers were female (9 of 15). Three taught multigrade classes and two were also principals.
- Nearly all of the principals were male (11 of 12). Only one principal did not have additional teaching responsibilities.
- Nearly all teachers were government permanent employees (14 of 15). One was a volunteer teacher.
- Nearly all teachers had completed at least mid-level teacher training. Their years of overall teaching experience ranged from four to 38 years.
- Thirteen of the 15 teachers reported being fluent in the local language.
- The PAs (3 female, 3 male) had been in PA roles ranging from three to 15 years.

Table 5: Interview participants for each cycle

Type of participant	Number interviewed Cycle 1 (2019)	Number interviewed Cycle 2 (2021)	Number interviewed Cycle 3 (2022)
G1 teacher	15	15	15
Principal	10 (12)*	10 (12)*	10 (12)*
PA	7	6	6
MoES representatives	-	-	12
DFAT/BEQUAL representatives	-	-	12
Total	**32**	**31**	**55**

Type of participant	Number interviewed Cycle 1 (2019)	Number interviewed Cycle 2 (2021)	Number interviewed Cycle 3 (2022)
Number of classroom observations of G1 Lao language lessons	30	30	30

*In each cycle, two principals were also G1 teachers.

Across the three cycles, analysis of the data occurred over two phases. Firstly, ACER held a data analysis workshop to enable active involvement of researchers in the initial data analysis process, acknowledging that they had extensive and rich knowledge to contribute.

The second stage of work involved ACER conducting more detailed analysis of the interview transcripts. This involved collating evidence from interview data against the sub-themes identified in 2019 and through the data analysis workshop to look both within schools and across schools (and regions) for similarities and differences, and tabulating responses.

ACER then analysed the classroom observations. This involved reviewing the contextual information recorded by researchers, creating observation maps by theme (interactions, pedagogy, gender, inclusivity), undertaking quantitative analysis of theme activities observed across the duration of lessons, and reviewing records of the classroom environment. ACER developed visual displays of the data created for the baseline study to understand and represent changes over the study period.

Further details about methodology can be found in the Baseline Report and Interim Report 1.

3.3 Study limitations

Limitations of the Study include:

- **Attribution –** Attribution is easier to establish when there is a clear causal relationship between the outcome and any preceding outputs. Teaching itself is a 'noise-filled' context. There are a wide range of contextual factors that enable and constrain productive investments in teachers, teaching and education communities. For example, budgetary constraints and political priorities within schools and the larger national context. In addition, in developing contexts, there are often multiple donor programs providing supports to schools and systems, and it is difficult to associate particular changes directly to any single intervention. While there may be relationships between various factors associated with student learning outcomes, direct causal relationships are difficult to determine.
- **Generalisability –** Given the surveyed schools were sampled from some of Lao PDR's most disadvantaged areas, the Study findings may not be generalisable to other contexts in Lao PDR. Further, case studies are not intended to generalise the impact of BEQUAL across Lao PDR. Case studies are intended to explore the experience of the investment by educational stakeholders in a small sample of schools, but across a multitude of variables. In this way, the case studies are intensive rather than extensive. The ability to extract this level of detail from the investment is an important part of the overall study design.
- **Disruptions due to COVID-19 –** Case study data collection took place in 2021 and 2022 after each school closure. G1 teachers participated in the new curriculum orientation training in June/July 2019. The theory of change assumed G1 teachers were acquiring new skills and familiarity with the new curriculum over the course of a school year, however, these

teachers only had the opportunity to complete a full year of G1 teaching with the new curriculum in school year 2020-21, and then there were further disruptions in 2021-22. It is possible that improvements in G1 teaching practices were curbed by COVID-19 disruptions.

Another issue related to COVID-19 disruptions is the effect that has had on the timing of data collection. Due to the pandemic, the planned 2020 data collection was delayed until 2021. The planned April 2022 data collection was then delayed until October 2022 given schools were closed until early September. This meant that data collection took place at the start of the new school year, rather than towards the end as per cycles 1 and 2.

- **Interpreting quantitative results** – Finally, due to the design of the sample, and the absence of population level data to inform design and weighting, standard errors which take into account the complex sample design could not be computed for any of the estimated parameters presented in the Study. This limited how the data can be analysed including the ability to use significance tests for any observed differences between groups. For the same reason, caution needs to be used when interpreting the quantitative results presented in this report.

4. Summary of findings from 2022 data collection

This section presents a snapshot of case studies and classroom observations in the 12 case study schools in 2022, as well as interviews with national representatives from MoES, DFAT and BEQUAL. As shown in Table 5, 31 school and provincial level participants were interviewed, as well as 12 MoES representatives and 12 representatives from DFAT and BEQUAL.

4.1 Key findings from 2022 case study data

Table 6 provides an overview of key findings from the 2022 case study data presented by research question. Annex A provides full details on the changes perceived and reported by participants in 2022, national participants, and observed by researchers.

Table 6: Key findings from cycle 3 (2022) case study data

A. TEACHING QUALITY: To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?			
A1. To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program?			
	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3
Teacher knowledge and attitudes	Many case study participants attributed increased levels of confidence in teaching G1 Lao language to new curriculum resources, and increased understandings about teaching Lao language gained from the teacher guide.	While case study participants indicated increased awareness and confidence in certain areas related to the new curriculum, they highlighted areas of difficulty for which they need more support.	

A. TEACHING QUALITY: To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?			
A1. To what extent do teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices, change following the in-service program?			
	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3
Teaching practice - preparation	The new curriculum resources (teacher guide, student textbook) provided strong support to teachers for Lao language lesson preparation.	Further training about lesson planning and good lesson plan examples are needed to support some teachers' lesson preparation for Lao language. This would be particularly useful for teachers working in multigrade classes.	Requirements related to lesson planning for the new curriculum were sometimes not clear to teachers. Directions about lesson planning from different MoES departments were not aligned.
Teaching practice - strategies	Teachers reported using a wider range of student-centred strategies. Teachers who were confident using these methods suggested they were effective in supporting student learning.	While most case study teachers and principals reported that student-centred strategies were used in G1 Lao language lessons, data indicated that some limited conceptions of these methods persist. National interviewees reported that the use of student-centred strategies was a big change for teachers, and it would take time for them to adapt.	While many case study teachers reported using a greater range of resources and learning activities, observations indicated that few teachers integrated things such as story books, games, songs and physical actions into their lessons.
Teaching practice - assessment	There was a shift in assessment practices in case study schools, towards more formative assessment practices.	There was an increasing awareness and use of rubrics. Some participants considered these provided clear criteria for assessing student learning.	Some case study participants reported they use assessment information to monitor student performance and make plans for teaching and learning.
Inclusive education	While there was a policy shift to strengthen inclusive education awareness, understanding and classroom practice, this did not translate into classroom practice.	The case study data indicated the range of strategies teachers applied to encourage the participation of girls and boys and students with disabilities in Lao language lessons was limited.	Teachers' use of mother tongue language during Lao language lessons was focused on providing explanations and connections for non-Lao speakers. The provision of extra instruction to non-Lao speakers, as recommended in the new curriculum guidance, varied.

A. TEACHING QUALITY: To what extent and how does teaching quality change following BEQUAL-supported in-service program?			
A2. What factors enable or impede teachers aligning their practice to the new curriculum?			
	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 2
Teacher professional learning	While the orientation training sessions provided crucial introductory information and support for teachers and principals in relation to the new curriculum, they were considered limited.	Case study teachers' and principals' participation in training related to Lao language teaching was very limited in 2022.	While many case study participants reported that they value the ways that COP and SAL assist them with their Lao language teaching, opportunities to participate in these forms of professional development appeared inconsistent.
Support from principals and teacher colleagues	Most case study participants in 2022 reported that G1 teachers had access to and greatly valued technical support at the school level.	Principals used a range of support types to assist G1 teachers with Lao language teaching.	Opportunities for teacher colleagues to support one another with their G1 Lao language teaching included a mix of informal and structured activities.
Support from pedagogical advisers (PAs)	The support that PAs provided in schools for Lao language teaching was typically highly valued. The data indicated the increase in PA support to case study schools between 2019 and 2021 had been sustained.	Case study participants in 2022 identified a more extensive range of supports that PAs provided.	PAs reported they wanted to assist teachers more, however their ability to provide support was constrained by budget and capacity challenges.
Impediments: student absenteeism, student readiness and parental involvement	School readiness continued to be an issue for Lao language teaching and learning. Case study principals and teachers reported a limited number of ways they supported students who were not ready for school.	Student absence appeared less of an issue to case study participants in 2022, than in 2019 and 2021. Case study principals and teachers reported a range of ways they supported often-absent students, but in some schools no extra support was provided.	Parental involvement in supporting student learning continued to be a challenge to Lao language teaching and learning.
COVID-19	Approaches used to support student learning included online learning, educational programs on television and radio, hard copy resources, and students practising reading and writing. In many locations a lack of access to technology for both students and teachers, inhibited online learning.	Most teachers reported that they neither sought nor were provided with support to continue teaching Lao language during school closures.	Student opportunities to learn during school closures were largely dependent on the capacity of their parents to support their learning at home.

B. LITERACY OUTCOMES: To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?			
B1. To what extent do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Perceptions of student learning	Many case study participants perceived positive change in students' performance in Lao language learning. Improvements in students' understanding of lessons was attributed to changes in content, pedagogies and teaching time associated with the new curriculum.	Some challenges to student learning reported by participants were: school readiness; COVID-19 disruptions; student ethnicity; and the extent to which teachers followed the new curriculum.	Some national interviewees cautioned against gauging the impact of the new curriculum on test results at this early stage in the reform and emphasised the importance of also looking at changes to student interaction and engagement.

B. LITERACY OUTCOMES: To what extent and how do students' literacy outcomes change following the new curriculum implementation?			
B2. How does the new curriculum influence students' attitudes and disposition towards learning?			
	Finding 1	**Finding 2**	**Finding 3**
Student attitudes and dispositions	There were positive shifts in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning with the introduction of the new curriculum. Students were perceived to enjoy Lao language learning as the activities were fun, active and interactive, and the new curriculum resources more attractive.	Many participants made connections between the new pedagogies and improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement in learning, and wellbeing.	Inclusive education strategies contributed to student participation and wellbeing for a wider group of learners.

5. Overall study findings: lessons learned within and across targeted districts and years

5.1 Key changes and challenges related to teaching quality

Three cycles of data collection (2019, 2021 and 2022) across BEQUAL targeted districts provided opportunities to understand and capture details about changes in teaching quality with the introduction of the new G1 Lao language curriculum.

The new curriculum represents significant change to both teaching and assessment practices. While there was evidence that many G1 teachers and principals were developing increasing knowledge about the new curriculum and were applying some new strategies into their practice, the complexity of this process means it is likely to take more time and support for all teachers to understand and fully incorporate these new approaches into their teaching practice consistently.

> It's a big change for teachers – [it] take[s] time to adapt to student-centred learning and move from old curriculum. (National interviewee)

Further, it is likely that given COVID-19 disruptions to both teaching continuity and opportunities for professional learning opportunities and support, that improvements to teaching practices were impacted.

Evidence from this Study indicated the new curriculum orientation training together with the new curriculum resources provided by BEQUAL, led to G1 teachers' increasing knowledge and confidence regarding the content of Lao language teaching and an expanded repertoire of strategies used for Lao language teaching.

There was evidence of a high level of participation in the orientation training, and that teachers and principals valued the training as an introduction to the new curriculum. However, across cycles 2 and 3, teachers and principals consistently indicated the limitations associated with this orientation training, and the need for further comprehensive and ongoing professional learning for continued learning and sustained change. This view was also reflected by national interviewees.

The new curriculum resources, and in particular the teacher guide and student textbook, were reported to be a significant support for teachers. The detail included in the teacher guide was highlighted as a key factor towards both enabling teachers to implement the new curriculum and to improve teaching quality.

Traditionally, the range of strategies used for teaching was somewhat limited, including mostly teacher centred approaches and rote learning. The evidence indicated a shift towards the use of student-centred and active learning pedagogies, as well as formative assessment approaches. It also indicated a shift towards better learning for students and more enjoyment in Lao language lessons for students and teachers.

> Biggest change in teaching and learning is change in teaching approach (pedagogy) and moving from rote learning towards more active learning, providing students chance to learn more and better. (National interviewee)

While some teachers and principals reported the new curriculum resources supported the development of their content knowledge of Lao language teaching, others emphasised that they felt confused about aspects of the new curriculum content and did not feel well equipped to teach Lao language. These teachers appealed for training specific to developing their understanding of and skills in teaching Lao language.

Factors that have enabled G1 teachers to align their Lao language teaching practice to the new curriculum included engagement in teacher professional learning, the provision of technical support at the school level from principals and teacher colleagues, and the provision of support from PAs. Among the factors that Study participants consistently reported to have impeded alignment of practice to the new curriculum were school characteristics such as shortage or inadequacy of materials, teacher characteristics such as teachers' limited knowledge and experience of Lao language teaching including their understanding of key elements of the new curriculum, and student characteristics including students' low Lao language skills, students' low readiness for transition to school, students' absenteeism and a lack of parental involvement in supporting student learning.

Table 7 outlines the intended outcomes for the BEQUAL in-service program. The BEQUAL Phase 1 approach was a logical starting point for the support needed for teachers in light of the new

curriculum, and the Study evidence suggests that the program went some way towards meeting the short-term outcomes outlined. With the BEQUAL Phase 2 program now underway and the final phase of the curriculum rollout scheduled for completion in 2023, the sharper focus on teacher professional development embedded in the Phase 2 design should help MoES with BEQUAL's support to meet some of those professional learning needs identified in the Study towards the medium and long-term outcome specified below.

Table 7: Intended outcomes for BEQUAL in-service program

Horizon	Outcomes
Short-term (1-2 years)	Teachers are familiar with the new curriculum and are confident to use the teacher guides and resource pack
	Teachers effectively engage with curriculum support systems and resources
Medium term (3-5 years)	Teachers select/adapt content and teaching techniques conducive to learning
	Teachers plan their own professional development with support from principals
Long-term (6-10 years)	Teachers take responsibility for their learning and development
	Principals lead on designing and implementing school-based continuous professional development

Change in teacher knowledge and attitudes

Across the three cycles of data collection, participants indicated that the BEQUAL-supported orientation training and new curriculum resources facilitated a shift towards improved teacher professional knowledge about Lao language teaching content and student-centred pedagogies used in the new curriculum. However, participants also highlighted areas where teachers need more support to build knowledge and understanding.

There was a positive shift in levels of teachers' confidence and awareness of the new pedagogies associated with the new curriculum. In 2019, more than half the teachers surveyed reported they were *not aware* of most of the new teaching strategies canvassed in the questionnaire. The 2021 data highlighted a significant shift in awareness, with more than half of the teachers reporting they were very confident with the following: student-centred learning; whole-class work; small group or paired work; checking students' knowledge prior to teaching; relating learning to students' lives; formative assessment; and addressing individual learning needs.

The 2021 and 2022 case study data aided further investigation into teachers' understanding of student-centred teaching strategies. The 2021 data indicated that while there was increased awareness of student-centred teaching strategies, levels of understanding about these were limited and there was evidence of misinterpretation among some participants. Data collected in 2022 indicated that these issues persist. For example, some participants reported that these strategies were not appropriate for G1 or non-Lao speakers because they required students to work on their own. There was a perceived need for teachers to lead and direct learning especially for younger students and non-Lao speakers.

> I don't [use student-centred teaching strategies]. In my observation it is impossible to apply student-centred methods. Everything should be teacher-centred because G1 students are too young to learn by themselves. If the students are older it is possible to use this method. (Teacher, southern province)

> We have never used student-centred teaching methods. It's impossible to apply in our area. We use teacher-centred method. What prevents us from using this method are students don't understand Lao language and they can't read or do activities by themselves. (Principal, southern province)

Participants in 2022 highlighted the need for further support to build teachers' content knowledge of Lao language teaching. Some of the new curriculum content was new to teachers, for example, a phonics approach. In 2022, case study teachers highlighted they had difficulties understanding specific content, such as transforming vowels, combining sentences and vowels to make words, grammar, and making sentences. These aspects have proven to be very challenging and point to a need for training sharply focused on Lao language content. A few teachers specified how their lack of content understanding impacts teaching and student learning.

> I tried to consult with another G1 teacher about how to read or teach it. I used to ask the PA and I am advised to teach based on my understanding… I understand it but not at a good level to explain it to the students. Nowadays, I keep teaching the way I understand without knowing if it's correct or not. (Teacher, southern province)

> I can't differentiate which word is a noun, a verb, or an adjective. This is too difficult for G1 students. I skip teaching what I don't understand and the students don't learn that part. (Teacher, southern province)

Case study participants in 2022 reported the new curriculum teacher guide provided much needed guidance on the content of Lao language lessons, the teaching strategies to use in Lao language lessons, and the teaching and learning activities to implement. Given the limited amount of further training available for G1 teachers, the teacher guide acted as a proxy for teacher professional learning and contributed to increased teacher confidence.

In 2021, case study participants attributed training as an effective means to supporting them to implement the new curriculum. In 2022, the teacher guide was highlighted by one-third of teachers and principals as contributing to higher levels of confidence given its detailed and clear instructions about techniques, activities, materials and time.

> I feel I have more confidence in teaching because I learn from many resources like teacher guide which is not only my learning source, but also my reference. In the teacher guide all teaching techniques are well elaborated. (Teacher, southern province)

A few participants noted that by studying the teacher guide, teachers would know how to teach.

> I study by myself a lot about the new curriculum. I study the teacher guide and understand well now. I think my students can understand what I teach. (Teacher, southern province)

High use of the teacher guide was indicated in the classroom observations, where 10 of the 15 teachers were observed to use the teacher guide during Lao language lessons.

A few case study participants also linked their higher levels of confidence to a perception that students were learning more effectively. For example, some teachers who reported positive levels of confidence in using student-centred teaching strategies noted they observed students to be learning well when teachers used these strategies.

> I am confident in using this method because students have better understanding. (Teacher, northern province)

> The teacher is more confident in using this method because the students are involved in learning, and speak and answer more questions. (Principal, central province)

Having said that, some national interviewees reported that teachers were still unfamiliar with the new approaches. They suggested teachers felt more confident teaching the new curriculum and using the new teaching strategies and materials when given time to adjust and consolidate their knowledge.

> At the beginning they did not have much [confidence] because it was new to them. After maybe one semester, we can see that they can understand the techniques better. Initially they were confused but after some time it was better. (National interviewee)

Some national interviewees also reported that generally teachers' response to the new curriculum was positive as teachers enjoyed the new approach to teaching and learning and were enthusiastic about implementing it in their own teaching. These perspectives aligned with the 2022 case study data from teachers and principals.

> They have more enthusiasm in the implementation. It is a new thing for them and they are making effort to learn. (National interviewee)

> New curriculum really asked teachers to step outside comfort zone and teach in new way – some uncomfortable but most enjoying new approach. (National interviewee)

However, school-level and national interviewees also gave examples of teachers who resisted adopting the new curriculum changes, or were reverting to their old teaching practices. The mindset of teachers to adapt to the new curriculum was reported as a key challenge, which contributed to a lack of teacher motivation for self-development and adaptability.

> Teacher motivation and how they actively develop themselves is a challenge (National interviewee).

> It's a mindset thing. It's changing. Difficult for teachers to reconcile changed approach - freaked out as kids were up and moving... Some teachers might never be comfortable with these changes to teaching. (National interviewee)

> The senior teachers don't accept the change easily, so we need to spend more time to change the mindset. (National interviewee).

Some participants raised other issues affecting teacher attitudes to the new curriculum, including teachers' limited knowledge and capacity, access to resources and support, and encouragement from their principal.

> If there is more support and more encouragement to the teacher – If the leadership do not support them - It is more likely that [the teachers] will stop and not continue. (National interviewee)

Change in teaching practice

Over the course of the Study, participants reported that teachers were shifting towards more student-centred pedagogies in their Lao language lessons. The orientation training and curriculum resources assisted teachers in lesson preparation and using more student-centred activities in classes. In 2021, classroom observations demonstrated evidence of teachers exploring new curriculum strategies. However, observations in 2022 indicated that teaching practices associated with the new curriculum were somewhat inconsistent. There were a range of possible reasons for this, including disruptions due to the pandemic, limited professional learning opportunities and support, as well as the timing of the data collection.

The classroom observations provided an opportunity to see whether teachers were using student-centred teaching and learning approaches in their classrooms. Researchers observed new curriculum teaching practices in each cycle.

Table 8 shows a heatmap that provides a snapshot summary of the intensity of practices observed across 90 lessons (30 per cycle) in the areas of preparation, pedagogy and inclusivity. Prevalence is indicated by the blue shading – darker blue indicates a higher proportion of teachers were observed to undertake a practice. Also included in the table is a summary of the number of lessons each practice was observed in each cycle, and the total number of coded instances indicating the frequency of each practice per cycle (instances were coded in five-minute time segments across each lesson). Notes relevant to each practice are also provided. Further analysis is detailed for each practice area in the sections below.

Table 8: Heatmap summarising classroom observation practices related to preparation, pedagogy and inclusivity, cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 3 (2022)

Description	Category	C1	C2	C3
Lesson preparation: Lesson plan Proportion of teachers **Notes:** More teachers were observed to have lesson plans in place in C3 than in C1 and C2.	Preparation	50-74%	25-49%	75-99%
Classroom interaction: Pair/group activities Proportion of teachers **Notes:** Teachers used pair/group activities at a higher frequency and/or duration in C2 than in C1 or C3.	Pedagogy	50-74%	50-74%	50-74%
Number of lessons	Pedagogy	11/30	13/30	10/30
Number of instances	Pedagogy	40	76	23
Prior knowledge and skills: Explicit reference Proportion of teachers **Notes:** Teachers were accustomed to the practice of making references to student's prior knowledge and/or skills. This was prevalent and consistent across the 3 cycles.	Pedagogy	75-99%	50-74%	75-99%
Number of lessons	Pedagogy	22/30	18/30	23/30
Number of instances	Pedagogy	35	27	35
Localisation: Explicit reference Proportion of teachers **Notes:** Teachers' practice of making explicit reference to local aspects was prevalent across the 3 cycles, with more instances observed in C2 and C3, than in C1. The practice of integrating local materials was emerging, but not yet widespread.	Pedagogy	75-99%	75-99%	50-74%
Number of lessons	Pedagogy	14/30	17/30	19/30
Number of instances	Pedagogy	27	39	39
Local materials	Pedagogy	1-24%	1-24%	25-49%

Description	Category	C1	C2	C3
Proportion of teachers				
Use of resources: 7+ resources Proportion of teachers **Notes:** More teachers were observed to use more resources in C2 and C3, than in C1. Few teachers integrated story books, games, songs and physical actions across the 3 cycles.	Pedagogy	25-49%	50-74%	50-74%
Classroom setup: Grouped tables and chairs Proportion of teachers **Notes:** More teachers were observed to have set up their classrooms to facilitate students to engage in different teaching and learning activities, including group work.	Pedagogy	25-49%	50-74%	50-74%
Space for whole class activities Proportion of teachers	Pedagogy	50-74%	50-74%	75-99%
Assessment: Explicitly checked Proportion of teachers **Notes:** Teachers' practice of checking for student understanding was prevalent and increased between C1 and C2, with a two-fold rise in number of instances.	Pedagogy	25-49%	75-99%	75-99%
Number of lessons	Pedagogy	15/30	24/30	24/30
Number of instances	Pedagogy	52	105	87
Observations of students Proportion of teachers **Notes:** The practice of teachers observing students practising or applying what they had learnt was also prevalent, with teachers doing this more frequently between C1, C2 and C3.	Pedagogy	75-99%	100%	100%
Number of lessons	Pedagogy	19/30	27/30	28/30
Number of instances	Pedagogy	82	123	145
Gender: Selection Proportion of teachers	Inclusivity	100%	75-99%	75-99%
Number of lessons	Inclusivity	29/30	22/30	23/30
Students with disability: Customised support Proportion of teachers **Notes:** • Very few teachers were observed across the 3 cycles to provide customised support to students with disabilities. • While the practice of teachers selecting girls and boys to demonstrate ideas or skills was prevalent, it was observed to be done less in C2 and C3, compared to C1.	Inclusivity	1-24%	1-24%	None

Description	Category	C1	C2	C3
Number of lessons	Inclusivity	4	1	0
Non-Lao speakers: Customised support Proportion of teachers **Notes:** Teachers' provision of customised support to non-Lao speakers was observed to decrease over the 3 cycles, but there was widespread use of local languages to provide explanations and connections.	Inclusivity	50-74%	25-49%	25-49%
Number of lessons	Inclusivity	15	8	7

Proportion of teachers	None	1-24%	25-49%	50-74%	75-99%	100%

Preparation

Data from the Study indicated that lesson preparation for Lao language lessons was commonly undertaken by teachers. The new curriculum resources (teacher guide, student textbook) provided strong support to teachers for Lao language preparation.

Nearly all teachers (98%) surveyed in 2019 and 2021 reported that they undertake lesson preparation for Lao language teaching. The case study data indicated that the preparation of lessons plans was more prevalent in 2022 compared to 2019 and 2021 – nearly all teachers in 2022 reported they prepare lesson plans and were also observed to have one in place.

Both the 2021 and 2022 case study data indicated there was high use of, and reliance on, the teacher guide and student textbook for planning given these are both well detailed.

> I use the teacher guide and the textbook together. I use the teacher guide as the main reference and take the content and use teaching materials and methods from the textbook. I can't just use the teacher guide because teachers are required by DESB to have a lesson plan. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Participants reported mixed observations about teachers' lesson planning capacity. While some suggested lesson planning was easier with the new curriculum resources, others reported some teachers found it difficult, either because they were confused or did not know what a good lesson plan looked like.

> Planning Lao language lessons is easier because I carefully base on each topic/lesson which is recommended in the teacher guide. In the guide, it is very detailed for each lesson/hour about what to teach and what activities should be included. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> Preparing lesson plans based on the new curriculum is difficult. I prepare one but I don't know if it's good enough to be used. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

National interviewees reported that some teachers were not familiar with lesson planning for the new curriculum, and there was some confusion regarding requirements for lesson planning, including the format to be used, which possibly stemmed from misalignment between MoES departments. Subsequent reports indicate misalignment between teacher performance appraisal processes, which require teachers to produce lesson plans based on the former curriculum, and the new curriculum.

> The new curriculum comes from RIES and was developed by RIES. Teacher management sits under the Department of General Education and monitor teachers based on old lesson plan template. Parts of ministry don't talk to each other. (National interviewee)

Participants made a range of suggestions regarding what might help teachers to plan Lao language lessons more effectively, including clear instructions and advice from PAs, good examples of lesson plans, and opportunities to learn from each other including through planning demonstrations and practice.

> In order to plan the lessons effectively, teacher should learn from someone who has more experience in lesson preparation, such as teachers in the learning group with more experience, to explain how to do it. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

A persistent challenge to planning (and teaching) lessons reported by some teachers and principals in 2022 was how to prepare Lao language lessons for multigrade classes. Comments from teachers and principals indicated there was some confusion related to what approaches were most effective and there is a need for specific training in this area. It should be noted that guidance on multigrade teaching was not included in the G1 orientation training or G1 teacher guide given the MoES' official policy that G1 students should not be taught in a multigrade setting.

> There has been a change in the process of preparing lesson plans and I have to merge both grades together. However, my plans are based on the old curriculum. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> Now in the new curriculum, I don't know how to plan Lao language lessons. When training, I was not taught how to prepare for a Lao language lesson plan for multiple grades. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> Multi-grade schools – particularly in rural areas – makes it difficult for the teachers to teach across a grade 1-3 class, instead of planning for one grade. (National interviewee)

Active learning strategies

Active and student-centred teaching and learning is a key feature of the new curriculum. Some national interviewees noted that the shift towards more student-centred approaches was one of the most significant changes to teaching practice since the introduction of the new curriculum, but it would take time for teachers to fully understand and incorporate these into their Lao language teaching practice.

These national perspectives aligned with school level data collected throughout the Study, which showed that an important development since 2019 had been increased levels of awareness and understanding of student-centred strategies among teachers. Multiple participants cited examples of delivering activities that: were more student-centred; catered for different student abilities; and improved student interaction and engagement. Nevertheless, the interview and observation data indicated limited conceptions of student-centred methods persisted, and implementation of these strategies was variable among teachers.

In 2022, participants were asked whether G1 teachers used student-centred strategies when teaching Lao language, and what this involved. The majority of participants noted that G1 teachers used student-centred strategies. Across the three cycles, more teachers and principals reported more examples of student-centred strategies. The following sections provide further detail on examples of student-centred strategies and how students of different abilities were catered for.

Examples of student-centred strategies

The strategies listed in Table 9 are presented in order according to those cited most frequently in 2022.

Table 9. Student-centred teaching strategies reported by case study teachers and principals, cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 3 (2022)

Strategy/cycle	Case study teachers and principals NORTH	Case study teachers and principals CENTRAL	Case study teachers and principals SOUTH	Teacher and principal totals
Group work/C1	◊◊	◊ ◊◊	◊ ◊◊	**4** 4
Group work/C2	◊◊ ◊	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊	**8** 7
Group work/C3	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊◊	**12** 8
Engaging in learning/C1	◊	◊	0	**0** 2
Engaging in learning/C2	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	◊ ◊	**5** 4
Engaging in learning/C3	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**11** 7
Students learning together/C1	◊	0	0	**1** 0
Students learning together/C2	0	◊	◊	**2** 0
Students learning together/C3	◊◊ ◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊ ◊◊	**7** 6
Use of many activities/C1	0	0	◊ ◊	**1** 1
Use of many activities/C2	0	0	◊	**1** 0
Use of many activities/C3	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**6** 6
Linking/connecting learning/C1	◊	0	0	**1** 0
Linking/connecting learning/C2	0	0	0	**0** 0
Linking/connecting learning/C3	◊◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊◊	**8** 2
Active learning (doing)/C1	◊◊◊ ◊◊	0	0	**3** 2
Active learning (doing)/C2	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	◊◊ ◊	**6** 4
Active learning (doing)/C3	◊	◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**5** 4
Use of questions/C1	0	◊ ◊	0	**1** 1
Use of questions/C2	◊	0	◊	**2** 0
Use of questions/C3	◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	0	**3** 4

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported 0 = nil

As Table 9 shows, involving students in group work and engaging students in learning were the two student-centred approaches that were most often reported in 2022.

> I get students to work in groups and I provide supports. I am confident doing this because the students and I can help each other. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> The teachers are engaging students, asking questions and encouraging… Teachers organise the classroom in grouped tables for good and poor performers to help each other. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

> They [teachers] put students into groups to discuss lessons and do activities. In this method the teachers are facilitators and advise students on what they can't do by themselves or when they have questions. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

In 2022 several more teachers and principals when compared to 2019 and 2021, spoke about students learning together, the use of many activities, and linking or connecting learning for students in G1 Lao language lessons.

> The students can learn better because they can see, touch and think by themselves. Also, my teaching is improved because there are more teaching activities for me to apply and learn. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> The students can connect with what they learn and what exists around them and then they learn more quickly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Interestingly, in 2022 teachers and principals in central province reported more examples compared with teachers and principals in the north and south.

Support to students of different abilities

Throughout the course of the Study, participants were asked about the strategies they used to support students of different abilities. The new curriculum specifies the minimum that students should learn and advises that teachers should use interesting and challenging extension activities. These activities can be designed to address a learning difficulty, to provide more practise where needed, or for students who need more challenging activities than those provided in the teacher guide.

Case study participants reported similar strategies for supporting students with 'learning difficulties' across the three cycles. The term 'learning difficulties' was used to refer to students with lower ability as well as intellectual/cognitive disabilities, given possible limitations to teachers' capacity to accurately diagnose these learning difficulties. The most common strategy was providing targeted help in class (by paying more attention to those students and providing extra support). This was followed by providing extra instruction, which was similar to 2021 data and an increase from 2019. Some participants referred to providing extra instruction outside of regular Lao language lesson time. One teacher noted that the new curriculum recommended providing two hours of extra lessons for students who have learning difficulties.

In 2022, more participants also referred to grouping lower achieving students with higher achieving students than in 2019 and 2021. Some principals and PAs noted that the new curriculum provided more advice on how to support lower achieving students, how to encourage their participation, and allowed more time to do so.

> In old curriculum, if someone is good only that person would be asked and be promoted. Other students who are weak learners would not get opportunity to express their opinions. They would keep quiet throughout the class. Now everyone gets the opportunity to answer questions. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

Across the three cycles, teachers and principals described very limited approaches to working with students who excel. These included having students who excel assist others, providing praise, and assigning extra assignments. Of interest is the large number of participants in 2022 who reported they teach students that excel in the same way as other students. For example, in 2022 11 of 15 teachers reported this, compared to only four teachers in 2021 and none in 2019.

Across the Study, data collection focused in on some aspects of student-centred strategies, including the inclusion of pair/group work, linking/connecting learning, and the use of many activities and resources through interviews and observations. These are discussed below.

Use of pair/group work

As noted above, pair and group work was highlighted as a key way for teachers to implement student-centred activities. National interviewees commented on teachers' awareness of and use of group work, noting that training helped teachers to understand how group work could support student learning.

> …G1-G4 teachers who have now received the training, their students are sitting in groups and in G5 classes with teachers who haven't yet had the training classes students are not in groups, but still at individual tables. (National interviewee)

All case study teachers reported in 2022 that they facilitated pair/group activities as part of their Lao language lessons. They reported examples which included group discussion, reading, assignments and presentations. Many participants reported mixing well-performing students with lower achieving performers. Teachers highlighted that the use of pair/group work provided opportunities for students to exchange and discuss ideas and help one another, and they reported students were more confident, expressive and understanding better.

> I would sit students in two groups and give them flashcards or textbook to mark the alphabets that I mention for them. They can talk and help each other answer questions. The previous curriculum, teacher mostly taught whole class and only teacher explained the lesson without participation of students. Now students can take more participation. They are brave to answer questions. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

However, classroom observations suggested that the use of pair/group work was not as prevalent or consistent as reported. In the 2019 observed lessons, nearly all lessons commenced with whole class activity, and whole class activity was used across large portions of all lessons. In 2021 pair/group activities increased, and some teachers made use of these types of interactions for greater portions of observed lessons. While there was a positive change between 2019 and 2021 in the use of pair/group activities, teachers were observed to be more actively using these student groupings in 2021 than in 2022.

On the other hand, there was a noticeable change in the way teachers set up their classrooms. More classrooms had been set up to facilitate students to engage in different teaching and learning activities, including group work. The classroom observations indicated that over the course of the Study, more classrooms had been set up with space for whole-class activities and there were greater numbers of classrooms with grouped tables and chairs. However, in some locations and particularly in the south, there appeared to be challenges with making changes to the physical set-up. The reasons behind these challenges were not explored. In addition, there were more examples of teachers, particularly in the north and central provinces, having display areas for student work and Lao language resources. However, reading areas appeared uncommon with only one teacher observed to have a reading area in 2022.

Linking/connecting learning

Another important aspect of the new curriculum is to make connections to students' prior knowledge and skills, which enables new lesson content to be introduced in a clear and meaningful way. The classroom observations indicated that this practice was prevalent and consistent. More than three quarters of teachers were observed to make references to students' prior knowledge and skills in all three cycles of data collection, and normally at the beginning of lessons as suggested in the new curriculum guidelines. This suggests teachers were already accustomed to this practice of reviewing previous lessons or asking students what they learned in a previous lesson.

Adapting or linking content to students' cultural heritage, their local context and their local environment is also encouraged in the new curriculum. In addition, teachers are encouraged to make use of real objects and resources that are available in the community in their teaching. In 2022, case study participants reflected on how they make connections to local contexts. More than half of the teachers discussed making references to things in the local environment, such as animals, trees and things in the landscape. Other ways that teachers reported making local linkages is through using local materials and using local language.

> In the textbook there is a picture of a goat. I compare the picture of goat with goat in village and explain in local language. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

Teachers highlighted how they perceived this impacted student learning, including that students were more interested and participated more, students understood and remembered the lessons more, and students learnt more quickly.

> Students can connect with what they learn and what exists around them and then they learn more quickly (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

The classroom observations undertaken during the Study indicated the practice of making explicit reference to students' cultural heritage, local context and environment during Lao language lessons was fairly prevalent and consistent, particularly in northern and southern case study schools. Around three-quarters of teachers in each cycle were observed to do this, but the frequency increased in 2021 and 2022. Interestingly, the practice of integrating local materials into lessons appeared to be emerging, with one-third of teachers observed to do this in 2022.

> In the past I didn't use local resources as teaching materials. I find it useful - my students understand the meaning of Lao words quickly when they see visual materials… they learn more quickly and have fun. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Activities and use of resources

An area of investigation through interviews and observations during the three Study cycles was the types of teaching and learning activities and resources that teachers often used in Lao language lessons. The 2021 data suggested that teachers were exploring using teaching activities that encouraged more active learning, as well as a broader range of resources. However, the 2022 data indicated that some teachers were reverting to their former practices.

In 2019, teachers reported using a limited set of activities and resources. The predominant teaching and learning activities reported by the case study teachers were: practising pronunciation, reading text written on the board, and students writing. Teachers relied heavily on the use of flashcards and pictures as resources.

In 2021, several participants emphasised the use of teaching methods (such as storytelling, matching activities, games) rather than activities associated with language dimensions (such as speaking and listening, reading, and writing). While flashcards and pictures continued to be well used resources, more teachers reported in 2021 using other resources, such as books, songs, games and puzzles.

In 2022, many participants referred to activities associated with language dimensions, similar to 2019 and 2021. These activities included students reading text written on the blackboard, students writing (copying, dictation), practising pronunciation, and using pictures and flashcards. These aspects were more often reported by participants in central and southern case study schools but were widely observed across *all* schools during classroom observations.

On the other hand, participants in northern case study schools more frequently highlighted reading books, storytelling, singing and games.

> … giving opportunities to think. Storytelling, singing. These are different. The teaching in the new curriculum has more activities that the students are involved in. These help students understand. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3).

> [I] often use storytelling in my teaching. These are different. The teaching in new curriculum has more activities that makes students involved more. On the other hand, in the old curriculum, there is not supplementary reading. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

The classroom observations provided additional insight into what resources were used in Lao language lessons. Generally, more teachers were observed to use more resources in 2021 and 2022, than in 2019, in their lessons. Over the three years, student textbooks, student notebooks, flashcards and the teacher guide were the resources most consistently observed to be used by teachers, as well as tools including the blackboard and a pointer/stick.

The proportion of case study teachers observed to use student textbooks and the teacher guide increased over the years, with all teachers observed to use student textbooks and two-thirds the teacher guide in 2022. Flashcards continued to be a well-used resource, but use of pictures declined.

Although the new curriculum allocates time for using story books and readers, very few classes were observed to use decodable readers and story books. Also, very few observed lessons involved games, puzzles, drama or role play. Some lessons were observed to use songs, but there was no observed change over time. Interestingly, there was a sharp increase in the use of physical actions in lessons between 2019 and 2021 (from 1 to 11 observations), but in 2022 only two lessons were observed to use physical actions.

Assessment

The new curriculum places an emphasis on formative assessment and new methods for summative assessment to shift teachers away from traditional assessment approaches and testing. Traditional approaches have included numerical scoring of students (e.g. a score out of 10) for each subject on a weekly basis, whereas the new curriculum encourages the use of rubrics. Across the three cycles of data collection, there was evidence of a shift in assessment practices towards more formative assessment, an awareness and use of rubrics, as well as using assessment information to make plans for teaching and learning.

Common differences in assessment practices reported by case study participants were the move away from whole-class monthly tests, and changes to the frequency of assessment such that students were assessed during lessons or after each activity, topic or lesson, in accordance with guidance in the teacher guide.

> … assessment was implemented once and in a single way, which was the monthly test… the new curriculum students can be assessed in a variety of ways based on their appropriateness. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

> According to the new curriculum it is required to assess writing, reading, combining words, matching picture to word. I can assess in the middle or end of the class. I ask students to read and write for me to see then I can assess them… Teacher guide tells you clearly when to assess. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

While participants in 2022 reported they use a range of assessment methods, these included some traditional approaches which were also reported in 2019 and 2021. Notably, participants in central

case study schools reported a wider range of assessment methods, whereas those in the south were more narrowly focused.

The 2022 data collection focused more on teachers' use of rubrics. All case study teachers and principals in central schools reported they use rubrics, and most in the north and south. Some participants highlighted that rubrics provide clear criteria for assessing student learning.

> I can't give score based on my feeling or thought as there's clear criteria set for me to give score. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

The classroom observations recorded examples of formative assessment during Lao language lessons. Observations indicated most teachers were checking for understanding and observing students when they are practising or applying what they have learnt.

Across the three cycles, the data showed teachers' practice of checking for students' understanding was prevalent and increased between 2019 and 2021, with a two-fold rise in frequency. In 2022, fewer instances were observed, but nevertheless teachers still did this more frequently than in 2019. Common examples of this practice involved teachers asking students questions related to the lesson content and asking students to read consonants, vowels or words. Other less common examples where checking students' pronunciation of words and sounds of letters and getting students to correct mistakes.

The practice of teachers observing students practising or applying what they had learnt was also prevalent, with teachers doing this more frequently between cycles. In 2021 and 2022, all case study teachers were observed to do this, and the number of instances had increased between years. Common examples of this practice included teachers moving between groups and providing assistance or instruction, getting students to take turns to read or write in front of the class, and providing individuals with additional support or explanation.

There were some differences by location. Both practices were consistently observed across teachers in northern and central schools. In southern case study schools, some teachers did not undertake these practices in 2019, but were observed to do so increasingly over the course of the Study.

The 2022 data collection also provided an opportunity to understand how assessment information is used. The questionnaires issued in 2019 and 2021 suggested more participants had started to use assessment data for a wider range of purposes. In 2022, many case study participants reported they used assessment information to monitor student performance and depending on progress make plans for teaching and learning. Some teachers and principals spoke about using the information to inform additional support for low achieving students and additional instruction or extra classes.

> The result of the assessment is an indicator of the students' progress that shows how much the student has learned in order to plan the teaching and learning to emphasise more on the areas that the student is not doing well. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).

While some principals reported they use assessment results to help teachers improve their teaching, they also spoke about using it for reporting (to DESB, PAs and parents) and planning. Four PAs noted they use the information to prioritise schools for support.

> The information I have guides me on how to support teachers in specific schools. When I know this school has poor student learning results, I advise them more closely compared to other schools. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

Half of the teachers and one-third of principals, particularly in the south, referred to creating monthly scores.

Inclusive education

An expectation of the new curriculum is that teachers will address students' individual learning needs by adapting their teaching and lessons. The Study explored changes to attitudes relating to inclusion, and how gender equality, disability inclusion and the inclusion of ethnic minority groups is part of teachers' practice. This focus on GEDSI is a key objective of the BEQUAL program.

It is important to recognise the policy shift in Lao PDR to strengthen inclusive education awareness, understanding and classroom practice. However, this may not have been translated into classroom practice.

National interviewees reported there was greater awareness of inclusive education in MoES and a recognition of the need for different teaching approaches for students from diverse backgrounds.

> In the past, difficult to get Ministry to recognise children from different backgrounds need different support. Something teachers didn't do before developing this. A big step forward. (National interviewee)

An important support for strengthening inclusive education awareness, understanding and practice was the orientation awareness training and the new curriculum and teacher guide which outlines strategies for how to incorporate inclusive practices.

> There's very specific information or guidance given to teachers [in the teacher guide] about how to include in their teaching practice, students who don't speak Laos as their first language or you know, very specific guidance about how to make sure that teachers are calling on girls and boys equally in the class. In including students with disabilities, for example, and giving advice on that and guidance on that to teachers. (National interviewee)

National participants reported teachers were more aware of inclusive practices, but observations about whether teachers were implementing these practices in their classrooms ranged. Some participants noted the need for better monitoring data on teachers' use of inclusive practice.

> Don't have immediate data that proves that is now happening on a big scale… Support is there but can't say whether they are implementing in their classrooms. (National interviewee)

The case study data from schools across the Study cycles showed that there had not been a significant shift in classroom practices.

Gender equality

The 2022 data indicated that the range of strategies teachers applied to encourage girls' and boys' participation in Lao language lessons was limited. The main strategies teachers used were mixed gender group activities and seating boys and girls together. These were the same strategies consistently reported in the *CPD Subnational Mapping Study* (BEQUAL, 2022).

> When playing games or asking questions, I put boys and girls together to participate in activities without separating them. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

While a few participants from the north noted these strategies were new to them, some participants reported they used similar approaches under the former curriculum. Some participants observed that these strategies promoted greater interaction between girls and boys.

> This way helps them support each other. These strategies are different. The boys and girls were separated under the old curriculum. This has impacted both girls and boys, they ask and discuss lessons more. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

While another strategy was to ask or select both boys and girls to volunteer for tasks, this was only reported by one teacher as the main approach they used. The practice of selecting girls and boys to demonstrate ideas or skills was observed in classroom observations. Interestingly, while this practice was prevalent and consistently observed in 2019, teachers were observed to do this less in 2021 and 2022, and at a much lower frequency.

At the same time, it is important to note that the G1 tests for this Study showed that girls were consistently outperforming boys. MoES should be encouraged to investigate and address this issue.

Disability inclusion

One objective of this study was to gather data about children with disabilities. As part of the G1 testing process for this Study, teachers (or principals) were asked about each student (tested and absent) having difficulty doing activities due to health problems. The categories were based on the Washington Group guidance (Washington Group, 2016). Three-quarters of students had no difficulties across all the categories (76%). Only three per cent of students were reported to have some level of physical difficulty, while 23 per cent were reported as having some cognitive difficulties. The most common difficulty was 'remembering or concentrating', with one-fifth of students having 'some difficulty' or 'a lot of difficulty' (20%).

Case study participants in 2022 reported there were no children with physical disabilities in their G1 classes. One teacher noted they would not know how to support students with physical needs.

> I do not know how to support them if I have one in the class. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

Most participants were able to discuss the different ways they support students with learning difficulties. This is discussed in section above on 'support to students of different abilities'. Note the term 'learning difficulties' was used to capture students with lower ability as well as intellectual/cognitive disabilities given possible limitations to teachers' capacity to accurately diagnose.

Over the three cycles of data collection, during classroom observations researchers recorded very few teachers providing customised support to students with disabilities.

Non-Lao speaking students

In 2019 and 2021, questionnaires collected information about language at home and in class. The data indicated Mon-Khmer was the most common student language group (48%), followed by Lao-Tai (37%). Overall, just over half of surveyed teachers in 2021 reported that they used a language other than Lao during Lao language lessons (51%). The vast majority of teachers (85%) did not use another language when teaching a class of students whose majority language was Lao. For classes where most students had a mother tongue other than Lao, almost three-quarters of teachers (73%) used another language in 2021, slightly higher than 67 per cent of teachers reported in 2019.

The 2022 case study data showed that teachers' use of local languages during Lao language lessons continued to be focused on providing explanations and connections for non-Lao speakers. Researchers documented how local languages were used in observed lessons which included using

local languages to explain words, name pictures, explain lessons and activities, and provide additional help to students.

PAs highlighted a range of strategies for teaching non-Lao speakers, including: using pictures, delivering extra lessons, advising parents to talk to their children in Lao, encouraging play between Lao and non-Lao speakers, enlisting friends to help, using body language to explain verbs. A few PAs noted there is a change in the approach, with greater emphasis on how to support non-Lao speakers and the provision of visual aids to support non-Lao speakers' learning.

> In the new curriculum there are a lot of visual teaching materials that teachers and students can communicate through those resources such as pictures. Students have more chance to practice speaking and reading. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

However, it is clear there was still some confusion about the policy and whether MoES supported the use of local language in the new curriculum.

> New curriculum emphasises to use more Lao language, but it is necessary to explain in local language in some lessons because students don't understand Lao language clearly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Classroom observations suggested the provision of customised support to non-Lao speakers had decreased over the three cycles. A question of interest is whether the prescriptiveness of the new curriculum teaching methods enabled teachers to better meet the needs of ethnic students in their classes, therefore requiring less customised support than might have been needed previously.

The provision of extra instruction to non-Lao speakers, as recommended in the new curriculum guidance, varied. The new curriculum guidance recommends an extra hour of spoken Lao language be added to the timetable each day in schools where most students do not speak Lao at home. The Spoken Lao Program (SLP) is being continued as part of BEQUAL Phase II. Some national interviewees discussed how it was being used to support non-Lao speakers.

> SLP is aimed at non-Lao speakers. Specific pedagogies – focus on oral language, scaffolded learning, use of visuals/body language, communication opportunities, geared towards the needs of those children. (National interviewee)

> SLP being taught is a big change. Adjacent to Lao language curriculum. Before BEQUAL this didn't exist. Teachers are teaching supplementary hours to children of non-Lao speaking backgrounds is immense change – developed, implemented ongoing program. (National interviewee)

The 2022 data suggested that provision of extra instruction to non-Lao speakers varied and seemed more prevalent in northern schools. In southern schools, no participants reported they provided extra instruction. In the north and central schools, responses about the kinds of extra instruction varied. Some reported they use the 'activity hour', designated days, or only schedule make-up classes if required. Many participants noted that the classes were for low achieving students regardless of ethnicity.

Lao language teaching time

Since the introduction of the new curriculum, there has been more consistency in the time teachers spend each week teaching Lao language, with most teachers and principals reporting 10 hours per week. The new curriculum recommends 10 hours a week of Lao language in the G1 program, equivalent to two hours per day.

Although case study teachers were teaching Lao language for the time recommended, many indicated they can only sometimes teach the required content each week. Similar to 2019 and 2021, in 2022 participants reported factors that impact the time needed to teach the required content, which included: different levels of student progress; student ethnicity; teaching multigrade classes; and attending meetings that take them away from class. As in 2021, many participants emphasised the need to ensure students understand the lesson content, before moving to the next lesson.

> My students learn slowly and I can't move forward to the next lesson until they understand it deeply and clearly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

One PA also described challenges related to the pandemic, which impacted G1 students' preparation due to the long break in kindergarten. Some participants noted the importance of covering all content given Lao language is a core subject.

> I have to work harder to make sure my students understand the lesson because I can't speed it up or skip any lesson. The G1 is the first step to studying and Lao language and is the core subject. They need a good foundation… (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Factors enabling alignment of practice to the new curriculum

Factors that enabled G1 teachers to align their Lao language teaching practice to the new curriculum included engagement in teacher professional learning, the provision of technical support at the school level from principals and teacher colleagues, and the provision of support from PAs.

Teacher professional learning

The BEQUAL-supported orientation training provided crucial introductory information and support for teachers and principals in relation to the new curriculum, however Study participants reported these were limited, and that ongoing professional learning is needed to improve teaching quality. The limitations of the orientation training were also recognised by national interviewees.

The orientation training was well attended with the majority of G1 teachers and principals surveyed in 2021 reporting they attended, as well as case study participants. In 2022 all case study teachers and principals reported they had the opportunity to participate in orientation training sessions for G1 and/or G2, G3 or G4.

Essentially, the training introduced the new curriculum and provided an opportunity for teachers and principals to gain some familiarity with it. Overall, it was highly valued by participants, with many reporting that it supported their understandings of Lao language teaching content, and their understandings and application of new teaching approaches including student-centred pedagogies.

However, many Study participants regarded the orientation training as too short and not extensive enough, and they reported that as a result of this some teachers did not fully understand the content and teaching approaches and found the new curriculum difficult to implement.

> The [MoES/BEQUAL] training was too short, six days for six subjects. As you know that to become a teacher takes time, but the training doesn't prepare us how to teach. They expected us to be able to teach the new curriculum after only six days training... The new curriculum is quite difficult and complicated. Even though I received the training, I still face difficulties. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 2)

> Even those [teachers and principals] that did participate say the training was too short. Six days is more orientation and introduction to the new curriculum. There is no way in this time to take them through the full new curriculum. (National interviewee, cycle 3)

In addition, Study data indicated there has been limited participation of teachers and principals in specific training related to Lao language teaching beyond the orientation training. While in 2021 many teachers and principals surveyed reported they had participated in some further training related to Lao language, only 2 of the 15 case study teachers in both 2021 and 2022 reported they had engaged in any further such training.

Across the Study cycles some other professional learning opportunities including COP and SAL were recommended to support implementation of the new curriculum, and these were highly valued by those who engaged in them. However, in 2022 it was reported that across targeted districts, opportunities to participate in these forms of professional learning were inconsistent. For example, across case study locations, COP varied with respect to who was responsible for setting them up, who participated, when they were scheduled, what format they took and what activities they included. Furthermore, where these professional learning opportunities were available there were factors that constrained their effectiveness, including having access to: colleagues with expertise/experience to support teaching improvement; ICT tools (including internet); and, support to develop knowledge and skills to use these ICT tools.

In both 2021 and 2022, participants at all levels reported the need for structured, supported, and ongoing professional learning to improve Lao language teaching. Participants suggested that this professional learning should be focused on helping teachers and principals to understand the content of the new Lao language curriculum and develop knowledge and skills to implement new teaching approaches.

> I recognize the need for more professional development around Lao Language; it is a living language. More professional development around teaching techniques, phonics, catering for individual students, etc. is needed; plus a lot of work around assessment (National interviewee)

Support from principals and teacher colleagues

Over the course of the Study, case study participants reported that technical support at the school level provided by principals and teacher colleagues was greatly valued by G1 teachers, and in some cases access to this support increased.

Survey data collected in 2019 and 2021 indicated that principal support in the form of observing teachers and providing feedback increased across cycles, and case study data also indicated that more teachers received technical support from their principals in 2021 compared with 2019. In 2022, all but one case study teacher reported receiving support for Lao language teaching from their principal.

The types of principal support reported by case study participants in 2021 included assistance with lesson planning, advice about teaching methods assistance with preparing materials, and monitoring teaching and learning. In 2022, these same support types were reported, as well as conducting classroom observations, conducting teaching demonstrations, advising on assessment methods (including rubrics), and assisting with Lao language pronunciation.

> He observes my teaching two-three times a year. Since he is also teaching G5, he hasn't much time to observe my classroom. He observes the class and advises me on teaching. He has a lot more experience in teaching. … The most helpful support is observing my classroom. Before he observes

> I make sure I prepare well, and I am open to learning from him. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> The principal has given help in teaching Lao language on anything I do not understand and what I could not pronounce correctly. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

While the supports provided by many principals were perceived to be highly valued, in some cases principal capacity to support G1 teachers with Lao language teaching was limited, and participants recognised that more training was needed for these principals to be effective in their support roles.

> I would like to participate in G1 Lao language training as I didn't participate in 2019. When I read the G1 textbook, I see some similarities and differences from G2 textbook. I just know enough to exchange with G1 teacher not to technically advise her. I would like to learn more about making multigrade lesson plans. I would like to learn more how to deliver knowledge to students more effectively. (Principal, southern province)

A range of support types that teacher colleagues provided one another for Lao language teaching was reported across the Study cycles. This included some that were formally organised and quite structured (e.g. weekly meetings where teachers exchange lesson plans and ideas; teacher networks supported by experienced/expert principals), and others that were informally initiated and less structured (e.g. teachers talk together about their teaching during breaks between lessons; teachers observe one another teaching and discuss techniques; teachers take opportunities at local meetings to share ideas about their Lao language teaching).

> There is a learning circle where all teachers can exchange lessons. There are classroom observations among teachers and a WhatsApp group was set up. There is a support program between teachers, for example between a G1 and G3 teacher. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

> The teachers have a lot of exchanges among themselves, but it is informal way. Mostly they exchange about the preparation of lesson plans and teaching activities in line with the new curriculum because they want to cover every learning activity and every activity is useful. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

Data collected in 2022 provided some evidence to suggest that opportunities to participate in formally organised collegial meetings were fewer than in the two years following the introduction of the new curriculum. It would be interesting to investigate whether there were possible disruptions to regular programs of support due to the pandemic.

Support from pedagogical advisers

The support that PAs provided in schools for Lao language teaching was typically highly valued. Across the three cycles of data collection, participants indicated that PA support to case study schools increased, and in 2022 PAs were reported to have offered a more extensive range of support types than previously. It is likely that these increases were facilitated by BEQUAL-supported grant funding.

Support for G1 Lao language teaching provided by PAs that was reported across all cycles included classroom observations, lesson planning, provision of advice about teaching methods, using teaching materials, assessing student learning, and classroom management.

> When I visit the school, my methods of providing support to teachers are: asking questions to find out their difficulties understanding in the new curriculum and advising, asking to see their lesson plan to see if they have it right and are ready to teach, explaining what they don't understand according to their plan, conducting classroom observation, and providing advice after the observation. (PA, southern province, cycle 2)

> The most helpful support for me is when they [PA] conduct classroom observations and have a discussion afterwards to reflect on my teaching and advise me for improvement. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

The data collected in 2019 and 2021 indicated that PA support to schools had increased, and this was sustained through 2022. In addition, participants in 2022 reported PAs were using a more extensive range of supports than in previous years. These included assistance with preparing teaching materials, teaching demonstrations, provision of advice about Lao language content (reading, writing), participation in WhatsApp groups, monitoring teaching, reviewing teachers' lesson videos, assistance with preparing improvement plans, and generally encouraging teaching. Subsequent information indicates these techniques were part of the BEQUAL-supported grant training in target districts.

While PA support was typically perceived to be very valuable, some participants identified limitations to PA support. Principals and teachers reported that the limited frequency of school visits, the focus of these visits, and the ability of PAs to provide the technical support needed by G1 teachers were constraints to the effectiveness of PA support in some cases. PAs themselves reported that they want to assist teachers more, however their ability to provide support was constrained by budget, having the appropriate tools (e.g. laptop, tablet, printer), and capacity challenges.

> If asked about PA capacity, we are enough. What we need is budget. We have very small budget to provide pedagogy so we could not visit every school in the district. We used the administrative budget to visit schools, but it is very small amount. If we have a specific budget to monitor and provide pedagogy, then we can implement our plan. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

> As a PA in DESB, I think the most important thing for teachers is teaching strategy. So, I want to gain more confidence in applying 16 techniques of teaching strategies in order to be able to support teachers… I want to be trained in teaching methods and if possible, I would like to visit schools. By doing this I could gain confidence in supporting teachers. I also want to conduct teaching demonstrations for teachers. During my school visit, I don't have chance to do so – mostly I only conduct classroom observation. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

Factors impeding alignment of practice to the new curriculum

Across the Study cycles several factors that might impede alignment of G1 Lao language teaching practice with the new curriculum were identified by participants. These were broadly categorised as pertaining to school characteristics, teacher characteristics and student characteristics. Data collected in 2019 and 2021 included each of these categories, whereas in 2022 the focus was on further investigating student characteristics. In 2021 and 2022 data related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Lao language teaching and learning was also collected.

School characteristics

In both 2019 and 2021, data from surveyed participants indicated that among school characteristics, the shortage or inadequacy of materials was the greatest issue for Lao language teaching. However, while all case study schools reported a lack of teaching materials to be an impediment in 2019, this was the case in only four schools in 2021. As noted in Interim Report 1, it is likely that schools would have received BEQUAL-supported teaching materials and resources after the 2019 case study data was collected, making the availability of materials less of an issue from that time.

In 2022, national interviewees raised the importance of continued supports and budget to ensure access to curriculum resources, including replenishment where needed, and future development and revisions when appropriate.

Teacher characteristics

Factors related to teacher characteristics that were consistently reported as issues by surveyed principals in 2019 and 2021 included a lack of qualified teachers, teacher absenteeism, and teacher turnover.

Case study participants across the two cycles reported teachers' knowledge and experience of Lao language teaching as a key challenge, including their understanding of key elements of the new curriculum. This remained a significant issue reported by case study participants and national interviewees in 2022.

> I want to be trained more on theory. I haven't much understanding in Lao language. There are many topics in the new curriculum. I want to learn more about how to combine vowels. I don't understand. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

> They need to understand underlying principles of the lesson – the teachers need to have a greater awareness of what they are trying to teach – what is the underlying skill, the learning outcome? (National interviewee, cycle 3)

The movement of teachers between different grades was reported as a concern by some national interviewees. They noted this meant teachers were not able to engage in sustained implementation of what they had received training on.

Student characteristics

Across the Study cycles, factors related to student characteristics that were reported as challenges to G1 Lao language teaching practice included students' low Lao language skills, students' low readiness for starting school, students' absenteeism and a lack of parental involvement in supporting student learning.

In 2019 and 2021, students' low Lao language skills were reported to be most problematic for G1 teachers. In particular, student ethnicity and their home language were reported as a challenge to Lao language teaching given the need for teachers to communicate using local language, the lower levels of foundational Lao language knowledge, and student difficulties with Lao pronunciation.

> It's challenging. The new curriculum is different. I could not use Lao language a lot; they don't understand; they are ethnic students. (Teacher, central province, cycle 2)

> Students and teacher are Khmu. It is very challenging to write correctly in Lao because they write based on sound. Students and teacher have problem in terms of tone, and in lesson, too many consonants to learn. (PA, northern province, cycle 2)

Data collected in 2022 indicated that students' low Language skills were a continuing challenge for G1 teachers. Further detail about this is provided in section above on 'inclusive education – non-Lao speaking students'.

Another challenge to Lao language teaching and learning that was reported across all cycles of the Study was student readiness for starting school. Student readiness can impact how students adapt to school and manage learning tasks associated with the G1 curriculum. In both 2019 and 2021 participants across several case study schools highlighted student readiness as an issue. Case study

participants in 2022 in north and central schools described ways they supported students who appeared not ready for school, but participants in schools in the south reported there were no students who appeared not ready for school.

Case study participants in 2022 offered a limited number of ways to support students who are not ready for school. Those most often mentioned were paying special attention to them, holding their hands to assist them to write, and asking parents to teach them at home. A few participants mentioned other strategies, including providing extra explanations, using visual aids, asking students to practise drawing and writing, and using student-centred methods.

> I support students who are not ready for school. For example, I help to hold their hands to write to get used to it. I recommend to the person who can write to support or recommend to parents to help at home. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

Some national interviewees commented on the importance of pre-primary education.

> ... [There is a] need to look at G1 students – some skip pre-school and move to G1 straight away. It's quite difficult for them (National interviewee, cycle 3).

Student absence was reported by case study participants to be an impediment to Lao language teaching across the three cycles of the Study, although it was less of an issue in 2022, than in 2019 and 2021. All schools in the north and one school in the central province noted in 2022 that students were not often absent, and national interviewees also reported that absence had decreased.

> This year, I don't have to visit student's home to tell them to come to school. Everyone comes to school regularly. I can encourage students to study and see that they have learned. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> In the provinces in the districts that I went, attendance rates have increased and [there are] lower levels of student absenteeism. [There is a] level of interest and better understanding of significance of study from parents. At the same time there have been efforts to reduce drop out. When doing monitoring visits, we try to use that time to encourage parents to send their children to school. (National interviewee, cycle 3)

As in 2019 and 2021, some case study participants in 2022 reported that student absenteeism was due to children accompanying their parents to work in the field. Another reason for student absence that case study participants reported in 2022 was sickness.

> Students are absent from school a lot during agricultural season. Some students already come to school but when their parents want to go to work in the field, they come to take their children with them. However, when these students return to school I will focus on them but I cannot repeatedly teach them the previous lessons. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

Principals and teachers reported a range of ways they support often-absent students, including: reviewing activities; repeating lessons; providing extra work (in class or homework); asking classmates to help each other; encouraging students to pay careful attention; providing extra classes; asking parents to provide extra instruction at home; and, encouraging parents to send their children to school. However, in some schools no extra support was provided for students who are often absent.

> I don't review the lesson for students who are often absent. I continue teaching as usual when they come. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> When they are absent from school for a few days, the teacher will report to the principal and head of the village to help get them back to school. After these students come back, there's no extra

> support or instruction provided to them. They just join their friends as usual. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

Case study participants across all cycles of the Study reported that parental involvement in supporting student learning was an ongoing challenge related to Lao language teaching and learning. Lack of parental support was the second most reported issue in 2021 case study schools. Parents' support of students attending school was highlighted as an issue. Often this was due to seasonal farming work and a declining demand for schooling.

In 2022, no case study participants reported that parents actively supported teaching and learning activities at school, and one principal suggested this was not a usual practice in Lao PDR. However, many participants noted that for those parents who could support students, they did take an active role at home.

> We have never invited parents to observe their kids learning in the class. Speaking from my 30 plus years of teaching experience, I've never seen parents involved in teaching and learning activities in school. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

> Parents of G1 students are actively involved in supporting the teaching of their children at home. They are also supporting [bringing/making] teaching learning materials to school. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

Among reasons for parents not being actively involved in supporting teaching and learning activities at home were: lack of own literacy skills and knowledge; lack of time; needing to work/earn a living; and lack of clear communication between school and home, including no invitation for parents to participate. A national interviewee also spoke about how a lack of knowledge of the new curriculum would constrain the ability of parents to support their children with learning at home.

> Teachers advise the parents of the students to follow up with their children's study, to look at their notebooks, help them solve their homework, help them to read and write at home. But most parents spend time with agricultural production and a high percentage are illiterate. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic led to schools across Lao PDR closing for varying periods of time from 2020-2022 and this impacted the ability to effectively deliver G1 Lao language teaching and learning. The approaches to supporting student learning and the challenges associated with school closures reported by participants across cycles 2 and 3 of the Study were similar.

The length and nature of school closures varied across districts. Participants reported that closures lasted from one month to one semester, with most schools completely closed during the lockdown period and some with staggered returns to class due to their small school size. MoES put in place guidelines to shorten the curriculum during school closures, such that students were expected to study 80 per cent of the curriculum.

In response to school closures different approaches were taken to support student learning. These included online learning, educational programs on television and radio, hard copy resources, and teachers advising students to revise and practise reading and writing. While online learning was advised, in some locations it was not considered successful due to a lack of access to technology for both the students and teachers. Students and teachers had limited access to ICT, particularly in rural areas, restricting engagement in remote learning.

> We were advised to teach online but we couldn't implement it because parents didn't have an internet connection and teachers didn't know how to teach online. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

The main mode of lesson delivery identified by most of the teachers across the districts was offline work for students to complete at home. However, this was reported to be difficult for G1 students who were young and needed support with learning tasks.

> Teacher could arrange lessons and homework for students who were in grades 3-5 because they were grown up and they could study on their own, but grade 1 students could not do that. They needed a lot of supports from teacher. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

Study participants reported that student opportunities to learn were largely dependent on the capacity of their parents to support their learning at home. Some parents had limited capacity to help their children due to their low levels of literacy, and participants reported that some children received help from older siblings.

Participants were asked about what forms of support were provided in Lao language teaching during the remote learning period. Most teachers reported that they neither sought nor were provided with support to continue teaching Lao language during school closures. This included support from other teachers, their principal and PA.

A challenge identified across all Study participants in 2022 was the increase in students leaving school and not returning following COVID-19 lockdowns. It was further reported by national interviewees that students from non-Lao speaking backgrounds were more likely to drop out once school had returned. It was suggested that students were also likely to drop out if their family had experienced financial hardship as they would be required to work with their parents.

Participants reported that upon the return to face-to-face teaching in 2022, teachers were advised to focus on the essentials and allow for students to 'catch up'. This also included re-teaching content that was taught prior to remote learning, as some teachers and principals reported students returning to school had forgotten previous Lao Language lessons.

> Teachers were asked to teach only two main subjects, Lao language and mathematics. A teaching timetable was given by Ministry of Education during the COVID period, to extend study for six months. Teachers had to teach even on Saturday. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

5.2 Key changes and challenges related to student learning outcomes

The Study had the opportunity to incorporate two assessments of student learning in 2019 and 2021, as well as collect case study perception data about changes in student outcomes across the three cycles.

The results from the 2021 G1 student Lao language literacy test indicated that all G1 students need a great deal more time and support to meet the G1 literacy expectations as set out in the new Lao language curriculum. While the assessments provided preliminary information on students' Lao language literacy, given the early stage in the curriculum reform process, it was also important to consider how the new curriculum supported changes to student interaction and engagement. Many case study participants reported improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement, and wellbeing, and attributed this to the new curriculum. The next step is to build on these promising results to support greater engagement in learning.

Results from the 2021 G1 student Lao language literacy test indicated slight improvement in overall G1 student performance after the introduction of the new curriculum, with more students able to demonstrate harder skills. However, the wide variation in results – both nationally, by province, and between girls and boys – demonstrated the significant challenges to Lao language learning. The results also confirmed some findings already known in the Lao PDR context, such as the links between ethnic minority groups, poverty and lower student performance levels.

Case study participants shared a range of perspectives about how students were performing in the new curriculum, but these were mostly positive. Some participants referred to an improvement in students' understanding of lessons and attributed this improvement to changes in content and pedagogies. Many participants reported changes in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning with the introduction of the new curriculum. Participants perceived students are enjoying Lao language lessons more and made connections between the new pedagogies and improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement, and wellbeing.

Based on the assessment data collected in 2021, correlations between teaching practices and student performance were weak. The new curriculum represents significant change to both teaching and assessment practices. More time and support for teachers is needed to understand and fully incorporate these new approaches into their teaching practice. While teachers were demonstrating more awareness and early adoption of some new (and possibly easier) approaches into their practice, the results indicated that these changes were not yet substantial enough to impact student learning in 2021.

However, the 2021 results indicated certain student and teacher factors were associated with G1 student performance levels.

Change in student literacy outcomes

Information about student literacy outcomes was collected through a Lao language literacy test for G1 students and case study interviews. The G1 test was administered in 2019 and again in 2021. The 2019 administration was conducted before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.

The test had five parts covering: letter and sound recognition; speaking; reading fluency and comprehension; listening comprehension; and writing. The skills assessed were included in the new G1 Lao language curriculum as well as in the previous curriculum.

Results from the 2021 G1 test indicated slight improvement in overall student performance in Lao language literacy after the introduction of the new G1 curriculum, but this needs to be considered with caution. There was still wide variation in the extent of students' Lao language literacy proficiency. Less than one per cent of G1 students met the expectations of the new G1 Lao language curriculum. Of concern was the large proportion of G1 students who had very limited or no Lao language literacy skills.

Due to COVID-19 related disruptions, it is likely that the kindergarten/pre-school experience of the G1 cohort tested in 2021 was impacted. This was also the first cohort to experience the new G1 curriculum in its entirety.

The 2019 and 2021 results from the test are summarised below based on analysis previously conducted. Further details can be found in Interim Report 1.

Overall student performance

Students' Lao language literacy proficiency is described in terms of levels in this report.[4] Level 1 describes the easiest skills and Level 6+ the hardest skills. Students in each level could demonstrate the skills described in all of the levels below them, so students in Level 4 could also demonstrate all the skills described in Levels 3, 2 and 1. To have met the G1 Lao language curriculum expectations, students were expected to be able to master the skills from Level 1 through to Level 6+. For this report, the levels have been grouped into 'high performing' (levels 5 to 6+, noting that 6 and 6+ have been collapsed in subsequent analysis), 'mid performing' (levels 3 and 4), and 'low performing' (levels 1 and 2).[5]

Figure 1 and Table 10 show the distribution of students' Lao language literacy skills between 2019 and 2021 across the described levels. They show a slight overall improvement in student achievement between the years. The line in the box of Figure 1 is the median, which shows that approximately half of the students in 2021 were in Level 4 or above, compared to Level 3 in 2019. Table 10 shows slightly more students in Level 5 and slightly fewer in Level 3 compared with 2019. There continued to be a wide variation in the extent of students' Lao language literacy proficiency. Overall, the distribution of students' skills remained relatively stable with some small fluctuations across different literacy skills, some of which were slightly harder, or slightly easier in 2021 compared with 2019.

Figure 1: Distributions for Lao language literacy student achievement in cycle 1 (2019) and cycle 2 (2021)

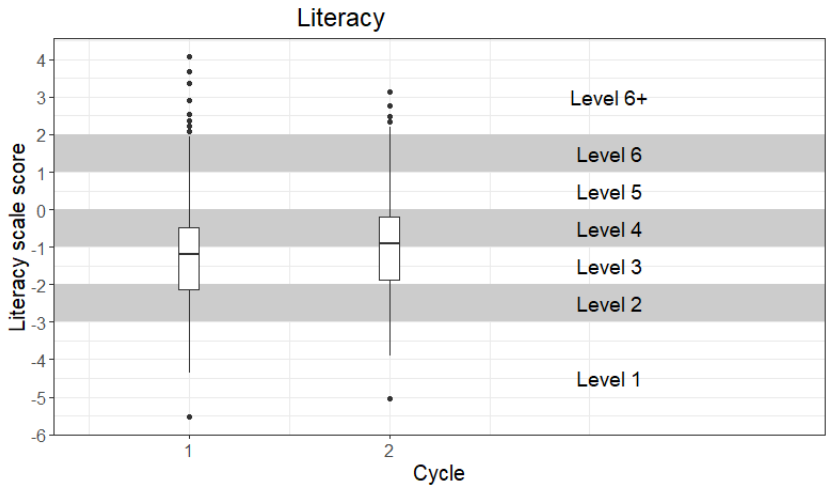


Table 10: Comparison of percentage of students by level in cycle 1 (2019) and cycle 2 (2021)

Level		C1 (2019)	C2 (2021)
'High'	6+	X	0.8%
	6	3.6%	4.7%
	5	8.8%	15.6%
'Mid'	4	30.9%	29.2%
	3	31.1%	26.3%

[4] Item Response Theory (IRT) was used to analyse the students' responses to the literacy assessment. Students were then located in levels. This involved estimating a score for each student (using IRT software), which placed them on a scale and applying cut points along the scale dividing the students into seven levels.

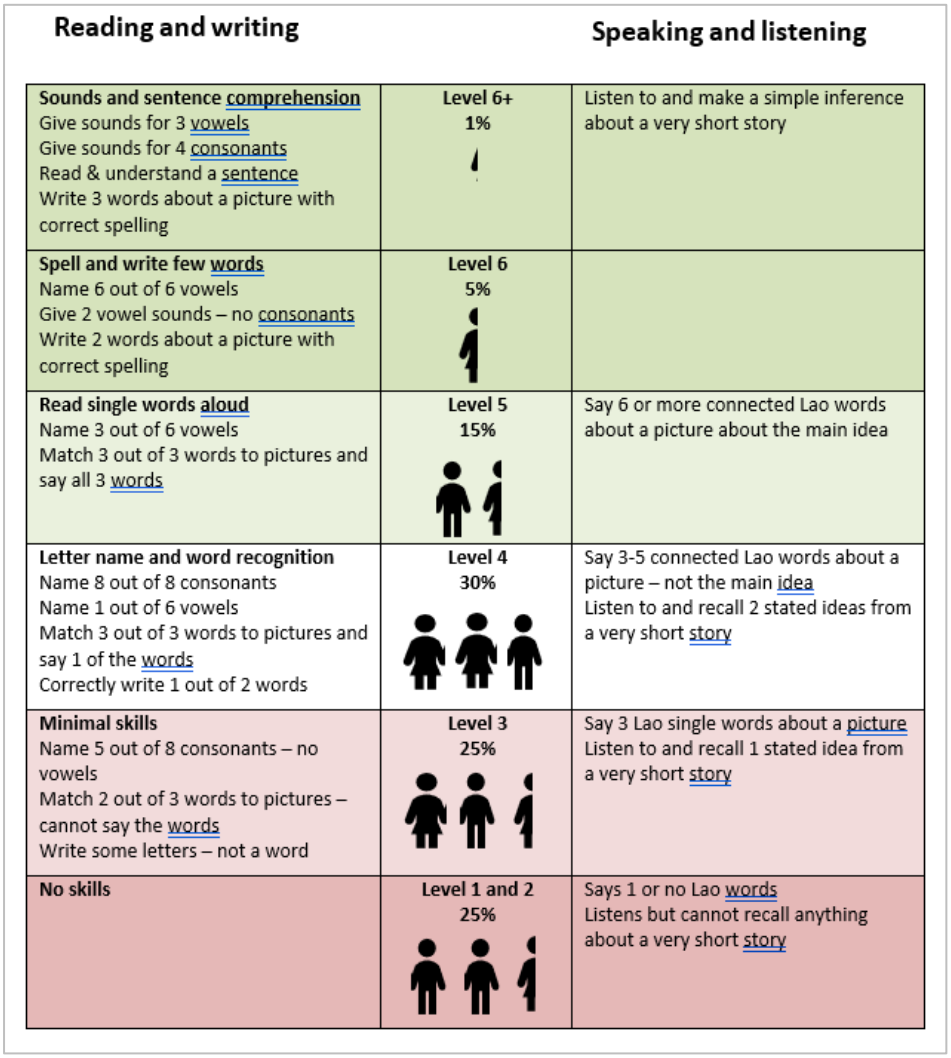
[5] The students within a level have varied skills. Students whose test scores put them near the top of a level can do all the skills described in that level. Students, whose test scores put them near the bottom of a level, can only do a few of the skills in that level.

Level		C1 (2019)	C2 (2021)
'Low'	2	11.7%	13.2%
	1	13.9%	10.1%

X indicates this level was not calculated in 2019

Figure 2 below illustrates the wide distribution of literacy skills of G1 students in 2021, going from no literacy skills at the bottom to the most skills at the top. Reading and writing skills are described on one side of the diagram and speaking and listening on the other. Each student icon represents 10 per cent of students. It shows the proportion of students who demonstrated the skills in each level as well as demonstrating skills in any levels below them. The high proportion of students with very limited Lao literacy skills reflect the enormity of the challenges teachers and school leaders face to improve literacy outcomes in Lao PDR.

Figure 2: Distributions and described levels for Lao language literacy student achievement in cycle 2 (2021)



Half the G1 students had little or no Lao language or literacy skills

In Figure 2 the bottom darker red level (Levels 1 and 2) shows on average approximately one-quarter of G1 students had no Lao reading, writing or listening skills and could only say one or two Lao words or no Lao words at all with no other literacy skills (26% in 2019; 23% in 2021).

Phongsali (48%) had almost twice as many students with these extremely limited skills compared with most other provinces (16-25%), with Khammouane (10%) having the least.

The light red level (Level 3) shows a further one-quarter of G1 students had minimal literacy skills (31% in 2019; 26% in 2021). They could name a few consonants but no vowels, match familiar words to pictures, but not say the words aloud, and only said a few single words in Lao about a picture, or recalled one stated idea after listening to a story.

Both red levels represent, on average, half the G1 students (many more in Phongsali). These students learned little or no Lao language with current classroom practices. The challenge is how to provide the intensive Lao language development these students needed first. Radical changes are likely to be required.

30 per cent of G1 students knew some letter names and single words

The unshaded level (Level 4) shows on average 30 per cent of students had basic Lao language speaking and listening skills (31% in 2019; 29% in 2021). They could describe a picture using three to five connected words and recall two pieces of information after listening to a very short story.

Their limited language skills also supported them to learn the names of eight out of eight consonants, but only one out of six vowels. They could also match three out of three written words to pictures but only say one of the words aloud correctly. It is possible they were learning to associate mother tongue words to Lao written script, so they could match a word to the picture, but they could not say the Lao word.

The students in this unshaded level were starting to develop literacy skills. The challenge is that they need extended, extensive support to improve their Lao language skills and learn many more G1 literacy skills before being ready for Grade 2.

20 per cent of G1 students were starting to read aloud words in Lao language and spell

The three green shaded levels (Levels 5, 6 and 6+) show on average 20 per cent of G1 students had good Lao language skills (12% in 2019; 21% in 2021). The least skilled of these students could say six or more connected words when describing a picture. Students need this level of language proficiency to support learning to read and spell.

Sekong (31%) had the most students in these levels followed by Khammounane (24%), Savannakhet (23%) and Saravane (19%). Phongsali (14%) and Luangnamtha (14%) had the least.

Most students (on average 15%) were in the lowest green shaded level (Level 5). They knew at least eight consonant names and were starting to learn the names of some vowels. Unlike students in lower levels, they could read aloud three single words in Lao language as well as match them to pictures. They were really learning to read.

Only five per cent of students were in the middle green level (Level 6). They could name at least six vowels but could give sounds for two vowels only and no consonants. They could correctly write two words to describe a picture. Ninety-five per cent of students below this level could not give any letter sounds. Giving sounds for letters was introduced in the 2021 test, as a phonics approach represents a major shift in the new curriculum to teaching reading. The test data suggested that teachers were not yet able to effectively teach letter sounds.

Only one per cent of students were in the top level. These were the only students who were meeting the G1 curriculum expectations. The challenge is most of the students were in the lowest of the three green shaded levels. They still needed a lot more time and support to learn the skills that one per cent of students demonstrated.

The next section discusses variability in student performance by region and by gender. Further details on performance disaggregated by other student factors, including by language group and family wealth level, follows.

Performance by region

There were regional variations in student performance. Table 11 below shows 2021 low and high performing students as identified by the student clusters, by province.

In both 2019 and 2021, Phongsali had the highest proportion of students in darker red levels (Levels 1 and 2), while Sekong had the highest proportion of students in the green levels (Levels 5, 6 and 6+). This disparity in outcomes widened over this period.

In 2021, almost half of students in Phongsali were in the low performing levels (47%), compared to one-third (34%) in 2019. In Sekong, almost one-third of students (31%) were in high performing levels in 2021, an increase from 16% in 2019.

Compared to 2019, in 2021 there were positive shifts in the proportion of students into the green levels from Khammouane (24% in 2021; 11% in 2019) and Savannakhet (22% in 2021; 12% in 2019).

Table 11: Student province by low and high performance cluster, cycle 2 (2021)

Student performance cluster	Level 1 and 2 %	Level 5 and 6+ %
Khammouane	9.7	24.4
Luangnamtha	23.6	13.5
Phongsali	47.7	13.7
Saravene	25.0	19.4
Savannakhet	22.5	22.2
Sekong	16.3	30.7

Performance by gender

While there were no gender differences in 2019, in 2021 female students performed better than male students, both overall and across half of the provinces (Sekong, Saravane and Savannakhet). Male students slightly outperformed female students in Luangnamtha and Khammouane. There were no gender differences in Phongsali.

Table 12 below shows that in 2021, more female students were performing better – students in Levels 5, 6 and 6+ were more likely to be female. This was particularly stark in Sekong where 40 per cent of female students were high performing, compared to 21 per cent of male students.

In 2021, there were higher proportions of female students in Levels 5, 6 and 6+ (23% in 2021; 14% in 2019) and fewer female students in Levels 1 and 2 (22% in 2021; 26% in 2019). There were similar proportions – around one-quarter – of low performing male students in 2019 and 2021.

Table 12: Student province and gender by low and high performance cluster, cycle 2 (2021)

Student performance cluster	Gender	Level 1 and 2 %	Level 5 and 6+ %
Khammouane	Male	8.4	24.4
	Female	11.1	24.4

Student performance cluster	Gender	Level 1 and 2 %	Level 5 and 6+ %
Luangnamtha	Male	23.1	14.3
	Female	24.1	12.6
Phongsali	Male	47.6	13.3
	Female	47.8	14.1
Saravane	Male	26.6	18.5
	Female	23.4	20.4
Savannakhet	Male	23.8	19.9
	Female	21.4	24.2
Sekong	Male	20.2	21.2
	Female	12.6	39.8
Overall	Male	24.4	19.2
	Female	22.3	23.0

Perceptions of student learning

Case study participants shared a range of perspectives about changes to students' performance in Lao language learning in the new curriculum in 2021 and 2022, but these were mostly positive.

A greater number of case study teachers in 2021 compared to 2019 reported they perceived their G1 students were progressing in Lao language as expected in the new curriculum. These perceptions were based on teachers' observations of their students' speaking, reading and writing skills, and assessment scores. Some teachers attributed this progress to the new curriculum.

In 2022 participants generally continued to report positive changes to student performance. Some teachers referred to an improvement in students' understanding of lessons and attributed this improvement to changes in content, pedagogies, and more time to teach each section in the teacher guide.

> I am more confident that the students understand lessons more because there are many topics, opportunity to speak, listen and actually learn by doing, and looking at pictures… Teacher guide has more detail and some lessons are repeatedly taught for many hours so they can focus on listening and speaking. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

Challenges to student learning reported by participants included students' readiness for transition to school, disruptions due to the pandemic, student ethnicity, and the extent to which teachers followed the new curriculum content and pedagogies. One PA felt that the results were not that different.

> … because teachers do not use the whole requirements in the new curriculum to instruct. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

While some participants referred to academic outcomes, many responses addressed other aspects of student learning related to student participation, interest, and student wellbeing. Some national interviewees cautioned against gauging the impact of the new curriculum on test results and emphasised the importance of also looking at changes to student interaction and engagement.

> ...change takes time; need to be cautious; classroom interaction, class activities, student engagement etc more realistic to look at before results. (National interviewee)

Change in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning

Over the course of the three cycles of data collection, data on student attitudes and dispositions towards learning was captured via the questionnaires, case study interviews and classroom observations.

Data from 2021 and 2022 indicated there had been positive shifts in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning with the introduction of the new curriculum.

Many national interviewees reported a perceived increase in student enjoyment, interest and engagement. They attributed the new curriculum as being conducive for creating a fun and interesting learning environment for the students.

> The environment for learning is more fun. (National interviewee)

Some national interviewees suggested that the introduction of active learning pedagogies had moved students from being passive learners to more active learners, with greater levels of participation and interaction.

> I have observed that students are more interested and pay more attention than before. (National interviewee)
>
> …seeing more children interacting with teachers and peers. (National interviewee)

These national observations were reflected in the data collected from schools.

Data was collected on perceptions of student enjoyment. In 2022 participants noted students enjoyed Lao language lessons under the new curriculum because there were: more activities that students like including storytelling, games and singing; practical activities; greater variety of resources such as colourful pictures; and more student interaction. These factors were similar to those reported in 2021.

> When we read a story there are some animal behaviours; we mimic the behaviours. The students enjoy too. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

A key part of the 2022 data collection was to explore the impact of the new pedagogies on teaching and learning. Many participants made connections between the new pedagogies and improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement, and wellbeing.

Some participants felt that teachers' use of student-centred strategies had increased student participation in learning and student understanding. Connections were also made between the use of pair/group work and higher levels of peer-to-peer interaction, student confidence, and understanding.

> It has affected teaching and learning because more students are talking to each other... They have different ideas they can exchange. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

Teachers also highlighted how the practice of making connections to students' cultural heritage, local context and environment facilitated students' interest, understanding and learning.

> The students can connect with what they learn and what exists around them and then they learn more quickly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Some participants reported that the new curriculum had more activities that facilitated student involvement and resources that attracted student interest.

> … giving opportunities to think. Storytelling, singing. These are different. The teaching in the new curriculum has more activities that the students are involved in. These help students understand. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

The data also suggested an awareness of inclusive education and associated strategies contributed to greater student participation and wellbeing for a wider group of learners, including girls and boys, lower achieving students and non-Lao speakers. Some participants noted that the new curriculum placed more emphasis on supporting low achieving learners and encouraged their participation.

> … working closely with them, focusing on their learning during class, observe and help them closely in their table, hold hand to practice writing. With old curriculum everything was mixed up - confusing with many lessons with limited time. So teacher couldn't focus on [poor performers] like we do today. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3).

The classroom observations over three cycles provided additional insights into the classroom environment of Lao language lessons in case study schools. Researchers were required to assess whether a class was 'cooperative and supportive', 'compliant' or 'unruly'. The 2021 and 2022 data indicated that most teachers were creating 'compliant' classroom environments. A 'compliant' environment was defined as having the following aspects: students do what the teacher says; classroom atmosphere is complacent; interactions are respectful but may not be kind or encouraging; and most activity focused on procedures and completing tasks. This suggested student engagement was more passive, as distinguished from more active forms of student engagement.

While in both 2021 and 2022 there were fewer examples of 'unruly' classroom environments than in 2019, few teachers were assessed to have 'cooperative and supportive' environments. 'Cooperative and supportive' environments are more likely to indicate the presence of positive student attitudes and dispositions towards learning. These were defined as having the following aspects: teachers and students work together harmoniously; classroom atmosphere is joyful; interactions are respectful, kind and encouraging; most activity is focused on learning.

Factors affecting student literacy outcomes

Results from the 2021 data collection indicated certain student, teacher and school factors were associated with G1 student performance levels.

Student factors

In 2021, student factors that were positively associated with higher levels of G1 test performance included students' participation in kindergarten or pre-school, students' home language if Lao-Tai, more exposure to stories and Lao language resources at home and in the community, higher family wealth, and lower absenteeism levels.

The student factors are presented in more detail below. Further details about other factors can be found in Interim Report 1.

- **Student participation in kindergarten or pre-school:** In 2019 and 2021 students who attended kindergarten or pre-school performed better in the G1 Lao language literacy test than students who did not. Table 13 shows the proportion of students in different levels who attended kindergarten or pre-school. Students at Levels 5, 6 and 6+ were more likely to attend kindergarten or pre-school compared to those at Levels 1 and 2.

Table 13: Student attended kindergarten or pre-school by low and high performance cluster, cycle 2 (2021)

Student performance cluster	Levels 1 and 2	Levels 5, 6 and 6+
Kindergarten/pre-school attendance	%	%
Yes	20.2	23.8
No	30.9	14.6

- **Student home language:** As in 2019, students who spoke Lao-Tai at home answered more test items correctly in 2021 than students who spoke other languages at home. The gap in performance between student language groups widened between 2019 and 2021. Students who spoke Lao-Tai improved their test performance slightly, while students who spoke Hmong lu-Mien, Sino-Tibetan or other languages experienced a decline in performance.

  Table 14 shows the proportion of students in the levels who spoke Lao-Tai at home. Students at Levels 5, 6 and 6+ were more likely to speak Lao-Tai at home either always or sometimes compared to those at Levels 1 and 2. Students in Levels 1 and 2 were less likely to speak Lao-Tai at home compared to students at Levels 5, 6 or 6+. The provinces with the highest proportion of students who did not speak Lao-Tai at home were from Luangnamtha (76%), Phongsali (67%) and Sekong (58%).

Table 14: Student home language by low and high performance cluster, cycle 2 (2021)

Student performance cluster	Levels 1 and 2	Levels 5, 6 and 6+
Speak Lao at home	**%**	**%**
Yes, always	9.4	29.8
Only sometimes	10.8	33.2
Not at all	37.6	11.0

- **Student exposure to stories and Lao language resources:** In 2019 and 2021, students were asked whether anyone at home told them stories, and if so, how often.[6] Around two-fifths of students were told stories, and half of these said it was daily. Those who were told stories at home tended to perform better than those who weren't, and those who were told stories everyday performed more strongly than those who were told stories sometimes.
  Students in 2019 and 2021 who had access to books at home, or could go to places to borrow, read, or look at books also answered more test items correctly than students who do not have this exposure outside of school.
- **Student family wealth[7]:** Students from higher family wealth homes tended to answer more test items correctly than students from the lower family wealth homes. Table 15 shows the proportion of students in the levels by family wealth quartiles. Students at Levels 5, 6 and 6+ were more likely to be from a higher wealth background compared to those at Levels 1 and 2. This achievement gap was particularly stark in Phongsali where the low family wealth students answered on average 10 per cent of questions correctly compared to an average of 32 per cent correct for the high family wealth students.

Table 15: Student family wealth quartile by low and high performance cluster, cycle 2 (2021)

[6] The survey did not specify the language, so stories could be told in any language.

[7] A family wealth measure comprised of books in the home, items in the home (including but not limited to electricity, television and radio) and meals in a day. Factor analysis was used to create a factor score which was then split into quartiles reflecting students from low family wealth backgrounds through to those with higher family wealth.

Student performance cluster	Levels 1 and 2 %	Levels 5, 6 and 6+ %
1	42.1	13.3
2	23.1	18.2
3	16.0	25.8
4	8.4	31.9

- **Student absenteeism:** In 2019 and 2021, students who were absent from school for more days answered fewer test items correctly.

Teacher factors

Teachers who were female, older, more experienced and had permanent teaching status tended to have students who performed better in G1 tests. Alignment between the student and teachers' home language if Lao-Tai was also associated with stronger test performance. There were weak correlations between the teaching practices and student performance investigated.

The teacher factors are presented in more detail below. Further details about other factors can be found in Interim Report 1.

- **Teacher and student home language:** As in 2019, students who shared the same home language as their teachers answered more test items correctly in 2021, if this language was Lao-Tai (36%). Students who did not share the same home language as their teacher answered, on average, between 22 to 26 per cent. Where students and teachers both shared Mon-Khmer as their home language, these students on average answered 24 per cent of test items correctly. Where the common language was Sino-Tibetan or Hmong lu-Mien, student performance levels were weaker (13 to 17% for Sino-Tibetan; 12% for Hmong lu-Mien).
  While most students and teachers did not share a mother tongue across all provinces, there was a higher proportion in Phongsali, Saravene and Savannakhet (84%, 82% and 80% respectively). Around a third of students in Khammouane, Luangnamtha and Sekong shared the same mother tongue as their teacher (33%, 30% and 34% respectively). In Khammouane only, this shared language was mostly Lao-Tai.
- **Teaching practices:** Unlike in 2019, more hours spent per week teaching Lao language were positively associated with higher G1 test performance in 2021. Weak but positive associations were found with the following teaching practices: teachers' greater use of a range of Lao language resources; teacher confidence in using different Lao language teaching methods; and less frequent use of mother tongue languages in Lao language teaching.

School factors

In 2019 and 2021 there was very little difference in test performance between students attending schools with male principals and those with female principals.

Students at schools with either no multi-grade G1 class or two multi-grade G1 classes tended to perform better in testing than students at schools with only one multi-grade G1 class, which perhaps points to stronger performance in larger schools.

There was a weak but positive association between test performance and the number of school facilities.

There was no relationship between principals' perceived hindrances (e.g. lack of qualified teachers, absenteeism, teacher turnover, inadequate facilities or resources) and student achievement.

6. Study conclusions and recommendations: informing teacher development in Lao PDR and beyond

This Study offers key evidence and lessons related to teacher development that can usefully inform the design, implementation, and sustainability of such programs in Lao PDR and other contexts. These lessons are explored below, with recommendations for investments in teacher development.

6.1 Design of curriculum implementation supports

Long-term professional learning design

The new curriculum involves significant change for teachers and teaching practices, which requires ongoing support over an extended time to enable teachers to develop knowledge and skills to incorporate those changes. The Study findings highlighted that some of the new changes were quite complex and challenging for teachers. Teachers, principals and PAs consistently appealed for ongoing assistance beyond the initial orientation awareness training provided by MoES and BEQUAL. A sharper focus on teacher professional development with the support of BEQUAL Phase 2 should help MoES to meet some of those professional learning needs identified in the Study.

Programs that aim to transform teaching and learning need commensurate investments. Programs need to be sustainable and scalable. They require long-term commitment and resourcing. One-off investments in teacher professional development are unlikely to be effective in supporting such significant changes. A long-term professional learning design needs to reflect a systematic approach to continuous professional learning. Such an approach would start with initial teacher education and extend through the professional pathway for teachers, school leaders and education support personnel such as PAs. It needs to be supported by coherent and aligned policies and operational systems. A systematic approach to continuous professional learning would enable MoES to achieve implementation of the new curriculum that is aligned and sustainable. Further details related to a system for continuous professional learning are presented in section 6.2.

Study participants signalled the importance of ongoing policy dialogue between DFAT and MoES on key areas related to long-term professional learning design, including teacher workforce management and professional learning resources and supports. This is a key part of any investment in teacher professional learning.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

1. Continue to engage in policy areas related to long-term professional learning design.
    a. DFAT and BEQUAL to continue to engage with MoES, relevant ministries and departments, and development partners in policy dialogue on areas such as teacher workforce management (such as teacher deployment, teacher turnover, career pathways and teacher wellbeing) and professional learning resources and supports (including teaching materials, infrastructure, expertise and budget).

Coherence of policy and practice

A key issue highlighted in the Study was the need for greater policy and practice coherence across systems players, including within MoES, and with TTCs and development partners. An increasing number of development partners are working on teacher development initiatives in Lao PDR. The lack of consistency and coordination across donors and implementing partners was raised as an issue by some national interviewees. Some suggested that there needs to be greater coordination of projects to minimise overlap and maximise the benefits of the available resources invested in the area.

> A big risk is the lack of government capacity to coordinate the different projects of donors. There is often overlap between donor programs but this is not managed well to ensure alignment. Teacher professional development is very popular and programs to build teacher capacity, but it's not well coordinated/harmonised. (National interviewee)

Further, alignment is needed between projects to reduce the risk of conflicting communication that may leave recipients (such as MoES, principals and teachers) "pulled in different directions" and confused with the direction of the program.

Greater policy and practice coordination is also needed across divisions within the Lao Government. The Study evidence indicated there was some misalignment or confusion around several areas, including lesson plan requirements, instructional language, and supports to non-Lao speakers. A siloed approach can present challenges for an effective and coherent continuous professional learning program that requires a coordinated approach between different areas of MoES (national and sub-national) and TTCs. Efforts by TTCs to align education programs (pre-service and in-service) with the new curriculum were already underway, promoting greater coherence across the teacher career pathway.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

2. Continue to build opportunities for coordination with different stakeholders to maximise policy and practice coherence.
    a. DFAT and BEQUAL to continue to engage with stakeholders at different points of design and implementation of investments and activities, to enhance buy-in, alignment and sustainability. The current mechanisms include the Teacher Education Focal Group and Education Sector Working Group.
    b. MoES, DFAT and BEQUAL to identify or create opportunities to maximise engagement across different parts of MoES, TTCs and relevant ministries and departments. The current formal points of engagement include the BEQUAL Technical Meeting and TTC Conferences.

Focus on building students' oral language skills and school readiness

The low performance of students in the G1 test of the Study highlighted there were significant challenges related to Lao language learning. The low Lao literacy results indicated that many students had extremely limited oral language skills in Lao.

Students from low-literacy backgrounds face an extraordinarily steep learning curve when they start school as they try to understand complex concepts about the relationship between speech, writing and reading. Many of these students come from non-Lao speaking homes, and trying to understand new complex language concepts is difficult when the instruction is in a language they do not speak.

BEQUAL has been supporting MoES to pilot a spoken Lao curriculum for non-Lao speaking G1 students in specified remote primary schools. This has been expanded under BEQUAL Phase 2 which is an important step towards building students' oral language capabilities. These students are provided with an additional hour of instruction a day, three to five times a week (BEQUAL, 2021).

While there was some association between higher test performance and students' participation in pre-school and kindergarten, high participation and poor results in Phongsali indicated the quality of early childhood education varied, and provision may not be focused on building early oral language literacy skills or skills focused on school readiness.

More time is needed to teach students to speak and understand Lao language proficiently before they can start to learn to read and write in Lao. The Study indicated students are likely to need *intensive* oral Lao language instruction (for example, 3 to 4 hours per day for 6 to 9 months at least) and intensive stimulation to improve their general cognitive abilities (short-term memory and executive function) before they are ready for the G1 curriculum.

Home support is also essential for children to learn how to understand language. Early language and comprehension skills are learned far more quickly in a supportive home environment where conversations extend the child's language. Where possible, home needs to build the foundations for language learning through family members engaging children in conversation, reading and telling stories.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

3. Support opportunities and partnerships that can build students' oral language skills and school readiness, in both education and home settings.
    a. MoES to consider how students, particularly those from low-literacy backgrounds, can be provided with more intensive support.
    b. MoES to consider how early childhood education provision can focus on strengthening oral language and school readiness skills.
    c. MoES to consider building parent-school partnerships to promote oral language and school readiness. This would include helping parents understand the critical importance of their role in supporting development of children's early language skills before they start school and showing them how they can do this.

Focus on the role of parents and communities

Community engagement and outreach needs to be part of any investment focused on large-scale curriculum reform. The significant changes to pedagogies and assessment in the new curriculum means that communities need to understand the reforms and be part of the change process. There is a need for a clear and well-resourced communication strategy around the purposes and objectives of the new curriculum, and the importance of education more broadly. Some communication material for parents was produced as part of the new curriculum implementation, and data suggested that schools distributed these materials and informed parents of the curriculum changes in different ways (BEQUAL, n.d.).

Parents and communities have an important role to play in supporting children's learning in the home, and especially with supporting early literacy skills. In the Study, there was evidence that where parents could support their children at home, they did. However, many faced challenges with

providing support due to agricultural work and low levels of parental literacy. Some national interviewees highlighted the risks to student learning of prolonged absence and lack of support.

The Study highlighted that student absenteeism was an ongoing issue. There is a need to help parents understand the impact of absenteeism on children's learning.

Recommendations:

4. Support further communication strategies that focus on building parental and community knowledge of the new curriculum and the importance of education.
    a. MoES to consider a government-run advocacy campaign on the new curriculum and to encourage parental engagement in schools and in learning. This campaign could also address the importance of children's participation in kindergarten or pre-school programs, and the importance of minimising absenteeism.

Opportunities to build internal capacity

BEQUAL has played a significant role in supporting the Lao curriculum reform process, including by providing technical assistance with curriculum design, production of resources, and professional learning supports. While this is much needed support, there are opportunities to support longer-term national capacity development in these areas.

An example that was highlighted by national interviewees in 2022 was centred on building expertise in curriculum development, Lao language and professional learning design and delivery. For example, one national interviewee spoke of the need to build capacity within Lao PDR regarding curriculum development so that when curriculum revisions are required, they would be equipped to do it themselves.

> We need to build the Lao people to be able to build their own curriculum - how do we make the Laos people the experts on curriculum development, Lao language, training? The experts in these areas is very limited within Laos. Not just focus on the teacher – but focus on capacity building at a broader level ...In 5 or 10 years when we want to reform the curriculum – how are we going to do that? How can the BEQUAL project transfer the knowledge to Lao staff? (National interviewee)

National interviewees suggested that upskilling teachers and technical staff would alleviate pressures associated with turnover of experienced and specialist staff members. International learning opportunities such as study tours or exchanges would allow MoES to learn from other neighbouring countries.

> MoES needs to learn from others. Before we just rely on experts, so we need study tours, exchanges… The problem in Laos is chronic. We need opportunities to learn, exchange and adapt. (National interviewee)

Recommendations:

5. Identify priority areas for capacity building and ways to support this.
    a. DFAT and MoES work together to identify or create opportunities for building national capacity in priority areas related to curriculum development and professional learning, such as through the Australia Awards program and Laos-Australia Human Resource Development Program.
    b. DFAT and MoES to consider opportunities for study tours and exchanges in the region that are relevant to curriculum development and professional learning.

6.2 Investment in professional learning – a system for continuous professional learning

Continuous professional learning for improving teaching quality

Support of teaching quality. While governments support improvement of teaching quality and the ongoing investment in teacher development programs, in many lower-middle income countries teacher professional learning opportunities are often ineffective, and at-scale programs do not follow the evidence of what constitutes teacher professional learning that is effective and impactful (Popova et al., 2018). Professional learning opportunities for teachers that are effective are documented as being sustained, collaborative, subject-specific, practice-based, draw on external expertise, and have buy-in from teachers (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2018), but questions remain as to how to deploy many of these features in practice.

Ongoing support relevant to the new curriculum helps ensure that teachers are using materials as intended, and the fidelity of implementation is increased. Such ongoing support contributes to motivation as well as increasing teacher confidence as they adapt to new content and practices (Ralaingita, 2021).

The findings of this Study together with BEQUAL's ongoing program of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) provide rich data related to what is working and what is not with respect to implementation of the new curriculum. A number of participants across MoES and BEQUAL spoke of the need for monitoring and evaluation in order to track progress of the implementation of the new curriculum and offer support to staff and teachers who need it. An opportunity exists to use MEL data to develop a targeted program of professional learning that responds to identified needs.

> The first thing is we have to do an evaluation about the use of the new curriculum – what are the real difficulties. We have to collect information on this first, then we can design and train on the topics of difficulty. … if we can have an evaluation across north, central and south and use that information to design. In some classes, they have two classes at the same time, difficulties with rubrics, problems with materials, etc. The problems may be different, like access to ICT. (National interviewee)

The new curriculum has both new content and teaching techniques, including phonics and student-centred teaching strategies. While there was evidence that awareness of these was increasing, there needs to be further opportunities to build knowledge and skills related to these. For example, with respect to phonics, Lao teachers were not familiar with phonics instruction. Lao is a tonal language and regional variations in tone, and widespread dialect variations are likely to be confounding factors in teaching and learning phonics because there is no clear, standardised reference for pronunciation.

Study participants suggested that ongoing and regular learning opportunities are much needed for teachers, principals and PAs. Teachers, principals and PAs cannot be expected to have acquired the required levels of knowledge and skills associated with these from participating in the orientation training and/or limited other professional learning opportunities.

BEQUAL Phase 2 with its focus on targeted in-service programs and school-based support is a step towards more opportunities for ongoing learning. Data from the Study suggested potential foci for continuous professional learning should include: pronunciation; alphabet, consonants and vowels; teaching activities/techniques; producing and using materials; lesson planning; student assessment

methods including rubrics; and using ICT. There are synergies between these foci and the priorities identified in the *CPD Subnational Mapping Study* (BEQUAL, 2022), which focused on subject knowledge and pedagogy (finding 2). Together these can usefully inform the work of BEQUAL with the new Internal Pedagogical Support (IPS) teams.

Data from the Study indicated that technical support for teachers as they are learning to implement the new curriculum needs to be systematic and systemic. All teachers across targeted districts need to be given opportunities to get quality technical support. This means that people supporting teachers (PAs, principals and teacher colleagues) have appropriate expertise and adequate infrastructure (e.g. budget, tools, ICT). For example, PAs (and new IPS teams) need expertise, time and money to visit schools and support teachers on a regular basis.

Professional learning opportunities such as COP and SAL also need appropriates structures and supports. Study data suggested some COPs were hampered by limited expertise, and some study participants reported SAL was hindered due to a perceived lack of skill and understanding and having no one to consult with on learnings.

The Study provided insights into online learning opportunities. The global pandemic accelerated development of online platforms and resources, and in Lao PDR this included Kampanya, YouTube teaching videos, WhatsApp groups, etc. While these were important developments towards increasing access and equity for professional learning, some study participants, particularly those in rural and remote areas, signalled difficulties with accessing and using these for learning.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

6. Support the collection and use of evidence to inform continuous professional learning design.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to use data from this Study, CPD Subnational Mapping Study and ongoing MEL to identify areas for professional learning support of content and pedagogy.
7. Design a program of technical support for teachers that is systematic and systemic and well resourced.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to ensure those responsible for providing support to teachers (Teacher Development Units at DESBs, IPS teams, principals, cluster/network leaders, TTC educators) have specialised training on new curriculum content and pedagogies, as well as specialised training on how to lead and implement effective professional learning opportunities for teachers.
    b. BEQUAL and MoES to find ways to enhance COP and SAL.
    c. MoES to put in place appropriate infrastructure, including time and budget, for those providing support to ensure effective implementation and sustained support over time. Policies related to school based management, continuous assessment, school block grants and the Fundamental Quality Standards should facilitate and reinforce sustained support for ongoing professional learning.

Inclusive classroom practices

Inclusive education is an important part of the new curriculum. The emphasis on inclusive education through MoES policy and advice provided via the orientation training and teacher guide have been important for facilitating increased awareness about inclusivity.

The Study data indicated while some participants were more aware of inclusive education, shifts in classroom practice were limited to date. For example, teachers demonstrated limited strategies on how to engage boys and girls in learning, how to support lower and higher achieving students, and how to support students with disabilities. Further, the absence of children with physical disabilities in case study schools suggested children with disabilities were mostly kept at home, and possibly, there were also capacity issues associated with identifying disabilities. Disability-inclusion is an area that requires close collaboration between schools, parents and communities, as well as MoES and the Ministry of Health.

Recommendations:

8. Continue to build knowledge and understanding of inclusive education to embed positive practices within the education system.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to consider more focused professional learning for teachers to develop greater understanding of inclusive education as well as practical strategies to support inclusion. This includes gender equality, disability inclusion, ethnic minority groups, and well-performing students.
    b. The delivery of disability-inclusion training to teachers and principals could assist them with identifying disabilities and developing classroom strategies and teaching aids to more effectively support children with disabilities. A possibility could be to support the certification of a number of teachers, principals and IPS members in disability inclusive practices to help school clusters.
    c. BEQUAL and MoES to consider how to support teachers and principals in efforts to encourage parents to send children with disabilities to school. This could include explicit training for teachers and principals, and the production of resources to communicate the benefits of schooling for these children.
    d. Parents and carers to be provided with coaching on approaches that can support children with disabilities and provided with the resources needed to do this at home.
    e. BEQUAL and MoES to conduct further research that investigates student learning using an approach that focuses on GEDSI.

6.3 Investment in collecting and using student learning data

Student learning outcomes data is an important source of evidence in understanding the impact of investments in teacher professional learning. Understanding what students know and can do is also an important source of evidence for teachers, principals and IPS members as they support ongoing student learning. This section reports on the implications of student learning data from this Study for systems, schools and teachers.

Systems monitoring

Student data enables governments to make decisions about need for change in curriculum, teaching support, assessment and resourcing to lift student achievement levels and encourage greater equity within a system (Cassity & Wong, 2022).

The G1 test provided important insights regarding student Lao language learning. This is a valuable resource that was prepared specifically for the Study, however its continued use can support understanding of how the new curriculum is impacting learning of G1 students. Also, while it was implemented in the 32 original BEQUAL-target districts the G1 test can be applied in other locations. The resource is particularly important given the timing gap between cycles of the national Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO3) and also because Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is targeted at end of primary (G5).

The G1 test uncovered important challenges related to G1 students' Lao language literacy. These included the proportion of students who need a lot more support to meet the curriculum expectations, as well as variations in student performance.

Recommendations:

9. Conduct regular assessments to measure and understand student learning outcomes in early grades.
    c. Development partners to continue to support MoES in ASLO3 administrations. There are plans for the Global Partnership for Education III to support further rounds of ASLO3.
    d. DFAT and MoES to consider the continued use of the Study G1 test to expand the range of assessments available in Lao PDR to measure student learning in early grades. Consider exploring ways to link this assessment to the national ASLO3 and SEA-PLM, as well as international work being conducted around learning progressions (Adams et al., 2018; Waters, 2019).
10. Support the interpretation and use of Study assessment data.
    a. DFAT to support MoES to interpret and use the Study assessment data to help make informed decisions about where to direct investment or change aspects of interventions.
    b. BEQUAL and MoES to use evidence from the Study assessment data on disparities to inform targeting of resources and professional learning.
11. Conduct further investigations to understand factors associated with low and high performance, and disparities in student learning.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to consider further research to understand the factors that are associated with low and high performance as a precursor to designing specific interventions. This is also what is needed to understand boys' underperformance, why students in Phongsali are lagging behind but those in Sekong are doing better, and factors related to ethnic minority groups and poverty. The analysis in this report provides a starting point, but further research is recommended.

School and classroom level monitoring

Assessment data can support teachers to understand student progress and whether or not they need to adjust their lessons to meet the learning needs of their students.

The new curriculum includes new approaches to assessing student learning, emphasising formative assessment strategies and use of rubrics. At this stage, the use of these new strategies and tools is emerging. An area of further investigation that is needed is to examine implementation, including the quality of data teachers are collecting and how they use it.

Many study participants reported the need for additional training regarding new assessment approaches, signalling they may not fully understand these. It is important to support teachers to develop understandings of how to interpret and use different data sources so that they can teach at the level of students' learning needs. This Study has outlined the extent of these needs. For example, approximately half of the tested G1 students had limited or no Lao language literacy skills. Teachers need to spend time and effort focussing on skills that are below the G1 curriculum expectations to meet the learning needs of these students. Teachers need flexibility that allows them to adjust teaching programs to respond to student needs.

<u>Recommendations:</u>

12. Examine the implementation of formative assessment strategies.
    a. BEQUAL and MoES to conduct further investigation to examine implementation of formative assessment strategies by teachers, including the quality of data teachers are collecting and how they use it.
13. Provide support to teachers and principals on how to interpret data and use data to inform practice.
    a. MoES to consider how to support teachers and principals to understand student assessment data and how to use that data to inform practice, and importantly how data supports monitoring of skills outlined in the curriculum.
14. Consider how policy can provide teachers with flexibility to adjust teaching program and pace to meet students' learning needs.
    a. MoES to consider providing policy advice which supports teachers to deviate from the curriculum as it is presented in curriculum resources (teacher guides and student textbooks). This will enable teachers to target content to where individual students are at with their learning.

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Annex A: Teacher knowledge, attitudes and practices

This Annex A provides more detailed findings in relation to teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices.

As defined in the Conceptual Framework (ACER, 2017), 'teacher knowledge' refers to professional knowledge including content, pedagogical, and pedagogical-content knowledge. 'Beliefs about teaching' can include beliefs about content, pedagogy and learning. 'Attitudes about teaching' can include confidence and motivation. Professional knowledge, beliefs and attitudes are factors teachers apply to their teaching practice to provide learning experiences for students. Teaching practice includes what teachers do to plan, implement, and evaluate learning experiences, and ways that teachers incorporate principles of teaching and learning (ACER, 2017).

A.1. Teacher knowledge and attitudes

Overall confidence in teaching Lao language

2022 Finding. Many case study participants attribute increased levels of confidence in teaching G1 Lao language to new curriculum resources, and increased understandings about teaching Lao language gained from the teacher guide.

In 2019 and 2021, participants were asked about levels of confidence in teaching Lao language in the questionnaires and case study interviews.

- The Cycle 2 Report highlighted that the majority of teachers surveyed in 2021 reported confidence in teaching Lao language using the new G1 curriculum (88-93% quite or very confident). Case study teachers in 2021 indicated varying levels of overall confidence and attributed this to their ability to understand and teach the new curriculum. For the most part, teachers in the northern province expressed higher levels of confidence in teaching than those in the southern and central provinces. At the same time teachers and principals attributed training as an effective means to supporting them implement the new curriculum.

How confidence in teaching Lao language has changed

In 2022, case study teachers, principals and PAs were asked to reflect on how G1 teachers' confidence levels have changed following the introduction of the new G1 curriculum.

- In 2022, 13 of the 15 teachers reported feeling more confident in teaching Lao language. Nearly one-third of participants (4 of 15 teachers; 4 of 10 principals) reported that the teacher guide contributed to higher levels of confidence noting it is very detailed and has clear instructions about techniques, activities, materials and time.

  > I feel I have more confidence in teaching because I learn from many resources like teacher guide which is not only my learning source, but also my reference. In the teacher guide all teaching techniques are well elaborated. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some PAs and national interviewees also referred to the curriculum materials, and particularly the teacher guide and teacher support videos supporting teachers in developing their understanding.

> The written manual has clear steps – it is quite clear. I think the teacher can understand quite easily – how to do, how to teach. It's quite convenient to have. Sometimes you don't need to do detail teaching, we just take the manual. (National interviewee)
>
> There has been a lot more accessibility to curriculum materials. I think that the curriculum materials have also provided a lot of support to teachers so that they, you know, can reference not just a textbook or a teacher guide, but other resources as well. (National interviewee)
>
> Teachers find it useful the program has developed a lot of Teacher support videos (including teaching Lao Language). To provide ongoing training to teachers is very expensive, so introduction of videos is very good for access to teachers in remote areas. (National interviewee)

- A few case study teachers and principals (5 of 15 teachers; 1 of 10 principals) also linked their higher levels of confidence to a perception that students are learning more effectively. The availability of pictures to use to explain lessons was also highlighted by one-third of teachers as an important support to building confidence (5 of 15 teachers).
- One principal in the central province highlighted that a re-training session provided by DESB and the PA on teaching techniques and rubrics really assisted their G1 teacher.

> The teacher did not understand these well previously… Now [they] understand and can do it. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- A few participants reported challenges to building confidence in Lao language teaching. Two participants highlighted Lao language teaching is challenging for ethnic teachers and particularly in relation to pronunciation. This issue was also reported in Cycle 1.

Knowledge of and confidence in the new curriculum

2022 Finding. While case study participants are indicating increased awareness and confidence in certain areas related to the new curriculum, they have highlighted areas of difficulty for which they need more support.

- Case study teachers have highlighted they have difficulties understanding specific content such as transforming vowels, combining sentences and vowels to make words, grammar, and making sentences.
- Some case study participants reported that G1 teachers' need more knowledge of the new teaching strategies and techniques.

In 2019 and 2021, teachers were asked in the questionnaire about their awareness and confidence of a range of teaching strategies that are a focus of the new curriculum.

- The Cycle 1 Report showed that more than half the teachers surveyed reported they were not aware of most of the new teaching strategies. The Cycle 2 Report highlighted a significant shift in awareness, with more than half of the teachers reporting they were very confident with the following: student-centred learning; whole-class work; small group or paired work; checking students' knowledge prior to teaching; relating learning to students' lives; formative assessment; and addressing individual learning needs. Further, while many teachers found aspects of Lao language teaching to be difficult or very difficult, more teachers in 2021 reported certain aspects were easier to teach: sight words; phonics; simple writing tasks; and handwriting.

In 2022, case study participants were asked what teaching strategies in the G1 Lao language curriculum do G1 teachers understand well, and what strategies are difficult to understand.

Strategies teachers understand well

- In 2022, some case study teachers and principals reported G1 teachers understand well how to teach reading and writing skills (3 of 15 teachers; 4 of 10 principals) and how to use resources in their teaching (3 of 15 teachers; 3 of 10 principals). A few participants highlighted understanding group activities (2 of 15 teachers; 2 of 10 principals) and use of student-centred teaching strategies more generally (2 of 15 teachers; 1 of 10 principals).
- PAs highlighted a range of strategies that teachers understand well, student-centred teaching strategies, pair and group work, and using materials as visual aids.

Strategies teachers find difficult to understand

- The most frequently reported strategies that case study participants reported teachers find difficult to understand were related to teaching specific content, such as transforming vowels, combining consonants and vowels to make words, grammar, and making sentences (10 of 15 teachers; 2 of 10 principals; 1 PA). A few teachers specified how this impacts teaching and student learning.

> I tried to consult with another G1 teacher about how to read or teach it. I used to ask the PA and I am advised to teach based on my understanding… I understand it but not at a good level to explain it to the students. Nowadays, I keep teaching the way I understand without knowing if it's correct or not. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> I don't know where to seek support so I live with it. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> I can't differentiate which word is a noun, a verb, or an adjective. This is too difficult for G1 students. I skip teaching what I don't understand and the students don't learn that part. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some principals and PAs also highlighted difficulties with understanding the many teaching techniques presented in the new curriculum. PAs also mentioned lesson planning and assessment rubrics were difficult for some teachers.

> For the new teaching strategies, if the teachers do not study, they won't be able to understand. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

A.2 Teaching practice

Perceptions of changed practice

2022 Finding 1. Case study participants reported the key differences in the teaching of G1 Lao language were the inclusion of a greater range of activities in lessons and the use of more teaching and learning resources.

2022 Finding 2. Case study participants highlighted changes to the emphasis and sequencing of literacy skills and the introduction of a phonics approach.

2022 Finding 3. Some case study participants noted that a few teachers are not implementing teaching strategies in the new curriculum. This may be due to limited knowledge, capacity or motivation.

In 2022, case study teachers, principals and PAs were asked to reflect on how similar or different G1 teachers' Lao language teaching is now, compared to before the new curriculum was introduced.

- While most participants spoke generally about key differences, some teachers (and their principals) referred specifically to changes to how *they* teach Lao language.
- The most common differences reported were: the inclusion of a greater range of activities (5 of 15 teachers; 7 of 10 principals), and more practical activities; and the use of more resources such as pictures, flashcards, and posters (6 of 15 teachers; 5 of 10 principals), including colourful resources that attract students' interest. Several PAs (4) reported similar differences.
- Half of the participants also highlighted changes to the emphasis and sequencing of literacy skills (speaking, reading and writing), and the introduction of a phonics approach (6 of 15 teachers; 5 of 10 principals).
- A few participants also felt there is more time to teach content in the new curriculum (3 of 15 teachers; 3 of 10 principals). One principal reflected on how this supports student learning.

  > The old curriculum has many lessons and teaching time was limited… there isn't time for teachers to help students one by one. For the new curriculum, we have enough time to help students in listening and speaking skills. We prioritise poor performers first. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- A few principals and PAs reported that they saw little change in how their G1 teachers were teaching. Some teachers are using old methods of teaching, using few resources, and not using new approaches related to phonics and pronunciation.

  > Teacher should phonetically pronounce the alphabets and consonants but the teacher still direct reads the alphabets... The method of teaching is not good/diverse enough. Mainly teacher writes on the board and let the students copy and read. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

  > The curriculum is not that difficult to understand, but I think the most challenge is the content itself. Teachers still don't understand the content of the lesson well, the use of phrases and grammar. It is because the teachers are ethnic, so they write/spell words based on their pronunciation. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

  > There are a lot of differences, but teachers still use old teaching style. The teachers use little teaching materials. They already have them, but they don't use them. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

- One PA in the south raised the issue of motivation and mindset, noting that some teachers are not adaptive to change and don't want to apply the new curriculum, noting "any support won't improve or be able to change him".

Lesson preparation

2022 Finding. The new curriculum resources (teacher guide, student textbook) provide strong support to teachers for Lao language lesson preparation.

- Most case study teachers use the student textbook and/or teacher guide to plan Lao language lessons, and also refer to these when teaching.
- Teachers, principals and PAs generally report that the teacher guide and student textbook are well detailed.
- Further training about lesson planning and good lesson plan examples are needed to support some teachers' lesson preparation for Lao language. This would be particularly useful for teachers working in multigrade classes.
- Requirements related to lesson planning for the new curriculum are sometimes not clear to teachers. Directions about lesson planning from different MoES departments may not be aligned.

As noted in the Cycle 2 report, the teacher guide for the new curriculum contains detailed model lessons that teachers are required to follow to prepare their own Lao language lesson plans, acknowledging that over time their reliance on the guide is anticipated to reduce. The student textbook for the new curriculum is another resource that teachers can use to plan lessons.

In 2022, case study teachers and principals were asked how the approach to planning G1 Lao language lessons changed since the new G1 curriculum was introduced, how teachers use the new teacher's guide and student textbook to plan Lao language lessons, and what would help teachers to plan Lao language lessons more effectively.

Preparation of lesson plans

- In 2022, 14 of the 15 case study teachers reported that they prepare lesson plans, with only one saying they do not (compared to 2 in 2019 and 3 in 2021 who reported they do not prepare plans). Two teachers were observed not to have a lesson plan in place for both of their observed lessons in 2022 (compared to 7 in 2019 and 11 in 2021).
- Three teachers from the southern province in 2022 noted that they use plans they prepared on a computer the previous year which had been approved by their principal at that time.
- The teacher who stated that they do not make a lesson plan said that they use three references when teaching Lao language lessons: the teacher's guide, the student textbook and their own record book of teaching techniques.
- National interviewees reported that some teachers are not familiar with lesson planning for the new curriculum, and there is some confusion regarding requirements for lesson planning, including the format to be used, which possibly stems from misalignment between MoES departments.

> The teachers are not familiar with the new features of the curriculum, especially lesson planning …. (National interviewee)

> The new curriculum comes from RIES and was developed by RIES. Teacher management sits under the Department of General Education and monitor teachers based on old lesson plan template. Parts of ministry don't talk to each other. (National interviewee)

How lesson planning has changed

- Four teachers stated that planning Lao language lessons is easier with the new G1 curriculum due to the detail it provides, and two teachers reported it to be more difficult, one due to confusing vocabulary, and another due to not being aware of what a good plan looks like.

> Planning Lao language lessons is easier because I carefully base on each topic/lesson which is recommended in the teacher's guide. In the guide, it is very detailed for each lesson/hour about what to teach and what activities should be included. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> Preparing lesson plans based on the new curriculum is difficult. I prepare one but I don't know if it's good enough to be used. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Three teachers reported their teaching to be *much* changed, with two reporting this includes the way they prepare to teach.

> There are a lot of changes to my approach to planning Lao language lessons since the new G1 curriculum because I often use the teacher's manual. The new curriculum is clearer. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

> I study by myself a lot about the new curriculum. I study the teacher's guide and understand well now. I think my students can understand what I teach. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Eight of the 10 case study principals noted that G1 teachers had changed their approach to lesson planning, and two reported there has been no change to G1 teachers' planning.
- PAs reported mixed observations about teachers' lesson planning, with two suggesting that lesson planning was easier using the new curriculum because of the rich detail provided in the teacher guide and student textbook, and three reporting that it was more difficult for teachers, either because they were confused or didn't know what a good lesson plan looks like. One PA noted that lesson planning was especially difficult for teachers who have multigrades because they need to refer to several teacher guides and student textbooks.

How teachers use the teacher's guide and student textbook

- Nine of the 15 case study teachers reported that they use *both* the teacher's guide and student textbook for planning lessons.

> I use the teacher's guide and the textbook together. I use the teacher's guide as the main reference and take the content and use teaching materials and methods from the textbook. I can't just use the teacher's guide because teachers are required by DESB to have a lesson plan. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Five teachers only mentioned the teacher's guide when talking about their planning and not the student textbook.
- One case study teacher in the southern province reported that they adapt the plan in the teacher's guide to suit their context.

> I consider whether the technique in the teacher's guide is suitable for our context. If not, I adapt it. I would teach the way it makes sense to my students. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Regarding the ways case study teachers used references *during* observed lessons, all 15 teachers made use of the student textbook in both of their lessons. Seven teachers made use of the teacher's guide in both lessons, three teachers used the teacher's guide in one lesson, and five teachers did not refer to the teacher's guide during their lessons. Only five teachers referred to their lesson plans during observed lessons.

What would help teachers to plan more effectively

- Regarding what might help teachers to plan Lao language lessons more effectively, case study teachers in 2022 made several suggestions. Two teachers said they need further support from their PA, including "clear instructions and advice" about planning. Two principals also suggested PA support for planning would be helpful.
- Two case study teachers suggested they would like to see a good example of a lesson plan, and one principal also considered good examples would help teachers. Some PAs supported these ideas suggesting that the provision of good examples as well as opportunities to have planning demonstrations and practice would help teachers with their planning. One teacher in the south reported they compare their plan with another G1 teacher's plan to learn from them, and one principal from the central province highlighted the need for teachers to learn with and from others.

> In order to plan the lessons effectively, teacher should learn from someone who has more experience in lesson preparation, such as teachers in the learning group with more experience, to explain how to do it. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- A persistent challenge to planning (and teaching) lessons reported by some teachers and principals in 2022 is how to prepare Lao language lessons for multigrade classes. Comments from teachers and principals indicate there is some confusion related to what approaches are most effective and there is a need for specific training in this area.

> There has been a change in the process of preparing lesson plans and I have to merge both grades together. However, my plans are based on the old curriculum. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Now in the new curriculum, I don't know how to plan Lao language lessons. When training, I was not taught how to prepare for a Lao language lesson plan for multiple grades. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> She [G1 teacher] should be trained specifically in multigrade class lesson planning or single class lesson planning. I think both of us should be trained because it's different from what we learned in teaching training college. … We have consulted with other teachers from schools in our cluster, but none of us know how to prepare the lesson plan successfully. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- One case study teacher from the central province suggested there needs to be "complete resources, such as materials for creating word cards, pictures and printers" to help make lesson planning better. And another teacher from the south reported that they would like to have a computer and printer so they can type and print her lesson plans and make changes to them "more comfortably". Two principals also noted the need for more teaching materials to enable teachers to be able to implement their lesson plans.
- One PA from the central province proposed that it would be helpful if the teacher guide and student textbook for each grade were merged for teachers, so that they could refer to just one book when they are planning and teaching, rather than two.

Lao language teaching strategies

Student-centred teaching strategies

2022 Finding. Teachers are reporting the use of a wider range of student-centred strategies, and teachers who are confident using these methods suggest they are effective in supporting student learning.

- Many teachers in 2022 reported a wider range of student-centred strategies when compared to 2021, and 2022 national interviewees reported that teachers have developed their practice to be more student-centred.
- While most case study teachers and principals reported that student-centred strategies are used in G1 Lao language lessons, data indicate that some limited conceptions of these methods persist.
- Some teachers and principals reported that students learn quickly and have better understanding when teachers use student-centred strategies, and national interviewees observed that student participation in learning has increased through these strategies.
- National interviewees reported that the use of student-centred strategies was a big change for teachers, and it would take time for them to adapt.

As reported in Cycle 2, student-centred teaching and learning is a key feature of the new curriculum. In 2019 and 2021, teachers and principals were asked about their awareness and use of student-centred teaching strategies in the questionnaires and in case study interviews. In 2022, case study teachers, principals and PAs were asked to provide descriptions of student-centred strategies used, and to comment on the level of confidence teachers have implementing these in Lao language lessons.

Descriptions of student-centred teaching strategies

- In 2022, 12 of the 15 case study teachers reported that they use student-centred strategies in G1 Lao language lessons, two said they do not use them, and one who teaches a multigrade class said they use it more with their G2 students than G1 students. Eight of the 10 case study principals reported that G1 teachers in their schools use student-centred strategies, and all six of the PAs interviewed reported they observed teachers using these strategies.
- In Cycle 2, data indicated that most teachers and principals in 2021 were aware of student-centred teaching strategies, however their interpretations, or general levels of understanding about student-centred strategies ranged from limited to more developed conceptions of what student-centred strategies entail. Data collected in 2022 indicate that some limited conceptions of these strategies persist. For example, two teachers in the southern province reported that student-centred strategies aren't appropriate for G1 because they require students to work on their own, and one principal also from the south suggested it is not possible to use student-centred teaching strategies in their area due to students' lack of understanding of Lao language.

> I don't [use student-centred teaching strategies]. In my observation it is impossible to apply student-centred methods. Everything should be teacher-centred because G1 students are too young to learn by themselves. If the students are older it is possible to use this method. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> We have never used student-centred teaching methods. It's impossible to apply in our area. We use teacher-centred method. What prevents us from using this method are students don't understand Lao language and they can't read or do activities by themselves. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- Table A.1 displays student-centred teaching strategies that case study teachers and principals most often described in C1 (2019), C2 (2021) and C3 (2022), with the number of participants per year tallied in the final column.

Table A.1. Student-centred teaching strategies reported by case study teachers and principals in cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 3 (2022)

Strategy/cycle	Case study teachers and principals NORTH	Case study teachers and principals CENTRAL	Case study teachers and principals SOUTH	Teacher and principal totals
Group work/C1	◊◊	◊ ◊◊	◊ ◊◊	**4** 4
Group work/C2	◊◊ ◊	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊	**8** 7
Group work/C3	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊◊	**12** 8
Engaging in learning/C1	◊	◊	0	**0** 2
Engaging in learning/C2	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	◊ ◊	**5** 4
Engaging in learning/C3	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**11** 7
Students learning together/C1	◊	0	0	**1** 0

Strategy/cycle	Case study teachers and principals NORTH	Case study teachers and principals CENTRAL	Case study teachers and principals SOUTH	Teacher and principal totals
Students learning together/C2	0	◊	◊	**2** 0
Students learning together/C3	◊◊ ◊	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊ ◊◊	**7** 6
Use of many activities/C1	0	0	◊ ◊	**1** 1
Use of many activities/C2	0	0	◊	**1** 0
Use of many activities/C3	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**6** 6
Linking/connecting learning/C1	◊	0	0	**1** 0
Linking/connecting learning/C2	0	0	0	**0** 0
Linking/connecting learning/C3	◊◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊◊	**8** 2
Active learning (doing)/C1	◊◊◊ ◊◊	0	0	**3** 2
Active learning (doing)/C2	◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊ ◊	◊◊ ◊	**6** 4
Active learning (doing)/C3	◊	◊◊ ◊◊◊	◊◊ ◊	**5** 4
Use of questions/C1	0	◊ ◊	0	**1** 1
Use of questions/C2	◊	0	◊	**2** 0
Use of questions/C3	◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊	0	**3** 4

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported 0 = nil

- The strategies listed in Table A.1 are presented in order according to those cited most frequently in 2022. Involving students in group work (12 of 15 teachers; 8 of 10 principals) and engaging students in learning (11 teachers; 7 principals) were the two student-centred approaches that were most often reported. PAs also made comments about these strategies.

  I get students to work in groups and I provide supports. I am confident doing this because the students and I can help each other. (Teacher, central province), cycle 3

  The teachers are engaging students, asking questions and encouraging… Teachers organise the classroom in grouped tables for good and poor performers to help each other. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

  They [teachers] put students into groups to discuss lessons and do activities. In this method the teachers are facilitators and advise students on what they can't do by themselves or when they have questions. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

- As shown in the final columns of Table A.1, in 2022 several more teachers and principals when compared to 2019 and 2021, spoke about students learning together, the use of many activities, and linking or connecting learning for students in G1 Lao language lessons.

  The students can learn better because they can see, touch and think by themselves. Also, my teaching is improved because there are more teaching activities for me to apply and learn. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  The students can connect with what they learn and what exists around them and then they learn more quickly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- In 2022, 10 of 13 teachers (excluding teachers new to the study in 2022) reported more examples of student-centred strategies when compared to 2021.

- In 2022 teachers and principals in central province reported more examples of student-centred teaching strategies compared with teachers and principals in the north and south.

North	Examples provided by teachers	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊
	Examples provided by principals	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊
Central	Examples provided by teachers	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊
	Examples provided by principals	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊
South	Examples provided by teachers	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊
	Examples provided by principals	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊

- Some national interviewees reported increased student participation when teachers use these strategies as well as increased interest and "better" learning for students.

> Student participation has been more – because it is more student centred than the past. (National interviewee)
>
> Student-centred approach makes learning more interesting for students. (National interviewee)
>
> Now [there] is more student-centred and observing. Students can develop their language skills better because of the impact of teaching approach. Students can practice speaking and writing more due to student-centred approach (National interviewee)
>
> The biggest change is in teaching and learning materials and change in teaching approach (pedagogy) and moving from rote learning towards more active learning, providing students [the] chance to learn more and better (National interviewee)

Confidence with student-centred teaching strategies

- With respect to teachers' levels of confidence related to using student-centred teaching strategies, 6 of 15 G1 teachers and 4 of 10 principals reported positive levels of teacher confidence, two teachers and three principals reported low confidence, and seven teachers and three principals did not comment about teachers' confidence levels.
- Those who reported positive levels of confidence often noted that they observe students to be learning well when teachers use these strategies.

> My confidence is 90% due to my observation that the students learn quickly from using student-centred teaching methods. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> I am confident in using this method because students have better understanding. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)
>
> The teacher is more confident in using this method because the students are involved in learning, and speak and answer more questions. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- The principals and teachers who reported low levels of confidence suggested reasons for this include lack of understanding about student-centred teaching strategies, and the perceived need for teachers to lead and direct learning especially for students who do not speak Lao language.

> The teacher of G1 did not understand this method well… The teacher was not confident, in particular, using teaching and learning materials. (Principal, northern province, cycle 3)
>
> My confidence in using this method is 50%. I have to lead them and speak a lot, even though I use student-centred teaching methods. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> I am not so confident in implementing student-centred methods because most of the students don't understand Lao Language. I can't just explain and let them do activities by themselves. My

> students still need me to explain more than doing by themselves. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- National interviewees reported that the use of student-centred strategies was a big change for teachers, and it would take time for them to adapt.

> It's a big change for teachers – [it] take[s] time to adapt to student-centred learning and move from old curriculum. (National interviewee)

Classroom interaction type

2022 Finding. Case study teachers consistently reported they facilitate pair/group activities as part of their Lao language lessons, but classroom observations suggest teachers' use varies.

- While all case study teachers reported they use pair/group activities in Lao language lessons, classroom observations suggest that teachers were more active in using pair/group activities in 2021 than in 2022.
- Teachers highlighted that the use of pair/group work provides opportunities for students to exchange and discuss ideas and help one another, and they reported students are more confident, expressive and understanding better.

An expectation of the new curriculum is that teachers will facilitate a mix of classroom interaction types. The new curriculum guidelines state that teacher-directed whole class activities will prepare students for practice and application activities. Practice and application activities are usually pair, small group or individual activities to support students to work independently with the teacher's support.

In 2022, case study participants reported on how they use pair/group activities in their G1 Lao language lessons, whether this is similar or different to before the new curriculum, and how it has affected teaching and student learning. National participants also offered their perspectives. Classroom observations looked at classroom interactions across all three cycles of data collection.

How use of pair/group work has changed

- National interviewees commented on teachers' awareness of using group work and the attempts they made to include group work in their Lao language teaching practice. They stated that teachers who had undergone the teacher training were observed to have incorporated group work into their teaching, whereas as those who had not undergone training did not.

> …G1-G4 teachers who have now received the training, their students are sitting in groups and in G5 classes with teachers who haven't yet had the training classes students are not in groups, but still at individual tables. (National interviewee)

  They also stated that the training undertaken by teachers helped them to understand how the implementation of group work within the classroom could support student learning.

> We trained the teachers to be aware, this new curriculum will focus more on group work. We paid attention to techniques to support the non-Lao speaker. E.g., group work has to have a mix of Lao and non-Lao speakers (National interviewee)

- In 2022, all of the case study teachers reported they use pair/group activities. Some provided examples of activities, such as group discussion, group reading, group assignments, group discussions, and presentations. Some teachers mix well-performing students with low achieving students, and one teacher reported rotating students into different groups.

- While some teachers noted that they used pair/group activities under the previous curriculum, about half (8 of 15) reported their approach towards this had changed:

  > I hardly pair students but I sometimes do group work. I would sit students in two groups and give them flashcards or textbook to mark the alphabets that I mention for them. They can talk and help each other answer questions. The previous curriculum, teacher mostly taught whole class and only teacher explained the lesson without participation of students. Now students can take more participation. They are brave to answer questions. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Teachers gave examples of how student learning had changed with the use of pair/group activities, including that students exchange and discuss ideas, students help each other, students are more confident and expressive, and students are understanding better:

  > It has affected teaching and learning because more students are talking to each other... They have different ideas they can exchange. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- A few teachers referred to how group work affects their teaching. One teacher felt that group work is easier to explain and allows them to provide support by group, while another reported it allows them to teach the other grade (multigrade class). One teacher felt that "using group activity is noisy".

In case study schools researchers observed and coded against three classroom interaction types used by teachers in their lessons: whole class activity, pair or group activity, and individual activity.

- Across all three cycles, almost all lessons commenced with whole-class activity, and whole-class activity was used across large portions of lessons. Most teachers involved individual activities during at least one lesson.
- The Cycle 2 Report indicated some positive changes between 2019 and 2021 in the use of pair or group activities. In 2019 and 2021, similar numbers of teachers used pair/group activities (8 of 15 teachers in 2019; 9 in 2021). In 2021, pair/group activities were included in more lessons (13 of 30 lessons) than in 2019 (11 of 30 lessons). However, there was a notable increase in the frequency and/or duration of pair/group work within observed lessons in 2021.
- In 2022, there was an overall reduction in the use of pair/group activities. While a similar number of teachers were observed to use them (8 of 15), pair or group activities were included in fewer lessons (10 of 30 lessons) and at a much lower frequency and/or duration.

Prior knowledge and skills

2022 Finding. The majority of case study teachers made explicit reference to students' prior knowledge and/or skills in Lao language lessons observed, and normally at the beginning of lessons as suggested in the new curriculum guidance.

- The practice of making references to students' prior knowledge and/or skills is prevalent and consistent across the case study schools, as indicated throughout the three cycles of data collection. This indicates teachers were accustomed to this practice of reviewing previous lessons or asking students what they learned in a previous lesson.

Across all three cycles, case study researchers were asked to observe whether teachers made explicit reference to students' prior knowledge and/or skills, either through asking students what they already know or promoting their recall of an earlier activity. The new curriculum encourages teachers to do this as a strategy to introduce new lesson content in a clear and meaningful way. The new curriculum guidelines suggest this be done at the beginning off lessons.

- Across all three cycles, teachers demonstrated that this practice is fairly prevalent and consistent. At least three-quarters of teachers were observed to make references to students' prior knowledge and skills (13 of 15 in 2019; 11 of 15 in 2020; 13 of 15 in 2022). In 2022, 10 of 15 teachers were observed to do this in both lessons. In all three cycles, most teachers were observed to make references in the first 10 minutes of the lesson. A small number of teachers would refer to prior knowledge and skills intermittently across a lesson.
- One teacher in the central province who participated in all three cycles of data collection was not observed to do this at all.
- While there was some variation between provinces, the teachers in northern schools were observed to undertake this practice more consistently across all three cycles.
- Case study researchers noted in their observations that teachers often reviewed or asked students what they had learned in the previous lesson.

Localisation

2022 Finding. The majority of case study teachers made explicit reference to students' cultural heritage, local context and environment during observed lessons. One-third of teachers integrated local materials into lessons.

- Teachers highlighted how this practice facilitates students' interest, understanding and learning.
- The practice of integrating local materials into lessons was observed to be more prevalent in 2022, but not widespread or consistent.

The new curriculum encourages teachers to adapt or link content to students' cultural heritage, their local context and their local environment. It also encourages teachers to make use of real objects and resources that are available in the community in their teaching. Researchers looked for these practices in classroom observations in all three cycles.

In 2022, case study participants were asked in what ways they make connections to local contexts, and how this impacts student learning.

- More than half of the teachers (8 of 15) discussed making references to things in the local environment, such as animals, trees and things in the landscape. Other ways that teachers reported making local linkages is through using local materials (3 of 15 teachers) and using local language (2 of 15 teachers).

> When the lesson relates to the environment like mountains, trees, animals and others, I tell the students to look outside the class as visual materials (Teacher southern province, cycle 3)
>
> In the textbook there is a picture of a goat. I compare the picture of goat with goat in village and explain in local language. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- Teachers highlighted how they perceive this impacts student learning, including that students are more interested and participate more, students understand and remember the lessons more, and students learn more quickly.

> Linking to local contexts or things close to them makes them better understand and remember. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Students can connect with what they learn and what exists around them and then they learn more quickly (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- One teacher from southern province reflected on how their approach has changed, which includes using visual materials. This teacher, during the classroom observation, was observed to use a local tree to explain a new word.

> In the past I didn't use local resources as teaching materials. I find it useful - my students understand the meaning of Lao words quickly when they see visual materials… they learn more quickly and have fun. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Across all three cycles, case study researchers were asked to observe whether teachers explicitly did this, and whether they used local materials in their lessons.

- Across all three cycles, teachers demonstrated that this practice is fairly prevalent and consistent in northern and southern case study schools. Overall, around three-quarters of teachers were observed to make references to local aspects (12 of 15 in 2019; 12 of 15 in 2020; 11 of 15 in 2022). However, the proportions of teachers who do this in both lessons in 2022 has increased both since 2019 and 2021 (2 of 15 in 2019; 5 of 15 in 2020; 7 of 15 in 2022).
- In cycles 2 and 3, three of the five teachers from case study schools in the central province made no references to students' culture and/or context, including two teachers who participated in both rounds of data collection.
- In 2022, one-third of teachers were observed to make use of real objects (5 of 15 teachers), which is more than in 2019 and 2021 (2 of 15 in 2019; 1 of 15 in 2020).

> Teacher compared consonants with objects found in the local community (Researcher, northern province, cycle 3).
>
> Teacher asks students to use tamarind to match words with pictures. Teacher explains lesson by referring to local materials (Researcher, central province, cycle 3).
>
> Teacher goes out and comes back with African Marigold tree to explain the word 'leaf' (Researcher, southern province, cycle 3).

Activity types

2022 Finding. Many case study participants reported G1 teachers mainly use activities associated with language dimensions in Lao language lessons, such as students reading text written on the blackboard, students writing (copying, dictation), practising pronunciation, and using pictures and flashcards.

  - Participants in northern case study schools more frequently highlighted reading books, storytelling, singing and games.

Case study researchers in 2019 and 2021 were able to both ask about and observe the types of teaching and learning activities that teachers used in Lao language lessons. In 2022, case study participants were asked how the activities that they use in Lao language lessons has changed since introduction of the new curriculum.

- In 2019, the predominant teaching and learning activities reported by the case study teachers were: practising pronunciation, reading text written on the board, and students writing. In 2021, several case study teachers and principals also emphasised the use of teaching methods (such as storytelling, matching activities, games) rather than just activities associated with language dimensions (such as speaking and listening, reading, and writing).
- In 2022, many participants referred to activities associated with language dimensions similar to 2019 and 2021. These activities included students reading text written on the blackboard,

students writing (copying, dictation), practising pronunciation, and using pictures and flashcards. These aspects were more often reported by participants in central and southern case study schools but were widely observed across *all* schools during classroom observations.

> Firstly, [I] would write lesson on the board to guide them to read first, then let them read on their own, write on their own and go out to write on the board. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> I use flashcards and pictures for students to form words and let the group who has done it faster go up and write on the board so that the group who can't do it can see and learn. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).
>
> The methods of teaching is not good/diverse enough. Mainly teacher writes on the board and let the students copy or read. When studying reading, teacher leads to read many times until students memorise, but they can't write the vocabulary. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- There were some participants in 2022 that emphasised the use of teaching methods such as reading books, storytelling, singing and games. These aspects were more frequently emphasised in case study schools in the north.

> … giving opportunities to think. Storytelling, singing. These are different. The teaching in the new curriculum has more activities that the students are involved in. These help students understand. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3).
>
> [I] often use storytelling in my teaching. These are different. The teaching in new curriculum has more activities that makes students involved more. On the other hand, in the old curriculum, there is not supplementary reading. (Teacher, northern province), cycle 3

- PAs also offered a range of activities that teachers often use in G1 Lao language lessons, which aligned more with the new curriculum methods. Two PAs highlighted reading and storytelling as having greater emphasis under the new curriculum. One PA noted that teachers are having difficulty incorporating some of the new reading activities.

> For the old curriculum the teacher rarely used storytelling. Additional reading was very limited. It's very different. (PA, northern province), cycle 3
>
> Mostly they follow the activities in the lessons. They could not do well on additional reading activity. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

Assessment

2022 Finding. There has been a shift in assessment practices in case study schools, towards more formative assessment practices, and there is an awareness and use of rubrics.

- A common difference reported by case study participants is the shift away from monthly tests towards assessing during lessons and at the end of activities and lessons.
- Observations indicate teachers are checking for understanding and observing students when they are practising or applying what they have learnt.
- There is an increasing awareness and use of rubrics. Some participants consider these provide clear criteria for assessing student learning.
- The case study interviews and observations highlighted some regional differences in assessment practices.
- Some case study participants reported they use assessment information to monitor student performance and make plans for teaching and learning.
- Teachers' conversations with parents continue to be mostly focused on student absenteeism.

The new curriculum places an emphasis on formative assessment and new methods for summative assessment to shift teachers away from traditional assessment approaches and testing. Traditional approaches have included numerical scoring of students (e.g. a score out of 10) for each subject on a weekly basis, whereas the new curriculum encourages the use of rubrics. Two key strategies described in the teacher guide for formative assessment are asking questions to check understanding and observing children when they are practicing or trying to apply what they have learnt.

In 2019 and 2021, aspects covering the purpose of assessment, assessment methods and frequency, and student feedback, were explored through questionnaires, case study interviews and classroom observations. In 2022, assessment practice was investigated further. Participants were asked how G1 teachers' assessment practices have changed with the new curriculum, whether they use assessment rubrics and how they use assessment information.

Assessment purpose

In 2019 and 2021, teachers and principals were asked in the questionnaires to select the purposes for which they or their school use assessment data, from four options. In 2019 and 2021 almost all surveyed teachers reported that they undertook some form of student assessment. However, in 2021, more teachers and principals surveyed reported they used assessment data for different purposes. All participants reported they used assessment data for planning next steps for learning, reporting student achievement, ranking students and monitoring student performance.

The 2022 case study interviews provided more information as to how teachers and principals use assessment information.

- Some case study participants reported they use assessment information to monitor student performance and depending on progress make plans for teaching and learning (4 of 15 teachers; 4 of 10 principals). Some noted they provide additional support for low achieving students (4 teachers; 4 principals), and additional instruction or extra classes (2 teachers; 2 principals).
- Teachers and principals referred to creating a monthly score (7 teachers; 3 principals), particularly in central schools. Some noted this was recorded in student monitoring books (2 teachers; 3 principals).

> The result of the assessment is an indicator of the students' progress that shows how much the student has learned in order to plan the teaching and learning to emphasise more on the areas that the student is not doing well. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).

- Principals also highlighted other ways they use assessment information. Four principals reported that they use assessment results to help teachers improve their teaching methods. Principals also spoke about how they use the information for reporting and planning. Three principals in central schools noted they report student progress to DESB. One northern principal noted they collect student results each week and reported it to the PA to find solutions together. Another southern principal noted they compile student scores to send to the head of their cluster to compare progress with previous months. One northern principal reported they send student results to parents in order for the teacher, principal and parents to work together to find solutions. One southern principal summarised how they use assessment information.

> I use it to identify poor performers and the reason for that. If students perform poorly due to teaching, I educate my teacher and support him. If it is caused by their family issues/conditions, I try to speak to their parents to teach their kids at home. My assumption is that if all students don't

> perform, it must be caused by teaching method. But, if many students perform well and a few don't perform, it must be about individual students and their family. In the latter case, I would talk to their parents. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- Four PAs reported how they use assessment information to prioritise schools for support and monitor and assist teachers in helping low achieving students.

> The information I have guides me on how to support teachers in specific schools. When I know this school has poor student learning results, I advise them more closely compared to other schools. (PA, southern province)

Assessment frequency

The teacher questionnaire asked how often teachers assess students during Lao language lessons, including, for example, formative assessment by observing students working on tasks and asking students to demonstrate skills.

- Similar to 2019, in 2021 all surveyed teachers reported they assessed students at least monthly, with just over three-quarters conducting assessments daily (78%), close to one-fifth weekly (18%) and a further four per cent on a monthly basis.
- In 2022, half of the case study participants (8 of 15 teachers; 5 of 10 principals) reported that a key change under the new curriculum was the shift away from whole-class monthly tests. To quote one principal:

> … assessment was implemented once and in a single way, which was the monthly test… the new curriculum students can be assessed in a variety of ways based on their appropriateness. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- One northern teacher still referred to monthly tests and a mid-term exams.
- Many participants highlighted changes to the frequency of assessment, with more than one-third (5 of 15 teachers; 5 of 10 principals) reporting that G1 students are assessed during lessons or after each activity, topic or lesson.

> Assessment in the old curriculum is assessed after finishing the lesson, but in the new curriculum it is after each activity. (Principal, northern province, cycle 3)

> According to the new curriculum it is required to assess writing, reading, combining words, matching picture to word. I can assess in the middle or end of the class. I ask students to read and write for me to see then I can assess them… Teacher Guide tells you clearly when to assess. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Three participants from southern schools (1 teacher; 2 principals) were very detailed, citing they assess students a specific number of times per month.

Assessment methods

Case study data provides details on the main assessment methods reported and observed in use.

- Participants reported a range of assessment methods, including some more traditional approaches also reported in 2019 and 2021. The main assessment method reported was assessing students reading and writing (sometimes involving blackboard work) (10 of 15 teachers). This was followed by a verbal/speaking assessment (for example, involving questions and answers) (2 of 15 teachers; 3 of 10 principals), and observation (3 of 15 teachers; 1 of 10 principals). Other methods mentioned were home assignments, and group work assessments. Five teachers referred to assessing students in groups or when they are doing group work. A few

participants felt these methods were similar to that under the former curriculum. One teacher from the central province emphasised that under the old curriculum they "used to write dictation and answer questions to get a score".

- Notably, participants in central case study schools offered a wider range of assessment methods, whereas those in southern schools were narrowly focused.
- In 2022, the case study interviews asked specifically about rubrics. All teachers and principals in central schools reported they use rubrics, and most in northern and southern schools. However, one teacher in the north stated they did not know about rubrics, and one in the south reported they didn't use them. Two teachers highlighted the benefits of using rubrics.

> I can't give score based on my feeling or thought as there's clear criteria set for me to give score. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> This is different from the past. Previously assessment is not as detailed as rubrics assessment… I follow a clear scoring criteria… it's easier. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Case study researchers recorded examples of formative assessment during classroom observations. Firstly, researchers documented when teachers 'explicitly checked' for students' understanding and what this involved. For example, if teachers prompted or encouraged students to demonstrate or articulate their understandings.

- Across the three cycles of data collection, there has been an increase in the number of teachers who explicitly checked for students' understanding overall, and across both lessons. In 2019, 11 of 15 teachers did this, and four did so in two lessons. In 2021 and 2022, 13 of 15 teachers did this, and 11 did this in two lessons.
- Compared to the observations from 2019, there was a two-fold increase in the frequency that teachers explicitly checked for students' understanding in 2021. In 2022, there were fewer instances observed, but nevertheless teachers still did this more frequently than in 2019.
- Notably there are some provincial differences. In 2019, four of the five teachers in the southern schools did not explicitly check for students' understanding at all, but over each cycle, there has been an increase. The practice was more consistently observed in northern and central schools. There was a noticeable increase in frequency in central schools between 2019 and 2021, but this decreased in 2022.
- In 2022, researchers made notes about what teachers did when checking for student understanding. Most commonly this involved asking students questions related to the lesson content and asking students to read consonants, vowels or words. Other less common examples where checking students' pronunciation of words and sounds of letters and getting students to correct mistakes.

Researchers documented when teachers observed students practising or applying what they had learnt. For example, if teachers moved from group to group and provided feedback, prompted or encouraged students, or recorded notes about students as they worked.

- In 2021 and 2022, the researchers documented *all* 15 teachers observing students practising or applying what they had learnt, compared to 12 teachers in 2019. In 2022, more teachers were observed to do this over two lessons compared to 2021. Over the three cycles, the number of instances has increased.
- Again, there are some provincial differences. In 2019, three teachers from southern schools in 2019 did not observe students practising or applying what they had learnt, but over each cycle

the proportion of teachers doing this over two lessons has increased. The practice was also more consistently observed in northern and central schools, with a noticeable increase in frequency over the three cycles in central schools.

- In 2022, researchers made notes about what teachers did when observing students. Most commonly this involved moving between groups and providing assistance or instruction, getting students to take turns to read or write in front of the class, and providing individuals with additional support or explanation. In two classes, researchers also noted the teachers scoring students' writing.

Providing feedback on student progress

In 2019 and 2021, teachers surveyed were asked how often they talk to individual students and their parents about each student's learning progress in Lao language.

- In 2021, almost 79 per cent of teachers surveyed reported they talked to students either daily or weekly (69% in 2019). Five per cent reported they did not do this (11% in 2019).
- Thirty-nine per cent of teachers surveyed reported they have a conversation of five or more minutes with parents of their students about their Lao language learning on a monthly basis (44% in 2019), with a further 16 per cent talking to parents weekly (17% in 2019) and five per cent talking to parents daily (less than 5% in 2019). Twenty-three per cent reported that this occurs each semester (21% in 2019) and a further eight per cent each year (6% in 2019). Nine per cent reported that they never have a conversation of five or more minutes with parents about students' Lao language learning (7% in 2019).

Across the three cycles, case study participants were also asked about G1 teachers' conversations with parents about their child's Lao language learning.

- In 2022, the majority of case study participants said they have conversations with parents. In 2019 and 2021, these conversations with parents were mainly focussed on student attendance. The 2022 data suggests that absenteeism continues to be the focus of many of these conversations with parents, and discussions about children's learning is raised when a child is showing learning difficulties.
- Some participants noted they have asked parents to provide more home support, such as through encouraging parents or siblings to assist or by providing learning materials.
- In one school in the south, both the principal and teacher noted that with the new curriculum, there is more emphasis on conversations with parents.

> A chance to meet with parents is rare because they mostly stay at the farm. At the village meeting, which is held 2-3 times per semester, parents would come. The meeting is organised by VEDC and school teachers are invited to participate. In most cases, [the] meeting is about asking parents to send their kids to school, reporting their kids' learning result, encouraging parents to teach their kids at home…. There are more conversations with parents after having the new curriculum because PA closely observes and encourages us to involve parents more in school (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3).

Use of resources

2022 Finding. With the introduction of the new curriculum, many case study teachers are using a greater range of resources.

- Resources most often used include the core curriculum materials (teacher guide and student textbook) and flashcards.
- Very few teachers were observed integrating story books, games, songs and physical actions across the three cycles of data collection.

Additional teaching and learning resources were provided as part of the new Lao language curriculum rollout. The new curriculum assumes that each teacher will have a G1 teacher guide and a copy of the student textbook, and each student will have a textbook. Other resources include alphabet cards, consonant and vowel charts, word cards, picture cards, and story books.

Surveyed teachers in 2019 and 2021 were asked to select from a range of resources that they and their G1 students used in Lao language classes. Across the three cycles, teachers' use of resources was also collected in case study interviews and classroom observations. In 2022, case study teachers and principals were asked what resources G1 teachers and their students often use in their Lao language teaching.

Resources often used by teachers

- In Cycle 2 there was a notable increase in the number of teachers who reported using each resource in the questionnaire compared to 2019. In 2021, all teachers reported they used curriculum materials, while almost all teachers used books (99%), flash cards, pictures or posters (98%), and songs, drama or physical actions (94%). Games or puzzles were used by around four-fifths of teachers (79%).
- When comparing these survey results to the case study observations across the three cycles, there is much deviation. While teachers were consistently observed to use curriculum materials and flashcards, resources from the other categories were rarely observed.
- In 2022, the following resources were observed to be used most by case study teachers: student textbooks (15 teachers), student notebooks (15), big blackboard (15), pointer stick (14), teacher guide (10), and flashcards (10).
- The number of resources observed to be used by each teacher ranged from four to nine across the two observed lessons. Three-quarters of teachers (10 of 15) were observed to use at least seven resources.
- A central province teacher noted challenges they perceive in relation to using teaching materials.

> I rarely use flashcards because I teach multiple grades and it is difficult to use flashcards to teach because it is taking so much time to guide students… mostly I assign learning activities to smaller grades then move to teach another grade… If I could control students not to make noise I would be able to use teaching materials. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Table A.2 shows resources used as reported by case study participants and observed over the three cycles of data collection.
  - Student textbooks, student notebooks, flashcards and the teacher guide were the resources most consistently observed to be used by teachers during lessons, as well as tools including the blackboard and a pointer/stick.
  - The proportion of case study teachers observed to use student textbooks and the teacher guide has increased. In 2022, all teachers were observed to use student textbooks (15 of 15 teachers in 2022; 14 in 2021; 10 in 2019) and two-thirds the teacher guide (10 in 2022; 8 in 2021; 7 in 2019).

- Flashcards and pictures were highlighted consistently during interviews each year as much used resources. While the use of flashcards was consistently observed (10 of 15 teachers in 2022), the use of pictures was observed less during lessons in 2021 (4) and 2022 (2) when compared to 2019 (10).
- The use of posters increased slightly following 2019, these are not well-used in central and southern schools.
- Very few classes were observed to use decodable readers and story books. The new curriculum allocates time for using story books and readers. However, more participants highlighted the use of books or storytelling activity in 2022, particularly in northern schools. PAs responsible for northern schools also reported use of story books.
- Very few observed lessons involved games, puzzles, drama or role play. Some lessons were observed to use songs, but there was no observed change over time.
- Interestingly, there was a sharp increase in the use of physical actions in lessons between 2019 and 2021 (from 1 to 11 observations), but in 2022 only two lessons were observed to use physical actions.
- There has been a small increase in the number of teachers who report and were observed to use local materials.
- Overall, there is a slight increase in the number of teachers that use at least seven resources (7 of 15 in 2019; 11 of 15 in 2021; 10 of 15 in 2022).

- While textbooks were observed to be used by all teachers during classroom observations in 2022, researchers have documented that a shortage of textbooks is an issue in some classes. In five classes it was documented that students had to share textbooks. For example, in one class in the central province, there were only two textbooks for one teacher and 15 students.

> When we go, we advise them to use teaching resources such as textbooks. Sometimes they bring out only one textbook to use but don't give to students to use. Story books are not used because they are afraid of damaging them. We suggest them to use these resources in the learning process, but they have to tell the students how to use them carefully. (PA, central province, cycle 3).

Table A.2: Resources used in Lao language lessons as reported by case study participants and observed in cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 2 (2022)

Strategy/cycle	Case study teachers and principals NORTH	Case study teachers and principals CENTRAL	Case study teachers and principals SOUTH	Teacher and principal totals	Observation totals
LL teacher guide/C1	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊ ••	•••	◊ ••	5 2	7
LL teacher guide/C2	◊◊◊ ••	◊ ••••	◊◊ ••	0 6	8
LL teacher guide/C3	••	•••••	◊ •••	1 0	10
LL lesson plan/C1	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊ ••	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊ •••	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊ •••	12 8	8
LL lesson plan/C2	◊◊ •	◊ •••	◊◊ •	0 5	5
LL lesson plan/C3	••	•••	0	0 0	5
Student textbooks/C1	◊◊◊ •••••	0	◊◊◊ •••••	6 0	10
Student textbooks/C2	◊ ••••	◊ ◊◊◊◊ •••••	•••••	1 5	14
Student textbooks/C3	•••••	◊◊◊ ◊ •••••	•••••	3 1	15
Student notebooks/C1	•••••	◊ ••••	•••••	1 0	14
Student notebooks/C2	•••••	◊ •••••	•••••	1 0	15
Student notebooks/C3	•••••	•••••	•••••	0 0	15

Strategy/cycle	Case study teachers and principals NORTH	Case study teachers and principals CENTRAL	Case study teachers and principals SOUTH	Teacher and principal totals	Observation totals
Decodable readers/C1	◊	0	•	0 1	1
Decodable readers/C2	0	0	0	0 0	0
Decodable readers/C3	0	◊	0	1 0	0
Story books/C1	0	0	0	0 0	0
Story books/C2	•	◊	◊ •	1 1	2
Story books/C3	•	0	•	0 0	2
Posters/C1	•	0	•	0 0	2
Posters/C2	◊ ••	◊◊	0	0 3	2
Posters/C3	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊ •••	•	◊ •	4 3	5
Flashcards/C1	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊ •••	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊ ••	◊ •••	9 5	8
Flashcards/C2	◊◊◊ ◊◊ ••••	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊ ••	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊ •••	12 8	9
Flashcards/C3	◊◊ ◊◊ •••	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊ ••	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊ •••••	10 9	10
Pictures/C1	◊◊◊◊ ◊ •••	◊◊ ◊◊ •••	◊◊◊◊ ◊••••	10 4	10
Pictures/C2	◊◊ ◊ ••	◊◊◊ ◊ •	◊◊◊ ◊ •	8 3	4
Pictures/C3	◊◊ ◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊	◊◊◊ ◊◊ ••	8 5	2
Big blackboard/C1	•••••	◊◊ ◊◊ •••••	◊◊ ◊ •••••	4 3	15
Big blackboard/C2	•••••	•••••	•••••	0 0	15
Big blackboard/C3	•••••	•••••	•••••	0 0	15
Pointer/stick/C1	•••••	••••	•••••	0 0	14
Pointer/stick/C2	•••••	•••••	•••	0 0	13
Pointer/stick/C3	•••••	•••	••••	0 0	12
Local materials/C1	••	0	0	0 0	2
Local materials/C2	•	0	0	0 0	1
Local materials/C3	◊ ••	◊◊ •	◊ ◊ ••	4 1	5
Games/C1	◊◊	◊ ◊	◊ ••	4 1	2
Games/C2	•	0	0	0 0	1
Games/C3	•	0	0	0 0	1
Puzzles/C1	•	0	0	1 0	1
Puzzles/C2	0	0	0	0 0	0
Puzzles/C3	0	0	0	0 0	0
Songs/C1	◊ •	◊ •	••	2 0	4
Songs/C2	•••	••	••	0 0	7
Songs/C3	•	••	••	0 0	5
Drama or role play/C1	0	0	0	0 0	0
Drama or role play/C2	0	0	0	0 0	0
Drama or role play/C3	0	0	0	0 0	0
Physical actions/C1	0	•	0	0 0	1
Physical actions/C2	•••••	••••	••	0 0	11
Physical actions/C3	0	••	0	0 0	2

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported • = observed 0 = nil

Classroom setup

2022 Finding. More classrooms have been set up to facilitate students to engage in group work.

- In some locations there appear to be challenges associated with making changes to the physical set-up of classrooms, particularly in the south.

In 2019, 2021 and 2022, case study researchers were asked to observe how classrooms were set up for Lao language learning – in particular, whether teachers had physically set up classrooms in ways that would enable them to engage students in different teaching and learning activities. In 2022, case study interviews included questions whether participants had changed their classroom set-up since introduction of the new curriculum and perspectives of how these changes impact teaching and learning.

Table A.3 displays aspects of the physical set up of classrooms in each study cycle.

- More classrooms had space for whole class activities in 2022 (13 of 15), compared to 11 of 15 (2021) and 8 of 15 (2019). All classrooms in the north and central provinces had space for whole class activities.
- Since 2019, there has been a noticeable shift in the number of classrooms with grouped tables and chairs (5 in 2019; 9 in 2021; 10 in 2022). All classrooms in the north had grouped tables and chairs.
- The number of classrooms that had individual/single lined tables and chairs, was similar across years (10 in 2019; 9 in 2021; 8 in 2022). These were more prevalent in southern schools.
- There were more examples of teachers in the north and central provinces having display areas for student work and Lao language resources. Only one teacher was observed to have a reading area.

Table A.3: Aspects of the physical set up of classrooms as observed in cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 3 (2022)

Aspect/cycle	A1#	B2	B4	C1	D2	E1	F1	F3	G2	H2	I1#	J1	J2	K1	L2
Space for whole class activities/C1	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	-
Space for whole class activities/C2	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	x
Space for whole class activities/C3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x
Grouped tables and chairs/C1	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-
Grouped tables and chairs/C2	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	x
Grouped tables and chairs/C3	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x
Individual/single tables and chairs/C1	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	-
Individual/single tables and chairs/C2	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x
Individual/single tables and chairs/C3	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Reading area/C1	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reading area/C2		-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reading area/C3	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Student work display area/C1	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-

Aspect/cycle	A1#	B2	B4	C1	D2	E1	F1	F3	G2	H2	I1#	J1	J2	K1	L2
Student work display area/C2	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-
Student work display area/C3	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Displays with items in LL/C1	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	-
Displays with items in LL/C2	-	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	x
Displays with items in LL/C3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	-
Other/C1	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	-
Other/C2	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
Other/C3	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x

Shaded areas (x) = observed in at least one lesson in that cycle # = G1 teacher is also principal - = not observed

Adjustments made to the physical set up of classrooms

- There are three examples of teachers who have shifted from individual/single lined tables and chairs to grouped tables and chairs between cycles of data collection.
- All teachers in the northern case study schools reported that their classrooms have been adjusted since the new curriculum introduction to facilitate group work, with two teachers observed to make this shift.
- In central case study schools, two teachers reported they have tables arranged in groups and this was observed by researchers. Three teachers reported they arrange tables into groups depending on the activity, but one noted this was not their preference.

> I prefer to arrange in a line because I can easily teach and when supporting them to write I can go help them one by one (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).

- The number of classrooms that had individual/single lined tables and chairs was more prevalent in southern schools, with some classrooms having a mix of grouped and individual tables. Three teachers reported they do adjust the classroom to facilitate group work, but two others reported challenges with doing so. From the observations, some classrooms are overcrowded, and some multigrade classes have the students separated by year level which could hamper the ability to make adjustments.
- Some teachers gave examples of how grouped tables and chairs impacts teaching and learning. Collaboration between students was an example often cited, with teachers reporting students discuss and help each other, higher-achieving students can assist low achieving students, and there is more student participation.
- Some case study teachers were observed to make changes to how they decorated their classrooms over time.

> In 2019 there were few visual aids and displays were rudimentary. In 2021, there were lots of Lao language posters which were also used by the teacher during lessons. In 2022, the classroom is decorated by a considerable amount of Lao language resources. (Researcher, northern province, cycle 3)

Lao language teaching time

2022 Finding. Since the new curriculum, there has been more consistency in the time teachers spend each week teaching Lao language, with most teachers and principals reporting 10 hours per week.

- Although case study teachers are teaching Lao language for the time recommended, many indicate they can only sometimes teach the required content each week.
- As in 2021, many participants emphasised the need to ensure students understand the lesson content, before moving to the next lesson.

The new curriculum recommends 10 hours a week of Lao language in the G1 program, equivalent to two hours per day.

Teachers and principals were asked in the questionnaire and case study interviews how many hours are spent teaching Lao language in G1 classes each week and if this is sufficient time to teach all the required content in the Lao language curriculum. PAs were also asked in 2022.

Time spent teaching Lao language

- In 2021 there was greater consistency in the amount of time teachers reported they spend teaching Lao language each week compared to times reported in 2019. The majority of teachers surveyed (84%) reported they teach Lao language between nine to 11 hours a week, averaging ten hours per week. This was also reflected in case study interviews in 2021.
- In 2022, most teachers and principals also reported teaching Lao Language 10 hours per week (12 of 15 teachers 7 of 10 principals).

Sufficiency of time

- More than half of surveyed and case study teachers in 2019 and 2021 reported they did not have enough time to teach the Lao language curriculum in a typical week or could only do so sometimes. In 2022, less than half of case study teachers and only one principal reported teachers did not have enough time. However, some participants who reported positive responses provided caveats regarding sufficiency of time.
- Similar to 2019 and 2021, in 2022 participants reported factors that can impact the time needed to teach required content include: different levels of student progress; student ethnicity; teaching multigrade classes; and attending meetings that take them away from class. As in 2021, many participants emphasised the need to ensure students understand the lesson content, before moving to the next lesson.

  > My students learn slowly and I can't move forward to the next lesson until they understand it deeply and clearly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- One PA described challenges related to disruptions caused by COVID.

  > Most of the G1 teachers are able to teach all the required content due to the lessen lessons. However, some teacher could not… because the students are slow learners and also the students in G1 had a long break in kindergarten because of the COVID pandemic so the preparation for these students were not good enough. (PA, central province)

- A principal and teacher noted the importance of covering all the content given Lao language is a core subject. While the principal noted the G1 teacher uses other subject time for Lao language if required, the teacher reported they use break times.

  > I have to work harder to make sure my students understand the lesson because I can't speed it up or skip any lesson. The G1 is the first step to studying and Lao language and is the core subject. They need a good foundation… (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Most PAs also noted the importance of covering all lessons, advising teachers to teach extra classes or use activity hour to complete lessons.

I always advise that they don't skip any lesson or activity because all activities are connected. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

Inclusive education

An expectation of the new curriculum is that teachers will address students' individual learning needs by adapting their teaching and lessons. The 2011-2015 National Strategy and Plan of Action on Inclusive Education defines inclusive education as the provision of quality education, continuously and appropriately adapted to the needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2021). It focuses on creating friendly, safe and protective environments for all. A focus of this section is exploring changes to attitudes relating to inclusion, and how gender equality, disability inclusion and the inclusion of ethnic minority groups is part of teachers' practice. This focus on GEDSI is a key objective of the BEQUAL program.

Overall policy and practice

2022 Finding. While there has been a policy shift to strengthen inclusive education awareness, understanding and classroom practice, this may not have been translated into classroom practice.

- National interviewees have reported that there has been a shift towards greater awareness of inclusive education in MoES and a recognition of the need for different teaching approaches for students from diverse backgrounds.

  MoES also have this policy of inclusive teaching and learning and during the training we focused on this area. We trained the teachers to be aware, this new curriculum will focus more on group work. We paid attention to techniques to support the non-Lao speaker... We always emphasise when we go to monitor that they have to pay attention to these students - students with disability and non-Lao speaking students. (National interviewee)

  In the past, difficult to get Ministry to recognise children from different backgrounds need different support. Something teachers didn't do before developing this. A big step forward. (National interviewee)

- National interviewees described how the new curriculum and teacher guide provide strategies and advice on how to incorporate and implement inclusive practices.

  In the manual to teach the ethnic students- the technique is there. The teachers knows what to teach for ethnic groups and what to consider. In the former curriculum this was not present in the manual… We can consider a number of factors, what should they do for this activity, what materials, what different materials they can use for all the different types of students they may have. (National interviewee)

  There's very specific information or guidance given to teachers [in the teacher guide] about how to include in their teaching practice, students who don't speak Laos as their first language or you know, very specific guidance about how to make sure that teachers are calling on girls and boys equally in the class. In including students with disabilities, for example, and giving advice on that and guidance on that to teachers. (National interviewee)

- National interviewees also reported teachers are more aware of inclusive practices. Their use and knowledge of these practices were said to have increased through training and reinforcement from MoES, and teachers had been observed using inclusive practices in their teaching.

> When they form students into groups, they try to balance the gender. They assign the students to make questions, teachers try to make sure that they take turns to balance boys and girls answering questions. (National interviewee)
>
> As teachers become more familiar with these methods (structured and step by step), these benefit all children. Not just those from non-Lao speaking backgrounds, but particularly those with learning disability or one with visual/hearing impairment (all equity groups identified) (National interviewee)

- Some national interviewees raised concerns that despite training, some teachers are not using inclusive teaching strategies. A couple of the interviewees identified the need for better monitoring data on teachers' use of inclusive practice.

> In reality the teachers did not do well on this. But in the training, we explained this to them, because in the curriculum we specify this. But when we observe – in reality there is no change, e.g. boys with sitting with boys and girls with girls. (National interviewee)
>
> I have seen the changes as there are instructions for teaching tribal and students with disabilities, but we haven't done teacher assessment properly so we're not that sure if the teacher follows the guideline. (National interviewee)
>
> Don't have immediate data that proves that is now happening on a big scale… Support is there but can't say whether they are implementing in their classrooms. (National interviewee)

Gender equality

2022 Finding. The case study data indicates the range of strategies teachers apply to encourage girls' and boys' participation in Lao language lessons is limited.

- Case study participants reported that the main strategies teachers use to engage girls and boys in Lao language lessons are mixed-gender group activities and seating girls and boys together.
- A few participants reported these strategies are new to them. Some participants observe that these strategies promote greater interaction between girls and boys.

As part of the 2022 data collection, case study teachers, principals and PAs were asked what strategies G1 teachers use to engage girls and boys in Lao language lessons. Across all three cycles, researchers observed how teachers encourage participation of girls and boys in lessons.

- In 2022, most participants reported mixed-gender group activities and seating girls and boys together as the main strategies to encourage equal participation of boys and girls (10 of 15 teachers; 8 of 10 principals).

> When playing games or asking questions, I put boys and girls together to participate in activities without separating them. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Some participants in the southern schools noted they used mixed-gender groups based on performance. While many participants noted that this approach had not really changed with the introduction of the new curriculum, four participants from northern schools reported it had changed as previously girls and boys sat separately. One teacher highlighted the impact it has had on student engagement.

> This way helps them support each other. These strategies are different. The boys and girls were separated under the old curriculum. This has impacted both girls and boys, they ask and discuss lessons more. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- One teacher reported that the main approach they use is to ask both boys and girls to volunteer for tasks, and they select both boys and girls to undertake tasks

Case study researchers recorded when teachers selected a girl or a boy to demonstrate an idea or skill during classroom observations, for example by being called up to the board.

- This practice was observed to be used less in the 2021 and 2022 data collections, when compared to 2019. In 2019, girls and boys were often selected to demonstrate. Nearly all teachers (14 of 15) used this approach across two lessons, and they selected girls and boys six or more times across the two lessons. In 2021 and 2022, fewer teachers were observed to do this across two lessons (9 of 15 in 2021 and 2022). Also, the number of instances was much lower with only 6 teachers in 2021 and 8 teachers in 2022 doing this in lessons often.
- Across the three cycles, there were similar proportions of lessons where teachers did not distribute evenly between boys and girls (with more teachers tending to favour boys).

Students with particular needs

2022 Finding. Case study participants reported they apply different strategies to support students with learning difficulties. They reported there are no children with physical disabilities in G1 classes.

  - Common strategies for supporting students with learning difficulties include providing targeted support and extra instruction.
  - Very few teachers and principals report providing extension activities to students who excel and need extending.

In 2019 and 2021, questionnaires collected teachers' perspectives on whether they are able to support students with particular needs when teaching Lao language, including: students with physical disabilities; students with intellectual/cognitive disabilities; and students who excel and need extension activities. The case study data provided detail on how teachers work with such students when teaching Lao language.

- The questionnaire responses in 2019 and 2021 indicate that that almost all teachers reported they are able to provide extra support to students who have difficulty learning Lao language and to students who need to have extension in Lao.
- Case study participants identified a similar range of strategies to assist students who have difficulty learning in 2019 and 2021. The most common strategy for supporting students needing assistance was providing targeted help in class (which usually involved holding students' hands to help them to write), followed by extra instruction, then grouping them with high achieving students.

In 2022, case study teachers, principals and PAs were asked how the G1 teachers' approach to engaging with students with particular needs in Lao language lessons has changed since the new curriculum implementation, specific to students with physical needs, students with learning difficulties, and students who excel and need extending. The national curriculum guidance specifies that it describes the minimum that students should learn, and teachers should use interesting and challenging extension activities. They can be designed to address a learning difficulty, to provide more practise where needed, or for students who need more challenging activities than those provided in the teacher guide.

How teachers support students with physical needs and learning difficulties

- In 2022, nearly all case study teachers and principals reported they do not have any students with physical needs in their G1 classes (13 of 15 teachers; 9 of 10 principals).
- One teacher in 2022 noted they would not know how to support students with physical needs.

> I do not know how to support them if I have one in the class. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Across the three cycles of data collection, case study participants reported similar strategies for supporting students with learning difficulties. As shown in Table A.4, again, the most common strategy in 2022 was providing targeted help in class (by paying more attention to those students and providing more supports) (6 of 15 teachers; 6 of 10 principals).

> I often call them to practice… side effect is that some poor performers don't want to come to school because I often call them to practice. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- One principal reflected that teachers have more time to support students with the new curriculum.

> … working closely with them, focusing on their learning during class, observe and help them closely in their table, hold hand to practice writing. With old curriculum everything was mixed up - confusing with many lessons with limited time. So teacher couldn't focus on [poor performers] like we do today. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3).

- The second most common strategy reported in 2022 was providing extra instruction (8 of 15 teachers; 2 of 10 principals), which is similar to 2021 and an increase from 2019. Some participants referred to providing extra instruction after class. One teacher noted that the new curriculum recommends providing two hours of extra class for students who have learning difficulties.

> We emphasise the main content and skip activities. By doing this, these students can catch up with their classmates and don't be left behind. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- In 2022, more case study participants referred to grouping low achieving students with higher achieving students (3 of 15 teachers; 4 of 10 principals) than in 2019 and 2021. Further, more participants referred to advising parents of the students' difficulties and requesting the support of parents or the students' siblings (3 of 15 teachers; 3 of 10 principals).
- PAs offered similar strategies, but a couple also noted there has been a shift with the new curriculum. One PA in the northern province noted that previously there was no detailed advice on how to support students with particular needs, and there was no guidance to provide extra lessons. Two PAs noted that under the old curriculum, there was less emphasis on supporting low achieving students and encouraging their participation.

> In old curriculum, if someone is good only that person would be asked and be promoted. Other students who are weak learners would not get opportunity to express their opinions. They would keep quiet throughout the class. Now everyone gets the opportunity to answer questions. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

- Over the three cycles of data collection, during classroom observations researchers recorded very few teachers providing customised support to students with disabilities (3 teachers in 2019; 1 in 2021; none in 2022).

Table A.4. Strategies for supporting students with learning difficulties as reported by case study teachers and principals in cycle 3 (2022)

Strategies for supporting students with learning difficulties	Number of teachers/principals
Pay attention / prioritise / more supports during lesson	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊
Extra instruction	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊ ◊◊
Group high and low achieving students	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊
Advise parents / siblings to teach at home	◊◊◊ ◊◊◊
Hold hand to write	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊
Home assignments	◊
Fewer questions	◊
Separate learners and provide extra support	◊
No supports	◊ ◊

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported

How teachers support students who excel and need extending

- Across the three cycles of data collection, case study teachers and principals reported similar approaches to supporting students who excel and need extending. For example, approaches across all cycles included teaching students who excel the same way as other students, having students who excel assist others, providing praise, and assigning extra assignments.
- Table A.5 displays the approaches reported by participants in 2022. Of interest is the large number of participants who report they teach students that excel in the same way as other students. For example, in 2022 11 of 15 teachers reported this, compared to only four teachers in 2021 and none in 2019.
- PAs in 2022 emphasised assigning well performing students with low achieving students or friends, with two PAs reporting such students to be group leaders or assist teachers.

Table A.5. Strategies for supporting students who excel and need extending as reported by case study teachers and principals in cycle 3 (2022)

Strategies for supporting students who excel and need extending	Number of teachers/principals
Teach like other students	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊ ◊◊◊◊◊ ◊
Help others / group with low achieving students	◊◊◊◊ ◊◊◊◊◊
Praise	◊◊ ◊◊◊
Extra assignments	◊◊◊ ◊

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported

Non-Lao speaking students

2022 Finding. Teachers' use of mother tongue language during Lao language lessons continues to be focused on providing explanations and connections for non-Lao speakers.

- The provision of customised support to non-Lao speakers has decreased over the three cycles of classroom observations.
- Visual aids were highlighted by PAs as being useful for supporting non-Lao speakers.
- The provision of extra instruction to non-Lao speakers, as recommended in the new curriculum guidance, varies.

In 2019 and 2021, questionnaires collected information about the languages spoken by students, whether teachers use a language other than Lao during lessons, and how they use this language.

- For both data collection periods, questionnaire data indicated Mon-Khmer was the most common student language group (48%), followed by Lao-Tai (37%). Other language groups were less common with ten per cent of teachers reporting that Sino-Tibetan languages were spoken by a majority of their students, and other language groups such as Hmong lu-Mien only in a majority in less than four per cent of classes. It should be noted that the data disaggregates by four ethno-linguistic groupings – Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong lu-Mien, and Sino-Tibetan. This does not allow for distinctions between speakers of Lao and those who speak another language in the Tai family.
- Overall, just over half of surveyed teachers in 2021 reported that they used a language other than Lao during Lao language lessons (51%). The vast majority of teachers (85%) did not use another language when teaching a class of students whose majority language was Lao. For classes where most students had a mother tongue other than Lao, almost three-quarters of teachers (73%) used another language in 2021, slightly higher than 67 per cent pf teachers reported in 2019.

In 2022, case study participants were asked about the strategies they use when working with students whose home language is not Lao, and whether extra instruction is provided to these students.

How teachers support students whose home language is not Lao

- In 2022 10 of the case study teachers reported using a language other than Lao to teach Lao language. Thirteen of the 15 case study classes included ethnic students, but two classes in the south were reported to have ethnic students that understand Lao language well. One school in the central province has a teacher who does not speak the local language but can understand it. This teacher asks these students to "tell their friends who speak ethnic language to explain if students do not understand".
- Some case study teachers explained they use Lao language as the main language of instruction but use local language when students do not understand. This is similar to case study data reported in 2021. Two teachers spoke about using pictures to support their explanations. They reported this aids student understanding.

  > When they see the picture, they know the word in their local language and learn the Lao word. I have tried to speak Lao language more than local language. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3).

- One teacher reported they get students to translate for each other because teachers have been instructed they should mainly speak Lao language.

  > I can explain lesson in local language well but we are told we should mainly speak Lao language. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- PAs highlighted a range of strategies for teaching non-Lao speakers, including: using pictures, delivering extra lessons, advising parents to talk to their children in Lao, encouraging play between Lao and non-Lao speakers, enlisting friends to help, using body language to explain verbs. A few PAs noted there is a change in the approach, with greater emphasis on how to support non-Lao speakers and the provision of visual aids to support non-Lao speakers' learning.

> In the new curriculum there are a lot of visual teaching materials that teachers and students can communicate through those resources such as pictures. Students have more chance to practice speaking and reading. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

- One teacher explained why it is important to use local language, but felt it is a departure from the new curriculum:

> New curriculum emphasises to use more Lao language, but it is necessary to explain in local language in some lessons because students don't understand Lao language clearly… their village is far from town and Lao language isn't used in their daily life. They get the chance to listen to Lao language from their teacher only. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Case study researchers also observed whether teachers provided customised support to non-Lao speakers during lessons observed.

- Researchers documented how local languages were used in lessons which included using local languages to explain words, name pictures, explain lessons and activities, and provide additional help to students.
- Researchers observed fewer teachers provided customised support to non-Lao speakers in lessons in 2022 (4 of 15) and 2021 (5 of 15) than in 2019 (9 of 15). A question of interest is whether the prescriptiveness of the new curriculum teaching methods enable teachers to better meet the needs of ethnic students in their classes, therefore requiring less customised support than might have been needed previously.
- Examples of customised support provided by teachers across the three cycles of data collection include: giving explanations in local language to assist students to understand the meaning of Lao words; providing instructions for activities; assisting with Lao pronunciation; and assisting with writing Lao words.

Extra instruction in Lao language for G1 students

The new curriculum guidance recommends an extra hour of spoken Lao language be added to the timetable each day in schools where most students don't speak Lao at home. The Spoken Lao Program (SLP) is being continued as part of BEQUAL Phase II. Some national interviewees discussed how it is being used to support non-Lao speakers.

> SLP is aimed at non-Lao speakers. Specific pedagogies – focus on oral language, scaffolded learning, use of visuals/body language, communication opportunities, geared towards the needs of those children. (National interviewee)

> SLP being taught is a big change. Adjacent to Lao language curriculum. Before BEQUAL this didn't exist. Teachers are teaching supplementary hours to children of non-Lao speaking backgrounds is immense change – developed, implemented ongoing program. (National interviewee)

In 2019 and 2021, data was collected through questionnaires and case study interviews on extra instruction in Lao language for G1 students whose home language is not Lao. In 2022, this issue was investigated further.

- Based on 2019 and 2021 questionnaires, it was not clear from responses the extent to which schools provided extra instruction in Lao language. This was because surveyed principals and teachers provided conflicting responses. In these years, around two-thirds of case study teachers noted that extra instruction was provided.
- In 2022, case study responses varied. Some teachers in the northern schools (3 of 5) and all principals reported they provided extra classes. One specified using the designated 'activity

hour'. Another reported they followed the new curriculum and based extra instruction on the activities in lessons. PAs in the northern schools also noted the availability of extra classes, but one noted it was for low achievers regardless of ethnicity.

- In central schools, most participants noted that additional instruction on Lao language was not specific to non-Lao speakers but for low achieving students. In one school the activity hour was used for this, in another school extra class was held on Fridays, and in two others make-up classes were only held if required.
- In southern schools, no participants reported they provide extra instruction.

> I know the new curriculum suggested teachers do this, but I can't follow the advice. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

A 'typical lesson'

A task that the researchers completed during the data analysis workshops in 2019, 2021 and 2022 involved them recalling their overall impressions of a 'typical lesson' in their case study schools. In 2019, the lead researchers who led the qualitative research in each geographical region recorded their impressions of typical lessons, and in 2021 and 2022 both members of the research teams (lead and support researchers) recorded their impressions of typical lessons in the regions that they visited. Figure A.1 displays the consolidated impressions of the 2022 lead and support researchers in each geographical region.

- The typical lessons documented by the researchers in 2022 for each region had some similar lesson components and activities to those documented in 2019 and 2021. For example, lessons began with greetings, checking attendance and recalling the foci of previous lessons.
- The researchers' impressions of typical lessons in 2022 continue to signal the use of several of the pedagogical practices suggested in the new curriculum. For example, teachers providing tasks for students to work on in pairs or groups (north and central provinces), teachers observing and assisting students as they engage in tasks or practice activities (all provinces), and teachers checking for student understanding (north and central provinces).
- Points of difference between the researchers' impressions of typical lessons in 2021 and 2022 include: researchers in each province in 2022 observed teachers asking individual students to demonstrate what they are learning at the board, whereas only one researcher included this practice in their typical lesson in 2021; no researchers in 2022 included teachers providing feedback to students in their typical lesson structure, whereas this was included by researchers in the two geographical locations (central and south) in 2021; and, no researchers in 2022 included teachers summarising or making conclusions towards the end of lessons, whereas both researchers in the south reported this practice in their typical lesson structures in 2021. These differences suggest that some of the new curriculum practices that were reported by researchers to be used by teachers in 2021 were not as evident to them in 2022.

Figure A.1: A 'typical lesson' in north, central and south schools as recalled by case study researchers in cycle 3 (2022)

North	Central	South
Greeting	Greeting	Greeting
Check attendance		Check attendance
Teacher asks students about date	Teacher asks students about date and subject studying today	Teacher asks students about date and writes day and date on board
Teacher reviews previous lesson	Teacher reviews previous lesson (using flashcards or board)	Teacher asks students about the previous lesson number
Teacher writes new lesson on board	Teacher writes new lesson on the board	Teacher writes new lesson on the board
Teacher explains and demonstrates (sometimes students practice reading after the teacher)	Teacher asks students to do tasks individually or in pairs/groups (practice)	Teacher starts teaching the lesson content, using the student textbook and asking students questions
Teacher asks students to do tasks individually or in pairs/groups (practice)		Teacher asks students to read after them
Teacher moves around observing / monitoring / assessing students	Teacher asks particular students to demonstrate what they are learning at the board	Teacher asks particular students to read or write at the board
Teacher asks particular students to demonstrate what they are learning at the board	Students copy the lesson from the board and teacher assists their writing	Teacher checks students' understanding
Students copy the lesson from the board	Teacher checks writing work	Teacher walks from table to table to observe and assist students
Teacher checks students' understanding of the lesson		Students copy the lesson from the board
Teacher assigns homework		

The use of the same colours/shades indicate similar activities reported by researchers

A.3 Professional learning

Participation in the orientation sessions about the new curriculum

2022 Finding. While the orientation training sessions provided crucial introductory information and support for teachers and principals in relation to the new curriculum, they were considered limited.

- Since the introduction of the new curriculum, all case study teachers and their principals have had the opportunity to participate in the BEQUAL orientation training sessions for G1, and/or the training sessions for G2, G3 or G4.
- The new curriculum orientation training sessions were highly valued by case study teachers and principals and provided useful and beneficial support for teachers.
- Participants considered the orientation training sessions were very short, and there is a need for continued professional learning regarding Lao language teaching.

In 2021, data about teachers and principals' participation in the new curriculum orientation training sessions were collected through questionnaires and case study interviews, and in 2022 data about their participation was collected through case study interviews.

- In 2022, participation in G1 orientation sessions in case study schools was reported to be very high, with 14 of the 15 G1 teachers and 8 of the 10 principals reporting they attended. One teacher who had not attended the G1 training attended G2 training, and two principals attended the G3 and G4 orientation sessions rather than the G1 orientation.
- Case study teachers and principals in 2022 recalled that the most helpful aspects of the Lao language orientation sessions included: teaching techniques and methods (e.g. using visual teaching materials, using games, storytelling, story books); focusing on Lao language learning activities (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and specifically the alphabet, vowels and consonants); student assessment methods; using teaching materials (including flashcards, decodable readers, storybooks); and connecting lessons to local contexts and environments.
- In 2022, several case study teachers and principals reported that the orientation training was not extensive enough, and noted they need more training related to the new Lao language curriculum. National interviewees also observed that the short duration of the initial training was too limited, and only allowed for an orientation to the new curriculum rather than covering the full extent of the curriculum.

  > Even those [teachers and principals] that did participate say the training was too short. Six days is more orientation and introduction to the new curriculum. There is no way in this time to take them through the full new curriculum. (National interviewee)

  > The training provided was too short, especially for Lao language. (National interviewee)

- Case study teachers and principals identified the need for more training related to Lao language teaching and the new curriculum. Areas in which case study teachers and principals in 2022 reported needing further training in are displayed in Table A.6.

Table A.6. Foci for further training needed related to Lao language teaching as reported by case study teachers and principals in cycle 3 (2022)

Foci for further training related to the new Lao language curriculum	Number of teachers/principals
Pronunciation of Lao language	◊◊◊◊◊ ◊
More about the alphabet, consonants and vowels	◊◊◊ ◊
Teaching activities/techniques	◊◊◊◊
Producing and using teaching materials	◊ ◊◊
Lesson planning	◊ ◊◊
Student assessment methods (including rubrics)	◊◊ ◊
Writing, reading	◊ ◊
Student-centred teaching methods	◊
Managing group discussion activities	◊
More theory about Lao language	◊
Dictation	◊

◊ = teacher reported ◊ = principal reported

- National interviewees also suggested further training to help teachers develop understanding and the ability to implement new practices with high fidelity in their teaching. ICT skills were reported to be a particular area that needed additional training as a lot of supports provided to teachers need to be accessed online or using other methods such as through a USB or WhatsApp groups, etc.

  > I recognize the need for more professional development around Lao Language; it is a living language. More professional development around teaching techniques, phonics, catering for individual students, etc. is needed; plus a lot of work around assessment (National interviewee)
  >
  > Introduction of phonics is challenging and some teachers want to learn more about that (National interviewee)
  >
  > I would like to see more training support to teacher to teach Lao Language, especially on the assessment, how they can support students who are struggling and for students who are non-Lao background. (National interviewee)
  >
  > We have a lot of materials developed and supported by BEQUAL like videos, and we are provided with USBs with all materials to the teachers. But, I can see that the teachers don't really have the chance to really use those materials. This is because the teachers themselves do not really have their own laptop. They don't even know how to open these files and therefore these resources aren't used. (National interviewee)

- Some comments made by case study participants in 2022 did not specify content or foci for further training, but instead noted the need for more training and training of a longer duration.

  > I think each subject should train for one week. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
  >
  > [I need] retraining on the G1 new curriculum. The previous training was too short. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
  >
  > The training was short so we do not understand well. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- Two 2022 case study participants, one teacher and one principal, reported they have no need for further training. The teacher noted this is because the new curriculum Teacher Guide is very detailed.

Participation in other training related to Lao language teaching

2022 Finding. In the 2022 calendar year, case study teachers' and principals' participation in training related to Lao language teaching was very limited.

In 2019 and 2021, teachers and principals were asked generally about their participation in any in-service training in the last two years through questionnaires and case study interviews. In 2022 the focus was narrowed to ask teachers and principals about training they participated in specifically related to Lao language teaching in the 2022 calendar year.

- In case study schools in 2022, only two of the 15 case study teachers reported they had received further in-service training on Lao language teaching during the last year. This is the same number of teachers who reported they had received further training in 2021.
- The two teachers in 2022 were from central province and attended training at their district education office which was organised by their PA and other district officers. The training focused on rubrics assessment.

- The only other training that any case study participants attended in the 2022 calendar year was the BEQUAL new curriculum orientation training sessions for G4. Two principals attended these sessions.
- Although in 2021 teachers and principals involved in the study reported the need for further training related to the new curriculum and teaching Lao language, it appears that opportunities for further training in the 2022 calendar year were very limited. It is possible that the pandemic may have been a factor in this.

Participation in other forms of professional learning

2022 Finding. While many case study participants in 2022 reported that they value the ways that COP and SAL assist them with their Lao language teaching, opportunities to participate in these forms of professional learning appear inconsistent.

- Across case study locations, COP varied with respect to: who is responsible for setting them up, who participates, when they are scheduled, what format they take and what activities they include. The main COP activity reported by participants was exchanging teaching ideas and advice.
- Few case study participants commented in detail about SAL suggesting this is an area of possible further development and support for teachers.
- The key constraints to engaging in COP and SAL relate to having access to: colleagues with expertise/experience to support teaching improvement; ICT tools (including internet); and support to develop knowledge and skills to use these ICT tools.

Participation in COP and SAL provides teachers and principals with opportunities for continuous professional development. In 2021, case study teachers and principals described the kinds of activities they engage in related to Lao language teaching in these forms of professional development. In 2022, case study interview questions focused on whether opportunities to engage in COP and SAL had changed since the new curriculum was introduced, and what factors support or constrain participation in COP and SAL activities.

Engagement in COP and SAL

- In 2022 case study teachers and principals reported varying types and levels of engagement in COP. The most common scheduling of in-person COP meetings was monthly, with other COP meetings occurring once a year, 2-3 times per year, bi-weekly and not at all. Only one teacher and one principal mentioned WhatsApp as a form of COP, whereas in 2021 several teachers noted WhatsApp enabled them to access and exchange information related to Lao language teaching.
- Case study teachers and principals reported four main activities related to Lao language that they engage in with COP in 2022: exchanging teaching ideas and advice (5 of 15 teachers; 6 of 10 principals); classroom observations and feedback (3 teachers; 3 principals); support with lesson planning (2 teachers; 1 principal); and teaching demonstrations (1 teacher; 1 principal).
- Three teachers noted that while COP were previously in place (soon after the new curriculum was introduced and prior to the pandemic), they had not yet resumed in the current school year.

> Last year the meeting was organised monthly, but this year it isn't organised yet. I ask other teachers to advise me on making lesson plans and they advise me on lesson plans and teaching as

> well. Since using the new curriculum, the group meeting is rarely implemented, I don't know why. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> We have participated in the school cluster meeting to exchange teaching lessons within the group. During the COVID period the meetings were not held. This year, school has just been opened for one month, so the meeting hasn't happened yet (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- One teacher reported formal COP had not been organised in their location, however they had taken opportunities in cluster meetings to informally exchange ideas with G1 teachers from other schools.

> Sometimes I exchange with G1 teachers from other schools when we have cluster meetings. The meetings are not specifically to exchange for COP, it is generally about school administration, but we personally discuss about the new curriculum and G1 teaching. … We do not have other COP. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Another teacher reported they have not been involved in any type of COP.

> I haven't exchanged with other teachers. The office did not advise me. Other teachers did not advise me. The PA did classroom observations but did not advise me. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- One principal described opportunities at his school for teacher learning and exchange, whereby weekly meetings function as a kind of within-school COP.

> Every Friday our school has a meeting to exchange lessons learnt in teaching and learning from every grade. All teachers help each other to improve and recommend what is not in line with teaching activities according to the new curriculum. Teachers can raise problems to be solved together between the principal and the teachers regarding the teaching activities and the teaching skills of teachers. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- In 2022 the main type of SAL that case study teachers reported was studying the new curriculum teacher guide. Using smartphones to access resources or view teaching on YouTube (including MoES/BEQUAL developed materials) was also mentioned often. Other types of SAL that teachers reported engaging in included: asking individual colleagues for help; observing experienced teachers; seeking advice from a PA; watching videos produced by MoES; reading books; and observing students learning.
- Only one teacher reported that they do not engage in SAL, and they attributed this to lack of motivation.

Factors that support or constrain participation in COP and SAL

- Table A.7 displays different factors that case study teachers and principals in 2022 reported encourage and support participation in COP and SAL, and factors they reported constrain participation in COP and SAL.

Table A.7: Factors that support or constrain participation in COP and SAL as reported by case study teachers and principals in cycle 3 (2022)

Type	Factors that support participation	Factors that constrain participation
COP	- teachers have opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding - teachers have opportunities to ask questions about the new curriculum - there is a good atmosphere for learning with teachers working harmoniously - principals provide follow-up advice and support - travel time to the meetings is comfortable - allowances for petrol and food are provided	- participants have limited levels of expertise and/or experience - lack of budget for travel - geographical challenges associated with getting to meeting locations - lack of access to smartphones - the need to leave classes at school with other teachers
SAL	- teachers have time available to engage in SAL - teachers are able to access resources to learn - engaging in SAL provides opportunity to gain knowledge about teaching	- access to and cost of the internet limits teachers' use for SAL - access to and lack of skill in using smart phones limits teachers' use for SAL - lack of understanding related to content read or viewed, and lack of colleagues to consult for help - lack of motivation to engage

- In 2021, many teachers and principals reported that the COP activities that teachers engaged in provided opportunities to receive and give support related to Lao language teaching. This was reinforced in 2022 with teachers and principals again reporting how much they value the opportunities COP provide for learning about Lao language teaching and the new curriculum.

  I gain more knowledge about teaching from other school teachers and we exchange knowledge and discuss difficulties in teaching-learning to help each other find solutions. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  I have an opportunity to consult with teachers in the cluster, especially when the principal can't help me address my teaching challenges, preparing lesson plans in particular. This year I was assigned to teach G2 although I didn't participate in G2 training. It's quite challenging for me but I try to do my best. When I get stuck, I consult with G2 teachers from other schools. So, engaging in COP is valuable for me. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  I can exchange with other teachers about 1) teaching-learning techniques, 2) using teaching materials more effectively, and 3) managing multigrades. Then we can apply what we learn into our teaching. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- A constraint to participation in COP reported by a principal in 2022 that was similar to one reported by a teacher in 2021, relates to participants having limited levels of expertise and/or experience and therefore not being able to provide the needed support.

  The other difficulty is working together with other teachers who have the same level of teaching skills and experience. So, each of us can't support or advise each other. For PA, they just advise us on how to make a lesson plan, observe some lessons, but they can't explain all topics and can't respond to all our questions and difficulties. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- In terms of factors that constrain participation in COP and SAL, issues related to access to devices and internet, and knowledge about how to use them were reported by case study participants in 2021 and these persist in 2022.

  > There is no online learning group because some of the G1 teachers don't have smart phones, and some don't know how [to use then]. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
  >
  > The difficulty is I don't have smartphone to search for more teaching methods from internet. There are no books for further research. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- Another constraint to participation in SAL that was also mentioned in 2021, relates to teachers' perceived lack of skill or understanding.

  > Sometimes I don't understand the content I watch or read, and I don't know who to consult. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
  >
  > I watch YouTube on my smart phone, but I am not good at using the smart phone. I don't like learning online and prefer learning from people, asking questions face to face when we meet. I am also a slow learner – it takes time for me to understand things. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

Annex B: Factors that support or impede existing teaching practice

Annex B provides findings about supports and impediments affecting teaching practice.

B.1 Supports for Lao language teaching

This section reports data collected related to the provision of technical support for G1 Lao language teaching from principals, teacher colleagues and PAs.

Support from principals and teacher colleagues

2022 Finding. Most case study participants in 2022 reported that G1 teachers have access to and greatly value technical support at the school level.

- Principals use a range of support types to assist G1 teachers with Lao language teaching.
- As in 2021 and 2019, training was identified most often by case study principals as important for helping principals to more effectively support their G1 teachers with Lao language teaching.
- Opportunities for teacher colleagues to support one another with their G1 Lao language teaching include a mix of informal and structured activities.

Case study interviews in 2022 asked participants to describe the kinds of technical support for Lao language teaching they received (teachers) or provided (principals and PAs). This section presents case study data by technical support provided 'within schools' and 'across schools'. Similar to 2021, participants in all 12 case study schools in 2022 reported there was some form of technical support related to Lao language teaching provided internally by their principal, and/or teacher colleagues.

Support provided by principals

In 2022, case study participants were asked about the types of support principals provide to teachers including the supports that are most helpful, and what further supports the principal could provide that might be helpful to teachers. Principals were also asked what would help them to more effectively support G1 teachers to improve their Lao language teaching.

Principal support types

- In 2019 more than half of the case study teachers (7 of 12) reported receiving some technical support from their principals. In 2021 this increased by two (9 of 12), and in 2022 12 of 13 teachers reported receiving support for Lao language teaching from their principals. And similarly, an increase in levels of principal support was also shown in the survey data between 2019 and 2021.
- Some national interviewees also observed that teachers had received support from their principals.

> In terms of principals providing support of teachers, we included principals in the G1 training and there are models on how principals can provide support to teachers. Some teachers have told us they can ask their principals for support. (National interviewee)

- The types of principal support reported by case study participants in 2021 included assistance with lesson planning, advice about teaching methods assistance with preparing materials, and monitoring teaching and learning. In 2022, these same support types were reported, as well as conducting classroom observations, conducting teaching demonstrations, advising on assessment methods (including rubrics), and assisting with Lao language pronunciation.

  > He observes my teaching 2-3 times a year. Since he is also teaching G5, he hasn't much time to observe my classroom. He observes the class and advises me on teaching. He has a lot more experience in teaching. … The most helpful support is observing my classroom. Before he observes I make sure I prepare well and I am open to learning from him. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  > I feel that what I recommended that was most useful to him [G1 teacher] was about student's progress and assessment rubrics. Before this he could not implement it and now he can do it. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

  > The principal has given help in teaching Lao language on anything I do not understand and what I could not pronounce correctly. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- One teacher in 2022 noted that in addition to supporting them, their principal played a support role for teachers in other schools.

  > As the chair of the pedagogical advisory group, the principal provides a lot of support to not only me but also teachers in other schools in this cluster by arranging exchanged classroom observation where teachers from many schools observe classes and learn from each other. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Similar to 2021, one teacher in 2022 reported that their principal did not provide them with support for Lao language teaching, although they noted the principal did observe their teaching for monitoring purposes only.

  > The principal did not provide any advice, but he attended classroom observation and monitored my teaching. The principal should monitor and provide feedback. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

Further principal support that might be helpful

- G1 teachers suggested a range of ways their principals might provide further support for their Lao language teaching. These included: the provision of specific advice related to teaching content (e.g. the teaching of reading and writing, the meaning of Lao words, combining words and phrases, pronunciation); advice about teaching activities in the new curriculum that teachers don't understand; advice about lesson planning; feedback to teachers about their Lao language teaching; advice about how to create teaching resources; advice about rubrics assessment; and coaching for teachers.

  > I need more advice on teaching because he has much more experience in teaching and observing the class… It would be good if he can observe my class and provide advice based on my teaching. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  > I would like the school principal to carefully support on lesson planning, rubrics assessment use, and pronunciation of consonants/alphabets. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- In addition to specific suggestions, some teachers commented more generally about hoping their principals could support them to improve, and some reported that the principals provide enough support already.

> If I could get some advice from the director it would be good. I can know what to improve. In the past I used to ask questions, but he answered that it was up to me what to do. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> I need him to follow up more on my teaching, maybe once a month would help. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> What he [the principal] helps with now is a lot already. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

What principals need to more effectively support G1 teachers

- As in 2021 and 2019, training was identified most often by case study principals as important for helping them to more effectively support their G1 teachers with Lao language teaching.

> If I receive training on the G1 new curriculum, I may be able to help the G1 teacher a lot. Fortunately, in our learning group there are teachers who are good at teaching and can explain to him [the G1 teacher]. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
>
> I would like to participate in G1 Lao language training as I didn't participate in 2019. When I read the G1 textbook, I see some similarities and differences from G2 textbook. I just know enough to exchange with G1 teacher not to technically advise her. I would like to learn more about making multigrade lesson plans. I would like to learn more how to deliver knowledge to students more effectively. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> Both my teachers and myself need refresher training on teaching G1. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

Support provided by teacher colleagues within schools and across schools

In 2022 teachers, principals and PAs were asked about the support that G1 teachers receive from teacher colleagues, within their school and across schools, including the supports that are most helpful, and what further supports teacher colleagues could provide for one another.

Teacher colleague support types

- In case study schools in 2021, the provision of support and advice from teacher colleagues was reported by 7 of the 15 case study teachers and 9 of the 10 principals. In 2022, a more varied story has emerged. Five of the 15 case study teachers, six of the 10 principals and three of the six PAs reported that teachers receive support and advice from teacher colleagues often.

> Teacher colleagues often help each other. (Principal, northern province, cycle 3)

- Four teachers and two principals, all from the central province, reported that support from colleagues within their school is limited because other teachers in the school are responsible for teaching other grades.

> Teachers can't help each other because each one is responsible for teaching. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- For two G1 teachers in the south, their principals are the only colleagues who support them with their Lao language teaching.

> [G1 teacher] doesn't get support from other teachers - I am the only one who can provide advice to them. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- One teacher in the central province reported that they mostly received support from their school's Lao language technical adviser.
- One teacher in the north reported they received no support from colleagues.

> Other teachers did not help anything, only told me to do my job. I don't know why they did not help me. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- As in 2021, the support of teacher colleagues was reported by some case study participants to occur informally and often, and others reported that it occurs through arranged meetings and activities.

> The teachers have a lot of exchanges among themselves, but it is informal way. Mostly they exchange about the preparation of lesson plans and teaching activities in line with the new curriculum because they want to cover every learning activity and every activity is useful. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

> I talk with other colleagues in this school about the teaching and some parts of the teaching I don't understand. Sometimes we bring up some Lao words to discuss. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

> It's quite frequent. We discuss many times each week. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> There is a learning circle where all teachers can exchange lessons. There are classroom observations among teachers and a WhatsApp group was set up. There is a support program between teachers, for example between a G1 and G3 teacher. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

- Also similar to 2021, the practise of teacher colleagues undertaking classroom observations of Lao language teaching was reported as a form of collegial support in some case study schools in 2022.

> Teacher colleagues participate in classroom observations and provide some feedback on how to improve teaching strategies. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

> Classroom observations are most useful. They have time to provide comments. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

- Exchanging teaching knowledge and experience across schools through cluster meetings was reported as occurring in more than half of the case study schools in 2021, however cluster meetings were less frequently mentioned by case study participants in 2022. This may have been due to timing, with the 2022 data collection taking place early in the school year when cluster meetings may not yet have been organised. Disruptions due to COVID may also have been a factor.
- WhatsApp groups were another form of structured support between colleagues that was evident across the northern and central provinces in 2021, however few case study participants mentioned these in 2022.

Further teacher colleague support that might be helpful

- When asked how teacher colleagues might further support each other with Lao language teaching, principals, teachers and PAs suggested: participating in WhatsApp groups with teachers in other schools; meeting more regularly (e.g. weekly) to discuss Lao language teaching and learning; conducting more classroom observations and exchanging teaching ideas; producing resources together; helping each other with Lao language pronunciation. Some teachers reported they already have enough support from colleagues.

> I want them [teachers] to set up an online group to share their daily work and provide weekly feedback to reflect the problems. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

> I want to get support from them on Lao language pronunciation. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> Everyone is busy teaching. Just discussing during the break is enough. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

Support from pedagogical advisers

2022 Finding. The support that PAs provide in schools for Lao language teaching is typically highly valued. The data indicates the increase in PA support to case study schools between 2019 and 2021 has been sustained.

- Case study participants in 2022 identified a more extensive range of types of supports that PAs provide.
- Many case study participants (principals, teachers, PAs) would like PAs to have more opportunities to visit schools to support Lao language teaching.
- PAs report that they want to assist teachers more, however their ability to provide support is constrained by budget and capacity challenges.

In case study interviews in 2022, teachers, principals and PAs were asked questions about the extent of professional support provided by PAs. Specifically, they were asked how often PAs provide support for Lao language teaching, in what ways PAs support G1 teachers, what kinds of PA support is most helpful, and how might PAs further support G1 Lao language teaching.

- In 2021, all principals and almost all teachers (14 of 15) in case study schools reported that PAs provided support for Lao language teaching in their school. Numbers in 2022 were similar, with only one teacher in the northern province reporting they received no PA support.
- Teachers, principals and PAs in 2022 reported that PAs provide support at different intervals, including: a lot; once a month, once a semester, twice a semester, 2-3 times a year, once a year, and not at all.
- The types of PA support reported by case study participants in 2021 included: classroom observations, lesson planning, provision of advice about teaching methods, using teaching materials, assessing student learning, and classroom management. In 2022, these same support types were reported, as well as assistance with preparing teaching materials, teaching demonstrations, provision of advice about Lao language content (reading, writing), participation in WhatsApp groups, monitoring teaching, reviewing teachers' lesson videos, assistance with preparing improvement plans, and generally encouraging teaching.
- Of the different support offered by PAs, case study participants in 2022 noted that the most helpful included: preparing lesson plans, assisting with teaching techniques, applying assessment rubrics, classroom observations and the provision of feedback, demonstration lessons, planning for improvement and classroom management. One teacher noted that they could call their PA to seek advice outside of school visits.

> Demonstration lesson is the most helpful for the teachers. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)
>
> Before he [PA] observes, I make sure I prepare well and am open to learning from him. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> The most helpful support for me is when they [PA] conduct classroom observations and have a discussion afterwards to reflect on my teaching and advise me for improvement. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> If I don't understand, I can call them. … Advising via telephone calls is the most helpful for me. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- One PA reported that prior to visiting his schools, he asks what it is that they need.

  First I ask the need of the school before providing supports. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

- Another PA reported that they observed improvements in teaching when they visited one of their schools.

  Each time I visit School 1, I see minor improvement on their teaching. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

- When asked how PAs could further support G1 teachers with Lao language teaching, principals and teachers in 2022 suggested: spend more time with teachers in schools; provide more teaching demonstrations; provide more support about teaching methods; provide assistance with teaching materials (make and provide more); participate in more classroom observations; provide more targeted feedback about how to improve; provide more advice about assessment rubrics; further monitor the teaching of reading and writing; assist with pronunciation; and, organise regular training.

  If he comes to observe the teaching, he could explain more often and point out to us where to improve. It will make us remember teaching processes well. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

  I would like to observe their [PA's] teaching methods and apply them to my teaching. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  We don't expect them to teach us. We just need them to visit us more often for consultation for improvement. We need support. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- When asked what would help them more effectively support G1 teachers with their Lao language teaching, PAs reported that they need increased budget to enable school visits, appropriate tools (e.g. laptop, tablet, printer), infrastructure for distance support (e.g. via WhatsApp, using video recordings of teaching), and further training for themselves and for teachers.

  If asked about PA capacity, we are enough. What we need is budget. We have very small budget to provide pedagogy so we could not visit every school in the district. We used the administrative budget to visit schools, but it is very small amount. If we have a specific budget to monitor and provide pedagogy, then we can implement our plan. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

  Our PA unit would like to have modern tools such as a laptop, tablet, printer. We could use these tools when providing pedagogy in schools. We could provide a small training session showing teaching demonstrations for teachers to see. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

  As a PA in DESB, I think the most important thing for teachers is teaching strategy. So, I want to gain more confidence in applying 16 techniques of teaching strategies in order to be able to support teachers… I want to be trained in teaching methods and if possible, I would like to visit schools. By doing this I could gain confidence in supporting teachers. I also want to conduct teaching demonstrations for teachers. During my school visit, I don't have chance to do so - mostly I only conduct classroom observation. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

  I want teachers to have more training opportunities. I want to request PESS and MOES to provide more resources for DESB to train the teachers. There should also be an opportunity for teachers to learn from teachers in another district. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

B.2 Impediments

In 2019 and 2021, case study participants were asked to identify issues that presented challenges for them when teaching Lao language. Among the issues identified as impacting schools across locations, were three that related to student characteristics: school readiness, student absenteeism, and parental support. In 2022, case study participants were asked to describe strategies used when working with G1 students who appear not ready for school, and strategies used when working with students who are often absent. They were also asked whether parents of G1 students are actively involved in supporting the school's teaching and learning activities either at school or at home.

School Readiness

2022 Finding. School readiness continues to be an issue in 2022 for Lao language teaching and learning.

- Case study principals and teachers reported a limited number of ways they support students who are not ready for school.
- Some participants reported pre-school and kindergarten attendance is an important factor in student school readiness.

Student readiness for school can impact how students adapt to school and manage learning tasks associated with the G1 curriculum. In both 2019 and 2021 participants across several case study schools highlighted student readiness as an issue.

- In 2019, more than half of the schools mentioned students' readiness for school as an issue, whereas in 2021 participants only five schools reported this as an issue. In 2022, case study participants in north and central schools described ways they support students who appear not ready for school, but participants in schools in the south reported there are no students who appear not ready for school.
- Several case study participants in 2022 reported they used the following strategies to support students who appear not ready for school: paying special attention to them; holding their hands to assist them to write; and asking parents to teach them at home.

  > I support students who are not ready for school. For example, I help to hold their hands to write to get used to it. I recommend to the person who can write to support or recommend to parents to help at home. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- A few participants mentioned other strategies, including: providing extra explanations; using visual aids; asking students to practise drawing and writing; and using student-centred methods.
- One principal noted they support some students in G1 who should be in kindergarten.

  > Grade 1 has three students who should be in kindergarten, but they do not have one, so the G1 teacher helps them by holding their hand to write, as they would for G1 students who cannot write. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- One PA reported that all students in G1 are treated the same.

  > What is not ready for school? Are those [students] who come to G1 younger than the G1 age? The teacher treats them the same as other students. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some national interviewees commented on the importance of pre-primary education.

  ...[There is a] need to look at G1 students – some skip pre-school and move to G1 straight away. It's quite difficult for them (National interviewee).

Student absenteeism

2022 Finding. While student absence was reported to be a major impediment to Lao language teaching and learning in 2019 and 2021, it appeared less of an issue to case study participants in 2022.

  - Case study principals and teachers reported a range of ways they support often-absent students, but in some schools no extra support is provided.

Students' absence affects the ability of teachers to teach the required curriculum content and impacts student outcomes. In both 2019 and 2021 participants across most case study schools highlighted student absenteeism as an issue (10 of 12 schools in both years).

- In 2022, while case study participants in all schools could describe strategies that can be used when working with students who are often absent, participants in all schools in the north and one school in central province noted that students were not often absent.

  Normally students are not often absent in this school. (Principal, northern province, cycle 3)

  This year, I don't have to visit student's home to tell them to come to school. Everyone comes to school regularly. I can encourage students to study and see that they have learned. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- National interviewees also reported that levels of student absenteeism had decreased.

  In the provinces in the districts that I went, attendance rates have increased and [there are] lower levels of student absenteeism. [There is a] level of interest and better understanding of significance of study from parents. At the same time there have been efforts to reduce drop out. When doing monitoring visits, we try to use that time to encourage parents to send their children to school. (National interviewee)

- As in 2019 and 2021, some case study participants in 2022 reported that student absenteeism was due to children accompanying their parents to work in the field. Another reason for student absence that case study participants reported in 2022 was sickness.

  Students are absent from school a lot during agricultural season. Some students already come to school but when their parents want to go to work in the field, they come to take their children with them. However, when these students return to school I will focus on them but I cannot repeatedly teach them the previous lessons. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

  There is not often absent students. They are absent from school from sickness mainly. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- The strategies that case study participants reported are used to support students who have been absent included: review activities students missed; repeat lessons missed; provide students with extra work in class or homework (e.g. complete reading activities, rewrite lessons); ask classmates to help each other; encourage students who have been absent to pay careful attention; provide extra instruction classes; ask parents to provide extra instruction at home; and, encourage parents to send their children to school. One teacher/principal reported that they make students repeat G1. And one PA noted that if an absence is prolonged teachers will report this to their principal and VEDC who will communicate with parents.

> The teacher closely takes care [of students who have been absent] and advises the classmates to help each other. (Principal, northern province, cycle 3)
>
> I would visit students' homes when they miss school frequently for 3 days. I would ask parents to support their child to attend school to catch up with their friends or get extra classes to catch up. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> If a student misses school he will be taught the lesson again so that he can catch up with his friends. When we had the old curriculum, I did not use this method. By teaching them again, all students are at the same page and everyone are not behind. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> I make these students repeat G1 for as long as they stop being absent and progress well enough to be in G2. I have a few students aged 12 years old. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> If a student is always absent or absent for a long time, the teacher reports the case to the principal and then to VEDC to communicate with their parents. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some case study participants noted that it is not possible to review or repeat lessons for students who are often absent because there would be insufficient time to complete all of the required teaching content.

> I will focus on them [students who have been absent] but I cannot repeatedly teach them the previous lesson. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Teachers only tell them to learn by themselves or ask their friends for the lesson they missed. No review session is provided as teachers don't have time to do that. If we spend time reviewing lesson for these students, we wouldn't be able to complete all required content. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some participants in 2022 suggested they do not apply different strategies in Lao language lessons for students who have been absent.

> Mostly teachers do not reteach the lessons. Teachers suggest parents teach them at home. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)
>
> I don’t review the lesson for students who are often absent. I continue teaching as usual when they come. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> When they are absent from school for a few days, the teacher will report to the principal and head of the village to help get them back to school. After these students come back, there's no extra support or instruction provided to them. They just join their friends as usual. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

Parent involvement

2022 Finding. Parental involvement in supporting student learning continues to be a challenge to Lao language teaching and learning in 2022.

- Case study participants report that active involvement in teaching and learning at school is not custom in Lao PDR. However, active involvement in supporting student learning at home is evident where parents are able to. Enablers include parental literacy, understanding the importance of education, and knowing how to help.

Lack of parental support was the second most reported issue in 2021 case study schools. Parents’ support of students attending school was highlighted as an issue. Often this is due to seasonal farming work and a lack of understanding of the importance of schooling. Their ability to support their children’s learning is also sometimes hampered by low levels of parental literacy.

In 2022 case study participants were asked whether parents of G1 students actively supported the school's teaching and learning activities either at school or at home, what kinds of activities they engage in, and what prevents them from being involved.

- No case study participants in 2022 reported that parents actively support teaching and learning activities at school. One principal suggested this is not a usual practice in Lao PDR.

  > We have never invited parents to observe their kids learning in the class. Speaking from my 30 plus years of teaching experience, I've never seen parents involved in teaching and learning activities in school. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- However, many participants noted that for those parents who can support students, they do take an active role at home.

  > Parents of G1 students are actively involved in supporting the teaching of their children at home. They are also supporting [bringing/making] teaching learning materials to school. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

  > At home they would be involved, but at school they are not involved as they are busy with their work. At home they help their children to practice writing or reading. Most of the parents here are literate. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  > They don't support teaching-learning activities at school because they do at home. The activity parents support at school is about fixing fences, benches, etc. At home they work with their kids to practice reading and writing. Good performers come from a family with a literate parent. But only about 20% of parents are literate and teach children at home in this village. Poor performers are those who don't get any support at home due to having illiterate parents. When they have questions, they don't know who to go to or where to get support (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- Some participants also noted the role that siblings can play in supporting G1 students' learning at home.

  > Most of the parents are not literate but their brothers and sisters can help them with reading and writing or doing homework. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

  > We don't only encourage parents to teach their kids at home but we also talk to their older siblings in the school, if they have them, to teach their younger sibling at home. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

- Among the reasons for parents not being actively involved in supporting teaching and learning activities at home were: lack of own literacy skills and knowledge; lack of time; needing to work/earn a living; and lack of clear communication between school and home, including no invitation for parents to participate.

  > Teachers advise the parents of the students to follow up with their children's study, to look at their notebooks, help them solve their homework, help them to read and write at home. But most parents spend time with agricultural production and a high percentage are illiterate. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

  > According to the population statistics, only 30% of villagers are literate which might be a reason preventing them [parents] from being involved in their child's learning activities. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  > In remote schools, parents don't know how to help their children, only teachers can help the children. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

B.3 Impacts of COVID-19

2022 Finding. In response to school closures different approaches were taken to support student learning. These included online learning, educational programs on television and radio, hard copy resources, and teachers advising students to revise and practise reading and writing.

- Online learning was not considered successful in many locations due to a lack of access to technology for both the students and teachers, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Most teachers reported that they neither sought nor were provided with support to continue teaching Lao language during school closures.
- Student opportunities to learn during school closures was largely dependent on the capacity of their parents to support their learning at home.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schooling in Lao PDR was felt across the country, with the pandemic lasting from 2020-2022. Schools across Lao PDR were closed for varying periods of time, impacting the ability to effectively deliver G1 Lao language teaching and learning in different ways.

In 2021, data collected related to COVID was focused on capturing the perspectives of teachers, principals and pedagogical advisers. In 2022, these perspectives were once again collected, together with those of MoES, BEQUAL and DFAT respondents. This enabled details of the impact of the pandemic to be captured from multiple stakeholders across the Lao education system.

The approaches to supporting student learning and the challenges associated with school closures reported by participants across cycles 2 and 3 were similar.

- Participants were asked how the teaching of Lao language was impacted by COVID. Most stated that student learning was disrupted due to lockdowns, with eight teachers reporting that no learning occurred during this period.

  > When children were at home, their chance to learn is rare. They didn't learn. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
  >
  > It was formality that work was sent home but in terms of learning - it is assumed that students had no learning during COVID 19. (National interviewee)
  >
  > Some people regard the losses caused by the pandemic have taken learning 'back to square 1'. (National interviewee)

- The length of school closures varied across the districts, with participants reporting these ranged from one month to one semester. Schools were said to have remained open more consistently in the 2021-2022 teaching cycle. Additionally, two teachers and one principal disclosed that during the 2021-2022 teaching period, their schools were not closed at all for various reasons (i.e., small school size, access to PPE), and they believed it had limited impact on their teaching.

  > The outbreak of COVID in the second period of the 2020-2021, school was not closed because this school was not many students, not too crowded so we could open. We could study as normal and finished all lesson/content in the curriculum. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
  >
  > In 2021 and 2022, school was not closed but we wore masks and maintained distance. We were able to finish up all the lessons. Not much impact for this year. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- The nature of school closures also varied, with most respondents reporting that schools were completely closed during the lockdown period. However, in the central province, two principals and one teacher reported staggered returns to class due to their small school size, and one teacher reported students returned to school to check their exercises with the teacher. Some

national respondents stated that schools that delivered remote learning were generally located in urban areas whereas schools that remained open were generally in rural or remote areas.

- In response to school closures different approaches were taken to support student learning. These included online learning, educational programs on television and radio, hard copy resources, and teachers advising students to revise and practise reading and writing.

> Ministry and UNICEF developed the Kampanya - the website. There were the textbooks, and Khan academy video (mainly mathematics) … Videos were in English. It was easy to translate but not so easy when teaching Lao. (National interviewee)
>
> MoES produced some teaching videos in core subjects including Lao language (3-4). Each day students were supposed to watch these on television, but not all families have TVs. (National interviewee)
>
> We advised parents to support children to study at home by reviewing what students have learned in their notebook. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
>
> The teacher would write the papers and students would come and collect them, and this was difficult because the students did not have regular learning. (National interviewee)
>
> But in some provinces, they [teachers] did a very good job. Even though they didn't have the opportunity to conduct online lessons, they went to the PESS and had a place to drop assignments (students/parents could collect materials). (National interviewee)

- Six Teachers, one PA and six national respondents reported that online learning was advised, but it was not considered successful due to a lack of access to technology for both the students and teachers. Students and teachers had limited access to ICT, particularly in rural areas, restricting engagement in remote learning.

> We were advised to teach online but we couldn't implement it because parents didn't have an internet connection and teachers didn't know how to teach online. (PA, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> For online learning, some parents do not have access online or compatible smart phone and if they do, they have to take it with them to work. Some classes had to be organised in the evening so they could access the device from their parents. Very difficult at that time. Student also not used to online-learning. When they look at the materials online, they didn't know it was for learning, they thought it was for their entertainment. (National interviewee)
>
> Did conduct online learning - can do that effectively with secondary schools, and for primary schools in the capital we have no problem. Teachers can do online learning. But for remote areas, it was challenging due to facilities available and capacity of teachers to use the online teaching and learning method. No computers, laptops, ICT skills. Very difficult for those teachers in those remote areas. (National interviewee)

- The main mode of lesson delivery identified by most of the teachers across the districts was offline work for students to complete at home. However, issues were identified with this for G1 students.

> Teacher could arrange lessons and homework for students who were in grades 3-5 because they were grown up and they could study on their own, but grade 1 students could not do that. They needed a lot of supports from teacher. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Teachers were supposed to assign homework to students to do at home, but it was so impossible. Every village was closed and not allowed to travel. (Principal, central province, cycle 3)

- A key theme to emerge from the participants was that student opportunities to learn were largely dependent on the capacity of their parents to support their learning at home. A number of teachers stated that they did not request parents to teach their children as they were aware that some parents had limited capacity due to their low levels of literacy. Some teachers encouraged parents to use older siblings in the family to support the teaching of their younger brothers or sisters in the home.

  I did not provide any suggestion to parents because most of them are illiterate and could not assist their child's learning at home. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

  Here it is different from children in the city who get enough support from their parents. Here, kids education is left with school and teachers. The reason parents don't support their kids are parents are illiterate, especially ethnic parents. Parents work hard on their farm and usually take their kids with them. (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

  In the city the students found it hard when there was no parent support… We would like to improve the infrastructure of ICT for the schools but also how to support parents to support their child in learning if COVID-19 were to come back - the role of parents is very important. (National interviewee)

- Participants were asked about what support was provided to parents and carers when helping their child during remote learning. Most teachers and principals reported that they did not provide additional support, beyond suggesting that they can help their child to either revise previously completed work or practise reading and writing. However, a few teachers and principals provided the parents with the learning materials and explicit teaching references to support them to teach their child at home.

  We gave parents a copy of the task paper for teaching their kids at home. The task was printed in A4 paper and handed it to parents to use as a teaching reference when they teach their kids at home during COVID lockdown. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

  Teacher explained each unit to the parents to help teach and give learning activities to the students. The parents could teach at home focusing on reading and writing. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- One challenge identified across all participants was the increase in students leaving school and not returning following COVID lockdowns. It was further reported by national respondents that students from non-Lao speaking backgrounds were more likely to drop out once school had returned. It was suggested that students were also likely to drop out if their family had experienced financial hardship as they would be required to work with their parents.

  Teachers worked harder to teach lessons and bring students to be back to school. Each grade in our school lost 2-3 students as they didn't come back after the COVID-19 break (Principal, southern province, cycle 3)

  We have also heard that there have been some students dropout because parents have needed to move to find new work and we're not sure if students have come back or they will come back. (National interviewee)

- Some teachers in the southern and central provinces expressed that they contacted parents and sought the support of village authorities to encourage students to return to school.

  When school resumed, we visited each household and talked to the parents to send their kids to school. Although working that hard, half of our students didn't come. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

> We had to get support from the village authority to ask parents to send their kids to school. Village chief also announced through village speak to encourage parents sending their kids to school. (Principal, southern province), cycle 3

- Two teachers noted that their students were anxious about engaging in school activities upon return, due to the fear of COVID-19 infection.

> The students were anxious to keep their distance. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Last year, only half of my students sat in exams. After a long break, they didn't come to school although the school and village authority worked together to get them to sit in the exam. They don't want to come to the exam because they were afraid of being COVID-19 infected. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Participants reported that upon the return to face-to-face teaching, the curriculum was shortened to 80 per cent of the new curriculum to allow teachers to focus on the essentials and allow for students to 'catch up". This also included re-teaching content that was taught prior to remote learning, as some teachers and principals reported students returning to school had forgotten previous Lao Language lessons.

> We shortened the lesson time, because there were only 26 weeks and we taught only important components, including mathematics and Lao language. (National interviewee)
>
> Only the district education office cut the unimportant topic in the Lao language in order to complete teaching on time. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)
>
> Of course, they could not teach all subjects. Teachers were asked to teach only two main subjects, Lao language and mathematics. A teaching timetable was given by Ministry of Education during the COVID period, to extend study for six months. Teachers had to teach even on Saturday. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

- Concern was expressed by a teacher and a PA in the southern province regarding students missing components of the Lao Language teaching programme.

> Grade 1 students did not complete their lessons, especially to learn to form words/vocab from alphabets and vowels. When they progressed to grade 2, it may be difficult because they did not learn some alphabets and vowels. (PA, central province, cycle 3)
>
> When we came back to school, we have no break to ensure the class is going on continuously and meet all required content. The challenge for me as a teacher is the new curriculum doesn't allow students to repeat grade. All students have to pass to G2. I wonder who can do this as it's not possible me to make 100% of my G1 students progress to G2. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)

- Participants were asked about what forms of support were provided in Lao language teaching during the remote learning period. Most teachers reported that they neither sought nor were provided with support from other teachers. However, three teachers in the northern province stated that in their school, teachers relied upon online text messaging with each other to discuss and exchange lesson plans and video links to teaching demonstrations.
- Most teachers stated that they did not receive support from their principal. Those that did explained that it was in the form of advice for teachers to support parents teaching their children at home, or to teach online. One teacher, however reported that their principal additionally worked with the district PA to find a solution for students returning to school, one grade at a time.
- The teachers in the northern and central provinces stated that they received support from their district PA, though the support was varied both across and within districts. Some teachers

reported that they received COVID-19 safety materials such as face masks and hand sanitisers, as well as advice to contact and support parents with the teaching of their children at home. Some teachers in the central province received advice to use the school closure time to revise and plan lessons to teach, and to create resources for teaching. All teachers in the south stated that they did not receive any support from their district PA.

Annex C: Student learning outcomes

Annex C provides analysis about student learning focused around the 2022 data collection.

Teacher and principals' perceptions of student learning

2022 Finding. Case study participants shared a range of opinions about changes to students' performance in Lao language learning, but these were mostly positive.

- Some participants referred to an improvement in students' understanding of lessons and attributed this to changes in content, pedagogies, and more time to teach each section in the teacher guide.
- Challenges to student learning reported by participants include students' readiness for transition to school, disruptions due to the pandemic, student ethnicity, and the extent to which teachers follow the new curriculum content and pedagogies.
- Some national interviewees cautioned against gauging the impact of the new curriculum on test results at this early stage in the reform and emphasised the importance of also looking at changes to student interaction and engagement. Many participants highlighted improvements in student participation, interest, and wellbeing.

Across the three cycles of data collection, participants have reported on their perceptions of student performance in Lao language. Interestingly, despite the evidence of generally low levels of student learning outcomes through the G1 tests administered in this Study, many participants reported they observed improvement in Lao language learning.

- A greater number of case study teachers in 2021 compared to 2019 reported they perceived their G1 students were progressing in Lao language as expected in the new curriculum. These perceptions were based on teachers' observations of their students' speaking, reading and writing skills, and assessment scores. Some teachers attributed this progress to the new curriculum. It is possible there is a gap between teachers' understanding of what progressing as expected means and the new curriculum expectations.
- Similar challenges to learning progress were raised by respondents in 2019 and 2021. These included: student absenteeism, underage, disability, lack of interest, ethnicity, and lack of parental support for student learning.

  > I don't think they meet the expected level due to students are ethnic students and they rely on teacher so much. At home, parents do not teach their kids. Parents often work long hours in the farm for a living and don't have time to teach their kids. (Principal, northern province, cycle 2)

- In 2022, the case study interviews also collected data from participants on how various strategies promoted in the new curriculum are impacting student learning. There continued to be a range of perspectives on changes to student academic outcomes, but these were mostly positive. Some teachers referred to an improvement in students' understanding of lessons and attributed this to changes in content, pedagogies, and more time to teach each section in the teacher guide.

  > If we compare to last many years, the students can understand better and deeply, recently because for teaching each chapter I have 10 hours. In the past I have only 2-3 hours… So we have

> much time to teach and emphasise the lesson and ensure students understand before moving to next chapter. (Teacher, southern province, cycle 3)
>
> I am more confident that the students understand lessons more because there are many topics, opportunity to speak, listen and actually learn by doing, and looking at pictures… Teacher guide has more detail and some lessons are repeatedly taught for many hours so they can focus on listening and speaking. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3)

- While many national interviewees reported they had not seen evidence to be able to comment on student outcomes, others reported they had observed improvement in academic outcomes.

> The changes I have seen the students can decode more clearly because we teach them how to differentiate and segment the sound, and the shape of the letter. (National interviewee)

- However, not all participants agreed. For example, one teacher reported that students did better with the former curriculum.

> If there were fewer topics, students will be able to progress. It's confusing. Students could learn in the old curriculum. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)

- In 2022, PAs also reported varying perspectives on how students are progressing. Three PAs reported they had seen clear improvement in academic outcomes, including one PA who noted that most of the ethnic students speak Lao now.

> [Results] have considerably improved. The students are progressing in reading, writing, listening and speaking. (PA, northern province, cycle 3)

- On the other hand, other PAs highlighted challenges related to both student and teacher factors, including students not being ready for transition to G1 due to lack of kindergarten/pre-school attendance, disruptions due to the pandemic, ethnicity, and teacher preparation and delivery of lessons. One PA (central) noted the results are not that different “because teachers do not use the whole requirements in the new curriculum to instruct”.
- While some participants referred to academic outcomes, many responses addressed other aspects of student learning related to student participation, interest, and student wellbeing. These are discussed in section X. Some national interviewees cautioned against gauging the impact of the new curriculum on test results and emphasised the importance of also looking at changes to student interaction and engagement.

> ...change takes time; need to be cautious; classroom interaction, class activities, student engagement etc more realistic to look at before results. (National interviewee)

Annex D: Student attitudes and dispositions towards learning

This Annex D provides further analysis on student attitudes and dispositions towards learning.

Student enjoyment and interest in learning

2022 Findings. The data indicates there have been positive shifts in student attitudes and dispositions towards learning with the introduction of the new curriculum.

- Participants perceive students are enjoying Lao language learning as the activities are fun, active and interactive, and the new curriculum resources are more attractive.
- Many participants made connections between the new pedagogies and improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement in learning, and wellbeing.
- Inclusive education strategies are contributing to student participation and wellbeing for a wider group of learners.

Over the course of the three cycles of data collection, data on student attitudes and dispositions towards learning has been captured via the questionnaires, case study interviews and classroom observations.

Data on student enjoyment was collected via the questionnaires and case study interviews. The data indicates that there is a widespread view that students are enjoying Lao lessons under the new curriculum as the activities are more fun, active and interactive, and the new resources are more attractive.

- Survey data on perceptions of student enjoyment of Lao language lessons in 2019 and 2021 report similar levels of enjoyment, with nearly all teachers reporting their students enjoyed Lao language lessons to a large or moderate extent. All case study respondents in 2021 responded G1 students enjoy or sometimes enjoy lessons. Respondents noted students enjoyed the pictures, stories and games in the new curriculum.
- Similar data was collected in the case study schools across the three years, where most teachers and principals responded their G1 students enjoy Lao language lessons (for example: 11 of 15 teachers in 2019, 15 in 2021, 14 in 2022).
- In 2022 participants noted students enjoyed Lao language lessons under the new curriculum because there are: more activities that students like including story-telling, games and singing; practical activities; greater variety of resources such as colourful pictures; and more student interaction. These factors are similar to those reported in 2021.

  > When we read a story there are some animal behaviours; we mimic the behaviours. The students enjoy too. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3)
  >
  > Children like to learn from pictures. Students understand and enjoy learning, and answer the lesson when the teacher asks. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).

- One teacher mentioned more games and activities “makes students active and desire to learn”.
- One teacher mentioned the limitations of traditional methods of teaching.

  > If you teach writing on the blackboard only or looking at textbook all the time, the students do not like this method as I have observed. (Teacher, central province, cycle 3).

- One principal noted that children feel less pressured.

> Students are not pressured, learning is fun. Students like less lessons and doing more activities. The old curriculum had a lot of content and student could not read and memorise all the learning activities. (Principal, central province, cycle 3).

A key part of the 2022 data collection has been to explore the impact of the new pedagogies on teaching and learning. Many participants made connections between the new pedagogies and improved levels of student participation, interest and engagement, and wellbeing.

- Some teachers and principals reported that students learn quickly and have better understanding when teachers use student-centred strategies. National interviewees observed that student participation in learning has increased through these strategies.
- Teachers highlighted that the use of pair/group work provides opportunities for students to exchange and discuss ideas and help one another, and they reported students are more confident, expressive and understanding better.
- Teachers highlighted how the practice of making connections to students' cultural heritage, local context and environment facilitates students' interest, understanding and learning.
- Some participants reported that the new curriculum has more activities that the students get involved in and more attractive resources.

> … giving opportunities to think. Storytelling, singing. These are different. The teaching in the new curriculum has more activities that the students are involved in. These help students understand. (Teacher, northern province, cycle 3).

> They [students] enjoy it because there are many pictures... They [are] excited to read and to ask each other. (Teacher, School G, cycle 2)

- It is suggested that inclusive education strategies are also contributing to student participation and wellbeing for a wider group of learners. Some PAs noted that under the former curriculum, there was less emphasis on supporting low achieving students and encouraging their participation.

> In old curriculum, if someone is good only that person would be asked and be promoted. Other students who are weak learners would not get opportunity to express their opinions. They would keep quiet throughout the class. Now everyone gets the opportunity to answer questions. (PA, central province, cycle 3)

National interviewees were asked in2022 about their observations and reflections on student attitudes and dispositions towards learning after the introduction of the new curriculum.

- Several national interviewees reported a perceived increase in student enjoyment, interest and engagement with learning. They attributed the new curriculum as conducive for creating a fun and interesting learning environment for the students.

> It [the new curriculum] makes it more exciting for the students. More eager. (National interviewee)

> The environment for learning is more fun. (National interviewee)

> Student-centred approach makes learning more interesting for students. (National interviewee)

- Seven national interviewees stated a perceived increase in student participation and interaction as a result of the new curriculum changes.

  I have observed that students are more interested and pay more attention than before. (National interviewee)

  …seeing more children interacting with teachers and peers. (National interviewee)

  Students have more participation, exchanging and students support each other more. (National interviewee)

- One interviewee suggested that the introduction of the 'active learning' pedagogy had moved students from being passive learners to active learners.

  … heard anecdotally, classrooms with students actively asking questions rather than just copying notes from the board. [There's a] reduction in passive learning (National interviewee)

Classroom environment

2022 Findings. The classroom observation data indicates that most teachers are creating 'compliant' classroom environments. Very few teachers were observed to have 'cooperative and supportive' classroom environments.

- In 2021 and 2022 researchers recorded less variation among the classroom environments they observed, when compared to 2019 observations.
- Fewer teachers were observed to have 'unruly' classroom environments since introduction of the new curriculum.
- Cooperative and supportive environments are more likely to indicate the presence of positive student attitudes and dispositions towards learning.

In case study schools, researchers were required to make an assessment of the classroom environment across the three cycles. Table D.1 below sets out examples of evidence that researchers might observe related to class environment and class interactions. Researchers were asked to select each evidence type observed, and to make an overall assessment as to whether the class was 'cooperative and supportive', 'compliant' or 'unruly'. Cooperative and supportive environments are more likely to indicate the presence of positive student attitudes and dispositions towards learning.

Table D.1: Classroom environment section of classroom observation instrument

Class is….	Evidence might include:
Cooperative and supportive of one another	○ Teachers and students work together harmoniously ○ Classroom atmosphere is joyful ○ Interactions are respectful, kind and encouraging ○ Most activity focused on learning
Compliant	○ Students do what the teacher says ○ Classroom atmosphere is complacent ○ Interactions are respectful but may not be kind or encouraging ○ Most activity focused on procedures and completing tasks
Unruly	○ Students do not do what the teacher says ○ Classroom atmosphere is disrupted ○ Interactions are disrespectful ○ Most activity focused on managing student behaviour

Table D.2 displays the researchers' assessment of the classroom environment for each lesson in 2022, and for those teachers who were part of the other rounds of data collection.

Table D.2: Classroom environment assessment made by researchers during classroom observations in cycle 1 (2019), cycle 2 (2021) and cycle 3 (2022)

Environment/cycle	A1#	B2	B4	C1	D2	E1	F1	F3	G2	H2	I1#	J1	J2	K1	L2
Cooperative and supportive/C1	••	••	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	••	•	-
Cooperative and supportive/C2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	••	••	••
Cooperative and supportive/C3	•	••	-	-	-	-	-	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Compliant/C1	-	-	-	-	-	••	•	-	-	-	•	•	-	•	-
Compliant/C2	••	••	••	•	••	••	••	-	••	••	••	••	-	-	-
Compliant/C3	•	-	••	-	••	••	•	•	••	••	••	••	••	••	••
Unruly/C1	-	-	-	••	-	-	•	-	-	-	•	•	-	-	-
Unruly/C2	-	-	-	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unruly/C3	-	-	-	••	-	-	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

- In 2019, researchers observed a wide range in classroom environments. In 2021, researchers recorded less variation among the classroom environments they observed, with the majority assessed as 'compliant'. This was also the case in 2022 where the majority of teachers were assessed as having 'compliant' classroom environments for both observations (10 of 15 teachers in 2022; 11 in 2021; 1 in 2019).

  During the lesson he tried hard to attract the attention of the students as some of them were naughty, which disturbed other students during the lesson. (Researcher, central province, cycle 2)

  Every single time, when held flash cards, she got attention from students by saying "turn your faces to me". (Researcher, southern province, cycle 2)

- While in 2021, three out of 15 teachers had 'cooperative and supportive' classroom environments for both observations (all in the south), only one teacher in 2022 was observed to have this. Two teachers were observed to have one 'cooperative and supportive' lesson and one 'compliant' lesson.

  When teacher asked for volunteer to write on the blackboard, many students were active and volunteered. Overall observation, this class was participatory, active and lively. (Researcher, southern province, cycle 2)

- In 2021, fewer teachers were assessed to have 'unruly' classroom environments than in 2019 and 2022. In 2022, two teachers had at least one 'unruly' lesson, compared to one in 2021 and four in 2019. Researchers made observations for the teacher who had consistent 'unruly' classes over the three cycles of data collection.

  Students do not have a textbook. When the teacher showed pictures from his textbook, students hardly see it. When they lost their focus on lesson, play with their friends, a student sits next to our table even sing a song. He hits a boy with a stick but many times threatening them when they don't listen to him. He rarely encourages students to study, be focus and listen to him. (Researcher, northern province, cycle 2)

  Teacher did not play anything before class. The teacher forced students to listen while teaching, but the students were not interested in what the teacher said. The majority of students talked during class. (Researcher, northern province, cycle 3)