

Improving the quality of training and fostering public officials in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in the new era

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Abstract: *Training and fostering the contingent of public officials and civil servants is a critical task that plays a decisive role in enhancing the quality of human resources across all nations, including the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This article examines the current training and fostering activities for public officials and civil servants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Based on the achievements and the existing shortcomings, the article proposes several solutions to improve the quality of these activities in the new phase.*

Keywords: *Training, fostering; public officials, civil servants; enhancing the quality; Lao People's Democratic Republic.*

1. Introduction

In a current knowledge-based economy, public officials and civil servants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic play a crucial role in establishing a modern and advanced administrative system, in state management, and in driving the country's socio-economic development (Manivong, 2021). Accordingly, this contingent must be equipped with the requisite knowledge to respond to the evolving demands of the era effectively. Furthermore, there is a need for meticulous preparation and selection to cultivate a cadre of officials and civil servants who are steadfast in their commitment to socialist ideology, thoroughly understand the

Party's policies and ideologies, and demonstrate solid political integrity, theoretical, legal, and professional expertise, as well as administrative skills and practical abilities, to successfully contribute to the nation's renewal.

2. The current situation of training and fostering public officials in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

First, regarding the qualifications of public officials:

Currently, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has a total of 176,151 public officials. Among these, 12,024 hold postgraduate degrees, 122,543 possess undergraduate or college degrees, 34,918 have intermediate-level qualifications, 662 hold elementary-level qualifications,

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and 604 lack formal qualifications. As of 2018, 120,797 public officials had obtained certificates in office computer skills. Each year, the Ministry of Home Affairs and provincial Departments of Home Affairs provide numerous training opportunities for public officials to enhance their office computing skills, supporting the ongoing modernization of civil service reform.

Regarding English proficiency, 81,141 public officials possess English language skills. Notably, between 2018 and 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs collaborated with the embassies of several English-speaking countries to offer English training courses for public officials nationwide, focusing on those at the central and ministerial levels. Concerning political theory qualifications, 18,081 public officials hold advanced degrees, 28,933 have intermediate degrees, and 49,768 possess elementary-level degrees.

Overall, the quality of public officials is steadily improving, with an increasing number holding postgraduate, undergraduate, or college degrees and a decreasing number of those with only intermediate or elementary levels, or no qualifications.

Second, regarding the infrastructure of training and fostering facilities:

Infrastructure is pivotal to the effectiveness of training facilities, as it not only provides the venue for activities but also significantly influences the quality of operations at these institutions. The more complete and modern the infrastructure, the better it accommodates work and recreational needs, thus alleviating physical strain on participants (Manivong, 2021). Consequently, in recent years, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, particularly at the local level, has actively pursued government programs and projects to enhance the infrastructure and equipment of training facilities. These improvements are intended to support educational programs aligned with the curriculum and textbook innovation roadmap, facilitating public officials' practical training.

Nonetheless, the infrastructure and equipment available for the training and fostering activities at these institutions are still limited, inadequate, and do not fully meet the requirements.

Third, regarding the quality of instructors:

Most instructors at domestic training and fostering facilities possess specialized knowledge, practical experience, and professional ethics and adhere to the regulations of training and fostering. They are generally evaluated positively for their appropriate conduct towards trainees, their responsibility in their roles, their understanding of the objectives and requirements of the training courses, and their ability to prepare and deliver lectures effectively. Additionally, they provide valuable advice and support for trainees' learning activities and utilize teaching aids proficiently. However, some instructors still exhibit limitations, particularly in state management knowledge and teaching methodologies. Moreover, while dedicated to their roles, part-time instructors have not received regular training in pedagogical skills and instructional techniques.

Fourth, regarding the curriculum and teaching materials:

Public officials' training and fostering materials are designed to align with each target group's specific functions and responsibilities. The curriculum and teaching materials are tailored to the duration of the training and different training systems. Efforts are underway to complete and standardize program content and core teaching materials, developing appropriate framework programs that address the requirements and content for various groups of state public officials.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of training and fostering for public officials in Lao People's Democratic Republic has been limited by several factors. The content, curriculum, formats, and methods of training and fostering often overlap and contain redundancies. The training is heavily theoretical, with insufficient practical application and work skills development. Additionally, mechanisms,

policies, and organizational structures for managing training and fostering have slowly evolved, and instructors' professional development and pedagogical skills need to be given more priority. As a result, even though public officials receive training and fostering, some continue to struggle with their duties, and their leadership, management, and problem-solving skills in practical situations still need to be improved, failing to meet the demands of the modern era.

3. Solutions to improve the quality of training and fostering of civil servants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in the new context

To enhance the quality of training and fostering for civil servants in Lao People's Democratic Republic and contribute to a clean, strong, professional, and modern civil service, the following solutions should be implemented:

Firstly, strengthening efforts to raise awareness and foster self-discipline in learning among civil servants. It is essential to enhance communication efforts to raise awareness about the importance of training and fostering among management agencies, heads of units, and individual civil servants. These stakeholders need to recognize their roles and responsibilities, understanding that as civil servants, their primary duty is to serve the public. Civil servants must stay updated and adapt proactively in the rapidly evolving environment. With increasing public expectations for direct communication through email and popular direct questioning methods, civil servants must be prepared to respond effectively and maintain high service standards.

Secondly, investing in infrastructure and training equipment for civil servants to enhance and foster the quality of their training. To improve the quality of training and fostering for civil servants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, investing in and building infrastructure and equipment for teaching and learning at academies, provincial and city schools, and district training and fostering centers is crucial. The State of Vietnam should

focus on investing in modern infrastructure and equipment to support staff, lecturers, and learners' teaching, learning, and scientific research activities, facilitating the application and use of positive exchange methods.

In practice, the space, environment, and conditions of infrastructure supporting teaching and research, such as conference halls, multifunctional classrooms, electronic libraries, projectors, and facilities for accommodation, recreation, and entertainment for learners, should be adequately considered. Training and fostering is an accumulation of experience and self-improvement to continue striving to complete tasks in the future.

In the short term, the State of Vietnam should invest in building and renovating libraries to be places of study, exchange, interaction, and information gathering to update and enhance civil servants' knowledge by participating in training and fostering courses. Significantly, the construction of open resource libraries is vital to allow civil servants to access the internet for information searching. With the development of science and technology, particularly information technology, the feasibility of building electronic and digital libraries in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is promising. Accordingly, training and fostering programs and materials will be uploaded to open resource libraries, allowing internet users (specifically civil servants with access account numbers) to conveniently and quickly use them.

Thirdly, restructuring training and fostering institutions. Central ministries and agencies must re-organize their training institutions, which function as career units under direct ministry management, to better align with each institution's specific functions and tasks (Thom, 2018). This may involve establishing new training centers in provinces, cities, or districts where they currently need to improve and develop class management and teaching regulations. Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined for training

and fostering institutions at both central and local levels. Additionally, it is essential to limit class sizes to effectively apply training and fostering methods.

Fourthly, improving the quality of the teaching staff. Lecturers at civil servant training and fostering institutions should possess appropriate professional qualifications, a minimum of five years of practical management experience, teaching skills, deep specialized knowledge, and rich practical research experience. Their teaching methods should align with current realities. Developing a cadre of adjunct lecturers and leading experts in various fields is essential to meet the high training demands and foster alignment with job requirements.

Once competent authorities approve, lecturers should enhance their practical research activities through initiatives such as the institutions' Project on sending lecturers for limited-term practical experience. This initiative will provide lecturers with valuable hands-on experience, allowing them to draw lessons and effectively contribute to the training and fostering of civil servants.

Establishing specific standards for full-time and adjunct lecturers involved in civil servant training and development is essential. Teaching staff should undergo "retraining" to meet professional standards, focusing on updating their knowledge in state management and adopting teaching methods tailored for civil servants. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that lecturers have qualifications comparable to international standards, gradually addressing the issue of lecturers who lack foundational knowledge or experience in drafting state administrative documents and may not be up-to-date with the latest amendments and additions to state management documentation.

Fifthly, innovating the methods and content of training and fostering programs. These programs should be closely aligned with real-world scenarios, addressing practical

issues that arise from performing official duties and enhancing administrative skills. These programs must ensure uniformity in the activities of administrative agencies, particularly in meeting the needs of people and businesses. Implementing mechanisms for pre-service training, mandatory annual in-service training, and fostering prior to appointments is crucial.

Government decrees and regulations on job positions and civil servant ranks must be strictly adhered to, clearly defining positions, structures, and standards for civil servant titles in each state agency. This will serve as a foundation for recruitment and appointment processes. Training and fostering plans should be developed based on these titles, standards, and job positions, ensuring they are specific, feasible, and practical and meet the standard requirements for civil servant titles and ranks.

The content of training and fostering must equip civil servants with the knowledge and skills required for their official duties, as outlined by the standards for leadership, management, and administrative ranks. It should also cover workplace culture, responsibilities, and ethics. For leadership and management roles, the content should focus on leadership science, including leadership skills and the art of leadership.

Attention should be given to integrating theoretical research with practical experiences, updating new policies, and addressing specific situations commonly encountered at the grassroots level. This will help improve civil servants' capacity and proficiency. Training and fostering programs should be developed based on job requirements, with clear objectives regarding the knowledge and skills learners must acquire upon completion. This includes updating information, supplementing modern knowledge, and developing professional or operational skills.

Civil servants should be able to select training and fostering programs that are relevant and practical for their job needs, thereby fostering positive and profound

learning attitudes. Curricula and materials for grassroots civil servant training should be continuously innovated and improved to align closely with the functions and tasks of each target group.

Investments should be made in developing appropriate curricula and teaching materials for various training periods and systems, avoiding duplication, and ensuring content remains engaging and efficient. Unifying program content and standardizing basic curricula are necessary steps. Framework programs should be developed according to the requirements and content of training and fostering for each group of state civil servants, and critical curricula should be standardized.

Training and fostering methods should be innovative, focusing on enhancing leadership and management capacity and aligning with civil servants' specific positions and responsibilities. Methods should be chosen based on the subject matter, utilizing advanced teaching techniques, modern tools, and equipment. Learning should emphasize research, problem-solving, and practical application, encouraging dialogue and the development of skills. After each lesson or topic, learners should engage in field research, surveys, and practical internships with guidance from lecturers. Reports should be submitted after these activities. The principle of innovation should link theory with practice, ensure scientific rigor, and promote active, creative, and independent thinking among learners.

Sixthly, supplementing and enhancing the standards, regimes, and policies for both full-time and adjunct lecturers. This involves building and improving the existing policies and regimes that support teaching staff engaged in the training and fostering of civil servants. Key areas include implementing policies from the Party and State concerning academic titles, honorary titles, allowances, salaries, promotions, and other incentives (Nghia & Hoang, 2019). Furthermore, improving incentive policies for state civil

servants participating in training courses is essential, ensuring they can entirely focus on their learning, enhance their qualifications, and make meaningful long-term contributions to the revolutionary cause.

Seventhly, building and improving the legal framework for training and fostering ethnic minority cadres. Specific policies must be developed to support and encourage ethnic minority cadres and civil servants to participate in training programs, enhancing their grassroots competencies. It is essential to create opportunities for working ethnic minority cadres to engage in training programs that will improve their professional skills. These policies, regulations, and regimes must be consistent and coherent, with continuous updates to ensure they suit the characteristics of each locality. This will ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of the policies.

Standards for ethnic minority cadres should be established to reflect the professional and operational requirements in each field of work, in line with regional development realities. This includes setting standards for recruitment, curriculum, teaching materials, and textbooks.

A strategy must be developed to build a team of ethnic minority cadres with the necessary qualifications to fulfill their duties. This strategy should involve methodological planning and the creation of a comprehensive training and fostering plan. Strengthening coordination among relevant departments, sectors, and local party committees throughout the training process, including planning, budgeting, and managing, is essential.

To cultivate a source of trained cadres, it is crucial to select and consult students from secondary schools and encourage them to pursue higher education. This development should start from high schools, vocational schools, and mass movements. Party committees and organizations must focus on identifying and introducing outstanding ethnic minority cadres into the Party.

The system of boarding schools for ethnic minorities should be consolidated, and the nomination-based enrollment policy should be rigorously implemented. The system of training centers for ethnic minority cadres should be expanded and developed to meet high standards and be aligned with international benchmarks. A team of instructors with solid teaching skills and capacities should be established and supported by appropriate policies and regimes.

Training methods should be diversified to suit the nature and characteristics of ethnic minority regions and the specific needs of ethnic minority cadres. Efforts should be made towards competency-based training, focusing on developing practical work skills and improving the efficiency of ethnic minority cadres.

Eighthly, innovating the funding mechanism for training and fostering cadres and civil servants to improve the effectiveness of these programs. In recent years, the training and fostering of public officials in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has received attention from the Party and State, with allocated funds for implementation. However, ministries, sectors, and localities have reported that the funds allocated are insufficient to meet the needs. Therefore, it is necessary to continue supplementing the budget for public officials' training and development while enhancing efforts to attract and diversify funding sources to promote practical training and fostering.

The financial management mechanism for public officials' training must be adapted to changes in the management model. This means that when management responsibilities are transferred to the heads of the agencies using public officials, those heads should determine the use of funds, including the purpose of use, the individuals selected for training, and the content of the training.

The use of funds also needs to be adjusted to allocate according to the need, quality, and effectiveness of the training. Allocating based on need first appears where, during sudden

tasks, the demand for training increases, and thus, the budget increases accordingly; in contrast, when work stabilizes, the budget may remain stable or decrease. Additionally, the training needs of public officials are diverse; there are cases where authorized training institutions cannot meet specific needs. In such cases, consideration should be given to allowing public officials to choose more reputable training institutions that can provide better, higher-quality services, even if they are more expensive. For the financial management mechanism to be effective, it is essential to focus on:

Innovating the method of allocating funds for public officials' training involves two key steps:

(1) It is essential to distinguish between standard-based and demand-based training funds. Standard-based training funds are fixed allocations provided to training institutions based on directives from the public officials' management agency. On the other hand, demand-based training funds should be allocated in a manner that holds both the units utilizing public officials and the public officials themselves accountable for using these funds effectively, with a direct focus on improving their working capacity;

(2) The utilization of demand-based training funds must adhere to a rigorous process, which includes identifying needs through a mandatory agreement between the public officials' users and the public officials themselves based on their tasks and performance throughout the year.

Ninthly, expanding international cooperation in the training and fostering of cadres and civil servants. This involves establishing a mechanism to engage competent and reputable foreign organizations and individuals to participate in teaching courses, particularly those focused on updating knowledge, skills, and experience to enhance international integration capabilities. Promoting and diversifying cooperation in

civil servant training is essential by combining domestic training efforts with overseas study and research opportunities. This includes sending civil servants to participate in international training programs and focusing on leadership, management, policy-making, and developing training instructors.

It is also important to collaborate with training institutions in developed countries on various activities, including training programs, instructor exchanges, material sharing, and academic collaborations. These efforts should aim for effective exchange, cooperation, and teaching collaborations, ensuring that training programs conducted abroad or with foreign participation are relevant, aligned with job requirements, and connected to socio-economic goals while accommodating the participants' conditions and capabilities.

Additionally, policies should be implemented to attract foreign instructors to teach at civil servant training institutions in Laos, incorporating advanced foreign teaching methods into training and scientific research activities.

4. Conclusion

To achieve optimal effectiveness in the training and fostering of civil servants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and to establish a robust cadre team capable of meeting the country's development objectives during its renewal period, it is imperative to implement a comprehensive and integrated approach. This approach should encompass a coordinated set of strategies designed to enhance the quality and impact of training programs. Furthermore, meticulous attention must be given to civil servants' evaluation, planning, appointment, and utilization. Annual assessments of post-training effectiveness should be conducted, supplemented by systematic surveys of the civil servant cohort to identify ongoing training and fostering needs. These evaluations will inform the strategic planning of cadres, ensuring that the training and fostering processes align with the evolving demands of

the public sector and contribute to the broader goals of national progress and renewal.

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