

Teaching English in Laos

“Angels for Children” is a German family foundation which was founded in 2003 by Ingrid Engel with the goal to support education and thus the future chances of children. Ingrid Engel, who passed away in 2011, formulated her vision as follows:

“All children in the world should get the same chances in life and opportunities for development, no matter where they were born. With our family foundation “Angels for Children” we want to contribute to getting closer to this goal by a few little steps.”

In 2004, these small steps began with the renovation of a primary school in Ban Sikeud, a small village on the outskirts of the Lao capital Vientiane. This developmental work was continuously expanded, and today Angels for Children supports two primary schools and one lower secondary school in Ban Sikeud and the neighbouring village Ban Phang Heng, i.e. 1,550 pupils and 60 teachers altogether. The foundation finances a part of the maintenance costs for the buildings, pays subsidies to the teachers’ salaries, provides medical and dental treatment for the pupils, purchases new teaching materials, and supports the three state schools in effective school management.

With the goal to also improve English lessons in the schools, the foundation started a small-scale volunteer programme with German school graduates and university students in 2012, to support the Lao English teachers’ lessons and train them to teach more effective lessons. In order to professionalize this programme, a cooperation between Angels for Children and the University of Education Karlsruhe was started in September 2015.

During the pilot phase of the joint project “Teaching English in Laos” from late October 2015 to January 2016, Prof. Dr. Isabel Martin (Director of the Institute of Multilingualism) established a systematic in-service teacher training programme for Lao English teachers in all three schools, assisted by a team of five university graduates who had studied English in her Department. Each volunteer would work together with two Lao English teachers to train them in modern didactics and methodology as well as English proficiency, to advise and co-teach in their English classes, offer English “Activities” in the afternoon, organize workshops for all teachers and write weekly teaching reports and articles for the project blog. On returning back home, they would hold an info-session for students and serve as mentors for the next team of volunteers.

The approach of “Teaching English in Laos” was soon thought to be suitable or even necessary not only for English learning at the three schools, but throughout the country.

Therefore, the infrastructure and programme of the Angels for Children “Model School” of Ban Sikeud is to serve as an example of how to improve teacher training, teaching techniques and material as well as curricula now. In order to achieve this, the project management works closely together with Lao state institutions in education such as the Ministry of Education and Sports, the National University of Laos, and the Research Institute for Educational Sciences.

Through systematic documentation and evaluation of the English lessons and of the teachers’ general methodological progress, recommendations can be fed into the Lao education system. For this, meetings and workshops are a regular feature between the project management, the volunteers, and the above-mentioned state institutions.

Together with the Lao German Technical College in Vientiane, the leading Vocational Training school in Laos and a cooperation partner of Angels for Children since 2013, the decision was made to include the College in the “Teaching English in Laos” programme. From September 2016 on, Prof. Martin and two additional volunteers from the University of Education Karlsruhe will therefore implement in-service teacher training here, too. Since the level of English is low at the College, too, the problems and tasks are the same as in the schools supported by Angels for Children.

Further information, photos, reports and documents can be found on the project blog:

www.thelaosexperience.com

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