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CHALLENGES TO POST-SECONDARY ARTS EDUCATION IN LAOS: EXAMINING TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE ARTS EDUCATION COLLEGE

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the challenges to teaching and learning in the Arts Education College of Laos. It involved document analysis, oral interviews and distribution of questionnaires to participants who were categorized into four groups: directors, heads of sections, lecturers and students. Data from the questionnaires was tabulated and analyzed along with that from the oral interviews. This was complemented by the analysis of documents, all of which aided in the data collection, analysis and discussion stages. The study found a number of factors that adversely affect teaching and learning at the institution. These range from insufficient human resource training through a loose quality assurance system to teaching and learning methods-related challenges. The study found that most of the lecturers do not use diverse teaching methods in class; they are overwhelmed by a high teacher-student ratio and limited classroom capacities, unavailability of resources and an overloaded curriculum among other challenges. The study noted that despite the many challenges, the Arts Education College is doing a great service to Laos as the only institution that trains teachers for the Arts in the country's primary and

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secondary schools. However, the findings suggest the need for improvement in various areas for an even more impactful service in the field of Arts Education in the country.

Keywords: Arts education; Curriculum; Fine arts; Laos; Teaching and learning

1. Introduction

With regards to the beginning of Arts Education, it is important to cite Efland (1990, p. 1) who argues that “as long as the arts have existed, artists, performers, and audience members have been educated for their roles”. However, formal Art Education globally is presented to date back to about a few centuries ago (Imonikebe, 2012). In the West, Lorenzo de Medici first opened his gardens for a school of painting and sculpture in 1488, laying a foundation for the first Italian Academy of Art (Stankiewicz, 2007). Subsequently, Florence’s *Accademia del Disegno* was established in 1563 as both a religious confraternity and an association for teaching painting, sculpture, and architecture (Boschloo, Hendrikse, Smit, & van der Sman, 1989). Osborne (1975 as cited in Imonikebe, 2012) notes that by 1790, there were over 100 academies that flourished in Europe, among which was the famed Royal Academy in London (Imonikebe, 2012). Traditionally, the role of the Art educator was at first largely to develop the technical and visual skills of the students who were taught to draw what they observed accurately and correctly (Lutfi, 2019). However, Lutfi notes that this has changed overtime as the educators’ role has continuously expanded to encompass the stimulation of the young mind, to encourage exploration of techniques and materials.

Contemporary Art Education centres on preparing pre-service teachers for a profession in Art Education (Okonkwo, 2010). Okonkwo notes that “through supplemental courses, pre-service teachers also may prepare for positions in museum education and other non-profit visual arts applications or for graduate study” (Okonkwo, 2010, p. 121). However, as equally argued by Okonkwo, it has to be noted that Arts Education is not restricted to formal education institutions as some professional artists also specialize in private or semi-private instruction in their own studios. Okonkwo (2010) further argues that if quality Art Education would be tended to so it succeeds, it would make enormous contribution to solving recurring problems of the society such as poverty alleviation and the sustainability of social and economic development of the nation via job creation. Quality Arts Education constitutes a rigorous standards-based work, highly qualified and licensed teachers, Arts supplies, materials and instruments among others (Israel, 2019). Consequently, an institution that lacks quality in its Arts Education would need to improve

and develop several factors in its teaching-learning environment such as providing further training for lecturers, developing and reviewing the curriculum, and developing standard infrastructure among others (Vongsa & Bovornkitti, 2014).

In Laos, the role of the Arts Education College in Arts Education cannot be overemphasized. However, its involvement has not been widely explored, with studies only focusing on a single aspect of the teaching and learning process at the college (Chaymueanwong & Bovornkitti, 2014; Vongsa & Bovornkitti, 2014). This underlies the need for a further exploration of the college's experiences by examining the general challenges that are faced in the teaching and learning process at the Arts Education College in Laos. Located in Vientiane Capital, the Arts Education College is the only institution of higher learning that trains Art Education teachers in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and presents itself as a complete Arts Education school. Established in 1982 as the Fine Arts School (FAS), the institution is under the Ministry of Education just like most of the institutions of higher learning in the country. In 1988, the FAS changed to the Fine Arts Teacher Training School under the direct responsibility of the Department of Teacher Training (DTT), Ministry of Education (MoE) (Ministry of Education, 1988). During this period, the institution offered under-diploma qualifications (certificates) to its students. In 2008, responsibility for the Fine Arts Teacher Training School was transferred from the Department of Teacher Training to the Department of Physical and Arts Education (DPAE) following a decree by the Minister of Education (Ministry of Education, 2008). Another decree in 2009 saw the change of the institute's name to the Arts Education College with the abbreviation AEC (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The Arts Education College, with its vision "To develop teaching-learning, work creativity, research and preserve national culture," contains two main programs: Music and Fine Arts. These programmes then contain a variety of subjects such as International Musical Instruments which include Piano, Guitar, Keyboard, Violin, Drums, Dancing, Singing etcetera and Lao Traditional Musical Instruments such as Saw (string), Khim (dulcimer), Khui (flute), Khaen, folksongs, etc. Fine Arts include Painting, Carving, Portraiture, LaiyLao Drawing, Sculpture, Molding, Picture prints etcetera. The bachelor's programme at the college contains a total of 46 courses. Out of these, 7 are offered as general courses,

12 are basic, 15 courses belong to Music, 12 courses fall under Fine Arts, and 4 are elective. On the other hand, the diploma programme for Music consists of 4 general courses, 13 basic courses, and 13 possible majors. For Fine Arts, the diploma programme consists of 4 general courses, 13 basic courses, 15 possible majors, and 4 elective courses.

To be enrolled into the Arts Education College, one must have successfully completed secondary school education. Student admission into the Arts Education College is generated through two ways: provision of quotas to different provinces and entrance examinations. Before 2017, government offered a maximum of 20 scholarships shared among potential candidates from the country's 17 provinces. Those who were awarded the scholarships were enrolled into the Arts Education College without having to sit for entrance examinations. The rest sat for entrance examinations to secure a place. From 2018 however, government reduced the number of scholarship awardees to 8 from the various provinces where preference is given to provinces that express need for Arts teachers. Then, there are 8 other scholarships as well that are awarded to the top 8 performers in the college's entrance examinations. The study duration varies according to the program of study. Under-diploma (certificate) students study for three years, diploma students for two years while bachelors' students study for four years. The difference in length between diploma and under-diploma students comes from the fact that diploma students are those who successfully completed upper secondary education while under-diploma students must have successfully finished lower secondary education as a pre-requisite. All students at each level learn the same basic courses before proceeding to various areas of specialization as they move from one level to another.

In the 2019/2020 academic year, a total of 98 students were enrolled in the college alone. This included 52 bachelor's students and 46 diploma students. As of June 2020, there were 379 students enrolled at the college. As for staff, the total number of lecturers for both diploma (and certificate) and degree programmes stands at 53 while that of administrative staff is 12. Since there is only one college for Arts Education in the country, most of the lecturers graduated from the same Arts Education College at the three levels of education offered at the institution: certificate, diploma and bachelor's degree. Only 3 out of the 53 lecturers obtained their bachelor's degrees outside Lao PDR.

The college has 14 lecturers who studied outside the country for their master's studies. This means when combined, a total of 17 lecturers obtained at least one of their qualifications from universities/colleges outside Lao PDR. All the lecturers who studied abroad were supported by the scholarship granting authorities of their host countries.

The college, as the only institute that trains Arts teachers in the country, has produced a lot of teachers since its formation. As of 2015, there were a total of 2,743 Arts teachers across the country (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2015). Once they graduate, the teachers are deployed to teach in various schools across the country. According to the recruitment policy, holders of bachelor's degrees from the Arts Education College are supposed to teach in upper secondary schools. Diploma graduates teach in Lower Secondary School, while under-diploma (certificate) graduates teach in primary schools. However, in some provinces, the lack of teachers forces most of the teachers to teach at all levels regardless of their qualifications.

A combination of increased demand for Arts teachers in public and private schools throughout the provinces in the country and the lack of institutions to train more teachers leave the College of Arts Education with a lot of challenges. These range from availability of resources through curricular content to teacher qualifications and professional development. However, there has not been any comprehensive study on the general challenges to teaching and learning as encountered by the institution. The closest that any known study has come to this is Chaymueanwong and Bovornkitti (2014)'s inquiry on the perspectives of teachers and students in the Art Education Program pertaining to development ideas as well as Vongsa and Bovornkitti (2014) in their exploration of instructional management in painting courses. Against this background, the study sets out to investigate the challenges encountered in post-secondary Arts Education in the country in relation to teaching and learning at the Arts Education College.

2. Objectives

The study's main objective was to investigate the challenges encountered in teaching and learning in post-secondary Arts Education at the Arts Education College in Laos. To attain the main objective, the study had a number of specific objectives viz:

(i) to evaluate the modalities of assessment and evaluation at the Arts Education College; (ii) to investigate the challenges affecting quality in the teaching and learning process at the Arts Education College; and (iii) to examine the Arts Education curriculum's effectiveness.

3. Scope of the study

The study was conducted at the Arts Education College in Vientiane, Laos. The collection of data covered a period of five (5) months, from September 2018 to January 2019. While the study's main limitation was the failure to interview other equally important stakeholders from the Ministry of Education due to time constraints and the challenges of bureaucracy, its delimitation was insufficient time and material resources to extensively engage with participants in more in-depth interviews for generation of even more comprehensive and solid data. This meant although the researchers were successful in generating relevant data that led to logical conclusions, the study did not grasp all important viewpoints in the provision of Arts Education by missing out on the relevant officials from the Ministry of Education.

4. Methodology

This study was conducted in the Arts Education College in Laos. The college is the only institution in the country that trains teachers of the Arts, making it an inevitable target. The research used mixed methods to ensure reliability. Data collection spanned from September 2018 to January 2019. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the data collection. In the qualitative method, the study relied on oral interviews and document analysis. In addition to the interviews and document analysis, questionnaires were also used to collect the data. The oral interviews were used to get a deeper understanding of the challenges facing quality of teaching and learning at the Arts Education College from the directors and heads of sections' perspectives. For the quantitative methods, the questionnaires were used to get perspectives from a wider variety of participants for a justified generalization of the findings. Four categories of respondents were interviewed/targeted with questionnaires: 3 Directors, 5 Heads of Section, 50 lecturers, and 150 students from the college. In total the sample population comprised 208 people. The research

deployed both purposive and convenience sampling. The earlier was used to identify the heads of section because through purposive sampling the researchers had the opportunity to make a deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possessed (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The researchers used convenience sampling because it was easier to access respondents as their choice was based on the respondents' availability. It was especially used in identifying both the lecturers and students who participated as respondents to the questionnaires, which were distributed to final year students at the diploma level and from third to fourth year at the bachelor's level respectively.

In both the interviews and the questionnaire, a number of relevant questions were asked to the participants. These sought to generate data on the perspectives of the directors, section heads, the lecturers and the students towards challenges that are encountered in the teaching and learning processes at the Arts Education College. Questions from both the interviews and the questionnaires guide the presentation and discussion of the study's findings in the subsequent sections.

5. Outputs and benefits

Findings from the study stand to help the Arts Education College in creating a pathway towards finding solutions to the challenges faced at the institution. This is the case since the study provides clear insights into the main challenges acting as barriers to effective teaching and learning at the Arts Education College. Thus, the study adds to the available literature on critical areas of teaching and learning that require improvement at the college. For example, the study will act as part of any guiding documents relevant in informing policy making on the need to reform the curriculum of the Arts Education College where/when necessary. This will help improve the knowledge and skills acquired by students who train in the college.

6. Results

Exploring the quality of teaching and learning in the Arts Education College was a crucial aspect of the study. Opinions from various stakeholders such as the section directors, heads of section, the lecturers and the students were asked for in a bid to

understand factors that pose as challenges to the teaching and learning at the institution. The focus of the questionnaires and interviews here were on the qualifications of the lecturers, evaluation and assessment of the lecturers' work, and pedagogical factors.

6.1 Academic qualifications for staff

As part of investigating the quality of teaching and learning that occurs at the college, the researchers wanted to understand better the quality of the lecturers in terms of their qualifications considering that they are the vehicles of education. This was important because the lecturers are the ones who carry out the teaching activities and transmit the necessary knowledge to the Arts Education students in the classroom. The question on their qualifications and whether they were satisfying was asked to the directors since they are responsible for recruitment of human resource and ensuring that quality is adhered to at the institution. Table 1 below is a representation of the lecturers' academic qualifications as per the directors' responses:

1) Education qualification of lecturers

Table 1 Education qualification of lecturers (Galafa & Ngoimane, 2019)

	Qualification	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	Certificate /Under graduate	4	8.0
	Diploma	6	12.0
	Bachelor	31	62.0
	Master	9	18.0
	Other (Specify)	None	
	Total	50	100.0

Data in table 1 shows that most of the lecturers in the Arts Education College hold a bachelor's degree (31 of them, representing 62.0%), 9 of them (18.0%) have a master's degree, 6 of them (12.0%) have diplomas and 4 (8.0%) hold a mere certificate. The results indicate that most of the lecturers are bachelor's degree holders.

The directors (one main director and two deputies) were positive about the qualifications, noting that although the highest qualified lecturers possessed a master's degree, the fact that most of them had upgraded their studies to bachelor's degrees from their previous programmes was a sign that there is progress at the institution. The main director mentioned the fact that most of the lecturers have recently upgraded from both national and international institutions of higher learning, adding that it was good for the college's future. "Presently, most of our teachers completed their bachelor's degree and some of them graduated from abroad with bachelors and master's degrees, we are happy with their qualifications". However, the directors noted that there was still a problem as some of these lecturers have not pursued their further studies in their areas of specialization, which sometimes makes their qualifications not very helpful in terms of practicality of their knowledge transmission to students at the college.

6.2 Evaluation and assessment

Another critical area which the study also targeted was the evaluation and assessment section of the college where the Head of Section was asked questions in relation to the concerned topic. Several questions in relation to evaluation and assessment were asked to the lecturers as well, who indicated that there are situations where assessment, evaluation and peer reviews happen as a way of checking the quality of education at the college. To begin with, the study enquired on how often the college holds peer reviews and discusses the lecturers' teaching methods as a means of ensuring continued improvement. The responses can be observed in table 2 below:

2) How often is there a peer review and discussion of your teaching methods in the institution per semester?

Table 2 The peer review and discussion of lecturers' teaching methods in the institution (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Frequency	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	1-2 times	20	40.0
	More than 4 times	1	2.0
	None	29	58.0
	Total	50	100.0

Data in table 2 above shows that most of the lecturers, 29 (58.0%) said there had never been a peer review and discussion of their teaching methods, 20 (40.0%) said their methods had been discussed and reviewed 1-2 times, while 1 (2.0%) said he had experienced the discussions and reviews more than 4 times per semester.

In relation to this, the study then sought to find out from the lecturers the frequency of assessment and evaluation of their work by the college through students. The responses are presented in table 3 below:

3) How many times do students assess and evaluate you per semester?

Table 3 Lecturers' assessment and evaluation by their students (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Frequency	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	1-2 times	48	96.0
	None	2	4.0
	Total	50	100.0

The data in table 3 above shows that 48 of the lecturers (96.0%) were assessed by their students 1-2 times per semester while 2 (4%) said they had never been assessed by their students. This shows that a majority of them are assessed by students every semester, at least twice.

Another important aspect of the assessment and evaluation was on how often the internal assessment committee assessed and evaluated the lecturers' work. The lecturers' responses are presented in table 4 below:

4) How many times is your work subjected to internal assessment and evaluation per semester?

Table 4 Lecturers' internal assessment and evaluation (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Frequency	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	1-2 times	43	86.0
	None	7	14.0
	Total	50	100.0

The data in table 4 above shows that most of the lecturers (43, representing 86.0% of the interviewed lecturers) were assessed and evaluated 1-2 times per semester by the internal assessment and evaluation committee. However, 7 of them (14.0%) said they had never been assessed or evaluated by the committee.

In relation to this, with regards to external assessment and evaluation, the study obtained the following results from the questionnaire administered to lecturers:

5) How many times is your work subjected to external assessment and evaluation per semester?

Table 5 External assessment and evaluation per semester (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Frequency	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	1-2 times	29	58.0
	None	21	42.0
	Total	50	100.0

The data in table 5 above shows that the majority of lecturers (29 representing 58% of the respondents) were assessed and evaluated by external evaluators 1-2 times per semester. 21 of the lecturers had never been evaluated by an external evaluation team.

In relation to this, the study also tried to find out how the assessment and evaluation at present affects the quality of teaching and learning at the college. This question brought out matters of relevance of the assessment and evaluation in terms of both findings and the resulting feedback that is given to the lecturers. With reference to the 2017-2018 assessment and evaluation, one section head stated that lecturers were assessed by fellow lecturers (peer assessment) as well as students for a balanced feedback. Some lecturers were found to be wanting at time management and lacked confidence in lesson delivery. Following the feedback, he noted that the lecturers have started working on their weaknesses. "However, this is only the first step because it is only teacher assessment, we need to evaluate teachers in each phase and evaluate in many factors that affect our education quality like curriculum, materials, facilities, and environment. We can't go to the next steps of improvement unless we have identified the factors".

In addition to how the assessment and evaluation is currently affecting the quality of education at the Arts Education College, the study also enquired about challenges hindering the assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning at the institution to which the Head of Section said there were a lot. Among others, he said the Arts Education College is still working on improvement of the tools and documents for assessment and that staff was failing to organize their work clearly. The other big challenge, as bemoaned by the evaluation and assessment section of the college, was that the Arts Education College does not have anyone who is a specialist in analysis and evaluation at present, so the college is currently facing huge challenges in monitoring and evaluation.

6.3 Factors in the teaching and learning process that affect quality

When lecturers at the college were asked what they considered as the main challenges that learners encounter in learning which in the long run affect the quality of education at the institution, the following were the responses:

6) What are some of the students' challenges that affect teaching and learning quality? (Respondents were permitted to choose more than one challenge)

Table 6 Challenges that affect the teaching and learning quality (Galafa & Ngoimane, 2019)

Challenges		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Learning difficulties	26	16.8%
	Too many courses	33	21.3%
	Demotivation	21	13.5%
	Irrelevant subject	4	2.6%
	Insufficient material	34	21.9%
	insufficient lecture rooms	37	23.9%
	Others		
	Total	155	100.0%

The data in table 6 above shows that a majority of the participants with 37 responses (23.9%) said that the students' challenges that affect the teaching and learning quality were learning difficulties and insufficient lecture rooms. This was followed by 34 (21.9%) who indicated that insufficient material was the main challenge affecting learners. 33 of the responses (21.3%) indicated that there were too many courses, 26 (16.8%) showed concern over learning difficulties, 21 (13.5%) pointed towards demotivation, 20 (12.9%) made reference to insufficient materials while 4 (2.6%) pointed to the irrelevance of subjects as affecting the students with regards to the quality of learning from the lecturers' perspectives.

In relation to this, Head of Students Affairs Section noted that there are variations in the learning ability amongst the students due to several other reasons beyond the college's control. "We recognize that most of our students are from different provinces, and backgrounds, many of them are from very poor families who have never left their parents before". He explained that this was a challenge because it brought about concern on the social aspect of adapting to a completely new life at the college. Some of the students are from an ethnic group that can only communicate in their own language so language barrier is also a problem.

Further, based on their educational results, the Head of the Students Affairs Section noted that the following were some of the main issues that proved challenging: the students find it hard to understand some lessons because they lack a desired prerequisite knowledge, too many subjects to learn, limited time to do their assignments, insufficient educational materials, insufficient classrooms, and a low quality of library resulting into limited information and unproductive research attempts.

The challenges that were listed by the lecturers and other participants in the study were also the ones that students bemoaned as hindering the learning environment, with lack of learning resources and poor infrastructure appearing to be a major concern.

6.4 The curriculum

Understanding that the curriculum also impacts greatly on the teaching and learning process in terms of content and pedagogy, the study sought perspectives from the participants on its effectiveness. From the students that were interviewed through the questionnaire, only 10 wrote down recommendations for improvement of the quality at the institution. However, 9 of them (a remarkable 90%) suggested a clear separation of the two subjects, with majors concentrating on either of the two but not both, citing mastery of content and skills as the main reason. This also coincides with the reality of passion where most of the students are not passionate about both subjects. Similarly, 70% of the lecturers strongly agreed to the separation and 28% agreed in moderate terms, with only 2% of the interviewees disagreeing. The data is presented in Table 7 below.

7) There should be separation of majors between Fine Arts and Music

Table 7 There should be separation of majors between Fine Arts and Music (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Response	Lecturers	Percentage
Valid	Disagree	1	2.0
	Agree	14	28.0
	Strongly agree	35	70.0
	Total	50	100.0

6.5 The learning environment

The environment in which learning takes place is also a major determinant of the success or failure of the teaching and learning processes. Cognizant of this, the study sought opinions from students on how they perceived their learning environment. The questionnaire results showed that a majority of the students bemoan the environment as not being conducive for learning. This can be observed from the data in the table below:

8) Does the Arts Education College have a good learning environment?

Table 8 Learning environment of the Arts Education College (Galafa & Ngoimanee, 2019)

	Response	Students	Percent
Valid	Undecided	15	10.0
	No	93	62.0
	Yes	42	28.0
	Total	150	100.0

As can be noted, the data in the table shows that most students, 93 of the respondents (87.3%), bemoan the environment as not conducive for learning.

7. Conclusion and discussion

7.1 Discussion of findings

As it can be noted, the study generated data that pointed to a number of challenges that are encountered in the teaching and learning of Arts Education at the Arts Education College in Vientiane, Laos. Most of these challenges appear to be cross-cutting with those encountered in other institutions (Okonkwo, 2010; Siharath, 2010; ASEAN University Network, 2016).

The first main challenge from the data collected is the presence of limited learning space. As observed, the students, lecturers, and the directors complained about the lack of sufficient classrooms for learning as well as the unavailability of learning space. Even with the limited classrooms that are available, they are mostly not in good condition when compared to the number of students that they have to hold per course. Interestingly, there is a three-story building that has been under construction since 2014. It is only the first floor that is relatively completed and some classes have been expanded to this new building.

The other problem is the lack of library. The current teaching and learning resources are placed in a temporary library that does not have enough capacity for students. This library is even located in the old building, which is at times faced with problems of excessive water flow in the rainy season. In addition to this, the resources that are stored in the library are not sufficient and mostly not directly related to Arts Education.

Further, there is no internet in the classrooms and library. The only places where there is internet connection are the offices, but even there the connection is too slow. This affects the search for information, and by extension is detrimental to research efforts by both students and lecturers at the college.

The study also found that the environment is generally not conducive for learning. Due to the lack of special facilities for the various Arts courses, there is always confusion from noise in the other classes when lessons are in progress. This mostly causes problems of learning when for example two classes with very different subjects are close to each other, but one produces louder sounds through practice. A good example is when there is a class of Music next to a class of Pedagogy.

The final problem that takes its toll on the teaching and learning in the Arts Education College relates to the institution's curriculum deficiencies. This problem is corroborated in a study on the status of higher education by Siharath (2010) who notes that some institutions in the country boast of curriculums that to a certain extent can be considered irrelevant. As argued by Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland and Palmer (2009), making learning relevant is a key element that ensures quality in the pedagogy of Arts Education. The curriculum for the bachelor's programme at the college includes both Fine Arts and Music (four years). Most of the lecturers are not contented with the students being forced to study both Fine Arts and Music. This is because some students are passionate about one of the two, and they find it challenging to enroll in both courses. This is strongly supported by evidence from the data collected in the questionnaire that was distributed to the lecturers and the students (see Table 7).

The idea of separation of the two courses has been in existence at the institution for a long time. The separation would mean producing students who are good in that one special subject, be it Fine Arts or Music. This has been put forward to the Ministry of Education on several occasions before but the Ministry has always rejected the idea citing funding as the main problem. Separation of the two implies increased funding to the Arts Education College for students' allowances. For the college, prospects of an increased funding come in light with the need for more students to major in the different subjects, which in turn also increases the need for general levels of admission into the college. This would strain the budgetary allocation by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) through which government funds the college. Every academic year, an allocation of LAK900million only (about USD100 000) goes to the Arts Education College. Further, the MoES argues that it is currently convenient to have students studying both Fine Arts and Music at the college as it serves the education system better since when these students graduate as teachers into the various schools across the country, they are able to teach both subjects, rendering themselves very important human resource.

As a result, the current curriculum has earned a pejorative name alluding to its shortfalls. It is not uncommon to hear staff members referring to it as the ‘Duck Curriculum’. The notion of a curriculum with deficiencies as a duck rises from the idea that much as a duck can swim, run and fly, it is unable to do all these three tasks fast enough. The metaphor works well because although the students can study and upon graduating teach both Music and Fine Arts, they often fail to demonstrate mastery of either of the two subjects.

Still on the curriculum, concerns of time allocation to the various courses and programmes also arose. The most worrying is the diploma where most of the students feel that two years is not long enough when measured in line with the content of the curriculum. This is also a general feeling amongst the academic staff at the institution. At least, if it was extended to three years because as a skills-oriented subject, the more one practices, the more one becomes better. Ironically, the diploma programme replaced a three-year long certificate programme that was being offered until 2017. This proves the need for the extension, as that was probably the logic behind the long period accorded to the certificate.

Another pertinent issue that was raised by both students and lecturers concerning the curriculum was the concept of general subjects. As an institute for Arts Education, Arts learning was supposed to be at the centre stage. However, as it transpired, especially through interviews, general subjects also consume a lot of time. This is counterproductive in the same sense that the students and lecturers complained about the programmes forcing students to enroll in both Music and Fine Arts. General subjects that are offered at the college include Pedagogy, Psychology, Politics, Philosophy, Computer, English, Lao Culture, Lao Language, Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Administration. Although the curriculum is already overloaded as this, some of the subjects are unnecessarily maintained for a longer duration. For example, English and Computer Studies are offered for four complete semesters. Much as they are important, their relevance cannot surpass the need to allocate more time to the Arts subjects such as Fine Arts and Music, which form the core of the college.

7.2 Solutions to the challenges

With the prevalence of all the challenges as noted by lecturers and students, the study solicited views on possible solutions from the participants. The lecturers at the Arts Education College recommended that the curriculum must be updated to be in line with the needs of students in terms of both passion and time allocation to the courses. In line with this, they argued for a clear separation of Fine Arts and Music majors for the college's bachelor's programme. Further, the lecturers also argued for a regular internal and external evaluation and assessment. This would help them improve tremendously in their teaching methodologies. In relation to this, the lecturers called for the need for all staff in the academic section to have high experience and ability, arguing academic activities/works ought to be a first priority of the college. This then called for the Arts Education College to lobby for budgetary allocation for further education of its lecturers and generation of funds for improved infrastructure, teaching and learning resources as well as other projects that require financing.

The students made a number of important suggestions which the researchers agreed with as well. First, as a follow up of their complaints about a heavily loaded curriculum, the students argued that general subjects must be limited in terms of course durations. This would in turn create more time for Arts subjects which are the core of the college. Second, the students argued that it was important to have a separation of subjects of major between Music and Fine Arts in the bachelor's programme. Students who want to major Music only and those who want to major Fine Arts must be allowed to do such without the need to combine the two under one degree. Third, the students saw it important that the college must add more teaching and learning materials particularly in a music course. This would in turn help in facilitating the learning process because Music, like many of the Arts courses, requires both theory and practice – and the practice part needs sufficient music instruments. In relation to this, the students also called for the need of facilities such as the internet, air condition or fan, projector, and other necessary materials to be enough and available in classrooms. Lastly, the students also argued that

lecturers have to be on time or punctual, and in the time of teaching they should have more practical activities than a simple lecture because art is a skills-subject and the focus should therefore be on learning by doing not through mere theory.

As it can be observed, the solutions that the lecturers and students suggested are complementing each other, pointing to similar perception of the challenges that are encountered at the institution. The relevance of considering these solutions in any possible step that relevant authorities might take in addressing the challenges rests in the fact that implementation would not face resistance. This is because the solutions are suggestions from the very stakeholders who would be instrumental in the final implementation of most of the solutions. This is different from a top-bottom approach where solutions to problems are arrived at by authorities without enough consultation with those responsible for the actual implementation – the administration and lecturers in this instance. Thus, any solutions that will include those suggested by the participants in this study stand a high chance of successful implementation.

7.3 Conclusion

The Arts Education College in Vientiane offers a lot of insights on the status of post-secondary Arts Education in Laos. As it has been discussed, the institution is the only college that trains Arts Education teachers for both primary and secondary schools in the country. This implies that discourses on Arts Education in the country cannot progress without mention of the college. As such, the challenges that are encountered in the teaching and learning of the Arts at the college are a setback to the advancement of Arts Education in the country as a whole. It is therefore important that the relevant authorities look into the challenges that were cited by the directors, the heads of sections, the lecturers and the students as factors that hinder teaching and learning at the college. It is also important to look at some of the possible solutions suggested by these two stakeholders as this will lead to successful and improved teaching and learning at the institution.

8. Suggestion

The findings of the study offer an opportunity for improvement in areas such as the challenges that have been found to have their roots in both administrative and financial loopholes. The same goes to the challenges raised by both teachers and students on several matters such as the teaching methodology among others. Therefore, there is need for a serious review of the challenges and plans to deal with those that can be handled at institutional level, and where necessary, call for intervention from relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education and Sports. Further, for any future studies, it would be beneficial to the college for researchers to conduct a detailed study on how graduates and interns from the college perform once they are dispatched to various schools to teach. Findings from such a study would prove critical on what requires to be improved at the college as well.

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