

Teaching English in Laos

Established in 2003 on behalf of Ingrid Engel, Angels for Children is a German foundation which, aims to support education and thus the future prospects of children. Ingrid Engel, who passed away in 2011, put her matter into words:

“All children in the world – no matter where they were born - should get the same chances in life and opportunities for development. With our family foundation “Angels for Children” we want to reach this goal step by step.”

By renovating a primary school in Ban Sikeud, a small village on the outskirts of the Lao capital Vientiane, these small steps began in 2004. In the meantime, the support has been enlarged, Angels for Children currently supports two primary schools and one lower secondary school in Ban Sikeud and the neighboring Ban Phang Heng, including 1,550 students and 60 teachers. The foundation finances parts of the maintenance costs for the buildings, purchases new teaching materials, pays subsidies to the teachers' salaries, provides medical treatment for the students and supports the schools in creating a more effective school management. With the goal to also improve English lessons at the schools, the foundation started a small-scale volunteer program with German university students in 2012, to support the Lao English teachers' lessons and train them to achieve more effective lessons. In order to professionalize this program, the cooperation between Angels for Children and the University of Education Karlsruhe started in September 2015. During the pilot phase of the new project “Teaching English in Laos” from late October 2015 to January 2016, Prof. Dr. Isabel Martin and a team of five alumni from the University of Karlsruhe established a systematic in-service teacher training program for Lao English teachers in all three schools. Each volunteer works together with two Lao English teachers to train them in modern didactics and methodology. The volunteers accompany the Lao English classes and give the teachers feedback on implementing the new educational approaches and methods. Furthermore they organize workshops for all teachers, lead English *activities* for the students in the afternoon and write weekly reports and reports for the project blog.

The approach of “Teaching English in Laos” was quickly enlarged, to not only support English education in the three schools, but also throughout the whole country. The work in the model schools of Angels for Children should serve as an example, how to improve teaching techniques, material, teacher training and curricula. For this purpose, the project management of “Teaching English in Laos” works closely together with Lao state institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Sports, the National University of Laos and the Research Institute for Educational Sciences.

The systematic evaluation of Lao English lessons provides the opportunity to set examples for the Lao education system on, how to improve in the long-term. Due to this approach, meetings and joint workshops between the project management, volunteers and the state institutions mentioned above take place on a regularly basis.

Together with the Lao German Technical College in Vientiane, which is the leading vocational training school in Laos and has been a cooperation partner of Angels for Children since 2013, the decision was made to also extend the project “Teaching English in Laos” to this school. From September 2016 on, two volunteers from the University of Education Karlsruhe will do in-service teacher trainings for vocational trainers in English. Since the trainers’ and trainees’ level of spoken English is low as well, the main problems and tasks there will be similar to the experiences in the schools to be 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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