Non-State Providers as Complementary Partners in Achieving EFA: The Mon Ethnic Minority Education System of Myanmar

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万人のための教育を目指した非国家教育提供者の補助的役割
―モン少数民族の教育システムを事例に―

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Abstract

The 2010 Education for All（EFA）Global Monitoring Report pointed out the failure of governments in reaching out to marginalised groups of people, with the international educational development agenda traditionally placing a strong focus on the role of states as the main providers of education. In looking at the alternative education system developed by the Mon ethnic minority in response to perceived failure of the State in fulfilling the social contract of delivering education services, this study questions how alternative education systems can complement state provision in achieving EFA. Structured interviews and observations were conducted at a Post-10 training facility of the Mon Education System (MES) located along the Thai-Burma border.

Qualitative empirical findings in this research have revealed that not only does MES successfully increase the extent of access to education and allow the promotion and practice of ethnic language and culture at a lower fee, it also provides a good quality education through support from international actors. Through including the Burmese language at higher grades of Mon national schools, MES also leaves an avenue for its people to reintegrate into the Myanmar's formal education system.

However, graduates are not recognised by the formal education system and employers, which hinders them from participating in mainstream society. Despite support from non-state actors, MES remains significantly under-resourced and under-financed, highlighting the high dependence on foreign donors and the unsustainable nature of such funding.

As such, this research argues that states should also partner with community-organised provisions of education and support them in developing their own quality education systems. By meeting the unique needs of specific groups while remaining relevant to the wider society, these educations systems become complementary education systems toward achieving EFA goals in highly ethnic-diverse countries.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The recent 2010 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report pointed out the failure of governments in reaching out to marginalised groups of people and denying them their right to education, thus highlighting the need for governments to address the root causes of marginalisation in education. In societies that are afflicted by conflict, barriers to education are even higher (UNESCO 2011). This is significant in countries like Myanmar that are struggling to address tumultuous and violent conflicts arising from the inability of the Burmese ethnic majority and the vast diversity of ethnic minorities to co-exist[1].

The international education development community has traditionally placed a strong focus on the role of states as the main provider of education. However, while the State does not fulfil its responsibilities towards its citizens, and does not provide functional educational services, little attention and recognition has been given to the role that non-state actors can play.

For the Mon ethnic minorities of Myanmar, they developed an alternative education system that encourages the learning of their mother tongue alongside the Burmese language. This encourages the continued learning of Mon students at higher levels, including university. Established by the New Mon State Party and operated by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), the Mon Education System was established to provide education to Mon children in the Mon language at Mon national schools. Prior to the 1995 ceasefire[2], officials from the Myanmar military junta (State Peace and Development Council) would often threaten teachers and students to shut down the Mon national schools, as the teaching of the Mon language was illegal under the Burmanisation movement. The Mon education system consists of Mon national schools[3] in the Mon State of Myanmar, as well as a Post-10 teacher training programme. The Post-10 programme is a two-year teacher training programme targeted at Mon students who have completed 10th grade (six years of primary education and four years of lower secondary education). The first year of study is held in Nyi Sar, Myanmar, and the second year is held in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand, where more training resources are available. The programme helps students to develop critical thinking skills and English fluency, and has three main objectives: to provide 10th grade graduates with opportunities to higher education, to train teachers for Mon national schools, and to prepare Mon students to get scholarships at overseas universities.

This research seeks to demonstrate how alternative education systems for marginalised groups like ethnic minorities have developed in response to the perceived failure of the State in fulfilling the social contract of education for all, and looks at education for ethnic minorities from the perspectives of education as a human right and as a catalyst for development. Through the case study of the Mon Education System, this study seeks to provide answers and insights to how alternative education systems can complement state provision of education to achieve education for all.

Studies on ethnic minority education, particularly in developing countries, are scarce. This research will contribute to current literature, and hopes to stimulate academic discussion on ethnic minority issues in Asia, which is much less developed than that in Western academic circles.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. Section two introduces the Myanmar context, and reviews international discussion and trends of education for ethnic minorities as well as alternative provisions of education. Section three presents the methodology adopted in this study. Main findings from the study are presented and discussed in section four, followed by a conclusion of the arguments made in this article in section five.

2. ETHNIC MINORITY EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

2.1 Ethnicity and Education in Myanmar

Myanmar's population is estimated to be around 58 million[4], and the Burmese majority ethnic group makes up more than two-thirds of the population. One hundred and thirty-five ethnic groups are officially recognised by the Myanmar government (MOFA[5]), and the seven largest ethnic minority groups are the Chin, Kachin, Karen (or Kayin), Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan ethnic groups.

Ethnic groups in today's Myanmar have long existed along the Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River, which runs down Myanmar today, in the form of 6th century Mon Kingdoms and 14th century Shan States. Myanmar then came under British rule in the 19th century, where Myanmar was made a province of then-British India. As a result of divide-and-rule policies and the loss of traditional authority structures under British colonialism, as well as the exploitation of Myanmar's rich natural resources, there were growing fears among the Bamar majority that they were becoming second-class citizens in 'their own country', thus setting the stage for 20th century Burmese nationalism (Herbert, 1991). Ethnic distinctions were increasingly politicised, as struggles over economic resources and political power heightened, as a result of colonial policies (Croucher 2003). The Burmese nationalism movement, or 'Burmanisation', thus sought to actively and forcibly reduce this ethnic diversity. State education was used as a socialising tool to create citizens who will serve to strengthen the state, at the expense of the unique and diverse education needs and rights of the various ethnic minorities. This was primarily actualised through repressing ethnic minority culture, making the teaching of ethnic minority languages illegal, and manipulating ethnic minority-majority relations and history in textbooks. In school systems, ethnic minority children are put at a disadvantage since they are not allowed to learn in their mother tongue language. Post-colonial days in Myanmar have thus seen insurgencies and rebellion by well-organised ethnic groups, who are trying to wrestle back their political rights and power.

Each of the seven largest ethnic minorities stands as a political administrative unit. In Myanmar today, people of the seven major ethnic minority groups can be found across some

of the seven states, but the ethnic Burmese (or Bamars) are the only group that can be found in significant populations across all of the seven states (Appendix 1). Myanmar's ethnic minorities seek not total independence, but autonomy for their political administrative units and the right to exercise their ethnic identity.

Myanmar's education system is made up of five years of primary education, four years of middle school, and two years of high school (Appendix 2). Following which, students have to sit for a national matriculation examination to enter Burmese universities or other forms of higher education; the examination is held across the country, but only in the Burmese language. The language of instruction for Mathematics and Science in Myanmar's public schools is Burmese, and the two languages taught at public schools are the Burmese and English language.

The right to education is guaranteed by Article 366 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008). The Basic Education Law (1973) states that basic education shall prepare citizens to be good workers, enjoy good health, and have a strong moral character. It should also lay the foundation for further vocational or university education. Basic education is not compulsory in Myanmar. However, Chapter IV of the Myanmar Child Law (1993) states that the Ministry of Education shall implement a system of free and compulsory primary education. Myanmar is currently drawing up a new constitution and the published draft recognizes the right of every citizen to education and provides for compulsory basic education for all (UNESCO 2012). Under the 1992 Burma Citizenship Law, Mons are recognised as 'Burma citizens'; accordingly, the target group for this case study fall under the above educational provisions[6].

2.2 International Discussion and Trends

Research on ethnic minority education is rather established, especially in the aspects of higher education in developed countries, such as UK (Modood 1993; Ball, et al. 2002; Bhattacharyya, et al. 2003), as well as 'Black Children' and ethnic minorities in US (Ogbu 1990; Ogbu 1995). However, case studies in developing countries are few, including some on China (Hansen 1999; Zhou 2001; Ku, et al. 2005) and in Laos (Inui 2009), particularly those affected by conflict. To this extent, this study will be able to contribute to the scarce academic literature on ethnic minority education in a developing country afflicted by ethnic conflict.

Education as a fundamental human right was stressed in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien Declaration 1990), later reaffirmed through the Dakar Framework, which identified six EFA goals by 2015, such as the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all, including ethnic minorities (UNESCO 2000).

From the perspective of education as human right, education is a means of enabling people to define and determine their self-identity of ethnicity. Ethnic minorities have the right to assert their identity through the use and promotion of their language, culture, and history in

the education system (The Polish Minority Treaty 1919; ICCPR 1966 [7]; Copenhagen Declaration of the Conference of the Human Dimension 1990) and should develop cultural identity and values (Kitwood and Borrill 1980). There was also growing emphasis on education to encourage mutual respect, tolerance, and friendship between nations, religions and races (UDHR 1948[8]). Amidst the growing prominence of ethnic difference in today's world and increasing political mobilisation, education plays a powerful role in influencing the self-identities of people, as well as their dynamics and how they interact with other groups within the larger world system (Johnson and Stewart 2007).

Education can serve as a means of enabling people to define, determine, and perpetuate their sense and identity of ethnicity, but it can also act as a double-edged sword that can harmonise or divide a multi-ethnic society. Many state education systems aim to promote national unity for economic growth and advancement. State education is thus often used as a socialising tool to create citizens who will serve to strengthen and develop the state. As Bloom (1997, pp.489-9) puts, "every education system has a moral goal that it tries to attain… [i]t wants to produce a certain kind of human being". As an agent of socialisation, the state education system transmits a certain underlying agenda and message in education and the way it is carried out (in the process of setting the vision of the education system, planning and development of the curriculum, and even teacher training).

However, the danger lies in that it is often at the expense of the unique and diverse education needs and rights of marginalised groups like ethnic minorities, and "the state can [also] socialize individuals, through education, into a monocultural form of citizenship" (Halsey 2006, p.14). It is for this reason that education remains a potential source of political and social conflict.

The state should thus recognise and define the existence of ethnic minorities, in a way that does not diminish or change their status and their right to education (UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education 1960; UN Minority Rights Declaration 1992[9]; Minority Rights Group International, 1994). Dual identities (cultural identity and national identity) can co-exist and need not be mutually exclusive (UNCRC 1989[10]; ILO Convention 169[11]). Indeed, states that demonstrate commitment to "provide some language, religious and cultural opportunities through education and that do not deliberately seek to suppress the rights of different groups" (Lynch, et al. ed. 1992, p.264-5) manage to succeed in building racial harmony and peace not only between minority and majority groups in diverse societies, but also encourages effective political participation of ethnic minorities (McDougall 2008).

2.3 Ethnic Minority Education as an Alternative Provision of Education

Barlow (2003, p.157) warily pointed out that the marginalised and excluded "left out of the social contract" (including health, education, etc.) would necessarily create ethnicity as a coping strategy. When they are denied access to quality education, as well as the right to

learn and pass on their language, culture, and history, they will actively seek devices to affirm their identity. This can be clearly observed through how the Mon ethnic minority have developed an alternative education system as an alternative to public schools, while still allowing avenues for re-entry into the Myanmar education system at higher levels. It provides people of the Mon ethnic people with access to education in their native language, as well as promoting its culture and history.

In being denied access to quality education, as well as the right to learn and pass on their language, culture, and history, the Mon 'race' of Myanmar thus develop their own mechanisms in response to state failure or oppression. In education, their organised response is the development of an alternative education system that is separate from the Myanmar state system, of which it is a part; it provides people of the Mon race with access to education in their native/mother-tongue language, as well as Mon culture and history. Further, there has been a general exodus of the Mon people, to study or work outside of Myanmar due to the lack of economic opportunities and job security in Myanmar, to neighbouring countries of Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, or further to the United States of America and Australia. In entering these new societies, the Mon 'ethnic group' "imagine and realize themselves" (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007, p.104), placing more focus on aspects that reinforce the Mon identity, such as language, culture, and the arts (dance/music).

Alternative education systems refer to education services delivered by non-state providers for those "under-served by government provision". Rose (2007) explores the role of non-government/state providers in "creating pathways to access" of education for under/un-served and marginalised groups, and argues that "there is a need for 'real' on-going dialogue… to ensure collaboration… benefits the underserved and so assists in moving towards the achievement of EFA goals". She points out that in Bangladesh and Pakistan, where states have not been able to fulfill their role in providing education, non-state providers play an important role in education service delivery, particularly to those who do not manage to receive education services (Ibid., 2007). While World Bank (2002) acknowledges that the state should be the eventual provider of educational services, Rose (2007) argues that EFA "could be achieved through the support of different providers rather than necessarily through state provision". Bennell (2003) also highlights the complementary role of alternative education systems, that they do not disturb sovereign states' "monopoly over formal schooling". However, he rightly points out that for graduates from alternative education systems to continue to higher education, an equivalency of qualifications is necessary to allow students to transit smoothly between different education systems.

Rose (2007) identifies four "comparative advantages of non-state provisions": Alternative education systems extend access to those who do not receive education provisions from the state, act as an additional choice of education system for groups to choose from, provide a higher quality of education due to better resources, are more cost-effective since they tend to

be smaller in scale, and have more accountability than state education systems as communities tend to be more involved with them. As a recognised interim solution to inadequate state provision, Rose (2007, p.19) argues that, non-state provision of alternative education systems has higher social benefits, and is further "complemented by a rights-based perspective reinforced by concern for the importance of education's role in national cohesion through a common curriculum and opportunities for social mobility".

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this research was obtained over two periods between September and November 2012 in the Post-10 teaching facility that MNEC set up in Sangkhlaburi, Thailand (Thai-Burma border) for the second-year programme. Sangkhlaburi was a preferred choice for the facility due to the greater availability of resources and expertise, than in Nyi Mar (Myanmar) where the first-year programme is located. During this period, the author was involved in the Myanmar Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) and the UNESCO Country Programming Document for Myanmar, 2013-2015. The author's simultaneous involvement with other UNESCO Bangkok projects has also provided valuable networking that is the basis for many of the contacts made and respondents approached in this research.

This research takes on a qualitative perspective, so as to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the Mon education initiative as an alternative education system. Qualitative daily experiences are needed for the study of marginalised groups, especially since educational statistics can reflect access issues without providing an understanding of the dynamics of discrimination (Stronquist, in Halsey, et al. 2006). At the same time, it is important to recognise that quantitative data and sufficient sample size is severely lacking in the studies of ethnic minority education, particularly in conflict areas.

This research takes the case study example of the MES within the context of Myanmar. Since not much is known about the Mon education initiative, this research utilises a descriptive approach to convey a comprehensive understanding of the entire system. Secondary data was first scoured thoroughly based on workshop findings and special reports on the MES. Following which, information gaps were identified and qualitative methods were used to gather primary data.

Participatory observations were carried out at the Post-10 teacher training facility of MNEC. The new teacher training school is six-months old, and located in a downhill residential area on a branch-off road ten minutes away from the main town of Sangkhlaburi. Students live in male and female wooden dormitories located just beside the training facility. Security and burglary pose as safety issues, as some female students had reported loss of valuables like laptops and mobile phones that they had kept locked in their dormitories, while they were having training activities. Walking is the main form of transportation for the students, and the facility is served by one motorbike. The road leading to the facility is bumpy

and uneven, and riding the motorbike on it is difficult for smaller-sized students who have difficulty controlling the bike. Students have their meals and classes in the main school facility that is made of concrete. Research and observations carried out at this facility was carried out toward the end of the monsoon season, meaning that temperatures would have normally dropped a little, making for cool mornings and evenings. However, afternoon classes within the poorly ventilated facility proved to be warm, humid, and un-conducive, even during this period.

A total of 13 respondents were identified through snowball sampling, both individually and in groups (Appendix 3). Since this study is limited to a small group of population, a subject was first identified through an acquaintance from one of UNESCO Bangkok's projects, and referrals led to further strategic referrals, lending to a variety of perspectives of community leaders, teachers, trainee teachers, students, teaching instructors, and donor organisations, including those closely associated to high-ranking officials of NMSP. Extensive, detailed, and informed observations and perspectives of these respondents were then able to lend for a comprehensive understanding and overview of the Mon education system and the issues surrounding it. Names were changed to protect the identity of these respondents.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out, with different sets of guiding questions for different categories of respondents (teachers, students, or donor organisations). This was to provide respondents with the "freedom to… talk about what is of central significance to him or her rather than to the interviewer" (Bell 1999, p. 138), in addition to guided structure that is crucial for a valid study. One-to-one interviews were carried out in either English or Mon, with the help of a Mon-English translator. Interviews with community leaders took place at their houses in the Mon village of Sangkhlaburi (20 minutes by bike/car from the provincial town), and the rest were conducted at the Post-10 training facility after lessons. Interviews took about 45 minutes on average, and were recorded with the permission of the respondents on an iPad that was placed between the researcher and the respondent.

Interview accounts were transcribed verbatim and analysed based on issues (Weiss 1994). Data coding was then carried out based on anticipated answers from the structured interview guiding questions. Other (unanticipated) narratives also came forth through the semi-structured interviews and discussions. Based on the categories of data coding, main themes were highlighted for interpretation, leading to "mini-theories" (Ibid., p.159) that form the discussion of this research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the local education workshops conducted by the National Health and Education Committee (NHEC) Burma issued a report bearing the translated transcript of the workshop discussions. There were a total of 166 participants of the workshops, which comprised of local teachers and officials from education department of the ethnic organisations. During the

workshop, participants were invited to share the situation and difficulties and provide suggestion or thoughts with regards to education in their various areas. Topics discussed included children's access to education, subjects taught in schools, the use of indigenous languages, teaching methods, teacher education, and parents' perceptions of children's education. Upon going through the transcript, and coding the narratives, themes were highlighted and factors affecting ethnic minority children's opportunity to learn across the six ethnic states of Myanmar were identified (Appendix 4).

In the Mon State, three main barriers to education were raised. Firstly, participants reported that language difficulty was the most significant barrier, since children speak in the Mon language at home from young, and most do not speak Burmese. With Burmese as the language of instruction in public schools, Mon children have difficulty learning in public schools. Parents also reported that they want their children to be able to speak their native language, so they prefer a learning environment that allows and accommodates for that. Secondly, participants also raised that the curriculum in public schools promotes a historical narrative from the perspective of the Burmese ethnic majority, neglecting significant aspects of the Mon culture. Lastly, they also brought up that poverty remains a barrier, with children having to work for the family's survival (Lwin 2001), and thus unable to go to school. The interviews conducted in this study support these findings, and show how the Mon alternative education system manages to overcome these three main barriers. The findings are also coherent with some of Rose's (2007) comparative advantages of alternative systems in extending access, providing an additional choice of education, without compromising on the quality of education.

4.1 Mon language instruction and the promotion of ethnic identity

Based on a Special Report (2008) by the Mon Forum, the situation of MES prior to the 1995 ceasefire was one fraught with difficulties, as Mon education officials (then NMSP officials) struggled to fight for their right to not only teach the Mon language, but also to use it as a language of instruction. In Mon national schools, other than Mon language and literature, content subjects like mathematics, geography, and science are also taught in the Mon language. In addition, Burmese language is also taught, based on the recognition and acknowledgement that Mon ethnic children need the language to participate in the larger society (Appendix 5).

The Mon language is used as a language of instruction up till Year 9, after which lessons are conducted in Burmese as students who wish to go on to local universities have to sit for the national matriculation examination that is conducted in the Burmese language. However, since students at Mon national schools learn content subjects in the Mon language, they are unfamiliar with the use of specific Burmese vocabulary and language used in content subjects. Thus, to ensure that Mon students are not disadvantaged by this at the national

matriculation examinations, MES chose to do away with the Mon language and history at the senior secondary level, in preparation for the national examinations (Appendix 6).

Being one of the earliest civilisations of Southeast Asia, and having been the focal point from where Theravada Buddhism spread throughout continental Southeast Asia, people of the Mon ethnic group take great pride in their ethnic identity, history, and culture. In fact, many high monks esteemed by Theravada Buddhist believers in Southeast Asia today, and many lead academics of the University of Yangon specialising in culture and literature, continue to be of the Mon lineage. This strong sense of pride is also observed in the younger generation,

> *I'm proud to be Mon people as we have many Mon history from the past, and we're very famous among the ethnic (groups) because we have our own palace and kings. —Mon Ma (22, female)*

Another respondent (Mon Cha, 19, male) recounts fondly and with pride the historical and cultural legacy in his hometown—the remains of an Old Palace from the time of the ancient Mon civilisation (estimated to date back to the 5th century, before Angkor Wat was built in the 12th century). However, alongside political and cultural suppression under the military regime, the preservation and maintenance of these pockets of ancient history have not been allowed, as the two respondents explain,

> *In my village, there is a palace also called Old Town. There is a lot of ancient history, long history. But now it's broken, only left a fence. It's very near the Mon school, for example (gestures approximately 1 metre). —Mon Cha (19, male)*

> *But for Mon, we do not have chance to repair because the government don't allow. But many Mon people they try to maintain. —Mon Ma*

This strong sense of ethnic pride also manifests in the form of unity within the ethnic group, where they lend a hand to each other for the betterment of all, as two teachers of the Mon teacher training school in Sangkhlaburi observe,

> *I would describe the students comparatively to other groups of students similar to their age… quite unified. I see aspects of a more communal versus individualistic society in the classroom. I see them as being quite proud of their origins and ethnicity. —Karen*

> *It seems that there's a big thing going on with the communal kind of aspect. There's a big emphasis on helping others. Often you'll see people working together and someone asking the other a question and helping each*

other. And I see it more in this context than I have in any other. —Richard

4.2 Lower fees to accommodate poorer families

Consistent with data in Figure 4-3, interviews carried out in this research revealed that in the Mon area, even though parental lack of interest in education is not one of the factors affecting Mon children's opportunity to learn, parents need their children to work and help with the family income.

> *I have 5 siblings, all completed school. But we (the village) have not enough income, so some students cannot go to school. They need to help their parents with daily needs and work. —Mon Ma*

Access to public schools is deterred by high school fees, such that those who can afford gain access to public schools, while those who cannot end up going to Mon national schools.

> *Government school is more expensive; one year is 100,000 kyat (approximately US$117 in current terms). For Mon schools, in my opinion, they do not have to pay lots of money, just for eating 1,500 (~US$1.75) monthly. They have donors for books (etc.). —Noh Ta (female, 19)*

Another respondent, daughter of a high-ranking official of the National Mon State Party (NMSP) that founded the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) and subsequently the Mon education system, who also taught at a Mon national primary school explains,

> *Mostly, the people with enough money go to government school, the person with not too much money go to Mon national school (because the fees are lower). —Mi Te (female, 30s)*

Noh Ta expresses how she would have chosen to study at a Mon national school had she known about them, for the lower fees and also because the government schools in her township were still not allowed to teach Mon language and history despite the fact that all the students were Mon. The fact remains that with the little resources MNEC has to provide for the educational infrastructure, there are much fewer Mon national schools serving the Mon rural population. She explains,

> *I didn't know that there were Mon schools (that's why I went to a government school instead). In our village, there is no Mon school—only government school. In Ree Township, they are not allowed to teach Mon subjects. —Noh Ta*

However, with the little resources that MNEC has to provide for the educational infrastructure, there are much fewer Mon national schools serving the Mon rural population.

Mon students face the difficulty of not having a Mon national school in their area, and even when there is one, competition tends to be stiff due to the high demand and low supply of Mon national schools. Many cannot find a place in a national school and end up having to pay higher fees at public schools if they can afford it. A former teacher at a Mon national middle school explains,

> *In the area near students' home, there are no schools. Families are poor and can't support children to go to government schools because more expensive than Mon national schools. —Nai Hla Paw, male, 30s*

4.3 Support from external partners for better quality of education

With globalisation, there has been more and improved resources and capacity. This has been crucial in developing the quality of MES through cooperation with international organisations and the free exchange of ideas with organisations and individuals,

> *MNEC is fortunately located not too far from the border. So we have a continuous stream of visitors, scholars, researchers, teacher training, ad-hoc courses. So if you compare this to Burmese schools, which are more of a rigid official government style, top-down, the dynamic is different. —Nai Sam*

As earlier mentioned, the MNEC teacher training facility in Sangkhlaburi houses the second year of the Post-10 programme, with the first year being in Nyi Sar, Mon State. Mon Ma, a graduate of the Post-10 programme describes the difference between studying in these two places, and the benefits of the facility location in Sangkhlaburi,

> *Here, we can learn from foreigner teacher. In Nyi Sar, there are no foreigner teachers, and not many resources. —Mon Ma*

With regards to the teacher-training curriculum, the main donor organisation, World Education (WE)[12]—a registered Boston-based private voluntary organisation that seeks to provide training and technical assistance in non-formal sectors of education—develops its own adaptive curriculum and teaching units that are available on an online private database platform to its teachers. There is room for adaptation by the teachers for each of the schools based on their individual needs and focuses. Karen, who has been teaching the Post-10 programme for nearly two years, explains,

> *When they were developing the curriculum, part of the purpose for WE was for the curriculum to be flexible according to the students' needs and what they were going to be doing after the school so they could prepare them better. It was known that these students were going to teach, and that*

teacher training was going to be an integral part of the curriculum. That
was discussed and agreed upon by World Education and MNEC. —Karen

The Curriculum Project provides curricular materials and teacher training to support education projects run by and for marginalised groups from Myanmar, including the Mon ethnic group who are currently living on the Thai-Burma border. Richard, another Post-10 teaching instructor recruited by World Education, explains how materials from both World Education and the Curriculum Project are used by instructors, in a manner that is most relevant and useful for the Post-10 students,

We do use things from the Curriculum Project (CP) as well, but that's not
the sole basis of our curriculum, but something that's added in various
sections. It depends on how much and how the teacher wants to include. As
a teacher, you find a way to teach that's best that's suitable and adaptable
for the students. Learning objectives however, stay the same. —Richard

World Education's support for MNEC began in August 2009 under the auspices of USAID, providing teacher stipends for MNEC schools inside Mon State (Myanmar), as well as operating costs for both the first and second year programmes of the Post-10 Programme (in Nyi Sar, Mon State and Sangkhlaburi, Thailand). To date, their annual budget has been approximately 170,000 USD, of which approximately 146,000 USD goes to paying teacher stipends, and the rest for operating costs (Appendix 7).

4.3.1 Salary

One other aspect affecting the quality of education in MES is the lack of resources.

Mon schools have few resources and teachers are paid low salaries.
Burmese teachers are paid double of Mon teachers. —SM

In 2012/2013, the total teaching force of 800 teachers[13] was paid from approximately 146,000 USD in donor funds[14], estimating an average monthly teacher salary of 15 USD (12,900 kyats). Compared to the 35,000 kyats (approximately 41 USD) Mi Kla earned as a government teacher back in 1996, teachers teaching at Mon national schools earn less than half of government teachers. In addition to that, Mi Kla reveals how government teachers have traditionally received 15kg of rice allowance monthly on top of their monthly salary. Nai Sita later revealed that NMSP now gives its teachers some rice allowances too, but had previously been unable to do so due to resource constraints.

4.3.2 Pre-service training

In addition, since it is important to give teacher trainees opportunities to build up experience through practicums, practicum programmes have developed out of the initiative of foreign teachers even though there is no such formal component in the MNEC teacher training programme. Highlighting some collaborations, Karen said,

> Last year we did a teaching practicum in that our students went to teach at both Children of the Forest[15] (COF) and Baan Unrak migrant school. This year we're trying to do it more regularly so students can get a sense of relationship with the class and see progress, to use all of the skills that we teach and apply them directly.

World Education is one of MNEC's main donor partners, and supports teacher training for MNEC's Post-10 programme in Sangkhlaburi by sending two native English teachers to guide some twenty second-year Post-10 students. Together with the Curriculum Project (CP) of the Thabyay Education Network, World Education provides needs-focused curricular materials, with an emphasis on academic English, critical and reflective thinking, scholarship and university preparation, and teacher training.

Additionally, Post-10 instructors do not know what subject teacher-trainees would be teaching, making it difficult to tailor their training accordingly.

> [T]hat seems to be information that they don't know ahead of time. What we know is that most of them would be teaching English. We also know that most of them would be teaching other things as well, but we don't know what. So applying more of a targeted approach to certain students who'd be teaching certain subjects doesn't seem possible. —Richard

> [M]y understanding is that this is the training that they get, regardless of what subject they'd be teaching…With our limited knowledge of what the studying is like, we have limitations on how specific we can be. But we are aware that the resources and the context might be vastly different. We try to talk about it and ask, "So when you do go back, what might be some ways you can modify using the resources you have?". — Karen

A former teacher at a Mon national middle school describes how he underwent a one-month pre-service training by the National Mon State Party (NMSP). In 1997, the Mon Unity League invited an international trainer from Singapore and there was a one-off intensive 3-month teacher training programme. In other cases, the Mon National Education Committee engages the cascade training method and selects some teacher-leaders for

training at Sangkhlaburi, where they thereafter return to their village schools and community to train their fellow teachers; the training content in these sessions include both curriculum and pedagogy and these trainings are carried out for teachers at all levels.

> *I went for a combined training for ethnic minority teachers in Mae Sot by international organisations. They selected teachers from armed ethnic minority parties, including NMSP, KNU, etc. NMSP sent 3 that year, including Nai Hla Paw. They gave a lot of training in different subjects, including human rights and international law. —Nai Hla Paw*

4.3.3 In-service training

When asked about what was most memorable about their training sessions, a distinct difference can however be observed. While Mon national schoolteachers learn the more child/student-centred approach of "how to teach and draw the attention of students", government school teachers learn about "how to control and keep the children quiet".

> *At the end of the training, there was a ceremony where each party had to present for 10 minutes. I did a roleplay on how to teach and draw the attention of students. I got first-place, and the prize was 200baht. Very fun. —Nai Hla Paw (Mon national school teacher)*

> *Learning how to control and keep the children quiet. —Mi Kla (government school teacher)*

Mi Te, another Mon national school-teacher shared about the system of in-service peer training for child-centred approach (CCA), funded by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Myanmar, the Shalom Foundation[16] (better known as the Nyein Foundation locally). In-service training was a platform for teachers to talk about their difficulties, exchange information, and share their experiences on effective teaching methods.

> *There was no training before she became a teacher, but while she was teaching…Before 2010, it was about teaching methods; after that it was about CCA. CCA training is about 1 month during holidays. — Mi Te*

With World Education paying the salaries of Mon teachers, providing resources, as well as capacity building and teacher training, it is clear that MES is highly dependent on international links and organisations like World Education. Without international organisations, Mi Te admits,

> *It's quite difficult as all our daily lives depend on the donors, and there're many Mon teachers. Maybe we need to find other ways like the community, fund-raising. Some communities, they buy the garden for the school, for the*

*teachers' salaries, but it's very low. They're also supporting students who
cannot get funds from their parents. —Mi Te*

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, this article has shown how MES has responded to current inadequacies of public schools in meeting the unique needs of ethnic minority students, through its alternative education system. It illustrates how alternative education systems can serve to advance both learning and life opportunities of its own community by providing the opportunity to promote and practise their native language and culture through the education system, while improving access to education. Concurrently, through the inclusion of the dominant Burmese language at higher grades of Mon national schools, it actively seeks to provide avenues for its students to continue onto higher education and matriculate into state universities, allowing for their participation in mainstream Myanmar society.

The presence of international links and organisations have also provided MES with increased opportunities and resources as well as improved quality of teacher training and education through curricular development, funding, and instructor support, thus demonstrating the impact of globalisation on ethnic minority education.

However, alternative education systems like MES face severe limitations, as they are not recognised by the formal education system and employers, hindering ethnic minority students from participating in mainstream education system and job market. They also remain significantly under-resourced and under-financed, highlighting the high dependence of non-state education initiatives like MES on foreign donors, as well as the unsustainable nature of the funding.

While the heavy reliance on international links and actors has been the sole option for Mon people thus far, with recent political progress and developments in the recognition of ethnic groups and their education systems, there is a growing environment for increasing state-resourced education or other forms of partnerships that would improve the self-sustainability of ethnic minorities' education systems.

In providing education to ethnic minorities, this study calls for a delicate balance of (i) minority identity and values, and (ii) values of the larger system they belong to. Thus, this research argues that states should partner with alternative/community-organised provisions of education and support them in developing their own quality education systems. In highly ethnic-diverse countries, by meeting the unique needs of specific ethnic groups while remaining relevant to the wider society, these education systems become complementary education systems to the state in achieving EFA goals.

Endnotes

[1] References to 'Myanmar' in this article refer to the Myanmar political state, while references to 'Burma' refer to the dominant Burma ethnic group. While the language of the Burmese people has been made Myanmar state's language, this article refers to it as the Burmese language, to provide a contrast to the language of the ethnic Mon minority group (Mon language).

[2] The New Mon State Party signed the ceasefire agreement with the government in 1995, and is one of fourteen armed ethnic groups to have done so. Twelve other armed ethnic groups have yet to do so. (The EC-Myanmar Strategy Paper, 2007-2013)

[3] The 'Mon national school' is a term by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), to refer to schools established by them, independent from the Myanmar state, and in contrast to public schools established by the Myanmar state.

[4] Reliefweb. 2011. http://reliefweb.int/node/466591 (Accessed 2 February 2012)

[5] Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://www.mofa.gov.mm/aboutmyanmar/population.html

[6] However, the Myanmar state does not recognise Rohingyas who live in northern Rakhine as citizens.

[7] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

[8] Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

[9] United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities 1992, A/RES/47/135

[10] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, Article 29c

[11] International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989.

[12] With a wide array of organisational experience in 50 countries over Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the United States, World Education's Thailand field office is located in Amphur Mae Sot along the Thai-Burma border. Together with the International Rescue Committee and funded by a USAID grant, it works to increase access to and quality of education for Burmese refugees and migrants in Thailand, including the Post-10 programme. To ensure sustainability and effectiveness of programmes, World Education works with other NGOs along the border who are more familiar with the intricate area context.

[13] Based on 2012/2013 data obtained from MNEC administration.

[14] Based on 2012/2013 data provided by donor organisation.

[15] Children of the Forest Report, 2014-2015 https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/2283933/ P10%20-%20CoF%20Partnership%20Report%202014-15-2.pdf

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Appendix 1. Racial Composition of Myanmar's Ethnic States based on 1983 Census

	Chin State	Kachin State	Kayin State	Kayah State	Mon State	Rakhine State	Shan State
Bamar	0.8 (0.8)	29.3 (29.1)	14.1 (14.1)	17.5 (20.6)	37.2 (37.1)	0.7 (0.7)	11.1 (11.4)
Chin	94.6 (94.1)	—	—	—	—	3.2 (3.1)	—
Kachin	—	38.1 (37.8)	—	—	—	—	3.8 (3.7)
Kayin	—	—	57.1 (51.3)	6.4 (5.4)	15.7 (12.7)	—	—
Kayah	—	—	— (1.3)	55.9 (54.1)	—	—	1.2 (1.2)
Mon	—	—	17.7 (17.7)	—	38.2 (38.2)	—	—
Rakhine	4.4 (3.7)	—	—	—	—	67.8 (67.8)	—
Shan	—	24.2 (24.5)	3.0 (8.8)	16.6 (14.8)	—	—	76.4 (75.2)

Notes: — denotes less than 1 per cent or negligible
* Bangladeshis comprised 24.3 per cent according to the 1983 Census.
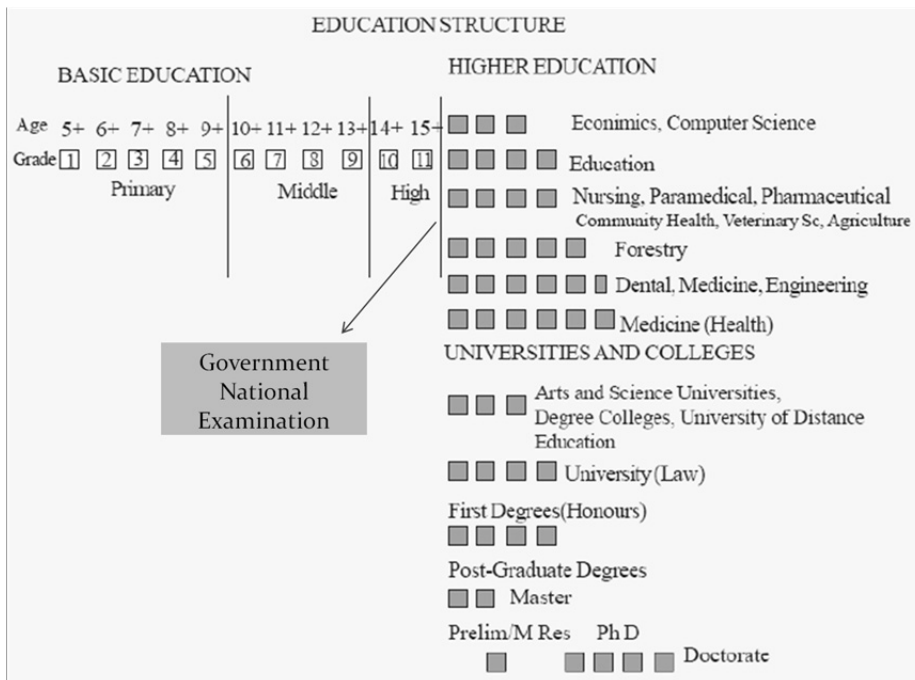The figures in parentheses are estimates based on more recent data published in 2001.
The figures do not add up to 100 due to the presence of non-indigenous races in all states.
Source: Government of Burma 1987 various issues; and Hla Min 2001.

Source: Maung Than, 2005

Appendix 2. Education Structure of Myanmar Education System

Source: World Data on Education Adapted by author

Appendix 3. Profile Overview of Interview Respondents

	Pseudonym	Category	Gender	Age Group
1	Nai Sam	Community Leader	Male	30s
2	Mi Radu	Community Leader, Professor	Female	40s
3	Nai Sita	Community Leader, Coordinator for Bilingual Programme	Male	50s
4	Nai Hla Paw	Teacher, Student	Male	30s
5	Mi Kla	Teacher, Student	Female	40s
6	Mi Te	Teacher	Female	30s
7	Mon Ma	Student, School Administrator	Female	20s
8	Noh Ta	Student, Student-teacher	Female	Teens
9	Mon Cha	Student, Student-teacher	Male	19
10	Tok Mam	Student, Student-teacher	Male	21
11	Richard	MNEC teacher trainer	Male	25
12	Karen	MNEC teacher trainer	Female	32
13	Alene	INGO/Foreign actor	Female	30s

Appendix 4. Factors affecting Children's Opportunity to Learn in Public Schools

	Mon Area	Karen Area	Karenni/Shan Area	Central Area	Kachin Area	Western Myanmar
Help with family income	O	O		O	O	O
Problems with school fees		O				
Parental lack of interest in education			O	O		
Language Difficulties	O	O	O	O	O	O
History/ Curriculum	O	O	O	O	O	O

Source: Thein Lwin, 2001. Adapted by author.

Appendix 5. Curricular Subjects Taught at Mon National Schools and the Corresponding Language of Instruction

	Subject	Language of Instruction
Main Subject	• Mon language and literature	Mon language
Other Subjects	• Basic mathematics • Geography • Science, etc.	Mon language
Language subjects	• Burmese	Burmese language

Source: Mon Special Report (2008). Adapted by author

Appendix 6. Curricular Subjects Taught at Mon National Schools

Level	Year	Subjects	Language of Instruction (Burmese, unless specified)
Junior Primary	1, 2, 3	Mon Burmese English Math	*Textbooks in Mon language, as prescribed by the Textbook Committee (NMSP)
Senior Primary	4, 5	+ Geography + Mon History	→ Mon language
Junior Secondary	6, 7, 8, 9	+ Science	*Only textbook for Mon History in Mon language
Senior Secondary	10, 11	+ Science (Physics Chemistry Biology) +Social Studies (History Geography Economics) -Mon language -Mon History	→ Textbooks prescribed by Burmese government (in preparation for matriculation to university)

Source: Mon Special Report (2008). Adapted by author.

Appendix 7. Breakdown of World Education Funding, 2009-2013

Period	Breakdown (USD)
August 2009 – September 2010	$170,000
October 2010 – November 2011	$170,000
December 2011 – November 2012	$175,000 + additional $33,000 for stipends
December 2012 – November 2013	$177,000

Source: World Education. Adapted by Author