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Continuous Professional Development for Teacher Educator Development in Myanmar Education Colleges

Introduction

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), which borders Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India, is the largest country in south-east Asia. According to the 2014 Census, the population of Myanmar is approximately 54 million. It is an ethnically and linguistically diverse nation with over 135 ethnic groups since it comprises seven States and eight Regions. It gained Independence from Britain in 1948 and was administered by the military from 1962 until 2011.

There was political change in Myanmar, a transition from military administration to democracy in 2010. Political change impacts various sectors such as economic, education and health. For example, the budget for education increases from 0.69 per cent to 8.4 per cent of GDP between 2011 and 2020. As a result of increased expenditure on education, education reforms can be conducted following the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR). The coup in Myanmar changed the country's politics once more on February 1, 2021. The National Unity Government (NUG) was also formed by the ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) politicians, activists, and representatives from several ethnic minority groups. This transition will have an unpredictable impact on Myanmar's education reforms, including higher and basic education.

Looking back to the history of Education in Myanmar, it can be divided into four periods: before Independence, after Independence, under Military Rule and during the democratic transition (Lwin, 2000). This paper reports how teacher education cooperates with the basic education in curriculum reform within the democratic period. It provides an overview of teacher education, basic education, curriculum reforms in Myanmar, and teacher education's role in the curriculum reform of basic education.

Teacher Education in Myanmar

Before Independence, it can be suggested that there is pre-service teacher training. Yangon University, which was founded in 1920, provided a teaching diploma for high school teachers. A faculty of education was set up in Yangon University in 1922, and the first teacher training college was in 1931 (Lall, M. 2020). However, Myanmar lacked a coherent teacher education policy before the 2012 education reforms. As a result, there was no pre-service or in-service teacher education structure and no professional standards for the many education stakeholders to meet. During the British independence period, there was no document about teacher education. Therefore, it can be said that there was no teacher training at the start of the military rule. There was no pre-service training and little investment in education between 1978/9 and 1997/8. As a result, new teachers were required to have a bachelor's degree, but no prior teaching experience or training was required (UNESCO, 2016).

According to Lwin (2000), a lack of qualified teachers impacts the quality of instruction. People who have just passed the Basic Education High School examinations are authorized to teach primary grades in some regions where there are few university graduates. These novice teachers join the classroom with no prior teaching experience. After several years of teaching, some teachers get training. The regime introduced pre-service and in-service teacher training after years of neglecting the teaching profession. According to a JICA report, pre-service teacher training ceased in 1971. However, it was reinstated in 1998 when five teacher training colleges (TTCs) and 14 teacher training schools (TTS) were upgraded to education colleges (JICA, 2013). As a result, the system overhauled today has remained untouched for the past 20 years.

At the time of writing, Teacher education in Myanmar is delivered through three types of institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Two Universities of Education (UoE) provide a five-year degree (B.Ed.) qualifying teachers to teach secondary school. These were upgraded from Institutes of Education (IoEs) in early 2015 in keeping with international trends. The fifth-year was recently added to include a year of research. In addition, the one University of Development of National Races (UDNR) provides free teacher training specifically to ethnic minorities.

There are 25 Education Colleges which provides diploma-level course known as D.TED course and Pre-service Primary Teaching Training (PPTT) course to produce qualified teachers to teach in primary and middle schools. Student teachers must have graduated with matriculation from upper secondary school to join a two-year D.TED course. This course allows teachers to teach at the middle school level, although they will start as primary assistant teachers when they graduate. Primary Teaching Training (PPTT) course, which takes four months, is provided for graduates to become primary teachers. These were also upgraded into education degree colleges in the 2020-2021 academic year, which provides the four-year courses for either BA (Education) or BSc (Education). However, it remains unclear to distinguish between the Art stream and the Science stream. Under this system, if teachers wanted to become secondary school teachers or move on to administrative posts in education, they needed a Bachelor of Education degree that could be acquired at the University of Education in Yangon or Sagaing, for those in Lower and Upper Myanmar, respectively (Lall, 2020).

In addition to these institutions, other organizations support teacher education. The *Education Thematic Working Group (ETWG)* has established a sub-group in Myanmar known as the Teacher Education Working Group (MTEWG). It was formed on May 3 2013, with the lead from UNICEF and support from the British Council in response to the needs of teachers in Myanmar. The Monastic Education Development Group (MEG) was established in 2011 to improve monastic education quality. One of its missions is to support teacher education, one of the monastic networks' primary tasks. Teachers in monastic schools are taught as trainers, who then train the teachers in their school, and then the teachers in the associated schools, according to the cascading technique of a variety of training providers.

Basic Education System in Myanmar

Lwin (2000) reported the education of Myanmar within the historical context. Before Independence, there were three types of school in Burma:

- Vernacular School in which the medium of instruction was Burmese or one of the recognized indigenous languages;
- Anglo-Vernacular School in which English was taught as a second language and the media of instruction were English and Burmese or one of the recognized indigenous languages;
- English School in which the medium of instruction was English, with Burmese as the second language.

After Independence, the organization of the school system in the new education plan was a 5-3-3 system that consisted of:

- Nursery School for children;
- Primary School for children;
- Middle School for children;
- High School including Agriculture and Technical High Schools for children and;
- Vocational and Technical Institutes and universities for young people.

In 1964, the system of education was reorganized under military rule. The structure of the 'New System of Education' comprised: (a) Basic Education; (b) Technical, Agricultural and Vocational Education; and (c) Higher education. In the Basic Education, school structure was changed from a 5-3-3 to a 5-4-2 system that consisted of Primary School, Middle School and High School. Kindergarten (KG) was

renamed Grade 1 in this system, and since then, KG has been used for severe teaching and learning rather than singing and playing, as is the case in most other countries. Even though the pupils are only five years old, the former Standard 1 syllabus is taught in KG. Therefore, it is possible to say that academic standards in Myanmar are a year ahead of the internationally recognized age norm (Soe, et al.; 2017, Htet, 2020).

By the Thirty-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan (FY2001-02 – FY 2030-31), the most significant education reform during the wave of democratization has been the alteration of the basic education structure. The former education structure (5-4-2) (grades 1 to 5 for primary level, grades 6 to 9 for lower secondary level, and grades 10 to 11 for upper secondary level) was modified into the KG+ 12 (5-4-3) structure in order to adhere to the basic education structure of other ASEAN countries. Thus, kindergarten, five years of primary schooling, four years of lower secondary schooling, and three years of upper secondary schooling make up the new basic education system KG+12 (5-4-3). The new KG class for five-year-olds began in the 2015-2016 academic year, with a new curriculum.

Education reform: curriculum reform

As the education system was changed to meet international standards, basic education and teacher education curriculum were upgraded. However, before the National Education Law was set up, there was no curriculum framework in primary education and teacher education.

In the previous education of Myanmar that has progressed from the old monastic education to the current modern education, there has never been a curriculum framework. However, syllabi, textbooks, teacher's guides with different teaching methods and various assessment forms were designed and used. Therefore, the Myanmar Ministry of Education is now implementing the educational reforms by setting the curriculum framework with the direction of the National Education Law (Soe, et al.; 2017, Htet, 2020). In the National Education Law, chapter 1, section 2 (n), *curriculum framework* is defined as "the systematic written programs for all fields in formal and non-formal education, which are designed to achieve educational objectives and which include learning outcomes, contents, instructional methods and evaluation".

Basic Education Curriculum Framework

According to the Myanmar National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2015), writing and implementing a curriculum framework for primary education mainly focuses on achieving basic education aims and thirteen guiding principles to realize these aims. The aims of the basic education curriculum are as follows:

After the completion of basic education, students will be able to:

- attend the school until the completion of basic education;
- develop "union spirit" and appreciate, maintain, and disseminate languages and pieces of literature, cultures, arts and traditional customs of all national groups;
- become good citizens with well-developed five strengths, including critical thinking skills, communication skills and social skills;
- apply they are civic and democratic in daily lives and abide by laws;
- be competent for Myanmar language, which is the official language of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and develop their skills in respective ethnic language and English;
- develop foundational knowledge and skills for higher learning and technical and vocational educations;
- develop sound body and sportsmanship through participation in physical education activities and school health activities, and apply health knowledge in daily lives;
- appreciate and maintain the natural environment and materialize its sustainability;
- become global citizens with awareness and appreciation of human diversity and abilities to practice basic knowledge of peace in their daily lives;
- take pride in being a citizen of the Union of Myanmar.

Basic education curriculum is vital for children and youth in any country because it meets their physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional, and social needs. As a result, the primary goal of basic education curriculum reform is to establish a new curriculum that focuses on crucial 21st-century knowledge and abilities and attempts to address the shortcomings and flaws of the previous curriculum (Htet, 2020).

In May 2015, a series of curriculum frameworks were approved for the four levels of basic education (pre-primary, called kindergarten, primary, middle and high school). This provides an important foundational document outlining the expected learning objectives and outcomes for Basic Education. For each level, the frameworks describe the aims, curriculum structure, the inclusion of local curricula, the age-appropriate teaching and learning approaches, and the relevant types of assessment (UNESCO, 2016).

According to the age and developmental stage of kindergarten students, the curriculum structure consists of six learning areas: (1) Wellbeing, (2) Moral, Social, and Emotional Development, (3) Communication, (4) Recognition of the Arts and Creativity, (5) Exploring Mathematics, and (6) Knowledge and Understanding of the World. The new kindergarten curriculum differs from the previous subject-based curriculum. It will ensure that kindergarteners comprehend the entire universe and how to behave appropriately in society through a teaching strategy that incorporates music, dance, poems, games, and storytelling. This is the most effective technique to make learning more pleasurable for these young children. Learning areas which are (1) Myanmar, (2) English, (3) Mathematics, (4) Science, (5) Social Studies, (6) Physical Education, (7) Life Skills, (8) Moral and Civics, (9) Aesthetics (Music & Art), and (10) Local Curriculum make up the primary school curriculum. The middle school curriculum is divided into eleven learning areas, which are compulsory for all learners. These areas are (1) Myanmar, (2) English, (3) Mathematics, (4) Science, (5) Social Study (Geography), (6) Social Study (History), (7) Physical Education, (7) Life Skills, (8) Moral and Civics, (9) Aesthetics (Music & Art), and (10) Local Curriculum. There are two streams of twelve study areas at the high school level. Science and Art are the two streams from which students can select. The high school Science Stream curriculum includes 11 areas of study that all students must complete and three art-based social studies courses from which students can choose one. These learning areas are (1) Myanmar, (2) English, (3) Mathematics, (4) Physics, (5) Chemistry, (6) Biology, (7) Physical Education, (8) Life Skills, (9) Moral and Civics, (10) Aesthetics (Music and Art), (11) Local Curriculum and (12) one elective from Social Studies (Geography), Social Studies (History), and Social Studies (Economics). On the other hand, the high school Art Stream comprises 11 learning areas plus two science-based subjects and Optional Myanmar, of which the students can select one. These areas are (1) Myanmar, (2) English, (3) Business Mathematics, (4) Social Studies (Geography), (5) Social Studies (History), (6) Social Studies (Economics), (7) Physical Education, (8) Life Skills, (9) Moral and Civics, (10) Aesthetics (Music and Art), (11) Local Curriculum and (12) one elective from Physics (Integrated Physics and Chemistry), Biology (Integrated Biology and Chemistry) and Optional Myanmar. 21st Century Skills for the job opportunity and personal development are specifically organized to be taught with some contents depending on the locality, according to the new curriculum.

Teacher Education Curriculum Framework

Although a few modifications were introduced in the Education College Curriculum in the last 18 years, it dated back to 1998 because the fundamentals of structure, content and delivery model remain in place (Lall, 2020). There were a variety of reasons to make the teacher education curriculum framework update. Firstly, it needs to be relevant to the structure of a four-year education degree college. The second one is that it needs to align directly to the basic education curriculum framework and reflect the exact expectations, subject areas and methodologies. Basic education teachers are now required to undertake pre-service and in-service training to familiarize themselves with new curricula and teaching methodology. Lall, M. (2020) described that the teacher education curriculum requires new content to link with the new basic education curriculum. A new curriculum for four-year degree colleges is being developed by technical experts, including education colleges' teacher educators, and coordinated through UNESCO's 'Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education.

Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) forms the basis for all teacher education across the different institutions, qualifications and stages (both pre-service and in-service). The framework should be used as the basis of the curriculum framework as it provides a clear description of the learning outcomes of a teacher-training course. It should be used to inform the design of the content structure, the methodologies and most importantly, how the student teachers are assessed (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, upgrading the teacher education curriculum framework was based on the Teacher Competency Standards Framework, which comprises four domains:

- professional knowledge and understanding;
- professional skills and practices;
- professional values and dispositions;
- professional growth and development (Dabrowski and Spink, 2020).

The first-year curriculum was introduced in December 2019. The next-year curricula are still in the process, and it takes more time than planned because of the pandemic.

Role of Teacher Education in implementation of Basic Education curriculum

In implementing the new basic education curriculum, teachers cooperate with basic education departments and the JICA CREATE project. Education degree colleges are responsible for the primary and middle curriculum of basic education. At the same time, the Yangon University of Education (YUOE) and the Sagaing University of Education (SUOE) have the responsibility to implement the upper secondary curriculum.

In preparation for the introduction of the new curriculum (KG, Grade1, Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grade 6), the Ministry of Education conducted workshops and training for teacher trainers from education colleges and education officers from townships, districts and states/ regions, as well as ministerial officials from the concerned departments at the central level. Following this, nationwide in-service teacher training and pre-service teacher training were conducted to introduce the new curriculum. Teacher trainers facilitated in-service teacher training for teachers, including all primary and middle teachers from all schools, including monastic schools, private schools, and other schools that used the government curriculum (JICA, 2017a). In pre-service teacher training, student teachers attending the D.TED course and Pre-service Primary Teaching Training (PPTT) course in the education colleges.

Concerning the training for the high school new curriculum, there is no valid information, documents and practices. It is not implemented in the basic education schools at the time of writing because of the pandemic. Therefore, there is still weakness regarding the training for the new curriculum of basic education. The JICA report states that teachers have encountered several challenges in implementing the new curriculum. These included insufficient time to prepare the lessons, teaching subjects they had no training in – such as performing arts, especially playing the flute and singing songs in front of their students, and visual arts 'because teachers by themselves are sometimes poor in drawing and painting'.

According to the Oxford Policy Management (OPM) team, teachers are concerned because they do not believe they have the pedagogical abilities to implement the new method. Teachers claimed that the training sessions were too short and did not help them teach the new topic or educate in a more child-centred approach, mainly when they had a big class size (OPM, 2019). They required further training in order to teach the new curriculum courses effectively. Due to a lack of familiarity with the new method, they could not conduct classroom assessments on individual learners. 'Trained skills and experiences for Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers are confined to two-week assignment/project work; thus, teachers cannot apply them effectively in classroom practices.

Following the coup, the military regime attempted to reopen schools closed due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus epidemic. On May 5, under the direction of the State Administration Council (SAC), the Ministry of Education reopened final-year, master's, and PhD courses in higher education. On June 1, all basic education schools were ordered to reopen. Generally, all teacher training institutions across the country reopen with half of the teacher trainers and half of the student teachers attending the schools

because another half are participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Basic Education Schools are likewise plagued by a shortage of teachers. Because of the third wave of the pandemic, basic education institutions were reopened after a few weeks. Currently, no new curriculum is implemented in junta-controlled schools. The National Unity Government has prepared a parallel basic education system for students who boycott junta-controlled schools. The NUG's Ministry of Education announced that a new curriculum that supports federal democracy is being planned. However, in the current political climate, the constraints of implementing a new curriculum in basic education are considerable.

Conclusion

During democracy, the Ministry of Education Myanmar, is doing education reforms by implementing curriculum reform in both teacher education and basic education. Although teacher education, including three institutions, cooperates with basic education in the implementation of the new curriculum, it found that there are still few weaknesses in the implementation of the new curriculum of basic education. Soe et al. (2017) recommended that the new curriculum will fulfil local needs and circumstances and discourage the practice of rote-learning, and will ensure that students grow as independent thinkers with their sense of creativity. Whether the new curriculum in basic education can be implemented remains in question in this political situation. For the future generations of Myanmar students, humanitarian aid from the international community should continue to support curriculum improvements.

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