

Education Reforms in Myanmar before COVID-19: Basic and Teacher Education

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Abstract: Myanmar has tried to improve its basic and teacher education system since they are crucial for quality education. This article aims to comprehensively explain the reforms in Myanmar's education, including basic and teacher education, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this article explains the long and complex political history and describes how basic and teacher education have changed along with the political settings. The data are illustrated using document analysis focusing on the circumstances of basic and teacher education in Myanmar by capturing the situation before starting the reforms in 2016 and the education reforms based on the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-21). In 2011, the civilian government conducted a comprehensive education sector review of the entire system after assuming political power that included an analysis of preschools, basic education, TVET, and higher education. The results of this review became a roadmap for establishing a quality education program called the NESP (2016-21). Based on this plan, many reforms were implemented in different educational sectors. First, basic education was reformed by improving access to quality inclusive education, curricula, and student assessments. Second, teacher education has been promoted by ensuring a teacher quality assurance system, upgrading pre-service teacher education in education degree colleges, establishing a teacher competence framework, and introducing short- and long-term revision programs for in-service teachers. Myanmar attempted to provide quality education through basic and teacher education reforms before COVID-19. If all the NESP targets had been achieved, all Myanmar's children would have had access to quality learning through the relevant curriculum for the 21st century by qualified teachers.

Key words: basic education, teacher education, education reform, Myanmar

1. Introduction

A country's development depends mainly on the quality of its education because it contributes to human resource development. Basic education primarily supports and shapes children's development, helping them develop the physical, intellectual, moral, emotional, social, and spiritual qualities of good citizens. The importance of education is highlighted in SDG target 4, "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Therefore, educational reform has become a priority in almost all countries. According to McKinsey and Company (2007), "the education system cannot exceed its teacher quality" (p. 16). Thus, for a successful education system, teachers are at least as important as policies and policymakers in education and are among the most fundamental factors of successful education. According to Musset (2010), teacher education ensures their quality (p.

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12). Therefore, teacher education is the most crucial source of qualified teachers for effective teaching-learning situations in classrooms. This study highlights Myanmar's attempts to promote basic and teacher education, which are central components of quality education.

Myanmar's political situation has led to educational changes. After assuming power in 2011, the civilian government implemented reforms across various sectors of the country. Since the democratic government started to engage with the larger world, international agencies from the UK, Japan, and Australia have been involved in the education development process. The new government embarked on a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) with the help of development partners involving three stages over three and a half years: 1) a rapid sector assessment, 2) an in-depth analysis of critical subsector challenges, and 3) an outline of a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) for 2016-21. The NESP provided a roadmap for reforms over five years (2016-21) (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 10), emphasizing nine transformational areas: preschool and kindergarten education; access, quality, and inclusion in basic education; curriculum; assessment; teacher education; alternative education; technical and vocational training (TVET); higher education (HE); and education sector management. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has implemented reforms in each area based on the NESP.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of the reforms in Myanmar's basic and teacher education systems before COVID-19. The following research questions were focused on to reach the purpose:

- 1) What was the situation in Myanmar before education reforms aligned with the NESP (2016-21)?
- 2) How was basic education promoted in Myanmar before the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) How was teacher education promoted in Myanmar before COVID-19?

This study is qualitative research that uses document analysis. The documents analyzed were as follows: 1) a data collection survey on the education sector (final report) conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); 2) CESR (secondary education); and 3) NESP (2016-21). The JICA survey, published in 2013, comprised 249 pages with the following objectives: 1) collecting data on basic education, TVET, and HE, 2) identifying urgent problems, and 3) designing a practical approach to solve these problems. The second report, principally funded by the Asia Development Bank and the Government of Australia and published in 2013, consists of 82 pages and presents an initial investigation of the secondary education subsector in Myanmar. These reports were analyzed because they explored issues in basic and teacher education before the education reforms, in line with the NESP (2016-21). The NESP (2016-21) was published by the MOE in 2016 and was investigated because all educational reforms prior to COVID-19 were based on it.

Previous studies have examined the history of education from various perspectives. However, research on recent education reforms in Myanmar is scarce. This study provides a clear description of the reforms introduced in basic and teacher education for a comprehensive understanding of the education reforms.

2. Social and Political Background and Changes in Education

Myanmar, officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, is one of the largest Southeast Asian countries. It has five neighboring countries: Laos PDR to the east, Thailand to the east and southeast, China to the north and northeast, India to the northwest, and Bangladesh to the west. Ethnic diversity is a distinct characteristic of Myanmar, which has 135 ethnic nationalities. The Union of Myanmar covers a surface area of 676,552.7 km², separated into seven states, seven regions, and one Union Territory. According to the 2014 census, 70.1% lived in rural areas and the rest in urban areas. The total population was 51,486,253 (p. 10), with 65.6% in the economically productive age group (15-64 years) (p. 16), according to the 2014 census (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014, p. 16).

The population density was 81 persons per km² in 2019-2020. According to the 2014 Census, 87.8% of the population was Buddhist and 6.2%, the second highest percentage, Christian (p. 26). The average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth was approximately 6.61 percent from 2011 to 2020. The official entry age for primary education is six years, and primary education is compulsory. The net enrollment rates at the primary, middle, and high school levels in 2018-19 were 97%, 71.45%, and 46.21%, respectively (MOE, 2018, p. 18).

Myanmar's political history is complex. Britain took over Myanmar (also known as Burma) in three stages during the Anglo-Burmese War, in 1824, 1852, and 1885. With the promise of freedom and the creation of the Burmese Independence Army, the Japanese invaded Myanmar in 1942 to end British rule. In 1945, the Burmese National Army opposed the Japanese with British sponsorship. Britain provided freedom, so Myanmar gained independence on the 4th of January 1948.

After gaining independence, Myanmar faced various governance difficulties. General Ne Win took control of the U Nu government in 1958 after brutal civil wars and ethnic insurgencies. After the general election, a new parliament took over, and in 1962 General Ne Win retook power through a military coup because of the opposition of non-Buddhist minorities to the government. General Ne Win established the Burma Socialist Programme Party under military control. In 1988, the military took over the country after protests against democracy (Thein Lwin, 2000, p. 4). Despite the success of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 general election, the military failed to hand over power. After the 2010 elections, political authority was handed over to the first civilian government, led by Thein Sein. However, Myanmar had an imperfect parliamentary democracy, since the military took 25% of the parliamentary seats (Hayden & Martin, 2013, p. 48). In 2015, the NLD party, led by Aung San Su Kyi, succeeded in the national election and governed the country for five years. Although the NLD party successfully established a government in the 2020 election, the military council seized power in a military coup in February 2021.

Myanmar's basic and teacher education systems have changed in response to the complex political situation. Under British rule, three categories of schools existed in Myanmar: 1) English schools, in which English was the primary instructional medium; 2) Anglo-vernacular schools, in which English and vernacular languages were the mediums of instruction; and 3) vernacular schools, in which vernacular languages were the medium of instruction (Suante, 2022, p. 6). Teacher education began in schools established by church missionaries in the mid-19th century. In the early 20th century, Rangoon University (currently Yangon University) established the Faculty of Education and produced high school teachers through graduate-level courses. The Rangoon Teacher's Training College was set up to provide high school teachers with a Bachelor of Arts (BEd) degree and middle school teachers with university-trained teacher certificates. However, the Japanese administration introduced a unified type of schooling instead of three types (Suante, 2022, p. 8).

After independence in 1953, the government announced a new educational plan under which the education system consisted of nursery schools (3-5 years old) provided by the private sector, primary schools for the infant class to standard IV (5-10 years old), middle schools for standard V to standard VII (10-13 years old), high schools for standard VIII to standard X, which included agriculture and technical high schools (13-16 years old), and vocational and technical institutes and universities (17 years and above). High school teachers with bachelor's degrees were trained at the Faculty of Education of Rangoon University. The Teacher's Training College (TTC) produced middle school teachers, while the Teacher's Training School (TTS) produced primary school teachers (Tanaka, 2022, p. 59). After the coup in 1962, the military regime nationalized all schools, and the basic education system was transformed from a 5-3-3 into a 5-4-2 schooling. The military government has initiated a hierarchical career path for teachers. Graduated primary school teachers attended teachers' training schools for one year. After three years of service as primary school teachers, they can take a one-year training course at the TTC

to become middle school teachers. With five years of work experience, teachers can take a Bachelor of Education course at the Institute of Education to become high school teachers. Their salaries increase with the educational levels they teach. In 1998, education colleges were founded countrywide in place of TTCs and TTSs (Tanaka, 2022, p. 64). These colleges provided two-year training to produce middle school teachers and a one-year course for primary school teachers.

After the 2010 general elections, the government conducted a comprehensive analysis of the education sector. The results, the NESP (2016-21), provide a roadmap for educational reform. The 2015 general election allowed the civilian government to continue its educational reforms. The NESP (2016-21) strongly focused on improving teaching and learning in all classrooms to promote student learning achievement. Different MOE departments are responsible for effective and efficient coordination. Four transformational shifts in the NESP were used to improve basic and teacher education. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework for achieving the NESP's goal of effective student learning. The following sections explain the reforms made to basic and teacher education in Myanmar.

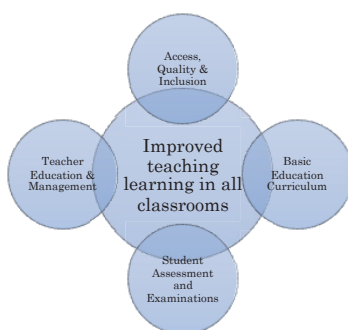


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework for Basic and Teacher Education Reforms

3. Situations in Myanmar Before Education Reforms

This section discusses the quality, access, and inclusion of basic education, curricula, assessments, examinations, and teacher education before the 2016 reform. Different categories of schools have been approved in Myanmar, including 1) main basic education schools, 2) branch schools, and 3) affiliated schools. Guidelines for upgrading schools to the next level, such as primary to post-primary school level, are provided by MOE in accordance with the number of students, remoteness of the school, and transportation troubles. Monastery schools and private schools are also permitted. Despite the differences in schools, access to schooling remains a problem. Opposite patterns of enrollment and dropout rates were found in the upper grades. A JICA study (2013) found this pattern mostly in children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those with socioeconomic problems, including income, ethnic minority groups, and health problems or disabilities (p. 147).

There were no qualitative criteria for establishing schools. According to the JICA study team, criteria for assessing the quality of classroom environments are required to ensure proper class sizes and facilities (JICA, 2013, p. 32). In both rural and urban areas, teachers use teacher-centered teaching approaches and rote learning. In addition, primary and middle school head teachers require more administrative power to improve their school management. Although school inspections are conducted regularly, improvements in the quality of teaching, school management, and facilities must be emphasized.

The Basic Education Law (1973) clearly defines the curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks. However, only textbooks are published and distributed as official documents in schools. Curriculum-related

information such as the objectives and teaching hours for each subject appeared in different documents developed by the regional education office, including textbooks and monthly curricula. Myanmar had no regular curriculum review mechanism, and textbook content was sparingly reviewed and required thorough revision. In addition, the textbooks contained only a large amount of information that required low-level thinking skills, such as recognition, description, and comprehension, and needed to be more relevant to higher-level thinking skills such as synthesis, prediction, and generalization. Moreover, a critical reason for children not enrolling in school or dropping out of school was a lack of interest. According to the CESR results, this may be because the education provided by schools is irrelevant to real-world situations.

The curriculum was reformed to improve students' higher-level thinking skills; therefore, assessments and examinations must be revised to measure students' achievement correctly. The previous assessment system was introduced in 1998, under which the Monthly Report Card (MRC), consisting of students' scores on the Chapter End Test (CET) and an evaluation of their manners in school activities, was used to assess students' achievement. According to a JICA study, CET pushed teachers to review the content of textbooks instead of teaching students to attain a higher level of thinking (JICA, 2013, p. 73). In addition, the teachers prepared for and reviewed the CET instead of teaching. The CESR team pointed out that this system encouraged rote learning and may have lowered the success rate of Matriculation Examinations. Moreover, the matriculation examination questions stressed subject content rather than higher-level thinking skills without an in-depth analysis of the results (MOE, 2013, p. 29).

Several issues in teacher education must be addressed. Myanmar has an ascending salary system based on teaching positions, ranging from primary to junior to senior assistant teachers. Teachers require more years of teaching service and advanced teaching qualifications for promotion, which removes experienced teachers from primary school, the most critical stage in education. Another issue was the need for a comprehensive teacher-education policy, which made it challenging to plan continuous professional development programs for teachers. The JICA study team (2013) recommended the formulation of teacher education policies and professional standards for all stakeholders (p. 40), pointed out inadequate teacher-support mechanisms and the lack of a teacher evaluation system for effective classroom teaching (p. 48), and urged reform of the curricula of institutes of education and education colleges (p. 49).

4. Basic Education Reforms in Myanmar

This section discusses basic education reforms in Myanmar in three subsections: 1) access, quality, and inclusion; 2) the basic education curriculum; and 3) student assessment and examinations.

The MOE has implemented several educational reforms. The education system was changed according to the National Education Law (NEL) (2014). The old system was 5:4:2, and kindergarten was included in primary education as grade one. Schooling began at the age of five years and was compulsory until Grade 5, the end of primary level. The new education structure, kindergarten:5:4:3, comprises one year of kindergarten¹, five years of primary, four years of middle, and three years of high school level schooling.

4.1 Access, quality, and inclusion

Regarding the problems and issues in access, quality, and inclusion, the new NEL (2014) identifies free compulsory primary education as a citizen's right, ascertains a quality assurance system, lengthens the years of basic education schooling (KG + 12), acknowledges the learning of nationalities' languages and culture, uses these languages as a medium of instruction, and commits to a decentralized education

system. NEL (2014) defines inclusive education and makes explicit provisions to guarantee that all children in the country have the opportunity to complete their basic education.

The government aims to solve issues regarding access, quality, and inclusion through a transformative shift in the NESP. Children countrywide have chances to accomplish quality basic education through three strategies with nine components to realize these changes. First is universal access to free education, whose three components are: 1) school census and mapping baseline, 2) extension of existing schools and establishment of new schools, and 3) supply of teaching aids to all schools (MOE, 2016, p. 103). Under this strategy, the MOE conducts sound evidence-based data collection that can direct attention to coverage gaps and identify schools needing upgrades. The findings also serve as a basis for the National School Infrastructure Investment Plan (NSIP), which includes extending classrooms in schools to align with the new KG+12 structure, developing new middle schools, and upgrading post-primary and branch schools. In addition, the school census and mapping baseline results identified schools' teaching and learning resource needs, including different resources for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and ICT facilities. The MOE continues to implement free and compulsory education policies by abolishing school fees at all levels of basic education, providing school grants, and supporting primary students with free exercise books, textbooks, and school uniforms.

The second strategy was to provide compulsory and inclusive education, with three components: 1) intensifying compulsory education, 2) maintaining vulnerable students in schools, and 3) promoting opportunities for children with disabilities (MOE, 2016, p. 104). First, based on the school census and mapping baseline, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) identifies the areas needing the most significant enrollment to keep children in schools. The DBE works with partner civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage with communities and encourage children to enroll or return to school. In the second component, children from low-income families who have a high possibility of not enrolling or leaving school without finishing schooling are supported by remedial teaching, scholarships, and school feeding. The third component, promoting inclusive education, includes 1) developing a specialist knowledge base of inclusive education through specialization in higher education, 2) establishing resource schools for inclusive education, and 3) developing an inclusive education module in pre-and in-service teacher education.

The third strategy for basic quality education, comprising three components, is to enhance the quality of school through a national school-based quality assurance system. The first component was the development of a national school quality standard assurance framework (SQSAF) (MOE, 2016, p. 106). The DBE led to the development of the SQSAF, which established minimum quality criteria for all aspects of the school environment. School-internal quality assurance teams replaced school inspection teams and used quality assurance assessment tools. The second component is school improvement planning under SQSAF (p. 106). The head teacher develops school improvement plans (SIPs) based on SQSAF specifying interventions to address school quality-related challenges. All schools must produce SIPs to provide quality grants. Parent representatives from parent-teacher associations need to monitor and report on the implementation of SIPs and the use of school quality grants. The third component is school leadership and management (p. 106). Headteachers act as instructional leaders when introducing new educational reforms. Therefore, instructional leadership training programs have been organized for head teachers. Myanmar is moving toward a decentralized education system; therefore, head teachers need to build their capacities in decision-making and improve parent and community contributions to schools.

4.2 Basic education curriculum

The NEL (2014) defines "curriculum" as "systematically written programs for all fields in

formal and non-formal education, designed to achieve educational objectives and include learning outcomes, content, instructional methods, and evaluation.” Moreover, the law describes the contents of the Education Commission to realize the basic education curriculum, which should (1) ensure the production of an educated, mature, and good society in which people have critical thinking skills; 2) meet the needs of current society and international standards; 3) create a countrywide curriculum framework and standards for each level of basic education; and 4) connect to practical life.

The NESP transformational shift regarding the basic education curriculum is that “all school children develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies that are relevant to their lives and to the socio-economic development needs of the 21st century” (MOE, 2016, p. 114). The new education system² with the new curriculum was implemented by introducing kindergarten education in 2016. The following strategies support the implementation of a basic education curriculum framework: 1) redesigning the basic education curricula to emphasize 21st century skills; 2) building the professional capability of curriculum development teams; and 3) implementing the new curricula through supported curriculum management, spreading information about the new curriculum to the community, and monitoring and evaluation systems. The first strategy comprises three components: 1) preparing new curricula design for basic education, 2) developing and finalizing curriculum-related materials, and 3) developing curricula of nationalities’ languages (pp. 115-117). Based on the basic education curriculum framework, the MOE, especially the Curriculum Section, with the help of international partners, drafted a detailed curriculum for kindergarten and all subsequent grades and related documents such as textbooks and teacher guidebooks. The Department of Myanmar Nationalities’ Languages has led curriculum development and national language teaching. The second strategy comprises three components: 1) teacher training on the new curriculum, 2) empowerment of curriculum development teams, and 3) empowerment of curriculum development teams for nationalities languages (pp. 118-119). The curriculum development section led to the establishment, training, and support of teachers and curriculum-development teams nationwide. The third strategy comprises three components: 1) strengthening the curriculum management team; 2) sharing information about the new curriculum through different media; and 3) strengthening the curriculum monitoring and evaluation system (p. 119). The Textbook Committee supported to developing and implementing of a curriculum material management policy. This policy considers the cost-effectiveness of high-quality materials, stressing that teaching-learning materials in the classrooms are attractive and durable. In the second component, information related to implementing the new curriculum is disseminated through different media to stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and education officers. Related to the third component, the new institutional structures and procedures of the MOE ensure the regular monitoring and evaluation of basic education curricula. Obstacles to successfully implementing the curriculum and providing sufficient support for teaching learning resources were identified by establishing new teams. In addition, the MOE plans to incorporate formal curriculum reviews into its curriculum management.

4.3 Student assessment and examinations

NEL (2014) provides a legal basis for assessing student learning achievements. Paragraph 16(c) in Chapter 5 states that student achievement must be evaluated at all educational levels. Chapter 10, paragraph 54 (a), mentions the quality assurance program for every level of education, and paragraph 54(b) emphasizes internal and external quality assessments in educational quality standards. The MOE identified the following transformational shift in the NESP: Education staff realize a quality assessment system that leads to improvements in student achievement. Two strategies with nine components were used to address this shift. The first is to improve assessments and examinations. The first component is the development of the National Assessment Policy (NAP),³ undertaken by the Department of Myanmar Examinations (DME) (MOE, 2016, p. 130). The second component is classroom-

level assessment, building teacher capacity and parental understanding of classroom assessment (p. 130), including both formal and informal assessments of student achievement. To realize the NAP and assessment framework, the DME must develop training materials for teachers to enhance the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment; develop assessment handbooks for teachers; provide monitoring tools to identify areas requiring further support; and provide training programs for teachers. The third component was the school-level assessment. The MOE replaced chapter-end tests with new school-level grade-based assessments. The fourth component comprises completion examinations for grades 5 and 9, and high school completion (p. 131). The DME improves the question type, test administration mode, scoring, and analysis of results of these completion examinations. The fifth component, national sample-based assessments, provides information about student performance in particular curriculum areas (p. 132).

Strategy 2, which strengthens coordination, management, and monitoring, has the following four components: First, the DME was reorganized to build human resource capacity aligned with the new assessment and examination system. Second, capacity building and advocacy involves creating professional development programs for schools and DME staff, whether current or newly hired, regarding test development, accountability for test publication, test administration, test analysis, and psychometrics. The third component is the establishment of information and communication technology infrastructure related to the assessment system, and fourth is the development of a monitoring mechanism (MOE, 2016, p. 134). Classroom- and school-level assessments were monitored by school-level self-evaluation teams headed by head teachers, and school inspection teams covering the township, district, and regional levels. Technical assessment teams monitor the completion of examinations and national sample-based assessments through the DME.

The above explanations describe the reforms implemented in basic education for quality education from different perspectives. In addition to these reforms, promoting classroom teaching quality is critical for improving student achievement and educational outcomes. This highlights the importance of teachers in promoting education. Therefore, it is vital to determine the reforms implemented in the teacher education sector. The following section describes these reforms.

5. Teacher Education Reforms in Myanmar

The NEL (2014) provided a legal basis for ensuring quality teachers. Chapter 9, paragraph 50 (c), emphasizes teacher education qualifications in basic education schools. Paragraph 52 also ensures improvements in teachers' qualifications by the MOE and other ministries. The MOE specifies a transformational shift to improving teacher education: teachers reinforce, improve, and employ interactive teaching-learning situations in the classrooms to benefit all children. This shift is realized through three strategies: The first strategy, with three components, supports teacher quality assurance and management. The first component is the establishment of a teacher education council that promotes and implements teacher education and management reforms such as institutionalizing professional standards (MOE, 2016, p. 143). The second component, the establishment of a teacher quality assurance system, comprises two reforms: the teacher competence framework and the teacher accreditation system (p. 143). The third involves designing and promoting equity in teacher hiring, promotion, and deployment practices (p. 144). The improved teacher recruitment system included recognizing prior teaching, such as teaching in monastery schools. The recruitment system works closely with teacher accreditation and performance assessment systems, including the teacher-competence framework. Additionally, teacher promotion and salary systems do not consider having experienced teachers at only one school's teaching level.

The second strategy was to enhance the pre-service teacher education quality. The first

component provides short-term reviews of the teacher-education curriculum (MOE, 2016, p. 146) to align the teacher-education curricula and assessment framework with basic education reforms in the curricula and assessment. The second component concerns the transformation of a two-year teacher education program into a specialized degree program (p. 146), including transitioning from a two-year diploma course to a four-year degree course in Education Colleges and developing specialized degree courses such as early childhood care and development, kindergarten, and primary education. The third component was school collaboration and practicum reform. Educational Colleges must establish partnerships with nearby schools to allow student teachers to utilize what they learn and acquire appropriate feedback and suggestions (p. 146). The fourth component is strengthening the management and administration of teacher education institutions (p. 146) to ensure that the staff in different departments of teacher education institutions are qualified to implement teacher education reforms.

The third strategy concerns the professional empowerment of in-service teachers. The first component was the institutionalization of the National Center for Teacher Professional Development (NCTPD) to offer long-term training for teacher empowerment via professional development programs at the township, cluster, and school-based levels (MOE, 2016, p. 148). The second component concerns implementing professional development programs for teachers (p. 151). The NCTPD must cooperate with experts from teacher-education institutions and related organizations to develop professional development courses. Teacher trainers and mentors from townships need to be recruited, trained, and deployed. They then train mentor teachers based on clusters of schools. The third component is a nationwide short-term in-service training related to the new basic education curricula (p. 151). The MOE ensures that all teachers apply the new approaches to pedagogy and assessment when implementing a new curriculum.

6. Conclusions

This article thoroughly explains the recent reforms in Myanmar's education, including basic and teacher education, by capturing the situation before the 2016 reforms and educational reforms based on the NESP (2016-21) before COVID-19. After gaining political power in 2011, the civilian government initiated educational reforms led by the MOE. After enacting the NEL in 2014, the NESP (2016-21) was made public in 2016 based on the CESR results, which identified weaknesses and priority challenges in the education sector. The MOE has been implementing comprehensive basic and teacher education reforms to accomplish the NESP targets, leading to significant improvements in education. If the NESP goals or shifts are successfully achieved, all children will have opportunities for quality teaching and learning classrooms with qualified teachers using updated and relevant curricula that could meet the 21st century challenges. However, these reforms have limitations. For example, kindergarten should be included in compulsory education because it helps children prepare for primary level learning and contributes to the development of non-cognitive abilities (Tin Nu Nu Wai & Miwa, 2022, p. 13). In addition, teacher education curriculum reforms have been implemented in education degree colleges, but not in universities of education. Nevertheless, the MOE has attempted to provide quality basic and teacher education in various ways, as outlined above.

However, these reforms have been left incomplete by COVID-19 and military rule. First, COVID-19 disrupted these reforms in 2019. All schools were closed, and reforms were hindered. Moreover, the military coup in 2021 resulted in the loss of human resources and development partners during the reform process because many staff members participated in the civil disobedience movement (CDM). A Myanmar Teachers' Federation official stated that 125,900 schoolteachers and 19,500 university staff members were suspended for participating in the CDM (Reuters, 2021).

Challenges due to COVID-19 and the MOE's inadequate capacity due to the coup have placed

Myanmar's education in an enormously difficult situation. Myanmar now faces various crises, including education, because of violence and conflict in different states and regions of the country, making Myanmar's educational future uncertain. Students have yet to receive the education envisioned by the NESP, whose reforms have not been achieved. What is certain about quality education is the need to end the civil war as quickly as possible and rebuild a democratic nation based on people's strengths.

Notes

1. According to the NEL (2014), kindergarten is for five-year-olds and grade 1 for six-year-olds. Therefore, it is not included in compulsory education, as it is the base level of primary-level schooling.
2. The new Grade 1 curriculum was introduced in the 2017-18 AY, and this Grade 1 group finished their primary schooling with the new curricula in the 2021-22 academic year. The new grade 6 curriculum began in 2019-20 AY. New grade 7 and grade 10 curricula were introduced in the 2021-22 AY. In 2022-23 AY, new curricula for grades 5, 8, and 11 will be introduced, and the new education system will be entirely implemented by introducing new curricula for grades 9 and 12 in 2023-24 AY.
3. NAP is a general framework for a basic education assessment system that includes classroom-level assessments, school-level assessments, and information on national educational policy.

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