

An Evaluation of the Elementary Education Policy in Myanmar

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Abstract—The Education system consists of three dimensions such as policy formation, managerial, and implementation. The purpose of education is to teach and train the young ones to grow in wisdom and knowledge because they are the hope of the nation. Unfortunately, the standard of education in Myanmar has declined markedly in the past couple of decades since the military dictatorship government led by U Ney Win took power in 1962. Since then, the education sector has experienced the challenges of reform to upgrade its educational policies. This article reviews and evaluates Myanmar's education system, with related policies, the principle of management, and the procedure of implementation. It concentrates on the quality, objectives, and implementation of education policy. This qualitative approach of evaluation would identify the necessity of updating and upgrading the concept of a better education system on several levels. To support the quality of education policy implementation, this paper examines different dimensions of policy design, stakeholder engagement, conducive context, and a coherent implementation strategy.

Keywords—education, policy, implementation, autonomy

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a prerequisite to national development. This is one of the basic human needs since it provides the necessities of an environment with securing good health, liberty, security, economic well-being, and participation in social and political activities. Education is very important to live a flawless life for every individual because it is knowing about the facts of life and learning in different forms to grow into maturity. Therefore, education helps to create our world and sustain our future generations and develop healthy relationships as responsible citizens.

In the era of globalization, education is very important in all aspects because it is an instrument not only to liberate humanity from backwardness but also from ignorance and poverty. Nations that are rich in natural resources realize that human resources are indispensable to prevent the exploitation of that inherent wealth. To produce competent and dedicated human resources, the schools are the important components to form, prepare and deliver a generation of promising young

people to the perspectives of the global context according to the Law Republic of Myanmar No. 41 2014.

Unfortunately, Myanmar's education system had been manipulated for political interests rather than social and economic development under the military dictatorship from 1962 to 2010. The standard of Education in Myanmar is very poor both in physical and human resources with few opportunities for the younger generation and small incentives for professional development. The government's policy of setting universities in Myanmar only favors the elite students and creates critical issues for a diversity of ethnicity, religion, language, and disabilities.

Myanmar since 2011, under the democratic form of governments, has made strong progress in increasing children's access to education and improved little the quality of the education system. However, many children remain out of school. Schools nationwide are also struggling to provide quality education to the students due to poor facilities and incompetent faculties with outdated teaching methods.

As democracy gradually growing in Myanmar, all development sectors are challenged to be upgraded to meet the required standards of a democratic system. In 2016, the newly elected government of NLD (National League for Democracy) has made the overhauling of the education system a national priority to increase human capital. Implementing the educational priority requires an increase of budget, the promulgation of new educational laws or policies, and making public school fees-free.

Besides, effective reforms would take time since more challenges are still to be addressed. The contemporary school teachers in Myanmar still limited experience and short career paths, poor salary, few mandatory hours in the classroom, low social status, and high levels of burnout. An outdated curriculum also makes Myanmar's education less effective. Myanmar's government is still challenged to implement long-term plans to improve the country's education system. Therefore, for Myanmar because of moving forward for a better future, the country has to renew and upgrade its

educational policy implementation as recommended by UNESCO,

“Getting the reform strategies right, by a broad-based dialogue, and by increasing responsibility and involvement of stakeholders at every level, will be a crucial element of educational reform”

In education, the elementary level is the first step that all children must complete. Basic knowledge starts with elementary education without which no dreams will be possible. At the same time, the quality assurance system is also critical to improve the education service delivery and outputs. To provide quality outputs that could further contribute to the development of the country, it is important to enhance quality inputs and quality assurance.

Therefore, for Myanmar to improve access to education and the quality of education, capacity building for teachers and academic administrators at different levels, it is essential to give importance to its elementary schools. To provide the possible approach, this article would evaluate its existing education system and explore the education policy implementation on the elementary level in Myanmar.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Community building becomes a powerful place if people are together as a community regardless of ethnicity or religion, language, or cultural background [1]. As a community, they build differences in their way. This indeed is possible through the process of developing the quality of education policy implementation, especially in Myanmar. Education plays a huge role in the community dimension since it contributes stability and sustainability, it promotes quality among its members to experience a sense of dependence and confidence, and it also spares different forms of exploitation. The quality of education is often measured by the quality of life the community develops eventually.

Parker and Bradley [2], did the survey based on the competing values framework of organizational culture as they explored the competing demands. They observed that organizations with internal focus make emphasis on integration, information management, and communication whereas external focus makes emphasis on growth, resource acquisition, and interaction with the external environment. In their assessments, they noticed that public sector agencies have a culture that reflects a focus on rules and regulations, with limited flexibility, yet participants prefer greater flexibility. It suggests that acting in the public interest is the most effective strategic policy, always enhanced by the substantial quality of education policy establishment with a higher level of trust, less conflict, and greater morale.

Crook and Sverrisson [3] identified five capitals for a human to survive such human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital. But in those capitals, education development plays a leading role to acquire those capitals and invest the capability, knowledge, and

employment opportunities for human capital and at the same time reduce the poverty rate in the society. According to him, educational development always addresses the social, economic, cultural, environmental problems in the country.

III. METHODOLOGY

The paper is a qualitative approach that would explore the phenomena of Myanmar’s education policy focusing on the observations available from books, articles, and internet resources. Therefore, the method is developmental evaluation on the education policy applied in Myanmar and to measure actions and activities taken in terms of social values, criteria, and standards. This approach study is a systematic collection of information about the current condition of education policy, projects, and programs in Myanmar to learn from such experiences, and at the same time making necessary changes; making outcome assessments, providing the basis for decisions for future initiatives of policy.

It is basically to enhance effectiveness in the public sphere and policymaking to improve the achieved outcomes with qualitative methods on participation and empowerment. It hopes to improve policy with performance management, systematic reviews, institutionalization and utilization, and policy learning and design. Thus, developmental evaluation is set to innovation which could project new programs, outcomes, organizational changes, policy reforms, and system interventions.

The purpose of an evaluation is to support the development of innovation and adaptation in dynamic environments for making a difference trusting in the innovators’ values and commitment. The policy evaluation in education is important because it conveys ideas that are relative to the current condition of the country from all aspects. Thus, this article investigates the policy, legislation, management, and financing in Myanmar Education, which covers the cross-cutting themes of access, quality and relevance, management, strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Myanmar’s Basic Education

Myanmar, according to the World Bank [4], is considered one of the least developed nations with less than 60 million population under an outdated curriculum yet inaccessible education system. In 2012, along with the political transitions, there was a comprehensive review of Myanmar education policies. The review group comes up with the proposal of education plans such as student learning centers on curriculum reform, restructuring the teacher education programs, and student assessment improvement programs.

In April 2013, the Institute of International Education encouraged the Myanmar government to invest in infrastructures for better services of internet access, library resources, teaching, and laboratory facilities. However, the

education sector experiences difficulties and certain limitations due to centralized administrative government.

In reality, there are so many children, especially in the rural and remote areas, who could not have easy access to basic education due to difficult transportation. Centralized administration policy could not help much to promote the right to education for all the children regardless of their ethnicity, religion, location, and gender. And Myanmar simply appears to lack efficient basic education policies in its education system.

B. Education Reform

The civilian-led government NLD initiated in 2016 for education reform to strengthen the education sector and tried to implement long-term and short-term plans to improve quality education programs. Certain policies and education laws have been laid down and enacted.

The NLD government, in its attempted process of reform, gave priority to accessibility, quality, curricular, and teacher training reforms, as well as the issues of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Ever since Myanmar’s education has been a monolingual system in multilingual environments. And the NLD government provides the priorities of education sector reform such as establishing early childhood care programs, improving basic education completion for every child, promoting to support nationalities’ languages and cultures, providing quality of life, developing a world-class higher education system, and ensuring the effective, efficient, and transparent allocation.

The NLD government reorganized the structure of donors and development partners with the aim of an effective education reform process. For effective transformation of Myanmar’s education system, it is necessary to change the style and structure of working attitudes. It would take time for an effective reform process and it would still have to address many challenges.

C. Improvements

Starting from 2016, the government’s education reform program had been relatively progressed in terms of budget allocation (Figure 1). According to the world bank report, Myanmar education spending for 2018 was 9.41% of the total GDP which increased little. The government of Myanmar did scholarships for students who are granted and stipends available for the poor. The government also provides school uniforms for Kindergarten (KG) students, a free uniform, textbooks, and exercise books for primary school students.

Myanmar Education Spending - Historical Data		
Year	Education Spending (% of GDP)	Annual Change
2019	10.46%	0.11%
2018	10.35%	0.25%
2017	10.10%	4.17%
2011	5.93%	4.17%

Fig. 1. Myanmar education spending - historical data [4].

As part of educational reform, a new basic education structure of KG+12 years was introduced in the 2016-2017 academic year. So that the education system would be in conformed to that of neighboring ASEAN countries. The government recruited more teachers for every level of education both in rural and remote areas to balance the teacher-to-pupil ratio in 2013 and 2014. As a result, teacher to pupil ratio in Myanmar is still high comparing to other countries (Figure 2).

	Myanmar	Brunei	Cambodia	Indonesia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam
Primary	28:1	10:1	45:1	17:1	25:1	15:1	19:1
Middle (Lower Secondary)	36:1	10:1	20:1	17:1	19:1	21:1***	16:1

Fig. 2. Students-Teacher ratio compared neighboring, 2014 [5].

D. Governance and Management

In principle, education and economy are directly related because education promotes the economic demands even for education investments falls under the department of economics, yet the impact of education in economics becomes significantly beneficial. Education management and administration in Myanmar have been excessively centralized by the government through the Ministry of Education department.

There are many challenges in Myanmar’s education system relating to finance, governance and management, pedagogy equity, and quality. Finance is grossly underfunded since the dictatorial government deliberately undervalued the importance of education.

The quality of education remains challenging for Myanmar with which it is impossible to produce qualified and competent human resources. The quality of education would help to improve the dignity of human beings holistically and the humanitarian dimension can be developed optimally. Therefore, education quality in Myanmar still needs much to be done concerning neighboring ASEAN nations that are advanced and ahead because their institutions and policies become the special strategic vehicle for the individual potential

of all the development efforts, including establishing national character and insight for learners. Strategy for education is serving large numbers of students and providing treatment and education services that are standard to all learners since the student has different needs, intelligence, skills, interests, and talents.

Myanmar National Law enacted on 30 September 2014 is designed to reform the outdated education system to create quality education which will generate the learning society to capable of facing the challenges of the knowledge. In 2011, the Myanmar government has initiated many efforts to strengthen and upgrade education as the educated population and workforce are demanding economic growth and poverty reduction.

The newly then elected democratic government of Myanmar, NLD led by Aung San Su Kyi, has made the repairing of the education system a national priority to meet the increase for human capital.

E. Teacher Qualification

The teachers have been inadequately trained which make less effect on teaching and learning. In general, a university graduate is required to be a primary teacher. However, due to the shortage of university graduates, high school graduates are recruited to teach at the primary level, and some with limited teachers' training while others without any training programs. Still, there are many schools with limited teachers, especially in rural schools. Therefore, the government should promote attractive programs providing them promising insurances both for pre-service and in-service teachers' training.

F. General Observations

Social-economic conditions limit many young promising people from the rural area for access to proper educational opportunities. According to the census, the children from 10 to 15 years of age from urban areas, the enrollment rate was high but the percentage from poor families and rural areas is low. So, the department of education pays attention only to the demands of policy and regulations from above and neglecting and diminishing to foster the quality of students and teachers. The quality of curriculum, teaching methodology and facility management are also still required to improve.

The limitation of Educational expenditure in Myanmar leads to slow progress in the process of reform. Most of the school types of furniture are limited as well as the classroom sizes are a crowded population of students which makes it impossible to apply the Child-Center-Approach method. Therefore, to enhance the teachers' competency in education, the college of education is necessary. Due to the lack of teachers, more employed teachers do not have the chance for teachers' training programs. The government of Myanmar

immediately need to plan and negotiate to provide the quality of pre-service and in-service teachers' training program.

In Myanmar Teachers are used to textbook-based teaching which means using the Teacher Center Approach and the exam and assessments of students' knowledge are also only from textbooks through the process of memorization. This points that the government has to promote and develop the method of teaching and learning should be a student or child-centered approach so that the students, as well as the teachers, become acumen, creative and critical.

V. CONCLUSION

The current situation of Myanmar's basic or elementary education policy as the result of the reform process has been highly appreciated and commended since the reform is a process of recovery from the damages of prolonged periods of military rule. And there is a significant improvement with regards to curriculum content reform, yet with regards to ethnic and cultural diversity, cultural differences are neglected rather than supported, and the question of equity is not yet part of the discourse of educational reform. Administrative centralization of education policy rather causes the school administrators, teachers, and education workers to remain helpless. Although the basic education reform process itself is welcomed and appreciated, equal delivery of the reform policy implementation is more desirable. For Myanmar's basic education policy to be more effective, accessible, inclusive, and equal for all, the cultural traditions, the hierarchical structures, and the top-down nature of the administration should also be reformed. The fact is that the reform process in Myanmar is improving but slow and difficult.

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