POLICY TRAJECTORIES IN MYANMAR'S EDUCATION REFORM AND THE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS AND POLICY ACTORS

by

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DEDICATION

First, my dissertation is dedicated to all Myanmar teachers who has participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement to fight against the military rule.

It is also dedicated to my late parents who encouraged me to excel throughout my education journey, my wife who supported me in several ways in my study and career, and our four children who are always proud of my achievements.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DERPT	Department of Education Research, Planning and Training
DfID	Department for International Development
DHE	Department of Higher Education
DPs	Development Partners
EFA	Education for All
EPIC	Education Promotion and Implementation Committee
ETVSCG	Education and TVET Sector Coordination Committee
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GPE	Global Partnership for Education

IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MDEF	Multi-Donor Education Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTBMLE	Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education
MUPE	Myanmar–UK Partnership for Education
NAQAC	National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NEPC	National Education Policy Commission
NCC	National Curriculum Committee
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
NLD	National League for Democracy
NNER	National Network of Education Reform
OBE	Outcome Based Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RC	Rectors' Committee

SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIF	School Improvement Fund
MTR	NESP Mid-Term Review
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

ABSTRACT

Myanmar has been undertaking education reforms since 2012. Tensions have arisen between central-level policymakers and teachers' union leaders regarding the implementation of some reforms. While this give-and-take between policymakers and teacher activists has been reported somewhat in the news media, the academic literature on these developments is scarce. This study explores the motivating factors behind these tensions and conducts a critical analysis of the power dynamic between policymakers and policy actors during the reform process. Policymakers' authoritarian ways of implementing education policies and other systemic factors have created tensions between those two groups. That, in turn, has exerted a negative impact on reform activities, particularly the new curriculum rollout. I also discuss socio-cultural and politico-economic factors that have shaped the relationship between the two groups and the reform.

I. POLICY-PRACTICE TENSION IN MYANMAR EDUCATION

Introduction

In May 2019, the hottest summer month in Myanmar, the Ministry of Education (MoE) organized a countrywide teacher training to introduce the new primary curriculum developed with the help of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The MoE structured the new curriculum rollout, beginning with kindergarten and sequentially adding one grade per year. To prepare for the rollout of the new curriculum, the MoE required that all primary teachers participate in the training for primary teachers during the 3-month summer period when schools are typically closed—in short, requiring them to work during their vacation. Primary teachers from each township were required to attend as a countrywide activity. The scorching heat of Myanmar's summer, when the temperature can reach over 110 degrees Fahrenheit, along with the intensive nature of the training, may have led to the death of a few teachers in the middle of the training in a few townships. Teachers voiced their grief and complaints mainly over Facebook, the most popular social network in the country, with many expressing their wishes that the training would stop. However, the Department of Basic Education, the main organizer of the training at the township level, decided to continue the training as planned. This incident was one of the heightened moments of tension between the educational policymakers from Nay Pyi Daw, the new capital of the country, and practitioners (teachers, principals, and township level education officers) who were responsible for implementing these education reform activities in more than 300 townships all over the country.

Myanmar (aka Burma) is a Southeast Asian country located in the western part of the Indochina Peninsula. It is similar in size to the State of Texas, and according to the

World Bank's data, its 2019 population was 54.05 million. It has varied topographic features depending on the region: snow-capped mountains in the North, river plains between mountain ranges, hilly regions in the eastern and western parts of the country, and coastal plains facing the Indian Ocean. It sits in a geographically strategic location between China and India, the world's most populous nations. Throughout Myanmar's history, different kingdoms and areas have been governed by different ethnic groups. At specific points in time, the king of the Burmans, the dominant ethnic group, conquered most or all areas of modern-day Myanmar. After three Anglo-Burmese wars in 1826, 1852, and 1885 respectively, Myanmar came under British colonial rule for 120 years.

In 1948, it became an independent country with a democratically elected government. Unfortunately, it has been struggling with political turmoil for the rest of its history. A full-fledged civil war broke out soon after the country's independence, and in 1950 the country faced invasion by the Kuomintang, whom the Communists defeated in the Chinese Civil War. From 1962 until 2010, the country was under different military-based authoritative regimes. In 1962, Myanmar saw the coup that brought military rule and later the Burmese-way Socialist government that gradually isolated the country from the outside world. In 1988, countrywide demonstrations and uprisings called for a multi-party democratic system. However, that ended with a second coup that kept Myanmar under military rule from 1988 to 2010. In 1990, the military organized an election, but generals refused to hand over power to the winning National League for Democracy (NLD) despite a landslide victory. Many Western countries targeted sanctions on the country to urge the military generals to change to a more democratic system (for a fuller account of Myanmar's history, see Steinberg, 2013; Topich & Leitich, 2013; Thant

Myint-U, 2008).

Brief History of Myanmar's Education

Myanmar's education sector existed long before the British conquest, and it dates back to the 11th century AD, when Buddhist monasteries became education centers for laypeople and monks who could learn the *Pali* language and Buddhist literature (Kaung, 1963). Kaung observes that from the 15th century onwards, spending some years in Buddhist Order and learning that Buddhist literature and canon became usual practice for Burmese young men. Therefore, at the time of the British conquest of two coastal areas of Burma (now Myanmar), almost every Buddhist village in the country had a monastic school that served as the hub of education that provided instruction focused on Buddhist moral education, basic Burmese literacy, and basic arithmetic for monastic novices and other local boys (Campbell, 1946; Kaung, 1963). Another type of school called Lay Schools that admitted both boys and girls had already existed at the time of the British conquest of the country and that provided education access to girls who could not be admitted to monastic schools due to the Buddhist rules that barred monks from close relations with females (Kaung, 1963).

Christian Missionary Schools also played a crucial role in Myanmar's education sector (Campbell, 1946; Hillman, 1946; Kaung, 1963). They started to exist in Myanmar in the 17th century when Myanmar kings of that time allowed their establishment to provide religious education mainly for the descendants of Europeans and Indians, who were a growing and prominent part of the country's population. Roman Catholic missionaries first established those schools, and later American Baptist and Anglican missions followed suit. With the British annexation of the two coastal areas after the first

Anglo-Burman war, missionary schools began to spread widely, opening in large cities and some rural areas (Kaung,1963).

Sir Arthur Phayre, the Civil Government Secretariat of British Burma, impressed by the expansive and established monastic education system, planned to build a new education system on the existing indigenous system, but his plan failed when the majority of the monks did not accept teaching new subjects like geography and surveying at their schools (Campbell, 1946; Chessman, 2003; Kaung, 1963). Despite this failure to absorb monastic schools into a new colonial education system—as they remained untouched by the Government education scheme— the British could draw Lay Schools and Missionary Schools into their education provision through the grant-and-aid approach (Campbell, 1946). Although Campbell claims that monastic education was in decline since 1917, Kaung maintains that monastic schools still thrived because while there was a decline in the number of registered monastic schools, there were a much larger number of unregistered schools. The British established a couple of Government schools, but the State's role in education in Myanmar was minimal before World War II (Hillman, 1946).

At that time, there were three types of schools with varied main languages of instruction: 1) vernacular schools where Burmese was the language of instruction; 2) Anglo-vernacular schools that used both English and Burmese; and 3) English schools where English was the language of instruction (Campbell, 1946; Hillman, 1946; Kaung, 1963). Generally speaking, English schools were considered the highest in terms of quality and standards, with Anglo-vernacular schools just behind them, and vernacular schools at the bottom of the ladder regarding public perception. As a result, the graduates of vernacular schools could not expect to aspire to be anything more prominent in their

careers than future vernacular schoolteachers, while the graduates from the other two types of schools could become government employees and also made up the majority of college students (Hillman, 1946). In terms of administration, local authority boards managed vernacular schools, and missionaries from different Christian denominations managed the two other types (Campbell, 1946). Therefore, both Hillman and Campbell conclude that the role of government in education administration before World War II was minimal.

A significant shift in education management happened after the war. In 1947, the Education Reconstruction Committee conducted a study to review the education system and issued a report (Thein Lwin, 2000). In the report, the Committee recommended the reconstruction of the education system as a homogenous one funded and controlled by the State to replace the pre-war system with three different types of schools. The report suggested allowing private vernacular and missionary schools to continue to exist but at their own expense. Those recommendations mirrored the then-Director of the Department of Public Instruction, Sir Alexandra Campbell's plan for education reform. Campbell (1946) highlights the need for a homogenous system by criticizing the quality of education before the war and pointing out the corruption prevalent among local education boards that managed vernacular schools and the religious managers of missionary schools. This shift to a centralized education management system gained momentum and became well-established after the country's independence from the British in 1947. Thereafter, MoE was established, overseeing the Department of Public Instruction, under which central level school inspectors and divisional headquarters with divisional school inspectors began to manage local schools in the early 1950s (Wolf, 1959). School

inspection occurred in the nine regions and three special districts demarcated for that

purpose (Knoblauch, 1955). This centralized education system could have been

decentralized if the-then Prime Minister U Nu's effort to democratize the centralized

public administration inherited from the British colonial government did not end with the

military coup in 1962 (Hook, Tin Maung Than, & Ninh, 2015). However, given the

military government's tendency towards centralized management, centralization in

education became more robust under the successive authoritative regimes from 1962 to

2010 because the political situation mainly shaped public policy during that era.

The 1962 coup by General Ne Win killed Myanmar's nascent democracy 14 years

after the country's independence and ended ethnic minority groups' hope for establishing

a federal union according to the 1947's Panglong Treaty between the majority of

Burmans and ethnic minorities. The Revolutionary Council, founded after the military

coup, "reversed" the public administrative reform efforts of the previous democratic

government (Hook, Tin Maung Than, & Ninh, 2015, p. 11). The military Revolutionary

Council nationalized private and missionary schools, nationalized the curriculum, and

withdrew autonomy from universities (Zarni, 1995). Hook et al. (2015) observe that after

the 1974 Constitution, some popular participation in township-level public administration

was allowed with the establishment of People's Councils. However, after the 1988 coup,

subsequent military regimes took a similarly authoritative approach to public policy and

administration as the earlier Revolutionary Council government.

Political Transition and Education Reforms in Myanmar

Myanmar drew much attention from the world when it transitioned from being

under military rule to a pseudo-democratic government after the 2010 election, the first

organized by the military government in about 20 years. In 2011, there was a transition from the military government to a new pseudo-democratic government of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by the former military generals (For a complete account of recent Myanmar history, see Steinberg, 2013; Topich & Leitich, 2013; Thant Myint-U, 2008). According to the 2008 constitution (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008), the military takes the 25% quota of parliamentary membership at the central and regional/state levels. It appoints the Defense, Internal Affairs, and Border Affairs ministers in the union level government and the Security and Border Affairs ministers in state/regional governments. Moreover, the elected President and his cabinet mainly consisted of the former military generals. However, the emergence of a new government marked a historic political development in the country's history.

The new government started its reforms in different sectors, including education. Despite not being an entirely civilian government, an unprecedented amount of foreign aid flew into the country to help and influence the new government's reform agenda (Lall, 2021). On the 18th day of the new government, President U Thein Sein announced his 10-point education policies during his speech to the first regular session of the Parliament in March 2011 and showed his government's eagerness for education reform. As the collaboration with the international organization was mentioned as one of the ten points, the Myanmar government and international aid organizations or Development Partners (DPs), agreed to work together for the education reform during the Conference on Development Policy Options with Special Reference to Health and Education Sectors in February 2012, and that led to the emergence of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) (http://www.cesrmm.org/; Lall, 2021).

Comprehensive Education Sector Review

The Comprehensive Education Sector Review was launched in July 2012 (Lall, 2021), and the official letter of agreement between the Development Partners and the Ministry of Education for the CESR was made on the 23rd of October 2012 (CESR, 2018). Both parties agreed to share responsibilities for acquiring human resources, facilities, and the cost of conducting the review. The DP signatories (who represented all DPs) were United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). They were the key focal organizations among the DPs, including Asian Development Bank (ADB), British Council, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Department for International Development (DfID), European Union, German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), JICA, Myanmar Education Consortium, Norwegian Embassy, Open Society Institute, Save the Children, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Bank. The Multi-Donor Education Fund (MDEF), a collaboration among Australian Aid, Denmark, DfID, European Union, Norway, and UNICEF to assist the Myanmar Government in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), gave financial support to CESR (CESR, 2018).

CESR was conducted in three phases: the Rapid Assessment, the In-depth Review, and the development of the sector-wide costed plan (http://www.cesrmm.org/). The DPs brought in international consultants to CESR to support their priority areas. They assisted in hiring a few national consultants to work with international consultants or as translators. During the Rapid Assessment, I worked as a national consultant for

translation and interpretation at CESR for five months, and UNICEF arranged to hire me and paid my salary. About 60 government employees from different departments under MoE were temporarily recruited to work for CESR and formed into teams for different areas of study. International consultants for each area of CESR worked with national teams. To my observation during my time at CESR and later as a UNICEF education officer whose tasks were often related to CESR, the influence of those international consultants on the national teams was usually significant. Not surprisingly, DPs used CESR as a channel to exert their influence on the education policies forthcoming from the process, and "the CESR was largely over-run by foreign experts" (Lall, 2021, p. 69). Lall also observes that the intention and justification of the DPs for assisting in the CESR process were undergirded by the human capital theory and other neoliberal ideas. Internationals were hired for the Chief Technical Advisor and International Coordinator positions, and only a deputy director, a junior level officer from the then Department of Educational Planning and Training, presided over the CESR office and became a de facto leader and the engine of the project. Therefore, Lall (2021) concludes that CESR had a big mandate but did not get substantial political support from the government.

Power Struggle over Education Reform

CESR saw its difficult times while caught in the power struggle over education reform (Lall, 2021). Just over one year of the launch of CESR, the President's Office formed Education Promotion and Implementation Committee (EPIC) to develop education policies. EPIC consisted of a task force of the ministers of the ministries that were providing education and presided by a senior President Office minister, an advisory group of former MoE officials, and 18 working groups. The involvement of the DPs in

the EPIC process was very minimal, and Lall (2021) notes that it was a strategic move from the President's Office with a two-fold purpose: 1) to retake control of the education reform process that was being done with high involvement of DPs in the CESR process and 2) to respond to the Parliament's effort to draft the National Education Law that would become an overarching framework for education reforms and to get more involved in the reform process. As a result of this power struggle, the task of CESR became only to provide recommendations for the reform (Min Zaw Soe et al., 2017).

The government's education reform process, including CESR, was also challenged by the National Network of Education Reform (NNER), which demanded a more inclusive reform (Lall, 2021). NNER was a network founded by the education committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the then opposition party, and civil society groups from the majority Burman ethnic group and minority ethnic groups. NNER also conducted its own review of the education system. Although some limited relation between NNER and CESR emerged, no substantial collaboration did not happen. Later, NNER teamed up with the student unions that boycotted the National Education Law stipulated in 2014. Students demanded four-party negotiation meetings among the student unions, NNER, the government, and the Parliament and 11 points to amend the law. The four-party meetings were organized three times to discuss the students' demands, and the government agreed to consider those 11 points. Although the government asked the students to stop their protests, student demonstrators continued to march to the former capital city of Yangon, and the government used force to disband and arrested them before they reached Yangon. The Parliament stipulated the Amendment of National Education Law (2015), but the Amendment includes only some

of the points that the students demanded. During the student protests, NLD expelled the leader of the NNER from the party and withdrew its support to the network (Lall, 2021).

NESP, 2015 Election, and NLD Government

During CESR Phase 3, a costed plan, namely National Education Sector Plan, was developed but could not be rolled out when the government led by President U Thein Sein was in office (CESR, 2018). The opposition party, the National League for Democracy, led by the pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory in the 2015 election. The NLD Government appointed a director-general highly involved in the CESR process as the Minister of Education. The NLD Government made not many changes to the National Education Sector Plan drafted by CESR under the former USDP government and launched it as the National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) in February 2017 (Lall, 2021). The State Counselor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, provided a forward to the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), which indicated that it is the primary education policy document of the NLD Government (MoE, 2016).

NESP was developed using five different information sources: 1) CESR Phase 1 and 2 reports, 2) EPIC Education Working Group Reports, 3) National Education Law (2014) and the Amendment (2015), 4) 9 NESP Sub-sector Action Plans, and 5) reform priorities of the government (MoE, 2016). The goal of the NESP to achieve by 2021 is: "Improved teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions" (MoE, 2016, p. 22). It is to achieve this goal through nine transformational shifts in nine different areas of education: 1) preschool and kindergarten

education; 2) basic education – access, quality, and inclusion; 3) basic education curriculum; 4) student assessment and examination; 5) teacher education and management; 6) alternative education; 7) technical and vocational education and training (TVET); 8) higher education; 9) management, capacity development and quality assurance (MoE, 2016). In fact, areas 1 to 5 are mainly concerned with basic education (grades K-12), and the consensus between the government and the DPs about the sub-sector that needs a significant overhaul is basic education (Lall, 2021; MoE, 2016). NESP lists eight principles that informed the NESP drafting process: 1) evidence-based, 2) consultative, 3) quality-focused, 4) integrated, 5) measuring change, 6) costed, 7) accessible, and 8) aligned. As a whole, NESP reveals traces of both equity-focused democratic principles and a neoliberal undertone (MoE, 2016). The latter reflects the influence of the DPs whose reform policies were undergirded by the human capital theory, as observed by Lall (2021).

Soon after its launch, NESP saw criticism from the leader of NNER in his open letter titled "Comments on the National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) of the Ministry of Education, Myanmar" on various grounds (Lall, 2021; Thein Lwin, 2017). First, on the process, he commented that the government's reform process did not involve civil society organizations (CSOs) by pointing out that the MoE excluded NNER, which he claimed was a network of civil society organizations and experts on "the people-based education," from the process. Second, he claimed that NESP does not pave the way to integrate indigenous education systems, i.e., ethnic education systems established and run by ethnic armed organizations. He also pointed out that the basic education curriculum is centralized and cannot meet the local needs, and there is a mismatch between the quality

set by the central level and the local needs. He encouraged using the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) in the areas where minority ethnic groups mainly live. The other areas of his critique are the prevalence of summative examinations, the lack of teachers' autonomy, not allowing the formation of student unions freely, and no equal right to education for disabled children (Thein Lwin, 2017). His critique of the non-inclusive nature of the reform process is notable. NESP hails that the CESR and the Education Working Groups initiatives are consultative by highlighting the meetings with different stakeholders in 2014 and 2015 and consultation meetings organized by CESR throughout the country in 2015. At least ethnic education stakeholders, however, were not widely involved in the process (Lall, 2021; Lall & South, 2018). How inclusive the reform process has been, therefore, is an area that needs attention.

Structural Changes Related to Reform

After the NLD government took power, structural changes for education reform occurred (Lall, 2021). Education Promotion Committees were established in the Pyithu Hluttaw (the House of Representatives) and the Amyotha Hluttaw (the Upper House). As a part of restructuring ministries, the Ministry of Science and Technology was merged into the Ministry of Education. In the Ministry of Education, the Department of Teacher Education and Training was abolished, and its responsibilities were divided and shared by the Department of Education Research, Planning, and Training (DERPT) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE). As stipulated in the National Education Law (2014) and its Amendment (2015), the MoE, with the approval of the Union Parliament, established the National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) with 21 academicians

and education scholars to serve as a body "to provide policies on education for the promotion of national development" on the 26th of September 2016 (Lall, 2021; NEPC, n.d.). In the National Education Law (2014), the NEPC was supposed to be a body with the majority of members from the government, but the 2015 amendment substantially changed the role of the NEPC to become a more independent body. As required by the National Education Law and its Amendment, the MoE also established the National Curriculum Committee (NCC), the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (NAQAC), and the Rectors' Committee (RC) under the umbrella of the NEPC (NEPC, n.d.). Although the NEPC has a legal mandate to formulate education policies, the MoE seems to maintain the de facto control of education policymaking.[1].

Dealing with the DPs in the education sector, the NLD government tried to control the process by aligning development aid with the government's policies (Lall, 2021). In order to do so, the MoE developed the Terms of Reference for the Education and TVET Sector Coordination Committee (ETVSCG) to stipulate the roles and responsibilities of the development aid organizations and the MoE. The ToR is "to support the Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Aid Effectiveness" and mentions the five principles for aid effectiveness with the first being "government ownership and leadership of the reform agenda" (MoE, 2017).

Large-Scale Reform Activities in the Basic Education Sector (Before and After the Launch of NESP)

The scope of the current education reform in Myanmar covers the whole education sector, and different reform activities are conducted mostly simultaneously. In

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[1] I learned about it during an informal conversation with an NEPC member.

this section, however, I will discuss only some reform activities that have an enormous impact on basic education provision countrywide.

Five-Teacher Policy (Pre-NESP)

The MoE used the five-teacher policy during the three years preceding the NESP launch to appoint at least five teachers in a primary school, i.e., to ensure a teacher for each of the five primary grades (MoE, 2016). The policy led to the recruitment of about 72,000 new teachers in three years, and these "dramatic increases in the number of teachers" is listed as one of the recent achievements of the national education system (MoE, 2016, p. 14). This well-intended policy to fill the teacher gap, particularly in remote areas, has caused unintended negative consequences (Lall, 2021). Many newly recruited teachers did not have formal teacher training before and attended only one-month-long teacher training before being appointed. New teachers usually filled the positions in rural, remote schools where they could not get enough support, and their appointments became opportunities for experienced teachers from those remote schools to move to urban area schools (Lall, 2021). The five-teacher policy, therefore, could not solve the urban-rural disparity issues and has left a daunting task of providing in-service professional development for those inexperienced teachers.

The Rollout of New Curriculum

Basic education curriculum reform is one of the nine transformational shifts of NESP, and the curriculum has been redesigned with the new K-12 structure— primary (KG-Grade 5), middle (Grade 6 – Grade 9), and high (Grade 10 – Grade 12) (MoE, 2017). The previous basic education structure was Grade 1 to Grade 11— primary (Grade 1 – Grade 5), middle (Grade 6 – Grade 9), and high (Grade 10 – Grade 11). The rollout of

the new curriculum appeared with "the first major curriculum revision in 20 years,"

starting with the new kindergarten curriculum in the 2016-17 academic year (Lall, 2021,

p. 87). UNICEF supported the development of the kindergarten curriculum, and the MoE

organized countrywide teacher training using the cascade model (UNICEF, 2016). JICA

has supported the development of the new curriculum for Grade 1 to Grade 5, and the

grade-by-grade curriculum rollout began in the 2017-18 academic year (Lall, 2021).

Asian Development Bank has supported the new secondary curriculum (Grade 6 to Grade

12 at middle and high school levels), and the rollout of the Grade 6 curriculum started in

the 2019-20 academic year (Asian Development Bank, 2018).

Since there is the highest number of students and teachers at the primary level, the

countrywide rollout of the new primary curriculum has tremendously impacted the basic

education sector. In preparation for the primary curriculum rollout, MoE organized the 4-

layer cascade model training (central – region/state – township – school cluster) from

2017 to 2019 (JICA, 2017; Lall, 2021). Since there are the water-festival holidays and

school enrollment week during the vacation, township and school cluster level training

was usually packed into the eight-week timeslot before and after the waster festival, and

they occurred during the hottest months, March to May.

The new curriculum rollout has faced challenges (Lall, 2021). As a weakness of

the cascade training model, the training quality suffered more when it reached the lower

layer of the cascade. Grade 3 and 6 teachers received the new curricular training as a two-

week assignment, and it was not sufficient. When the new curriculum is being rolled out,

so is the new assessment system with a formative emphasis, and that has confused

teachers' work. Since the new curriculum is being rolled out grade by grade, there are

parallel systems of the old and new curriculums simultaneously. Moreover, some principals, who are supposed to be the instructional leaders in the rollout, did not or could not join the training for the new primary curriculum. On a similar note, some teachers interviewed by the evaluation team revealed that principals did not support teachers, particularly in preparing lessons. Importantly, parents, who have not been involved well in the new curriculum rollout, do not understand the aspects of the new curriculum and cannot support the rollout sufficiently. As before, large class sizes deter the use of more interactive methods. Rote learning, a deeply rooted practice of Myanmar's education, is still prevailing. In short, insufficient training, rote learning, and lack or little parental involvement have undermined well-purposed efforts of the new curriculum rollout.

School Grants and Student Stipend Programs

The USDP government, which took power in 2011, introduced the school grant and stipend program in the 2012-2013 school year (Lall, 2021; Min Zaw Soe et al., 2017; World Bank, 2018; NESP, 2017). It is an initiative to achieve free basic education provision and a kind of decentralization initiative by delegating township principals to develop school improvement plans and make decisions on school expenditures when the township education officer approves the expenditure plans from schools in the township (Lall, 2021). From 2014 onwards, the World Bank has supported the school grants programs alongside the student stipend program and has a plan to support them until the 2020-21 school year (World Bank, 2018). The amount of school grant or School Improvement Fund (SIF) for a school ranged from US$ 250 to 15,000 per school year depending on the enrollment, and 48,000 public and registered monastic schools received the grant (MoE, 2019a). Each year, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) organizes

the training on the program guidelines for officials and administrators from state/regional, district, township, and school levels (World Bank, 2018). Although the school grant program is a financial decentralization initiative, the eligible types of expenditure have been stipulated (World Bank, 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that the principals' and township education officers' authority to decide on school grants is still restricted. There is tension between policymakers and policy actors in implementing the school grant program.

Monitoring and Evaluation of NESP Activities and Recent Developments

As discussed, NESP, together with the National Education Law (2014) and its Amendment (2015), has served as a policy framework for Myanmar education reforms in recent years (MoE, 2020). In 2019, an independent research team commissioned by the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders conducted a mid-term review of NESP to help the MoE improve the NESP implementation and make relevant adjustments (Lall, 2021; MoE, 2020). The MoE also issued two Annual Performance Appraisals, 2016-17 AY and 2017-18 AY, regarding the NESP implementation (Lall, 2021; MoE, 2018; MoE, 2019b). Notably, MoE has developed the Annual Planning and Budget Estimate cycle to implement NESP and conducted annual performance review activities (MoE, 2019b).

The NESP Mid-Term Review (MTR) found mixed findings on both strengths and weaknesses of NESP (MoE, 2020). Several stakeholders have regarded NESP as a significant improvement in the planning and delivery of education provision. Although NESP's transformational shifts are long-term goals and may not inform the annual planning well, the MoE has evidently developed planning, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms. Education budget allocation quadrupled from the 2011-12 fiscal year (FY)

to 2017-18 FY, but there needs to be a proper link between NESP and students' learning outcomes. While there is gender parity in enrolment, it is necessary to support inclusive education for disabled children and ethnic language education for minorities. One notable finding of the MTR is that education for internally displaced children is not included in NESP. However, the rollout of the new basic education curriculum is regarded as a positive reform for student learning achievement in the MTR (MoE, 2020).

Regarding the basic education reform in general, the MTR notes: "The Basic Education reform is highly complex because it involves many large-scale activities occurring simultaneously…each intervention is inter-related requiring sustained investment and time before systematic gains in student learning are evident" (MoE, 2020, p. x). Reflective on the complexity of the basic education reform, Lall (2021) comments that MoE, with the current human resources with many unfilled positions in the departments and sub-national offices, cannot start any new reform activities in the basic education sector other than the current ones. The top-down nature of reform, cultural tradition, and the gap between policy and practice are challenges facing the current education reforms in Myanmar, and there are some relationship issues between the MoE and donors (Lall, 2021). Despite those relationship issues, the MoE joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a multi-stakeholder financing platform, and the UK started a five-year bilateral program called Myanmar–UK Partnership for Education (MUPE) in 2019 (Lall, 2021).

Some unprecedented things are exerting a negative impact on reform efforts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the schools have been closed for nearly one year, disrupting the new curriculum rollout timeline. Although the NLD won another landslide victory in

the 2020 election, a military coup d'état occurred on the 1st of February. That has created

uncertainties around the political situation and the future of current education reforms.

<center>**Statement of the Problem**</center>

Despite the aforementioned education reforms that have taken place in recent

Myanmar history, two studies conducted in 2013 on these education reforms (Esson &

Wang, 2018; Zobrost & McCormick, 2013) found that an authoritarian approach and top-

down policies were still prevalent in Myanmar's education sector, as had been common

in the previous totalitarian era. In the 2015 election, the National League for

Democracy—the former opposition party led by the prominent pro-democracy leader

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi—came to power. Many hoped for more democratic education

policies, delegating responsibility to the sub-national level education offices and less top-

down management. However, the Ministry of Education still used a top-down policy

implementation approach (Lall, 2021). In my own experience as an education project

officer in Myanmar, I noticed that practice was still well in use when I closely worked

with the MoE's departments for education projects in the mid and late 2010s. Unlike

working under the previous authoritative regime and with ongoing democratic transition,

teachers seem empowered to express their voices. As a result, in implementing reform

activities, many clashes emerged between the central level policymakers and leaders from

teachers' unions. Although those clashes were widely reported in news media, analyzing

these recent developments in Myanmar's education policy process in the academic

literature is scarce.

This study aims to explore 1) the driving factors behind the tension between

policymakers and policy actors and 2) how this tension is manifested. On the basis of the

data gathered through the exploration of these two points, I will then be able to also 3) critically analyze the power relation between these two groups.

Research Questions

The study's main research question is: What features characterize the relationship between policymakers and policy actors during the current education reforms? Sub-questions are:

1. What are the policy trajectories in the implementation of reform activities at the local level?

2. How do policy actors view the education policy process, both in general and during the current education reforms in particular? How do they view their role in the process?

3. How do policymakers view the education policy process, both in general and during the current education reforms in particular? How do they view their role in the process?

4. What are the communication channels in place between policymakers and policy actors, and how do they impact the relationship between these two groups?

5. How are conflicts between policymakers and policy actors manifested in Myanmar, and what are the power relations between these groups?

The Significance of the Study

This study aims to explore the reasons behind the tension between education policymakers and practitioners in Myanmar, how this tension is manifested, and to critically analyze the power relation between these two groups. In particular, the study

aims to examine the perspectives of teachers who have to implement education policies laid down by policymakers. The study will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between these two groups, especially during the current reform process. Moreover, it will provide both groups to reflect on their roles and improve the implementation process. It can also inform international aid agencies about the unexpected negative consequences as well as a positive impact resulting from the MoE's education policies and implementation that they have been provided technical and/or financial support.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Given Myanmar's reliance on international development aid and the topic of the study being related to stakeholder relations in the policy process, I here review the literature on policy borrowing and policy analysis with an emphasis on the sociology of the policy process. From this, I identify a theoretical framework suitable for the unique policy situation embedded in Myanmar's ongoing education reform process.

Educational Policy Borrowing and Lending

Educational policy borrowing and lending have existed since the 1800s, when European countries imposed external education models on their colonies (Portnoi, 2016). For example, as a colonial power, Britain borrowed the Tuskegee education model used in the Southern United States and implemented an adaptation of it in the Gold Coast, now known post-independence as Ghana (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). More regular instances of educational policy borrowing have occurred from the 1980s onwards through the more significant trend toward globalization, with one of the prominent examples being how both developed and developing countries have borrowed New Zealand's model of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (Portnoi, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006). Transatlantic educational policy borrowing also occurred regularly between the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s (Halpin & Troyna, 1995), and Britain has borrowed from Germany's education models for centuries, such as the idea of kindergarten (it passed on to former British colonies like the US) (Philips & Ochs, 2003). With the rising trend of international ranking tables resulting from international tests like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), many participating

countries like Britain and Germany became interested in borrowing policies from the top performers in such assessments, like Finland (Portnoi, 2016).

Portnoi (2016) concludes that policy borrowing may take different directions and occur among the countries of the Global North (developed countries), from the Global North to the Global South (developing countries), within the Global South, and from the Global South to the Global North (e.g., the transfer of the Brazilian based Conditional Cash Transfer model to New York City). However, policy borrowing often takes the form of the transfer of education policies from the Global North (donors) to the Global South (aid receivers) through a development aid process organized by international governance organizations like the World Bank and UN organizations and through bilateral aid provided by agencies such as USAID (the US Agency for International Development), DfID and the JICA (Portnoi, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, 2006). These North-to-South policy borrowing practices have become a hallmark of international aid resulting from the Washington Consensus and Post Washington Consensus initiatives, and Portnoi (2016) discusses their nature as follows. The Washington Consensus, initiated by Washington-based financial organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, became a standard for the development aid regime from the 1970s to the 1990s. Development aid organizations pressured aid-receiving countries to adopt neoliberal practices such as privatizing public services, cutting the budget on those services, and trade deregulations to open countries to the global market. The failure of the Washington Consensus to assist aid-receiving countries to achieve significant development has led aid agencies' policy shift to use the Post Washington Consensus, which incorporates poverty reduction ideas

but still has neoliberalism as its core. Policy borrowing from the Global North to the Global South through development assistance has taken the forms of global educational and development governance frameworks like Education for All (EFA), MDGs, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has been executed through the global funding platforms such as the FastTrack Initiative/ GPE (Portnoi, 2016). Some examples of education policies borrowed or imposed through the development assistance process throughout the history are mass education, child-centered approach, education decentralization, school choice, privatization of education, and policies based on human capital theory (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Anderson- Levitt, 2003; Portnoi, 2016; Straubhaar, 2014, 2020)

Among different theories explaining education policy borrowing, the World Culture theory views it as the transfer or diffusion of best practices among countries (e.g., mass education) and highlights the policy convergence among different countries, making education models more and more alike (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Portnoi, 2016). In their World Culture theory and neo-institutionalist accounts of schooling, Baker and LeTendre (2005) contend that schooling in different countries has become more and more similar in many different aspects, including the relation between family and schooling, shadow education, decentralization, school violence, and homework. However, there has been a critique of the World Culture theory. Anderson-Levitt (2012) considered culture as a meaning-making process and problematized the concept of world culture as forces traveling around the world by highlighting the role of actors and power in spreading ideas. She claimed, "World culture is locally produced in social interaction in the sense that particular people construct it together in particular places, drawing on familiar

resources from their own localities" (Anderson-Levitt, 2012, p. 451). Steiner-Khamsi (2004) also considers a common international model that World Culture theorists claimed as something *imagined*.

Some scholars proposed concepts alternative to World Culture theory to explain the concept of policy borrowing. Barlett (2003) uses the concept of transnational educational project using the example of two contending approaches in Brazilian education: popular education and economic efficiency. Popular education rooted in Catholic liberation theology and emboldened by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy in his literacy campaign in northeastern Brazil aims for a social movement to achieve equality. At the same time, the economic efficiency approach took precedence in education projects supported by international aid organizations after the 1964 military coup in Brazil. Since those two approaches have been competing for influence on literacy education in Brazil, Barlett (2003) considers it as an example of heterogeneity rather than homogeneity among education systems of different countries as viewed by World Culture theorists. In his critique of World Culture theory, Straubhaar (2014) emphasizes the temporal dimension of world culture in addition to its spatial nature while analyzing the pedagogical practices of the instructors from an adult education project in Mozambique. He concludes that the teacher-centered practices the instructors mainly used were the impact of mass schooling, a historically situated practice of world culture. Straubhaar (2014) expands Barlett's construct of the educational project and highlighted the temporal dimension and the role of power to call those teacher-centered practices a *previously dominant educational project* and the Freirean pedagogical practices that the adult education program tried to promote *a currently dominant educational project.*

Straubhaar (2020) gives the market-oriented educational project as another example of a currently dominant educational project that attracted recruits for Teacher for America and a similar project called *Ensina!* in Brazil.

Besides the sociocultural perspectives of policy borrowing, some scholars emphasized its other aspects. After reviewing the literature on educational policy borrowing between the United States and Britain, Halpin and Troyna (1995) argue that "its significance has more to do with form than content" (p. 308) because the borrowing between the two was, to them, more symbolic than substantive. Similarly, Steiner-Khamsi and Quist (2000) highlight the political motives that undergirded the transfer of the US-based Tuskegee model to the British colonies in Africa. The lender (in this case, the U.S.) wanted to legitimate their model (through externalization) because African American scholars and leaders were criticizing the model at home. On the other hand, the borrower, in this case the British colonial government, had the political aim of preparing African students from its colonies to take on farm laborer roles similar to those occupied by African Americans in the Jim Crow South. On either side, both borrower and lender had underlying political motives for implementing the practice of policy borrowing.

Philips and Ochs (2004) propose a continuum of educational transfer to analyze and understand policy borrowing in different contexts. One end of the continuum is the imposed policy transfer, with the other end being policy transfer introduced through influence. Imposed policy transfer can be manifested under authoritarian rule, and near that end lies the example of the British education model imposed on its colonies to accommodate the economy of the British empire. Policy transfers through influence occur through the social spread of educational ideas. In the middle lies the policy transfer

required under bilateral or multilateral agreements, mainly induced through the development aid process.

Philips and Ochs (2003) propose an educational policy borrowing model consisting of four stages: cross-national attraction, decision, implementation, and internalization/ indigenization. The cross-national attraction stage encompasses a country's impulses, related to issues such as political situation and externalizing potential, to find policy solutions and models in other countries. The decision stage may be: 1) theoretical – using a successful external policy as a theoretical stimulus at home; 2) phoney – dishonest use of a superficially attractive concept to seek political support, 3) realistic – borrowing a policy that may be still successful even when contextual factors change, or 4) quick fix – borrowing a policy as a short-term and ineffective solution to a long-held problem. During the implementation stage, an adaptation based on the context may occur, while implementation may be quick or slow, reflective of both support and resistance, and influenced by significant actors. Internalization is the stage in which a borrowed policy is institutionalized into the education system of a borrowing country.

Policy Trajectories

Although many often see the policy process as a dichotomous process in which policymaking and implementation are two separate processes, some policy scholars see policymaking through a critical lens as a dialectic power relation between elites who usually dominate policy making at higher levels and street-level bureaucrats who are supposed to enact those policies (Gale, 2001; Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). Gale (2001) proposes his critical policy sociology model with three lenses: policy historiography, policy archeology, and policy genealogy. Policy historiography deals

with "the substantive issues of policy at particular hegemonic moments" (p. 384) in the past and "temporary policy settlements" (p.385) emerging during particular periods. As a critical scholar, Gale emphasizes who benefits from those policy arrangements. Policy archeology is the lens to analyze "the conditions regulating policy formations" (Gale, 2001, p. 384). In his analysis of the Australian higher education entry policy, Gale tries to find out why certain items were on the policy agenda, why certain actors participated in the policy formation, and what conditions shaped the formulation of those policies. Through the policy genealogy lens, Gale looks at "social actors' engagement with policy" resulting in temporary policy settlements reflecting the nuanced nature of different versions of policies at different localities (Gale, 2001, p. 385). Although he discusses the three lenses, he does not claim the distinct demarcation among those lenses that may overlap.

Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead (2009) consider policy as a practice of power, and for them, it is essential "to question naturalness and normalcy of policy" first (p.770). They assert that policy may be formal or informal and "documented" or stem from "ongoing institutional memory and practice" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 770). In their analytical approach to policy, there are two critical aspects: the will in policy – normativity of policy – a normative cultural discourse that tries to control behavior to meet the ideal situation stipulated by the policy and the will to policy – socio-political conditions that shape the emergence of a particular policy. The analysis of the way to policy is similar to Gale's archeology of policy lens (2001). Using their critical policy analysis model, Levinson et al. conducted a critical analysis of the policy formation process that political and technocratic elites dominate. More importantly, unlike

traditional analysis of policy implementation, they emphasize the agency of local actors who appropriate policies that they engage with. In such a way, they will remake a policy "in situated locales and communities of practice" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 767) that represents temporary policy settlements at the local level (Gale, 2001).

Policy analysis theories used by Western scholars in analyzing social policies in Western liberal democracies may not explain some nuances of the policy process in non-Western non-liberal contexts (Fimyar, 2014). By reviewing policy analysis literature, Fimyar points out that "the divide between words and deeds, rhetoric and reality" is much broader in non-Western illiberal political systems while referring to the Soviet era under the authoritative communist regime (p. 15). She found that Jowitt's (1992) concept of dissimulation nicely captured such a context as the Leninist regime in which "public compliance will occur without private acceptance" (Fimyar, 2014, p. 17). In the public policy context, individual policy actors may simulate top-down policies even though they do not agree with those policies. Fimyar (2014) hypothesizes that dissimulation may occur in policy actors' response to the introduction of standardized testing policies in Ukraine even twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This dissimulation concept may apply to other polities under authoritative regimes or those that transitioned from them.

An Overarching Framework for Policy Understanding: The Four Orientations to Education

After reviewing education policy analysis literature, Tiffany Jones (2013) proposes a paradigmatic framework that can underpin different research orientations and movements in the era of modern education. She added the postmodern orientation to

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Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett's framework of three orientations to education: conservative, liberal, and critical. She coupled conservative and liberal orientations with neo-conservative and neo-liberal ones, respectively. Conservative orientation that has existed since the pre-1960s aims to maintain the status quo through cultural transmission approach in education to hand over the dominant group's beliefs and values across generations. An often-cited example of the conservative orientation is the three R's approach (reading, writing, and arithmetic), and this orientation tends to prescribe moral values and behaviors. Education policies in this orientation are geared toward "maintaining social stability and protecting the interests of dominant groups in society," and the policy process takes a top-down nature and uses accountability of measures by setting benchmarks (Jones, 2013, p.30). Neo-conservative orientation views that the status quo is threatened, and education is to reclaim those values. It has led to different back-to-basics approaches and an emphasis on vocational education.

The second among the four orientations is liberal orientation, which has existed since the 1960s, targets developing individuals to their fullest, and encourages competition and meritocracy (Jones, 2013). It aims at educating students on all aspects of life, including employment, for which students are prepared to be employable in different areas rather than a particular career. Unlike conservative orientation with an emphasis on basic skills, liberal orientation also promotes enriching affective and intellectual domains and learning subjects like social studies, arts, and music. Education policies in this orientation may be broader and flexible with options and choices, but 'best practice' and 'excellence' in policy implementation are encouraged. Competition among schools, districts, states, and nations is promoted. Neo-liberal orientation supports choice in

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education and is often related to privatization movements. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and other subsequent federal education policies under the Obama administration took neoliberal orientation (Hursh, 2005; Lipman, 2015).

Critical orientation that has existed since the 1970s challenges the status quo and aims to create a better society with justice (Jones, 2013). Through this orientation, critical scholars see society "in terms of conflict and oppression" (Crotty, 2003, p. 113). Therefore, education in the critical orientation tends to question the status quo and aims to include and empower marginalized groups and change the society to become more just and equitable (Jones, 2013). Jones observes that education policies in this orientation may emerge from the bottom-up approach with advocacy, evolve to become critical or result from a more top-down approach. She mentions the Australian government's funding policy for indigenous language education as an example of education policies in the critical orientation.

Jones (2013) maintains that in the postmodern orientation that started to exist in the 1990s, "education can demystify 'truth'/ 'reality' and problematise knowledge" and "students can deconstruct and co-construct values" (p. 27-28). In this orientation, students are encouraged to use different perspectives, deconstruct traditionally accepted 'truths,' 'reality,' and hegemonic ideas, and challenge the notion of 'authority.' In a similar vein, Slattery (2013) calls for a postmodern reconceptualization of curriculum by contending that "society has become a global plurality of competing subcultures and movements where no one ideology and episteme (understanding of knowledge) dominates" (p.19). He recommends an autobiographical approach as a situated approach to reconceptualization instead of modernism's ahistorical and detached approach.

Policymaking and implementation in this orientation may be contextualized and "highly localised" at the school level (Jones, 2013, p.46). Jones mentioned *Supporting Sexual Diversity in School*s policy from the Australian State of Victoria in the late 2000s as an example of the postmodern orientation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my study focuses on the policy process or policy trajectory of Myanmar's current educational reform efforts. Because of the unique historical, political, and socioeconomic context of the reform, a bricolage of theories will be best as opposed to a single theory. Therefore, the theoretical framework is informed by policy borrowing (Anderson- Levitt, 2003; Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Philips & Ochs, 2003; Portnoi, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006; Straubhaar, 2014, 2020), Gale's (2001) critical policy sociology model, critical policy analysis concepts from Levinson et al. (2009), the concept of dissimulation (Fimyar, 2014; Jowitt, 1992), and the Four Orientations to Education framework (Jones, 2013). Figure 1 depicts the policy process or trajectory in the Myanmar context.

The policy process starts with the policy borrowing or lending stage. Since the education reform process appeared after the transition from the military regime to an elected government, externalization could be a sensible choice for the USDP-led government to find "innovative" ideas outside of the country (Philips & Ochs 2004). The USDP government consisted mainly of former military generals, and the President was the former Prime Minister of the military government. They were eager to show that they were different from the previous regime. The Ministry of Education (MoE) conducted CESR with technical and financial support from the development aid agencies, and the

situation was paving for policy transfer under bilateral and multilateral agreements (Portnoi, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, 2006). Therefore, the type of transfer would lie in the middle of the educational policy borrowing continuum of Philips and Ochs (2004) or leaning towards the coercive end in Dolowitz and March's continuum of policy transfer (Portnoi, 2016). At the same time, Myanmar's education had been under the international education governance, EFA. When the reform process started, EFA-related policies also still existed.

As Portnoi (2016) maintains, the agency of the policy borrowing country should not be underestimated. In this regard, when transitioning from the policy borrowing stage to the policy adaptation or policy formation at the central level, Myanmar would not take all policies lent through the development aid process. It should be noted that its education system with well-established with stipulated regulations and normative practices in the form of institutional memory (Gale, 2001). I would argue that some concepts from critical policy analysis (Levinson et al., 2009) and the idea of dissimulation (Fimyar, 2014) may apply, although those scholars used them for analyzing the policy process that does not deal with international policy borrowing. Myanmar may choose two possible options: appropriation of borrowed or lent policies (Gale, 2001) or dissimulation when fulfilling its obligations concerning global education governance (Fimyar, 2014).

When the policy process reaches the local level, enactment of the policy can take different forms based on the level of the agency of policy actors. They may appropriate policies laid down from the central level in different ways and to different degrees as communities of practice at their respective locales (Levinson et al., 2009), resulting in
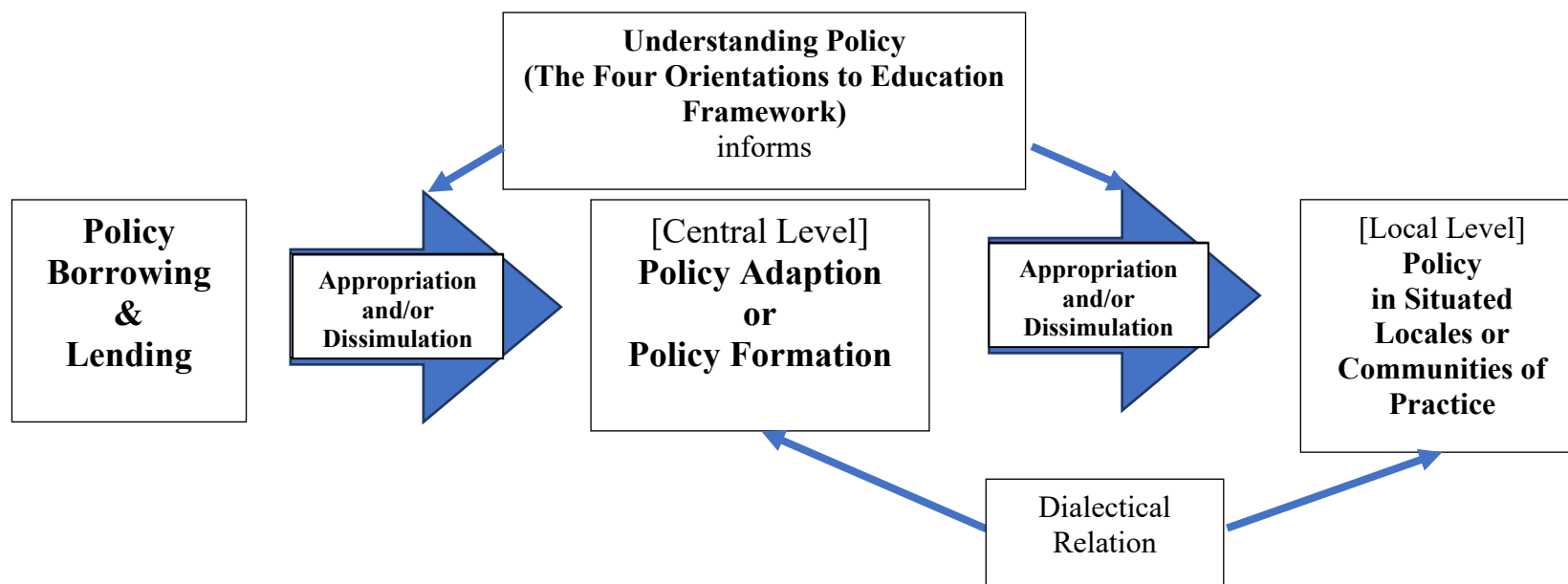
Figure 1. Educational Policy Trajectory in Myanmar Education Reform

temporary policy settlements (Gale, 2001). Given the successive governments' well-established top-down policy implementation practices, dissimulation may be a pragmatic approach for local social actors. It is also possible that they would use both appropriation and dissimulation simultaneously. Their understanding of the policy that would be analyzed through the Four Orientations to Education framework may influence their engagement with and response to policies. Rather than a linear process of moving from policy formation at the central level to implementation at local levels, it would be a dialectic relation between those two stages shaping each other.

I would argue that many aspects shape the relationship between policymakers (elites) and enactors. First, local level actors' understanding of education policies (and education in general) will inform their attitude towards "the will in the policy" (Levinson et al., 2009). Second, what they think about "the will to policy" or the pollical and sociocultural situations underpinned by the policy will shape how they enact it (Gale, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009). Third, how they consider the policy formation at the central level and how they see themselves in the whole policy process (both current and historical situations) will influence their attitude towards the systems and their relations with policy elites at the central level. Fourth, how policies are communicated from the policy elites to local actors shapes their attitude towards each other. The aforementioned aspects will also reflect the power relations between these two groups.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present some significant tenets of critical realism as my study's ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Next, I provide an overview of my methodological approach, explaining why I have used critical qualitative inquiry. By taking a critical stance, I assume that there are power relations embedded in the current education reform policy process in Myanmar. Then, I discuss the data collection and analysis process that I used, reflecting my ontological reasoning based in critical realism. This critical realist data analysis approach, complemented by my use of the concept of "depth ontology," allowed me to better understand the causal mechanisms and structures that underlie the issue I studied (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

Critical Realism as an Onto-Epistemological Framework

I took a critical qualitative inquiry approach during this study, undergirded by critical realism. Critical realism is a theoretical perspective that emerged from the debate on the positivism-constructivism dichotomy (Fletcher, 2016). It combines ontological realism, or the concept that there is an underlying existing reality, with epistemological constructivism, or the perspective that our individual and human constructions of reality are not objective (Maxwell, 2012, 2013). Roy Bhaskar, a British philosopher, and Donald Campbell, an American social scientist, were among the scholars who introduced various theories that now fall under the umbrella of critical realism (Maxwell, 2012).

Bhaskar's conceptualization of critical realism is an important touchstone for this work. Corson (1991) details the strengths of Bhaskar's theorizing of critical realism. First, it is "not excessively technical" (p. 235). Second, it is parsimonious in maintaining and pulling together the strengths of earlier theories, leaving weaknesses and inconsistent

elements out and thus using only the fewest possible entities for "adequately and economically dealing with the subject matter" (p. 236). Third, Bhaskar conceptualized knowledge as evolving, and thus well-suited to study open and changing systems such as education. Fourth, given its open and flexible nature, his model is useful for addressing practical societal problems. Finally, Bhaskar's conceptualization is in harmony with other post-empiricist theories and several contemporary research methods and tools such as ethnography, participant observation, and (as I use in this present study) discourse analysis. Therefore, Corson (1991) claimed that "Bhaskar's conception seems to be operationalisable in education (and in the human sciences more generally) at a de facto basis" (p. 236). In this spirit, I have used this conception and framework for the present study.

More specifically, guided by critical realism, I used the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 and review of the literature on Myanmar as an initial theory to conduct "a deeper analysis that can support, elaborate, or deny that theory to help build a new and more accurate explanation of reality" (Fletcher, 2016, p. 184) on the ground in contemporary Myanmar. I used critical realism to understand the issues around the relationship between policymakers and policy actors, in particular to identify underlying mechanisms shaping those relationships (Corson, 1991).

Overview of Methodological Approach

I used a qualitative design in this study because the complexity of the issues related to the topic warrants an approach that can induce meanings to understand them better and to examine the nexus of the issues related to education policymaking and implementation in Myanmar (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Being a

qualitative researcher myself, I personally collected and analyzed the lived experience of different stakeholders. Their "multiple perspectives and meanings" (Creswell & Poth, p. 44) were understood through "demi-regularities," theme-like concepts in the critical realist ontology, that served as the base to find the mechanism underneath the empirical level (Fletcher, 2016). Moreover, this qualitative approach enabled me to make necessary modifications to the research design to respond to emergent findings throughout the study.

Importantly, I approached this qualitative study from a critical perspective, and as a result I frame it as a critical qualitative inquiry. By employing a critical perspective, I view that there are innate power relations among the complex nexus of different stakeholders in the policymaking and implementation process, particularly between policymakers and policy actors in the context of current education reform in Myanmar (Crotty, 2003; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg; 2012; Willis, 2007). The study is critical because I intended to push against hegemonic ideas that reproduce social inequality in the design and implementation of my research, and carefully listened to the voice of policy actors through their Facebook posts and comments to better understand the functioning of hegemony in this context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted in-depth data collection from two primary sources: Facebook posts and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although I planned to conduct interviews and focus groups with policymakers and teachers, the deteriorating situation after the 2021 February military coup led me to change my plan. Therefore, I mainly relied on Facebook posts and documents for my study. I received the approval for my protocol to collect data

from a public Facebook group from the Texas State University Institutional Review

Board on August 20, 2021. I started my data collection immediately afterward.

Data Collection: Collecting and Organizing Facebook Posts

I selected the Facebook posts from the Facebook group called "The forum where

basic education teachers express their feelings" (Translation from Burmese). The group

has nearly 670,000 members, and it is a public group, i.e., anyone can see who the

members are and what they post. Although it is a public group, most group members are

teachers, principals, and education administrators residing in Burma. The Facebook posts

are in Burmese, except for a few in English. Since it is a huge group with many members

who actively post, there were an abundance of posts that I could utilize for my study.

There are different types of posts according to the purpose of the writer: some focus on

educators sharing their feelings, others are intended to criticize the education system and

various education policies, others are informational posts intended to share information

about the new curriculum, training, and teaching aids, and some are question-based posts

asking for information or guidance about policy guidelines, career issues, and lesson

ideas.

To select necessary posts to cover the scope of my study (that is, education reform

and tension between policymakers and policy actors), I used keywords in Burmese like

"reform," "grade 1," "grade 2," "grade 3," "training," "policy," "dispute," and minister,"

and English keywords like "grade 1," "grade 2," "grade 3," "G1," "G2," and "G3."

There were about 350 posts that fit these criteria, and I saved them in a designated folder

in my Facebook account. They were posted during the period from 2015 to 2021. Then, I

prepared an Excel spreadsheet in order to categorize these posts, including the date of the

post, the name of the person who posted it, the number of different types of reactions (Like, Love, Angry, Wow, Ha-ha, Sad), the number of shares, and comments under each post. After that, I copied and pasted each original post and comments under it in the relevant cells and recorded the date, original writer, and the number and types of reactions on the Excel sheets.

When copying and pasting posts and comments, I faced a font issue. Most of the posts I selected were in the font called "Zawgyi" (the primary font used to type in the Burmese language), that are not legible on Excel sheets. Therefore, I had to copy those posts and comments in Zawgyi font to an online font conversion site, in order to convert them into the Burmese Unicode font, which is legible and readable on Excel sheets. Some Facebook posts did not have any comments under them, while others had many comments, ranging from a few to hundreds. Copying hundreds of comments to the conversion site, and then converting and copying them to an Excel sheet proved to be a time-consuming and tedious task. It took me much more time than expected.

In the middle of copying Facebook posts, I also faced an unexpected issue that slowed down the data collection process. Namely, I had to extend my passport before it expired in February 2022. Since I posted political posts against the military regime on my Facebook, I was worried that my passport would not be extended and could be confiscated. Therefore, I deactivated my Facebook account about two weeks after I applied for my passport extension and reactivated it only when I, fortunately, received my new passport. This event caused me to pause my data collection during that time.

Data Analysis: Coding Facebook Posts

In preparation for data analysis, I categorized the Facebook posts according to the year they were posted, copied them to new Excel sheets, and put them in chronological order. I selected only the posts that would cover my research scope, namely those that were related to education reform activities and issues teachers faced related to education reform.

I started with open coding, in order to familiarize myself with the data and cover all the potential kinds of codes/topics that might arise in the Facebook posts and comments. When I had analyzed about half of the data, I already had about 70 codes. Then, I paused my coding, organized the codes into categories, and looked at some patterns of their relations. Then I went back to my research proposal, particularly the theoretical framework, and reorganized/categorized my codes with the intention of keeping that framework in mind.

However, as I did this, I began to see that the critical realist approach is theory-laden, but not theory-determined. Rather than changing my codes to fit my framework, I found myself changing my theoretical framework based on the codes I had found so far. I organized them in three different ways. The first one is concerned with the relationship between policymakers and policy actors. Second, I located some codes along the path of policy trajectories during education reforms. Finally, as a new element, and as informed by the critical realist ontology of structure and agency and causality, I organized them according to places where I saw a causal relationship between policy actors. Also, informed by the depth ontology of critical realism, some separations between "actual" and "real" started to appear.

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I went back to the rest of the data with an updated coding scheme. I copied and pasted the posts and comments to the Excel sheets for the respective years according to when they were posted. It was a deductive analysis, but I changed my codes according to the data. Then, I conducted the second level coding to find the demi-regularities. Demi-regularity is a term used in the critical realist tradition, and it is like a theme (Fletcher, 2017; O' Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Unlike positivist laws, demi-regularities are tendencies in the data which are not assumed to be universal. If a researcher sees persistent demi-regularities, they have resulted from robust tendencies caused by an underlying mechanism (Pinkstone, 2002). At this stage, I revisited the Facebook posts I analyzed and used data from government and aid agencies' reports to understand demi-regularities better and see if they were reflected in this secondary data source of policy documents.

Abduction and Retroduction

I conducted abduction as the next level of my data analysis. Abduction is the process of redescribing empirical findings in the form of demi-regularities, using the theories from the literature review (Fletcher, 2016; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Fletcher called it "theoretical redescription – in which empirical data are redescribed using theoretical concepts" (p. 188). From the critical ontology perspective, those theoretical concepts were assumed to be fallible (Fletcher, 2016). At this stage, I revisited my theoretical framework, which I improved after coding, and referred to the information from relevant documents to understand demi-regularities better regarding theories. This process allowed me to recognize the following: 1) different aspects of the relationship between policymakers and policy actors; 2) causal relations along the trajectory of reform

policies; 3) the causal and dialectical relation of the relationship mentioned above from no. 1 and the policy trajectory in no. 2; 4) the causal relationship between system issues and teacher morale, and 5) the dialectics between the system and the agency of policy actors.

Retroduction accounted for the final stage of my data analysis. Using it, I aimed to find the underlying mechanisms and structures that give rise to empirical findings in the form of a causal relationship (Fletcher, 2016; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Following the critical realist ontological reasoning, I set out with the understanding that the results from retroduction may or may not support the concepts from my theoretical framework—in other words, this process might cause me to rethink and reorganize my theoretical framework yet again. This did occur, as understandably my empirical findings did not account for all aspects of my theoretical framework. I will discuss that in detail in subsequent chapters.

Documents and Document Analysis

Document analysis of documents issued by the government and development aid agencies enabled me to understand the background situation regarding the different stages of policy trajectory in current education reform in Myanmar: namely, policy borrowing, policy adaptation, and policy implementation (Fairclough, 1995, 2001). I used this document analysis as a validation mechanism for our analysis of Facebook posts, seeing if the same trends shared by teachers as policy actors were shared by the higher-up policy actors who wrote and shaped these policy documents.

Positionality

Regarding positionality, I engaged in the reflexivity of my position in this study as someone from Myanmar who had shared experience with the teacher participants in my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). That analysis of my own position has helped me understand my empirical findings and the causal structures and mechanisms underneath, as I explore in the subsequent chapters. According to Chavez's (2008) insider-outsider continuum, I consider myself an indigenous outsider. I completed my primary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate-level education in Myanmar's education system. Since I attended a village school from kindergarten to 8th grade, I had first-hand experience of the limitations and difficulties of rural education. I worked with both policymakers and policy actors from Myanmar during the current reform in my previous jobs. I represented UNICEF as part of a more extensive development aid network and participated in policy lending processes. I also witnessed the situation of schooling in very remote areas of the country comparable to my experience at the village school. I worked with policymakers from the national level to issue instructions to implement activities supported by UNICEF. Therefore, I consider that I secured and maintained a privileged position myself in the policy process in Myanmar.

Moreover, I am living with emotional baggage from that experience. I often think that I participated in imposing education policies supported by the development aid network on education officers from different administrative levels, principals, and teachers during my time at UNICEF, policies that I now consider harmful. I could exert too much pressure on those educators to implement those policies when they did not have enough resources, institutional arrangements, and other contextual factors necessary to do

so. As a UNICEF education officer, I was part of the network of development aid

organizations that, often in a competitive manner, tried to advocate and lend different

education policies through several projects and programs until it reached the point that

the Ministry of Education was overwhelmed and could not accept development aid for

any new projects/programs (Lall, 2021). These emotions associated with my past

experiences of course also shape my current analysis, and I try to account for that

influence and shaping, when possible, in the analysis that follows.

Limitation

The study's main limitation was the current political and public health situation

that did not allow me to return to Myanmar to conduct interviews and focus groups in-

person. After the military coup staged on February 1, 2021, most Myanmar public school

teachers joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) not to cooperate with the

military government. The military government fired those who joined the CDM and

arrested some others. Therefore, many teachers were on their run to avoid criminal

charges, and some later joined the armed resistance against the military. Among

policymakers, the education minister was detained, and some who joined the CDM were

under the military's chase. Since interviewing with me may affect their safety, I decided

that to conduct interviews and focus groups with policymakers and policy actors given

those circumstances was not ethically correct. Therefore, I could not collect enough data

to answer my research sub-question on policymakers' viewpoints using interviews and

had to find another data source.

Despite this limitation, the Facebook posts extended rich data to hear the voices of

policy actors. Those posts and comments represent their authentic voices shared in a

natural setting; that is, these posts were part of natural conversations held in the medium in which it was most politically safe to share them given present circumstances (that is, online via social media), rather than interviews or focus groups that would have been artificially organized for the purpose of this study. Moreover, they also provided some data to know the general viewpoints of policymakers on education reform.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS AND POLICY ACTORS

In my research proposal, I planned to answer the main research question through answering five sub-questions. However, as I explained in the previous chapter on methodology, the deteriorating political situation after the 2021 February military coup did not favor me to conduct interviews with policymakers and policy actors. That led me to rely on the analysis of the Facebook posts of teachers as the main data source along with the document analysis. Therefore, I could not get the policymakers' viewpoints in their own words and answer the sub question 3. Nevertheless, very rich data from the teachers' Facebook posts answers the other four sub questions adequately to cover the different aspects of the main research question. Interestingly, my data analysis informed by the framework of critical realism (described in depth in the previous chapters) revealed the causal relationships between those aspects. The power relations, conflicts, and communication issues between the policymaker and policy actors have a dialectical and causal relationship with the policy trajectory during the reform process. In this chapter, I will discuss the former part of this dialectic relation.

Cogs in the Education Machine: How Teachers View their Roles in the Policy Process

Many policy actors perceive themselves as being powerless in the current system. Several issues lead to their perceived powerlessness: top-down management with authoritarian measures, issues related to new curriculum training, lack of support from administrators, oppressing whistleblowers, the negative impact of ineffective teacher management, and negative attitudes towards teacher management. In the following

sections, I will explore each of these emerging themes from the data in turn.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism has always been a prevailing aspect of the education policy process in Myanmar. Many Facebook posts and comments under them reveal different facets of authoritarianism that is prevalent in Myanmar's educational system. Primarily, the system is structured around top-down implementation, with central offices sending guidance and instructions to the sub-national levels and has been structured in this way for decades. In Myanmar, those guidance and instructions are called orders, and the word itself correctly reflects the power relation between the central and peripheral. Often, policy makers may send out orders to implement activities without carefully considering their feasibility. Here their motive is to get things done, and questions and complaints are not usually welcomed. Teachers often use a Burmese phrase "ရေဘူးပေါက်တာ

မလိုချင်ဘူး ရေပါတာပဲ လိုချင်တယ်" [I don't want to hear that the water bottle has a hole.

What I want is water in the bottle.] to describe this authoritarian culture succinctly. This phrase, which was originally developed and popularized in the military, later spread to non-military public administration departments, and has been commonly used to indicate to lower-level policy actors that rather than question policies or structures, the expectation is that lower-level policy actors are expected to follow commands strictly, like in the army.

This top-down implementation approach was often coupled with a non-inclusive policymaking process in which teachers did not have a voice. The primary venue in which teachers could share their ideas to solve issues was in Facebook posts and

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comments, there were not any official channels to voice their concerns and express their thoughts. To a lesser extent, teachers expressed their voices through teachers' unions. Policymakers did not proactively seek policy actors' ideas and thoughts, instead only reacting to teacher unions' activism by convening meetings with union members when they were under enormous public pressure. Even under the supposedly "pro-democracy" NLD government, authoritarianism seemed to become an undercurrent. For instance, it surfaced when policymaker headed by the education minister and teacher union representatives—got at loggerheads during a dispute over the minister's proposed changes to the sequence of examinations. The minister proposed organizing school-level examinations after the standardized tests for grade 4 and grade 8. Teachers thought that it would unnecessarily lengthen the academic year of K-3 elementary students, who would need to wait for the completion of the standardized tests taken by grade 4 and grade 8 only to take their in-school examinations as their last activity of the school year. Those K-3 elementary students would need to stay at home during the standardized testing period because their teachers would need to serve as exam proctors, and/or their classrooms would be used as testing rooms. The majority of teachers opposed this proposal using the union's platform.

Under pressure, policymakers invited the union representatives to a meeting in which the minister asked them to agree to his proposed plan, despite the problems they had pointed out in the minister's proposal. Some comments to the Facebook post about that meeting show teachers' perceived powerlessness in an authoritarian institutional culture: "စိတ်ပျက်စရာ အခြေအနေ" [disheartening situation], "စိတ်တွေကုန်" [feeling desperate], "လုပ်ကြဦးပေါ့ ရှင်တို့ခေတ်ကိုး" [do as you please because it is your time to

shine.], "�‌ဘာလုပ်လုပ်စိတ်ချမ်းသာမှုမရှိတော့တာပညာရေးကဝန်ထမ်းတွေ" [Educators are

people who are made to feel unhappy no matter what they do].

Outside of this specific example, other teachers' social media comments also indicate

their perceptions of the authoritarian leaning of policymakers above them. Specifically,

with regard to the debate on whether to open the schools during the COVID-19

pandemic, consider the following two posts:

> "မတားဘူး အမိန့်အတိုင်းလုပ်မယ် ပြောနေရင်အဆဲပဲလာမှာမထူးနေဘူး" [I will not
> stop schools from reopening; I will follow the command; if I say something, I will
> face nothing other than damning criticism.]

> "ကိုယ့်လို အဆင့်က တားပိုင်ခွင့်မရှိဘူးလေ။အခက်အခဲတင်ပြတာပဲ ရှိတယ်။
> အတင်းတက်ခိုင်းရင်လဲ တက်ရမှာပဲ။" [With such low-level positions, we do not
> have the privilege to stop it (school reopening); we just inform our administrators
> about possible difficulties; if we are forced to go to schools, we have to do so].

In the first comment, we see ironic resignation, with the teacher expressing

acceptance that they have to act in accordance with commands, but also pushing back

rhetorically by sarcastically recognizing that they are doing so under duress. In the

second, the author expressed a desire to push back against authoritarian policies, but also

made clear that they do not feel they have a choice.

Similarly, when responding with social media comments to the issues regarding

new curriculum training, many teachers shared a feeling of powerlessness. A comment to

a post with a photo showing teachers travelling on a rough country road to attend the new

curriculum training reads "ကျရာနေ စေရာသွားရသူတွေဆိုတာ ဆရာ/ဆရာမတွေကို

ပြောတာပေ့ါ" [Those who must stay where they are put and must go wherever they are

commanded to go are teachers]. Here is another comment to the post about too much training during holidays: "ဆရာဆိုတာထာဝရကျောင်းသားမို့ သင်တန်းပြီး သင်တန်းဆက်တက်ကြပါစို့ မတတ်သာပြီမို့အဲ့လိုသာဖြေသိမ့်ကြပါစို့" [Since a teacher is a lifelong learner, let's attend one training event after another (in a sarcastic tone); let's console ourselves like this because we cannot help but just follow the instructions]. Another teacher responded to the comment about the uncomfortable accommodations during the training by saying "တို့ပညာရေးဝန်ထမ်းတွေကအနိမ့်ခံတွေပါ။" [Educators are underdogs]. Moreover, many teachers referred to mid-level officers at state/regional, district, and township levels as "အထက်ဖားအောက်ဖိ", i.e., pleasing those who are above them in the hierarchy and oppressing those below them.

Sometimes, teachers perceived authoritarianism in the form of retaliation against whistleblowers. Among Myanmar's teachers during this period, there were teacher activists who often criticized policies and took pains to reveal any wrongdoings in the education ministry. One activist teacher reported about a case of principals at six different primary schools illegally collecting exam fees from grade 4 students. That teacher was interrogated by the ministry for participating in interviews with media about the case and bringing negative media attention to the education sector, while those who collected the money from the students faced no administrative actions. A teacher responded with this case with a comment: "ခုခေတ်က လူမှန်ဘေးထွက် ဆိုတာမျိုး" [These days, righteous people are to be excluded]. The general perception among educators was that corruption

had reached many education officers in the ministry, whose primary priority was to cover up their illegal activities.

Feeling Unprotected and Unsupported

Myanmar's teachers are among the lowest-salaried government employees in the country. The teaching profession is considered as not being financially rewarding. Often on social media teachers expressed their thoughts that they got only a little reward and support from their principals or higher-level education officials for all their efforts in educating students. Worse, they expressed feeling that they did not often get enough protection from physical threats. In the areas of the country with active armed conflicts, it made headlines when two teachers were murdered by armed insurgents. Teachers blamed the government for not protecting teachers teaching in remote and dangerous areas. A teacher asked a rhetorical question in her comment on a news social media describing a teacher who was shot to death: "နယ်မှာလုပ်နေရတဲ့ဆရာမတွေ လုံခြုံမှုမရှိတာ ဘယ်သူတွေ တာဝန်အရှိဆုံးလဲ" [Who is most responsible for the lack of safety for teachers who work in the rural areas?", with the implied message that it is the government who is responsible]. Another teacher used stronger language in his comment, stating that: "ဒါမျိုးဆိုဝံချိုးနားပင်းနေပြီ။မျက်စိကန်းနေပြီ။" [The minister (in derogatory spelling) is deaf and mute and blind in such cases].

In another instance, a teacher was hospitalized after being attacked by a construction worker when the teacher asked them to not school desks without permission in their work. In a social media post describing the case, several teachers noted in their comments that the teacher received virtually no support from his principal and township

education office, who did not even submit a police report for the case. The comments read as follows:

"ဘာမှမပြောချင်တော့ဘူး" [I no longer want to say anything.]

"စိတ်ကုန်လို့" [feeling desperate]

"ပညာတတ်တွေက ငွေရှိပညာမဲ့တွေကိုကြောက်နေရတဲ့ခေတ်ဆိုတော့ ခက်တော့ခက်တယ်ဆရာရေ" [It is difficult, Sir, because it is the age when the educated have to fear the wealthy uneducated].

"ဘာမှမပြောတာဘဲကောင်းမယ်" [It's better to say nothing]

"ဆရာ၊ဆရာမဘဝကဒီလိုပါပဲ" [It's an educator's life].

"ဒီလိုပဲငုံ့ခံရမဲ့ဘဝတွေလား" [Are we doomed to be submissive like that?].

"ကျနော်တို့ပညာရေးလောက စိတ်ပျက်စရာပါလား [Our education field is such despair].

"ပွင့်လင်းမြင်သာတဲ့ခေတ်ဆို ရေများရေနိုင် မီးများမီးနိုင်ဘဲလား ဒီအကျင့်တွေက ကျန်ရှိနေတုန်းလား" [Isn't it the age of transparency? Is it a dog-eat-dog world? Do those (unhealthy) habits still exist?]

In these comments, teachers expressed a combination of resignation and indignation in the face of violence against teachers which they felt helpless to stop. When teachers were required to participate in the grading of the matriculation exams during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the issue of the lack of safety arose again in social media discussions. In several comments under one post, teachers demonstrated frustration and anger that hundreds of teachers had to do the grading without social distancing and other safety measures:

"ဆရာ ဆရာမတွေကိုအသက်အပိုပါတယ်ထင်နေလားမသိဘူး" [Do they (the responsible officials) think that teachers have an extra life?]

"အသက်ပင်သေသေတိုင်းပြည်အတွက်အလုပ်လုပ်နေသောဆရာ၊ဆရာမများ" [(With sarcastic tone: "teachers sacrificing their lives for the country while working.]

"အသက်တွေကိုတန်ဘိုးထားကြပါ!" [Value human life!]

"ဆရာဆရာမတွေ ကို လူစာရင်းထဲ မထည့်ဘူး" [Teachers are not considered as

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human beings].

Again, as in previous posts, teachers here demonstrated feeling anger, though they also demonstrated feelings of frustration that there was nothing they could do to change their circumstances.

Policy "Guineappigging" and Frequent Policy Shifts

Local policy actors consider themselves, along with their students, as guinea pigs in the policy process. They think policymakers from the central level are testing one policy after another without consulting or involving them in the policy process. When the Ministry of Education tried to implement groupwork as a means of assessment in chapter-end tests and year-end tests, it faced a lot of backlash from teachers. Teachers thought that central level policymakers did not provide clear information about this initiative, and many of them thought the initiative was not feasible. Many comments under a Facebook post about this initiative indicate that teachers thought that the central level elites were experimenting with another new policy that had not been fully tested or explored:

> "ခုထိပညာရေးကစမ်းတဝါးဝါးနဲ့ စမ်းသပ် ပညာရေးဘဝက မတက်သေးဘူးလား တိုင်းပြည်ရဲ့ အညွန်လေးတွေရဲ့ဘဝကတော့ မတွေးရဲစရာ" [Is education system still going without a clear direction and still at the stage of experimented education? I am very worried about the life of our children].
> "အစမ်းသပ်ခံအသဲနှလုံးမင်းစိတ်ကြိုက်သုံး" [My heart is for your experiment. Use it as you like" (an excerpt from the lyrics of a popular Myanmar song)].
> "ပြီးရင် အောင်မြင်လား‌မအောင်မြင်လား စစ်ဆေးခြင်းမရှိဘဲ နောက်စီမံချက်တစ်ခု ထပ်စီစဉ်မယ် အခုချက်ချင်းလုပ်ဆိုပြီး အော်ဒါထုတ်မယ်။" [Then, they (policymakers) will plan another project without evaluate whether this (assessment) policy is successful or not. They will send out an order to implement the new project right away"].
> "စမ်းသပ်မှု တွေက အရင်းအနှီးကြီးလွန်းလှုပါတယ်" [Experimenting policies is costly]

"အစမ်းသပ်ခံဘဝပါ" [Teachers lead the life of experimenting subjects].

"ပညာရေး လောကရဲ့ခေတ် အဆက်ဆက် အ ခြေအ နေပါ "အစမ်းသပ်ခံ" [This is the situation of education in different eras: that of guinea pig].

The last comment in particular indicates the common perception of teachers that policy experimentation has been a long-lasting practice in Myanmar's education. This was similarly reflected in a recent piece by a political satirist who said, "ပညာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန အခွန့်ရှည်ပါစေ၊ ကေဒသမအကြိမ်မြောက် အစမ်းသပ်ခံပညာရေးကြီး အောင်ပါစေ။" [Long live the Ministry of Education, wishing the eleventh great experimented education be successful].

In the eyes of local policy actors, state-level policymakers lack knowledge of or disregard the real situation involved in implementing educational policies in the field. As one comment under a post listing the reasons why Myanmar education is unsuccessful reads: "ဖြစ်ချင်တာဘဲသိပြီးဖြစ်နေတာကိုမသိချင်ယောင်ဆောင်နေသောလူကြီးမင်းများရှိတဲ့ တိုင်းပြည်မှာတို့ဆရာတွေဘဝအောက်တန်းကျနေရတာမဆန်းပါ" [It is not surprising that we, teachers, are underprivileged in a country where there are high-level officials who know only what they want and pretend not to know what is happening].

Another teacher made a similar comment under a post suggesting a solution to the issue of current teacher promotion system, pointing out policymakers' lack of knowledge about teachers' feelings due to their lack of shared experience or background with most teachers: "မျိုးသိမ်းကြီးအပါအဝင် ပညာရေးအထက်လူကြီးတွေ ရုံးပိုင်းနဲ့ အဆင့်မြင့်ဘက်က

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လာတဲ့လူတွေများတော့ ဆရာ/မတွေရဲ့ခံစားချက်ကိုနားမလည်ဘူး" [Since the high-level

officers including Myo Thien Gyi [the Minister of Education] come from the background

of working in an office and in higher education, they do not understand teachers'

feelings]. Lastly, another post written by a teacher who has become a writer also implied

that policymakers do not realize the actual situation on the ground. He gave suggestions

in his post as a response to the minister's proposed schedule change of school-level

examinations:

> "ဒါကြောင့် စီမံချက်တစ်ခုချပြီဆိုရင် အကောင်အထည် မဖော်ရသေးခင်မှာ
> ကိုယ့်ဘက်က �’ာတွေဖြည့်ဆည်းပေးဖို့လိုမလဲ။ မိမိတို့အကောင်အထည်ဖော်ချင် တဲ့
> လုပ်ငန်းအတွက် ဘာတွေလိုအပ်မလဲဆိုတာ အရင်လေ့လာပြီးမှ၊ လိုအပ်ချက်တွေကို
> ဖြည့်ဆည်းပြီးမှ အကောင်အထည်ဖော်စေ ချင်ပါတယ်။ ဒီလိုမဟုတ်ဘဲ အ
> ကောင်အထည်ဖော်ပြီးမှ လိုအပ်ချက်တွေကို လိုက်ဖြည့်ဆည်းမယ် ဆိုရင်
> အောက်ခြေကလူတွေ (ဆရာတွေ)ကလည်း ဖုတ်ပူမီးတိုက်လုပ်ရတာမို့ ရလဒ်ကောင်း
> တွေထွက်လာဖို့ ခဲယဉ်းမှာဖြစ်တဲ့အကြောင်း စေတနာကောင်းနဲ့
> တိုက်တွန်းရေးသားလိုက်ရပါတယ်။"
>
> [I write with good intentions to encourage you (the MoE). So, if you plan a
> project, I want you to implement it only after finding out what you will have to
> provide, what is necessary for the implementation to be successful and providing
> those things as needed. However, if you provide what is needed only after you
> have already *started* implementation, you cannot get good results because the
> employees from the ground level (teachers) will need to implement it in a rush].

In this post, this teacher tries to approach the Ministry from a perspective of

assuming good intentions—however, even assuming good intentions, he has noted that

implementation of new policies has not been sufficiently structured and supported with

the resources to be successful. Overall, across the posts and comments I collected for this

study, there is a prevailing opinion among local teachers and policy actors that the current

education system and policymakers are ineffective, inefficient, and non-responsive to

feedback.

Frequent policy shifts have also caused teachers' frustration. They have been feeling weary about frequent changes in policy coming in the form of instructions sourced at the central level and passed down in a rigid top-down management mechanism. There is a popular sarcastic saying among teachers that vividly indicates the situation: "ခုတစ်မျိုး တော်ကြာတစ်မျိုး ၂ မျိုးပဲရှိတဲ့ ပညာရေး" [There are only two things in education: one right now and the other soon].

Perceived Powerlessness

Another theme noted in the posts and comments collected for this study is a demonstrated sense of powerlessness on the part of local policy actors. In response to a post calling for teachers' activism by posting a picture of nurses demonstrating against a government's policy and asking when teachers are going to wake up, some teachers responded as follows:

> "အိပ်ကောင်းတုန်းဘဲဗျ" [We are in a sound sleep].
> "ဆုတောင်းတာမှပြည့်အုံမယ် အကြောက်တရားကြီးတယ် ဆရာ\မ တွေလေ" [You wish! Teachers are so scared].
> "ပညာရေးကဖိခံနေကျဆိုတော့ မထနိုင်တော့ဘူး" [(They) cannot get up since (people in) education is(are) always oppressed].

> "နိုးမထနိုင်သေးပါ စာမေးပွဲတွေ စာစစ်တွေ သင်တန်းတွေပိနေလို့" [We cannot get up yet since we are under huge workload of exams, grading, and training].

In these responses, we see several proposed reasons why teachers feel powerless—their oversized workload that leaves little room for advocacy, their sense of fear of retaliation, their lack of recognition of the problem at hand. However, across these responses there is a theme—that teachers do not feel they are in a position to have the power to make

change.

This institutional culture typified by frequent policy shifts and perceived powerlessness on the part of teachers has created frustration among low-level employees, especially among teachers. Being in an education system with these characteristics for decades has led to distrust among teachers towards the Ministry of Education and the policies that come out of it. As a result, they have a negative perception of reform policies that have come with the recent political transition. Of course, there are some policy actors who are pro-reform and ready to take part in policy implementation, but as reflected as a proportion of the comments and posts I have collected for this study, they seem to make up only a small percentage of the larger teacher work force. As reflected in the comments above, many teachers see themselves as simply cogs in the education machine.

The *Will to Policy* and the *Will in Policy*

One potential theoretical framing for understanding these trends comes in the constructs of the *will to policy* and the *will in policy* (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). The *will to policy* refers to the sociopolitical situation leading to the development of a policy, and the *will in policy* refers to the norms set by the policy in response to which policy actors are supposed to act accordingly (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). With regards to the first point, the *will to policy* as reflected in the overall policy climate at the time a policy is developed, as I have illustrated in the previous sections, policy actors have a strong understanding of the ongoing political transition and its influence on education reform. However, the unrealistic expectations and pace of implementation mandated by policy elites have undermined any potential good will

towards the reform at the local level. As an example of this, when the NLD (National League for Democracy) government was in power and would try to implement a new policy, local policy actors would sarcastically respond with the NLD's election slogan: "Time to change." For local actors, there *was* indeed a change, but it was not necessarily positive.

Regarding the *will in policy*, that is, the norms and expectations associated with a new policy change, some teachers in this study tried to recognize the positive in their responses to education reform policies, demonstrating a pro-reform and eager attitude towards new initiatives. The objectives and components of the new curriculum impressed them. However, there were probable causes impairing the understanding of the *will* in the reform policies. First, the communication issues outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter made it difficult for local actors to get clear information about new reforms. Second, as mentioned above, frequent policy shifts during regular periods of reform in Myanmar's past have created negative attitudes amongst local actors towards almost any kind of new reform activities in the present. The lack of inclusion of local policy actors in the policymaking process also led lower-level policy actors to feel a lower sense of investment in, or at worst indifference towards any new policy.

Communication Issues

There are a lot of communication issues between central level policymakers and local policy actors with regards to Myanmar's education reforms. First, policies outlined at the central level are often perceived as not clear in how they should be implemented at the local level. Second, one-way policy communication from the central level may arrive at the lower levels at various parts of the country at different times due to the remoteness

of some areas, creating a lot of confusion on the part of policy actors in local townships and schools. Teachers from different areas may receive instruction about a new policy at different points of time. Moreover, education officers at different lower-level offices may interpret a new policy in differing ways.

The Facebook group used as the site for this study is one arena where teachers have tried to get clarification about policies. There are often different understandings of an education policy, whether it is related to teacher training, a new assessment method, teacher management issues, the classification of teaching positions, teacher promotion and transfer, a new basic education structure, or the last day of academic year for K-2 students who do not have to take year-end exams, to name a few topics for which there are multiple posts in the Facebook group asking for clarification.

Regarding the teacher training for the new curriculum, many teachers in the group shared that they felt unclear about how many teachers were supposed to be posted in each school, and who among those teachers were supposed to attend the training, or when and at what administrative level the training was going to be organized. Different teachers shared different information on all these points, so that there was a high level of inconsistency and disagreement regarding training-related information among them. Sometimes, the information or instruction participants shared as having received from the state education office was different from what other participants shared as having received from their local township education office, although all participants were discussing the same training program and the township office is ostensibly under the supervision of the state office. Similarly, when state policymakers initiated a policy of using group work as an assessment method for chapter-end tests, teachers did not get

very clear instructions on how to implement that policy in their local schools. This lack of clarity was shown even in posts associated with system features like teacher management. In the teacher classification system, there is a position called junior assistant teacher II (J2). Although junior assistant teachers usually teach middle grades, J2 is generally considered as a specific teacher role within the junior assistant teacher status that instead teaches primary grades. However, many J2s did not seem to be very clear about their roles and responsibilities, and they expressed their confusion and frustration when they were required to attend the training for the new primary curriculum.

One big change brought about by the education reform was the change in basic education curriculum structure, from the grade 1-11 structure to the K-12 structure. The old structure had a number of organizational inconsistencies, including differences between the names of the grades in Burmese and those in English. The most visible one is that kindergarten in the Burmese language was called grade 1 in English, despite there being a separate "grade 1" in Burmese. Rather than making the names consistent, grade 1 in Burmese was grade 2 in English, grade 2 in Burmese is grade 3 in English, and so on. The new structure was meant to remove those inconsistencies. However, the new curriculum was only introduced at the rate of one grade level per year, so the old and new systems coexisted as a result. On this issue, one teacher sarcastically commented with a laugh emoji, saying: "နာမည်အရင်ပြောင်းရမှာ နာမည်နဲ့တိုင်ပတ်နေတယ်" [Name change should have come first; now, it is complicated even with names]. Despite the fact that there remained a lot of confusion around the English names for grades among teachers, state level policymakers did not seem to take this issue seriously or try to provide clearer information to local policy actors.

Unsustainable Workload

Many teachers in the Facebook group shared feeling overwhelmed with a workload they perceived to be unsustainable. This workload resulted from a widespread teacher shortage, a systemic issue throughout the country. Teachers from schools that could not fill vacant positions had to teach multiple grades at the same time or teach much larger classes than they had in the past. Below are some posts and comments regarding the overtaxed workload of teachers:

> "KG,G-1,G-2,G-4engတစ်ယောက်တည်းသင်ရပါတယ် ... ဝန်ထမ်းက၂ ယောက် ပဲရှိပါတယ် .... သင်ခန်းစာမီအောင် မနည်းသင်နေရချိန် မှာ...အကဲဖြတ်မှတ် တမ်းမလုပ်နိုင်ရင် ...အလုပ်ဖြုတ်ခံရနိုင်ပါသလား!??? ဘယ်လိုအဆင်ပြေအောင် လုပ် ရမလဲ..??? ကျေးဇူးပြု၍အကြံပြု ပေးကြပါလား..ဆရာ၊ဆရာမတို့ခင်ဗျာ။"

> "I have to teach KG, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 4 English on my own. There are only two teachers (including myself). Can I get fired if I cannot complete the reflection journal when I have to barely finish my lesson??? How do I work it out??? Please give me suggestions, my fellow teachers."

> "တစ်ခါမှတော့ ဝင်မရေးဘူးပါဘူး အထက်လူကြီးတွေကိုနားမလည်နိုင်တော့လို့ ဘယ်လိုလုပ်ရင်ကောင်းမလဲလို့ အားလုံးကို တိုင်ပင်တာပါ။ အခုချိန်မှာ kg G1 G2 က သင်ရိုးသစ်နဲ့သင်နေကြတာပါ။ အရင်သင်ရိုးဟောင်းလိုသာဆို ဆရာ၂ယောက်ရှိလဲ့ရပါတယ်။ အခုက လူဦးရေ ၅၀အောက်ကို ဆရာ၂ယောက်ပဲပေး မယ်ဆိုတော့ ဘယ်လိုစာသင်ရပါ့မလဲ။ကျောင်းမှာက ကျောင်းအုပ်အပါ ဆရာ၃ယောက်ပဲရှိနေ ပါတယ်။သင်ရတာတော်တော်အဆင်မပြေဖြစ်နေလို့ပါ။ ဆရာအပြင်ကဒ္ဓားသင်ရင်လဲ သင်ရိုးသစ်အတွက်မဆင်မပြေနိုင်ဘူးထင်လို့ပါ။"

> [I have never posted before. I am consulting with all of you because I cannot understand my administrators anymore. We are teaching Kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 with new curriculum. With the old curriculum, we could manage it even if there were only two teachers. How can we teach if two teachers are appointed for a student population of less than fifty? There are three teachers including the principal in our school. We are facing difficulties in teaching. I do not think it is okay to hire an outsider teacher to teach the new curriculum].

In another post, a teacher shared that they felt they could not handle her current

load teaching 75 students. Another teacher shared that they had to teach even larger classes of more than 90 students in grade 6 and 7. Another primary teacher shared the following about her huge workload: "ကူညီကြပါဦး G1 ကနေG5အထိ ဘာသာစုံ တယောက်တည်း သင်နေရတာ ဘယ်အချိန်အနားယူရမလဲ မစဉ်းတတ်တော့ဘူး" [Please help me. I must teach all subjects in grade 1 to 5, and I can't see when I might take a rest]. The exhaustion in this comment seems palpable, with the teacher not knowing when or if they might be able to rest.

Another factor added to teachers' already crowded to-do lists was teacher training, which accompanied the new curriculum rollout. Since trainings were usually held during holidays, teachers did not get any time during their holidays to rest and to spend time with their families. The situation caused teachers to share thoughts in the group expressing that there was too much training and that their workload was not sustainable. Many teachers found it impossible to find any sense of work-life balance. Since some teachers could not afford to get babysitters, those with little children often had to bring the whole family to the larger cities where trainings were held.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in the data presented and analyzed in this chapter, local policy actors such as teachers have demonstrated feelings of powerlessness in an authoritarian system, burnout when faced with an oversized and unsustainable workload, as well as frustration in the face of unclear policy and communication, unintended negative impacts of new curriculum teacher training, among other factors. It is in this context of low teacher morale that the government has decided to roll out new curricular

reforms, and the particular perceptions of those policy reforms will be outlined in the

following chapter.

V. POLICY TRAJECTORY OF THE NEW CURRICULUM ROLLOUT

This chapter tracks the policy trajectory of the new curriculum rollout, the most significant countrywide activity of the education reform outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. In this chapter I also discuss the dialectical relationship between the power relations of the policymakers and policy actors (explored in more detail in Chapter 4) and this policy's trajectory. Finally, I review how my theoretical framework can provide an interpretive lens through which to better understand why the new curriculum rollout proceeded as it did.

Policy Borrowing

As I explore in depth in Chapter 2, policy borrowing in education is not new to Myanmar. Its current education system itself resulted from the European education models brought into the country by Christian missionaries and later by the British during the colonial time (Kaung, 1953). As a UN member state, Myanmar cooperated with the UN organizations for its education sector even when it was under military regime governance. UN education initiatives like Education for All (EFA) influenced Myanmar's education policies (Han Tin, 1995). In recent history, before the reform that I studied, Myanmar's Ministry of Education conducted an Education Sector Study Project in collaboration with UNESCO and UNDP to assist Myanmar in implementing an education reform to meet global EFA goals (Khin Saw Naing, 1990). As one of the reform activities, a new assessment system called the Continuous Assessment and Progression System (CAPS) was piloted in practicing schools (lab schools) of education universities and colleges and later was rolled out countrywide with the help of UNICEF in 1998 (Khin Saw Naing, 1990; Yoshida, 2020). I will discuss CAPS as a crucial factor

in shaping the contemporary educational landscape in Myanmar that became the backdrop for the current reform. The Child-Centered Approach (CCA) was also imported into the country by international NGOs and aid organizations, with the largest CCA project being the Strengthening Child-Centered Approach (SSCA) project supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, or JICA (Lall, 2011; Suzuki, 2011).

The reforms that are the focus of this current study, referred to commonly as the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), were also started and conducted with the support of development aid agencies (CESR, 2012). With the 2011 political transition, many development organizations were among the financial supporters of this reform, alongside the Ministry of Education's usual international partners, JICA and UNICEF. In addition to financing, these aid agencies exerted influence on the shape of Myanmar's reform policies through the international consultants they hired to build and run CESR (Lall, 2021). Notably, the development and rollout of the new curriculum reveal instances of policy borrowing through international partners. In the introduction of the Basic Education Curriculum chapter of the National Education Strategic Plan (or NESP), it states: "International evidence highlights the added value of an emphasis on 21st-century skills, soft skills, and higher-order thinking skills in the new basic education curriculum. Many governments worldwide explicitly state that the national curriculum should have relevance for all students by equipping them with the knowledge and practical skills they need for life, the workplace, and for continuing education" (p. 114). As Lall (2021) mentions, advocating the development of workplace skills in students is a neoliberal narrative, one that can be commonly seen in the kinds of official reports produced by development workers and scholars at large multinational institutions,

including in early reports evaluating CESR. In one such report, the authors argued that Myanmar's old curriculum was "too academic" and not focused enough on practical, applicable job-related skills (Young, 2014). The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supported the primary curriculum review, and Australian Aid supported a similar curriculum review at the secondary level. With this degree of involvement in the development of both the policies and curriculum of the CESR by outside, international consultants and aid agencies, the CESR becomes a clear example of policy lending and policy borrowing, as these consultants and organizations draw on their own and other parallel international experiences in the shaping of these programs and documents. This was, again, not new in Myanmar—through its long relationship with JICA, there were examples of policy borrowing from Japan before. For example, a professional development model created in Japan known as "lesson study" had been introduced to teacher education colleges in Myanmar in 2011 (Yin Mar Win, 2022).

Curriculum Development at the National Level

While policy borrowing has occurred over an extended period of time, as outlined above, Myanmar did not borrow education policies in a wholesale manner. That was particularly true in the case of the development of a new curriculum. According to Clause 39 (d) of the 2014 National Law, the National Education Commission is required to ensure the "curriculum giving the ability to raise each ethnic group's rich literature, culture, arts, traditions and historical heritage along with the values that every citizen should have" (National Education Law, 2014). The goal of this law was to ensure that Myanmar's socio-cultural values were represented across several content areas including Myanmar language arts and history curricula. The curriculum development process was

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led by members of the national curricula team from the Department of Education Planning and Training.

Issues around Curriculum Training

The rollout of the new curriculum in the centralized education system required countrywide teacher training in how to implement the new curriculum. Although the curriculum rollout started on a one-grade-per-year basis, it was an extremely daunting task for the Ministry of Education to organize a series of trainings in more than three hundred townships throughout the country.

Several issues affected the implementation of this training. First, the top-down nature of the implementation model meant the quality of training varied widely across contexts. Second, the training was very intensive because it needed to be completed during a one-month window during summer vacation. This meant that the training somewhat resembled a series of crash courses in new content and pedagogical ideas.

The physical conditions of the training, which occurred largely in non-air-conditioned training venues during the scorching hot summer, also undermined the learning process of teachers. Underserviced and dilapidated rural school buildings could not serve as comfortable accommodations for those from remote areas, who instead had to travel to more urban areas and stay overnight during the training. Several teachers complained about the uncomfortable conditions of training venues. Here are some posts and comments on this issue from the Facebook group:

> "ကျောင်းတွေမှာ Grade 1
> သင်တန်းဘာသာရပ်ဆွေးနွေးပွဲများပြုလုပ်ကြရာတွင်
> သင်တန်းသားဦးရေနှင့်ကိုက်ညီဆီလျော်သင့်တင့်မျှတသည့် သောက်ရေ သုံးရေ
> သန့်စင်ခန်း စသည့်အခြေခံလိုအပ်ချက်များကို

အတတ်နိုင်ဆုံးဖြည့်ဆည်းပေးရန် ကြိုတင်စီမံဆောင် ရွက်ခြင်းဖြင့် သင်တန်းသားများ စိတ်ချမ်းမြေ့နိုင်ကြပါမည် ။
ယနေ့မှကောက်ဖွင့်သည့်သင်တန်းမဟုတ်ပဲ စီမံချက်ဖြင့် တာဝန်ရှိသူများမှ ဆောင်ရွက်ခြင်းမျိုးဖြင့် ပညာရေးကို ပြောင်းလဲစေချင်ပါသည် တခါတရံ သင်တန်းတာဝန်ခံပင် နေ့စဉ်မလာရောက်ခြင်းများ ရှိနေတတ်ပါသည်။"

[When using schools as training centers for Grade 1 curriculum training, preparation should be done to provide basic needs such as water and restrooms enough for trainees so that they would feel happy. I want responsible officials to conduct education reform activities by performing their tasks according to a plan rather than in an ad-hoc fashion. Sometimes, even the training focal point does not come to the training center].

"နည်းပြ တွေ ရဲ့
အိပ်ဆောင်က ကားလမ်းမကြီး
ကပ်နေပြီးတော့ တစ်နေကုန်
နေပူထား တစ်ညလုံး အပူပြန်
လုံးဝအိပ်မရ။ ဘာပန်ကာမှမရှိ
တစ်ည ၁ နာရီ တောင် နှစ်နှစ်ခြိုက်ခြိုက် အိပ်မရဘူး။"

[Since the building where the trainers slept was beside a highway and heated up in the sun for the whole day, I could not sleep at night. There were no fans; I could not sleep even for an hour per night].

"ပူပူအိုက်အိုက် ချွေးတပြိုက်ပြိုက်နဲ့ တက်ခဲ့ရတဲ့ G-1သင် ရိုးသစ်"

[Grade 1 new curriculum training we attended when feeling hot and sweating].

"G2 သင်တန်းက သုံးပုံနှစ်ပုံတော့ကျိုးသွားပြီ
ဒီလောက်ပူပြင်းတဲ့နွေရာသီဆိုတော့ အတော် ပင်ပန်းကြပြီဆိုတာကို
နားလည်ပါတယ် ကိုယ်ချင်းလည်းစာမိပါရဲ့"

[We have completed two-thirds of Grade 2 training. I understand that trainees have been very tired because of the summer's scorching temperatures. I empathize with you].

"ဒုတိယတန်း သင်ရိုးသစ်ကို အညာနွေပူပူပြပြတဲ
အပင်ပန်းခံပြီး တတ်လာခဲ့ရတာ ။"

[I took Grade 2 new curriculum training

while enduring the scorching heat of summer].

As can be seen in these quotes, the physical conditions for this training were very strenuous and unhealthy. In addition to the heat and sleeping conditions, food was also a concern for many. While some townships received help from the community for preparing lunch for trainee teachers, trainees from many townships faced difficulties getting sufficient food for all the trainees. As explained by the teachers:

"လူ ၃၈၈ယောက်စာကို
ရ၀၀ကျော်စာ စားသုံးရသောအခါ
နားလည်ပေးနိုင်သော်လည်း
အခက်ခဲဖြစ်ရပါသည်။"

[Although I can understand the situation, it is difficult for more than 700 hundred people to share a lunch prepared for 388 people].

One post, which described one community's work organizing and cooking lunch for their local village school's trainees, inspired envy among many commenters. Several comments under the post mentioned that they had to make their arrangements for lunch. There also were insufficient training materials. The following comments made by teachers reflect that issue:

"သင်တန်းစကတည်းကသင်တန်းလက်စွဲဆရာလမ်းညွှန်ကျောင်းသုံးပုံနှိပ်အား
လုံးပြည့်စုံရင်ပိုကောင်းမယ်ထင်ပါတယ်သင်တန်းကရက်လဲတိုသလိုပဲ"

[Training manuals, teacher books, and student textbooks should have been provided since the beginning of the training. I also think that the training duration was short].

"ခရိုင်အဆင့်မထားဘဲ မြို့နယ်များမှာ စာသင်ခန်းနည်းပြ သင်ထောက်ကူ
ပစ္စည်းအစုံအလင် ပွံ့ပိုးမှုပြည့် စုံစွာဖြင့် ပြုလုပ်လျှင် ပိုထိရောက်နိုင်
ပါမယ်"

[It would be more effective if training is organized at township level with

the provision of enough number of classrooms and trainers, teaching aids, and it is not organized at the district level].

"ယခင်နှစ် Grade 1သင်တန်းတုန်းက လိုအပ်သောG 1စာအုပ်များကို

သင်တန်းချိန်မှာမရခဲ့သော်လည်း ဒီနှစ်Grade2

သင်တန်းမှာတော့သင်တန်းစတက်တဲ့နေ့မှာဘဲ G2

ဆရာကိုင်စာအုပ်တွေကြည့်ရှုခွင့်ရခဲ့သည့်အတွက် ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်။

ဒီလိုဘဲဖြစ်ရမှာပါ။ကျောင်းသားကိုင်ဖတ်စာအုပ်များပါတခါတည်းရလျှင်ပို၍

ကောင်းပါ၏။"

[Although we did not receive necessary grade 1 curriculum materials during the training last year, we got grade 2 teacher's books on the first day of the training this year. Thank you for that. It must be like that. It would be better if student textbooks were available too].

As can be seen here, even when teachers try to make the best of insufficient materials or be thankful for what they receive, they recognize that what they have received is not sufficient to meet their needs. This extended to the quality of the training, as a number of comments mentioned that training lessons and trainers were disengaging. However, there was a debate over this issue, with one trainer in the Facebook group firmly responding that their work was great, and rather it was trainees who were disengaged. Whatever the truth of that matter, the conflict regarding it reveals that the training, both in terms of the physical resources as well as the quality of instruction, was debated and largely seen as insufficient by local policy actors.

Unintended Effects of Training on Teachers

As discussed in the previous chapter, participation in these training programs was seen as an imposition to the bulk of Myanmar's teachers, who were already teaching a larger-than-expected group of students with a significant workload. One teacher wrote a poem to express how busy her summer was:

"#လစ

တိုးတာ မတိုးတာ ဘေးဖယ်ထား ။

Grade 1 ပြည်နယ်အဆင့်သင်တန်း

တက်ဖို့ပြင်ထား ။

#လစာ

လောက်တာ မလောက်တာ ဘေးဖယ်ထား။

#Grade 1 ခရိုင်အဆင့် သင်တန်းတက်ဖို့ပြင်ထား။

#Grade 1 မြို ့နယ်အဆင့် သင်တန်းတက်ဖို့ပြင်ထား

ပြီးတော့ရှိသေး

#လယ်/ ပြ ဘာသာရပ် မွမ်းမံသင်တန်း (ခရိုင်အဆင့်)

#စတုတ္ထတန်း အောင်ချက်နည်း

#စတုတ္ထတန်းသင်ဆရာမ မွမ်းမံသင်တန်း

တက်ဖို့ပြင်ထား ။

~~~~~~~~~~

ခုအချိန်ထိလည်း ဟိုစာရင်းတောင်း ဒီစာရင်းတောင်းနဲ့

~~~~~~~~~~

ပြီးတော့ ------->> #သင်တန်းသင်တန်းသင်တန်း နဲ့

~~~~~~~~~~

~~~#ကုန်ပါပြီနွေရာသီကျောင်းပိတ်ရက်။"

[Set aside the salary increase;
Get ready for state-level Grade 1 training.
Set aside the sufficiency of salary;
Get ready for district-level Grade 1 training.
Get ready for township level Grade 1 training.
Here comes more...
Get ready for
District-level middle school subject improvement training
Grade 4 improvement training (for schools with low exam pass rates)
Up to now, asked to submit these data, and those data
~~~~~~~~~~
Then, training, training, training.
~~~~~~~~~~
~~~Long gone, my summer vacation!]

This poem clearly states trends I saw throughout the data, that teachers felt they

were being asked to do too much for too little reward. This sentiment was shared

by some of the trainers themselves, not just the trainees:

"မပြောပဲ မျိုချနေတာပါပဲ
မနေနိုင်လို့ ပြန်အန် ထွက်လာပြီ
ဗဟိုအဆင့် G 1 သင်တန်းတဲ့
ထောက်ကြန့် ကို ကြည်ကြည်
ဖြူဖြူ သွားခဲ့ပါတယ်။ ပညာရေး ဝန်ထမ်း ဘဝ ၁၀ နှစ်
လောက် တာဝန်ထမ်းရဦးမှာ
ဆိုတော့ ကိုယ်တိုင်သေချာသိ
ချင်တယ်။ ပီပီပြင်ပြင် သူများ
ကိုယ် လက်ဆင့်ကမ်းချင်တယ်လေ။ တကယ်လည်း အပီ
လုပ်ခဲ့တယ်။ ဗဟိုအဆင့်မှာလည်း ဂုဏ်ဆောင်ခဲ့တယ်။
တိုင်းအဆင့်လည်း ပီပီပြင်ပြင် ပို့ချခဲ့တယ်။ လူ
တိုင်းကျွန်မ ပို့ချ ဆွေးနွေး မှု
ကို နှစ်သက်တယ်။ အဲဒါ မပြီး
သေးဘူး ခရိုင်အဆင့် ဆက်ပို့
ချဦးတဲ့ လွန်သွားပြီလို့ မထင်
ဘူးလား။ ဆရာ ဆရာမ တို့ရေ
လူနဲ့ ခိုင်းနှား လွဲနေပြီနေမှာ။
နောက်မှ ပြင်ပြီး စာထွက်လာတယ်
ခရိုင် အဆင့်ကြီးကြပ်တဲ့။
သင်တန်း သင်တန်း နဲ့ လွယ်တယ်မှတ်လို့။
စားဖို့ လုပ်ပေးလည်း ကုန်
တာပဲနော် ။မသိတာမဟုတ်
သိသိကြီးနဲ့ နိုင်ရာထောင်
ကြတာနော်။"

[I swallowed my feelings.
However, I could not do so any longer, and they came up.
I voluntarily went to the mid-level training at Htauk Kyant.
Since I will have to work as an educator for ten more years,
I wanted to know (the new curriculum) well.
I could make (my school) feel proud of me at the central level.

I facilitated well at the regional level.
Everybody liked my lessons.
My duty is not over yet.
I was asked to be a trainer at the district level.
Don't you think it is too much?
My fellow teachers, I think they are mistaking me for a working ox.
Later, they changed the instructions to ask me to serve as a district-level
training supervisor.
It is not easy to join a training event.
Even if meals are arranged, you still need to spend money. It is not true
that they do not know about that.
They are knowingly bullying me, who is powerless].

While this policy actor was a trainer rather than a trainee, receiving slightly more in

salary as well as better accommodations, it is telling that they still shared feeling more

like a "working ox" than a respected and valued colleague. Also, while participants were

promised daily allowances to cover their expenses, this money was only promised to

come later, and teachers were told they would have to spend their own money upfront.

Some teachers needed to spend money out of their pocket for transportation to commute

between their homes and training venues. This represented a significant financial burden,

especially to rural teachers who often are paid a lower salary.

This lack of sufficient resources for the training led many trainees to feel

disengaged. One teacher wrote a post creating a wish list of what she wanted and did not

want from the training. Her thoughts included:

- Groupများခွဲ၍သင်ကြားရာ၌ မိမိ Gp ၌ မိမိကိုသာဦးဆောင်ခိုင်းပြီး
  မိမိသာအဖွဲ့ကိုကယ်တင်ရသောကယ်တင်ရှင်ကြီးမဖြစ်ပါစေနဲ့.....
  [I do not want to be the group's savior when other group members
  make me the group leader all the time...]
- "ငါတို့ကအသက်ကြီးနေပြီ အတွေ့အကြုံရပီးသား နင်တို့
  အငယ်လေးတွေထွက်ရဲပြောရဲအောင်အလေ့အကျင့်ရှိအောင်လုပ်"ဟု
  ဆိုသော် ညာတာပါတေးခိုင်းတတ်သော ဂျင်းဆရာမ များနှင့်လဲ
  မဆုံတွေ့ရပါလို့၏...

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[I do not want to meet senior teachers who tricked me by saying, 'We are old and seasoned. You juniors practice to dare to get up and speak up,' and (made me go to the front of the class and discuss on behalf the group)].

This teacher felt frustrated not only by the circumstances of the training, but the fact that not all teachers were participating, leading those who felt invested in the success of their schools to have to contribute more. One other teacher commented on her post sharing that she felt the same way: "သင်တန်းအပြီးထိဘာမှမပြောဘူးဆိုသူများနဲ့ဝေးပါရစေ" [I wish to

be able to stay away from trainees who have determined to be silent all the way to the end of the training].

Limited Support for Curriculum Rollout

The new curriculum required activities-filled, student-centered lessons. Such a teaching-learning approach required many teaching aids, particularly at the primary level. The new curriculum rollout started with kindergarten (KG), and before its rollout, teachers pointed out the need for improved school facilities if the rollout were to be successful. After the new KG curriculum rollout began in 2016, this issue regarding limited teaching aids and school facilities emerged as a more and more prominent point of discussion in the Facebook group. The Ministry of Education provided a kit of teaching aids and some charts, but many teachers posted feeling frustrated that more teaching aids were needed. One teacher proposed a list of necessary teaching aids and facilities for teaching KG as follows:

"KG အတွက် ဘာတွေလိုသလဲ?
လိုအပ်တာရေးရင်တော့ ကုန်နိုင်မယ်မထင်ဘူး...
ခု...ကျောင်းတွေမှာ နိုင်ငံတော်အစိုးရက ထောက်ပံ့ပေးထားတာဆိုလို့ KG KID BOX ရယ်၊ ကားချပ်တွေရယ် ဒါပဲရှိတယ်....😀😀😀😀

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တစ်ကယ်ပေးရမယ်ဆိုရင်....
သင်ခန်းစာနဲ့ဆီလျော်တဲ့ကားချပ်တွေ....
အထောက်အကူပြု သင်ထောက်ကူတွေ....
ကလေးတွေအတွက်ကျောင်းဆောင်....(ဒါက ထားပါ
၊သင်ထောက်ကူတောင်မပေးနိုင်တာ   ကျောင်းဆောင်ဆို ဝေး)
ကစားကွင်းတွေ
ကစားကွင်းအတွက် လိုအပ်မယ့် အရာတွေ..."
[What is needed for (teaching) kindergarten?
If you make a list, I do not think it will end.
What the government has provided to schools are KG kit boxes and charts;
that is all …. 😃😃 😃😃
They need to provide charts relevant to lessons, teaching aids, and a
school building dedicated to kindergarten (let alone a school building, they
cannot even offer teaching aids)
Playgrounds
Playground facilities].

As the reader can see, this list includes a number of facilities (such as

playgrounds) that are commonly assumed to be present in kindergarten settings.

This was not true in many Myanmar schools. As this teacher continued in their

comments, he speculated that the lack of supports and resources would doom the

potential success of the program:

"အစိုးရက ပြည့်ပြည့်စုံစုံ ထောက်ပံ့မှု မပေးနိုင်သမျှကာလပတ်လုံး
ဘယ်လို ပညာရေးစနစ်လာလာ ဘာမှမတိုးတက်ဘူးဆိုတာ....
ကျွန်တော် ရဲရဲကြီး အာမခံရဲတယ်😃😃😃😃"
[I am dead sure that whatever education system will not see any
improvement as long as the government cannot fully support it].

This was discussed at length regarding kindergarten because, as described above, the new

curriculum was only rolled out to one grade level at a time, so the first year of

implementation was only concerned with kindergarten. However, subsequent Facebook

posts showed that this issue of limited teaching aid provision persisted the following year,

when the new grade 1 curriculum was introduced. Different teachers received different levels of support from their principals for securing teaching aids, as the central Ministry did not coordinate this effort and the responsibility of getting teaching aids fell on each individual local school and township. One teacher posted about their experience working under a principal who they did not see as supportive at all. The teacher stated that his principal did not provide any financial support and stopped him from using an electronic device for his instruction because she worried that that might raise her school electricity bill. Another teacher worked under a supportive but unresourceful principal, sharing their experience as follows

> "၁ရက် နေ့နဲ့၂ရက် နေ့တုန်းG.1 တွေကိုစသင်တယ် ..သချာသင်မယ်လုပ်တော့သင်ကူကတန်းလိုတာပဲ..ဒါနဲ့ဆရာမကြီးဆီ တင်ပြ တော့အစိုးရကထုတ်မပေးရင်တော့ ပေးပါမယ့်တဲ့...ခုလဲသူ့မှာ ပေးစရာ တော့မရှိပါဘူး...kg.kitများယူသုံးရင် သာပေါ့...သင်ကူမပါပဲလဲအဖြစ် မသင်ချင် ပါဘူး...ဖြစ်တာစသင်လိုက်တာပေါ့"

[I started teaching grade 1 on (June) 1 and 2. When I planned to teach math, I realized I needed teaching aids. I talked to my principal about that, and she said she would provide support if the government did not, but she had nothing to give me at that time. She allowed me to use the KG kit if it worked. I started another lesson that did not need teaching aids since I did not want to teach ineffective lessons without using them].

Another teacher responded to him by saying, "အဲ့ပဲဗျာ စနစ် ရဲ့နောက် က

ဘားမှမပါလာတာ စိတ် လေပါတယ်" [That's it. It is disheartening when no support follows

the (new) system]. The following complaint from another teacher echoed the same issue:

> "ဆရာလမ်းညွှန်က ၁အုပ် ပဲ ရသေးတယ်ဗျာ ခုထိဘာတွေလဲ သေချာမသိရဘူး စိတ်ပျက်စရာကောင်းတယ် ဘာမှသေချာရေရာမှုမရှိဘူး သင်ကူလဲ ဘာမှမပြည့် ့စုံဘူး စနစ်ကိုတော့ ပြောင်းပြီး ထောက်ပံ့မှုကြ တော့

ဘာမှမထိရောက်ဘူ"

[I received only one teacher guide. I do not know what is in the teacher guides. It is disheartening. Nothing is clear. There are not enough teaching aids. There is no adequate support even though they have changed the system].

Besides teaching aids shortages, many other issues undermined the new grade 1 curriculum rollout. A teacher shared his review of the rollout as follows:

"...ပြဋ္ဌာန်းစာအုပ်တွေ အချိန်မီ လုံလောက်စွာ မရတာ တွေ၊ သင် ထက်ကူမရတာတွေ ၊ ပြဋ္ဌာန်းစာအုပ်ပါ တချို့ Eng ကဗျာ တွေကို ဆရာ/မ တွေကိုယ်တိုင် သံစဉ်မရတာ တွေ ၊ ဗျည်းအက္ခရာ တွေကို အသံထွက်နဲ့သင်ရမှာလား ၊ ဗျည်းအက္ခရာနာမည်နဲ့သင်ရမလားဆိုတဲ့ဝိဝါဒတွေ အများကြီးပါပဲ။ တချို့လည်းသင်ရိုးဟောင်း ပုံစံအတိုင်း သွားလေကြရဲ့။ တချို့လည်း ကလေးပေါက်စတွေကို ကျူရှင်ပို့ကြလေရဲ့။ တကယ်တော့ ပညာရေး ပြောင်းလဲပစ်ချင်သူတို့ ဖို့ ဒီထက် စနစ်ကျနစွာ ကြိုတင်ဆောင်ရွက်ထားသင့်ပါတယ် ။ အဆိုးဆုံးကတော့ ပြဋ္ဌာန်းစာအုပ်တွေကို အချိန်မီ လုံလုံလောက်လောက် မပေးနိုင်တာပါပဲ။"

[… (Issues around new grade 1 curriculum rollout include) insufficient and late distribution of textbooks; teachers do not know the melodies of some English poems in the textbook; diverse views regarding whether to use the phonics method or names of the alphabets in teaching Burmese alphabets. Some teachers stuck to the approach used in the old curriculum. Some parents send their little kids to private tutoring classes. Those who want to conduct education reforms should have prepared more systematically. The worst is the late and insufficient provision of textbooks].

Again, this teacher highlights insufficient resources and training to implement the new curriculum, mentioning as well as those students who were most successful were those whose parents could afford additional private tutoring above and beyond that supported by the state. Other Facebook posts and comments also indicated that the Ministry of Education did not distribute enough teaching aids nor financially support teachers in buying them on their own. In the group, posts shows that this situation discouraged even

those teachers who were eager to teach learner-centered lessons and implement their training. Many posts showed teachers feeling that they had no choice but to revert to the more traditional, teacher-centered, rote-learning-based forms of instruction that were feasible for their large classes.

Ineffective Teacher Management: A Systemic Issue

In the eyes of teachers in this Facebook group, ineffective teacher management also undermined the effort to successfully roll out the new curriculum. Teacher training for the new curriculum was organized during April and May before the start of the new school year in the first week of June. Teacher transfer and promotion notices usually come in June or July. Often, teachers trained to teach the new curriculum were transferred to other schools, leaving their original schools with no teachers trained for the new curriculum.

Teacher shortages have been a systemic issue that existed for decades in the Myanmar education system, particularly affecting remote schools from where teachers tried to move out. As discussed in Chapter 1, with the five-teacher policy, the Ministry of Education tried to solve this issue by recruiting daily-wage untrained teachers to fill vacant positions in those remote area schools. However, with the implementation of this new curriculum, it was effectively impossible to roll out the new curriculum in schools inflicted by teacher shortages because teachers in those schools needed to teach multiple classrooms simultaneously or large classes. Therefore, those schools usually had inexperienced teachers, or at best teachers who had not been able to participate in quality trainings, who thus struggled to complete their responsibilities.

How Policy Actors Responded to Education Reform

According to my theoretical framework (Chapter 2), local policy actors typically use one of two approaches in dealing with reform policies laid down by central policymakers: appropriation and dissimulation. I will discuss each of these in turn, while also exploring a third approach that arose frequently in my thematic analysis of these Facebook posts—that of policy resistance.

Appropriation

As seen in the quotes above, a number of local policy actors tried to appropriate and implement as well as possible the education policies that had been passed down from the central level, expressing optimism and willingness to change in their posts. Some of those appropriators were pro-reform, expressing the belief that change was necessary to overhaul the education system. However, a number of the posts above also demonstrate that teachers could not help but recognize the ineffectiveness of policymakers and other education officers at different sub-national levels. Therefore, they used localized and contextualized solutions in implementing reform activities as best they could given the circumstances.

Dissimulation

The second group of local policy actors who were used to following instructions from the central level used dissimulation. That is, they implemented mandated reform activities as precisely as possible for the sake of their careers, even when their comments show that they do not personally believe in those policies.

Policy Resistance

Lastly, a number of local policy actors showed in their posts that their primary reaction was one of resistance, resisting the implementation of new policies, and only implementing reform activities with minimal effort, when necessary, if they implemented them at all.
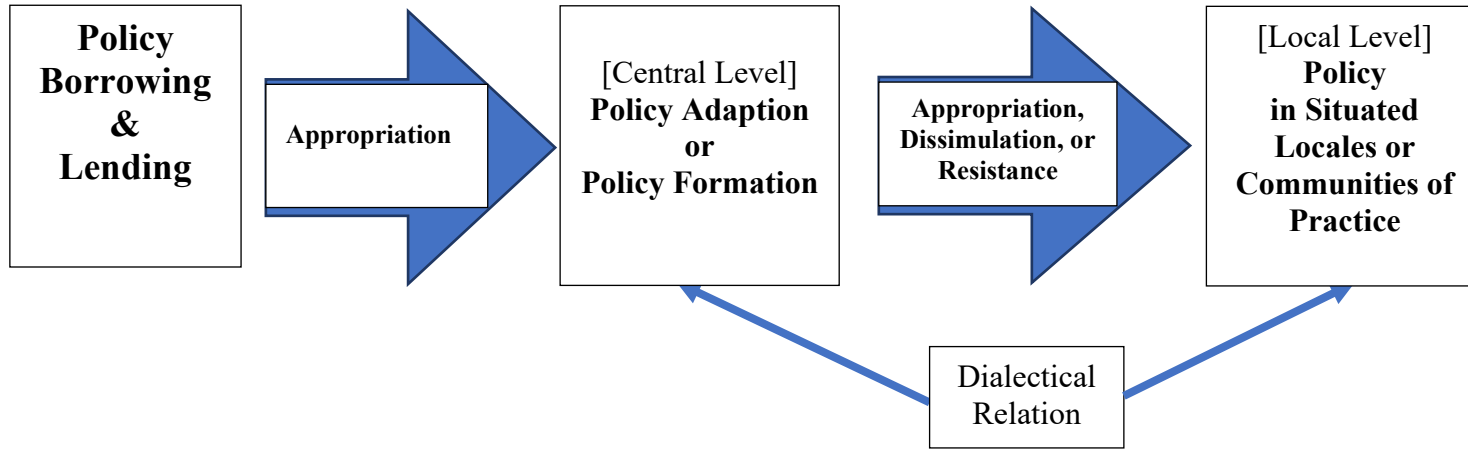
Conclusion

According to the onto-epistemological approach of critical realism, I consider the case under my study as "theory-laden but not theory-determined" (Fletcher, 2016, p.182). I have used my theoretical framework as a starting point to study the policy trajectory of the curriculum rollout, but I have also throughout tried to accept and recognize that my framework, as well as all other frameworks, are flawed, incomplete or fallible in some way. Through my data analysis, I was able to refine my theoretical framework to reflect more closely on the reality on the ground (Figure 2). While I had originally assumed that Myanmar's local policy actors would use dissimulation in response to policy lending done by international development organizations, as the posts above outline it instead mainly used appropriation to mix the 21-century skills development ideas put forward by international organizations alongside Myanmar's cultural values in curriculum development. Moreover, I found that local policy actors could rely on policy resistance other than appropriation or dissimulation.

Critical realism also allowed me to look at the causal relationships along the policy trajectory. System issues like authoritarian institutional culture, the power imbalance between policymakers and policy actors, teacher shortages, ineffective teacher management, and significant workload led to low teacher morale. Then the compound

effect of low teacher morale and various training-specific issues finally led to a

curriculum rollout that was not as successful as it was aimed.

Figure 2. Educational Policy Trajectory in the New Curriculum Rollout

VI. DISCUSSION: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND POLITICO-ECONOMIC CONTEXTS OF MYANMAR'S EDUCATION REFORM

According to the depth ontology concept of critical realism, underlying mechanisms give rise to what is observable at the empirical level (Fletcher, 2016; Maxwell, 2012; O' Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). In this chapter, I engage in a deeper thematic discussion of my findings from this standpoint of critical realism. In particular, I will draw on my data as presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to discuss the socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions in Myanmar's education sector during this reform process, focusing on and highlighting the following thematic trends in the data: 1) the prevalence of testing and rote learning; 2) the continuing influence of shadow education; 3) the resurgence of activism through unions in this period following the political transition of 2011; 4) the continued centralization of educational policy authority; 5) the limited budgets available to educational leaders; and 6) the continued salience of Myanmar's history of authoritarian political rule.

The Contemporary Socio-Cultural Situation of the Education Sector: Why Did the Reforms Fail?

This section provides information about the situation in the education sector in addition to the background information discussed in Chapter 1. This information has emerged from the data analysis, and that helps me better understand my findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and most importantly, helped me to better understand why recent curricular reforms have failed to gain traction. I will discuss each of these thematic trends in turn, on the basis of how they arose in my data and then providing background and support from academic literature where necessary.

Prevalence of Testing and Rote Learning

Testing, especially standardized tests, has been a crucial part of Myanmar's education for decades. Testing has been used mainly for summative purposes, and tests have exerted much impact on curricular activities that Myanmar students experience. Standardized tests for the terminal grades in primary, middle, and high schools have existed since Myanmar's independence from the British. Matriculation exams, which are informally known as 10th standard examinations, are perceived as most important because students' grades in those examinations are virtually the sole factor for admission to different higher education institutions and their majors or specializations. There were mid-year and year-end tests for non-terminal grades until 1998, which were organized at the school level. The prevalence of testing and its focus mainly on factual knowledge has led the teacher to teach to the test and students to rely on rote learning.

The Ministry of Education, under the auspice of the Education for All (EFA) initiative and with UNICEF's support, introduced the Continuous Assessment and Progression System (CAPS) in 1998 (see Chapter 5) to shift the focus of testing from summative to formative nature (Yoshida, 2020). For students from all grade levels, except the matriculation examinations for grade 10 students, chapter-end or unit-end tests replaced mid-year and year-end tests. Because teachers leaned on summative assessment as the primary measure of their "success" in the classroom, CAPS could not improve students' learning as intended but brought adverse consequences to Myanmar's education. Teachers generally accept that CAPS has caused lower academic achievement of students because of its automatic grade promotion. The Ministry of Education's reintroduction of standardized tests for grades 4 and 8 may be a response to this criticism.

Since there are supplementary classes and exams for those who do not pass those standardized tests for the first time, virtually all students are allowed to pass those tests.

In my data set, these policies arose regularly as flashpoints for criticism from local policy actors. Participants in the Facebook group expressed their views that those tests as a waste of human and material resources and a "hollow action" on the part of the ministry that focuses more on looking good than authentically improving students' learning outcomes. Whether CAPS or standardized tests are used, participants in the Facebook group expressed their opinion that current assessment activities in Myanmar still encourage memorizing facts through rote learning.

Shadow Education

Shadow education, or private tutoring (generally known as "tuition" in Myanmar), has been another integral feature of Myanmar's education for decades (Bray, Kobakhidze, & Kwo, 2020). More than 80 percent of student participants in Bray et al.'s study mentioned attending private tutoring classes. Shadow education in Myanmar is closely intertwined with the prevalence of testing discussed in the previous section. Shadow education has a normal part of their education for high school students, particularly those who will take the matriculation exams. Students take private tutoring classes from public school teachers or private and freelance teachers (Bray et al., 2020). This was also frequently mentioned in my dataset, as many Facebook posts I analyzed indicate that middle and primary students attend private tutoring classes. In addition to standardized testing, chapter-end tests resulting from the CAPS approach have played an important role in increasing the number of private tutoring classes taught by public school teachers. One teacher mentioned in his Facebook post that CAPS has led some

teachers to provide shadow education classes to their existing students, even when they did not do so previously. To some teachers in the Facebook group, this is an ethical issue, as payment for these private classes increases the potential for corruption. Although the new curriculum requires teachers to use continuous assessment without year-end or chapter-end tests, some teachers have continued or even extended their private tutoring services beyond what was available under the old curriculum. Some participants in the group expressed feeling that shadow education is "normal," revealing the extent to which it has become a normalized and expected part of the educational experience in contemporary Myanmar.

Politico-Economic Conditions

Political Transition and Reemergence of Activism

In 2010, the military government that came to power after the 1988 coup organized the first election in 20 years. The military-backed USDP won the election despite being accused of election fraud. USDP formed a government in 2011, marking a significant political transition to a quasi-democratic political system. The USDP government eased the stringent restrictions imposed by the military government on political movements so that students and teachers could establish unions again. Those unions became the political mouthpieces for the expression of dissatisfactions for both students and teachers, respectively, and union activism has reemerged as a potent and important political force. The biggest confrontation between the USDP government and student unions appeared when students demonstrated against the 2014 National Education Law (Please see Chapter 1 for more details). Student and teacher activism has gradually picked up momentum, even more so after the NLD government took power in

2016.

As reflected in my dataset, teachers' unions have started more publicly criticizing policymakers and their policies, including the education minister. Several Facebook posts I analyzed discuss these public criticisms, at times reading like open letters from teachers and union representatives to the Minister of Education. One such post directly challenged the minister, criticizing his policies and asking questions about the experimental nature of these reforms, the gap between policy and local reality, and the continued presence of bribery and corruption through shadow education and other means. This post was supported with more than 200 like and love reactions in the group.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the teachers' union confronted the Ministry of Education when the minister proposed changing exam dates. Policymakers invited teacher union representatives to meetings to persuade them to agree to the minister's proposal. Teachers' unions submitted the case to the education committees of the Parliament, where the minister was summoned to explain his actions in public hearings. The Parliament finally forced the minister to withdraw his proposal. This tension exemplifies the dialectical relation between structural oppression through long-held top-down implementation on the part of centralized policymakers, and the uprising agency of teachers as local policy actors.

Centralization in Education and Beyond

As discussed in the section on the history of Myanmar's education in Chapter 1, Myanmar's education system became centralized after World War II. Centralization has become increasingly rigid under military regimes and dictatorships, and top-down policy implementation has become normalized. As in the military, the line of command goes

down from the central government level to the sub-national levels. That long-lasting institutional memory (policy sociology) continued to exist as a norm for the daily operation of the Ministry of Education, even after the political transition and during the time of the "pro-democracy" NLD government. Centralization is not limited to the education sector. Instructions, guidance, and orders go from center to periphery in all departments within the government bureaucracy. Ten years of semi-elected governments could make a tiny dent in unyielding institutional culture. Decentralization did not advance much in education as in other sectors because the 2008 Constitution is designed to maintain power at the center as much as possible. This was reflected throughout my data, particularly in those posts which comment on the authoritarian leanings of the Ministry of Education, explored in depth in Chapter 4.

Small Budget

As a developing country, Myanmar earns only a small GDP, which limits the government's spending power. Given the structure of the government as a military dictatorship for decades, the allocation for the military has traditionally taken the lion's share of the whole government budget, while social services like education are left with relative scraps. Although the share of education in the total budget increased from 2.3 % in 2010-2011 to 8.4% in 2019-2020, the increase in nominal values represented a lesser amount in real values (UNICEF, 2020). Despite this positive upward trend, the generational legacy of underfinancing education under the military regime before the 2011 political transition has left persistent and clearly visible devastating impacts. Therefore, although development aid has flowed into the country for some education reform activities, the Ministry of Education could not spend enough for new basic

infrastructures in schools and the maintenance of the old, and its provision of teaching

aids has been limited. As seen in the previous two chapters, this was the primary criticism

made by teachers in the Facebook group regarding the rollout of the new education

reform, that it has been inherently limited in its success due to insufficient resources for

training and implementation.

Authoritarianism as a Societal Feature

As noted in the previous chapters, authoritarianism has often gone hand in hand

with centralization and top-down implementation in Myanmar's education sector.

Authoritarianism has prevailed to different degrees in all public sectors. The socio-

political perspectives of Myanmar's authoritarianism may help explain the persistence of

authoritarian practices in education even under the NLD government. Maung Maung Gyi

(1983) studies to understand the socio-political roots of authoritarianism in Myanmar and

mentioned its key features. First, the king, the head of the State, had the final say in all

political decisions in precolonial times because absolute power was vested in him. People

also considered the king as someone responsible for the welfare of his subjects during

that time. Therefore, the fate of the people depended solely on the quality of his

leadership. This one-man-leadership mentality stayed as a cultural undercurrent during

the British colonial period, resurfacing after independence. Military dictators used this

same rhetoric and value system to gain and maintain power after the 1962 military coup

until 2011. The tendency noted by Maung Maung Gyi to view centralized authority with

reverence and awe may likely allowed those dictators to govern the country without

prolonged resistance. Even to this day through the rollout of the curricular reforms

addressed in this study, the one-man-leadership mentality prevailing among the people

may have enabled the education minister (probably all other ministers) to make final decisions in education policymaking.

Moreover, Maung Maung Gyi (1983) maintains, "To Burmese *awza* (authority), *gon* (prestige), and *ah-na* (power) reside in a person, not in the law" (p. 174). Therefore, people tend to use personal connections rather than depend on the rule of law. That leads to the acceptance of giving and getting bribes in dealing with government officials and the practice of preferring to please one's supervisors rather than performing one's responsibilities. Therefore, dissimulation (Fimyar, 2014; Jowitt, 1992) has become a handy choice for many policy actors when instructions from the central level require them to implement what they think are bad policies. They did not want to displease their supervisors by telling the truth. Findings from my study indicate that those practices and approaches are prevalent among policy implementers in the field, as reflected in the Facebook posts I have analyzed in the prior chapters. In short, the socio-political roots of Myanmar's authoritarianism play a continuing essential role in maintaining authoritarian institutional practices in the education sector and beyond.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have more deeply discussed and explored several thematic trends that consistently arose from my dataset. The situation of the education system, the political climate, the economic conditions of the country, and the socio-political and cultural norms of the society at large have continued to serve as the backdrop for the current wave of education reform, and they serve as underlying mechanisms for observable features of the relationship between policymakers and policy actors and the policy trajectory of the curriculum rollout. Namely, as I have outlined here, several trends

in the data have helped to explain the relationship between policymakers and policy actors, including 1) the prevalence of testing and rote learning; 2) the continuing influence of shadow education; 3) the resurgence of activism through unions in this period following the political transition of 2011; 4) the continued centralization of educational policy authority; 5) the limited budgets available to educational leaders; and 6) the continued salience of Myanmar's history of authoritarian political rule.

VII. CONCLUSION

I conducted this dissertation study to better understand the features of the relationship between the policymakers and policy actors in Myanmar's educational system, in particular during the recent wave of education reform. The scope of the study emphasized the new curriculum rollout because it was the most extensive reform activity in the country. I used thematic analysis of the Facebook posts in my dataset to answer my research questions and their various sub-questions, covering different aspects of the relationship between these two groups. As the name of the Facebook group states, it is a forum for teachers to voice their feelings and express their concerns and disappointments. As noted in my findings, perceived powerlessness and low teacher morale are prevailing feelings among teachers, and several factors lead to those feelings.

First, performing daily responsibilities in an authoritarian institutional culture is a daunting task for teachers when instructions from the immediate supervisor often come at short notice and with little opportunity for input or feedback. Authoritarianism in Myanmar's education carries different features. It takes the form of top-down implementation of education policies without substantial involvement of policy actors in the policymaking process. This prevailing trend reflects the previous research findings from Esson and Wang (2018), Lall (2021), and Zobrost and McCormick (2013). This top-down approach is often associated with policymakers' limited knowledge of or indifference towards the reality on the ground. Moreover, as demonstrated in my findings, retaliating against whistleblowers can happen in the authoritarian institutional culture of Myanmar's education to maintain the power imbalance. The societal characteristic of reliance on personal connections rather than the rule of law (Maung

Maung Gyi, 1983) in authoritarian institutions can help explain why shadow education and other forms of corruption are so commonly accepted by many education officials.

Second, teachers often feel that they do not get enough support and protection, and they find it harder to make ends meet with their low salaries. They consider that their lives are under threat when they hear about the types of conditions described in my findings, such as physical attacks on teachers, the killing of teachers in remote areas, or making teachers work in crowded places during the COVID-19 pandemic without safety measures and precautions.

Third, frequent policy shifts have also negatively impacted teacher morale. Given the top-down nature of policy implementation in Myanmar, a framework in which not all stakeholders are involved in the policymaking process, the policies that result can change quickly and frequently in response to changes in the political context of the central government. Little consideration of the feasibility of a policy and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are typical of the policy cycle, as exemplified in the social media posts I have here analyzed for my study. Teachers in this study often mentioned that policy elites at the central level seem to be experimenting with one policy after another rather than planning for a sustainable future, leading to frequent policy failure and even more policy shifts. These frequent policy shifts led to a distrust of the education system by local policy actors such as the participants in this study.

Fourth, communication issues also affected the policymaking process, and the situation did not seem to improve implementation of the reform activities. The one-way information flow from the central level to subsequent sub-national levels created uncertainty and lack of clarity on the part of my participants in terms of their

understanding of the goals of these policies or how they were expected to reach those goals. Teachers in this study often could not find accurate information about teacher management rules and regulations regarding their roles and responsibilities or teacher transfer and promotion. Regarding reform activities, many teachers in this study found it challenging to get clear answers to logistical questions about the new curriculum training and the other elements of the implementation of this round of reform.

Fifth, many teachers in this study shared that they worked in schools with teacher shortages suffering from an overly large and unsustainable workload. They have to teach large classes or multiple grades simultaneously. Therefore, the new curriculum and other different training have significantly added to their responsibilities. Moreover, the requirement of attending training during holidays has caused personal sacrifice for the teachers in this study and their families. All the issues discussed here have contributed to low teacher morale, which in turn negatively affected the implementation of reform activities, including the new curriculum rollout.

Issues other than low teacher morale have undermined the new curriculum rollout, and the teacher training has several weaknesses. The top-down training model has its innate issue of losing quality gradually when moving from the higher to the lower levels. Cramming is another issue, when trainings are organized to occur in a short, intense period during the summer holidays. Issues around uncomfortable training venues, meals, and transportation were commonly expressed in the Facebook group during this study by both trainers and trainees. When teaching the new curriculum, teachers shared their concerns about limited support for teaching aids, textbook shortages, and late arrival of textbooks. Some schools lost teachers trained for the new curriculum due to ineffective

teacher management and had to assign untrained teachers to teach it. At the ground level, reform policies led to three different types of responses that were captured in the dataset for this study – first, some policy actors appropriated them according to their contexts; second, some drew the dissimulation approach and did not put much effort into implementing them; third, others resisted them and did not implement them according to policymakers' instructions. In short, the new curriculum rollout has been an excellent example of unsuccessful education reform.

Societal norms and political conditions have shaped the policy trajectory of Myanmar's recent curriculum rollout and the unbalanced power relation between the policymakers and policy actors. The prevalence of testing and rote learning, shadow education, underfinancing education for decades, centralization in the education and other sectors, and authoritarian practices are all trends I noted in my data that have been perceived by participating teachers as undermining the reform endeavors. However, the political transition has enabled the reemergence of activism among students and teachers and created a push toward more democratic governance in education. Unfortunately, the impact of education reform during the ten years of semi-elected governments was undone by the latest military coup, and current education policymakers under contemporary military rule have become even more authoritarian than before.

Nonetheless, on the more positive side, the 2011 political transition contributed to teachers' resistance to the military junta. Most of the teaching force joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and refused to work under military rule. Interestingly, activist teachers who were at loggerheads with Ministry of Education policymakers under the democratic NLD government have also become fierce opponents of the military

education officials that more recently seized back power from NLD. The military government is facing difficulties reopening schools due to CDM teachers and students who refuse to return to their classrooms. The Ministry of Education under the National Unity Government (NUG), or the government in exile formed by the parliamentarians elected in 2020, has discouraged students from returning to classrooms and provided alternative learning opportunities. It has even opened schools in the area controlled by the resistance forces. Therefore, the current situation of Myanmar's education and its future is directly related to the power struggle between the NUG and the military junta, and it is difficult to see what will happen to Myanmar's political and educational systems in a still uncertain future. However, at the least this present study has brought forward data to support the argument that future education reforms will need to include strategies to solve systemic issues in education, particularly to weaken authoritarianism. While there is a lot of work to do to reach this (perhaps utopian) goal, the presence of the thousands of committed, civically engaged teachers in the Facebook group I have centered in this study is evidence that we have the working hands we need to do it.

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