TECHNICAL BRIEF:

Diversity and Fragmentation of Myanmar Education: Schooling Shaped by Protracted Conflict and Crisis

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world — ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children — through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge — at local, national, regional and global levels — through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, Forcier Consulting, ODI, Osman Consulting, Oxford Policy Management and Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC's inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

A. Introduction

Violent conflicts and protracted crises disrupt the learning and development of children and youth, limiting their potential for personal and academic growth. As such there is an urgent need for evidence-based decision-making to address the severity of the learning crisis (INEE, 2024). However, there remain significant challenges in relation to data collection and analysis, research capacity-building, and coordination and evidence sharing between stakeholders in the education system (Bakrania et al., 2021). Overcoming these obstacles and developing a comprehensive evidence base is essential for providing decision-makers and practitioners with the insights needed to ensure that children can access education that is safe and secure, contextually relevant, equitable, and of high quality.

It is important to note that the availability of research evidence is not always sufficient to propel changes in policy and practice. Policy changes, programme designs, and practices within education systems are part of complex political economy dynamics that are characterised by the contesting visions, ideologies and interests of different actors at local, national and global levels. Nevertheless, where robust research evidence exists, it can provide the basis for policy decisions, educational planning, and changes in practices. Most importantly, research evidence can equip educational actors with the confidence to advocate for policy change and to initiate transformative educational programmes that can help strengthen the drivers of learning.

This technical brief highlights key findings from a detailed report of a rigorous review of the existing body of research in education in the conflict-affected context of Myanmar: **Diversity and Fragmentation of Myanmar Education: Schooling Shaped by Protracted Conflict and Crisis (Rinehart et al 2024)**. Myanmar's history since its independence in 1948 has been characterised predominantly by political instability and violent internal conflicts involving ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and the Myanmar military. As a result of the 2021 coup, 98% of Myanmar children, including approximately 11.4 million school-aged children, are affected by the ongoing crisis. Over 3.5 million are out-of-school and 6.5 million are experiencing learning deprivation despite attending school (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). Schools have been caught in the conflicts between armed resistance actors and the State Administration Council (SAC) military junta. Moreover, educational provisions have become heavily politicised, often used to serve the ideologies and political visions of different armed groups, making education a victim of political controversies as well as the ongoing violence. There is an urgent need for a robust evidence base to help education providers – and those that support them – navigate the barriers to education and mitigate disruptions to teaching and learning amid ongoing violence.

This review draws upon relevant studies conducted since 2000 as well as complementary findings from journalistic writing and key informant interviews conducted in 2024. It organises, describes and analyses the current evidence base for education in Myanmar and identifies evidence gaps for future research. It looks primarily at three educational settings affected by conflict and crisis contexts:

1. non-state ethnic minority education provided by various actors in areas contested by or under the control of different EAOs, operating in parallel to the central state education system;

2. refugee education provided in the nine refugee camps on the Thailand side of Myanmar's border, overseen by two ethnic minority refugee committees (Karen and Karenni); and

3. migrant education in Thailand's Tak Province, consisting of over 60 learning centres for

1. Myanmar migrants

Our study highlights the particular challenges associated with generating an evidence base in contexts with high degrees of violent conflict and disruptions to educational provisions. It also contributes insights into how diverse parallel, non-state education systems operate in settings where oppressive policies from the central state have led to violent resistance from ethnic groups across the country.

Our study has been guided by the ERICC conceptual framework (Figure 1), which examines education systems affected by protracted conflict or crisis at both the (macro) policy systems level and the (micro-meso) local systems level. The framework maps the relationships between and within key stakeholders at each level and is designed to identify, analyse and support four drivers of learning and development amidst conflict and crisis: (i) access to education; (ii) quality of education; (iii) continuity of education; and (iv) coherence within the education system. These four drivers collectively contribute to improving children's holistic outcomes, including academic achievement, psychosocial development, physical and mental health, and overall wellbeing. It offers a tool to comprehensively map, organise and generate research evidence by highlighting the pathways through which education outcomes are influenced by different elements in policy systems and local systems (Kim et al., 2022).

Figure 1. ERICC Conceptual Framework
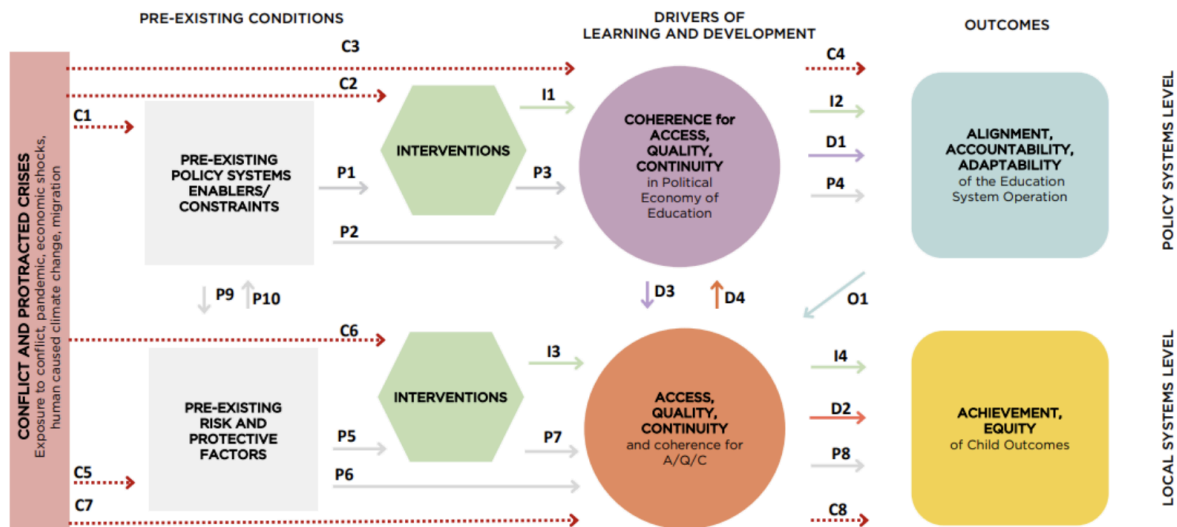
B. Methodology

This study involved a rigorous search and organisation of the existing body of knowledge, the key evidence gaps, and the implementation gaps in the areas that are experiencing ongoing violent conflict. Research questions were derived from the ERICC conceptual framework, organised around the drivers of learning within the policy systems, and programme and practice (local systems) levels. Consequently, the evidence review addresses (i) macro-level factors at the policy systems level affecting the overall coherence of education systems, especially with regard to policy decisions and operations; and (ii) meso- and micro-level factors at the programme and practice level affecting access, quality, continuity and coherence of education. The review is underpinned by contemporary political economy factors shaping educational policy, curricula and pedagogy in the conflict-affected context of Myanmar, including educational provisions in areas controlled by EAOs, and in refugee and migrant educational settings on the Thai-Myanmar border.

The following overarching research question guided the evidence review:
> What is the status of education and overall outcomes in terms of access, quality, continuity and coherence of education in conflict-affected contexts in Myanmar, particularly in regions that are controlled by ethnic armed organisations?

The subsequent sub-questions, aligned with the ERICC conceptual framework, are as follows:

Policy Systems Level

- What enables and constrains education policy decisions in conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar? **(Pre-existing conditions)**

- What are the political economy factors that underpin education system (in)coherence regarding alignment, accountability and coherence (or discordance/disagreement) in goals and operations across main actors in providing children with access to quality and continuity of education? **(Drivers of learning)**

- To what extent are the budget, data systems and educational response aligned with each other, accountable to the learning communities and adaptable to the conflict and crisis dynamics to meet changing needs and realities? **(Outcomes)**

- What policy interventions, if any, exist to improve access, quality and continuity of education and improve coherence in conflict-affected ethnic regions of Myanmar? What evidence exists about their impact? **(Interventions)**

- What education policy interventions exist around the promotion of peace, democracy and reconciliation in Myanmar? **(Interventions)**

Programmes and Practise Levels

- What are the school, community, household and personal risk and protective factors that affect access, quality, continuity and coherence of education? **(Pre-existing conditions)**

- What are the conditions of children's access to quality and continuity of education in schools, communities and households? **(Drivers of learning)**

- What is known about children's academic, social and emotional, and health and wellbeing outcomes? How do wellbeing outcomes vary across gender, ethnicity and displacement status (the question of equity in educational outcomes)? **(Outcomes)**

- What programmatic interventions at school and community levels, if any, exist to improve access, quality and continuity and improve children's academic learning, social and emotional learning (SEL), and physical and mental health and wellbeing? What evidence exists about their impact? **(Interventions)**

- What programmatic interventions, if any, exist to improve curricular provisions, teacher quality and pedagogical practices in learning institutions? **(Interventions)**

- What education programme interventions exist around the promotion of peace, democracy and reconciliation in Myanmar? **(Interventions)**

A multi-stage review process was undertaken from January to March 2024 to identify relevant sources of publicly available literature from academic outlets and grey literature from organisations working within the context. This evidence review followed a protocol created by the ERICC team, using adapted inclusion criteria for the literature search and study screening, and the ERICC conceptual framework to organise studies. We found 114 studies that passed all levels of screening, allowing for synthesis and comparison of key themes organised at the policy systems and local systems levels within the ERICC conceptual framework. Each theme was selected based on its prominence in at least one study, oftentimes occurring across multiple studies, and/or its prominence within credible news media and key informant interviews conducted by the authors in 2024. We also identified seven studies that assessed the effectiveness of particular interventions. These interventions were coded and rated using a categorisation table provided by ERICC, which has been used in previous evidence reviews.

Of the 114 included studies, 79 were published in academic peer-reviewed journals and 35 were found in the grey literature. Only 21 studies that were published in the post-coup period (from 2021 onwards) met the criteria and were included in the review. There was a balanced coverage of policy systems (59 studies) and programme and practice levels (69 studies). Nearly half of the studies focus on Myanmar government education (56 studies) or ethnic education (46 studies). There are comparatively fewer studies on refugee education (18 studies) and migrant education (21 studies).

We used the ERICC methods framework to identify four types of studies:

Formative research refers to the analysis of pre-existing problems in education.
Design research refers to the creation of an educational intervention that is feasible, desirable and cost-effective, with a view to scaling it up once its effectiveness is established.
Implementation research refers to the assessment of an intervention to establish whether the programmes or policies are implemented as desired, tracking the fidelity and quality of interventions.
Effectiveness research refers to the rigorous measurement of the impact of an intervention on intended outcomes, so that effective interventions can be scaled up for broader impact.

The vast majority of studies take a formative approach, focusing on either identifying needs (37 studies) or describing the status quo (106 studies). Only a handful of studies – each in the single digits – are design studies, implementation studies or effectiveness studies. Most studies employ case study or qualitative methods (73 studies). Literature reviews (45 studies) are also common, with quantitative descriptive methods being the third most common (16 studies). In general, there is a significant lack of inferential quantitative studies.

The notable scarcity of published academic works and grey literature following the 2021 coup reflects the significant difficulties in conducting research in the current political climate. Where research has been conducted, researchers and commissioning organisations may often be hesitant to disseminate findings publicly due to security concerns and potential threats to researchers and communities. Our experience in this study highlights the broader issue of conflict sensitivity and the ethical responsibilities of researchers when conducting evidence mapping in high-risk environments.

The landscape and dynamics of education in Myanmar have profoundly changed since 2021, and we acknowledge that some analysis of the information drawn from the literature published before the coup may no longer reflect the current status of education. To balance this limitation, we have supplemented findings from published works with information gathered from news media and insights from in-depth interviews with 32 selected educational stakeholders representing local, non-state providers of education and the wider development partner community. Despite limitations, this review remains essential to providing as clear a picture as possible of the current state of education amidst the unfolding conflict and crisis in Myanmar, and was used as the basis for co-constructing the future research agenda for education in conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar.

C. Evidence review findings

We organise our key findings primarily around three different types of educational provisions in the context of Myanmar: Ethnic education, education in refugee settings, and educational provisions for Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand.

1. Ethnic Education in Myanmar

Key Finding #1: Emergence of Ethnic Education Provisions

Historical grievances among the ethnic minority communities, stemming from exclusionary and hegemonic government education policies (pre-existing constraint), have contributed to the formations of diverse ethnic educational provisions (pathway P9) as a form of resistance (pre-existing protective factor). Education offered by ethnic education providers (EEPs), typically under the supervision of EAOs, reflects the ethnolinguistic identities of ethnic communities, households and students (pre-existing protective factor). This ultimately promotes an alternative vision of nation-building in opposition to the monolithic, Burman-dominated national identity (pathway P9). However, EEP systems are marked by resource-scarcity (pre-existing constraint), which affects the quality of education (pathway D3). Coordination and convergence between the state and EEP systems have been limited due to incoherence around actors, goals and incentives within the political economy of education (driver of learning).

Historical processes of exclusion and injustices by the Burman-led state against ethnic minority groups are depicted in terms of marginalisation of the latter in economic, social/cultural, political and environmental spheres (Maber, 2019). These issues have fuelled aspirations for political autonomy and cultural recognition – within an inclusive political structure – among diverse ethnic communities. Public education policies have generally failed to adequately acknowledge Myanmar's cultural diversity, unique histories and traditions, and the significance of different ethnic languages. The use of Burmese as an official language, standardised curricula and textbooks, and teacher-centred pedagogies have been used to reproduce dominant ideologies and assimilate the country's ethnic diversity around the majority Burman identity (Bigagli, 2019; Lwin, 2019; Kingpen, 2022; Suante, 2022; Swindell, 2022). Despite curricular reforms, textbooks continue to reflect the dominance of the Burman majority (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2019; Bertrand, 2022). As a result, government education has often been perceived as a perpetrator of cultural violence, fuelling discontent and rejection of public education by ethnic communities. This has helped to catalyse political opposition and reinforce ethnolinguistic identities through the use of education as a tool and site of political resistance.

Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, EAOs have seized control of sizable territories inhabited by ethnic communities. In these areas, various EEPs have established parallel education systems. Ethnic education has served ethnic political interests by constructing ideological, symbolic, linguistic and cultural boundaries to maintain separation from the nation-building project of the Myanmar state (Kubo, 2021; Oh et al., 2021). Simultaneously, it protects the ethnic identities of communities, households and children. Efforts towards self-determination and autonomy – manifesting as socialisation (through school textbooks and rituals) and mobilisation (through the language of instruction) – have encouraged a spirit of ethnic pride among children (Kingpen, 2022). The historical narratives found in ethnic education, which include degrees of (in)tolerance and 'othering' of the Burman group, have fostered a lack of trust in the central Myanmar government. Collaboration and convergence between the state Ministry of Education and EEPs have been

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limited, occurring only during periods of durable ceasefires and when the state did not challenge EEPs' ownership over their educational provisions (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016; South and Lall, 2016a and 2016b).

Historically, many EEPs have relied on international aid and assistance to finance their educational provisions, with relatively limited resourcing provided by EAOs and communities (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). Precarity of funding has affected the quality of educational provisions; consequently, EEPs have faced (i) challenges in hiring, retaining and adequately compensating quality teachers, (ii) difficulties in providing basic educational resources and (iii) challenges in maintaining some schools or supporting an adequate number of ethnic schools to meet the demand (ibid). Educational qualifications obtained in most EEP-administered schools are not recognised externally, and teachers working in these schools are usually underqualified and undertrained (Speers Mears et al., 2015). Despite operating amidst resource-scarce conditions, EEPs have proven to be resourceful and adaptable in navigating disruptions caused by conflict and crisis. Ethnic educational provisions are essentially 'designed for disruption' as they operate as complex adaptive systems situated within a continuously unstable and precarious sociopolitical environment (Rinehart and Tyrosvoutis, 2023).

Key Finding #2: Absence of Ethnic Education During Reform and Peace Processes

The absence of ethnic education voices in education reform and peace processes during the 2010s reflected a disregard for education as a historical grievance (pre-existing constraint) and the failure to recognise education's potential to contribute to peace and justice (pre-existing constraint). The elite capture of the education system operations (driver of learning) has overlooked community realities and undermined community needs and aspirations in educational planning and reconciliation efforts (pathway D1).

During the 2010s, neither the education reform nor the peace process adequately included ethnic civil society or the voices of ethnic communities (Higgins et al., 2016). The historical presence of EEPs and their contribution to education were largely neglected. The peace process barely touched on the deep-rooted social inequalities between the Burman majority and ethnic minority communities. Education reform prioritised tangible change and quick wins, such as increasing school enrolment, over the need to address the ways in which education has historically been – and continues to be – a key structural grievance for groups marginalised by the Myanmar state (Smith et al., 2016). The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement proceedings promoted a liberal peacebuilding model that failed to discuss structural issues in education, such as the right to education in the mother tongue and the recognition of the diverse histories of ethnic communities. This failure prevented the realisation of peace dividends through greater inclusion and equity in educational provision (South and Lall, 2016b; Maber, 2019). Overall, there was limited or no recognition of education as a key area for promoting peace and reconciliation (Zobrist and McCormick, 2017; Maber et al., 2019; Lall, 2020).

Key Finding #3: Limitations of State Decentralisation

During the reform era, the government education system made tentative steps towards decentralisation (intervention) and the inclusion of local languages, cultures and histories in education (pre-existing protective factor). However, these efforts often resulted in de-concentration rather than true decentralisation (pathway D1). Issues around engagement with civil society actors, as well as challenges in achieving consensus and compromise on which minority languages and histories to include (driver of learning), revealed significant weaknesses. Any future design of a national federal education system must learn from these lessons.

Education reform during the 2010s made tentative strides toward decentralisation and better accommodation of ethnic minority students within the state system. However, in practice, the decentralisation of state education often manifested as de-concentration – a less radical reform that allowed some decision-making power to be devolved to local authorities while maintaining financial control at the central Ministry of Education level (Zobrist and McCormick, 2017). New administrative layers were created, with some discretionary budget to lower levels, but allegedly with minimal devolution of real power.

Despite these limitations, decentralisation policies did allow schools to teach ethnic minority languages and use them as mediums of instruction. During the 2019-2020 academic year, a total of 64 languages were taught to nearly 767,000 children by approximately 25,000 teachers across Myanmar (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). Additionally, each State and Region was permitted to develop its own 'local curriculum' to teach the cultures and histories specific to those regions. The local curriculum was delivered as a taught subject, with instruction ranging from two to five periods per week depending on the grade. These policies created opportunities for subnational governments to collaborate with civil society actors, primarily Literature and Culture Committees, and occasionally with EEPs (ibid).

However, the guarantee of local curriculum in government schools reportedly did not meet the expectations of many stakeholders, largely due to the lack of coordination between the government and local actors, a shortage of quality teachers, and inconsistencies in implementation across schools (Takeda, 2020; Anui and Arphattananon, 2021; Bertrand, 2022). Additionally, significant challenges arose in deciding which languages to include for instruction and which histories to include in the local curricula. This process highlighted incoherence in goals and interests regarding the promotion of ethnic diversity through inclusion of local languages and curricula (Salem-Gervais and Lian, 2020; Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020; Anui and Arphattananon, 2021; Salem-Gervais and Seng, 2022).

Key Finding #4: Two Emerging Priorities

Over the last decade, language-in-education and investments in teachers emerged as key priorities for decision-makers (drivers of learning), with the aim of improving the quality of education as well as contributing to peace and social justice outcomes (pathway D3). However,

the limited evidence regarding the quality of language-in-education provision and teacher effectiveness makes it difficult to determine how much progress has been made in these areas.

Language-in-education became a significant topic of advocacy by EEPs to the central Ministry of Education during the reform era. Prior to the introduction of minority languages in government schools, UNICEF's 2014 Language, Education and Social Cohesion project examined the role of language policy and planning in education reform and peacebuilding, and successfully drafted a set of policy principles and preambles intended for a future national language policy (UNICEF, 2016). Although these were endorsed as the basis for planned language policy consultations, a language policy was never developed by the Myanmar state. During the 2010s, mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) was advocated by some as a pathway to address aspects of structural violence in education, achieve superior academic outcomes, and foster peacebuilding (Lwin, 2019; Wong, 2019; Takeda, 2021; Mangshang, 2022). However, the extent to which EEPs implement MTB-MLE (including Burmese) as opposed to focusing primarily on mother tongue-based education (excluding Burmese) is unclear. Designing and implementing MTB-MLE policies is recognised as challenging given Myanmar's linguistic diversity (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). Moreover, prioritising mother tongue-based education to the exclusion of other local languages or Burmese could hinder reconciliation and further entrench ethnic divisions (Bigagli, 2019; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2019).

EEPs have sought to keep pace with state-led education reforms and the significant investments in government teachers. Following the Ministry of Education's introduction of a Teacher Competency Standards Framework, several EEPs have developed frameworks of their own, often incorporating contextually relevant concerns such as MTB-MLE and conflict sensitivity, which are absent from the government framework. However, it is unclear how these frameworks are being utilised within EEP systems. Many EEPs have also established and maintained their own in-service and pre-service teacher education programmes, with the duration, frequency and contents varying by provider (Lall, 2020). Teachers within EEP systems may have inadequate wages and limited opportunities for professional development and career progression, leading to feelings of being underprivileged and inferior to their counterparts employed by the government. Nonetheless, these constraints may generally be outweighed by a motivation rooted in teaching as an act of service and means of protecting one's ethnic identity (Niskanen and Buske, 2019).

Key Finding #5: Effects of the 2021 Military Coup

The 2021 coup has had a profound impact on all education systems in Myanmar (pre-existing constraint) and dramatically increased the number of children affected by conflict (pathway P9), leading to an acute schooling crisis and exacerbating the learning crisis that predates the coup (pathway P6). Most EEP facilities remain at risk of attack, and many EEP systems regularly experience disruptions (pre-existing risk factor). The international community's stance of non-engagement with the SAC means that international aid and assistance for education is now going to non-state provisions (pre-existing enabler), including in ethnic education. However, heightened security concerns have significantly encumbered coordination and data systems, making evidence-based decision-making more challenging for international aid organisations (pathway P2).

Following the coup, the SAC enacted laws to restrict the operations of civil society organisations and target those perceived to be working with opposition groups. This has significantly heightened security concerns among EEPs regarding the collection, protection and sharing of data. Since 2021, over 35,000 armed conflict events have affected nearly 97% of Myanmar's 330 townships, and there have been 445 confirmed attacks on educational infrastructure, largely through airstrikes (GCPEA, 2024). Estimates suggest that 98% of children are experiencing crisis, and nearly 90% are at risk of being caught in armed conflict (Østby et al., 2022; Valenza and Stoff, 2023). Education has become highly politicised. Parents who continue to send their children to government schools are seen by resistance supporters as endorsing the SAC, rather than as citizens exercising their right to education (Choo and Aye, 2022). Moreover, education is increasingly becoming a tool to promote competing nation-building projects by the SAC, the National Unity Government (NUG) and various EAOs. Communities are caught in the middle, balancing their loyalty to political groups with the need to survive in this politically divided environment.

Myanmar is currently facing an acute schooling and learning crisis. Enrolments in government basic education have declined amid a massive exodus of government teachers to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024), Attendance in non-state educational provisions has increased, though exact figures are hard to verify (Bhatta et al., 2023). In 2022, the UN Human Rights Council reported 7.8 million out-of-school children, while 2023 estimates from Education Cannot Wait identify over 3.5 million out-of-school children living in emergency situations (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). Although anecdotal evidence suggests a surge in enrolments in ethnic educational provisions, it is unclear to what extent demand has increased. Some available reporting confirms that enrolment has risen by as much as 35% in some EEP systems (KECS, 2023). Due to disruptions related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the coup, the average learning adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) is estimated to have decreased by 1.9-2.2 years and the learning poverty rate will likely increase to 100% (Bhatta and Katwal, 2022). Education Cannot Wait has estimated that 6.5 million children attending school are experiencing learning deprivation (Valenza and Stoff, 2023).

Given the lack of literature focusing specifically on learner achievement in EEP systems, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the state of learning in ethnic educational provisions.

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Since the coup, most international donors and development partners have ceased engagement with the SAC and have shifted their support to non-state educational provisions, including EEPs. Coordination by the international community around a Joint Response Framework for education is reportedly cohesive, and commitments to ethnic education appear to have ensured that many EEPs can maintain some level of annual financing amidst the backdrop of a worsening economic crisis for all of Myanmar.

Key Finding #6: Prospects for a National Federal Education System

Many – but crucially not all – EAOs and ethnic minority communities have historically campaigned for a federal democratic political settlement (pre-existing enabler). However, there is evidence of ambivalence among key ethnic stakeholders regarding the Federal Democracy Education Policy proposed by the NUG (pathway P2), raising questions about the potential realisation of a national federal education system for all of Myanmar.

Many ethnic minority communities and elites have advocated for greater federalism in Myanmar. For communities, federalism is seen as a means to prevent the continuation of armed conflict; while for elites, it is viewed as a tool for achieving self-determination (South, 2021). Before the coup, elements of federalism were observed – to varying extents - in EEP systems, particularly through locally owned and managed schools (South and Lall, 2016a). Since the coup, calls for federalism have broadened, with some EAOs and newly formed coordination bodies engaging in bottom-up, federating practices (South, 2022; South et al., 2024).

The NUG has released a Federal Education Democracy Policy (FDEP) that acknowledges EEPs and includes them within their proposed federal administrative structure (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). However, evidence from key informant interviews suggests EEPs – many of which may not have been adequately consulted during the creation of the FDEP (South et al., 2024) – express ambivalence towards the policy. Diverging views among EEPs and their associated EAOs on the desirability and design of a federal education system for Myanmar complicate the prospects for achieving a cohesive national federal education system.

2. Refugee and Migrant Education in Thailand

Key Finding #7: Opportunities for Refugees Constrained by Thai Policy

Thailand's policies towards refugees isolate them from professional and educational opportunities outside the nine refugee camps (pre-existing constraint). The lack of current opportunities and future prospects undermines refugees' motivation to attend educational provisions (pathway D3) and makes it difficult for them to apply the skills and knowledge acquired through education (pathway D2). Refugee education, which is managed by the refugees themselves, seeks to respond to these constraints, but reliance on limited donor funding threatens the sustainability of the programmes (pathway P2) and the overall quality of education (pathway D3).

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Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. As such, refugees are precluded from legal rights, including access to education, mobility, healthcare and the right to work (APRRN et al., 2023). Thai policy emphasises the temporary and minimal nature of its humanitarian commitment and maintains a de facto stance of non-access to Thai public schooling for refugees, while adopting a laissez-faire approach to refugees organising and providing their own education (Oh, 2010). The lack of educational and employment opportunities for refugees outside the camps has made it difficult to plan and provide relevant education within them (Carpeño and Feldman, 2015; APRRN et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges, schools within the refugee camps – managed by refugees themselves – provide basic education and some higher education to young people, utilising their own curricular materials or drawing upon those from EEPs. These provisions are largely dependent on external aid and technical assistance from international donors and development partners (Carpeño and Feldman, 2015; Shiohata, 2018). This dependency undermines the sustainability of education initiatives and makes them more likely to be ad-hoc and based upon donor interests, rather than community-driven.

The restrictions on mobility and employment, coupled with limited opportunities for progression to higher education, undermining the motivation of children and young people in refugee camps to enrol in and continue through basic education (Carpeño and Feldman, 2015). Amidst this uncertainty, the camps have been experiencing increased (i) sexual and gender-based violence across all levels of society, (ii) mental health issues, particularly depression and suicide attempts, and (iii) alcohol and substance abuse amongst youth (APRRN et al., 2023). The restrictive context of the camps largely prevents refugees from converting the skills and knowledge acquired through education into meaningful opportunities (Hill et al., 2023).

Key Finding #8: The Precarious Acceptance of Migrant Education

Migrant educational provisions operate within a 'zone of exception,' meaning they are generally tolerated by the Thai state but do not receive any governmental support (pre-existing constraint). As such, migrant learning centres (MLCs) are largely dependent on precarious funding (pathway P2). MLCs offer an alternative to Thai public schooling, which, although it enrols more migrant students, may not adequately accommodate their needs to the same extent as MLCs (driver of learning).

Migrant educational provisions exist within a 'zone of exception' wherein local authorities sometimes persecute and at other times facilitate the operation of MLCs, depending on the Thai state's interests (Nawarat, 2019). An ambiguous national policy, a plurality of local policies, and variations in governmental behaviours towards MLCs means that MLC administration varies from place to place (Nawarat and Medley, 2018). Overall, Thai policy remains fragmented and vague regarding the state's involvement in and stance towards MLCs (Nawarat, 2017). MLCs often struggle to provide quality teaching and learning due to the tenuous commitments of the Thai government, a lack of

common standards and accreditation systems, and precarious financing due to donor dependency (Tuangratananon et al., 2019; Mowry, 2023).

MLCs provide migrant households with educational choices, although significantly more migrant children enrol in Thai government schools than in MLCs (Lowe et al., 2022). MLCs reflect parental preferences for a Myanmar-based curriculum and instruction in a language from Myanmar. Although access to Thai government schooling has improved over the decades, migrant families may still face discrimination during enrolment procedures. Non-Thai speaking and over-age children may not be adequately accommodated, and Thai education reportedly takes an assimilationist, rather than a multicultural or transnational, approach to integrating migrant children into Thai society (Nawarat, 2012 and 2018; Arphattananon, 2021a; Lowe et al., 2023; Mowry, 2023). Consequently, MLCs continue to play a necessary role in meeting migrant children's right to education.

3. Interventions

Key Finding #9: Limited Evidence of Educational Interventions

Overall, across ethnic, refugee and migrant educational provisions there is limited evidence on the existence of policy and programmatic interventions towards improving access, quality, continuity and coherence of education (interventions). Consequently, it is unclear what particular interventions have had an impact on improving children's outcomes in relation to academic and social and emotional learning, and physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as societal outcomes related to the promotion of peace with justice, democracy and reconciliation (outcomes).

There is a lack of systematic evaluation of policy and programmatic interventions. The one clear piece of effectiveness research on a policy intervention is the mid-term review of Myanmar's National Education Strategic Plan (MoE, 2022). The review found that, while there are efforts to support displaced learners and increase funding in conflict-affected areas, student achievement remains low due to the absence of strategies for supporting minority language users. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and capacity for inclusive practices at the school level and insufficient data to effectively address equity and inclusion issues.

We identified six studies on interventions that aimed to improve access, quality and continuity of education. Of these, only one was set in a humanitarian context within Myanmar, and only two had higher than a limited strength of confidence. A study by Save the Children on its Catch-up Clubs intervention, based on Teaching at the Right Level and using a multilingual approach (Burmese and a local language), showed significant improvements in children's literacy levels and social and emotional learning after 50-60 hours of remedial instruction over seven weeks (Arlini et al., 2023). TeacherFOCUS's Learn-Choose-Use training improved the teaching competencies of teachers in MLCs (Tyrosvoutis et al., 2021). The implementation of the Child-Centred Approach pedagogy in Myanmar monastic schools faced challenges due to cultural barriers and logistical issues (Lall,

2011). In Thailand, a three-day multicultural education training course improved teachers' multicultural competencies, though its long-term impact is uncertain (Arphattananon, 2021b). The introduction of Montessori education in an MLC improved pre-primary students' personal-social skills (Tobin et al., 2015). A supplementary Dhamma education programmes in Myanmar monastic schools enhanced students' resilience, though the gains diminished over time.

No systematic evaluations were found for interventions promoting peace with justice, democracy and reconciliation, although a few interventions with peacebuilding elements were noted. The Language, Education and Social Cohesion project, for example, aimed to address language-in-education issues by facilitating a coordinated, evidence-based approach, which enabled stakeholders to debate relevant social issues and explore policy alternatives (UNICEF, 2016). A volume edited by Wong (2022) highlights peace education initiatives designed and implemented before the coup by educators from civil society. These initiatives covered topics such as history teaching, multilingual education, creative dialogues and social cohesion.

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Table 1. Emerging Themes for Ethnic Education in Myanmar

	Pre-Existing Conditions	Drivers of Learning	Outcomes
Policy Systems Level	**Constraints:** ● Historical grievances against the central government ● Failures of the education reform and peace processes ● Ambiguity around education for peacebuilding ● Post-coup restrictions on civil society and education ● Challenges in financing and resourcing **Enablers:** ● Reportedly coherent post-coup response from donors and development partners	**Alignment and Coherence:** ● Decentralisation and emergence of subnational governments as decision-makers ● Language-in-education highlighted as a priority area for education reform ● Ethnic education systems 'designed for disruption' **Discordance/Disagreement:** ● De-concentration instead of decentralisation ● Lack of consensus and compromise around language-in-education and local curricula ● Limited convergence and collaboration between MoE and EEPs ● Elite capture within the education political economy	**Policies:** ● Ambivalence around the Federal Democracy Education Policy **Budgets:** ● No evidence found **Data Systems:** ● Limited public data reporting
Local Systems Level	**Risk Factors:** ● Government education reproduces dominant ideologies around ethnicity, religion and monolingualism ● Politicisation of education ● Attacks on schools **Protective Factors:** ● Ethnic education reflects the ethnolinguistic identity of communities, households and children ● Education reform involved some significant developments toward the inclusion of historically marginalised identities	**Access:** ● Historical issues in access to schooling ● Current schooling crisis **Quality:** ● Schooling as a perpetrator of violence ● An emerging emphasis on MTB-MLE ● Investments in teachers from parallel systems outpaced by investments in government teachers ● An emerging emphasis on teacher competency frameworks ● Persistent challenges in supporting education in conflict-affected areas **Continuity:** ● Historical issues in educational attainment	**Academic Outcomes:** ● A learning crisis **SEL Outcomes:** ● Limited literature **Wellbeing Outcomes:** ● Limited data collection and efforts to address adolescent mental health **Peacebuilding Outcomes:** ● Limited literature

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Table 2. Emerging Themes for Refugee and Migrant Education in Thailand

	Pre-Existing Conditions	Drivers of Learning	Outcomes
Policy Systems Level	**Constraints:** ● Isolationist policy toward refugees ● Challenges in financing and resourcing **Enablers:** ● Migrant education in a 'zone of exception'	**Alignment and Coherence:** ● No evidence found **Discordance/Disagreement:** ● Elite capture within the education political economy	**Policies:** ● No evidence found **Budgets:** ● No evidence found **Data Systems:** ● Limited public data reporting
Local Systems Level	**Risk Factors:** ● Limited opportunities for refugee children **Protective Factors:** ● MLCs offer choice for migrant households	**Access:** ● Transfer between MLCs and Thai government schools **Quality:** ● Youth aspirations for refugee education **Continuity:** ● Transfer between MLCs and Thai government schools	**Academic Outcomes:** ● No evidence found **SEL Outcomes:** ● No evidence found **Wellbeing Outcomes:** ● Limited data collection and efforts to address adolescent mental health **Peacebuilding Outcomes:** ● No evidence found

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D. Evidence gaps

1. Policy Systems Level

Post-coup political economy: Firstly, a political economy analysis of ethnic, refugee and migrant education following the coup is needed to understand constraints and enablers of drivers of learning. The coup has unquestionably altered the dynamics of the preceding reform era in terms of the actors and their goals, procedures, incentives, and resource arrangements within the political economy of Myanmar education. A comprehensive political economy analysis will assist in understanding the (in)coherence, (mis)alignment and (un)accountability within the new educational landscape, identifying how these dynamics enable or constrain efforts to improve access, quality and continuity of education.

Alignment of federal education goals: Given the apparent frequency of discussions on federalism and federal education, it is problematic that there is no clear alignment of federal education goals within and between the different ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems. Research into the alignment/misalignment of federal education goals of diverse actors will provide insights into levels of coherence for access, quality and continuity of a federal education project.

Policy framing, formulation and enactment: There is limited evidence on how policy framing, formulation and enactment occur in ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems, and the extent to which these align with the needs of children and communities. A better understanding of the power dynamics of participation, including community engagement, may help design interventions that aim to increase local involvement in, support for, and ownership of education.

Education financing and resourcing during conflict and crisis: More evidence is needed on the financing of ethnic, refugee and migrant educational provision. It is not clear how donor dependency – though a common phenomenon in low-resource conflict and crisis settings – has affected the priorities of ethnic, refugee and migrant education decision-makers and the trajectories of their respective systems.

Data systems and data sharing: There is limited evidence on how data systems are used to inform policy and practice in different education systems. Overall, data systems appear weak, fragmented and under-prioritised, which leads to ad-hoc policy and programme interventions.

Potential contributions of education to peace and reconciliation: While observers like to ascribe a peacebuilding function to parallel provisions of education, it is unclear whether or not decision-makers within parallel systems are truly designing educational provisions to explicitly contribute to both regional- and national-level peace, justice and reconciliation. More investigation into the potential of education to have a liberating and/or peacebuilding function is warranted, recognising that the provisions of parallel education are more often than not responses to conflict and protracted crisis. In particular, it is important to investigate the ways educational initiatives across different parallel systems promote social cohesion, equity and justice – or indeed conflict drivers.

Impact of conflict and displacement on systems coherence: Finally, many ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems are caught in a situation of protracted conflict and crisis, yet there is limited evidence on how they have maintained and developed educational provisions in the face of frequent disruptions. More broadly, there is a lack of evidence on how ongoing conflict and displacement have impacted systems coherence.

2. Local Systems Level

Impact of conflict and crisis on access, quality and continuity: Firstly, more evidence is needed on how the current conflict and disruptions to teacher and learning impact access, quality and continuity of educational provisions.

Impact of conflict, crisis and displacement on wellbeing: Additionally, there is little evidence of the impact of conflict, crisis and displacement on the wellbeing of students, teachers and communities. Evidence of these impacts will assist in designing appropriate interventions to improve the drivers of learning.

Critical analysis of parallel education curricula: A critical analysis of the curricula used in ethnic, refugee and migrant schools is needed. Investigating curricula content could contribute to our understanding of how non-state educational providers include and exclude particular identities, and how this affects the potential for peace, social cohesion and national reconciliation.

Implementation research on MTB-MLE and teacher competency frameworks: Although MTB-MLE is often mentioned as a key policy and programme intervention in ethnic education provisions, there is limited evidence on the extent to which EEPs, refugee education providers and MLCs have adopted the policy – or indeed the degree to which MTB-MLE is viewed as a vehicle for addressing the educational needs of diverse communities. It is also important to assess the impact of language-in-education practices more broadly on learning, SEL and wellbeing outcomes. Formative and implementation research on language-in-education and MTB-MLE is therefore recommended.

Similarly, formative and implementation research is needed on the use of teacher competency frameworks, recognising that many ethnic, refugee and migrant education providers see significant value in designing their own framework. It is unknown if and how these frameworks are being used to enhance teacher management and professional development – and ultimately contributing to the quality of education, the continuity of teachers, and the achievement of positive outcomes.

Academic, SEL and wellbeing outcomes: Finally, a policy-relevant and actionable evidence base on the academic outcomes of learners in different educational provisions is lacking. More research is essential in order to understand how the presence of conflict and protracted crisis, pre-existing conditions at the local systems level, interventions, and the drivers of learning affect the achievement of equitable learning outcomes.

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Table 3. Evidence Gaps

Policy Systems Level	Local Systems Level
• **Post-coup political economy** (**Pre-existing conditions and pathway P2**) (**Drivers of learning and pathways D1 and D3**) • **Alignment of federal education goals** (**Drivers of learning and pathways D1 and D3**) (**Outcomes and pathway O1**) • **Policy framing, formulation and enactment** (**Pre-existing conditions and pathway P1**) (**Drivers of learning and pathway D3**) • **Education financing and resourcing during conflict and crisis** (**Pre-existing conditions and pathway P2**) (**Drivers of learning and pathway D3**) • **Data systems and data sharing** (**Pre-existing conditions and pathway P2**) (**Drivers of learning and pathway D3**) • **Potential contributions of education to peace and reconciliation** (**Divers of learning and pathways D1 and D3**) • **Flexibility and adaptability of systems during disruption and the impact on access, quality and continuity** (**Pre-existing conditions and pathways P1 and P2**) (**Drivers of learning and pathways D1 and D3**) • **Impact of conflict and displacement on systems coherence** (**Pathways C1, C2 and C3**)	• **Impact of conflict and crisis on access, quality and continuity** (**Pathway C7**) • **Impact of conflict, crisis and displacement on wellbeing** (**Pathway C8**) • **Critical analysis of parallel education curricula** (**Drivers of learning and pathway D2**) • **Implementation research on MTB-MLE and teacher competency frameworks** (**Interventions and pathways I3 and P7**) (**Drivers of learning and pathways D2 and I4**) • **Academic, SEL and wellbeing outcomes** (**Outcomes and pathways I4, D2, P8 and C8**)

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E. Recommendations

This evidence review concludes that there is a significant gap in our knowledge of how education has been affected by the ongoing armed conflict, the displacement of teachers and families, and the continuing political instability following the 2021 military coup. It is unclear to what extent access, quality, continuity and coherence of education have been affected in the areas of Myanmar experiencing conflict. Evidence suggests that a schooling crisis and a learning crisis are wholly occurring, but the lack of disaggregated figures makes it difficult to determine exactly who is being affected and how.

Evidence is needed to better understand the current policy and programming landscape, identify needs and diagnose problems. Across our interviews with key stakeholders, we observed an ongoing emphasis on the need to collect evidence that assists in developing solutions – policies, programmes and strategies – to address problems related to the access, quality and continuity of education. More research is needed into what educational interventions would be feasible, desirable and contextually appropriate for the range of communities across ethnic, refugee and migrant settings, accounting for ongoing violence, poverty and experience of displacement. As many donors and development partners are engaged in a range of educational support to all three forms of educational provision, research needs to focus on how they are being implemented and whether they achieve desired changes in outcomes.

As a historical grievance, equitable and inclusive provision of education can also catalyse durable peacebuilding, reconciliation and social justice. More research is required to determine the types of policies, curricula and linguistic provisions needed to promote coherence of different parallel systems so that education not only serves to preserve learners' ethnic identities but also to build a dialogic bridge between different communities to help create a stable democratic Myanmar. In this sense, it is vital to research the potential for parallel systems to align with the national education system, bringing different provisions together, ensuring recognition of diversity, representation of different groups in educational decision-making, and redistribution of educational resources to address inequalities.

The findings of this evidence review have, to some extent, addressed each of the research questions, but gaps in our collective, public knowledge remain. Moving forward, we identify the need for research in the following nine broad areas:

1. Policy framing, formulation and enactment during crisis
2. Language, identity, culture and history in education
3. The effects of protracted conflict, crisis and disruption on the drivers of learning
4. The safety and wellbeing of students, teachers and communities during conflict and protracted crisis
5. Academic outcomes
6. SEL, health and wellbeing outcomes
7. Teacher management, quality and professional development and support

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8. Education's potential contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation
9. Aspirations for a federal education system

Greater evidence in these areas, covering both the (macro) policy systems and (micro-meso) local systems levels, will benefit not only providers of ethnic, refugee and migrant education, but also the many institutions that support them. Ultimately, it is hoped that this comprehensive evidence review assists in evidence-based advocacy and practice strategies for improving the four drivers of learning.

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