DIVERSITY AND FRAGMENTATION OF MYANMAR EDUCATION: SCHOOLING SHAPED BY PROTRACTED CONFLICT AND CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This rigorous review synthesises evidence on education in the conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar. Applying the ERICC conceptual framework (Kim et al., 2022), we analyse the status of education and overall outcomes in terms of access, quality, continuity and coherence of education, particularly in regions that are controlled by ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), in refugee camps and in migrant settings on the Thai-Myanmar border. 114 studies were coded against the ERICC conceptual framework to prioritise key themes at policy systems and local levels. The study found that grievances among the ethnic minority communities because of the exclusionary and hegemonic education policies adopted by the central government have contributed to the formations of diverse ethnic educational provisions that assert autonomy and serve as a vehicle for political resistance. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in knowledge about the quality of these provisions and the extent to which they promote equity, justice and social cohesion. The 2021 coup has significantly affected all education systems in Myanmar, leading to an acute schooling and learning crisis for millions of children. Most ethnic education systems remain at risk of attack while many are regularly experiencing disruptions due to ongoing clashes between EAOs and the Myanmar military in their regions. Even though some EAOs and ethnic minority communities have historically campaigned for a federal democratic political settlement, there is evidence of ambivalence among key ethnic stakeholders with regards to the Federal Democracy Education Policy proposed by the National Unity Government.

Thailand's restrictive policies towards refugees limits the opportunities open to refugee youth and prohibits them from seeking employment educational opportunities outside the nine refugee camps on the border. This lack of future prospects undermines refugee children's motivation to continue education. Even though the education in refugee camps is managed by refugee organisations, their reliance on limited and precarious donor funding means that the sustainability and overall quality of the provisions are perpetually at risk. The 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. As a result, migrant learning centres largely operate with external funding. This study highlights serious gaps in education research and calls for policy-relevant and actionable research evidence that could inform educational decision-making in the conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar.

Suggested citation

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ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASQ	Ages and Stages Questionnaire
BECA	Basic Education Completion Assessment
CCA	Child Centred Approach
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
CuC	Catch-up club
EAO	Ethnic armed organisation
EEP	Ethnic education service provider
EiE	Education in emergencies
EMIS	Education management information system
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
ESG	Education Sector Group
ESRG	Education Sector Representative Group
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FDEP	Federal Democracy Education Policy
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDP	Internally displaced person
IE	Impact evaluation
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRF	Joint Response Framework
KECD	Karen Education and Culture Department
KII	Key informant interview
KIO-ED	Kachin Independence Organization Education Department
KnED	Karenni Education Department
KNU	Karen National Union
KRCEE	Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity
LAYS	Learning adjusted years of schooling
LCU	Learn-Choose-Use
LDF	Local Defence Force
LESC	Language, Education and Social Cohesion
MECC	Migrant Educational Coordination Centre
MLC	Migrant learning centre
MNEC	Mon National Education Committee
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoRAC	Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture
MTB-MLE	Mother tongue-based multilingual education
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NEL	National Education Law

NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUCC	National Unity Consultative Council
NUG	National Unity Government
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development--Development Assistance Committee
PDF	People's Defence Force
SAC	State Administration Council
SEL	Social and emotional learning
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TCSF	Teacher Competency Standards Framework
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Education in conflict and crisis contexts

Violent conflicts and protracted crises disrupt the learning and development of children and youth, limiting their potential for personal and academic growth. Education Cannot Wait estimates that in 2023, 224 million school-aged children living across 73 crisis-affected countries were in need of educational support (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). Of these, 72 million were out of school, and among the 152 million who were in school, 127 million (84%) were not achieving minimum proficiency in reading or mathematics. This highlights the scale of crisis in education and long-term impact on societies.

The revised Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards highlights the importance of evidence-based decision-making when designing education responses to conflict and crisis (INEE, 2024). Despite some – albeit limited – progress towards building a rigorous evidence base on education in such contexts, significant challenges persist in terms of access and security during data collection; limitations in research capacity and resourcing; and concerns about coordination among researchers, education providers and funders to ensure the generation and utilisation of relevant evidence (Bakrania et al., 2021). A more 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.

This evidence should critically analyse how conflict and crisis affect education outcomes, not only in terms of academic performance – typically measured as literacy and numeracy – but also in terms of developing a critical awareness of conflict dynamics and of contributing to the social and emotional development and wellbeing of learners. Moreover, it is crucial to understand the complex interactions between social, economic and political conditions of the society in question, and the contested role education plays in perpetuating social divisions and conflict drivers through inequitable distribution of learning opportunities, inequitable resource allocation, the (mis)recognition of cultural diversity, and oppressive curricular content. What is less appreciated in the field of education and conflict is the positive role education can play in fostering critical consciousness about inequalities and injustices, addressing historical grievances between groups, and contributing to broader social outcomes in peacebuilding, social cohesion, and social justice.

It is important also to understand not only what interventions have been found to be most effective for providing education to populations affected by conflict and crisis, but also for whom these interventions have worked and the processes influencing their effectiveness. Such insights enable evidence-based decisions regarding investments for scaling up interventions. For an evidence base to be most useful, it must consider both (macro) policy systems and (micro-meso) local systems processes, examining and articulating pathways of influence and change across these levels. These pathways involve policy framing, formulation and enactment, and the financing and resourcing of education, as well as the diverse networks of international aid and assistance, local communities, households, teachers, other educators and students.

Myanmar presents a case where an evidence base of education in conflict and protracted crises is greatly needed. The Peace Research Institution Oslo (Østby et al., 2022) reported that 87.9% of children in Myanmar are living in conflict zones and face the risk of violence. Valenza and Stoff (2023) estimated that 98% of Myanmar children – including roughly 11.4 million school-aged children – are affected by the ongoing crisis, with over 3.5 million being out of school and 6.5 million attending school but experiencing learning deprivation. Consequently, it is estimated that only around 12% of school-aged children

affected by the crisis in Myanmar are learning at an adequate level. Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar is experiencing an educational upheaval on a scale unprecedented in its tumultuous post-colonial history. To respond to this, we need a robust knowledge base that underpins a critical political economy analysis of education systems, and that identifies approaches and mechanisms for enabling education providers to facilitate evidence-informed educational decision-making.

This review draws on the ERICC conceptual framework to organise and analyse the existing body of literature on education in the conflict-affected context of Myanmar. This framework guides exploration of education policies, programmes and practices that are designed and implemented to improve access, quality and continuity of education, and the coherence of stakeholders, budgets and data within education systems. The review is situated within broader considerations of the political economy of Myanmar education, identifying conditions that enable or hinder the extent to which educational processes lead to equity and achievement of holistic student outcomes, and to which they promote social cohesion, peace and justice, security, economic prosperity, and reconciliation.

The comprehensive evidence review of education is presented primarily within three specific conflict and crisis contexts affecting populations from Myanmar (Annex 1):

(i) non-state ethnic minority education provided by various actors in areas contested by or under the control of different ethnic armed organisations, operating in parallel to the central state education system;

(ii) 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

(iii) migrant education in Thailand's Tak Province, consisting of over 60 learning centres for Myanmar migrants.

By drawing upon relevant studies conducted since 2000, as well as complementary findings from journalistic writing and key informant interviews conducted in 2024, this study organises, describes and analyses the current evidence base for education within the Myanmar context and identifies key evidence gaps for future research. It shows 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 resistance and revolution.

B. Disruption to Myanmar's reform era

Myanmar, home to approximately 54 million people, transitioned to a nominally civilian-led democracy in 2010-2011 following nearly five decades of repressive military rule. Under the 2008 Constitution, the political settlement involved a power-sharing arrangement between the civilian government and the Myanmar military. This arrangement reserved 25% of parliamentary seats for the military, maintained its key executive positions, and allowed it to operate outside of civilian authority. Myanmar's democratic transition facilitated re-engagement of the government with international development partners including Western donor countries and international non-governmental organisations, leading to unprecedented attention, foreign aid and technical assistance, and private capital investment into the country. Despite criticisms around continued militarisation, weak political representation, limited freedoms and civil liberties, and a weak rule of law (Bünte et al., 2019), Myanmar made modest progress at the national level during the 2010s: achieving the medium Human Development Index status in 2015[1];

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[1] Human Development Index, United Nations Development Programme, 2024

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averaging nearly 7% GDP growth from 2013-2019[2]; attaining 'partly free' status in political rights and civil liberties in 2017[3]; and transitioning from a 'closed autocracy' to 'electoral autocracy' with 'fragile improvements' in 2018.[4]

In terms of education, the new political settlement and the increasing presence of international development actors catalysed a significant reform movement. This began with a multi-year Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) under Thein Sein's Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government, which led to the passing of the 2014 National Education Law (NEL) and its 2015 Amendment. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Development (NLD) government published an ambitious National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), which was implemented from 2016 to 2021. Although educational progress was not without controversies and criticisms, which included student protests alongside allegations of limited meaningful consultation with key stakeholders and the reaffirmation of centralised decision-making, it was evident that the central state was demonstrating an unprecedented commitment to improving access and quality of public education throughout the country.

Following the sweeping electoral victory of the NLD in November 2020, Myanmar awoke on February 1, 2021, to the surprise news that the Myanmar military was staging a coup d'état, claiming that the previous year's elections were fraudulent. The State Administration Council (SAC), the military junta formed the day after the coup, deposed the civilian government and arrested NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other party members. Government employees, including many teachers, soon launched the nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which has involved diverse forms of nonviolent resistance by civil servants, private sector employees and the general public to disrupt the functioning of the SAC-controlled state. In February, deposed members of the parliament, representing a handful of political parties including the NLD, formed the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) as a democratically-elected legislative body in exile. Later in 2021, the CRPH established the National Unity Government (NUG) as the Myanmar government in exile and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) as an advisory body to the NUG. Both the NUG and NUCC are relatively diverse bodies, with representatives from across Myanmar's pro-democracy actors and the ethnolinguistic spectrum. The CDM has continued into 2024, with over 130,000 government teachers still refusing to work for the military regime, thereby hampering the provision of public education.[5]

As a consequence of the military coup and its grave aftermath, Myanmar is currently experiencing a protracted socio-political crisis marked by ongoing armed conflict and precarity of any kind of political settlement that would enable the country to return to a viable democracy. Since February 2021, the SAC has ruthlessly sought to consolidate its authority through the killing and imprisoning of opponents, attacking innocent civilians, and waging armed conflict on numerous fronts across the country. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners reports that as of August 2024, over 27,000 civilians have been arrested and over 5,500 have been killed by the Myanmar military.[6] The Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar reported that at least 57 incidents of civilian massacres by the Myanmar military have resulted in over 1,200 deaths.[7]

Following violent crackdowns on anti-coup protests and pro-democracy activism, an armed insurgency against the SAC had spread nationwide by mid-2021. Many civilians, particularly young

[2] World Bank Open Data – Myanmar, The World Bank, 2024
[3] Freedom in the World 2017 – Myanmar, Freedom House, 2017
[4] V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019, V-Dem Institute, May 2019
[5] Anti-junta teachers still 130,000-strong, *Radio Free Asia*, October 5, 2023
[6] What's happening in Myanmar, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, August 2024
[7] ISP Mapping No. 59, Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar, August 22, 2024

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adults under the age of 35, formed or joined hundreds of armed groups scattered across the country. New armed actors include the many People's Defence Forces (PDFs) operating as the armed wing of the NUG and various autonomous Local Defence Forces (LDFs). These new actors join a landscape already featuring different ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), many of whom have been resisting the central state since Myanmar's independence from Britain in 1948. Overall, these armed actors vary in size, resources and political aspirations, but there appears to be a consensus that they are fighting a revolutionary war to unequivocally defeat the SAC and the Myanmar military. The CRPH and NUG have emphasised a federal democratic future for the country, as outlined in the 2021 Federal Democracy Charter, a vision generally shared by the PDFs. However, the extent to which each EAO and LDF shares this vision varies.

Since the coup, much of the country, both in the periphery and centre, has been engulfed in violent conflict. Large swathes of the periphery are now contested, with territories held by a great variety of non-state armed actors who frequently clash with the Myanmar military. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that nearly 36,000 conflict events have occurred across 319 of Myanmar's 330 townships (96.6%) as of August 2024.[8] Examining only clashes between armed groups, the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar reported over 14,400 clashes across at least 233 townships as of August 2024, with resistance actors having taken control of up to 74 towns.[9] As of August 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that over three million people have been internally displaced.[10] Many of the areas with high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) since the coup are likely to be heavily populated by ethnic minority groups. In its 2024 conflict index, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project lists Myanmar as the most violent and fragmented country globally, due to the frequency of conflict events and the presence of hundreds of armed actors. Nationwide, battles between the Myanmar military and resistance groups and acts of remote violence have been increasing.[11] In 2024, most armed clashes and airstrikes occurred in areas likely heavily populated by ethnic minority groups in the north (Kachin and northern Shan States) and southeast (Kayah/Karenni, Karen and Mon States, and east Bago and northern Tanintharyi Regions).[12] Estimates suggest 98% of children are experiencing crisis to some extent and 87.9% of children are at risk of being caught in armed conflict (Østby et al., 2022; Valenza and Stoff, 2023). Of the over three million reported IDPs, UNICEF estimates that 637,000 are children.[13]

The situation remains extraordinarily complex, with a multitude of historical and newly formed armed resistance actors fighting against the SAC. The SAC has also formed alliances with certain EAOs and has facilitated the creation of new 'Pyusawhti militias' to assist the military. Complicating matters, there have been reports of fighting between some anti-SAC armed groups, and anti-SAC political bodies have struggled to find common ground in envisioning a future political settlement for Myanmar. This highlights the very real fractures around power politics vis-à-vis politics of cooperation and consensus among anti-SAC actors.

The ongoing armed conflict has worsened the living conditions of communities that have also been affected by adverse climate conditions. The INFORM Risk Index (European Union, 2024), which assesses risk related to humanitarian crises and natural disasters, categorises Myanmar as having an overall 'very high severity' score. Myanmar was identified as the second most affected country by extreme

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[8] Myanmar Conflict Map, International Institute for Strategic Studies, August 2024

[9] ISP Mapping No. 58, Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar, August 12, 2024

[10] Operational Data Portal - Myanmar, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, August 2024

[11] ACLED Conflict Index, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, June 2024

[12] Myanmar Conflict Map, International Institute for Strategic Studies, June 2024

[13] Myanmar Education Infographic Fact Sheet, UNICEF, April 2023

weather events from 2000-2019 (Eckstein et al., 2021). Heatwaves, floods, cyclones, droughts and rising sea levels all impact production, food security and land scarcity. UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (2021) rates Myanmar as 'extremely high' — ranked the 31st country in the world overall — based on children's exposure and vulnerability to climate change. Myanmar's climate change vulnerability is not solely due to global changes in temperatures and weather patterns. Rather, it is also inextricably linked to issues around governance, natural resource use and conflict (Kyed and Chambers, 2023). The fragility of the central state following the coup and shifting governance in non-state areas have made it more difficult to coordinate humanitarian aid and disaster response. Extractive industries, including rare earth and jade mining, have accelerated, and protracted conflict risks intersecting with the climate crisis, putting many communities at risk.

The economic crisis in Myanmar has driven more households into poverty. The United Nations Development Programme reported that by the end of 2023, nearly 50% of the population was living below the national poverty line, with a further 25% reportedly living just above it. The poverty gap, a measure of the average income shortfall of those who are poor, stands at approximately 25%, an increase of nearly seven percentage points from 2022.[14] The World Bank reported that the value of the Myanmar kyat against the US dollar continues to depreciate on parallel markets, hitting a two-year low with an overall decline of 28% over the year to May 2024. Consumer prices have risen by over 30% since September 2023 and food prices have increased by 27% since October 2023. Estimates suggest Myanmar now has 7 million more people living in poverty than it did immediately before the Covid-19 pandemic, with poverty having risen to levels last seen in 2015.[15]

Overall, the widespread military repression of ethnic minority communities and other political opponents, and the ongoing clashes between armed actors, has meant that communities have been unable to operate schools and maintain teaching and learning. Given that the ensuing violence is unlikely to halt in the foreseeable future, educational provisions need to be organised in such a way that they are resilient to violence and designed to cope with disruptions. Hence, research is needed to investigate educational provisions that ensure safety and adaptability amidst unpredictable security situations, protracted crises, and climate-related disruptions.

C. The fragmented landscape of basic education within the Myanmar context

Since gaining independence in 1948, a diverse array of parallel education systems have existed in Myanmar alongside its central education system. The formal education system governed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) provides basic education, including primary (Grades 1-5), lower secondary (Grades 6-9) and upper secondary (Grades 10-12, with Grade 12 having been introduced in 2023). The public system, which became nominally free and compulsory in 2011, is complemented by a monastic education system and for-profit private providers. There is also a range of parallel, non-state educational provisions within regions that are controlled by ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). The ethnic education service providers (EEPs) in these regions manage schools and higher education colleges that promote their own language, culture and political autonomy.

While the for-profit private providers primarily serve the middle class and elites, religious organisations and EEPs most often serve disadvantaged populations for whom the government system is inaccessible or unaccommodating. Myanmar's monastic system is nominally governed by the MoE and Ministry of

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[14] Poverty and the Household Economy of Myanmar: A Disappearing Middle Class, United Nations Development Programme, April 11, 2024

[15] Myanmar Economic Monitor, World Bank, June 2024

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Religious Affairs and Culture (MoRAC), but in practice, it operates more autonomously under the discretion of Buddhist abbots or head monks, with minimal investment from the central state. For some perspective of scale, according to Myanmar's Central Statistical Organization, in 2019-2020 (prior to the disruptions that began with the Covid-19 pandemic) there were just over 8.9 million students enrolled in government schools, around 304,000 students enrolled in monastic schools (with primary levels accounting for over 66% of enrollment) and approximately 270,000 students enrolled in private education (with upper secondary accounting for nearly 75% of enrollment).[16] Since the coup, the number of children accessing government schools has fallen significantly (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). While official statistics from the SAC have not yet been publicly shared, a phone survey of 8,500 households by the World Bank estimates that the share of the total enrolled population aged 6-22 years in educational institutions has declined from 69.2 percent in 2017 to 56.8 percent in 2023 (Bhatta et al., 2023).

Ethnic educational provisions in Myanmar

To begin to understand the variety of ethnic educational provisions across Myanmar, largely but not exclusively provided by EEPs, it is necessary to have a sense of the country's geographic and ethnolinguistic diversity. The Myanmar state has recognised 135 'official' indigenous ethnic groups (this number is highly disputed and controversially linked to citizenship rights) within its territory, and the 2024 Ethnologue volume identifies 115 living indigenous languages in Myanmar.[17] At the subnational level, Myanmar is divided into seven States and Regions, one Union Territory (the capital, Naypyidaw), one Self-Administered Division, and five Self-Administered Zones.

Myanmar's ethnolinguistic diversity is spread across these administrative divisions, with the indigenous territories of many ethnic minority groups generally distributed over Myanmar's periphery and borderlands. The seven Regions and Naypyidaw are predominantly inhabited by the ethnic Burman majority group and the Self-Administered Division is directly controlled by the powerful ethnic Wa group. The five Self-Administered Zones and the seven States are home to various ethnolinguistic groups of different sizes, including significant populations of the Burman majority group. The seven States were created at different times between independence and 1974 while the Self-Administered Zones were created under the 2008 Constitution. The States and Self-Administered Zones are each named according to the largest ethnic minority group in that territory. Despite their heterogeneous ethnolinguistic makeup, these 12 States and Self-Administered Zones have historically been governed by political parties affiliated with the Burman majority group.

Nestled within and across Myanmar's official administrative divisions are areas controlled by EAOs, who often function as de facto states with their own systems of governance, taxation, land and property rights, and social services including health and education. These EAOs and their respective education departments, as well as EEPs within EAO territories that they may not be directly affiliated to, aim to preserve and promote the languages, cultures, histories and traditions of specific ethnic communities (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). In many ways, the EEP systems represent acts of resistance against the national education system, which has long been perceived by ethnic communities as a perpetrator of cultural assimilation. The Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Kayan, Mon, Shan and Ta'ang are among the ethnic minority groups that operate parallel ethnic education systems that are protected by their respective EAOs.

There is a significant diversity among EEPs, including in terms of size, languages of instruction, curriculum, financing and resourcing, infrastructure, and their relationships with the central state and

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[16] 2022 Myanmar Statistical Yearbook – Education, Central Statistical Organization (Ministry of Planning and Finance), 2022
[17] Ethnologue: Myanmar, Ethnologue 2024

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proximal EAOs. It is estimated that the ethnic education sector had around 300,000 enrolled students in 2019, roughly the same size as the monastic education sector (Lall, 2020). Specific figures on the number of students, schools and teachers within each EEP system have never been made publicly available due to their politically sensitive nature.

Although Myanmar has seven States named after ethnic groups, it is incorrect to assume that an EEP only has coverage in its corresponding State or that an EEP has coverage throughout that entire State. For example, the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) has schools in southern Mon State as well as northern Tanintharyi Region and parts of Kayin/Karen State. Similarly, the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) has schools in Kayin/Karen State, eastern Mon State, eastern Bago Region, and northern Tanintharyi Region. The contours of EEPs are complex (and at times shifting) and are primarily related to (i) the presence of an ethnic minority language, which becomes linked to the movement of people in the context of conflict, and (ii) the presence/control of an EAO, which becomes linked to the territorial gains/losses as an outcome of armed conflict. There is evidence to suggest that enrollment in EEP systems has increased since the coup due to displaced populations seeking refuge in many EAO-controlled areas and the expansion of EAO control in certain regions following the removal of the SAC administration. For example, enrollment in ethnic Karen education provided by the KECD has increased by as much as 35% in some areas (KECS, 2023).

Education in refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border

Armed conflict in Myanmar has displaced ethnic minority populations to nine refugee camps on the Thailand side of the border since the mid-1980s. As of July 2024, the total population of refugees across these camps was over 103,000, with 92% identifying as either ethnic Karen or Karenni and 33% being school-aged children and youth.[18] The respective administrative bodies of the seven Karen camps and two Karenni camps – the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE) and the Karenni Education Department (KnED) respectively – provide their own education for refugees, who are otherwise barred from accessing any other educational provisions in Thailand.

Education for Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand

Thailand also hosts a substantial number of migrants from Myanmar. As of October 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates 334,000 persons from Myanmar reside in the Thai Provinces along the border, with nearly one-fifth (63,000) reportedly arriving since the coup in February 2021.[19] Migration to Thailand is expected to remain significant due to conscription rules, higher conflict, and declining real wages in Myanmar.[20] Tak Province is home to the most Myanmar migrants, at just over 87,000, which is more than twice the amount of the second most populous Province. As of March 2024, the Migrant Educational Coordination Centre (MECC) in Tak Province lists just under 15,000 students enrolled across 64 migrant learning centres (MLCs), from kindergarten to high school, with nearly 47% of students at the primary level.[21]

Rather than a cohesive system, migrant education exists as a constellation of independently run MLCs that are not recognised as schools under Thai law and adopt different approaches to educational provision. In general, their education is more Myanmar-leaning, often adopting the national Myanmar curriculum or the curriculum of another provider from Myanmar (such as an EEP) and using a language from Myanmar as the language of instruction (Burmese or an ethnic minority language). In the past, the education provided by some MLCs was recognised by the Myanmar MoE and the choice of sending

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[18] Refugee Camp Population: July 2024, The Border Consortium, July 2024
[19] Mobility Tracking Myanmar Migrants: October 2023, International Organization for Migration, October 2023
[20] Myanmar Economic Monitor, World Bank, June 2024
[21] March 2024 Update, Migrant Educational Coordination Centre, March 2024

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one's child to an MLC as opposed to a Thai government school has typically reflected migrants' aspirations to return to Myanmar. However, accessing education – whether from an MLC or through the public Thai system (which enrols considerably more Myanmar migrant children) – is a challenge, especially as migration from Myanmar increases. In the same October 2023 survey by IOM, over one third of the 113 locations surveyed in Tak Province reported that only half or fewer of newly arriving migrant children were attending school.

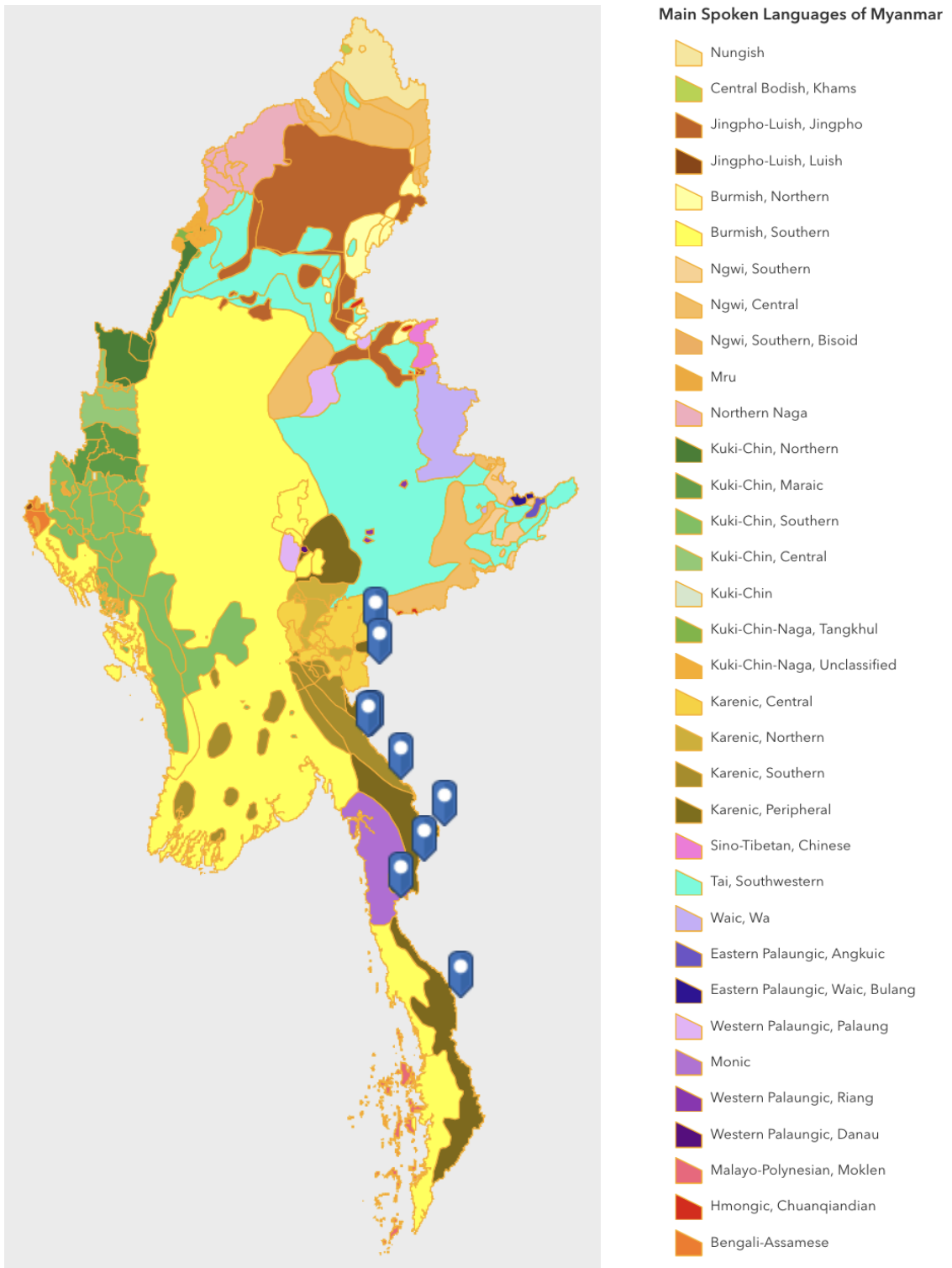### Education provided by the National Unity Government (NUG)

Additionally, the NUG has established its own Ministry of Education and is providing so-called 'interim education,' both on-site and online. The NUG functions more as an education policymaker than a direct provider, as schools within the 'interim' umbrella are loosely administered and resourced by the NUG. In practice, these schools may be more independent, ground-up initiatives that follow the Myanmar national curriculum as prescribed by the NUG and the administrative guidelines it sets for students to be eligible to sit its Basic Education Completion Assessment (BECA). The NUG reported that over 63,000 students took the BECA in 2023, which may have included students from other parallel education systems.[22] On-site schooling occurs in areas liberated from SAC control by PDFs, which jointly govern these territories with People's Administration Teams nominally under the NUG. Online schooling occurs through various 'Virtual Federal' schools. According to 2024 data released by the NUG, nearly 119,000 CDM teachers teach some 630,000 students in around 6,000 physical schools across 304 of Myanmar's 330 townships.[23] It is unclear to what extent these figures include emerging EEPs, such as those in newly liberated Chin and Karenni areas, which may be more in alliance with the NUG than directly under its administration. Over 53,000 students are reportedly enrolled in online schooling overseen by the NUG.[24]

[22] NUG ရဲ့ ပထမအကြိမ် တက္ကသိုလ်ဝင်ခွင့်စာမေးပွဲ PDF တွေအပါအဝင်၊ ဝင်ရောက်ဖြေဆိုသူ ၆၀,၀၀၀ နီးပါးရှိ (ရုပ်သံ), *Mizzima Daily,* March 29, 2023

[23] ဆ္ဒွေမအကြိမ်မြောက် ပြည်ထောင်စုလွှတ်တော်အစည်းအဝေးသို့ အမျိုးသား ညီညွတ်ရေး အစိုးရမှ တင်သွင်းသည့် အစီရင်ခံစာ, National Unity Government, February 1, 2024

[24] 'We can't afford to treat them equally': Non-CDM students enter the revolutionary fold, *Frontier Myanmar,* June 13, 2024

Figure 1. Main Spoken Languages of Myanmar[25] and Refugee Camps in Thailand

Main Spoken Languages of Myanmar

- Nungish
- Central Bodish, Khams
- Jingpho-Luish, Jingpho
- Jingpho-Luish, Luish
- Burmish, Northern
- Burmish, Southern
- Ngwi, Southern
- Ngwi, Central
- Ngwi, Southern, Bisoid
- Mru
- Northern Naga
- Kuki-Chin, Northern
- Kuki-Chin, Maraic
- Kuki-Chin, Southern
- Kuki-Chin, Central
- Kuki-Chin
- Kuki-Chin-Naga, Tangkhul
- Kuki-Chin-Naga, Unclassified
- Karenic, Central
- Karenic, Northern
- Karenic, Southern
- Karenic, Peripheral
- Sino-Tibetan, Chinese
- Tai, Southwestern
- Waic, Wa
- Eastern Palaungic, Angkuic
- Eastern Palaungic, Waic, Bulang
- Western Palaungic, Palaung
- Monic
- Western Palaungic, Riang
- Western Palaungic, Danau
- Malayo-Polynesian, Moklen
- Hmongic, Chuanqiandian
- Bengali-Assamese

Note: Blue pins represent the refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thailand border

D. The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Programme

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme is a large-scale, multi-country initiative funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). ERICC addresses the lack of rigorous evidence on what is needed and what works – for whom, at what cost, and under what conditions – in contexts of conflict and protracted crisis. Led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with the academic team from University College London and consortium partners in seven countries, ERICC aims to transform education policy and practice in conflict and crisis settings worldwide by identifying and addressing evidence gaps and by offering a hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base that can support efforts to improve holistic outcomes for children.

ERICC conducts robust and policy-relevant research to identify priority research agendas, leading to research studies carried out in Bangladesh (Cox's Bazaar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria. This is achieved through collaborative engagement with local, national, regional and global stakeholders, resulting in the co-construction of research partnerships and the bridging of research, practice and policy.

The ERICC conceptual framework (Figure 2) examines education systems affected by protracted conflict or crisis both at 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) system 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 paths through which education outcomes are influenced by different elements in policy systems and local systems (Kim et al., 2022).

Figure 2. ERICC Conceptual Framework
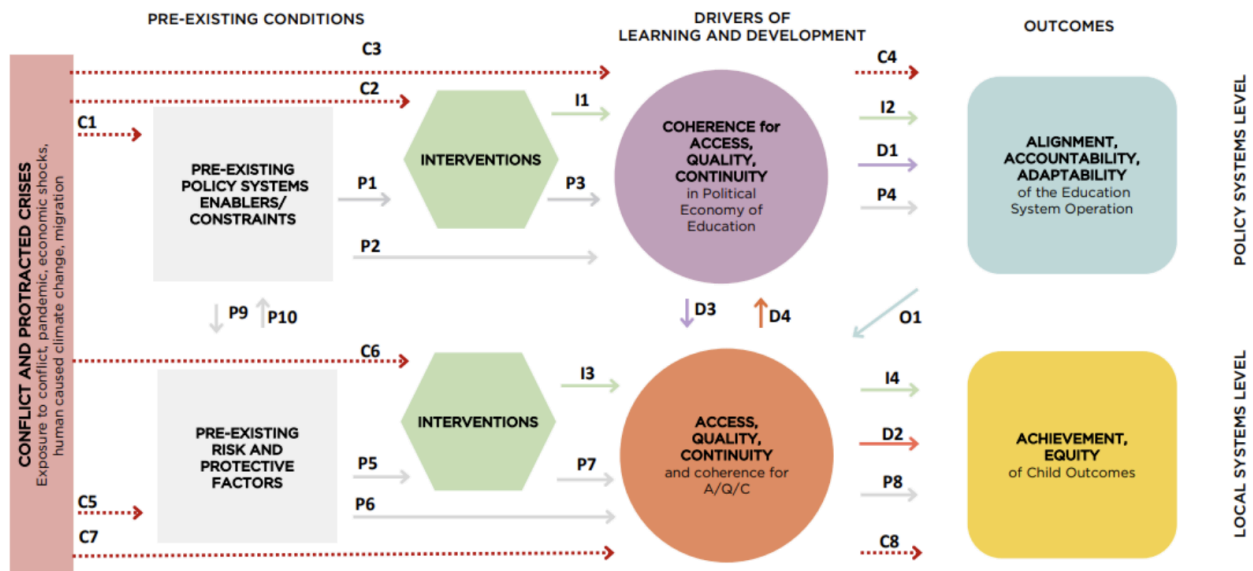
II. THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of this evidence review is to identify the current state of knowledge and locate knowledge/evidence gaps in education and protracted crises across diverse regions and educational systems in Myanmar and its borderlands. This study involved a rigorous search and organisation of the existing body of knowledge, the key evidence gaps, and the implementation gaps in areas that are experiencing ongoing violent conflict. Given the political challenges around engagement and research collaboration with the de facto authorities in Myanmar, the research programme focused on education in ethnic minority regions and among refugee and displaced communities from Myanmar along the border with Thailand.

Research questions were derived from the ERICC conceptual framework, organised around the drivers of learning within the policy systems and 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 local systems 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:

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)**

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- 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)**

Local Systems Level

- 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), 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. Data and procedure

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 (Table 1). The first stage involved identifying relevant studies using online searches of academic databases such as Google Scholar, Proquest and the Education Resources Information Centre. To narrow our search, we used a variety of search strings related to the populations, interventions, contexts, and outcomes of interest (Table 2). This stage also included searches for published reports available in public domains such as Academia.org and ReliefWeb and the repositories of relevant institutions such as the INEE, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and Save the Children. Search results were scanned up to the 30th page to evaluate potential fit for inclusion. When possible, we used the citation network provided by LitMaps to discover additional literature. The searches covered literature from 2000 to the present.

Table 1. **Identified Studies**

Category	Description	Screening		
		First	**Second**	**Third**
Academic	Journal publications, books, book chapters, theses, conference proceedings	267	129	79
Grey Literature	Non-peer-reviewed reports, papers, briefs, insights and evaluations from international and local organisations	96	47	35
	Totals	366	179	114

Table 2. **Search String Categories**

Population	Intervention	Context	Outcomes
Ethnic minority Internally displaced persons (IDPs) Migrants Refugees Students Teachers	Community learning Education Education in emergencies Ethnic education Language-in-education Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) Teacher professional development	Chin Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) Conflict Kachin Karen (Kayin) Karenni (Kayah) Mon Myanmar Reform era/ NLD administration Shan Thailand	Access Challenges Continuity Democracy Learning Peace Quality Reconciliation Social cohesion Social-emotional learning Social justice Wellbeing

In total, over 2,100 search results were scanned, of which 366 studies were downloaded based on the relevance of their titles. In the second stage, identified studies were screened at the abstract/first-page level for relevance using our inclusion criteria (Table 3). This led to 179 studies proceeding to the third stage, which involved a full-text review. Of these, 114 studies were selected for coding, consisting of 79 academic papers and 35 publications of grey literature. This report is primarily based on the evidence reported and reviewed in these studies, all of which were published in English and 42 of which (37%) had a (co)author of Myanmar origin (Table 5). Findings within the report are also complemented by information and insights from credible journalistic writing and key informant interviews conducted in 2024.

Table 3. **Inclusion Criteria**

Abstract and First Page-level Screening

Inclusion Criteria:

1a. Studies concerned with education in Myanmar
1b. Studies concerned with education for refugees of Myanmar origin residing in Thailand as the host country
1c. Studies concerned with education for Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand

2. Studies addressing conflict and protracted crises in Myanmar which have affected populations in Myanmar, Myanmar refugee populations in Thailand, or Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand

3a. Studies in the form of systematic reviews
3b. Impact evaluations (IEs) or observational studies with clearly defined and relevant methodologies
3c. Studies that employ other acceptable quantitative or qualitative approaches, studying
- how, why, under what circumstances, and for whom a programme has had an impact;
- how education has impacted the crisis, as a catalysing force or a mitigating force; or
- how education has been impacted by conflict and crisis.

4. Studies that have been completed

Full-text-level screening

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Studies concerning an education-related policy, programme, intervention or needs assessment that is closely aligned with one or more of the four drivers of learning and development (access, quality, continuity or coherence) identified in the ERICC conceptual framework.

2. Studies and reports of sufficient quality to merit inclusion in this evidence review, in terms of analytical logic, argumentation, data quality, grammar/spelling and novelty.

B. Instruments

This evidence review followed a protocol created by the ERICC team, using adapted inclusion criteria for the literature search and study screening. Coding was conducted using an Excel spreadsheet based upon the ERICC conceptual framework (Kim et al., 2022) and included added thematic areas relevant to the Myanmar context, particularly outcomes related to peacebuilding, social cohesion and multiculturalism.

The indicators used in the spreadsheet included information on the type of study, research questions and findings, study purpose, methods, and the inclusion of the four drivers of learning. Additionally, it captured enablers and constraints at the policy systems level, risk and protective factors at the local systems level, and outcomes at both levels. For studies that examined interventions, we also recorded details about the intervention, such as its duration, target population, level and type.

C. Analytic strategy

The 114 studies that passed all levels of screening were deductively coded using the spreadsheet, allowing for synthesis and comparison of key themes organised at the policy systems and local systems levels within the ERICC conceptual framework. These themes – summarised in Tables 6-10 in Chapter 3 – describe the pre-existing conditions, drivers of learning, and outcomes of education in settings affected by conflict and protracted crisis in the Myanmar context, thereby answering our research questions. Each theme was selected based on its occurrence as a prominent issue in at least one study, oftentimes occurring across multiple studies, and/or its prominence within credible news media and key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted by the authors in 2024. The formulation of each theme comes from the evidence presented across these sources. Evidence gaps – summarised in Tables 11 and 12 in Chapter 4 – were similarly identified using the ERICC conceptual framework.

To answer the three questions on interventions, we identified seven studies that assessed the effectiveness of an intervention. These interventions were coded and rated using a categorisation table provided by ERICC, which has been used in previous evidence reviews (Table 4).

Table 4. Intervention Evidence Categorisation Legend

Interpreting the evidence strength	Interpreting study context	The direction of impact
● ● ● = **Strong** [2 or more systematic reviews demonstrate impact: whether positive, negative, uncertain or null]	**Stable**: Contexts not experiencing conflicts, disasters or crisis	**+** = positive result
● ● =Moderate [At least 1 systematic review, at least 1 literature review with predominantly IE-based evidence, or 2 or more IEs demonstrate impact: whether positive, negative, uncertain or null]	**Fragile**: Contexts that are very impoverished or rendered vulnerable due to past crises. Will also include contexts that frequently experience a crisis	**±** = mixed result **–** = Findings indicate a negative result **?** = uncertain/ inconclusive
● =Promising [At least 1 IE demonstrates impact: whether positive, negative, uncertain or null]	**Humanitarian**: Contexts facing conflicts, disasters or crisis	**Ø** = null result For each directional finding, the addition of an asterisk (*) shows there was at least one statistically significant result. The lack of an asterisk means no significant results.
● =Limited [Only observational or qualitative evidence demonstrates impact including literature reviews of only observational or qualitative data]	**Low Income Country**: Calculated by the World Bank to have a Gross National Income (GNI) of $1,035 or less	Example: **+*** Means positive, statistically significant results

D. Overview of studies

Of the 114 included studies, 79 were published in academic peer-reviewed journals and 35 were found in the grey literature (Table 5). The distribution of studies is relatively even between the periods before and during the NLD administration, with 56 studies covering the 2000-2015 period and 67 studies covering the 2016-2020 period. Only 21 studies are from the post-coup period of 2021 onwards. The coverage of policy systems (59 studies) and local systems (69 studies) is also quite balanced.

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 (17 studies) and migrant education (20 studies). Other types of education covered, though to a lesser extent than ethnic, refugee and migrant education, include Thai government schooling, non-formal learning spaces, monastic education, and EiE for displaced communities.

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 the view of 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, either identifying needs (37 studies) or describing the status quo (106 studies). Very few studies, all 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.

Table 5. **Included Studies**

Study Type	Amount	(Co)Author from Myanmar
Journal article	54	20
Book chapter	12	4
Thesis	7	2
Conference proceeding	3	3
Book	3	2
Academic Total	**79**	**31 (39%)**
International organisation report	21	5
Local organisation report	9	4
Background paper	2	0
Global brief	1	0
Policy brief	1	1

Working paper	1	1
Grey Literature Total	**35**	**11 (31%)**

E. Limitations

This study presents evidence based solely on publicly available data. Official government policies, documents and memos were not included in our rigorous review but are cited when relevant. Moreover, our review did not search for non-English language studies. While we doubt this affected what peer-reviewed texts were included, it may have led to the exclusion of some relevant books and grey literature. However, we observe that many local organisation reports – the most likely studies to be produced in Burmese or an ethnic minority language – are often translated into English to reach an international audience. During our consultations with key stakeholders, we sought their advice on any literature either in English or other languages that was not available in the public domain and met the selection criteria for review. However, no additional literature was suggested.

We recognise that education actors within the Myanmar context may be conducting their own research projects following the coup and choosing to restrict wider dissemination of their findings. Sensitivities within the Myanmar context since the 2021 coup have made it increasingly risky for organisations to publicly report on educational interventions. We were unable to draw on institutionally held research reports that have not been shared in the public domain. Consequently, what is known by the various actors may go beyond what is captured by this present study. However, we hope that our evidence review can still provide complementary information and insights for those already working within the Myanmar context.

We found a notable lack of published academic works and grey literature following the 2021 coup. This reflects the significant difficulties in conducting research in the current climate and the security concerns in making evidence public. While it is unlikely that any academic texts have been removed from the public domain due to security and sensitivity concerns following the coup, in some cases, grey literature that had been publicly available before 2021 has been removed from the public domain. Even though we recognise it as a limitation of our study, our experience in this study highlights the broader issue of conflict sensitivity and the ethical responsibility of researchers when evidence mapping in high-security 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 be significantly relevant. To balance this limitation, we have supplemented findings from published works with information gathered from news media and insights from KIIs we conducted in March and April 2024 with stakeholders from local, non-state providers of education and the international donor and 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. When presenting supplementary information, we will accordingly provide the source of information, aiming to ensure it is as credible as possible.

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III. RESULTS

A. Pre-existing conditions

Pre-existing conditions at the policy systems level include factors that either enable or constrain effective policy decision-making processes and implementation. These conditions encompass resource availability and infrastructure, the political economy landscapes, and processes relating to alignment, accountability and adaptability of education systems operation. At the local systems level, pre-existing conditions include factors that either impede or support the access, quality and continuity of educational experiences for children. This acknowledges that households, schools, classrooms and communities vary in their human capacities, resources and structures, all of which influence educational access, quality and continuity. The characteristics of children, including their capacities and interpersonal relationships, can also act as either barriers or assets to their engagement in learning and development. The impact of conflict and crisis can alter the many pre-existing conditions at each level. This section examines the evidence on pre-existing conditions, beginning with enablers and constraints at the policy systems level, followed by risk and protective factors at the local systems level.

A. 1. Policy systems level: Enablers and constraints

- **What enables and constrains education policy decisions in conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar?**

A total of 40 studies included evidence on the pre-existing conditions that enable or constrain policy decisions. These conditions generally relate to the state of resources, accountability systems, and political economy considerations. The majority of these studies focus on the 2010s reform era in Myanmar. There is therefore limited evidence on pre-existing conditions affecting refugee and migrant education in Thailand (Table 6).

Table 6. **Summary of Constraints and Enablers at the Policy Systems Level**

Myanmar	**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
Thailand	**Constraints:** - Isolationist policy toward refugees - Challenges in financing and resourcing **Enablers:** - Migrant education in a 'zone of exception'

Historical grievances by ethnic minority groups against the Burman-led central government

There is a significant amount of literature on the historical grievances of ethnic minority groups against the Myanmar state and its education system. This literature highlights how pre-existing constraints at the policy systems level impede the coherence between state and non-state actors within the political economy of education, and how these constraints undermine the confidence of ethnic minority communities in public schooling. The historical processes of exclusion and injustices are often depicted in terms of economic, social/cultural, political and environmental conditions, and generally relate to aspirations for political autonomy and cultural recognition of diverse ethnic communities within a federal state (Maber, 2019). National education policies and practices specifically have played a destructive role in dividing and antagonising ethnic groups. Generally, public education policies have never adequately acknowledged 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 assimilate the country's ethnic diversity around the majority Burman identity. This promotion of a monolithic culture around a single dominant language has been referred to as 'Burmanisation' (Bigagli, 2019; Lwin, 2019; Kingpen, 2022; Suante, 2022; Swindell, 2022). Government education has thus been a perpetrator of violence, fuelling discontent and rejection of public education by ethnic communities. This has, in turn, catalysed political opposition and reinforced ethnolinguistic identities through the use of education as a tool of resistance.

Although Myanmar's NEL recognises its ethnic diversity, and Myanmar's [2015 Ethnic Rights Protection Law](#) nominally grants equal rights to ethnic minority groups, the MoE and the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, which was established to protect these rights, largely failed to curb the legacy of Burmanization. Moreover, political exclusion and economic marginalisation suffered by the peripheral regions predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities fuel grievances, jeopardising social cohesion. In sum, segregation through education has occurred based on wealth and social circumstances such as ethnic background, rural-urban residence, religion and multidimensional poverty (Smith et al., 2016).

Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, the revolutionary actions of EAOs against the central state have led to the loss from government control of large parts of territories inhabited by ethnic communities. The areas controlled by EAOs have seen the emergence of different ethnic education providers (EEPs) that have established their own parallel education systems. Research suggests that ethnic education in the cases of the Karen (Oh et al., 2021) and the Karenni (Kubo, 2021) has served ethnic political interests by constructing ideological, symbolic, linguistic and cultural boundaries to maintain separation from the Myanmar state. Kingpen (2022) suggests that within the KECD and the MNEC ethnic education regimes, actions 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. The historical narratives found in these regimes, which include degrees of (in)tolerance and 'othering' of the Burman group, foster an overall lack of trust in the central Myanmar government. Case studies on the EEPs systems present in Shan and Kachin reveal similar dynamics around socialisation, mobilisation and resistance (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016; South and Lall, 2016a). Education within Myanmar thus represents the ongoing struggle over governance and sovereignty, identity, and nationhood.

Education reform and peace processes failed to sufficiently include voices from ethnic education contexts

There is also a significant amount of literature on the exclusion of voices from ethnic education stakeholders and civil society organisations during the education reform and peace processes led by the Myanmar state in the 2010s. This literature describes how the absence of these voices constrained coherence between actors within the political economy of education. During the 2010s, the education reform process and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) proceedings opened space for a possible convergence of state and non-state education regimes. However, this space was dominated by political elites (primarily senior officials from EAOs and the Myanmar military) and largely excluded civil society. In both education reform and the NCA proceedings, education did not feature as an important contributor to sustainable peace, nor did it explicitly emerge as a political claim.

Additionally, the education reform and peace processes were kept separate, leaving education largely absent within the peacebuilding architecture. Higgins et al. (2016) contend that peacebuilding had an implicit presence in education, in terms of addressing material imbalances, upgrading teacher training, and changing the national curriculum. Raynaud (2016) explains that ethnic civil society and EEPs had important roles as providers of education and partners to the MoE during the early stages of reform under the USDP. However, it was observed that non-state actors were sidelined or asked to serve as followers during the education reform discussions led by the NLD, who favoured an international aid agenda (Lall and South, 2018; Bigagli, 2019; Lwin, 2019; Lall, 2020).

Reforms predominantly embraced education as a means towards economic development and only marginally as a means towards reconciliation and social transformation (Smith et al., 2016). Even though the education reforms prioritised by the NLD MoE explicitly advocated for greater equality and equity, the reform process did not engage with deep-rooted social inequalities (Lall, 2020). The reforms neglected the concerns around low educational outcomes among disadvantaged populations and inequalities between the majority group and ethnic minority communities. For example, despite increased per-student budget allocation to conflict-affected Rakhine, Chin and Kayah/Karenni States, their respective national examination results remained the lowest of all States and Regions, and concerns remained unaddressed around the posting of inexperienced teachers to remote regions and the use of Burmese as the primary language of instruction in minority language areas (MoE, 2020; Lall, 2020).

Education reform prioritised visible change and quick wins over the need to better consider the ways in which education had and continues to be a key structural grievance of those groups historically marginalised by the Myanmar state. For instance, the final draft of the NLD's NESP eliminated nearly all references to conflict, peacebuilding and social cohesion. As Shah et al. (2019) observe, surface claims were made to notions of redistribution, representation and recognition, but the substance of education reforms largely lacked actual recognition of Myanmar's conflict-affected context.

The NCA proceedings promoted a liberal peacebuilding model that failed to discuss key educational grievances, particularly around the right to education in the mother tongue, and failed to secure peace dividends through greater inclusion and equity of provision (South and Lall, 2016; Maber, 2019). During the NCA proceedings, the MoE largely failed to leverage the observed potential of EEPs to contribute to peace and reconciliation through their provisions of education, which may be valued as more desirable by many ethnic minority populations (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). Moreover, the peace process was driven by elites from the central government and the EAOs, for whom education was not a part of the political negotiations (South and Lall, 2016b). Education was not observed to feature prominently within

the text of peace agreements for bilateral ceasefires – between EAOs and the Myanmar military – nor within the NCA (Novelli et al., 2017; Maber, 2019).

When ceasefires were brokered between the Myanmar military and EAOs, the MoE sometimes encroached on EEP territories, providing competition with a disregard for pre-existing educational provisions. Lenkova (2015) and Oh et al. (2019) show how the expansion of Myanmar government education into new areas of Kayin/Karen State following its ceasefire with the Karen National Union (KNU) was not executed in a conflict-sensitive manner. While Karen communities were generally willing to accept the recognised and better-resourced government education, they nonetheless perceived the provision of state education as a process of undermining community education systems (under the KECD) and misrecognition of local Karen language and identities. With limited success, the KECD attempted to engage with the MoE to assert its legitimacy in representing Karen populations and to retain recognition of Karen language and cultural identities as fundamental components of their schooling. In contrast, the MoE's expansion of its educational provisions into EEP areas was not adequately reported amidst the backdrop of ceasefires in Mon and Shan States (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016), which reveals incoherence within peace processes between the Myanmar state and different EAOs.

Ambiguity around the role of education in peacebuilding

There is a lack of clarity as to whether the Myanmar state, its MoE, the EAOs, and their EEPs view education as having a peacebuilding role. While foreign observers and academics often ascribe a peacebuilding role to education in the Myanmar context, it is difficult to claim that the actors themselves share similar values. Zobrist and McCormick (2017) acknowledge a general societal discourse within Myanmar around the importance of being 'educated.' However, in interviews with MoE and MNEC officials, they found little attempt to unpack what it means to be 'educated' beyond a common belief that "if education happened, then everything else would fall into place" (Zobrist and McCormick, 2017: 187). Lall (2020) argues that Myanmar's education reform emphasised education for national development (largely economic) at the expense of recognising education's potential for social justice.

Interviews with EEP teachers by Maber et al. (2019) suggest that they attribute notions of peacebuilding to teaching interpersonal behaviours to students to avoid fighting in the classroom. They also generally believe that their primary function is to cover the assigned curriculum and prepare students for tests. In some instances, they may recognise the potential of critical history teaching as contributing to peacebuilding, but are constrained by prescriptive curricular frameworks and their own attachments to more sectarian approaches to history. Generally, education across all systems in Myanmar has provided little or no freedom for teachers to exercise their own agency in promoting peacebuilding in and through education. Drawing on the work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), teachers in Myanmar broadly perform the role of 'hegemonic intellectuals,' who represent the ideologies of dominant groups and recreate the social class within the educational environment. Consequently, they are complicit in reproducing existing systems that nurture social, cultural and political inequalities. At best, teachers fulfil exam-related expectations, as obedient civil servants, by following what has been prescribed in the curriculum without being able to critique curricular content and enable their students to develop critical consciousness about social inequalities, political exclusions, and systemic injustices (Maber et al., 2019).

Taking these findings together suggests that education is rarely viewed as a space or vehicle for addressing social inequalities, injustices and ethnocentrism, and education for peace has not been socialised within different education systems. Moreover, given their respective emphasis on a particular ethnic identity, the MoE system and the parallel EEP and refugee education systems may be seen as

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leading their own, potentially incongruent, nation-building projects. Apparent incoherence between the goals and incentives among different providers of education inhibits education's potential to have a peacebuilding function. This function is similarly compromised by the conditions of conflict. As noted by South and Lall (2016a), EEPs are less 'separatist' in character when ceasefires with the Myanmar military are in place, and more separatist when armed conflict is occurring. For example, when the ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Organisation and the Myanmar military broke down in 2011, Kachin EEPs began teaching more in English and the mother tongue, and less in Burmese.

Post-coup restrictions by the SAC on civil society and education

In October 2022, the SAC enacted the [Organization Registration Law](#), which now mandates registration for all international and local non-governmental organisations in Myanmar and includes a highly controlling, invasive and punitive reporting framework.[26] A preliminary assessment from the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law suggests that the law will cause further contraction of Myanmar's civic space as it becomes riskier for civil society organisations to operate. In 2023, the SAC issued a slew of new by-laws pursuant to the [2014 Counter-Terrorism Law](#), giving the regime vast and unchecked powers to control, monitor and target any resistance actor. The SAC has weaponised the Counter-Terrorism Law to shrink civic space, challenge the function of civil society, and threaten human rights.[27] It has labelled the NUG, CRPH and PDFs as 'terrorist' organisations, meaning that any individual perceived to be linked to these entities is at risk of arrest, including teachers and students who have participated in the CDM and the NUG's interim educational provision.[28]

Since EEPs often operate in areas of contested governance and therefore limited SAC control, typically in the presence of an EAO, it is unclear to what extent these laws have directly affected ethnic educational provisions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that fears around these laws have led non-state actors in SAC-controlled territories to operate as illegibly as possible to avoid targeting by the SAC. Our KIIs revealed that nationwide, data is treated with the highest security and activities are conducted as low-profile as possible so as to avoid SAC surveillance. Consequently, data systems are highly safeguarded and the documentation of parallel educational provisions is oftentimes shielded from the public eye. Nonetheless, more evidence on the collection, sharing and use of data by parallel education providers is needed to understand the extent to which evidence-based decision-making is possible, and is occurring, within conflict-affected settings.

More directly related to education, the SAC announced a [2022 Amendment](#) to the NEL, which nullifies article 49(f) granting subnational governments the freedom to administer educational matters. Furthermore, the amendment explicitly suppresses the possibility of using minority languages as classroom languages, mandating that Burmese be the sole language of instruction. It also restricts the teaching of minority languages as subjects to the primary levels alone. These legislative steps back towards a more centralised administration and a more monolingual language-in-education policy limit the inclusion of ethnic minority languages and cultures in public schooling and hinder possibilities of recognition and bridging between the MoE and EEP systems.

Challenges in financing and resourcing education in Myanmar

The Myanmar state has historically failed to meet financing benchmarks for public education. The Education 2030 Framework for Action recommends two benchmarks: allocating at least 4-6% of GDP to education and/or at least 15-20% of government expenditure to education. Data from the World Bank

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[26] [Preliminary Impact Assessment: Myanmar's New Registration Law](#), International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, n.d.
[27] [The Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures in Myanmar](#), International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, April 15, 2023
[28] [Myanmar Junta Arrests 15 NUG-Linked Teachers](#), *The Irrawaddy*, April 6, 2023

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suggests that during the 2010s, Myanmar fell significantly short of these benchmarks, with an allocated high of 2.3% of GDP in 2017 and an allocated high of 9.8% of government expenditure in 2019.[29] Detailed reporting on the public finance management of EAOs vis-à-vis the financing of educational provisions is limited.

In EAO territories, the EAOs often provide some support for the EEPs, although the amounts vary greatly and may be generally limited to in-kind support (transportation, rations, accommodation) or one-time expenses such as school construction (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). Consequently, most EEPs depend on international aid and assistance for the running costs of educational provisions. This dependence means that EEPs have historically faced (i) challenges in hiring, retaining and adequately compensating quality teachers, (ii) deficiencies in providing basic school materials, textbooks and furniture, and (iii) issues in maintaining some schools and supporting an adequate number of schools to meet the demand for ethnic education. Interviews with Mon and Karen households by Jolliffe and Speers Mears (2016) highlight resource shortages and poor quality of ethnic educational provisions as the main reasons for parents enrolling their children in Myanmar government schooling over an EEP school as long as both are present within the community.

Moreover, challenges exist around a lack of formal recognition in ethnic educational provisions, making it more difficult for students to transfer to government systems and pursue higher education opportunities. Examining different ethnic education systems in five of Myanmar's States, Speers Mears et al. (2015) concluded that the major issues EEPs have faced relate to a lack of recognition of educational qualifications, a lack of educational materials, a lack of qualified and adequately trained teaching workforce, and ongoing conflict that disrupts teaching and learning. Overall, these financing and resourcing constraints affect the quality of education. More research is warranted on how conflict and crises following the coup have impacted the financing and resourcing of EEP systems.

A reportedly coherent donor and development response following the coup

In March 2022, the Joint Response Framework (JRF) for education in Myanmar was launched to serve as the key guiding document for development partners through 2025. The JRF is a comprehensive document covering the basic, higher, and technical and vocational education and training subsectors, adopting a development-humanitarian nexus approach. It emphasises do-no-harm, conflict sensitivity, and risk-mitigation (including minimal engagement with the SAC-controlled MoE). The JRF establishes a new coordination and governance structure for education response, consisting of an Education Sector Group (ESG) and an Education Sector Representative Group (ESRG), which assumes the decision-making role and functions of the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Local Education Group. The JRF is complemented by an Education Cluster Strategy, which focuses specifically on the needs and activities within the humanitarian response coordinated by Myanmar's Education Cluster. Monitoring of the JRF has not yet been made publicly available, making it difficult to conclude how effective the response has been in ensuring access, quality and continuity of education. More investigation into the coherence of the actors, financing and data within the JRF-led response environment would benefit the global evidence base on EiE response, contributing to greater evidence-based decision-making in settings where the international community is not engaging with the de facto state.

Coordination and voluntary knowledge sharing between international and national stakeholders in Myanmar is reportedly constructive and productive, although there are persistent safeguarding concerns around data. In addition to the ESG and ESRG there exists a forum for Ethnic Education in

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[29] World Bank Open Data – Myanmar, The World Bank, 2024

States and Regions, an Education Development Partners Group, and the EiE Education Cluster national and subnational fora. Data sharing between stakeholders remains a significant issue due to security risks. For data to be shared, it must do no harm and be trusted, which often results in only sanitised and aggregated data being shared.

Financing the JRF, which was budgeted at over USD 630 million for the first year alone, remains a significant challenge. Although a joint fund for the JRF was never established, there is reportedly consensus among international actors about where to allocate resources, and these actors have worked together to secure some financing. For example, Myanmar's Education Sector Program Implementation Grant from GPE has successfully been reprogrammed to enable USD 50 million to be channelled to civil society education activities.

Donor commitments for ethnic education appear to have ensured that many EEPs can maintain some level of annual financing. This has primarily occurred through the Myanmar Education Consortium and the local NGO, Rural Indigenous Sustainable Education. Both have active partnerships with many of the EEPs in Myanmar, providing institutional funding as well as technical support for quality enhancement and systems strengthening.

Isolationist Thai policy toward refugees

It is well documented that in the nine refugee camps, Thai policy serves to isolate refugees and limit national inclusion. Thailand's political relationship with Myanmar and its own security concerns have established the parameters for how it deals with its refugee population, acting more as a transit country than a host country for refugees. Thailand is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol, a factor that has contributed to a lack of legal identification and documentation for refugees, restricted access to legal work, and limited access to quality education (APRRN et al., 2023). Thai policy repeatedly emphasises the temporary and minimal nature of its humanitarian commitment (Oh, 2010). It stipulates that the camps be officially referred to as "temporary shelters" and the refugees as "stateless migrants," and Thai language is not legally permitted to be taught in the camp education systems. Thai policy maintains a de facto stance of non-access to Thai public schooling but adopts a laissez-faire approach to refugees organising and providing their own education. However, NGO personnel are disallowed from working as teachers of refugee learners, school buildings can only be semi-permanent (no concrete) and cannot be expanded and textbooks must be apolitical (Oh, 2010). The lack of access to educational and employment opportunities for refugee youth outside the camps, due to restrictive Thai policy, has undermined refugee learners' motivation for education, making it difficult to plan and provide relevant, quality education within the camps (Carpeño and Feldman, 2015; APRRN et al., 2023; Hill et al., 2023)

Challenges in financing and resourcing refugee and migrant education

Although refugee education may be managed by refugees themselves, there has been a strong presence of, and overreliance upon, INGOs to provide aid and assistance (Carpeño and Feldman, 2015; Shiohata, 2018). The dependency on donor funding makes education initiatives unsustainable, less likely to be led by communities themselves, and more ad-hoc depending on the interests of the funder. MLCs struggle to provide quality teaching and learning due to tenuous commitments by the Thai government, a lack of common standards and accreditation systems that limit the prospect of students transferring between institutions/systems, and the precarious position of MLCs due to their dependence on donors (Tuangratananon et al., 2019; Mowry, 2023). In contrast to foreign aid and assistance for education within Myanmar, refugee and migrant education providers are reportedly struggling for donor funds and development partner support.

Migrant education exists within a 'zone of exception'

Within this zone of exception, some laws and regulations are not applicable, so as to protect the Thai state's key interests (Nawarat, 2019). MLCs emerged in the 1990s alongside growing Myanmar migrant populations, who had limited access to Thai public schools due to discrimination, cost and parental preference for Myanmar-rooted education (Nawarat, 2012; Mowry, 2023). The proliferation of MLCs occurred in the 2000s as the rights of undocumented children in Thailand gained more legitimacy through a 2005 Cabinet Resolution. MLCs became more accepted by local authorities, and international actors increased investments to mitigate the number of out-of-school children under Thailand's Education for All initiative.

Within the zone of exception, local authorities sometimes persecute and at other times facilitate the provision of unregistered MLCs. The leaders of MLCs, often Myanmar migrants themselves, negotiate this grey area to create space for the education of migrant children, often in accordance with their own cultural and political priorities. Thailand's 1999 National Education Act allows for administrative decentralisation, and Nawarat and Medley (2018) contend that Thailand therefore has a plurality of local policies and variations in actions that are ambiguously governed by national policy. This leads to differences in how migrant education is administered by locale, and there has been some evidence of bottom-up policy formation in the development of regulations legitimising MLCs. A regulatory framework for the registration of MLCs as official entities was issued by the Thai MoE in 2012. However, evidence suggests that few MLCs have been able to engage with this framework in practice. Overall, Thai policy on education for migrant children "remains fragmentary and ambiguous" regarding direct state provision and the state's stance towards MLCs (Nawarat, 2017:240). Interestingly, this seeming incoherence around the formal acceptance of MLCs may at times be a constraint to and at others an enabler of educational provisions.

A. 2. Local systems level: Personal risk and protective factors

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

A total of 19 studies included evidence on the pre-existing risk and protective factors that affect the drivers of learning at the local systems level. These factors generally relate to community, school and classroom characteristics. Most studies focus on ethnic education, so there is limited evidence on risk and protective factors affecting refugee and migrant education (Table 7). There is also a lack of evidence across all settings regarding household and child characteristics.

Table 7. **Summary of Risk and Protective Factors at the Local Systems Level**

Myanmar	**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

Thailand	**Risk Factors:**
	● Limited opportunities for refugee children
	Protective Factors:
	● MLCs offer choice for migrant households

Day-to-day curricular, school and classroom practices in Myanmar government education reproduce dominant ideologies around ethnicity, religion and monolingualism

Exclusionary educational practices, whether intentional or not, hinder the delivery of inclusive, equitable education. Students from minority backgrounds have experienced inequalities and exclusions based on their religious identity, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although there may be some limited attempts to celebrate different cultural and religious identities in government schools, there remains a lack of proper educational strategies for promoting recognition and respect for different cultures, practices, norms and customs (Soe, 2020). Some teachers have acknowledged the prevalence of an institutional culture that reproduces dominant identities through teaching and learning and they find themselves incapacitated by the system to promote equity and justice in their professional practice (Aung et al., 2023). Barriers to social inclusion in government schools have included verbal harassment and bullying of children from minority backgrounds, a commonly held belief that women are unequal to men, a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ identities and reluctance to discuss interpersonal differences that have any reference, allusions or overtones of a sexual nature (Soe, 2020). While the educational practices within government schools are relatively well reported, there is limited information about the extent to which ethnic educational provisions are themselves inclusive. Additionally, there are concerns around whether EEPs may be reproducing exclusionary practices in favour of privileging their own ethnolinguistic identities and histories.

Following the coup, the politicisation of education in Myanmar has reduced access to education

Education in Myanmar has become increasingly politicised, both in terms of how education access is being seen as a political action, where the type of school that parents choose to send their children to is seen as a political choice, and how it is being used more explicitly for political goals. Since the coup, members of the CDM have referred to education provided by the SAC-controlled MoE as 'military slave education'[30] – although it is unclear the extent to which the indoctrination suggested by this pejorative is actually being practised within government schools. Parents who continue to send their children to government schools are seen by the NUG and supporters of the CDM as endorsing the SAC, rather than as citizens simply exercising their right to education (Choo and Aye, 2022). Moreover, students and teachers who did not join the CDM boycott of SAC-administered education have been threatened with backlisting or fines if they seek enrollment or employment in NUG interim education.[31] At the same time, students and teachers participating in NUG interim education risk arrest by the SAC under the Counter-Terrorism Law. Within this politically divided environment, communities are caught in a difficult balancing act.

Secondly, education is increasingly being used as a tool for positioning competing nation-building projects by the SAC, NUG and various EAOs. Statements from SAC officials emphasise that the education provided by the state promotes the values of the Myanmar military, such as discipline,

[30] The emerging alternatives to 'military slave education, *Frontier Myanma*r, June 24, 2021.

[31] 'We can't afford to treat them equally': Non-CDM students enter the revolutionary fold, Frontier Myanmar, June 13, 2024

nationalism, patriotism and obedience.[32] In contrast, the NUG's interim educational provisions reportedly focus on federalism and democratic values as well as critical thinking.[33] In northern Shan State, overlapping territorial claims by ethnic Kachin and Ta'ang EAOs have led to disputes around the provisions of ethnic education, exposing acute ethnic sensitivities.[34] Communities on opposing sides have accused the Kachin and Ta'ang educational provisions of focusing on their own language and history at the expense of cultural identities representing other groups, and controversies have arisen around the flying of particular EAO or ethnic flags outside of schools. In areas liberated from SAC authority by EAOs, educational provision plays a strong role in legitimising the EAO's political authority. Overall, communities have to balance their loyalty to political groups with the need to stay safe. These risk factors around the politicisation of education violate children's right to education.

Attacks on schools in Myanmar have increased dramatically since the coup

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2024) reports 200 attacks on schools in 2021 and 245 from 2022-2023. The majority of attacks have involved the use of explosive weapons, with some involving arson and small arms fire. GCPEA additionally reports a pattern of increasing attacks on students, teachers and other education personnel: 40 in 2022-2023 compared with 10 in 2021. Finally, GCPEA has collected over 190 reports of military occupation of schools and universities from 2022-2023.

By July 2024, attacks on schools appear to be overwhelmingly perpetrated by the Myanmar military through airstrikes on resistance-held territories, including in ethnic Karenni and Karen areas.[35] Airstrikes are intensifying, with 1,103 recorded in 2023 and 654 recorded from January to April 2024.[36] The regular targeting of civilian populations by these airstrikes shows that the distinction between combatants and civilians no longer applies.

Prior to the coup, correlational research found a consistently negative but statistically insignificant impact of township-level conflict on primary school attendance and total years of education (Yamada and Matsushima, 2020). Since the coup, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that the threat of armed conflict regularly disrupts education, with local-level decision-makers determining when and how to close or relocate schools due to security risks. More evidence on the crisis-preparedness and risk-mitigation strategies of EEPs operating in high-conflict settings is needed. This would benefit the global literature on how education systems maintain access, quality and continuity of education through flexibility and adaptability during times of conflict.

Ethnic education reflects the ethnolinguistic identity of communities, households and children

The appeal of EEP systems for ethnic minority communities is well documented. The key features of ethnic educational provisions include mother-tongue instruction, the teaching of ethnic histories and cultures, the ethnic demographics of the teachers, the flags featured outside school buildings, and the symbols and heroes celebrated within the education system. The education provided by EEPs is often portrayed as protecting ethnic identities against the threat of Burmanisation through government schooling, offering a quality of education that would otherwise be absent. For example, the educational processes in KECD schools differ from those in the government system in terms of the language of instruction and curricular contents. At the heart of this schooling is the drive for Karen political

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[32] ပြည်ထောင်စုဝန်ကြီး ဒေါက်တာညွန့်ဖေ ကချင်ပြည်နယ် မြစ်ကြီးနား ပညာရေး ဒီဂရီကောလိပ် ဆရာ/ဆရာမများနှ င့်တွေ့ဆုံ အခြေခံပညာကျောင်းများ လှည့်လည်ကြည့်ရှုစစ်ဆေး, *Myanmar National Post*, April 3, 2022.

[33] Statement of Basic Education Competency Standards for Interim Period, Ministry of Education, National Unity Government, December 2022.

[34] Blood brothers? Tensions test an old oath in northern Shan, Frontier Myanmar, June 26, 2024.

[35] Schools Caught in the Crossfire, Myanmar Witness, July 2024

[36] ACLED Dashboard, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, April 2024

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consciousness and the positioning of ethnic identity as central to any peace agreements (Thako and Waters, 2023).

In many cases, EEPs have unique access to territories unserved by government education. In some cases, where both government and EEP systems are present, EEPs may be preferred due to their experience in providing mother-tongue instruction and culturally relevant education that communities value; in other cases, the government system may be preferred because its schools are typically better resourced and provide more broadly recognised/accredited education (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). While different EEPs have different approaches, some may employ a mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) approach, using the primary mother tongue of the EEP's catchment area as the main language of instruction, with other languages introduced from upper primary levels and beyond. It is not uncommon for EEPs to utilise the national curriculum, in Burmese and English, although most have developed their own history textbooks and some have developed textbooks in other subjects.

In the aftermath of the coup, the fall of territories to armed resistance actors, including LDFs and EAOs, has led to the emergence of new ethnic education projects and the expansion of EEPs, particularly in Chin and Kayah/Karenni States.[37] Even though there are reports of increased enrollments in these provisions, it is not known how EEPs have responded to the diverse needs of children, in terms of quality of services and learning and of continuity and coherence of systems operations. Moreover, it is unclear if internal displacement has markedly changed the demographics of students attending different EEP systems, potentially resulting in schools and classrooms that are more multilingual and multicultural.

The 2010s reform era involved the Myanmar MoE leading some significant developments toward the inclusion of historically marginalised identities

There is a significant body of literature describing and debating the efforts of the Myanmar MoE to provide education that is more inclusive of ethnolinguistic minority groups, thereby improving the quality of public education through new educational practices. In terms of inclusion through language-in-education, the NEL stipulated that minority languages could be introduced into government schools in two ways: as taught subjects during school hours for several periods each week and as 'classroom languages' to explain, when necessary, the national curriculum. While neither effort reflects an MTB-MLE approach to language inclusion, they do allow for minority language (mother tongue) literacy and learning to occur in government schools. Teaching Assistant positions were created to teach minority languages as subjects and assist teaching and learning by using these languages as classroom languages. Teaching Assistants were not salaried as full-time roles but did offer a more accessible entry point for ethnic minority instructors into public education – they were locally recruited and required an educational background of just through Grade 9. During the 2019-2020 academic year, the last year for which figures are available, a total of 64 languages were taught to nearly 767,000 children by approximately 25,000 teachers (with about 12,000 being teaching assistants) across Myanmar (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020).

In terms of inclusion through curriculum, the NESP aimed to make the national curriculum more relevant to all students through the revision of basic education textbooks. Complementing this, the NEL allowed each State and Region to develop its own 'local curriculum' to be used in 10-15% of the total syllabus, based on grade level. The local curriculum was intended to teach the cultures and histories present within a given State or Region. By 2020, it was unclear to what extent local curricula were being taught, and the periods allocated to the local curriculum were reportedly used largely for teaching ethnic

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[37] Amendment of the National Education Law and other language-in-education developments following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar (Part 2), *Tea Circle Myanmar*, May 9, 2023

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languages (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). Since the coup, minority languages are no longer permitted as classroom language in SAC-controlled schools, although anecdotal evidence suggests ethnic language classes may be continuing. Government schools continue to use the revised national curriculum, which is also used by the NUG and other parallel actors (with the exception of the history textbook), but it is assumed that the introduction of local curricula has not progressed much, if at all, given the explicit position of the SAC to promote a monolithic national identity defined by Burman language, history and culture.

Limited opportunities for children in the Thai refugee camps

The challenges of being a refugee in the Thai camps are well documented. Interviews with refugee children conducted by Carpeño and Feldman (2015) found that children experience worry and stress due to the lack of legal work and higher education opportunities available to them. Decreasing motivation, coupled with the pressures of living with adult responsibilities, leads students in the camps to drop out of school. While children and youth reportedly strive to maintain a positive outlook, they nonetheless have to cope with long-term uncertainty. Amidst this uncertainty, the camps have been experiencing increased (i) sexual and gender-based violence across all levels of society, (ii) mental health issues, notably depression and suicide attempts, and (iii) alcohol and substance abuse amongst youth (APRRN et al., 2023). Educational interventions to support children and youth in the camps are underreported, which means it is unclear how actors in refugee education are addressing the health and wellbeing risk factors faced by children and youth.

MLCs offer choice for migrant households in Thailand

The hazy acceptance of MLCs within the zone of exception provides migrant households, many of which exist in a liminal legality, with choices around educational decision-making (Petchot, 2014). The presence of MLCs allows migrant households an alternative to the Thai government system, which takes an assimilationist approach, rather than a multicultural or transitional approach, to integrating migrant children into Thai society (Arphattananon, 2021a). However, significantly more migrant children enrol in Thai government schools overall than in MLCs; for example, 145,000 compared with 16,000 in 2018 (Lowe et al., 2022). For some migrant families, the choice is between having their children earn household income outside of school and having them enrolled in school at all (Bird, 2023). However, there is no official report on how many migrant children may be outside of school, likely due to the politically sensitive nature of such data. The body of literature suggests that progress has been made by the Thai government and other actors in supporting migrant children's access to education, be it through a public school or an MLC, but there is limited literature on the quality of education for migrant children in either provision.

B. Drivers of learning

At the policy systems level, pre-existing enablers and constraints affect the overall coherence of decision-making and operations in providing access, quality and continuity of education to children. Education systems, authorities and stakeholders may or may not be aligned in their goals, procedures, resource arrangements and incentives. Conflict and crisis can dramatically change political economy landscapes and existing conditions, further straining relationships and causing misalignment between stakeholders, leading to incoherence within the policy system. This incoherence can negatively impact the provision of systems-wide policies, financing and accountability mechanisms needed to achieve access, quality and continuity of education available at the local systems level — in the community, in the household, and in schools and classrooms.

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Systems experiencing fragility prior to conflict and crisis are more likely to be negatively affected than those that were previously stable and well-aligned. This section examines the evidence on drivers of learning, beginning with coherence at the policy systems level, followed by access, quality and continuity at the local systems level.

B. 1. Policy systems level: Coherence

- **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?**

A total of 52 studies included discussion of coherence at the policy systems level. The vast majority focus on education within Myanmar, and particularly (in)coherence within the public education system during the 2010s reform era (Table 8). There is a lack of evidence relating to refugee and migrant education in Thailand.

Table 8. **Summary of Coherence at the Policy Systems Level**

Myanmar	**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
Thailand	**Alignment and Coherence:**
	- No evidence found
	Discordance/Disagreement:
	- Elite capture within the education political economy

Decentralisation and the emergence of subnational governments as decision-makers in education and in 'ethnic affairs' during Myanmar's 2010s reform era

In Myanmar's 2008 Constitution, education falls under the jurisdiction of the central Union government, yet the NEL mandated the subnational State and Regional governments to govern schools in certain regards. In particular, article 49(f), which has since been repealed by the SAC, allowed for subnational governments to administer educational matters in accordance with the current law, and article 42(b) allowed them to develop education for ethnic groups. This most notably includes the teaching of minority languages and their use as classroom languages as well as the development and implementation of local curricula. Moreover, the 2015 Ethnic Rights Protection Law prescribes much of the responsibilities of 'protecting' ethnic rights, including in education, to subnational governments. As observed by Salem-Gervais and Raynaud (2020), subnational offices of the MoE were granted new powers and responsibilities over educational governance. In practice, subnational governments began to decide which languages to feature in schools, who to hire as teaching assistants, and how to create the local curriculum. However, there is lack of coherent evidence around the scale of implementation of

this policy, how effective the policy was, and whether there were measurable outcomes towards access, quality and continuity as a result of this policy.

De-concentration, not decentralisation, by the Myanmar MoE

The literature highlights the limitations of this nascent decentralisation. In practice, the decentralisation of state education was seen most often as an act of de-concentration, a less radical form involving redistributed decision-making authority and financial management only within the central MoE (Zobrist and McCormick, 2017). New levels of administration were created and lower levels were provided a discretionary budget, but there was allegedly minimal devolution of power. Lower-level civil servants did not have authority commensurate with their responsibilities and remained reluctant to act without permission. Directives from the central government were not necessarily followed at the subnational level. Examining decentralisation policy and its potential implementation in Mon State and Yangon Region, Zobrist and McCormick (2017) find that the top-down institutional culture of the MoE was a main hindrance to the effective implementation of the decentralisation policy. They argue decentralisation requires a fundamental re-evaluation of civil servant roles and administrative practices. One notable decentralisation effort involved the return of refugee students to Myanmar government schools in Kayin/Karen and Kayah/Karenni States in the mid-2010s. This support was relegated to subnational and local-level authorities by the central MoE, which provided minimal support. These modest return efforts were hampered by non-streamlined, ambiguous, and sometimes corrupt enrollment procedures (Dare, 2015; Pinto, 2019).

However, Salem-Gervais and Raynaud (2020) argue that subnational decision-making around the inclusion of ethnic languages and identities in education should not be overlooked. They highlight how subnational governments have cooperated with civil society actors to establish minority languages in schools and local curricula. The most important civil society actors in this regard were the Literature and Culture Committees (LCCs), which are local groups committed to the preservation of a particular language and its associated literature and culture. The local curriculum was reportedly developed in Kachin, Kayah/Karenni, Kayin/Karen, Chin, and Mon States with technical support from UNICEF and supervision from the subnational government (Anui and Arphattananon, 2021).

Even so, the NLD government's guarantee of using these languages as a medium of instruction in basic education reportedly did not meet the expectations of many ethnic stakeholders. This was due to a lack of coordination and collaboration between the national and subnational governments and local actors, a lack of quality in teachers, and corruption (Takeda, 2021). For example, the implementation and management of Karen language classes varied greatly depending on the attitude and aptitude of government school principals. In terms of local curriculum, Anui and Arphattananon (2021) examined its initial implementation in Grades 1, 2 and 3 in four States and one Region. Interviews with local curriculum creators and teaching assistants revealed convictions that the local curriculum promotes multiculturalism and social cohesion. However, successful implementation faced significant variance from school to school, largely dependent on the will of the principal. In sum, the decentralisation efforts around language and local curriculum were seen by many ethnic minority groups to be limited concessions lacking meaningful decentralisation (Bertrand, 2022). Despite the seemingly well-meaning intentions of the Myanmar MoE, incoherence around the implementation of policy has meant the quality of educational practices was often unequal and inconsistent.

Language-in-education highlighted during Myanmar's reform era

UNICEF's 2014 Language, Education and Social Cohesion (LESC) project for Myanmar examined the role of language policy and planning in education reform and peacebuilding. The project utilised participatory action research through a series of dialogues with over 150 civil society organisations, EEPs,

and state institutions and departments. The LESC project successfully drafted a set of policy principles and preambles intended for a future national language policy. These inclusive policy principles, named the Naypyitaw Principles, were endorsed by the USDP MoE in 2014 as the basis for the planned language policy formulation consultations (UNICEF, 2016). However, despite a few references to a 'forthcoming language policy' in the NESP, this was never developed by the NLD MoE following the 2015 elections. This highlights an incoherence between the MoEs of the USDP and NLD in progressing linguistic rights in state policy. While the USDP was open to engagement with ethnic civil society and EEPs during policy development, the NLD administration preferred to handle policy reforms on its own terms (Lall, 2020).

Difficulties finding consensus around local languages as media of instruction and compromise around local curricula

There is a rich body of evidence discussing the complex negotiations that occurred when implementing new language-in-education and curricular policies, and unpacking how they impeded a straightforward implementation in schools and classrooms. The decision of which languages to include in school is underpinned by local politics within and between linguistic groups. In geographies with multiple local languages (in addition to Burmese) or with non-standardised languages, these politics become particularly complex. Salem-Gervais and Raynaud (2020) offer descriptive case studies that highlight the linguistic complexities within groups such as the Shan, Danu, Akha and Lahu, which make language inclusion in education challenging. In examining the future for minority language teaching in Chin State, which has great ethnolinguistic diversity, with no fewer than 53 Chin groups, Salem-Gervais and Lian (2020) observe two main options, each with their own trade-offs: ethnolinguistic 'Balkanisation' or giving priority to certain languages over others. Describing the fluidity of language practices and shifting conceptions of identity within the Kachin ethnic group, which itself has six 'official' ethnolinguistic subgroups, Salem-Gervais and Seng (2022) point out how issues around language discretisation and standardisation originate from colonial-era census and missionising projects. They draw upon the concept of 'fractal recursivity' from language anthropology to describe the political claims from different actors in Kachin State, each with their own linguistic projects, regarding the inclusion of ethnolinguistic identities in education.

Moreover, the feasibility of introducing a local curriculum was called into question, particularly regarding who was involved in the curriculum's creation (especially the inclusion/exclusion of EEPs and other notable ethnic local actors) and what compromises were being made in its creation (especially the inclusion/exclusion of local cultures, heroes and histories). In Mon and Kayin/Karen States the MNEC and the KECD were reported to have directly participated in local curriculum creation alongside LCCs and government staff. However, in Kachin State, the Kachin Independence Organization Education Department (KIO-ED) was not involved (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). LCCs played significant roles in deciding curricular content with State-level education staff, but had disagreements among themselves regarding the inclusion of local heroes (Anui and Arphattananon, 2021). The incoherence caused by contestations around which local languages and curricular contents to include in school systems made it difficult for local actors to come to an agreeable solution.

Limited convergence and collaboration between the Myanmar MoE and EEPs

The participation of the MNEC and the KECD in the development of the local curriculum highlights some acts of convergence and collaboration between state and non-state education actors in the 2010s. But overall and with some exceptions, convergence and collaboration between the central state MoE and EEPs has been limited, as has collaboration between EEPs. As noted by South and Lall (2016b), ethnic education stakeholders have often only engaged with peers in their respective networks who share similar values and political approaches. This has led to a more siloed, contentious and politically

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fragmented approach to education, especially regarding stances on how ethnic education might converge with the public system in a future political settlement. These stances often depend on the political position of the EEP's affiliated EAO vis-à-vis the Myanmar state. In general, if an EAO did not have a ceasefire with the Myanmar military, its EEP was unlikely to be collaborating at all with the MoE; and when ceasefires were present, such as in the case of the MNEC, convergence with the MoE was reportedly only acceptable if EEP ownership over its educational provisions was not challenged (South and Lall, 2016a).

Unique in having had long-standing ceasefires with the Myanmar state, the New Mon State Party and its MNEC have had a recent history of convergence and collaboration with the MoE. Most notably, the MNEC has hired, deployed and provided professional support to Mon language teachers in Myanmar government schools. Students from the MNEC system have also typically been able to sit government exams, which assist in transfer to government schooling and matriculation to government higher education. The MNEC's use of Burmese as one language of instruction and its use of a curriculum broadly the same as the MoE's have also facilitated convergence (Lall and South, 2014). Jolliffe and Speers Mears (2016) note that the Myanmar state most typically uses ceasefires with EAOs to override EAO territories through a 'development' agenda rather than to negotiate a new political settlement. Consequently, an unknown number of schools that had been previously administered by EEPs in southeast Myanmar were fully converted into government schools, causing understandable tension. Lessons learned from the limited attempts at convergence and collaboration between different educational providers during the reform era offer important insights for understanding the sensitivities surrounding the prospects of a future federal education system for Myanmar. For agreeable convergence and collaboration to occur, it is paramount to ensure the coherence of incentives and goals among the stakeholders within the education political economy.

Ethnic education systems may be 'designed for disruption'

During the Covid-19 pandemic and the first year following the military coup, the Myanmar government education system experienced 532 days of school closures, the most in ASEAN (Bhatta and Katwal, 2022). Looking specifically at the 2020-2021 period of the Covid-19 pandemic, Rinehart and Tyrosvoutis (2023) find that, unlike their state counterpart, EEP teacher education systems were able to remain open and continue providing many services. They argue that many non-state teacher education systems are designed for disruption because they operate as complex adaptive systems. In other words, they are sensitive to the external environment, they value organisational adaptation and learning and they practise decentralised management structures. Even though what was observed in the EEP settings might not have been intentional, the inquiry into 'designed for disruption' is potentially a helpful approach to understanding how actors navigate barriers to education during emergencies, highlighting the importance of a coherent, complex adaptive response in order to maintain access, quality and continuity of education.

Elite capture within the education political economy

Although the body of evidence is relatively limited, there is concern that educational decision-making has suffered from elite capture, with stakeholder influence manifesting through top-down, centralised and hierarchical processes. Lall and South (2018) observe that policy debates within Myanmar typically represent the views and agendas of international, national and, to a lesser extent, local elites. Consequently, these debates often occur removed from the needs, aspirations and realities of local communities. They may even at times exclude civil society organisations, smaller political parties and EAOs. However, even when these bodies are present during policy debates, significant gaps may still exist between their positions and the realities of local communities.

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Refugee education in Thailand is notable for being established, provided and managed by the refugees themselves, with assistance from external organisations (Oh, 2010; Yeo, 2022). Consequently, refugees control language-in-education policies, but decision-making over the language of instruction remains a political choice related to the agendas of the power elite, tied to inclusion and exclusion and contestation over the future of refugees. Decision-making within the camps is reported to be of an authoritarian nature, privileging Christian S'gaw Karen elites and the parallel Karenni government in their respective camps, and with little participation from other groups (Oh and van der Stouwe, 2008; Le, 2021). The lack of consensus among sources of authority regarding the future for refugee learners remains a pressing issue (Shihohata, 2018; Yeo et al., 2020). Additional research into the extent to which policies are framed and formulated with participation from stakeholders in the local community will provide insights into the overall political economy of ethnic and refugee education. Surfacing instances of incoherence due to elite capture within the political economy may also help us better understand how the delivery of quality education desired by communities can be better incorporated into policy formulations.

B. 2. Local systems level: Access, quality and continuity

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

A total of 77 studies included discussion of at least one of the drivers of learning at the local systems level, with many including more than one: 23 relating to access, 67 relating to quality and only 8 relating to continuity. However, most of these studies had a geographic focus on Myanmar, resulting in limited evidence of the drivers of learning for refugee and migrant education (Table 9).

Table 9. **Summary of Access, Quality and Continuity at the Local Systems Level**

Myanmar	**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
Thailand	**Access:** • Transfer between MLCs and Thai government schools **Quality:** • Youth aspirations for refugee education **Continuity:** • Transfer between MLCs and Thai government schools

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Historical issues in ensuring all children access education in Myanmar

[The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Education](#) surveyed children aged 7-15 and found nearly 500,000 children who had never attended school (5.2% of the surveyed children) and nearly 1.9 million children who had dropped out of education (21.6%). No differences between males and females were found. Significant differences were found between States and Regions, generally disfavoring the States. Nearly 90% of the children who had never attended school lived in rural areas. Although the census did not ask for reasons for not attending school, analysis of census data suggests agricultural employment and affordability may be the two main reasons.

In investigating out-of-school children in ethnic minority areas, Johnston et al. (2019a) identified the following major barriers to returning to school: (i) extreme poverty, with education not being seen as a means to alleviate it; (ii) the lack of secondary schools in rural areas; (iii) the absence of local languages in government schools; and (iv) disruptions to education due to conflict. They also found that children at risk of dropping out were more likely to be working, uninterested in or struggling in school, over-age for their grade after having repeated at least one grade, and suffering from illness. Though the conditions affecting access to school have been researched, there is no evidence of interventions being introduced specifically to address these barriers and improve access.

An acute schooling crisis in Myanmar due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the coup

In response to the pandemic, all public schools in Myanmar were closed from June 2020 to February 2021, an entire academic year (Bhatta and Katwal., 2022). Following the coup, public school re-openings were brief due to further waves of Covid-19, making Myanmar public education one of the most disrupted due to the pandemic. In total, public schools were fully closed for 532 days and partially closed for 77 days during the pandemic, from February 2020 to February 2022.

A purported nationally representative household survey commissioned by the World Bank finds that the proportion of the population aged 6-22 enrolled in educational institutions has decreased from 69.2% in 2017 to 56.8% in 2023 (Bhatta et al., 2023). There are large disparities in access across students from different income groups at all levels of education and between females and males, with females outnumbering males. There is also wide variation in access across locations—between rural and urban areas, across States and Regions, and between high- and low-conflict areas.

Around 92% of the children currently enrolled in school reportedly attend government schools, while the share of children attending non-state schooling has increased from 5% in 2017 to 8% in 2023 (ibid.). It should be noted, however, that participants in our KIIs have challenged these figures, noting that anecdotal evidence suggests a much sharper decline in government school attendance and increasing enrollments in parallel educational provisions. Changes in household educational expenditures during this period also suggest a shift toward non-state schooling. Less than 5% of respondents use online education as a resource for learning, with it reportedly being used more as a supplementary tool than as a replacement for traditional schooling (ibid).

In 2022, the UN Human Rights Council reported that 7.8 million children in Myanmar were out of school, although this number appears to have decreased based on more recent estimates from other institutions.[38] The 2023 World Bank household survey finds that approximately 28% of children aged 6-17 are currently out of school, which is six percentage points higher than the share of out-of-school children in this age group in 2017 (Bhatta et al., 2023). In 2023, Education Cannot Wait estimated that

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[38] [Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar's children and undermining Myanmar's future](#), United Nations Human Rights Council, July 2022

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over 3.5 million out-of-school children are living in an emergency, amounting to just over 31% of the estimated 11.4 million children experiencing crisis in Myanmar (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). There is limited reporting on what interventions, if any, are being implemented to address barriers in access to schooling following the pandemic and coup.

Schooling as a perpetrator of violence in Myanmar

In Myanmar, schooling has historically been a perpetrator of violence because of two main factors: language of instruction and curriculum. While there is a plethora of analysis critiquing the state education as a perpetrator of violence, there is limited literature that critically examines the role of parallel educational provisions in fuelling conflict drivers. The Myanmar state has long sought to legitimise itself through schooling, using textbooks that represent an ideal citizen as having distinct ethnic (Burman), religious (Buddhist) and gender (male) characteristics (Cheesman, 2002). Salem-Gervais and Metro (2012) observe that the Myanmar MoE as well as EEPs have modified their respective history textbooks to present radically different conceptions of history and identity, putting ethnonationalist projects at odds with one another. Research into the quality of ethnic education and the extent to which it strives to mend social divisions would contribute to a deeper understanding of the orientation of ethnic education in terms of its potential for promoting peace, justice and reconciliation.

Although the national Myanmar curriculum has been revised with the support of members of the international community, analysis of early primary textbooks contends that subtle biases privileging certain powerful groups remain.[39] Bertrand (2022) argues that ethnic minority contributions to the revised curriculum were minimal, with the curriculum continuing to reflect the dominance of the Burman majority. Ethnic minority youth were reportedly frustrated that the revised curriculum did not adequately recognise their historical traditions and failed to incorporate diverse perspectives (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2019). The local curriculum in government schools – primarily developed by LCCs, local elites and State-level government staff – was criticised for its superficial inclusion of ethnolinguistic diversity; it was written from a Burman perspective and taught purely through rote-memorisation – rather than through critical thinking, which could lead towards greater awareness of ethnolinguistic power dynamics, inequities and injustices (Anui and Arphattananon, 2021). It is unclear to what extent ethnic education provisions themselves include diverse perspectives and critical pedagogies. A critical examination of ethnic education through the lens of peace and justice would help understand the extent to which they harden ethnic divisions or facilitate peace and social transformation.

San et al. (2021) examined two government primary schools teaching subjects in Karen languages and found a weak association between the provision of mother-tongue instruction and access to education among Karen children. They find, however, that teaching Karen languages promotes the preservation of Karen children's ethnic identity and consolidates their dual (national-ethnic) identity, while also contributing to meaningful inter-ethnic interactions and acceptance of ethnic diversity among the wider school community. However, the quality of the teaching is called into question, with textbooks and teacher guidelines found to be lacklustre, teaching aids lacking, and teaching staff in short supply. This highlights the potential of mother-tongue instruction in public education to contribute to social cohesion, although barriers related to the resourcing of education must be addressed.

An emerging emphasis on MTB-MLE

There is a significant body of literature that cites MTB-MLE as a pathway for inclusive language-in-education policy and for addressing aspects of structural violence (Lwin, 2019; Takeda, 2021; Mangshang, 2022). MTB-MLE is believed to benefit Myanmar's linguistic diversity and lead to not

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[39] A missed opportunity for schoolroom reform, *Frontier Myanmar*, November 12, 2019

only superior academic outcomes but also peacebuilding dividends. Using the 4Rs theoretical framework (Novelli et al., 2017), Wong (2019) argues that multilingual education has the potential to enhance learning and foster peacebuilding, but the valuing of language diversity must first overcome the privileging of Burmese and English within education. Since the literature on MTB-MLE in Myanmar is largely based on theoretical arguments, generating more evidence on the language-in-education policies and practices of EEPs will contribute to deeper empirical insights of how MTB-MLE is perceived and realised, how it impacts learner achievement, and the role it may play in fostering peace and justice.

Moreover, there are debates around the feasibility of MTB-MLE implementation. Although MTB-MLE is advocated for in the literature, it may be that a mother tongue-based approach is more common in ethnic and refugee education, wherein a second language (likely Burmese) is not systematically introduced as a language of instruction (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016; Mangshang, 2022). Bigagli (2019) warns that mother tongue-based education alone could further cement an ethnic divide unless it is complemented by peace and citizenship education programmes supported by critical thinking skills. Similarly, Lopes Cardozo et al. (2019) caution that reconciliation may be hindered if some languages, whether minority languages or Burmese, are excluded from educational content. Oh and van der Stouwe (2008) observe the use of S'gaw Karen as the medium of instruction in the Karen camps as excluding students who speak other local languages or only Burmese. Designing MTB-MLE approaches is particularly challenging in catchment areas where multiple mother tongues are present (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). Furthermore, the population displacement following the coup may have changed the linguistic profiles of some areas, adding another layer of complexity.

Investments in teachers from parallel systems outpaced by investments in government teachers

The 2010s saw significant reform by the MoE in teacher education, including the expansion of pre-service teacher training colleges to offer four-year diplomas and the revision of the entire pre-service curriculum based on a new Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF). The introduction of a revised basic education curriculum involved nationwide in-service training, which at times included teachers from the monastic sector and different EEP systems. Maber et al. (2022) argue that teacher education reforms created competing narratives of teacher identity, with varied agendas in the conceptualisation of teachers and their professional practices, the expectations of the roles of teachers within society, and the assumed alignments and relationships between teachers, the state and the community. The new prominent narratives depict teachers as future-oriented leaders who possess 21st-century skills and are loyal to the state. However, in practice, teachers have developed a greater sense of alliance with the wider community, which has created resistance to the expectations of serving the state agenda. After the coup, this manifested as greater alignment and alliance with students and communities through mass teacher participation in the CDM.

Interviews with monastic and EEP teachers by Niskanen and Buske (2019) reveal that these teachers exhibit strong dedication to educating disadvantaged communities and experience similar dilemmas regarding their professional identity when comparing themselves to teachers in government schools. They observe a lack of professionalism, job opportunities and salary, leading to negative self-perceptions about being underprivileged and inferior. Monastic teachers may often aspire to become government school teachers due to better incentive provisions in the state system. For EEP teachers, this is not a realistic avenue. However, EEP teachers state that the constraints of their profession are generally outweighed by a motivation rooted in teaching as an act of service, which protects their ethnic identity. This motivation was also highlighted in the profiles of Karen teachers by Johnston (2016).

It was evident from our interviews with stakeholders that parallel systems value teacher education. Many EEPs manage their own varied pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes (Lall, 2020). For example, the mobile teacher education model operated by the Karen Teacher Working Group has been successful in delivering in-service training to over 1,000 teachers annually in rural and remote areas (Johnston, 2016). Supporting local ethnic educational provision, KTWG's mobile teacher trainers help build community-school partnerships, support mother tongue-based learning using the local ethnic curriculum, deliver teacher stipends and teaching-learning materials, and provide complementary school leadership training. Rinehart and Tyrosvoutis (2023) observe that EEP teacher education systems are relatively well positioned to navigate disruption, effectively pivoting to deliver the most appropriate support as situations change. According to our KIIs, disruptions caused by the coup and displacement of teachers have significantly limited the frequency and duration of training, resulting in the loss of trained teachers and increasing reliance on unqualified and untrained teachers. More evidence is needed on how teachers are themselves affected by conflict and crisis as well as how their professional identities and practice are shaped by conflict-related challenges faced by their schools and communities. The focus on their overall wellbeing can contribute to the design of appropriate teacher-related policies and programmes.

An emerging emphasis on teacher competency frameworks

Our interviews with EEP and refugee education stakeholders reveal that different non-state providers have designed their own frameworks, often inspired by the content of the MoE's TCSF. These frameworks vary from provider to provider and reflect contextually relevant concerns, such as in relation to MTB-MLE and conflict sensitivity, neither of which are present in the TCSF. Generally, these frameworks may be used to evaluate teachers and identify areas for professional development. Evidence from teacher observations suggests ethnic and refugee teachers possess foundational multilingual education competencies (Tyrosvoutis et al., 2021a and 2022). For example, they are able to adequately integrate translanguaging and code-switching strategies in their teaching, even without formal training. So far, the evidence on how different teacher competency frameworks are designed and implemented is limited, meaning it is not yet possible to determine how they are affecting the quality of education.

Persistent challenges in supporting education in conflict-affected areas in Myanmar

Thwe (2018) notes four major challenges facing development assistance to education providers in areas with IDPs: (i) securing access to the IDPs; (ii) conducting comprehensive data collection; (iii) coordinating activities with the central government; and (iv) securing adequate levels of funding. Interviews with stakeholders suggest that many new EiE projects, especially in IDP areas, are experiencing shortages of education personnel and are therefore relying on 'volunteer' teachers who are generally young, inexperienced, untrained and underpaid. Due to obstacles in accessing conflict-affected communities, many new EiE projects also lack teaching-learning materials and adequate infrastructure for temporary learning spaces. No (2024) examines community-led EiE initiatives in Pekon Township – home to over 80 community schools providing education to over 12,000 displaced children – and finds that financial barriers and capacity gaps can be partially overcome through strong school-community-family partnerships that emphasise resilience, adaptation and local leadership.

The curriculum, teachers and infrastructure differ across EEPs, the two refugee education providers, and the various MLCs. Our interviews with stakeholders revealed that organisational capacity of the providers varies, which may be reflected in the overall quality of the curriculum, qualifications and professional experience of teachers, and school infrastructure in different settings. However, interviews

also indicated that providers typically share common needs regarding the quality of education. A more thorough investigation into these needs will benefit the design of context-appropriate interventions.

Historical issues in educational attainment in Myanmar

Educational attainment in Myanmar has historically been low, as measured by the highest grade or level completed. According to the [2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Education](), 16.2% of the population aged 25 years and older reported having no schooling, with higher rates for females (18.8%) and those in rural areas (20.2%). Only 7.3% of the population had graduated from tertiary education and more than half of these graduates were female. Only 3.1% of persons living in rural areas had completed tertiary education. Educational attainment was generally lower in the States than in the Regions. Continuity through primary schooling and matriculation to secondary schooling appear to be major obstacles: 22.6% of the population had not finished primary education and 22.5% had only finished primary without continuing. Thus, as of 2014 and according to the census, 60% of Myanmar's over-25 population was estimated to have no higher than a primary education. While there has been some reporting of educational attainment in government education, no such evidence base exists for ethnic, refugee and migrant education. Moreover, there is a lack of evidence on how the current conflict and crisis have impacted the continuity of education in all educational provisions, although it has been reported that enrollment in public higher education since the coup has dropped by as much as 90%.[40]

Transfer between MLCs and Thai government schools

In Tak Province, many MLCs have been gaining some degree of recognition and legal protection from the MECC under the Thai MoE, which has increased the opportunity for children to transfer from an MLC to a Thai public school (Thoresen et al., 2020). While around 90% of migrant children in school are reportedly attending Thai government schools (Lowe et al., 2022), they face barriers to access, quality and continuity. Migrant students without a birth certificate or Thai identification may be required to pay a fine upon enrollment, Thai-language preparation classes for migrant students are generally rare, as are Burmese-language teaching assistants, and migrant children under the age of six are placed in kindergarten while those over six are by default enrolled in Grade 1 (Arphattananon, 2021a; Nawarat, 2018; Lowe et al., 2022).

Youth aspirations for refugee education

Interviews conducted by Hill et al. (2023) find that refugee youth desire accredited basic education, higher education opportunities, and more vocational training, valuing these as means towards gainful employment and self-sufficiency. However, investments in refugee education are limited because they are de-prioritised for more urgent, humanitarian needs. Moreover, higher education and vocational training are relatively scarce, making them difficult to access. Overall, Hill et al. (2023) conclude that the restrictive context of the camps largely prevents the skills and knowledge acquired through education from being converted into meaningful opportunities by refugees. In the camps, the quality of education is misaligned with the aims and expectations of learners, which undermines the role education can play in supporting the capability of individuals to achieve the lives they value (Nussbaum, 2011).

C. Policy systems level and local systems level outcomes

At the policy systems level, coherence shapes the alignment, accountability and adaptability of policies, budgets and financing, and data-based accountability mechanisms. Incoherence can reduce the

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[40] [University student population has plunged 90% since coup](), *Radio Free Asia*, January 8, 2024.

effectiveness of operations aimed at achieving access, quality and continuity of education at the local levels. At the local systems level, compromised educational access, quality and continuity can negatively impact achievement and equity in child outcomes, affecting academic performance, social-emotional learning (SEL) and physical and mental health. This section examines the evidence on outcomes, starting with alignment, accountability and adaptability of policies, budgets and data systems at the policy systems level. It then explores academic, SEL, health and wellbeing outcomes at the local systems level.

C. 1. Policy systems level: Policies, budgets and data systems

- **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?**

A total of 35 studies included evidence on outcomes at the policy systems level relating to policies, budgets and data systems. The vast majority of these studies only consider the extent to which policies in Myanmar, especially of the central MoE, are aligned, accountable and adaptable. There is consequently a lack of evidence on the alignment, accountability and adaptability of policies, budgets and data systems within ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems (Table 10). Some evidence on these outcomes was presented earlier during the analysis of the evidence around pre-existing conditions at the policy systems level.

Table 10. **Summary of Policies, Budgets and Data Systems at the Policy Systems Level**

Myanmar	**Policies:** - Ambivalence around the Federal Democracy Education Policy **Budgets:** - No evidence found	**Data Systems:** - Limited public data reporting
Thailand	**Policies:** - No evidence found **Budgets:** - No evidence found	**Data Systems:** - Limited public data reporting

Ambivalence around the Federal Democracy Education Policy

The NUG's MoE has produced a Federal Democracy Education Policy (FDEP) that envisions a largely decentralised education system and exhibits a willingness to work more closely with EEPs towards a federal future.[41] The FDEP was reportedly prepared through consultation with a range of civil society, education, religious and pro-democracy stakeholders as well as national and international education actors. A final version of the FDEP was approved by the NUCC in May 2023 and offers a vision for education in marked opposition to the SAC's monolingual, monoethnic, centralised education and the centralised policies of the previous military regimes. The FDEP emphasises values of equity, self-determination, social justice, academic freedom, critical thinking and human rights. It establishes a federal administrative structure for education that grants school councils various decision-making responsibilities, most notably around curriculum and language of instruction. The policy commits to a

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[41] အမျိုးသားညီညွတ်ရေး အတိုင်ပင်ခံကောင်စီ ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစီ ပညာရေး မူဝါဒ, National Unity Consultative Council, May 8, 2023

MTB-MLE approach that includes local languages as the primary language of instruction in at least the early primary years, before introducing Burmese as the national language. It acknowledges the presence of EEPs and includes them within the federal administrative structure, granting them decision-making powers and identifying them as recipients of budget support (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). However, critics argue that the FDEP was developed with limited input from EEPs and may be overly future-oriented, neglecting the current realities of EEPs and failing to adequately build upon their existing roles and systems (South et al., 2024).

Many ethnic minority communities and elites have regularly campaigned for greater federalism in Myanmar; for the former, it is primarily valued as a means to prevent the continuation of armed conflict; for the latter, as a tool for achieving self-determination (South, 2021). Since the coup, calls for federalism have expanded beyond these two groups, and many EAOs and newly formed ethnic coordination bodies have been observed to continue bottom-up federalist practices (South, 2022).

In some ways, EEP systems had begun the process of enacting federalism before the coup. For example, South and Lall (2016a, 2016b) have observed 'federalism from below' occurring in the MNEC and the KIO-ED educational provisions. They describe locally owned schools as concrete examples of self-determination in practice, offering possible blueprints for future federal political and administrative arrangements in education. South et al. (2024) describe an ongoing 'federating' process in which EEPs are laying the groundwork for federal education. This process includes advancements in MTB-MLE, stronger utilisation of local capacities and technical expertise, increased recognition of EEP legitimacy, and the creation of new coordination and consultation bodies that promote alliance-building among diverse actors. However, it remains unclear how these building blocks might eventually come together, or whether or not they have a place within the NUG's vision for a federal education system.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is an ambivalence around the NUG's vision and its FDEP, with EEPs holding diverging views on federalism. The federalist aspirations of EEPs are likely inextricably linked with the political views of the EAOs in their proximity. Interviews conducted in March 2024 with international and EEP stakeholders indicate limited awareness of conversations occurring between non-state education actors and the NUG MoE regarding the enactment of the FDEP. The ambivalence of EEPs towards implementing the FDEP highlights a misalignment of goals and incentives among actors when envisioning a future national education system for Myanmar, and additional research is needed to better understand these specific, diverse goals and incentives.

Limited public data reporting

There is very little evidence on the impact of data systems in ethnic education, refugee education and migrant education. It is unclear to what extent education providers utilise an education management information system (EMIS), although anecdotal evidence suggests some EEPs have their own EMIS. Given the risks around data sharing, it is understandable that public knowledge of EMIS usage would be limited.

The Myanmar Education Cluster maintains a [Monitoring Tool Dashboard](#) that provides some data related to the support provided in the nationwide EiE context. It reports on the general reach of different activities and provides information on temporary learning spaces, with figures disaggregated to the township level. The dashboard also measures key targets related to the Education Cluster's commitment to supporting teaching and learning in EiE contexts. Due to security concerns, it does not specify whether activities are conducted in collaboration with EEPs. The two largest beneficiary groups are in Sagaing and Magway Regions, which do not have an EEP presence. However, the third largest group is in Kayin/Karen State, which does.

In Tak Province, the MECC maintains several useful monitoring tools including a [Student Monitoring Dashboard](), a [Teacher Monitoring Dashboard]() and [MLC Mapping]().[42] The data provided offers insight into the quantifiable differences between MLCs in terms of their size and the scope of education offered. Overall, there is no evidence on the effectiveness of data systems in supporting evidence-based decision-making by education providers to improve access, quality and continuity of education.

C. 2. Local systems level: Academic, SEL and health and wellbeing outcomes

- **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)?**

A total of 52 studies included some discussion of outcomes at the local systems level, but very few provided empirical or qualitative evidence for measuring outcomes. Only 10 studies contained a focus on academic outcomes (literacy and numeracy) and even fewer engaged with SEL or physical and mental health outcomes (Table 11). The vast majority of evidence relates to arguments around the potential of education in Myanmar, and ethnic education in particular, to contribute to outcomes relating to peacebuilding, reconciliation, equity, social justice and social cohesion. However, there is no effectiveness research, and consequently no causal evidence on how education might affect such outcomes.

Table 11. **Summary of Academic, SEL, Wellbeing and Peacebuilding Outcomes at the Local Systems Level**

Myanmar	**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
Thailand	**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

A learning crisis in Myanmar

The 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics assessed a nationally representative sample of Grade 5 students and found that only 11% were proficient in Burmese literacy, 5% in Burmese writing and 12% in mathematics (ACER, 2021). Urban schools, high socioeconomic status, preschool attendance, and Burmese as a home language were found to be positive predictors of achievement.

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[42] ศูนย์ประสานงานการจัดการศึกษาเด็กต่างด้าว, Migrant Education Coordination Centre – Tak Province, 2024

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Due to disruptions since 2020, Bhatta and Katwal (2022) estimate that the average learning adjusted years of schooling (LAYS)[43] will decrease by 1.9-2.2 years and the learning poverty rate[44] will increase to 100%. The LAYS in Myanmar had previously been only 6.8 years of learning over the course of basic education, which followed a KG+11 model until the addition of Grade 12 in 2023.

Bhatta et al. (2023) used a phone-based learning assessment (based on early-grade reading and mathematics instruments) to measure learning disparities in a non-representative sample of 7–14-year-olds across Myanmar. Overall, children generally performed worse on more complex literacy and numeracy subtasks. Within the sample of 1,340 children, those enrolled in school consistently exhibited higher overall average proficiency rates across literacy and numeracy subtasks as compared to out-of-school children, with this gap becoming progressively larger for older children. Socioeconomic status was found to be a positive predictor of performance, whereas gender and home language were not significantly associated with learning outcomes.

Education Cannot Wait estimated that of the 11.4 million children experiencing crises in Myanmar, 6.5 million (57% of all school-aged children) are attending school but experiencing learning deprivation, with a further 3.5 million children (31%) being out of school; consequently, only 1.3 million children (12%) are sufficiently learning (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). These estimates drew upon multiple international datasets and employed a six-dimensional model for crisis-affected children, which we find highly credible. However, these estimates are not disaggregated, and so it is not possible to discern the extent to which the learning crisis is affecting ethnic minority children.

Only one study was found on learning assessments within ethnic education settings. Johnston et al. (2019b) deployed early-grade reading and mathematics assessments in ethnic Karen and Shan schools and found that first-language literacy (in a local language) was stronger than Burmese literacy, but that most children did not have foundational skills in either language. In this same study, grade level, gender (female), mother's literacy level, and having the same first language as the teacher were found to be positive predictors of literacy. No studies were found on learning assessments within refugee and migrant educational provisions. Consequently, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the extent to which academic outcomes are being achieved in parallel provisions of education. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the concerns in learner achievement found in previous national studies are true within parallel systems, recognising that parallel systems have historically dealt with significant resource shortages and are currently experiencing the effects of significant conflict and crisis.

Limited literature on SEL outcomes in Myanmar

There is a notable lack of studies on SEL outcomes in all education systems within the context – just a single effectiveness study provides insight into the state of SEL outcomes for children in Myanmar. A Catch-up Clubs intervention run by Save the Children used play-based learning to improve children's literacy and SEL in areas of protracted conflict. SEL indicators were adapted from the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) indicators and involved seven questions targeting four skills: (i) social engagement skills; (ii) stress management skills; (iii) empathy skills; and (iv) problem-solving skills. The results indicate that children's SEL competency is statistically significant in

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[43] Learning Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) is an index that combines two elements: (i) the average years of schooling; (ii) average learning-per-year of a country divided by the average in a high-achieving benchmark country. LAYS answers the question *how much do students learn each year they are in school?* It recognizes that students in different countries who have completed the same number of years of schooling often have vastly different learning outcomes.

[44] The learning poverty rate refers to the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a short passage of age-appropriate material.

contributing to higher literacy outcomes, leading to the recommendation that remedial and SEL activities be combined to improve children's literacy skills (Arlini et al., 2023a and 2023b). Children in the treatment group were observed to have improved their stress management skills, empathy skills and problem-solving skills. They were twice as likely to show high SEL competency as the control group. The treatment group from Kayin/Karen State, which was experiencing active conflict, improved their SEL competency from 16.9% at baseline to 43.4% at endline whereas the SEL competency of the control group dropped significantly. This suggests that SEL activities improved competency even when children were experiencing prolonged stress. However, children belonging to an ethnic minority group and children who were out of school had lower likelihood of having positive SEL. Children who reported that any family member read at home or read with them were more likely to have high SEL competency. Children whose future aspirations included being able to study at a higher level or achieve their dream job were also more likely to have high SEL competency. There is a need to generate a stronger evidence base on the presence of SEL within parallel education systems – what policies, programmes and practices are aimed at supporting SEL, and how SEL outcomes have been affected by conflict and crisis.

Limited data collection and efforts to address adolescent mental health

Similarly, there is a limited evidence base on mental health and wellbeing outcomes in all education systems. Data from the 2016 Global School-based Health Survey shows that adolescent depression (27.2%) and suicidal ideation (9.4%) are substantially higher in Myanmar than regional averages.[45] Correlational analysis in a systematic review by Caroll et al. (2021) suggests that violence and bullying, alcohol and substance abuse, and home, family and community security and cohesion are closely related to mental health outcomes for adolescents. There is a general lack of evidence on the health of children across all education systems in the Myanmar context, although anecdotal evidence suggests a consensus that many have experienced trauma following the Covid-19 pandemic and military coup. An online non-probability survey of 7,720 adults over the age of 18 in Myanmar finds consistently high rates of probable anxiety and depression following the coup (Saw et al., 2023). A World Bank study found that approximately 25% of Myanmar's population was suffering from moderate to severe depression, with younger persons and those living in crisis more likely to be affected.[46]

In Mae La and Nu Po refugee camps, Hill et al. (2023) find that barriers to youth wellbeing relate to challenges around their rights to work, to move, to access quality education, and to hold cultural celebrations. Youth wellbeing is described as multifaceted, with sociocultural aspects of life – such as sports and recreation, cultural events and practices, religious observance, and stewardship of the natural world – playing important roles. Due to shrinking opportunities for refugees in Thailand, the limited sense of agency and voice in decision-making among youth, and the increasingly unlikely return to Myanmar due to armed conflict, options for the future appeared to be limited. For many, the only option for a more promising future may be the remote possibility of resettlement to a third country. More evidence on how the current conflict and crisis are affecting the wellbeing of children and youth in all education systems is needed, which will assist in designing appropriate interventions to support positive wellbeing outcomes.

Limited literature on education contributing to peacebuilding

While education may be generally theorised as having a role to play in national peacebuilding in Myanmar, there is limited empirical evidence investigating this claim. Smith et al. (2016) generally observe Myanmar youth to be framed ambivalently as both threats and bearers of hope towards sustainable peacebuilding, social cohesion and transformation and development. Interviews with youth

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[45] Myanmar Global School-based Student Health Survey 2016, World Health Organization, 2016
[46] Analysis of Access to Essential Health Services in Myanmar 2021-2023, The World Bank, January 2024

from Yangon Region and Mon State by Higgins et al. (2016) reveal that youth feel that attempts to engage them politically are often tokenistic. They report that their experiences with schooling are largely negative and disempowering. Various factors undermine their agency, including a lack of access to quality and relevant education. However, youth continue to see education as a key contributor to peace and social transformation. Drawing upon interviews with teachers in government and MNEC schools, Maber et al. (2019) report that teachers' agency to promote peacebuilding is constrained by the instrumentalist approach to education imposed by the education system in which teachers are expected to be obedient civil servants. Teachers in these two systems were aware of the potential of critical history teaching to contribute to peacebuilding, but they felt obliged to follow the curricular frameworks prescribed by the government. Additionally, their own biases about national history were reproduced through their teaching activities. Observing and interviewing a small sample of Karen, Kachin, Chin and Lisu educators across different non-state schools, Wong (2017) found that ethnic identity shaped perspectives about language-in-education, peacebuilding and reconciliation. She reported that some educators were active in peacebuilding roles, while others were more passive or ambivalent.

There is some literature about using non-formal education spaces to actively engage with education for peace**.** Drawing on anecdotes from experienced national and international educators, Wong (2022) profiles various endeavours occurring in non-formal learning spaces that position education as a liberator, using critical pedagogies to engage with inequalities and injustices. This includes addressing structural violence, developing peace curricula, discussing identity-based conflict, addressing biases in history teaching, and examining teacher agency. These projects are generally reported to benefit peacebuilding outcomes at the classroom level. In her work leading history curriculum workshops for non-formal learning spaces, Metro (2013) finds potential for reconciliation emerging from non-linear and unpredictable intergroup encounters between participants from different ethnic backgrounds. However, due to the shrinking civil society space following the coup, it is unclear to what extent non-formal learning spaces within Myanmar will remain safe spaces to engage in education for peace activities.

D. Interventions

Understanding how change occurs from pre-existing conditions to current conditions helps identify potential solutions to improve both education policy and practise during times of conflict and crisis. Interventions are considered most effective when they target and improve the four drivers of learning.

The policy systems level interventions should enhance the coherence of the education system operations to help achieve goals related to access, quality and continuity. This may include increased funding, provision of infrastructure and training, coordination between different actors, and improved data systems. However, isolated improvements in or the lack of coherence among these factors are unlikely to promote alignment, adaptability and accountability in policy decision-making and system operations.

At the local systems level, interventions should improve children's access, quality and continuity of education and foster coherence among households, schools, classrooms and communities to achieve equity and holistic outcomes for learners. This requires implementing contextually relevant, cost-effective and cost-efficient educational interventions that foster the drivers of learning for all learners.

Interventions at both the policy and local systems levels need to be carefully selected, designed and adapted to address the specific demands of different types of conflict and crisis. This ensures that

goals, target mechanisms and systems, and implementation strategies are well-aligned and sufficient to meet the challenges and conditions presented. This section examines the evidence on interventions, beginning with policy and programmatic interventions impacting access, quality, continuity and coherence, followed by interventions promoting peace, democracy and reconciliation.

D. 1. Interventions impacting drivers of learning and 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?**

- **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), physical and mental health, and wellbeing? What evidence exists about their impact?**

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

There is a lack of systematic evaluation of policy interventions, although many studies have discussed the dynamics and implications of the Myanmar government's education reform process, as covered earlier in our analysis of the evidence. The one clear piece of effectiveness research on a policy intervention is the mid-term review of Myanmar's NESP (MoE, 2020). This review used a mixed methods approach to evaluate the NESP according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria. In particular, the review focused on three of the six OECD-DAC criteria – relevance, effectiveness and efficiency – with gender and social inclusion as a cross-cutting theme.

Regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the NESP in conflict and crisis settings in Myanmar, the review noted that although there is no mention of EiE within the NESP, the MoE has made some efforts to provide government support for displaced learners to access schools in host communities (or in temporary learning spaces) and take government exams, payments for volunteer educators, and provisions of textbooks. Per-student budget allocation was found to have increased to conflict-affected areas, but over the same period, the examination scores of students in these areas remained low. The review suggested this is because many students in these areas have a non-Burmese mother tongue, and the NESP does not provide any explicit learning strategies to cater to minority language users. Finally, the review observed an institutional lack of awareness about inclusivity and limited capacity to implement inclusive practices at the school level. Moreover, quality data to understand and address equity and inclusion issues was found to be lacking, such that while the NESP advocates for inclusive education practices, the public system is not well positioned to realise this.

Six studies were found on interventions at the local systems level that aimed at improving access, quality and continuity of education. Of these, only one was set in a humanitarian context within Myanmar and only two were deemed to have higher than limited strength of confidence. In general, there is a lack of rigorous impact evaluations on policy and programmatic interventions in the Myanmar context. None of the studies in our evidence review considered cost-effectiveness.

The most encouraging study comes from Save the Children and examines its Catch-up Clubs (CuCs) intervention, which is based on Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) (Arlini et al., 2023a, 2023b). The study revealed that after 50 to 60 hours of remedial instruction over seven weeks, the literacy levels of the children in the CuCs had reached higher literacy levels than those who did not attend the clubs: Level

4-Story (57.7% vs. 28.4%, p<0.05) and Level 5-Comprehension (21.4% vs. 10.1%, p<0.05). However, the number of children from both the treatment and control groups who reached the highest level (Level 5-Comprehension) was relatively low at endline. The overall literacy level of children in the intervention group increased by 0.92, suggesting that the CuCs were effective in supporting children to improve their foundational literacy by nearly one level. There was no statistically significant difference between the progression of boys and girls in the CuCs.

Moreover, the CuCs were designed to support children's SEL development, which was measured through a survey of seven questions mapped onto the skills of (i) social engagement, (ii) stress management, (iii) empathy and (iv) problem-solving. At endline, children in CuCs were twice as likely to show high SEL competency as children in the control group.

Other interventions found in the literature relate to pedagogy and supplementary learning programmes. TeacherFOCUS enrolled 132 MLC teachers in a 10-month teacher training based on its Learn-Choose-Use (LCU) approach (Tyrosvoutis et al., 2021b). The study found that participants in the LCU intervention, designed as collaborative and experiential workshops, improved knowledge-based teaching competencies by an average of 15.34% across 10 observed criteria. For many competencies, the average participant improved from a 'competent' level to a 'distinguished' level, as per the TeacherFOCUS' rubric. The greatest improvements occurred in the domains of Professional Skills and Practices, and Professional Growth and Development.

Elsewhere, an evaluation of the Child-Centred Approach (CCA) pedagogy across monastic schools, which had been trained in CCA through a cascading model pushed by international actors, found little uptake of the pedagogy (Lall, 2010 and 2011). This was partly attributed to CCA being a Western approach to pedagogy, whose emphasis on student-centredness undermined traditional hierarchical structures of respect for teachers and elders, resulting in a culture clash in the classroom and at home. Moreover, CCA was difficult to implement due to logistical issues, such as large class sizes (between 60-100 students) encouraging teacher-centred, rote-learning instruction. There was also a lack of adequate teaching aids to assist teachers in applying CCA, and teachers stated that they did not have sufficient time to prepare lesson plans that leveraged the approach.

In Thailand, a three-day in-service multicultural education training was found to improve the multicultural competencies of teachers in Thai government schools with migrant students, as compared to a control group (Arphattananon, 2021b). The content of the training was designed by the researcher around three core competencies – multicultural knowledge, multicultural skills and multicultural attitudes – and included four modules: (i) rights to education of migrant children; (ii) cultures of migrant students from Myanmar; (iii) prejudice and stereotype reduction; (iv) pedagogic approaches to teaching migrant students. The training consisted of lectures by the researcher and guest speakers, group discussion and lesson planning. However, the sustainability of multicultural competency gains is questioned due to the short duration of the training and the absence of longer-term follow-up evaluation of teacher competency.

Also in Thailand, the introduction of Montessori education by the Khom Loy Development Foundation was found to improve MLC pre-primary students' performance on the 54-month Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), as compared to a control group (Tobin et al., 2015). The Montessori programme lasted one academic year and replaced the normal MLC educational experience, moving away from a teacher-centred and rote-learning pedagogy. The ASQ assessed students on five domains: (i) communication skills; (ii) gross motor skills; (iii) fine motor skills; (iv) problem-solving skills; (v) personal-social skills. However, only the improvement in the personal-social domain was found to be statistically significant due to the small sample size.

Finally, a supplementary Dhamma education programme in monastic schools was found to improve the resilience of students when comparing baseline and endline scores on the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Phyu and Han, 2021). The curriculum used in the programme, which occurred once per week for nine months, focused on Buddhist philosophy and teachings to build a harmonious and peaceful country. It was reportedly taught using CCA. The immediate gains of the programme were found to have decreased during follow-up assessment three months later. Anecdotal reports, however, suggested that students who had attended the programme were continuing to exhibit resilient behaviours.

Overall, we did not find much implementation or effectiveness research on interventions related to policies, programmes and practices within ethnic education. Evidence from our KIIs suggests interventions are occurring, such as in relation to language-in-education and teacher competency frameworks, but these interventions have not yet been studied. A table categorising the intervention evidence can be found in Appendix 1.

D. 2. Interventions promoting peace, democracy and reconciliation

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

No systematic evaluations were found relating to interventions that promote peace, democracy and reconciliation. Only a few interventions from the literature have a peacebuilding element. UNICEF's LESC project aimed to foster a coordinated and comprehensive, evidence-based approach to addressing language-in-education issues, which have been a major historical grievance (UNICEF, 2016). LESC facilitated dialogues for various education stakeholder groups, including state and non-state actors, to debate and contest social issues and canvas policy alternatives. These facilitated dialogues were rooted in deliberative democracy, emphasising the importance of both the process and product in decision-making.

Four facilitated dialogues were held: one in Mae Sot (Thailand), two in Mawlamyine (Myanmar) and one in Naypyidaw (Myanmar). The facilitated dialogues were reported to have allowed for constructive and positive relationships to be formed among different stakeholders, established a dialogue space for discussing language-in-education, and created a sense of agency and ownership around language-in-education. The facilitated dialogues resulted in the creation of the Naypyitaw Principles (UNICEF, 2016:36), to be used for the development of a future language policy:

> **Unity**: by supporting all to learn Myanmar language and literacy, for common and equal citizenship

> **Diversity**: by supporting ethnic and indigenous communities to maintain, enjoy and transmit their languages to their children

> **Cohesion**: by promoting inclusion and participation for ethnic and indigenous minorities

> **Education**: by improving equitable access and participation, literacy, vocational and life skills and academic standards

> **Employment**: by raising standards in Myanmar, English and mother tongues, where relevant, to help young people enter the competitive labour market including trades and professions

> **Service delivery**: by supporting communication planning to make sure that public administrations are communicating effectively with all citizens especially interpreting and translation in health, legal contexts and social services

International relations: in order to support trade, diplomacy and travel through widespread knowledge of English and labour migration in the context of ASEAN mobility and learning of strategic foreign languages

Inclusive communication: by integrating support for visually- and hearing-impaired persons and other communication disabled citizens

Ethnic rights: by recognising the unique cultures and traditions of Myanmar's indigenous people

A volume edited by Wong (2022) highlights how different educators have designed and implemented peace education initiatives. The volume includes anecdotes by national and international educators about their praxis, largely in non-formal learning spaces before the coup. Many anecdotes describe specific activities, tasks or approaches for fostering peacebuilding attitudes. The anecdotes are grouped around the themes of identity, agency and critical pedagogy, and they encompass topics such as the teaching of history, multilingual education, creative dialogues, and teaching social cohesion.

IV. EVIDENCE GAPS

Following our comprehensive review of the evidence base on educational provisions within the contexts of ethnic, refugee and migrant education, we have identified eight policy system-level and five local system-level evidence gaps (Tables 13 and 14). To assist in the further development of the knowledge needed to ensure evidence-based decision-making during the conflict and crises following the 2021 coup, we recommend these gaps be addressed through future research projects. In describing each evidence gap, we draw upon the ERICC conceptual framework (Figure 1) as an organisation and analysis tool.

Table 13. **Summary of Evidence Gaps at the Policy Systems Level**

Policy 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)**

ERICC

	(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 of 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)**

Post-coup political economy: Firstly, a political economy analysis of ethnic, refugee and migrant education following the coup is needed. The coup has unquestionably shifted 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. Many international donors and development partners are not engaging with the SAC, under guidance from the JRF, and consequently more aid and assistance is going through ethnic actors to reach communities in need. Conflict has led to the formation of new, and sometimes much more localised governance bodies, many with an education mandate. This includes the NUG and its claims to being the rightful government of Myanmar, as well as provisional governments (often termed 'Interim Executive Councils') in Chin and Karenni. New EEPs have been formed and historical EEPs have grown in size and capability. Many EEPs are in unprecedented conversation with one another, with federalism being a not uncommon topic of discussion, although many are also beholden to the political agendas of their respective EAOs. On the one hand, there is a broad goal held by many resistance actors of establishing federal democracy as Myanmar's future political settlement. On the other hand, as EAOs seize territory from the SAC, they use educational provisions as a tool to promote their political legitimacy, which is typically based around claims to self-determination for their ethnic peoples. Recognising historical provisions in Thailand, the presence of transnational education in the forms of refugee and migrant education has heretofore been overlooked in considerations of federal 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 dynamics enable or constrain efforts to improve access, quality and continuity of education.

Alignment of federal education goals: Given the frequency with which federalism and federal education appear to be discussed, it is problematic that the alignment of the federal education goals within and between diverse ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems is unclear. Moreover, the extent to which parallel education actors believe in and are enacting the NUG's FDEP is unknown. More broadly, the overall relationship of the NUG (as a policymaking entity) with different parallel actors is underreported. The NUG has seemingly taken the first steps towards envisioning and establishing a federal democracy, but little appears known about if and how other governance and educational stakeholders are involved. If there is potential for the NUG to lead envisioning and forming a future federal democracy for Myanmar, it is pertinent to investigate the ways in which parallel actors are involved in the formulation of this educational vision, and whether there is the required level of trust among the education leaders representing NUG and ethnic education systems to engage in a meaningful participatory dialogue. Research into the alignment of the federal education goals of the diverse actors will provide insights into levels of coherence 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. There is some evidence of hierarchical decision-making characterised by elite capture. But at the same time, during our KIIs, parallel systems were described as operating more community-based education models, which are typically characterised by bottom-up participation. 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 overall on the financing of ethnic, refugee and migrant educational provision. This is required to understand the sustainability of parallel education and identify potential funding models that ensure the stability of these provisions, recognising there has historically been a dependency on international aid and assistance. Relatedly, it is unknown how this dependency 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. Data systems overall appear weak, fragmented and under-prioritised, which leads to ad-hoc policy and programme interventions. Therefore, strengthening these systems could support greater evidence-based decision-making and the allocation of educational funds to improve drivers of learning.

Potential contributions of education to peace and reconciliation: Education has historically been both a victim and perpetrator of violence in Myanmar. 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 national peace, justice and reconciliation. There is some concern that parallel systems may be reproducing cultural violence in the form of ethnonationalism and the suppression of education as a means to develop critical consciousness. More investigation into the potential of education as a liberator or peacebuilder is therefore warranted, recognising that the provisions of parallel education are more often than not responses to conflict and protracted crisis.

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 despite frequent disruptions. In particular, evidence on how a system is organised and how decisions are made therein will help identify leverage points for introducing interventions that address access, quality and continuity of education. More broadly, there is a lack of evidence on how ongoing conflict and displacement have impacted systems coherence. This impact includes the creation of new constraints and enablers to policies, resources and data, the presence of new demands for policy systems interventions, and the overall coherence of access, quality and continuity.

Table 14. Summary of Evidence Gaps at the Local Systems Level

Local Systems Level	• 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)**

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 contribute to a better understanding of the current landscape of education and assist in designing feasible 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. The Myanmar public system has undergone a lengthy curriculum revision that resulted in improved, but not entirely inclusive, textbooks, most notably regarding the teaching of history. It is unclear what specific curricula is being used in parallel systems, including whether it serves the needs of the learners and communities in their diverse social, political and economic contexts and, more importantly, how it contributes to peace, justice, social cohesion, economic prosperity, and preparedness for potential disruptions. It is unclear how different provisions of education approach the teaching of history and support learners to situate their positions within the wider political, social and cultural context of Myanmar. Given that history teaching is intricately linked with the formation of national identity, and hence implicates the processes of peacebuilding, the analysis of the history curriculum and teaching is significant for promoting equity, inclusion and diversity for sustainable peacebuilding. Investigating curricula content could contribute to understanding how non-state educational provisions include and exclude particular identities, affecting the potential for social cohesion.

Implementation research on MTB-MLE and teacher competency frameworks: Although MTB-MLE is championed in the literature, there is limited evidence on the extent to which inclusive language policies and practices exist at the school and classroom levels in ethnic, refugee and migrant education. Little is known about the political incentives for the education authorities to adopt MTB-MLE, and the extent to which different language-in-education practices serve the needs of learners, teachers and communities is unclear. If MTB-MLE is desired by stakeholders, it is essential to document the enablers and constraints of its implementation. It is also pertinent 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 unclear what values around teachers and teaching are present in these frameworks. It is also unknown if and how these frameworks are being used to enhance

teacher management and professional development, 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. There is generally very limited data on the foundational skills of children in ethnic, refugee and migrant education, not to mention data on critical and creative thinking skills. Furthermore, evidence on SEL, physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes is needed. There is seemingly no literature on interventions designed to improve achievement and equity of child outcomes. Baseline assessments on these different outcomes will help identify needs and design appropriate interventions. 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 learning outcomes.

V. CONCLUSION

The state of education is increasingly fragmented within the Myanmar context as more households move away from the public system now controlled by the State Administration Council. It is largely assumed that demand for ethnic, refugee and migrant education has significantly increased since 2021, although the scale of demand is an estimate rather than evidence-based. These unique systems have historically existed on the margins of the state education systems of Myanmar and Thailand, and in the face of complex challenges. During Myanmar's 2010s reform era, there was limited convergence between ethnic education providers and the Ministry of Education, as education reform was dominated by the state and the peace process sidelined education as an important dimension of political settlement and reconciliation. Moving forward, the historical grievances of disadvantaged groups in and through education must be acknowledged and addressed in the building of a future, potentially federal, political settlement for Myanmar. In Thailand, refugee education has historically been isolated by the Thai government, while MLCs have been tolerated in a zone of exception.

Before 2021, investments in ethnic education were more pronounced than in refugee and migrant education, primarily due to the agenda of the international community, which generally prioritised the return and repatriation of Myanmar populations in Thailand. At present, all parallel systems appear to need greater investments across the board. Schools in conflict-affected contexts are either directly targeted for violent attacks or caught in the clashes between the Myanmar military and resistance groups. This has put children's and teachers' lives at enormous risk. Where schools have survived the clashes or direct attacks, the extent to which they serve children's academic outcomes, social emotional learning and wellbeing is largely unknown.

This evidence review concludes that much more knowledge needs to be generated about how education has been affected by the crisis following the 2021 military coup. It is unclear to what extent access, quality, continuity and coherence of education have been affected in conflict-affected regions of Myanmar. 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 they are being affected. While recognising that data collection can be tremendously difficult and sensitive during armed conflict, it is nonetheless crucial to know how different groups – including girls, persons with disabilities and displaced persons – have been affected in terms of their ability to access and continue through quality education.

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. Regarding the interventions already underway in these settings, more investigation is needed to assess how they are being implemented and whether they achieve desired changes in outcomes. As it stands, there is limited reporting on interventions occurring in ethnic, refugee and migrant settings. This is partially because of the lack of coordination and fragmentation of educational initiatives but mainly due to security risks relating to data sharing and public dissemination.

As a historical grievance, education can also serve as a catalyst for durable peacebuilding, reconciliation and social justice. However, educational processes that promote biassed history, glorify violence, repress cultural diversity, and ignore the diverse needs of learners and communities can fuel conflict drivers. More research is needed to determine the types of policies, curricula and linguistic provisions that are needed to promote reconciliatory education, in both parallel systems and a national education system that brings different provisions together, ensuring recognition of diversity, representation of different groups in educational decision-making, and redistribution of educational resources to address inequalities. It is therefore vital to analyse all types of systems critically and investigate the future vision of education for all communities.

The findings of this evidence review have, to some extent, addressed each of the research questions, but gaps in our collective, public knowledge remain. There is scant evidence on the current, post-2021 state of policies, budgets and data systems. Although there is very useful analysis of pre-existing policy enablers and constraints, updated analysis is needed for the current crisis. Relatedly, we lack analysis on the coherence of policies and programmes as stakeholders, to varying extents, begin to envision and prefigure a future federal democratic political settlement for Myanmar.

Moreover, we lack updated insights into the risk and protective factors at the community level post-2021. Data on access, quality and continuity has been lacking, although there is some useful qualitative commentary on the significance of language-in-education and curriculum. The academic and wellbeing outcomes of education have historically been underreported in ethnic, refugee and migrant education, leaving us with minimal baseline insights. There is a lack of study into interventions, exploring what works, how it works and for whom it works, regarding academic and non-academic (SEL, physical and mental health, wellbeing) outcomes of education. Finally, while there has been some beneficial analysis of education's relationship to peacebuilding in Myanmar, this reflects the pre-2021 landscape, which has been irrevocably changed by the coup.

Moving forward, we identify the following nine broad areas of research in the context of Myanmar:

- Policy framing, formulation and enactment during crisis
- Language, identity, culture and history in education
- The effects of protracted conflict, crisis and disruption on the drivers of learning
- The safety and wellbeing of students, teachers and communities during conflict and protracted crisis
- Learning outcomes across different forms of educational provision
- SEL, health and wellbeing outcomes
- Teacher management, quality and professional development
- Education's potential contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation

- Aspirations for a federal education system

These research themes have also been validated by a range of educational stakeholders representing the three educational provisions – ethnic, refugee and migrant education – reviewed in this paper. Our research agenda report (Rinehart et al., 2024) provides a rigorous analysis of the research agenda for the education sector in Myanmar. Greater evidence in these areas, covering both the (macro) policy systems and (micro-meso) community systems levels, stands to 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 – access, quality, continuity and coherence.

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APPENDIX 1

Table. Intervention Evidence Categorisation

Intervention Name *Type, Setting, Brief findings*	Strength of Confidence	Direction of Impact	Study Reference
Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Education – National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) *Implementation of policy reforms in humanitarian and fragile settings* Myanmar's NESP was initiated in 2016 as a comprehensive guide for the implementation of education reforms across all levels of education. Nine transformational shifts were envisioned towards the achievement of the NESP's overall goal of 'improved teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions.' Drivers of Learning: Access, Quality, Continuity and Coherence Evidence for the impact of the NESP comes from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations, secondary quantitative research, and a literature review. While the NESP was found to have impacted some overall positive change, the review determined that it had not significantly improved the conditions of teaching and learning for students in conflict settings and ethnic minority students. The study employed a mixed methods approach with a reliance on quantitative data from the MoE, which was reportedly of low quality and not sufficiently disaggregated for nuanced analysis of educational inclusion based on student background characteristics.	Moderate	±	MoE, 2020
Save the Children – Catch-up Clubs (CuCs) *Academic remediation in humanitarian settings* The CuCs provided seven weeks of academic remediation through a community-led, play-based literacy model that was based upon Save the Children's Literacy Books programme and Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level. The CuCs were piloted with more than 3,000 children aged 8 to 15, in Grades 3 to 7, from 36 communities in conflict-affected Rakhine and Kayin (Karen) States. Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of the CuCs comes from a quasi-natural experimental impact evaluation that investigated the causal relationship between the CuCs and the children's outcomes relating to foundational literacy and SEL competencies. The CuCs were found to have a significant and positive impact on the levels of literacy, SEL competency and self-confidence in participating children as compared to children	Moderate	+*	Arlini et al., 2023a and 2023b

who did not participate. This study used inferential statistics through regression analyses to control for children's background characteristics, wellbeing status, and prior schooling and learning to show that CuCs improved foundational literacy by nearly one full level and increased the likelihood that children would achieve high SEL competency.			
TeacherFOCUS – Learn-Choose-Use (LCU) Approach *In-service teacher training in fragile settings* TeacherFOCUS provided an in-service teacher training programme of three 1-day workshops over a 10-month period based on its LCU approach to 132 MLC teachers from primary, middle and high schools in Tak Province, Thailand. The LCU approach allows teachers to learn new instructional techniques through modelling, choose which techniques they would like to try, and practise using these new techniques in micro-teaching before having their class observed. Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of the LCU approach comes from a pre-/post-test evaluation of observed teacher performance as measured by Myanmar's TCSF. Teachers who received the LCU approach were found to increase their performance across all domains of Myanmar's TCSF, with an average increase of 15.34%. This study was purely descriptive and did not take into account limitations of validity when using a pre-/post-test evaluation method.	Limited	+*	Tyrosvouti s et al., 2021b
Mahidol University – Multicultural Education Training Programme *In-service teacher training in fragile settings* The study author designed and implemented a three-day in-service multicultural education training programme that was delivered to 80 educators of migrant children in Thai Government Schools in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand over three weeks Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of the multicultural education training programme comes from a comparison of treatment and control samples in Samut Sakhon Province, with the comparison schools having similar characteristics in terms of the number of migrant students, the number of teachers, age distribution and teachers' experiences working in multicultural schools. Sixty-five completed multicultural competence questionnaires were analysed. Teachers who took part in the training demonstrated a higher level of multicultural competence compared to those who did not, and an independent-samples t-test showed this to be statistically significant. This study was purely descriptive and did not control for treatment	Limited	+*	Arphattan anon, 2021b

sample characteristics such as age, educational background, grade level taught and experiences teaching in multicultural schools when determining association between the intervention and an increase in multicultural competence.			
Dhamma School Foundation – Dhamma Sunday School *Supplementary class in fragile settings* The Dhamma School Foundation offered Dhamma Sunday School for grades 1 to 8, two hours weekly for nine months and with a curriculum focusing on Buddhist philosophy and teachings to build a harmonious and peaceful country through a child-centred approach. This study looked at the impact of the Dhamma Sunday School programme on 44 Grade 5 students at two monastic schools. Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of the Dhamma Sunday School on students' resilience comes from a comparison of the treatment and control samples of randomly selected students at two monastic schools. Comparisons occurred at the pre-treatment, post-treatment and 3-month follow-up levels with students completing the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale. No statistically significant difference was found at the pre-treatment level using a paired-sample t-test, but statistically significant differences were found at the post-treatment and 3-month follow-up levels. At the post-treatment level, the treatment group scored nearly six points higher and at the 3-month follow-up they scored nearly four points higher, although their overall resilience score had decreased by an average of nearly five points between the post-treatment and 3-month follow-up levels. Interviews with the presiding monk of each school confirmed that students who had attended the Dhamma Sunday School were exhibiting more resilient behaviours according to the scale used. This was a two-part study that began by using regression analysis to investigate individual, family and environment protective factors that correlate to degrees of resilience. However, the evaluation of the intervention did not take these factors into account and was instead purely descriptive.	Moderate	+*	Phyu and Han, 2021
UNICEF and JICA – The Child-Centred Approach (CCA) *Teacher training in fragile settings* Through a variety of local partner organisations, UNICEF and JICA offered CCA training to monastic school teachers at various levels and for various durations and frequencies. Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of CCA training comes from classroom observations in 11 monastic schools, interviews with 66 teachers and 19 teacher trainers, and focus groups with 58 parents or caregivers across	Limited	±	Lall, 2011 and 2011

four schools. It was found that although CCA is expressed to be a better approach to teaching and learning than more traditional rote memorisation methods, it undermines traditional hierarchical structures of respect for teachers and elders, which leads to a culture clash in the classroom and at home. Moreover, teachers face many barriers in implementing CCA, including a lack of resources, large class sizes and resistance from principals and head monks. The CCA training was also found to have been rolled out unequally with not all teachers at all schools receiving the training, which led to inter-collegial conflict. This study relied on qualitative methods and did not seek to investigate the extent to which the CCA method quantifiably impacted student learning outcomes or teacher competencies.			
Khom Loy Development Foundation – Montessori Education *Teacher training in fragile settings* The Khom Loy Development Foundation converted a pre-primary classroom of 60 migrant children in Mae Sot, Thailand into a Montessori classroom, moving away from more traditional teacher-centred and rote-learning instruction. Drivers of Learning: Quality Evidence for the impact of the Montessori class comes from a difference-in-difference comparison of a treatment class and a control class using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) with 66 children. At the baseline assessment, students in the Montessori class scored lower than the control class, and after one year the Montessori class had closed the gap by 18 points. Due to the small sample size, this study only had adequate statistical power to detect very large differences between groups. Therefore, the Montessori class intervention only led to a statistically significant improvement in the personal-social domain of the ASQ.	Limited	+*	Tobin et al., 2015

ABOUT ERICC

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.