Myanmar’s Education Reforms

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Teacher education and training: Is changing practice possible?

Introduction

The chapter focuses on the reforms and the restructuring of teacher education and training in light of the issues faced by student teachers and teacher educators. Drawing on original survey data collected across 20 education colleges in the midst of the reform process in 2015 and 2016, it engages with the views, hopes, challenges and fears faced by those who want to become teachers. As teacher training is being revised at the time of writing, the chapter can only reflect the realities as they are in the midst of flux, rather than discuss any tangible results of the reforms in this part of the education sector. What is clear throughout the process, however, is the lack of attention paid to the issues of inequalities inherent in the teaching profession as it stands.

The chapter also engages with a number of additional teacher training programmes supplemented by development partners, in particular, the more recent engagement of the BC-funded ‘English for Education College Trainers’ (EfECT) project that focused on upgrading teacher educators’ English and teaching methodology; and the UNESCO ‘Strengthening Teacher Education in Myanmar’ (STEM) programme that is responsible for the review and upgrading of the pre-service teacher education curriculum. The chapter discusses how this teacher education curricular review is not in sync with the curricular reforms of basic education (discussed in Chapter 2 of this volume), as they are supported by different aid agencies with little communication or coordination. Teacher education is, therefore, another example of the tensions that arise from these uncoordinated efforts to improve education across Myanmar.

The issues relating to teacher education are complex, shaped by cultural gender politics and inequitable structures that result in many
more female teachers in the system, yet with more of their male counterparts reaching positions of power by becoming TEOs or SEOs. Issues with ethnicity and language, specifically the special challenges faced by the few ethnic nationality student teachers who manage to get into the education colleges, are touched on and expanded upon in Chapter 6.\(^2\) While the lack of ethnic teachers is a real issue for ethnic nationality children who cannot understand Burmese, this chapter focuses on gender inequities and discusses how reformed teacher education might become a key part of sustaining peace and social justice across the country.\(^3\)

### Background on teacher training

Until the 2012 education reforms, Myanmar did not have a comprehensive teacher education policy. Consequently, there was no framework for pre- or in-service teacher training and none for the professional standards the various education stakeholders were supposed to meet. According to a JICA report, pre-service teacher training had stopped in 1971 but was re-instituted in 1998 when five teacher training colleges (TTCs) and 14 teacher training schools (TTSs) were upgraded to education colleges (JICA, 2013). The system that is being reformed today has, therefore, been in place virtually unchanged for around 20 years.

Teacher trainees, known in Myanmar as student teachers, are required to have graduated with matriculation from upper secondary school. The main way of becoming a teacher has traditionally been to take the Diploma in Teacher Education (DTEd), a two-year post-matriculation course. Previously, there was a one-year certificate qualification route to become a primary school teacher, but the new pre-primary teacher training (PPTT), a four-month course for graduates to become primary teachers, has now replaced this. The DTEd allows teachers to teach at middle school level, although they will start as primary assistant teachers when they graduate, and then move up to middle school after five years when they can become junior assistant teachers (JAT). Under this system, if teachers wanted to become secondary school teachers or move on to administrative posts in education, they needed a Bachelor of Education degree that could be acquired at the Institutes of Education in Yangon or Sagaing, for those in Lower and Upper Myanmar respectively.\(^4\) The whole system is being revamped as the new teacher education curriculum is being upgraded to a four-year degree level course, further discussed below.

The traditional basic career path of a teacher was linear, from primary assistant teacher (PAT), to junior assistant teacher (JAT) through...
to senior assistant teacher (SAT) and above. By gaining years of teaching experience and upgrading teaching certificates and degrees, teachers advanced in their careers and increased their salaries, moving from primary schools to secondary schools as they became more experienced. Due to the ascending linear salary system, once a teacher started their career, they started looking for a better position in a higher level school. It also meant that the most inexperienced teachers were serving at primary level, often in the most difficult and remote parts of the country, and the more experienced teachers were in secondary schools in urban areas. As discussed further below, this linear model is also being changed as part of the reforms, so that student teachers train towards a level (primary or secondary) and a specialisation.

At the time of writing, there are 22 education colleges and two institutes of education that produce around 10,000 teachers annually. In the 2019–20 academic year, education colleges admitted 3,343 first-year student teachers (1,676 female and 1,667 male), for the new four-year degree programme (May San Yee, 2019). These numbers are lower than those for previous years, presumably, to ensure manageability for education colleges in the roll-out of the four-year degree programme. The four-year degree programme discussed further below was rolled-out in December 2019 for first-year student teachers while the second-year courses continue to follow the previous two-year curriculum.

To date, the Institutes of Education in Yangon and Sagaing approve any changes to the curriculum and ensure consistency across the board of the education colleges. The curriculum is quite demanding: 17 subjects are covered in the first year and 14 in the second year, including the following (UNESCO, 2016):

- Subject content knowledge: knowledge and understanding of school subjects in the basic education curriculum (referred to as academic subjects). The subject textbooks are all in English, which creates issues.
- Pedagogic content knowledge: teaching methods and ways of assessing learning related to specific subject areas, and how these are matched to the capabilities of learners (referred to as ‘methods’ courses).
- Professional studies: understanding how children learn; knowledge and skill in classroom management and pastoral care; knowledge of effective techniques to promote learning; acquisition of professional identity as a teacher; and awareness of relevant educational legislation, responsibilities, etc.
• A short 9-week teaching practicum referred to as block teaching.
• Co-curricular subjects include music, art, agriculture, physical education, domestic science, and industrial science. These courses, on the whole, appear to be considered the bottom of the ‘curricula hierarchy’.

Classes in ICT are offered in all education colleges. The ICT teacher educators teach basic Microsoft programs with training handbooks that are often out of date. Student teachers have access to computers during these classes although they often have to share. The lack of reliable electricity supply and non-functioning computers mean that practical ‘hands on’ training is not always possible. According to a UNESCO site visit, the teacher educators are also responsible for fixing the computers when they break and supporting the education college staff to do their own computer-related work (UNESCO, 2016: 12–3). Teacher educators use a combination of methods that include demonstration, whole-class teaching using question and answer, lecture and some simulation. However, the main emphasis is on theoretical knowledge about teaching and not on demonstrating how to teach or using learner-centric approaches so that student teachers experience the teaching methodology they are supposed to apply. The academic subject textbooks serve as ‘manuals of instruction’ for activities that are to be conducted by the teachers. Despite the fact that many teachers will face challenges that include language barriers as well as multigrade teaching during their posting, the diversity of potential learners and their different abilities are not addressed by the pedagogical approaches that are taught at the education colleges.

Anecdotal evidence shows that different education colleges do use different teaching strategies, sometimes including storytelling, observation, demonstration and role-play. Demonstration lessons include one demonstration for each subject the students will have to teach – including maths, Myanmar language, English, science, geography and history. The student teachers are then asked to give feedback. There is also ‘peer teaching’ that involves groups of student teachers making lesson plans, which are delivered to the other student teachers and the education college teacher educator, who then gives feedback. It seems that this strategy is practiced before the ‘block teaching’. However, discussion as well as question-and-answer sessions appear to be the most commonly used methodologies, emphasising the passive methods that predominate in the classrooms across Myanmar. It seems that teacher educators and their students predominantly apply the method in which they have been taught when they themselves are teaching.
During the nine-week block teaching where student teachers practice in schools, they often find themselves left to their own devices, barely supported by the already overloaded local head teacher or the teacher educators. Feedback on a recent project spoke of ‘surviving’ rather than ‘learning’ on the job. Many student teachers found that the theory they have been taught is quite different from the practice they have to apply, leading to confusing situations. As a part of the block teaching students are now encouraged to conduct basic action research under the heading of ‘lesson study’. This includes choosing a classroom action research theme, designing the lesson plan, being observed using observation tools and checklists and receiving constructive feedback. Clearly, for this to work well requires the support of peers and the head teacher, which is not always readily available.

To date, the education colleges have been perceived as second-class institutions within Myanmar’s educational hierarchy. The education colleges have extremely limited budgets, out-dated curricula and textbooks, and inadequate teaching and learning resources. The teacher-to-student ratio is supposed to be 35–40 students per teacher educator, although there is evidence of larger classes with up to 55 student teachers. Teacher educators are considered overworked, not only because of the time spent teaching, but because they need to prepare classes, mark correspondence work from in-service teachers and manage continuous professional development (CPD) activities for in-service teachers (UNESCO, 2016: 12–3).

It is notable that despite this structure for training teachers, there are still a large number of untrained teachers serving in government schools, especially in the remote and conflict-affected areas. An often cited figure from the MoE in 2000 states that approximately 57 per cent of primary teachers, 58 per cent of middle school teachers and 9 per cent of high school teachers had never attended any teacher training (Thein Lwin, 2000). These figures are 20 years old, but the recent recruitment of daily wage teachers by the government to increase overall teacher numbers might have increased these numbers.

The reforms

When the 2012 reforms started, the MoE was in the midst of implementing its 30-Year Long-Term Plan for Basic Education 2001–31, one of the priority areas being teacher education and specifically the reduction of in-service uncertified teachers, ensuring full strength of teaching staff for
basic education schools in border areas and improving the quality of teacher education (JICA, 2013). These aims were overtaken by the NESP reform priorities for teachers that include the following three priority areas:

- Strengthening teacher quality assurance and management, including the introduction of teacher competency standards, deployment and promotion mechanisms.
- Improving quality of pre-service education using the recently developed Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) as a driver for improvement.
- Improving the quality of teacher CPD including access to a coherent system with basic recognised qualifications and mentoring, and targeted training for the new basic curriculum.

Section 50 of the revised 2015 National Education Law stipulates the following:

Teachers shall:

a) be allowed to research freely without impact to the national benefit
b) be allowed to choose methods which are relevant to the curriculum freely for the development of learning
c) have the opportunity to continue to learn internal or in foreign for improving quality of teaching
d) be allowed to apply to their desired schools or regions freely

To meet the legal and NESP goals, teacher education requires an overhaul.

**A new teacher training curriculum and degree**

To meet ASEAN standards, the teacher education system is preparing to shift to a four-year degree, a basic pre-service qualification that will replace the two-year DTEd. The teacher education curriculum requires new content so as to link in with the new basic education curriculum (JICA's ‘CREATE’ project). A new curriculum is being developed by technical experts including education colleges’ teacher educators and coordinated through UNESCO’s ‘Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education in Myanmar’ (STEM) project, covered in more detail below.
The first-year curriculum was introduced in December 2019. STEM’s focus has been to ensure that student teachers master the competencies – a combination of content knowledge, skills and attitude needed to produce effective learning for pupils in a classroom – shifting from the way they were taught themselves (by rote) to the new student-centred way. The training approach is changing in that teachers no longer only receive the theoretical knowledge to teach, relevant in a content-based curriculum, but receive training in the ability to teach through a competency-based approach. A validation survey for the TCSF is currently being piloted by the MoE before national implementation.13

No publically available study has collected data on how education colleges, teacher educators and student teachers are managing with the new curriculum and the new teaching method or what challenges they face in understanding and implementing these. According to a consultant from TREE, feedback collected for STEM revealed that teacher educators struggled with new subjects, the number of activities that have to be conducted in limited time, and understanding some of the learning outcomes. Some teacher educators complained that the English curriculum was dense, the Myanmar translation confusing and the education colleges lacked resources to support lesson planning.

Part of the change in qualification and coursework has been the development of a TCSF between 2017 and 2019 as a set of written standards underpinning ambitions for the creation of a teaching workforce with the: ‘professional knowledge, understanding and skills associated with the role and duties expected of Myanmar’s teachers and the process of teaching’ (MoE, 2019d: 5). The TCSF was developed by a core working group led by Dr Aung Min, retired Rector of the Yangon University of Education, supported by Dr Aye Aye Myint, Acting Rector of the Yangon University of Education, and included members from the Yangon University of Education (YUOE), the Sagaing University of Education (SUOE), the University for the Development of National Races (UDNR),14 as well as invited representatives from Yankin, Thingangun and Hlegu Education Colleges.15 Technical assistance was provided by UNESCO’s STEM project.16

The field testing of the framework by the TCSF working group in 2016 involved 76 test sites that included education colleges as well as schools. Data was collected from student teachers and teacher educators as well as serving teachers, head teachers and principals of education colleges. The report documents that those interviewed understood the intent of the framework but that the technical language
made it difficult to use and respondents felt the language needed to be simplified. Stakeholders also had concerns on how the framework would be implemented, especially for those teachers with less experience (Aye Aye Myint and Myo Win, 2016: 21–2). This conclusion is supported by UNESCO’s report on STEM and the TCSF that found the introduction of generic international standards to Myanmar creates challenges: ‘Likely issues include difficulties in understanding the language in these products, in transitioning from current to new practices, and difficulties around a lack of knowledge in skills required in using the products’ (UNESCO, 2019b: 21).

Dr Aung Min, the retired Rector of YUOE writes in the foreword to the TCSF (MoE, 2019d: 2) the following:

In Myanmar’s tradition, it is believed that “Knowledge is treasure; Teachers matter and teachers are at the centre of the learning process.” In Myanmar society, teachers are regarded as one of the “five gems” (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, parents and teachers). While remaining in this highly respected position, we must recognize that, as education moves towards a learner-centred approach, the role of the teacher is changing to that of a facilitator. (…) At present, our teachers need to be equipped with the teacher competencies necessary for them to move from a teacher-centred approach, in which teachers engage in purely direct instruction as the sole source of knowledge, to a learner-centred approach, in which the teacher provides guidance and support, coaching and facilitation. In a number of different countries, competency-based teacher training programmes are based on the following categories: knowledge, skills, and attributes or values. (…) The content of each category has been aligned with the Myanmar context.

The standards are not only going to be used to assess and train student teachers at education colleges, but will also form the basis of their professional development throughout their teaching career. The draft document states the following (MoE, 2019d: 3):

As Myanmar raises the quality of the education system, through reforms to the basic education curriculum and structure of schooling (Kindergarten to Grade 12), it needs teachers with the right values, skills and knowledge to be effective practitioners. To achieve this objective, Myanmar needs a strong system of teacher education (pre-service and continuing), with programmes that
provide the theoretical foundations to produce graduates and a quality teacher workforce with the kinds of professional knowledge, understanding and skills associated with the role and duties expected of Myanmar’s teachers and the process of teaching.

As part of the reformed system, teachers will now train for a certain level: KG, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary plus a subject specialisation of their choice. The complete set of competency standards includes teaching competence – the role of the teacher in the classroom, directly linked to the act of teaching (pedagogical content knowledge) as well as teacher competence – the wider systemic view of teacher professionalism including the role and responsibility of the teacher as an individual, within the school, the local community and as a participant in professional networks (MoE, 2019d: 9).

With an interesting nod to the international community and the development partners involved in the education reform process, the document emphasises that the framework: ‘is grounded in the culture of the country’ (MoE, 2019d: 7) and demonstrates: ‘values and attitudes consistent with Myanmar’s tradition of perceiving teachers as role models’ (MoE, 2019d: 17). Whilst not explicitly mentioned, this seems to be a reaction to the various programmes such as the Western CCA pushed upon Myanmar teachers in the years preceding the reforms.

**Promotions and transfers**

Changes to the promotion and transfer system are also planned, but are currently quite unclear. Teachers are all civil servants, and major reforms are under way as detailed in the Civil Service Reform Strategic Action Plan. According to JICA: ‘the civil service personnel management system is not administered consistently … [and] nepotism and bribery are still common practices for recruitment, transfer and promotion’ (JICA, 2017b: 1). President Thein Sein brought in significant wage increases for teachers to relieve issues created by corruption and the tuition business, without which teachers could not survive. According to the WB, the whole wage bill of all civil servants had therefore increased quite dramatically. As of 2013, annual pay and allowances have also been increased whereby all civil servants receive a monthly bonus. A new ‘hardship pay’ was introduced for civil servants (including teachers) who serve in ‘hardship’ areas, mainly remote border areas, to incentivise them to work there.
With the new qualification being a university degree, the implementation and management of pre-service teacher education has been shifted within the MoE from the Department of Teacher Education and Training (DTET) to the Department of Higher Education. In-service teacher training, however, will go on under the DEPT. While teacher educators become academics teaching towards a four-year degree, it is unclear if they will have to rotate from one campus to another, as their peers at universities do. A new points-based system is being put in place where teacher educators can accrue points according to a number of criteria—qualifications, research output, departmental activity, seniority and other activities. Panels, including members from the MoE, unions and departmental staff, will then make recommendations on appointments. The Department of Higher Education is encouraging teacher educators to undertake research and is disbursing grants for this purpose.

The structure of the education colleges is likely to change significantly as the curricular reforms progress. For education colleges to be able to confer degrees, they must have powers equivalent to universities. Options for status change of education colleges are already being discussed and the Higher Education Bill is likely to describe the final decision, but integrating education colleges with existing universities was one possibility being discussed.

It is unclear how the new system will affect the appointment and deployment system for basic education teachers, although a more devolved approach is being considered: ‘Since 2013–4, state/region education officers can make some decisions about teacher deployment, including daily wage teachers’ (MoE, 2016: 40). However, to date, the collaboration of education colleges and TEOs is limited to attending graduation ceremonies at education colleges and coordinating practicum placements for education college students, rather than becoming involved in deployment of teachers to areas of need.

**Teachers: Needs and supply**

The issue of deployment links in with the problem of teacher needs and teacher supply. Every year, teacher vacancies are reported by all the TEOs and, based on this available data, teacher posts are compiled into a list by the DBE by 1 March every year, from which requests for the new teachers are sent to the DEPT. The DEPT then provides a new teacher list and the DBE forms the educational committee chaired by the director general to deploy newly certified teachers from education colleges and
institutes of education. JICA’s report maintains that new teachers are considered depending on their specialised subjects and native hometown, but evidence on the ground does not bear out the claim that consideration of mother tongue and cultural background are linked to new posts (JICA, 2013). Exact data on the supply and demand of teachers does not seem to be available publically, although conversations with state education officers across four states and regions in the past few years point to the fact that the supply of teachers is insufficient to meet the demand, especially in remote areas.

Problems and challenges with teacher education

The current realities of teacher education include a long list of challenges that include the following issues: the teaching at the education colleges, the practicum, ICT, CPD, along with the uncertainties of the changed degree structure. The existing practicum system does not prepare student teachers for the real world and the student teachers do not get adequate support or feedback. This often means they are unable to use a student-centred pedagogy as they face overcrowded classes, classroom management issues, resource shortages and at times language difficulties. With regard to access to computers and the internet during training, the education colleges have few computers (more likely to be desktops than laptops), and these are often located in administrative rooms. Student teachers tend to use their personal phones to access the internet, and instruction on how to use ICT in teaching is not a systematic part of their training.

Even if student teachers leave the education college reasonably well prepared, it is not easy for them to develop their skills further later in their careers. This will be a particular problem as those who have taken the two-year diploma are likely to be seen as second rate to those completing the future four-year teaching degree. There is no systemic CPD framework in place and principals do not see this as their responsibility. Most CPD consists of one-off workshops, or a series of workshops as the current mode of CPD. Other recognised CPD options include Master Degrees and PhDs, and there are also ‘National Competitions for Teaching Aids and Action Research’ held twice a year, as well as informal CPD programmes at some colleges where short refresher courses are available. Although it is being reformed, the teacher education curriculum does not prepare teachers for the realities on the ground such as multigrade teaching, the short supply of ICT and other
teaching resources, large classes and language difficulties (Stigler and Hiebert, 2007). These issues reflect the study on student teachers (Lall, 2015 and 2016b) that is detailed in the next section of this chapter.

Views from 20 education colleges in 2015–6

In 2015 and 2016, the first ever study of student teachers was conducted as part of the British Council funded EfECT project (discussed further below). The survey was distributed to 100 students in each one of the existing 20 education colleges by British Council staff during the academic year of 2015, and repeated in 2016. It is unclear how the responding students were chosen. However, the study was able for the first time to reveal who in Myanmar chose to go into the teaching profession, for what reasons, and what challenges they faced. The study also serves as a baseline for teacher education before the NESP reforms really began to affect Myanmar school education.

In 2015, there were 2,003 respondents, 1,005 in their first year of study and 969 in their second year of study. There were 29 respondents who did not specify which academic year they were in. Of the 2,003 respondents, 791 (39 per cent) were male and 1,196 (60 per cent) were female and 16 did not specify their gender. As would be expected, the majority of students were between 17 (37.7 per cent) and 18 (42.69 per cent) years of age. However, there were 3 per cent of younger students at 16 years of age, and a few older ones between 19 and 23. In the first year of study, there were 764 and in the second year there were 725 Bamar students, with 241 (year 1) and 244 (year 2) identifying as ethnic students. Just under 93.5 per cent self-identified as Buddhists, with 108 (5.4 per cent) Christians and only 17 Muslims (< 1 per cent), signalling a sharp lack of religious diversity.

The survey was repeated in 2016 and there were again 2,003 respondents, 951 in their first and 1,050 in their second year of study. There were two respondents who did not specify which academic year they were in. There were 796 respondents who took the survey for the second time; there were 460 male and 479 female students (year 1) and 466 male and 580 female students (year 2). For this survey, there was a higher male representation with 47 per cent male respondents compared to 39 per cent male respondents in 2015. The increase in the number of male respondents was due to the increase in those belonging to the non-Bamar ethnic groups. However, overall, the intake of men in education colleges is much lower than women, as teaching is seen as a
less attractive profession for men, although once in the system, male teachers tend to move up the ranks more swiftly than their female counterparts. Similar to 2015, the Bamar ethnic group constituted 74 per cent of the total respondents. Almost 25 per cent of the respondents identified themselves as members of ethnic groups, and only four respondents did not specify their ethnic group. Almost 93 per cent of respondents identified themselves as Buddhists, 6.2 per cent as Christians and 0.7 per cent as Muslims. As would be expected, the majority of the students were between 17 (35 per cent) and 18 (44 per cent) years of age. Again, there were about 3 per cent who were younger (16 years of age) and there was a similar proportion of older students between the ages of 19 and 23.

In year one of the research, the survey did not ask about matriculation marks, however, upon requests from a number of donor agencies, this question was added in 2016. The self-reported matriculation marks of the respondents in 2016 suggested higher performance among the Bamar ethnic group, with a majority of the respondents scoring in the range of 400–99. The performance of the non-Bamar ethnic groups was in the lower range between 300–99. Women performed higher than their male counterparts. The difference between ethnic groups was not unexpected as pupils for whom Burmese is not a first language struggle to follow the lessons in Burmese at government schools, and generally lag behind Bamar students throughout their academic careers. This has always resulted in a lower numbers of ethnic teachers, so that the cycle of ethnic underperformance repeats itself – an issue elaborated upon in Chapter 6 in this volume.

Being a teacher in Myanmar is a challenging profession. Despite the respect bestowed by society, salaries are low and, as civil servants, teachers are sent where the government deems it needs them. Younger teachers are often sent to remote areas, where life is especially hard if they do not speak the local language. Mairead Condon’s Masters dissertation revealed that many women who entered the teaching profession felt it was impossible to marry. They were often posted away from their families, and husbands unable to move with them might not accept this kind of an arrangement – a situation her respondents found deeply unjust (Condon, 2017). It was, therefore, interesting to find out more about the motivation of the students in wanting to become a teacher. In both years of the study, around half the students said they wanted to serve their country or contribute to society. The second most important reason was a stable job and a regular salary – although it is not high, at least it is guaranteed. A small percentage cited love for children
or parental expectations. The numbers of those responding that their ‘parents pushed them’ can probably be attributed to the young age of respondents. Only very few said that they did not want to become a teacher and had no choice. The main significant difference between male and female students was with regard to a stable and regular salary, with more women choosing that option as motivation. Given the social and economic changes in Myanmar that include rampant inflation, a stable government job can be attractive. Whilst the teaching profession has traditionally been badly paid, this – as mentioned above – changed with the Thein Sein government (2011–5) increasing pay for public servants and teachers, and offering a bonus for those working in remote and conflict-affected areas.

Respondents were asked where they wanted to teach once they were qualified and they were asked to choose between where their family was located and where the government needed them or would place them. Reflecting the motivation of wanting to serve their country, around two-thirds were happy to accept the government’s choice. This seems related to a great sense of nationalism and personal responsibility towards the development of their country.

In both years, career goals were fairly evenly distributed across the sector. Very few respondents wanted to join a private school or envisioned a career outside of the education system. Looking in more detail at the responses, and adjusting for sample size differences between men and women, it became clear that for those who expressed their career goal as being a teacher at secondary school, women were 50 per cent more likely to state that as a goal. Women were also a third more likely than men to pursue the goal of becoming a teacher educator or a head teacher. Men were 50 per cent more likely to state their desire of becoming a township education officer as a driver for being a teacher, and a quarter more likely than women to state their desire of becoming a state education officer as a career goal – posts that hold real power compared to head teachers in schools. This is reflected in Myanmar’s administrative reality where women are more prevalent in the teaching profession at every grade (including head teacher) apart from senior administrative posts such as township education officers or state education officers, which are mostly held by men. For those who expressed their career goal as moving on from teaching as a profession (which has an impact on attrition), men were one-and-a-half-times more likely than women to state that goal before completing their training, possibly because of salary issues.

One of the main issues the survey endeavoured to uncover was the challenges student teachers expected to face in the classroom and how
their training prepared them for these issues. Student teachers, recently having left school, understand the issues of the education system both from the student as well as the teacher perspective, making them the ideal respondent to review the state of education across Myanmar. Responses to the question about what challenges the student teachers expected once they became teachers were incredibly varied and detailed. Student teachers gave very frank and very personalised answers, revealing anxieties and worries in commencing their profession. The answers fell into several categories that included: lack of classroom experience, a real worry of implementing CCA, infrastructural issues that include everything from lack of transport to too many students in class, dealing with parents, living far away from home, being sent to a remote area, language issues and confronting student and family poverty.

The quotes below are samples from a very rich set of responses that was given across the 4,000 plus surveys. Very few said that they expected to face no problems, or felt confident enough to deal with whatever arose. However, in the section asking them how prepared they felt to start their career as a teacher, the student teachers mostly said that they felt prepared enough to teach children at school. Two major issues that emerged across the two years were classroom experience and CCA. The qualitative data pointed to a marked lack of confidence, as student teachers felt they did not have the practical, in-classroom experience that they would need to be able to apply what they were learning at the education colleges. Some spoke of their shyness and their fear in dealing with students for the first time. A few also mentioned that children might have a better understanding of the new technologies than their teachers and they might not be able to respond to all questions, something which made them particularly nervous as it would erode respect for them. Responses by students included the following (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

- ‘The difficulties are having little classroom experience and not being friendly with the students, being at the start of the career and being worried, and being tired of doing the teaching and admin stuff.’
- ‘When I become a teacher, I’d be younger than other teachers, so the students might not show respect. I’m worried that I can’t overcome the new experiences and I can’t put the teaching theories into practice. But I’ll try.’
- ‘Technology has improved now. The children are curious and inquisitive. I suppose only if teachers know about everything, they
will be able to answer the children’s questions. The children will expect teachers to be aware of the development changes.’

• ‘The problems that I might have when I become a teacher is how to control and manage students. As I am the only son in my family and I don’t have any siblings, I have never done baby-sitting. So it would be difficult for me to manage and monitor students. Teaching knowledge is pretty good through the training at this college. However, we still need to know how to monitor students.’

• ‘Limited classroom experience, large number of students and too many lessons to cover in limited period.’

• ‘Inexperience in teaching, weak in classroom management, numerous students to handle and unfamiliar with the lesson.’

The fear of using/practicing CCA is directly linked to a lack of classroom experience and the fact that often the student teachers themselves are not taught with this methodology. In addition, teachers expressed the fear of being overtaken by student knowledge. The student teachers point to the fact that CCA requires them to have a lot of knowledge, as students would expect them to answer questions on everything under the sun. They also pointed to the practicalities of overcrowded classrooms, short periods, lack of teaching aids and not enough time to cover all the material on the syllabus. Lastly, they were aware that school cultures, older teachers and parents might not be supportive of what is a relatively new teaching method in Myanmar.

• ‘If CCA is used, I need to have a lot of knowledge to be able to answer the students’ questions so I think I have to read so many books. I also need to guide them [the students] to develop right attitudes so that the standards of the education system of Myanmar will be upgraded.’

• ‘There might be delays in lessons because of not having enough time if we use CCA; we might not complete the lessons in time because individuals need to think and answer. These problems are more common in schools where there are many students and just a few teachers.’

• ‘I will face difficulties in the rural areas because Myanmar is a developing country and so there aren’t enough classrooms and teaching aids; [in those circumstances] I will have difficulty in teaching. Plus, there are not many schools that use CCA and it’s difficult to use it.’

• ‘Approaching CCA can be difficult as it is a new methodology and not widely used in Myanmar. I might not be able to answer the students’ questions because of my inadequate general knowledge.’
• ‘[I] won’t be able to use CCA when we are in rural areas because of [constrained] classroom space and other conditions.’
• ‘Problems with parents, colleagues and the education staff because of the difference in teaching techniques and not all the teachers use CCA.’
• ‘There are difficulties in accomplishing CCA [objectives] because most students are used to rote learning and are not good at thinking on their feet.’

These responses reflect issues that had been uncovered in previous research where teachers find CCA impossible to administer due to overcrowded classrooms, time and material constraints as well as the chapter-end tests that dominate the pace of the syllabus (Lall, 2010, Lall 2011; Lall et al. 2013). Since student teachers are aware of the realities of the classrooms where they themselves have been taught not that long ago, they cannot see how – without significant structural transformation of the system – the teaching method can be successfully changed.

Other difficulties included the exam system, the problems in the classroom (the result of the lack of preparation), tuitions (most teachers give priority to tuitions), the need to deal with the parents (some parents are likely to offer bribes), and private schools, regarding which one respondent commented: ‘those schools spoil the teachers and just focus on making their school famous’. Some further comments of note were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

• ‘In G4 and G8 exams are held for students by the government. If I am responsible for grade 4, when students fail the government exam, I have to explain why this has happened to the superiors. That is why, starting from grade 1, students are allowed to pass exams only if they are qualified.’
• ‘Having lots of students, heavy workload and the exam system. As I can’t pay full attention to the students, it leads to rote learning.’
• ‘The system today is exam-oriented so we can’t provide the knowledge they need … there is little time to teach all subjects. We can’t help students reach their true potential.’

Infrastructure as a challenge was a broad category and referred to inadequate textbooks, too many students in a classroom, a lack of teaching aids, too little time to get through the materials, but also practical considerations such as issues with public transport both for
the students and themselves. Some further comments were as follows (Lall 2015; Lall, 2016b):

• ‘The textbooks are not up to date, so I will have difficulty in adapting the text to the outside world, e.g. Science and Geography subjects are not practically useful subjects, they [the students] can’t make a living with those. For the students, earning is more important than learning. I'll also face difficulty in using teaching aids.’
• ‘The difficulties are having too many students and too many lessons to teach in a short time. The teacher will be stressed when the number of students and teachers are not balanced. If there are many lessons to finish in a short time, there won't be any preparation time and we can’t focus on teaching the key concepts.’
• ‘Because I want to teach in rural areas, the difficulties are with transportation, food and accommodation, teaching, managing language and social dealings.’
• ‘Because the number of classrooms and the number of student numbers are not matched, too many students gather in one classroom. This makes it difficult to teach them, to guide them and to teach them with the CCA approach.’
• ‘Transportation can be a problem. Although urban areas are very modern and developed, there are many children who are living in very far places and poor regions. It could be difficult to educate these children.’
• ‘There will be problems with the school building, toilet, pure water, living and food.’
• ‘The problem with living, water, electricity, teaching aids, and having not enough teachers are prevalent in remote areas.’

Communication, social structure and hierarchy issues that included worry about lack of respect, social communication with parents who are less educated and the fear of communication with superiors, were other prominent themes. It showed that the student teachers were very aware of how important communication issues are, and that they felt unprepared to deal with this particular aspect of the job. Many had problems of self-confidence, and some were afraid of students and superiors alike. The status of a teacher is crucial, as they feel they will be young and inexperienced, yet expected to live up to a professional ideal by colleagues and parents alike. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):
• ‘I will have social problems with the senior teachers and difficulties in the workplace because of my lack of experience – and I’m still learning.’
• ‘Firstly, teachers must deal with students’ parents. Then, they have to associate with people from the community. As the social status of being a teacher is so high, teachers need to be very careful how to behave in society. When we meet naughty students, it is our duty to train them very well.’
• ‘As I am an ethnic person and a small and short person; I think I could face difficulties in getting respect from the children and to communicate well with children.’
• ‘If I’ve got my position in a very far place, I’ll have the usual problems like communication. It’s hard for me to take responsibility for students. I’m not sure that students will understand my teaching.’
• ‘When I become a teacher, I may face the problems of having less experience, social problems and dealing with my superiors.’
• ‘Problems with parents, colleagues and the education staff because of the difference in teaching techniques and not all the teachers use CCA.’

Parents were also seen as a challenge for the student teachers. In Myanmar, parental involvement in education is rare, and usual only amongst the middle classes living in urban areas. Student teachers understand that in rural areas parental priorities will be different, and whilst all parents want their children to be well educated and do well, parents might not always be able to support their children adequately. In addition, becoming a teacher gives the young student teachers a respected social status that can complicate relations with parents. Some have prejudices towards rural populations referring to parents as ‘less intelligent’. Some comments were as follows ([Lall, 2015]; [Lall, 2016b]):

• ‘If I become a teacher, the difficulties are having problems with the parents. In some places, the parents have little knowledge and so they can’t train their children. So the children might be spoilt, their thinking might not be creative and they might not listen to the teacher.’
• ‘The difficulty is that the village people don’t encourage education since the parents dropped out from their middle school and there are no graduates.’
• ‘I need to understand the parents because they want their children to be educated and they rely on us for this.’
• ‘I have to face the problem of lack of trust of students’ parents and [constant blame on teachers for student’s performance] because most of their parents think that teachers are greedy.’

Living away from home and far away from parents was less prominent than the other issues detailed above, but it did worry quite a number of student teachers. Most are very young, and until now have been able to rely on their families for help and support. The first posting is likely to be in a remote or rural area, far away from home where they have no support networks. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

• ‘The difficulties are having to work in a remote area because my parents are old now. Plus, I’m the youngest in the family and I won’t be able to take care of my parents if I have to work in far away places.’
• ‘My parents will feel very sad if I’m away from them because my father loves me so much and he doesn’t eat well without me, even when I’m studying in another town near to my place.’
• ‘The problems related to transportation, teaching and living associated with remote areas … the need to choose the right methods and the security issue.’
• ‘Difficulties in food and accommodation due to being away from home.’

Being posted to a remote area, that could be a ‘black’ zone or conflict area was also a fear expressed by a large number of student teachers. They worry about shortages of water and food, not being used to local food and customs, lack of transport and not having family support. Serving in a school located in such an area also means that there is a shortage of teachers, resulting in multigrade teaching and that sometimes students cannot attend class due either to having to help their families or due to the on-going conflict. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

• ‘The difficulty is food and accommodation because if I need to go to a remote area, there are no relatives, no place for me to stay, and if I have to stay in someone else’s house, I won’t be comfortable.’
• ‘In remote areas the students can’t attend the classes regularly and I need to do lots of duties because there won’t be enough teachers.’
• ‘If you serve in far-away places, it can be difficult to live and adapt to a different society.’
I have to face issues such as no electricity, poor telephone network, food availability in a remote area.’

‘The problems with transportation, water shortage, parents, children from the different backgrounds, and having to work in brown areas.’

Language is another overarching theme, often linked to being posted in a remote area where students do not speak Burmese. There were some respondents who were worried they would not be understood and then there were those who were more worried they would not be able to understand the students (or parents) where they were posted. These challenges were more prevalent with student teachers who were being trained in ethnic states, but they were not often mentioned by respondents in Bamar-majority regions. A few student teachers voiced their fear of not being able to speak English well enough to teach at higher levels. Another set of student teachers said they were shy and therefore their voice did not carry, their language was not clear and that this frightened them. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

‘I will have difficulty with the language, for instance, if I have to work in some states with ethnic groups, we might face the problems of not understanding each other’s language.’

‘There will be difficulty in teaching English because it is not our mother tongue and there will be difficulty in pronouncing it correctly.’

‘The difficulties are with languages in the border areas, if there are so many people who don’t understand Myanmar, the teaching won’t be effective.’

‘The government does not know how to assign teachers to several provinces. If you are wrongly assigned to work in a place speaking a different language, you have to manage to speak in a different language and to predict how children feel. All these are hardships faced by a teacher.’

‘The problems with dialects and people living there, because of living in remote areas, they might not understand Myanmar language.’

‘Problems with the dialect, having not enough contact with the students and students might not understand the classroom language when teaching English.’

Very few respondents thought poverty of the resident population at their posting was another problem they might face. Those who did worried
about not being able to solve the problems that the children and their families faced and somehow felt responsible. This links in with the status of the teacher in Myanmar society, who are seen as natural leaders in society representing wisdom and, therefore, possibly expected to solve community issues.

Some respondents tended to see students as part of the problem, saying that they were dirty, rude or less intelligent. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

- ‘I’m worried about whether I could manage a large number of children since in some schools a large number of students are stuffed in one classroom like the schools I went to when I was young. I also find it annoying if the students do not care for personal hygiene.’
- ‘The students might be dirty, rude and they don’t understand my language.’
- ‘To face the parents of the students because now, government has a rule that we are not allowed to strike children if they become rude. If we strike them for their rudeness, parents will send a complaint letter to officials; in addition, if we can’t teach those rude children, the parents will blame us.’

Some respondents were even afraid of children, but interestingly, these were not the ones who admitted that they did not want to become teachers. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

- ‘I am so afraid of the children that I don’t dare to face them. When I am in front of the classroom, I may be shaking. I don’t like to be blamed. I am worried if the children will understand my teaching because I don’t have enough experience.’
- ‘The problem is that I am afraid of children. Because of the fear of children, it could lead me to put in less effort in teaching comprehensively.’

The fewest responses came from those respondents who did not see the challenges or problems ahead, and those who felt that they would be able to manage whatever came their way. Some comments were as follows (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b):

- ‘If I become a teacher, I don’t think I will have difficulties because I will teach my students with as much effort as I can. Plus, I will have prepared for the lessons.’
• ‘If I become a teacher, I believe that there will be almost no difficulties because I have confidence and a strong personality and I am interested in teaching children as well as training them to be decent. However, many challenges there are, I wouldn’t give up this job for the sake of the children and their parents.’

• ‘The problem just depends on my attitude; I will try to find solutions to all those teaching problems because I have this desire to do my job for the best.’

• ‘A teacher needs to manage different students from different backgrounds, so we need to learn teaching and also to fulfil the needs of the students who have different natures and personalities. I’m confident enough as I am now in the second year at this Education College and I’ve learned the methods of teaching, those of motivating the students, and of tackling the difficulties from subjects like Psychology and Education Theories.’

• ‘There won’t be big problems because I’m willing to serve my country. But I’ll have a problem with my family because they aren’t supporting my career choice.’

• ‘I chose a career in teaching to support and serve the State. [...] There are difficulties in any jobs. But I am ready with the spirit of teacher [to face] whatever problems I meet because my hobby is exactly the same as my career.’

The overall findings from the two-year study (Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b) concluded that, at the time of writing, teacher education does not include sufficient practical classroom experience as an integral part of the training, and teacher training methodology is teacher centric and not learner centric. Students find it difficult to apply child-centred methods themselves as they have mostly not been taught this way themselves. It also concluded that newly qualified teachers are not supported in the early years of their training and that young teachers and student teachers are worried as to how to stay on top of new or changing knowledge and how to answer student questions. It also concluded that there is insufficient IT access and training at the colleges that can lead to a gap between teachers and students, especially in urban areas; and that no ethnic language training is made available for those who will (or want to) be posted in ethnic or remote areas.

Over recent years, development partners have started to support the education colleges’ reforms to improve teacher education, most recently as part of the NESP.
Development partners supporting teacher education and further training

One of the main early projects supporting teacher training was JICA’s ‘Strengthening of Child Centred Approach’ active from 2004 to 2011. In addition to training, the project also proposed concrete descriptions of teacher competencies. In the 2000s, the MoE requested JICA to help develop a teacher’s guide to new textbooks that they had published in order to support teachers’ understanding of child-centred approaches. A number of workshops and seminars were conducted by JICA to introduce CCA to the education colleges and improve teacher training. They also developed model lesson plans for active learning, and introduced peer review of lessons (British Council, 2016: 17). Other CCA programmes developed in parallel, but many focused on teachers in the monastic or ethnic systems, which were easier to access than government schools.28

The three major programmes run by development partners that engage with teacher education and teacher training include the UNICEF’s School-based In-service Teacher Education (SITE) project and competency frameworks, TREE under the DFID-funded Myanmar UK Partnership for Education (MUPE) programme (the former BC EfECT programme) that focuses on English and teaching methods of teacher educators and UNESCO’s STEM. There are a few other smaller programmes as well, such as UNICEF’s head teacher training that is offered to 5,000 head teachers in 34 townships, focusing on management and instructional leadership. The programme is delivered through a cascade model of training and includes school assessment tools, advice on planning and how to mobilise the community and, most importantly, the head teacher’s role in teacher development and CPD for staff. This programme, although helping to develop school leaders, has limited effect on the education of student teachers or early career teachers.

Supporting UNICEF’s in-service and teacher education for teacher educators (SITE)29

UNICEF’s SITE was funded by a consortium including the British, Australian, Danish and Norwegian aid agencies and was part of QBEP 2.30 The SITE project piloted a programme of school-based professional development for existing primary teachers in Mon State in 2012. This included teachers in government, monastic and ethnic/community
schools. The project was based on a series of ten self-study distance learning modules, allowing teachers to draw on their classroom experience and helping them collaborate with other teachers in inter-school clusters (Higgins et al., 2016: 109). The focus was on the development of pedagogical skills and reflective, child-friendly teaching practices. Since teachers did not leave their schools for training, the learning was grounded in the reality of the teachers’ individual classroom realities. Experienced teachers are meant to support younger, less experienced colleagues and the head teacher has a mentoring role. Capacity building included a programme for in-service teacher training based in schools (SITE) that a local network of state-level training staff, including teacher educators at education colleges, and TEO staff provided through cluster-based, in-service training sessions and monitoring visits. Head teachers were offered a five-day course to help them in their role to provide guidance to teachers during SITE activities. Part of SITE also included working with the BC to produce competency frameworks for teachers, teacher educators, head teachers and TEOs. The integrated nature of the programme, allowing teachers from different sectors to work on these CPD modules, has been one of the very few instances that the ‘silo-ed’ sectors of Myanmar’s education system has been broken down.31 However, the independent final evaluation showed that in order to change their behaviour, teachers needed more training in interactive approaches and how to include discussions and dialogue in their teaching, as well as opportunities for peer-to-peer support (Stenning, 2018: 11). At the point of the final evaluation, no questions were asked as to why teachers were not doing these things or what the barriers were. Issues raised included the lack of an initial needs assessment and the top-down nature of the project (UNICEF, 2016: vii, 21–2).32 One of the main issues at the time was that the SITE CCA approaches were not supported by the examination system. Another significant factor hindering SITE activities were transfers and promotions. For SITE to work, a ‘critical mass of teachers’ were needed, without which other teachers lost motivation (UNICEF, 2016: 32).

The English for Education College Trainers (EfECT) Project – now replaced by Towards Results in Education and English (TREE)

The EfECT project was initiated in 2013 when former President Thein Sein asked the UK Prime Minister during a state visit to provide expatriate
teacher–trainers to work in Myanmar’s education colleges to support teacher educators with English proficiency and teaching methods. This became a GBP 4.5 million DFID and BC-funded project that deployed 50 expatriate staff (half taken from the BC and half from the Voluntary Service Overseas) across 20 education colleges and two institutes of education to work with 2,200 teacher educators.

In response to the failure of CCA in government schools, EfECT developed a teaching methodology course which combined learner-centred approaches with the use of direct instruction, and which emphasised developing critical thinking and building on prior knowledge throughout (Clifford, 2016). According to Ian Clifford, who headed the programme and whose MA dissertation examined how EfECT impacted teacher agency: ‘teachers have traditionally had few opportunities to make choices and realise their agency as professionals. […] If a pedagogy which encourages autonomy in students is to be promoted then teachers themselves must be enabled, and given the tools, to make choices about their subjects, careers and methods’ (Clifford, 2016: 32). Because of decades without much autonomy, teachers and teacher educators had little confidence in using different approaches and teaching methods. Teacher educators cited a range of structural constraints to the use of alternative methodologies including time, assessment, class sizes, classroom layout, levels of student teachers’ motivation, training, and fears around the perceptions of teacher educators. Clifford’s findings showed that the programme offered a range of methods to teacher educators, including some support for promoting more teacher-directed whole-class teaching such as direct instruction, and that they felt empowered to choose the type of method that was appropriate in different circumstances.

The focus of the programme, however, was in the first instance the use and quality of English. According to the EfECT needs analysis (British Council, 2015), around a third of teacher educators are expected to teach their subjects with English as a medium of instruction. In reality, Burmese is used, as neither teachers nor students are proficient enough in English. In fact, the levels of English of the teacher educators was found to be very low (British Council, 2015). Drinan, who was engaged by the BC to undertake two studies to support the work of the CESR in 2013 commented on this as well: ‘Instructors teaching English sometimes teach in English but more often in Myanmar. This is because students enter the college with low matriculation results and low levels of English language proficiency. Those spoken to felt most of their students were elementary level at reading and writing. Their speaking and listening is
even lower. Very few enter the education colleges at an intermediate level and those who do are probably graduate educators from university. Therefore, the translation method is used in teaching and students “learn” through memorisation (Drinan, 2013: 31).

Overall, EfECT was deemed to have had a positive outcome as teacher educators improved their English and increased their confidence. Simon Borg, who undertook the final evaluation of the programme commented: ‘Relative to their position at baseline, TEs across Myanmar made measurable and visible progress in their English proficiency, knowledge of teaching methodology, confidence, teaching skills and basic reflective competence. Their entry levels of English were particularly modest, and the fact that they performed as well as they did over the two years on a programme taught entirely in English is further evidence of EfECT’s achievements’ (Borg et al., 2018: 84).

Towards Results in Education and English (TREE) 2019–24 builds on EfECT and aims to improve the quality of teaching of teacher educators and academic oversight of management staff in teacher education institutions (Myanmar Teacher Education Working Group, 2019). There are four integrated workstreams: CPD; English proficiency and pedagogy; systems strengthening through practicum and partnerships; and inclusive practices and disability. These workstreams will integrate two cross-cutting themes – educational technology and research and monitoring – which develop over three phases: Foundation, Consolidation and Continuation. At the time of writing, TREE is in the process of deploying 50 trainers to work in the education colleges and use education technology in order to support the workstreams (DFID, 2019). TREE is supported by DFID with GBP 12 million (DFID, 2019).

**UNESCO’s ‘Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education in Myanmar’ (STEM) project**

The UNESCO’s ‘Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education in Myanmar’ (STEM) project is funded by DFAT, the Australian bilateral development agency. There are a number of programme elements that relate to teacher education and the management of education colleges. In the first instance, STEM is focusing on the reform of the teacher education curriculum over a five-year period that will transform the teacher education curriculum in the education colleges to degree level. STEM also aims to improve the ICT equipment for the education colleges, with teacher educators being trained in how to use ICT, and STEM
developing a curriculum module around ICT for teacher educators to deliver to student teachers.

STEM was originally conceived of as one component of the multi-donor ‘Quality Basic Education Programme’ (QBEP). QBEP consisted of three components, with UNICEF having responsibility for Output One (policy), while UNESCO had responsibility for delivering Output Two (curriculum/pedagogy) and Output Three (management) (UNESCO, 2016: 14–5). Under the QBEP, STEM was initially intended to focus on four pilot education colleges. However, the MoE felt that all education colleges needed to be involved. In 2014, Australia decided to directly fund the partnership with UNESCO for the implementation of STEM, independent of the QBEP programme (UNESCO, 2016: 14–5). STEM Phase One (2014–7) focused on three outcome areas: teacher policy, curriculum and pedagogy, management and ICT. According to the curriculum review report (UNESCO, 2016: 14–5; DFAT, 2017), STEM had successfully worked on the following outputs:

- the current curriculum at ECs has been reviewed and a new two-year diploma curriculum has been proposed
- the curriculum framework for a four-year degree programme for basic and middle school teachers has been drafted
- a teacher-competency framework has been drafted using a participatory process
- an ICT subject has been developed and is being delivered in all education colleges, each education college now has two to three ICT tutors and the programme is continuing to support the capacity building of ICT teachers through training, the installation of internet infrastructure in all education colleges and the development of an e-portal.

The Draft Education College Curriculum Framework is at the heart of the most important change as it will require teachers to be educated to degree level. UNESCO says that the focus is to ensure that student teachers master the competencies (a combination of content knowledge, skills and attitude) needed to produce effective learning for pupils in a classroom. The training approach is changing in that teachers no longer only receive the (theoretical) knowledge to teach – relevant in a content-based curriculum – but receive training in the ability to teach through a competency-based approach. The Draft Education College Curriculum Framework is linked to the TCSF discussed above, which describes the minimum competency standards a teacher should be able to
to demonstrate (UNESCO, 2016: 16). The new proposed modules include the following:

1. Educational Studies: that focuses on the ability to teach rather than just being knowledgeable of teaching.
2. Curriculum and Pedagogical Studies: an integrated approach wherein the underlying educational theory and knowledge required is learned through practicing real teaching and applying concepts in the classroom. Academic subjects are to be taught in conjunction with how they need to be taught in either primary or middle school.
3. The Practicum: extended from the current curriculum, monitored and supported to contribute to learning from feedback and practice.
4. Core skills: communication, use of language, additional English, and ICT have been added as new core skills.
5. Self-study and reflection: ensuring time for investigation, self-study and reflection, especially online as connectivity improves. (UNESCO, 2016: 16)

While the changes seem to address some of the shortcomings of the current structure, there seem to have been insufficient links between the teacher education curriculum to the new basic education curriculum. JICA’s CREATE MTR (Mizuno et al., 2019) confirmed that there had been a collaboration mechanism between CREATE and UNESCO–STEM to link the new primary school curriculum with the new education college materials (lesson plans, lecture notes and student handouts) and that ‘Grade 1–3 training modules for education college teacher educators was developed and distributed at the time of the Central Training.’ (Mizuno et al., 2019: 11) But it also seems that not all CREATE materials were introduced to the teacher educators and student teachers in education colleges because the timings of the two projects were not coordinated. In the event, some of the materials provided by JICA to UNESCO arrived too late to be included in the training materials. This does not seem to be seen by JICA as too much of a problem because it has produced detailed teacher guidebooks, which allow even less well-trained teachers to deliver the class with CCA elements. Each chapter has detailed suggestions on activities, questions with the relevant answers (so no teacher loses face in front of the children) and an explanation on how to achieve the required learning outcomes. There seems to be a fundamental disconnect between what UNESCO has in mind for the
teachers, and what JICA is designing for the classroom, showing how poor the development partners’ coordination is.

STEM has also been working on the management of the 22 education colleges in light of the changes brought about by the NESP. The UNESCO management review report (UNESCO, 2016) explains that the new organisational structures of the education colleges are not clear to education college staff and that education college staff, including managers and administrators, are not clear on the roles and responsibilities of each position in the new education college structure. To UNESCO, this indicates a need to review existing guidelines for the management of education colleges, and the development of policies and guidelines in areas where they have not yet been developed (UNESCO, 2016: 6–7). The UNESCO report also recommended that ICT needs to be mainstreamed as an integral part of efficient education college management and will require more ICT equipment, software and training. In addition, the report mentions the need for a systematic training programme for education college staff, including management staff, such as a human resource development programme. While education colleges have college management boards, these do not have the decision-making authority to propose necessary posts or adjust the number of staff and how these are allocated. UNESCO suggests that the development of an online sharing platform for education colleges could facilitate greater learning and collaboration between teacher educators at the different education colleges, which could enhance their professional development (UNESCO, 2016: 24). Given that education college management is centralised at MoE department level, the management issues are likely to remain challenging.

The Australian Government reports that STEM has operated in a difficult environment and that problems included the restructuring of the MoE following the 2015 elections, and policy decisions being deferred until after the establishment of the NEPC in October 2016. Nevertheless the programme continues – STEM Phase Two (2017–20) started in January 2017 and builds on STEM Phase One, adding a fourth output related to human rights, equity and promotion of gender equality.

**The National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) Mid-Term Review on teacher education**

The MTR Inception report (MoE, 2019b) reminds the readers that the NESP had promised an integrated approach in order to reform both
teacher education and management. The report however finds that: ‘the emphasis on reforming teacher management is either overlooked, de-emphasised or not yet actioned’ (MoE, 2019b: 45). Nevertheless, the MTR acknowledges that progress has been made with regard to the Teacher Competency Standards Framework: ‘The standards, elements and indicators of the Teachers Competency Standards Framework (TCSF), Beginner level, have been developed and piloted and NEPC has provided feedback on this. The TCSF aligns with the learning outcomes of the four-year competency-based teacher education programs, which are to be implemented throughout Myanmar from 2020’ (MoE, 2019d: 46). In line with the four-year degree structure, the MTR Inception report warns that there could be a lack of teachers between 2021 and 2023:

‘To fill this gap MoE has introduced six-months teacher training programs for graduates and has proposed the reintroduction of Daily Wage Teachers. While these may be short-term solutions to maintain teacher strength in the near future, the potential risks of reintroducing Daily Wage Teachers (such as increase in the number of teachers who apply for promotion to teacher higher grades) need to be mitigated, such as through defining a clear time period for their deployment’ (MoE, 2019b: 47).

The final MTR report (MoE, 2020) acknowledges that reform mechanisms for teachers have been slow and that there still is no Teacher Task Force to support an effective teacher management system (MoE, 2020: vii). The final report reiterated the issues of a potential lack of teachers between 2021 and 2023 due to the four-year degree programme (MoE, 2020: ix). A masterplan to support recruitment, training for teacher educators, building of classrooms and expanding provision of accommodation on campus has been developed. Despite this, there may still be a shortage of teacher educators and teachers.

With regard to the priority recommendations for NESP 2019–2021, the MTR suggests: ‘Assign high priority to development of strategies for the retention of quality teachers through better mechanisms for teacher recruitment, deployment, career pathways, and promotion’ (MoE, 2020: xiii) in addition to addressing the other issues promised by the NESP such as the Teacher Task Force and expanding the TCSF at beginner level across all schools. The MTR also recommends that it is a priority of education colleges to ensure the effectiveness of the new four-year programme as well as the student-centred pedagogical approach.
Conclusion: Teacher education and social justice

The system of teacher education and the teaching profession is inherently inequitable. Not only do teachers face their own social justice challenges partly due to material constraints, and partly due to the local cultural outlook, but teacher education is instrumental in reproducing the same social justice issues again and again. The main issues are around gender and ethnicity. According to JICA, more than 80 per cent of teachers are female. However, only 60 per cent of female teachers become head teachers and fewer make it to TEO positions, something reflected in the expectations of the student teachers surveyed between 2015 and 2016 (see Lall, 2015; Lall, 2016b). Serving in conflict-affected areas and deployment to remote areas favour men getting quicker promotions because they are able to serve in difficult areas, unlike their female counterparts. Recent reforms have tried to address the gender imbalance by raising salaries and lowering the selection criteria for men, not something that the higher-achieving women are likely to find fair. However, the issues are more than just salaries. Teaching is seen in Myanmar as a service profession where the teacher serves society and is a role model to the community in which they work. The transfers often mean that female teachers cannot marry, as their husbands might not be able to find a job where they are posted. Mairead Condon examined how teacher educators felt empowered by their position, finding that teacher educators often chose not to marry, both because of society’s expectation and to be ‘free from family’ and able to dedicate their lives to their profession (Condon, 2017). She explained how many of the younger women coming to the profession thought these expectations were unfair and that men would never behave in this way (Condon, 2017). It can be argued that the structure of the teaching profession, as well as the teacher educator profession, is in fact exploitative of women and that they do not receive the same recognition or respect as their male counterparts.

Marginalisation is rife, and remains unaddressed in teacher education and the teaching profession. There are fewer ethnic minority teachers in schools than their Bamar counterparts, in part because the matriculation exam is offered only in Burmese, which is not the mother tongue of the ethnic students. The Ministry of Border Affairs runs the University for Development of National Races (UDNR) located in Ywathitgyi, Sagaing Region, that focuses on educating ethnic groups in the border areas (JICA, 2013). For decades this has been seen as the answer to ‘ethnic teachers’, but the system is in effect discriminatory.
The lack of ethnic teachers perpetuates the problem of more ethnic students not making the matriculation grades that would allow them then to become teachers themselves.\textsuperscript{39}

Recent changes in the 2017–8 academic year suggest access to education colleges appears now to have become more equitable and inclusive. According to Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, the MoE now has a township-based enrolment policy for the DTEd teacher-training pathway, which means that every year a number of places in the education colleges are reserved for candidates in each of the townships of the state/region (\textit{Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020}).\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, applicants in remote, rural, ethnic or poor townships no longer have to compete with those in townships with better education and economic opportunities or with a predominantly Bamar population. Previously, applicants from the majority group Bamar could apply to education colleges in ethnic states. As many of them usually performed better in matriculation examinations than ethnic students did, they were admitted to education colleges at the expense of ethnic applicants.\textsuperscript{41} This policy is indeed progress, but will take time to feed ethnic teachers through the system, balancing the numbers with the Bamar majority. Certain ethnic groups from remote areas might remain unrepresented, especially if their performance is below that of other candidates. Salem-Gervais and Raynaud report that the director general in charge of the education colleges in the MoE’s higher education department believes that ‘compromises are needed between at least three imperatives: (1) the necessity to train more teachers to keep up with the recent progresses in access to schooling and efforts to diminish student/teacher ratio; (2) decentralization and the training of more local teachers; and (3) maintaining the education standards of the teachers’ (\textit{Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020: 109}).

Despite modest improvements, education colleges still need to proactively ensure their progress towards equitable and inclusive HEIs in all their practices including preparing student teachers to be able to apply inclusive pedagogy, for instance, in ensuring learning achievement of ethnic children who will have to learn in the Myanmar language. According to TREE, reflecting other conversations with SEOs, TEOs and teachers over the past decade it was striking that many teacher educators and heads of departments seemed to have neither awareness nor interest in ethnic culture and language issues for teachers or students. This was something they were not preparing student teachers for, possibly due to lack of practical experience in local classrooms, and as most teacher educators were Burmese, possibly lacking sensitivity around language and cultural needs.
The importance of the fear of language barriers is reflected in the views from the 20 education colleges in 2015 and 2016 as detailed earlier in the chapter. TREE also questions the wisdom of ‘partner schools’ clustered around the education colleges envisioned by the four-year degree course that is in the making, which will mean that student teachers are not exposed to the areas where most of the ethnic nationality groups reside, institutionalising the discrimination further. TREE found that in certain cases, the limited scope for shaping policy was used positively by local SEOs and TEOs:

For example, in Kayah State the State Ministers of Social Affairs, with the support of the Minister of Ethnic Affairs, developed and implemented what amounts to a policy of positive discrimination/affirmative action for accepting ethnic Kayah students into Loikaw’s new education college. As a result of the Minister’s formal request to the Union Minister of Education, the education college can now apply criteria including completion of Grade 10 in Kayah State or a Kayah ethnicity stated on one’s national registration card.\(^42\)

However, in essence, this requires leaders to have a view that differs from most others. The fact that teacher educators, teachers and student teachers do not question issues around ethnicity and language makes them complicit in the reproduction of dominant hierarchies that reinforce marginalisation (Metro, 2019) and forms of Bamar ‘cultural imperialism’ as ethnic differences are not affirmed. Teachers have been accused of a failure of promoting critical thinking and not deviating from textbook content. Higgins et al. go as far as to say that the: ‘pedagogy is seen as reproduction of violence – rewarding obedience and replication’. (Higgins et al., 2016: 92). Their research shows that teachers within government and ethnic systems were aware of the potential of history to contribute to peace building, but felt constrained by existing curricula frameworks. However, the problem goes further in that the teachers’ own sectarian approaches to history ‘undermined their commitment to exploiting the subjects to contribute to social cohesion’ (Higgins et al., 2016: 123).

Education colleges have made some progress in inclusive access in terms of gender, yet according to the NESP MTR (MoE, 2020: 48) the numbers of female student teachers still far exceeded those of male student teachers from 2014–5 to 2017–8.\(^43\) The root cause of the disparities remains fundamentally structural and the education reforms are not engaging with the structures that recreate the inequity and social
justice challenges. The full new teacher education curriculum cannot yet be judged. However, given that the changes to the basic education curriculum do not address gender and ethnic disparities in a systematic way, it is questionable how far the new education college degree will engage with social justice issues that are so engrained in Myanmar’s culture and society.

What the reforms do offer is an increased level of monitoring through the new teacher competency framework. It is unclear how far this new system of accountability will focus on the teaching and learning process, promote equity in the classroom and the staff room, and/or be used as a tool to control. Technical monitoring might not engage with the actual learning happening in the classroom, but rather focus on indicators that can be easily measured, ranging from number of students and teachers, to other materials they find present in the school (Higgins et al., 2016: 97). So while there is an urgent need to reform teacher education, what is on offer does not at present engage with the structural inequalities of the system. The question remains as to how far the additional interventions in teacher education and training offered by development partners are able to engage with these issues.

No donor/development partner-led work seems to directly engage with the inherent issue of gender disparity, however, Higgins et al. claim that conflict, peace and by extension ethnic issues are being considered (Higgins et al., 2016). The Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding looked at teacher education interventions and development partner support through a ‘peace promotion lens’. Their premise is that teachers are a critical component for the peace process to be successful and sustainable. Teachers they spoke to agreed, for example, stating the following:

... They are the medium connecting, like improving the youths, for students to understand the country, to understand each other and the foundation of the country in every sector. So the teacher is very important, the teacher needs to understand contemporary issues and conflict issues and needs [to be] more proficient in their language, their subjects. (Higgins et al., 2016: 98)

However, teachers’ primary role as expected by parents and the MoE is not to promote peace, but to complete the curriculum so as to prepare children for exams. Examining four development partner programmes, they concluded that all programmes had: ‘frequent implicit and indirect approaches to enhancing the peace building role of teachers.’ The team
claims that teachers to whom they spoke understood that the pedagogical and managerial skills they were given through the training was relevant to their roles in the classroom, especially to establishing peaceful relations at their school, but this did not necessarily reflect on the wider issues of ethnic relations, conflict and peace across the country. However, the emphasis on demonstrating respect, a lack of bias when dealing with student diversity, critical thinking, and using problem-solving techniques do teach students different approaches to solving issues without violence. How difficult all of this is will be made clear in the next two chapters of this volume that engage with education issues faced by the ethnic nationalities across Myanmar.

Notes

1. At the time there were only 20 education colleges. There are now 22.
2. Chapter 6, dedicated to language, looks in more detail at the alternative teacher education college that was set up by the Pa-O to specifically train those ethnic nationality candidates that failed to get into the education colleges.
3. Language issues are dealt with in Chapter 6 of this volume.
4. In 2013, and as a part of the education reforms and a way to increase the number of teachers in schools, uncertified teachers who have been working at monastic or private schools have been allowed to join government schools under a special scheme. These teachers receive a month of training and are then employed at a lower salary and without benefits. After a year, they can become permanent staff. ‘Since the start of the policy an additional 72,000 teachers (representing nearly a quarter of all teachers employed) had been recruited and deployed in this way’ (Unpublished WB report on impediments to effective teaching, Yangon 2015). The new teacher hiring policy means that it is now much easier to join the profession. This also means that state education officers and township education officers now have a greater say in which teachers they wish to hire or fire, which previously was the prerogative of the ministries in NPT.
5. The education colleges in Chin and in Kayah State were opened very recently.
6. Informal discussions with EfECT tutors.
7. A nine-week practicum in schools.
8. Informal discussions with EfECT tutors.
9. The curriculum is being revised – more on this later in this chapter.
10. Informal discussions with EfECT tutors.
11. For more on CREATE see: https://createmm.org/en. At the time of writing, Grades 1–3 and Grade 6 textbooks are already in use.
13. The purpose of the survey is to ascertain the extent to which teachers understand education reform, awareness of the TCSF and whether the TCSF captures effective teaching practice in Myanmar. Efforts have been made to disseminate the first level of the TCSF and seek feedback; some stakeholders view the TCSF to be over ambitious and catering to the most capable teachers. The survey was not accessible for review.
14. A report for the British Council 2015. ‘English for Education College Trainers’ (EfECT) Project Needs Analysis, 15. There is also a smaller teacher training system run by the Ministry of Border Affairs to place assistant teachers from Myanmar’s ethnic groups in border areas where Myanmar is not the main language spoken. The Ministry of Border Affairs runs the University for the Development of the National Races which conducts five-year courses to train teachers from minority groups through a similar curriculum but with additional ‘special co-curricular’ subjects such as traditional medicine, martial arts and military training.
15 Specialised advice provided by three national advisers Dr Khin Zaw, Dr Htoo Htoo Aung, Dr Myint Thein and U Zaw Htay, retired Director General of the Department of Higher Education.

16 Funded by the Governments of Australia and Finland.

17 Other issues include: ‘The context of the relative status, remuneration and profile of current teachers across Myanmar (mostly under-qualified women with variation in skill between locations) is absent. This detail would clarify the means or resources, incentives and barriers to skills upgrading for this group, and for the reform of education colleges. It would also test the feasibility of certain delivery platforms such as distance learning for teachers in rural locations. The documents do not convey the ethnic diversity of Myanmar and the fact that teachers will likely need competencies in multilingual, multicultural classroom management.’ (UNESCO, 2019b: 21–2).

18 There are four domains: Domain A: Professional Knowledge and Understanding; Domain B: Professional Skills and Practices; Domain C: Professional Values and Dispositions; Domain D: Professional Growth and Development.

19 For an analysis of the issues surrounding CCA in Myanmar schools, see Lall, 2010 and Lall, 2011.

20 The operation and legal framework of Myanmar’s civil service is described in a number of related laws, namely the 2010 Union Civil Service Board Law, 2011 Union Civil Service Board Rules, 2013 Civil Service Personnel Law and 2014 Civil Service Personnel Rules.


22 The ‘TREE Political Economic Analysis’ is not in the public domain but was shared with the author. (TREE Political and Economic Analysis: 9)

23 Discussion with the Director General of the Department of Higher Education in September 2019.

24 While assistant township education officers (ATEOs) cannot monitor the student teachers during their practicum period, ATEOs instruct the respective head teachers to supervise and mentor the student teachers (Thornton and Tolmer, 2017: 17).

25 The demand for teachers will also increase across the system as the school years are expanded to include KG plus 12 years of schooling, and the transition from a two- to a four-year teacher education course slows the production rate of new graduates.

26 A four-year School Mentoring and Cluster Programme has recently been put in place aimed at: ‘Providing in-service continuous professional development to the approximately 90,000 primary school teachers’. 157 mentors were trained in 2016 in 50 townships, and each month a mentor would do 3 weeks of mentoring and have approximately 30–40 mentees with which to work. Mentors are trained by a core group consisting of professors from YUOE and some education college educators who provide training twice a year for 5–7 days. Mentees are teachers with no teaching certificate or unfinished qualifications and with less than three years’ teaching experience. ‘Myanmar Additional Financing for the Decentralizing Fund to Schools Project (P157231) Community Participation Planning Framework (CPPF), DRAFT, 2016–2017’ – cited in Drinan and Zin Zin Win, 2017: 24.

27 Neither the BC nor the author had any input into which student teachers took part.

28 See Chapter 3 on Monastic Education for more on CCA programmes.

29 The final evaluation was conducted by Montrose in 2016. It is unclear how much of the programme has continued since then.

30 Quality Basic Education Programme (QBEP) was a four-year (2012–6), USD 76.6 million joint Myanmar Multi-Donor Education Fund (MDEF) and MoE effort to strengthen the provision, quality, and administration of government basic education. The QBEP programmes supported education reform before the NESP brought in the nine transformational shifts. This included capacity building and providing direct education services in 34 select disadvantaged townships.

31 The Myanmar MoE has provided in-service training for government and Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) teachers together, but this was not deemed a success by the MNEC teachers. For more on MNEC, see Chapter 7 on EAO education provision in this volume.

32 Final Report Dr Mike Thair (Montrose).
The Report found that levels of English of the teacher educators was low, with 75 per cent having a level lower than B1 on the Common European Framework (i.e. 75 per cent lower than the intermediate level teacher educators might be expected to have).

‘UNESCO with Montrose has applied some parts of the materials provided by the project to develop textbooks and teachers’ guides.’ (p.11 italics added) ‘CDT (Curriculum Development Team) and TET (Teacher education team) as well as UNESCO officers explained that it varies between subjects but about 50% of materials provided by the project (CREATE) were integrated into the Year 1 textbooks and teachers’ guides partly or as a whole. […] In some subjects, because the new curriculum materials from the project were provided after the UNESCO STEM project had developed the draft of textbooks, it was too late to reflect those materials from the project into EC curriculum.’ (Mizuno et al., 2019: 13).

The project is being implemented with approximately USD 7.1 million funding support by Governments of Finland, Australia and UK provided in varying timeframes (UNESCO, 2019b).

According to JICA, 2013, one institute of education has now fixed percentages at intake (60 per cent male and 40 per cent female).

There is no hard data on this. According to the JICA report (JICA, 2013), course completion data suggests that between 1964 and 2010, only 12,493 ethnic teachers have been deployed in the system.

And there is no offer to lower entrance requirements for ethnic students as has been done to increase numbers of male students.

This is further discussed in Chapter 6 on language in this volume.

Criteria include the overall capacity of the local education colleges and the student population in each township of the state/region, of course, but also the gender of the candidates (a 50/50 ratio) as well as their subject stream (‘30 per cent arts, 30 per cent science and 40 per cent “mixed”). (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020: 109).

Information from informal conversation with staff working for TREE who met with education college staff in ethnic states.

From an unpublished report for TREE.

For example, 39,249 female and 8,821 male students in 2017–8 academic year (MoE, 2020: 48). According to a conversation with the staff working for TREE, some education college staff believed that selection criteria for male applicants were relaxed in 2019–20, in order to increase male teachers and improve the gender ratio among schoolteachers.

The BC’s EfECT; UNICEF’s SITE; UNICEF’s HT; and Monastic Education Development Group’s Yaung Zin modules (Higgins et al., 2016: 112–3).

‘However, some interventions did explicitly engage with the peacebuilding agency of teachers. For instance, the addition of “Conflict Sensitivity” to UNICEF’s head teacher training addresses issues of conflict resolution. This emerged out of a recognition within aid agencies and amongst recipients of initial training for head teachers that handling conflict and building peaceful relationships between students, staff and the wider community was a key aspect of the school leader’s role’ (Higgins et al., 2016: 114).