

**Regional Research Paper**

# **Reform of the Education System: Case Study of Myanmar**

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AY	Academic Year
CCA	Child-Centred Approach
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
DFID	Department for International Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EPIC	Education Promotion Implementation Committee
FESR	Framework for Economic and Social Reform
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KG	Kindergarten
MoE	Ministry of Education
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
STEM	Strengthening Teacher Education in Myanmar
TCSF	Teacher Competency Standards Framework
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

## **1. Introduction**

As democracy develops in Myanmar, it is essential for all sectors to be upgraded to meet the standards required of a democratic system. With the aim of developing human resources, Myanmar's education reform began in 2011 when the country's government system changed from a military government to a democracy. Now, the new government of Myanmar has also made education reform a national priority.

In order to find solutions to the challenges and gaps in the current education system, since July 2012, the government, in collaboration with development partners, has embarked on a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR).<sup>1</sup> Significant achievements of the major education reforms until now include, an increase in the budget for education, the publication of a new education law and the removal of public school fees.<sup>2</sup> Starting from the school year 2015-2016, education enrolment is free for high school students. Enrolment in primary schools was made free in 2010-2011 and middle schools followed in 2013-14.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, policies and laws have been laid down as part of the process of the education system reform. The most recently enacted laws are the National Education Law in 2014 and the Amendment of the National Education Law in 2015. Education policy was laid down in 2011 according to the guidelines of the former president.

Given that effective reforms take time to be successfully accomplished, many challenges are yet to be addressed. Although the current expenditure on education in Myanmar is higher than before, it is still low compared with neighboring countries.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, pupil-to-teacher ratios are significantly higher in Myanmar than they are in neighboring countries, such as Thailand, at both primary and secondary levels.<sup>5</sup> An outdated curriculum also makes Myanmar's education system less effective. The country did reform its curriculum once – between 1995 and 1999 - and that curriculum has been used continuously up until the academic year 2015-2016. However, other countries revise their curriculums on a much more frequent basis.<sup>6</sup>

The objectives of this research paper are to study the achievements and challenges of the current education reform in Myanmar, and to review the associated policies and laws. Secondary data collected from online sources such as government official reports, journals and international organization reports have been used as sources of information.

## **2. An Overview of the Education Reform Process and Progress in Myanmar**

With the vision of creating an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age<sup>7</sup>, the Myanmar government is implementing long- and short-term plans to improve the country's education system. As the educated population and workforce are demanding economic growth and poverty reduction, the government of Myanmar

has made many efforts to strengthen the education sector. Since 2011, the civilian government, led by the former president, made nation-wide reforms particularly in the education sector in order to upgrade human resources. The newly democratic government of Myanmar, which was formed in March 2016, has also made the overhauling of the education system a national priority with the purpose of meeting the increasing need for human capital.

In Myanmar, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is the main provider of education. The MoE is primarily responsible for the provision of the basic education sub-sector, which is divided into three levels: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary (KG+12 (5-4-3) – see Section 2.2). Besides the MoE, there are some other ministries such as Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health and Sports, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture that are responsible for the provision of the higher education sub-sector, and the Ministry of Science and Technology takes responsibility for vocational education at the tertiary level.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.1. The Process of Myanmar Education Reform**

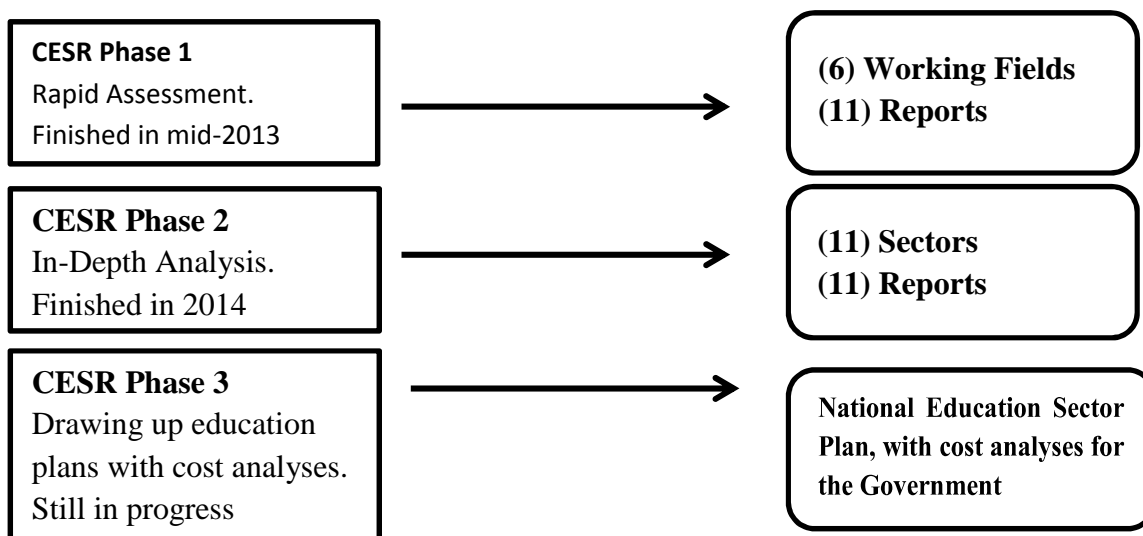
Building a good education system is a long-term process. Therefore, successive governments of Myanmar have implemented not only short-term plans but also long-term plans to improve the education sector.

The Ministry of Education formulated the Special Four-Year Education Development Plan from the 2000-2001 Fiscal Year (FY) to the 2003-2004 Fiscal Year (FY) to develop the education sector and to strive for the development of highly qualified human resources. In addition, in 2001, as a long-term plan, the Myanmar government set up the 30-Year Long-Term Basic Education Plan (FY 2001-02 to FY 2030-2031) to be implemented in six phases each of five-years duration. The 30-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan contains 10 programs for basic education with the purpose of promoting greater access to, and quality of, basic education, and 36 programs for the higher education sector which focus on six areas that will generate qualitative development of higher education and contribute to national development endeavors and the preservation of national identity and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, in February 2012, to initiate the pragmatic reforms in the education sector that are the most important factors in the development of the country, the Conference on Development Policy Options with Special Reference to Health and Education Sectors was organized by the government and development partners. As a result of this conference, an official launch of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) followed in July 2012 with the collaboration of development partners and internal and external experts.<sup>10</sup> This was the second time a CESR had been formed; the first was in 1992. The aim of a CESR is to set up a plan to understand what the current situation is and a strategy to achieve quality improvement and development in the education sector. CESR focuses on the following areas: (1) policy, legislation, management and finance; (2) basic education; (3) teacher education; (4) non-formal education; (5) technical vocational education and training (TVET); (6) higher education; and (7) information and communication technology (ICT).<sup>11</sup> CESR's process is an in-depth analysis of education to

develop a strategy to improve the access to, and quality of, education throughout the country. There are three phases in CESR: Phase 1- Rapid Assessment; Phase 2 - In Depth Analysis; and Phase 3 - Development of one overall National Education Sector Plan, with cost analyses for the government.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1. The Process of CESR**



Then, in October 2013, the government formed an Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC) and 18 thematic working groups to formulate policies and plans for pragmatic education reforms. The main task of CESR is to develop recommendations for reform of the education system, and the main purpose of EPIC is to draft policies for the implementation of educational reform. At present, the CESR team and the EPIC working groups are collaborating to develop an education reform agenda. CESR and EPIC come together to work on Phase 3 of CESR and they have already drawn up the following two plans:

- A two-year plan covering 2014-16; and
- A five-year plan covering 2016-21.<sup>13</sup>

The CESR is now in the last stage of implementing a sector-wide costed National Education Sector Plan (NESP), with the overall goal of improving teaching and student learning achievement in all schools and educational institutions by 2021. Myanmar's policy and legal framework relating to education will be further discussed in Section 3 of this paper.



## 2.2. Achievements and Progress of Myanmar’s Education Reform

Much progress is being achieved by the Myanmar government’s Education Reform Program since it has been in operation for five years. For example, the government has made a commitment to a substantial increase in the overall education budget, and, as Figure 2.2 shows, it has already been increasing since 2011.

**Figure 2. Government expenditure on education from the fiscal year 2011-2012 to fiscal year 2015-2016**

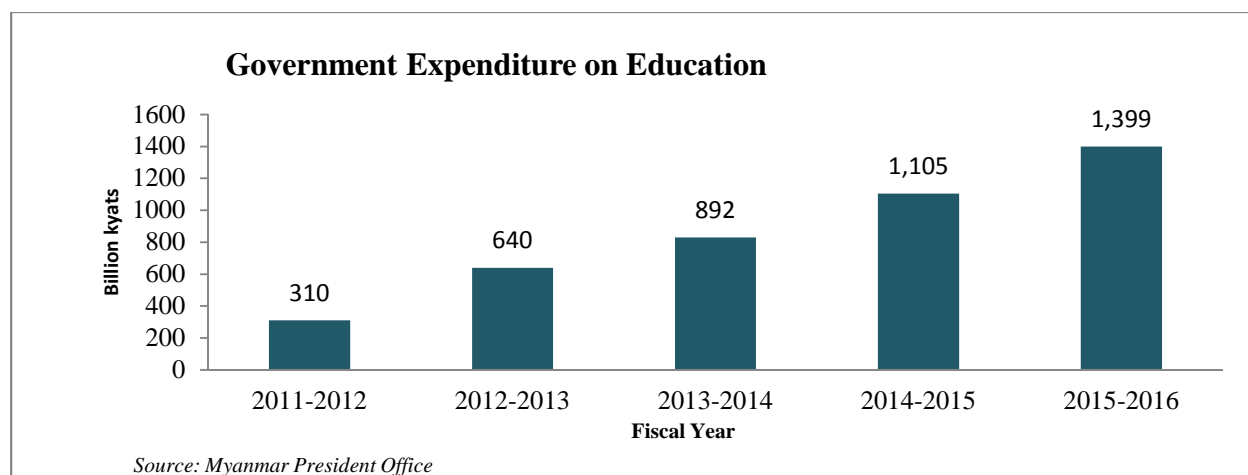


Figure 2.2 above shows that government expenditure on education in fiscal year 2015-2016 was four times that of fiscal year 2011-2012. This rapid rise in government expenditure can also be seen in a comparison between fiscal year 2011-2012 and fiscal year 2012-2013, during which it increased by more than 100 percent.

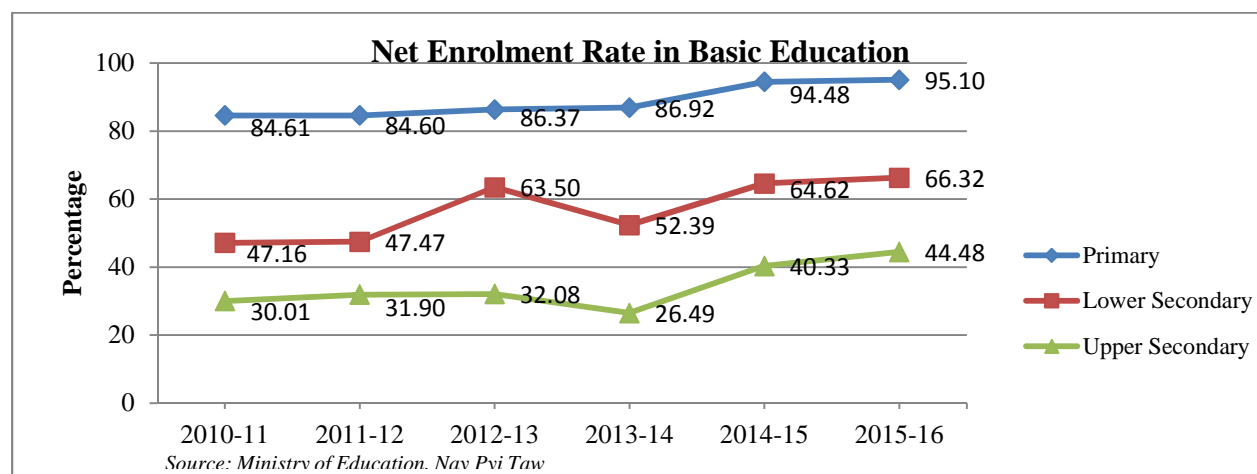
The government also invested USD 100 million in a school grants and stipends program. School grants rose to a minimum of 800,000 kyats, equal to nearly USD 700 per school, and student stipends have also increased. There is also an extension to the scholarship programs, and to the scouts and girl guides programs. The government provides a free school uniform for kindergarten (KG) students, a free school uniform, free textbooks and six free exercise books for primary school students, and free text books for secondary and upper secondary students.<sup>14</sup> Further details about these incentives appear in Section 3.1.3.

As part of the basic education reform program of the Ministry of Education, a new basic education structure of KG+12 (kindergarten plus 12 years) was introduced for the Academic Year (AY) 2016-17. In order to conform to the basic education structure of other countries in the ASEAN region, the previous education structure (5-4-2) (grade 1 to 5 for primary level, grade 6 to 9 for lower secondary level, and grade 10 to 11 for upper secondary level) was transformed into the KG+ (5-4-3) structure. The new basic education structure KG+12(5-4-3) consists of kindergarten, five-year-schooling for primary level, four-year-schooling for lower secondary level and three-year-schooling for upper secondary level. The new KG class is for five-year-olds (the official school age starts from the age of six) and it was launched with a new curriculum.<sup>15</sup>

These KG students will be promoted to Grade-1 next year, and they also have to learn in accordance with another new curriculum, which has already been drawn up.

One of the most significant achievements has been eliminating entrance fees for high schools starting from AY 2015-2016. The entrance fees were eliminated for primary schools from AY 2010-2011 and for middle schools from AY 2013-2014.<sup>16</sup> Primary education is free and compulsory in Myanmar.

**Figure 3. The Net Enrolment Rate at Basic Education Level**



The enrolment rate in basic education rose in AY 2015-2016 compared with the previous years. As the government eliminated entrance fees for every level, the enrolment rate rose at every level of education in AY 2015-2016. Moreover, implementing the free compulsory education system for primary students, and providing stipends and scholarships are also reasons behind the increasing student enrolment rate.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 1. Comparing the number of Basic Education Schools, and Students between AY 2007-2008 and AY 2013-2014**

<b>Number of Basic Education Schools, and Students (AY 2007-2008 vs. AY 2013-2014)</b>				
Sr.No	No.of Schools, and Students	AY 2007-2008	AY 2013-2014	Increase(%)
1	<b>Basic Education Schools</b>			
	Upper Secondary (High) Schools	1,095	2,795	155.3
	Lower Secondary (Middle) Schools	2,159	3,748	73.6
	Post-Primary and Primary Schools	36,144	36,638	1.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39,398</b>	<b>43,181</b>	<b>9.6</b>
2	<b>Students</b>			
	High School	657,108	745,946	13.5
	Middle School	2,077,024	2,586,270	24.5
	Primary School	5,042,016	5,265,132	4.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7,776,148</b>	<b>8,597,348</b>	<b>10.6</b>

Source: Education for all 2015 National Review Report: Myanmar

The number of schools and students has increased dramatically: compared with 39,398 basic education schools, and 7,776,148 students in AY 2007-2008, there were 43,181 basic education schools (a 9.6 percent increase), and 8,597,348 students (a 10.6 percent increase) in AY 2013-2014. In addition, the government opened more new schools in neglected and remote areas to achieve a balance between the number of students and the number of classrooms.

**Table 2. The increasing number of teachers from AY 2011-2012 to AY 2015-2016**

<b>Increasing number of teachers during (5)years</b>			
<b>Sector</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>Increased number</b>
Basic Education	277,644	331,619	<b>53,975</b>
Higher Education	11,074	13,307	<b>2,233</b>
Teacher Training	1,334	1,868	<b>534</b>

*Source: The record of the activities and improvement of Union Ministries during five years terms in Myanmar ( From 2011-2012 to 2015-2016) Part- 2*

Another significant achievement of the education reform over a five-year period was the substantial increase in the number of teachers. To reduce the teacher-to-pupil ratio, the government recruited more teachers for every level of education. In rural and remote areas, university graduates who are residents of these regions were appointed as primary school teachers in 2013 and 2014 to increase the numbers of teachers. As more schools have opened around the country, more teachers have been appointed. As Table 2.2. shows, 53,975 more basic education teachers, 2,233 more higher education teachers and 534 more teacher trainers were appointed in AY 2015-2016 than in AY 2011-2012.<sup>18</sup>

Some achievements can also be seen under the category of policy and law. The Private Schools Registration Law was enacted in 2011, the National Education Law was approved in 2014, the Amendment of the National Education Law was passed in 2015, the draft law relating to TVET was submitted to Parliament in 2015, and the TVET Council was established in 2016.<sup>19</sup> Since the Private Schools Registration Law was passed in 2011, 335 private schools have been allowed to open.<sup>20</sup>

The current government of Myanmar set up a 100-day plan for every ministry, and the Ministry of Education laid down eight main processes such as upgrading schools, more efficient programs for school enrolment, and assessment programs for teachers in giving lectures in order to promote the education sector. During this period, to accomplish the eight main processes, the MoE has upgraded schools and carried out programs for school enrolment, sanitation, health and development. In AY 2016-2017, 3312 schools were upgraded and the ministry has also assisted teachers from schools in Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay and from universities and colleges to gain access to banking systems in order to draw their salaries. Moreover, the ministry has relaxed some rules for faculty members of universities and colleges to enable them to attend

doctorate courses. The ministry also instituted Alternative Education to give a second chance to learn for children who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to finish their formal education. Assessment programs for teachers giving lectures in the education and training sectors were also created, and the ministry worked with 18 other ministries and 14 regional governments to open short-term vocational training schools in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Challenges and Barriers in Myanmar's Education Reform**

Myanmar is trying to make overhauling the education reform a national priority for human development with an enlarged budget, a new national education law and the removal of public school fees. However, significant challenges remain. Below are some of the initiatives taken by the government to deal with these challenges.

#### **3.1. Review of Policy and the Legal Framework**

As discussed in section 2. above, a country needs to adopt good policies to improve its education sector so that it can produce better outcomes.<sup>22</sup> In view of this, the former governments of Myanmar tried to improve education by introducing a new education reform agenda to the sector. The most significant elements of Myanmar's education reform were started by the previous government, such as introducing the 10-point education policy (See Annex - A) and prescribing the laws relating to education.

The Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), which, as discussed above, started in 2012, was established along with the Framework for Economic and Social Reform–FESR (focusing on poverty reduction). As the diagram on page 6 shows, the CESR Phases focused initially on a rapid assessment and in depth analysis to support the EPIC Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC). Eighteen thematic working groups were established to formulate the policy, which aimed to achieve quality improvement and the development of the education sector.<sup>23</sup> Another significant step in the reform process in the education sector can be seen in the process of enacting the laws relating to education - drafting laws relating to education is an ongoing process in the parliamentary legislative calendar.

##### **3.1.1. Previous and Current Legal and Policy Foundation**

The fundamental law of Myanmar is the Constitution of 2008, which serves as the foundation for the nation's transition towards democracy and the reform of its education sector. The Constitution of 2008 describes the obligations and duties of the Union with regard to education, and the right of all Myanmar citizens to education. Most importantly, in clause 366, the Constitution describes its obligation to citizens regarding their right to education (in Chapter 8: Citizens, Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens): Article 366 stipulates that: "Every citizen shall, in accordance with the educational policy laid down by the Union:

(a) have the right to education;

- (b) be given basic education which the Union prescribes by law as compulsory; and
- (c) have the right to conduct scientific research, explore science, work with creativity and write, to develop the arts, and conduct research freely with other branches of culture.”

Again, in Chapter 1, the Constitution describes the obligations of the Union in respect of the provision of education, which is linked to the health sector: “28. The Union shall:

- (a) earnestly strive to improve the education and health of the people;
- (b) enact the necessary *laws* to enable the Nation’s people to participate in matters of their education and health;
- (c) implement a free compulsory primary education system; and
- (d) implement a modern education system that will promote all-around correct thinking and a good moral character, contributing towards the building of the Nation.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in support of democracy, the government is required by the Constitution to enact necessary laws to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate in matters relating to improving the education system.

### **3.1.2. Previous and current government policy and programs to improve access to education**

A particularly significant step in the reform of the education sector was the previous government’s reform agenda on education. The President’s 10-point education reform agenda was announced at the first regular Session of the first term of Pyi Daung Su Hluttaw on 30 March 2011, and this served as a strong initiative to speed up the reform process in the education sector.<sup>25</sup> To support education reform, the 20-Year Long-Term Plan called the “Basic Education Sector National Education Promotion 20-Year Long-term Plan 2011-2031” was written and reflects the President’s 10-point education policy as well as listing the key points of the 30-Year Long-Term Education Plan. The 20-year plan also includes key policy measures currently being implemented for enhancing access to education such as, implementation of the free, compulsory primary education program, and the awarding of stipends for students from needy families. Furthermore, the school grant program can be seen as another significant step in the reform process for enhancing access to education and speeding up the decentralization of the administrative structure for basic education.<sup>26</sup> The current government set up the 16 point reform agenda,<sup>27</sup> which is still in force, to implement quality assurance systems in all educational sectors, to promote inclusive education for all citizens and to promote decentralization. (Annex - A).

### **3.1.3. Policy implementation and ongoing process of reform in respect of previous and current stakeholders**

Although the Law on Free and Compulsory Education and law for TVET is still under review by Parliament, the program implementation began in 2011–2012 with the provision of free school textbooks worth more than USD 1.59 million for more than 5 million primary school students. In addition to providing school textbooks, the government has been encouraging parents to send their children to school by providing school uniforms for every child enrolled in primary school.

To improve access to education, stipends and scholarship programs were officially introduced in 2011–2013, targeting all basic education schools. In the 2012–2013 academic year and the 2013–2014 academic year, the government spent USD 0.5 million on each year program.<sup>28</sup> Briefly, the previous steps in the government’s legal and policy reform agenda reflect the urgent and long-term efforts to improve the three main areas of education - access, quality and management - but the process of reform and its implementation are ongoing.<sup>29</sup>

The significant changes made by the current government can also be seen in the changes made to the curriculum and teaching methodology in the basic education sector, and the university entrance system in the higher education sector. The amendment to the Law of Myanmar Board of Examination of 1973 (the previous version of this law does not mention decentralization, or teacher and student unions) has already been drafted and submitted for the legislation process<sup>30</sup>. The fact that teachers are now allowed to teach in ethnic languages in remote, hilly regions where these languages are spoken, is a further major change. The National Education Commission formed the independent National Education Standards and Quality Assurance Committee to carry out the following sub-articles mentioned in section 54 of National Education Laws as follows: (a) At every level of education there shall be a program of quality assurance; (b) In the assessment of education quality and standards there shall be program of internal and external quality assessment; and (c) The Commission shall establish the standards and methods of evaluation in order to ensure quality.<sup>31</sup> The policies of the current government have shown stability because they have not completely changed the previous policy overall, and they maintain the momentum of the reform process up to its target date of 2030.

### **3.2. The laws relating to education**

The current law guiding basic education was enacted in 1964 and has been amended several times. The law outlines four key objectives in the promotion of education. In brief, these are: promoting “good moral character”; ensuring that students are “well-equipped with basic education”; giving “precedence to the teaching of science”; and delivering vocational training programs, with a “strong foundation” for continuing on to tertiary education. The Basic Education Law 1964 previously mandated the education system as five years of primary-level education, followed by four years of lower secondary-level education, and two years of upper secondary-level education, although now, the curriculum is changing to the KG+12 format (the elements of this format have been explained in Section 2.2).<sup>32</sup>

The other laws relating to education are the University Education Law of 1973 (amended in 1998) that mandates ministries in specific sectors to manage universities in their sector, the Law of Myanmar Board of Examination of 1973, the Education Research Law of 1973, and the Agricultural and Vocational Education Law of 1974 (amended in 1989). The Private Education Laws of 1984 and 2006 prohibit teachers in public schools from practicing fee-based teaching after school hours.

The education legislation supporting the reform process includes the Private School Registration Law of 2011 that provides for the systematic registration for private schools, and the National Education Law of 2014 (amended in 2015) intended to cover the standard curriculum, systematic quality assurance system and how to reduce decentralization. The Law for the Rights of Disabled People (2015) provides for the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that such people do not encounter any discrimination regarding educational rights.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.3. Constitutional and legal support for the education of ethnic groups**

It is estimated that there are more than 130 ethnic groups in Myanmar, though the government usually identifies only eight as the major ones. In the Constitution the nation is responsible for supporting the language and literature of “National races” but it does not provide exact definitions, so that legislation is needed to ensure government support for educational opportunities, including non-formal education for children who live in areas of conflict or in remote, hilly regions. Education law relating to indigenous languages needs to be drafted to ensure that children who speak a language other than Myanmar receive teaching and can read literature in their own languages, and so that the languages and culture of ethnic minorities are maintained.

According to Chapter 1, clause 22, of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar, the Union Government of Myanmar is committed to assisting in developing and improving the education, health, language, literature, arts and culture of Myanmar’s “National races.”

“The Union shall help:

- (a) to develop language, literature, fine arts and culture of the National races;
- (b) to promote solidarity, mutual amity and respect and mutual assistance among the National races; and
- (c) to promote socio-economic development including education, health, economy, transport and communication, and so forth, of less-developed National races.”

### **3.4. Equity**

Due to their socio-economic status, most young people from rural areas have few chances to continue their studies. According to the Myanmar Population and Housing Census<sup>34</sup>, for children

aged 10 to 15 years from urban areas, the enrolment rate was 76 percent, while for children of the same age from rural areas the enrolment rate was under 53 percent. The census data also shows that for children aged 10 to 15 from rich and financially average families, the school enrolment rate was 85.5 percent, while for children of the same age from poor families the rate was only 28.2 percent. The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census reveals that out of 33.9 million people aged 15 years and over, 30.37 million reported that they were able to read and write. Thus, the literacy rate for Myanmar is 89.5 percent. Literacy rates are higher for males (92.6 percent) than for females (86.9 percent). The labor force has a participation rate of 67 percent of all people who are of working age (15-64), with the proportion of males in the labor force much higher (85.2 percent) than that of females (50.5 percent)<sup>35</sup>. Although both the literacy rate and workforce participation rate of males are higher than those of females, in higher education, students and teaching professionals are 86 percent female.

The teaching profession is traditionally regarded as a female occupation in Myanmar not only for reasons of ‘dignity’, but also because male students tend to have financial responsibility for the family and they do not want to enter the teaching profession because of the lower salaries it offers.<sup>36</sup> Despite the positive steps introduced in the government’s agenda and in the law covering the rights of people with disabilities (2015), the education system still needs improvement in catering to the needs of the disabled if it is to be all-inclusive. In addition, ethnic-language teaching outside of school hours, which was initiated in AY 2014-15, still needs upgrading if the school curriculum is to remain culturally relevant to indigenous tribes.<sup>37</sup>

### **3.5. Quality**

One of the most significant challenges for the education system in Myanmar is quality assurance. The district and township offices are responsible for supporting and maintaining the quality of the school system for basic education. In practice, however, these offices focus mainly on the demands of MoE policies and regulations, and are weak in terms of school and teacher inspections. Although matters relating to vocational training are already covered by the national education law, there is no unifying national qualifications framework for TVET and the higher education sector. In the process of reform, a quality assurance system for universities under the Ministry of Education, along with Internal Audit Teams, has been formed and internal assessments for quality assurance at the program level have been made.<sup>38</sup>

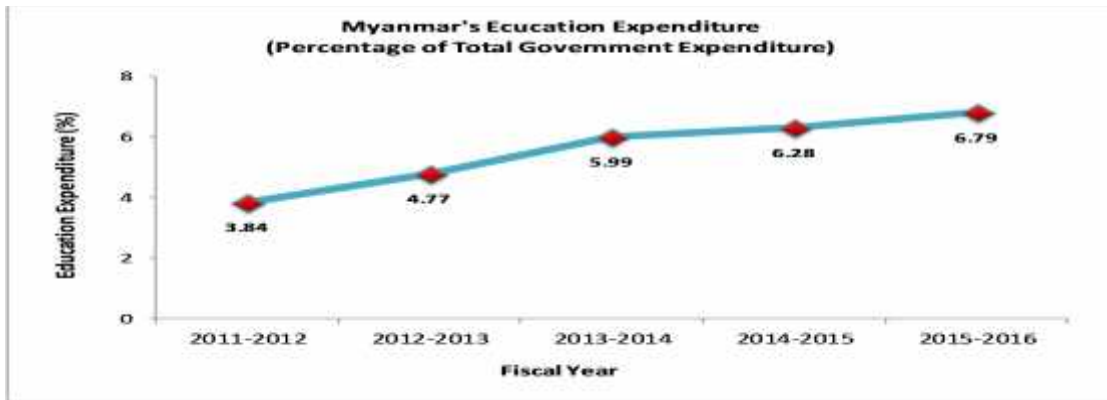
### **3.6. Education Expenditure**

#### **3.6.1. Education expenditure as a percentage of government expenditure**

In 2015-2016, spending on education was around 7 percent of the government budget.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 4. Myanmar's Education Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Government Expenditure**

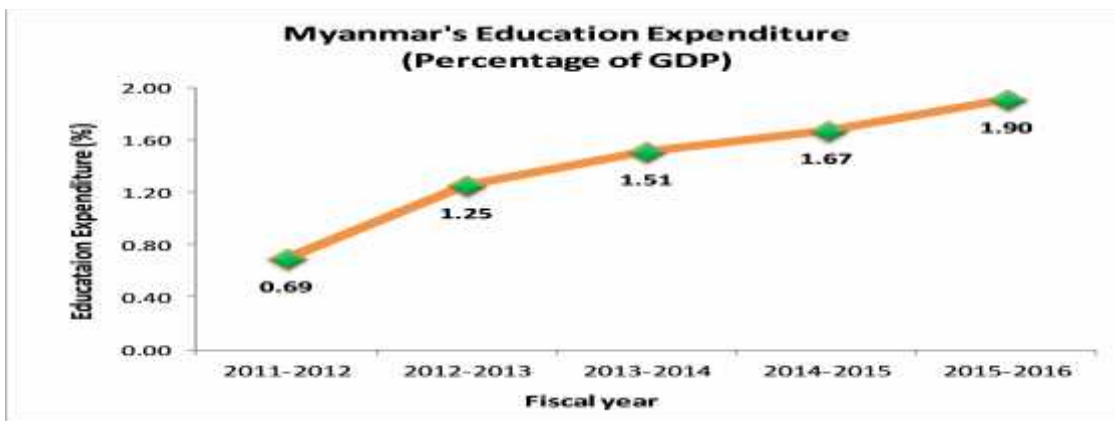


Source: Government's significant efforts in respect of education<sup>40</sup> and Report on government expenditure in 2014-2015 budget year, 2016<sup>41</sup>.

The amount of annual budget spent on education has been increasing but when compared to the annual budget as percentage of overall government expenditure there has been only a small difference.

### 3.6.2. Education expenditure as a percentage of GDP

**Figure 5. Myanmar's Education Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP**

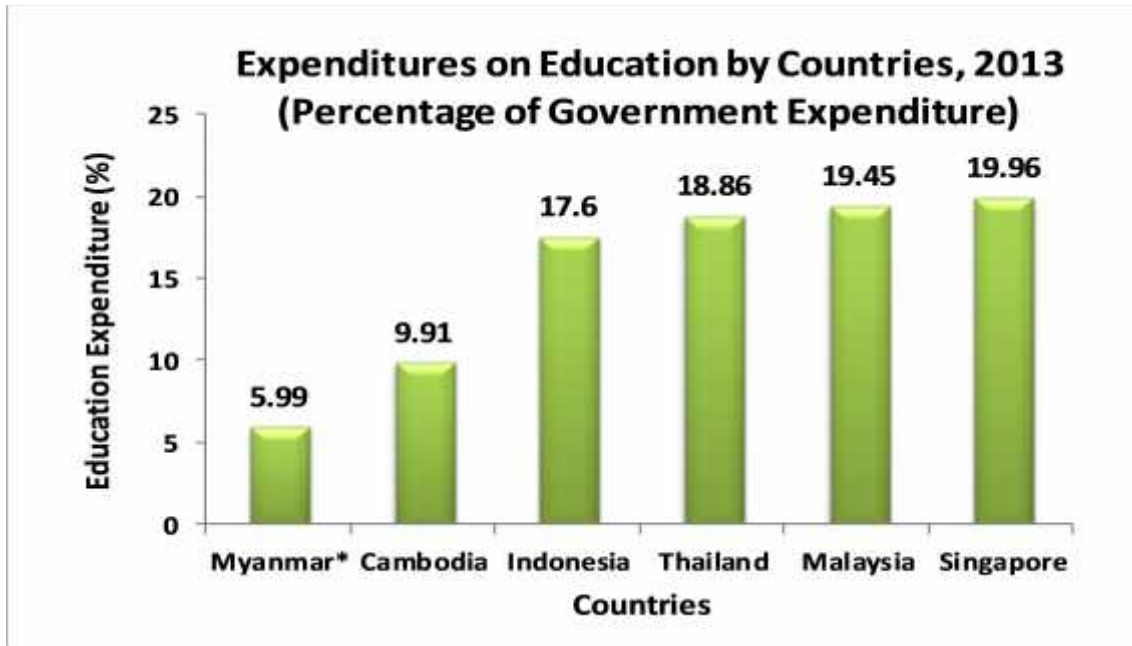


Source: Government's significant efforts in respect of education<sup>42</sup> and Ministry of Planning and Finance, Public Centered Development.

Government expenditure on the education sector increased fourfold from 2011-2012 fiscal year to 2015-2016 fiscal year. However, as a percentage of GDP, there was a smaller, albeit steady, increase. Currently, spending on education is almost two percent of GDP.

### 3.6.3. Education expenditure in Myanmar compared with other countries in the region

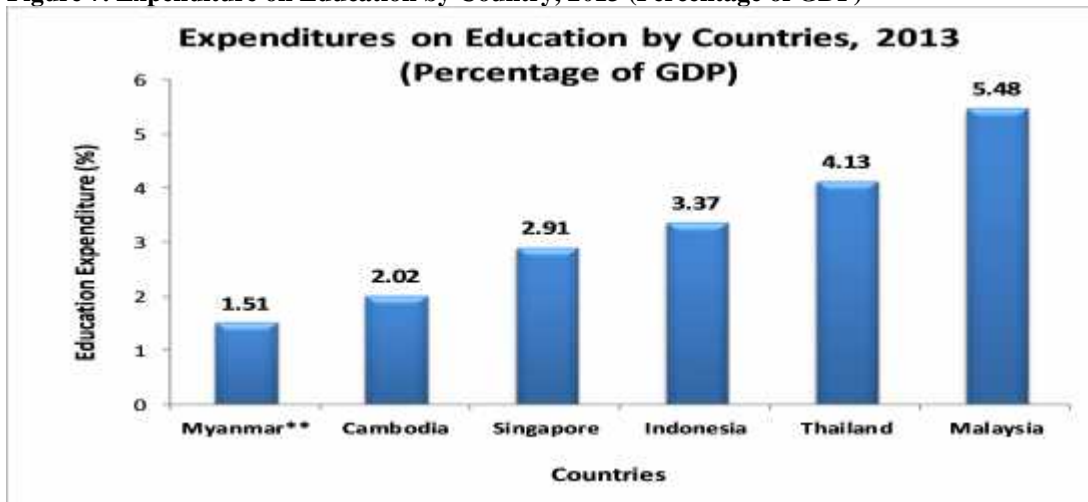
Figure 6. Expenditures on Education by Country, 2013 (Percentage of Government Expenditure)



Source: UNESCO, Expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure.

Although the government has significantly increased the education budget from 2011 to 2016, Myanmar's spending on education is still one of the lowest in the ASEAN region. In 2013, Myanmar's spending on education was 5.99 percent of total government expenditure, which represented a significant difference compared with the 19.96 percent of Singapore.

Figure 7. Expenditure on Education by Country, 2013 (Percentage of GDP)



Source: UNESCO, Expenditure on education as % of GDP.

As shown in the table above, in 2013, Myanmar's education expenditure compared with other regional countries, Myanmar is the lowest at 1.51 percent of GDP on its education sector, while in Malaysia that figure was 5.48 percent.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.6.4. Problems with low expenditure

Education is very important to the economic development of Myanmar. Only when the education system is good enough will the workers needed for the country's manufacturing and services sectors that support the development of the economy be improved. For that kind of quality education, the level of expenditure plays a major role.<sup>44</sup>

In Myanmar, education expenditure, the curriculum, infrastructure, learning materials and the attractiveness of the teaching profession are related. If those elements, and especially the budget allocation, are limited, the education environment will not be conducive to effective teaching and learning.<sup>45</sup> Limited budget allocations cause significant difficulties for education reform. Most graduates are not interested in being teachers because the low salaries offered to them are not attractive.<sup>46</sup>

According to a survey conducted by CESR, teachers reported that most schools do not have enough desks and chairs for classrooms, the classroom size is inadequate, and there are no toilets in the schools. Moreover, many classes are crowded into the same room without any walls or partitions between them. These kinds of problems are mostly the result of inadequate budget allocation.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.7. Literacy, general education level of youths and student-teacher ratio

Literacy, together with educational attainment, strongly influences employment prospects. Some 20 percent of households in Myanmar at the national level have no members of working age who can read or write a simple message. This figure is as low as 11.6 percent in urban areas but rises to 23.4 percent in rural areas. The percentage of households with females of working age, none of whom are literate, is 18 percent.<sup>48</sup>

**Table 3. Literacy level at urban and rural levels, 2015**

Characteristic	Urban	Rural
% of households with no literate members	11.6	23.4
% of households with no literate female members	10.3	21.0

Source: ILO, the survey in March 2015 by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and the Central Statistical Organization of Myanmar with the support of ILO.

**Table 4. Percentage of youths who have reached the various levels of education in urban and rural areas, 2015**

Domain	Percentage of youths with level of education								High School and above	Literate below High school
	Not literate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Vocational certificate	High school	Under graduate diploma	Bachelor degree and above		
Urban	2.4	7.8	23	36	0.7	13.5	4.8	11.8	30.1	67.5
Rural	6.9	16.6	37.1	27.7	0.2	7	1.3	3.1	11.4	81.6

Source: ILO, the survey in March 2015 by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and the Central Statistical Organization of Myanmar with the support of ILO.

According to the table above, there is a significant difference between urban and rural areas in respect of the numbers of young people who complete education at the level of high school and above - 30.1 percent in urban areas as opposed to 11.4 percent in rural area. Below high school level, there is 67.5 percent of youths in urban areas versus 81.6 percent in rural areas. So there are more students in rural areas who are below high school level than urban areas.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 5. Student-teacher ratio compared with neighboring countries, 2014**

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

Source: UNESCO, pupil-teacher ratio by level of education.

According to the table above, there is a significant higher student-teacher ratio in Myanmar compared with other countries in the region. At the primary level, Myanmar has the second highest in student-teacher ratio at 28:1 compared with Brunei's 10:1 which is the lowest in the region. The highest country in student-teacher ratio is Cambodia as 45:1. At the secondary level, Myanmar's student-teacher ratio is the highest at 36:1 while Brunei is the lowest at 10:1. Myanmar's student-teacher ratio is almost four times that of Brunei.<sup>50</sup> Overcrowded classes are detrimental to effective teaching. The student-teacher ratio is an important indicator of the level of investment in education. How much time and attention is given by teachers to each of their

students depends on the student-teacher ratio, or the class size, as well as the social dynamics between students.<sup>51</sup>

The Department of Basic Education under the Ministry of Education is trying to solve this problem. To reduce the teacher-to-pupil ratio, the government recruited more teachers for every level of education. In rural and remote areas, university graduates who are the residents of these regions were appointed as primary school teachers in 2013 and 2014 to increase the numbers of teachers. As more schools have opened around the country, more teachers have been appointed.<sup>52</sup> And another way to reduce high student-teacher ratios is through the government announcing that teachers who graduated from the Education College will be recruited as permanent teachers and teachers who have 10 years' experience in the middle school post will be promoted to temporary high school posts with three year contracts.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.8. Teacher qualifications and the quality of education

The quality of education mainly depends on the teachers' qualifications, competency and level of professional development, as well as other relevant factors such as the student-teacher ratio, the curriculum, learning materials and infrastructure.

#### 3.8.1. Teacher qualifications

Inadequately trained teachers can have a detrimental effect on teaching and learning. In general, a university degree is needed to be a primary level teacher in Myanmar. In some places where there are not enough university graduates, teachers at the primary level are required to have a level of education higher than matriculation, and to have completed one or more teacher training sessions. However, some teachers have never attended any teacher training sessions, but after gaining some teaching experience, they are permitted to attend that training. However, there are still not enough teachers in two-thirds of schools especially in crowded rural schools. To combat this issue, the government is planning to give pre-service and in-service teacher training.<sup>54</sup>

**Table 6. Teachers by Academic Qualifications**

Period	Total No. of Teachers		
	Graduates	Non-Graduates	Total
2007	229,702	24,450	254,152
2008	237,080	22,252	259,332
2009	243,895	17,577	261,472
2010	255,642	17,339	272,981
2011	253,299	24,345	277,644

Source: Central Statistical Organization, Ministry of Planning and Finance, teachers by academic qualifications.

### **3.8.2. Capacity building support for quality education**

Teachers perform a crucial role in education and that is why the government is planning to enhance their skills. Teachers who graduated and have higher qualifications, and those who are particularly motivated, are selected for teacher training programs.<sup>55</sup>

Teachers are trained in different subjects depending on the level at which they will be teaching. For example, more than 20,000 primary school teachers have been trained in the Child Friendly School and Child Centered Approaches, 4,254 Grade 1 teachers have been trained to help children to make the transition from home/Early Childhood Care and Development Center-ECCD<sup>56</sup> (which was formed by the Early childhood care and development law in 2014 with the objective of development of children in all sectors such as physical, mental and social sectors)<sup>57</sup> to school, and 16,390 secondary teachers have been trained in Life Skills Education. As a further strategic approach to capacity building, the development of a National Teacher Education strategy that includes the design, capacity development and management of the teacher education system, teacher qualifications and continuing professional development has been initiated.<sup>58</sup>

As Myanmar raises the quality of its education system, it needs teachers with the right values, skills and knowledge to be effective practitioners. Therefore, Myanmar needs a strong system of teacher education, with programmes that provide the theoretical foundations to produce graduates with the kinds of professional knowledge, understanding and skills associated with the role of the teacher and the process of teaching. That is why the Myanmar Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) have been developed by a group of national professional education experts and UNESCO education specialists over a period of eight months in 2015-2016. UNESCO through the Australian aid funded Strengthening Teacher Education in Myanmar (STEM) project, provided technical assistance in developing the framework. The main objective for the development of this framework is to establish an agreed set of teacher competency standards to support improvement in the quality of teachers and teaching in Myanmar.<sup>59</sup>

The independent development organization, VSO International, in partnership with the British Council, is also providing teacher development training in Myanmar. A project funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), provided two years of teacher training in education colleges, led by foreign education professionals, in 2014. English was taught in the first year of the program, and followed by teaching methodology.<sup>60</sup>

### **3.9. Curriculum Reform and Teaching Methodology in Myanmar Education**

A proper curriculum is fundamental to good teaching, and is required at every level of education.<sup>61</sup> Upgrading Myanmar education standards to reach an international level is one of the tasks for the enhancement of national education laid down by the former president, H.E. U Thein

Sein.<sup>62</sup> To achieve this, a revision of the school curriculum, which has been used for over a decade, has been required.<sup>63</sup>

The primary education curriculum was revised in AY 1998-99 and its introduction began in AY 2000-01. The upgraded curriculum for the upper secondary level was implemented in AY 2000-01, and for the lower secondary level in AY 2001-02. The Seminar on Upgrading Curricula and Syllabi of the Basic Education High School Level was held in April 2006, with the aim of modifying and upgrading the high school curriculum to the international level. The currently used upper secondary school curricula and syllabi were implemented in AY 2008-09.<sup>64</sup> Subjects designed for every level from primary to lower secondary are compulsory. As for upper secondary, Myanmar, English and mathematics are compulsory, but students then have a free choice of any three elective subjects from physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, economics and optional Myanmar.

Since the objectives of the primary curriculum should include basic life skills such as literacy, numeracy, hygiene, and thinking and reasoning,<sup>65</sup> the topics of General Studies (natural science, moral education and civics, and life skills), Aesthetic Education (painting and music), Physical Education and School Activities have been added to the lower primary education curriculum. Social Studies (geography, history, moral education and civics, and life skills), Basic Science, Aesthetic Education (painting and music), Physical Education and School Activities have been added to the upper primary education curriculum as co-curricular subjects. Lessons on human rights education are taught under Moral Education and Civics from Grade 6 to Grade 10 and personal hygiene/health education and environmental education are imparted in all basic education schools through various subjects.<sup>66</sup> Life skills education is taught as part of the national curriculum for the purpose of encouraging the students to be able to live harmoniously with the environment – healthily, physically and mentally. Moreover, students’ personal skills, interpersonal skills and communication skills are motivated through the life skills curriculum, through the use of child-centered activities and through a participatory and interactive approach.<sup>67</sup>

Although those subjects have been added to the new curriculum, the curriculum in schools can still be regarded as centrally determined, without any consideration of local needs and circumstances. It also encourages rote learning, and textbooks and teaching aids are centrally prescribed.<sup>68</sup>

In Myanmar, teachers are used to textbook-based teaching, and examinations and assessments of students are also textbook-based. However, educational achievement cannot truly be attained through traditions and practices such as rote-learning, teacher-centered approaches, and so on.<sup>69</sup> For the improvement of the acumen, creativity and critical thinking of the students, the government is planning to apply the child-centered approach to teaching nationwide.<sup>70</sup> However, lack of teaching and learning materials, insufficient teachers, overcrowded classrooms, high teacher-student ratios, overloaded curriculums, rote memorization and exam systems are the

reasons for the failure of the Child-Centered Approach (CCA), which has been applied since AY 2004-2005 with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and UNICEF. Teachers sometimes cannot apply CCA, despite their willingness, because of the above mentioned barriers. Furthermore, although teachers are urged to apply the Child-Centered Approach, some still just focus on teacher-fronted ‘chalk and talk’ and the old exam-based system.<sup>71</sup> Although textbooks are provided to enable students to discuss subjects individually or in groups, and to learn to think independently, teachers are eager to finish the textbook exercises for the chapter-end tests. So, students lack the skills of critical thinking because the emphasis is on memorizing the lessons learned from the classroom just to pass the exam.<sup>72</sup> Hence, most people agree that the teaching methods of the Myanmar education system still need to be improved.

Improving the quality of basic education is one of the programs to be implemented under the Thirty-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan (FY2001-02 – FY 2030-31), starting from Academic Year 2016-17, as discussed in Section 2.2, and KG + 12 (KG + 5-4-3) is being implemented in the basic education sector.<sup>73</sup> Kindergarteners are being taught using the new, well-modified curriculum to meet the changing needs of the current situation. Teachers think that the new curriculum for kindergarten is different from the previous subject-based curriculum because the new one will ensure that the kindergarteners understand the whole world and how to behave well in society, based on a teaching approach that uses music, dance, poems, games and storytelling. They believe that this is the best way to create a more enjoyable education environment for these young children.<sup>74</sup> A senior official, who has already participated in the Comprehensive Education Sector Review, said that the updated curriculum will discourage the practice of rote-learning and will ensure that students grow as independent thinkers with their own sense of creativity.<sup>75</sup>

For the secondary education sector, the Myanmar Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) Phase 1 recommended that curriculum reform should be conducted; (i) to meet the needs of a technology-based society facing rapid socio-economic development, (ii) to improve quality, reduce overload, remove overlap and gaps in content coverage, and ensure continuity in the current curriculum, (iii) to align with the planned restructuring of school grades, and (iv) to align the Myanmar curriculum to the ASEAN regional standard.<sup>76</sup> For the preparation of new curricula from Grade 1 to Grade 12, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary level, frameworks for each subject are being designed. Those curriculum frameworks will be submitted to the curriculum committee, and then the Commission of National Education Framework will approve them. Curricula will then be drawn up in accordance with the curriculum frameworks for primary level, lower secondary level and upper secondary level, and they will be used for teaching.<sup>77</sup>

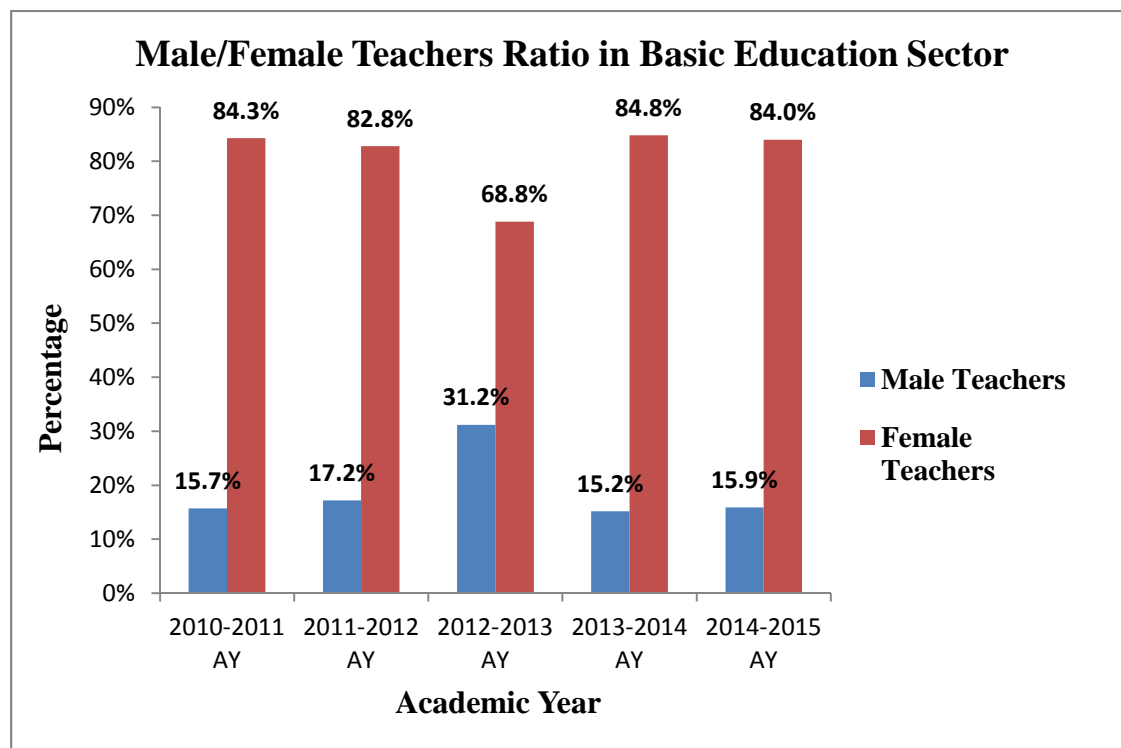


### 3.10. Gender equality in education

According to the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census (and as discussed in Section 3.4), the literacy rate for people aged from 15 years and older is 89.5 percent. However, the male literacy rate is higher than that of females at 92.6 percent and 86.9 percent, respectively.<sup>78</sup>

According to Article 348 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, “The Union shall not discriminate against any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth”. Hence, both girls and boys are given the same right in respect of school enrolment in Myanmar, and women have the same right of access to education at any level, either general education or professional education. According to the World Bank, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of primary school enrolment in 2014 was 0.97 and the GPI of secondary school enrolment in 2014 was 1.02. Therefore, it can be considered that the enrolment rates for girls and boys are almost the same.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (5) is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It is, therefore, a requirement for Myanmar to comply. However, gender disparity can be found in the teaching profession. Because of disincentives such as lower salaries, and insufficient accommodation and facilities, most male breadwinners do not choose teaching as their profession and thus, as shown in the chart below, the number of female teachers is higher than that of males.<sup>80</sup>

Figure 8. Male/Female Teacher Ratios in the Basic Education Sector



Source: Ministry of Education, Myanmar (2016)

### 3.11. Policy Options

**Strengthening the policy of maintaining the quality assurance system to speed up the reform:** The district and township offices have the responsibility for controlling and maintaining the quality of basic education. However, in the process of reform these offices have been mainly concerned with the demands of MoE policies and regulations, and are still weak in terms of school and teacher inspections. In respect of matters relating to vocational training, these are already covered by the national education law, but there has been no unifying national qualifications framework for TVET and the higher education sector up until 2017. In the process of reform, a quality assurance system for universities under the Ministry of Education, along with Internal Audit Teams, has been formed and internal assessments for quality assurance at the program level have been made.<sup>81</sup> In practice, the government should explain to those offices that have the responsibility to apply and implement government policy to establish quality assurance systems, what the anticipated results and advantages of implementing the policy would be, and also to motivate the host office by giving them an understanding of the expected results of applying this policy. This would encourage those involved to conduct their duties and responsibilities more effectively.

**Increasing budget allocation to meet the needs of the education reform:** Increases in education expenditure still need to be greater because limited budget allocations cause significant difficulties in education reform.<sup>82</sup> Most graduates are not interested in teaching as a profession because of low salaries, and this leads to overcrowded classes which are detrimental to effective teaching: Myanmar has thus become the country with the highest student-teacher ratio in the ASEAN region. To combat this problem, the government needs to recruit more teachers to reduce the student-teacher ratio.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by CESR, most schools have many failings, such as insufficient infrastructure, inadequate classroom sizes, and few libraries, and so on.<sup>84</sup> While the government is trying to solve those kinds of problems by increasing the budget, it also needs to be transparent and accountable in the allocation of the education expenditure. Thus, the MoE should be setting up a systematic transparent portal for education, and taking accountability on that portal is the relevant way to solve those issues.

**Upgrading ethnic literature in the school curriculum:** The Constitution and the national education law guarantee the protection of the languages, literature and the cultures of Myanmar's National races. So ethnic-language teaching outside of school hours was initiated in AY 2014-15.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, upgrading and maintaining the indigenous languages and literature in an official way is preferable to the practice whereby each generation hands over the literature and culture to the next in an unofficial way. If the government includes indigenous languages in the school curriculum as a minor subject for use in respective states and regions, all the records that have been created, and the good practice that has been introduced by the government, will have the long-term benefit of maintaining ethnic languages, and can also help to advance study and research in these topics in the future.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From 2011, since Myanmar became a democracy, the government has been implementing pragmatic reforms to create a better education system that can match those of other countries in the region. As the reform period has now lasted for more than five years, it can clearly be seen that there have been benefits in many parts of the education sector. For instance, the enrolment rate has increased as the government has eliminated entrance fees for every level of students. Because of the reform, the budget for education has risen higher than it was before. As a result of the increasing budget, the numbers of schools, students and teachers have also risen. Some policies and laws have also been enacted to improve the standard of education.

The most significant education reform of recent times has been the alteration of the school structure of 5-4-2 to KG+12(5-4-3) starting from AY 2016-2017. Also important is the fact that teachers are now required to undertake pre-service and in-service training so that they can familiarize themselves with new curricula and teaching methodology.

Although the government is maintaining a focus on the education sector and trying to upgrade it so that it does not fall behind those of other countries in the region, there are still many challenges and barriers to overcome in the process of education reform in Myanmar. Even though government expenditure on education has noticeably increased, more is required to improve the education expenditure to meet the needs of the education reform. Moreover, in the implementation of curriculum reform, ensuring that teachers and students are familiar with the changes is also very challenging since they are used to the previous education system of chalk-and-talk teaching and rote-learning. Applying the Child-Centered Approach successfully requires that the high student-teacher ratio is lowered, poor infrastructure and teaching methodology, and limited teaching aids must be addressed in order to have an effective education system. To be able to overcome the abovementioned challenges, the government needs to keep focusing on its ongoing process of education reform in cooperation with local experts and international development partners.

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**Annex – A Comparison and review of previous and current government policy relating to Education**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<b>A.1</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To implement free, compulsory primary education system of an international standard To provide scholarships, stipends and awards both locally and internationally	Opening more schools in rural and border areas; Monastic Schools, Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE); Development of Non-Formal Middle School Education (NFMSE) curriculum and learning packages Provision of free textbooks, exercise books and stipends, school grants
<b>A.2</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To implement a free compulsory primary education system and to extend to other levels	Ongoing process
<b>B.1</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To nurture the new generation as intellectuals and intelligentsia in human resource development	Expansion of Child Friendly Schools; Implementation of Child-Centered Approach (CCA) training; Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy has been finished; Development of quality indicators; Expansion and quality improvement of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services; KG curriculum transition; Opening pre-school classes at basic education schools
<b>B.2</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To nurture new generation as intellectuals and intelligentsia in human resource development	Ongoing process
<b>C</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To upgrade the quality and the socio-economic status of educational personnel	Increasing education expenditure four times FY.2011 to 2015
<b>D.1</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To promulgate relevant laws for the participation and contribution of the private sector in education services	Passing the private school registration law (2011) National Education law (2014) amended in 2015
<b>D.2</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To allow the establishment of private schools in accordance with the law and encourage their cooperation in education To achieve freedom in education in accordance with Myanmar National Education Law and other education laws	Ongoing process
<b>E.1</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To collaborate with international and local organizations including the UN, INGOs and NGOs	Changing the curriculum with the support of development partners



<b>E.2</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To welcome the advice of experts, non-governmental education organizations, representatives selected by parents, teachers and students when the ministry and respective ministries formulate the education policies	Ongoing process Changing the curriculum with the support of development partners
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Sources; *National EFA Review Report.(Myanmar)(tbc.)*

No.	Policy	implementation
<b>F.1</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To utilize teaching aids more effectively	Ongoing process
<b>F.2</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To utilize modern technology to upgrade education standards to the international level	Ongoing process
<b>G</b>	<b>Previous Government policy</b> To upgrade education To improve capacities of teachers in both the basic and higher education sectors	Ongoing process
<b>H</b>	<b>Current Government policy</b> To collaborate in upgrading education	Ongoing process
	To conduct inclusive education	
	To create an education system that advances lifelong learning and continuing education	Ongoing process
	To give knowledge that can be applied in socio-economic life	Ongoing process
	To establish autonomous universities	Ongoing process
	To reduce centralization	
	To support a university entrance system that enables students to make a choice based on their desires and qualifications	Ongoing process
	To be free from interference of religious and political affairs in institutions	Ongoing process
	To implement quality assurance systems in all educational sectors	Ongoing process
	To create an opportunity to establish a Teachers' Union as well as a Students' Union To increase the enrolment rate in the basic education sector in higher education institutions in line with the charter of the respective institutions	Ongoing process