

CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN RURAL AREA OF MYANMAR

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Abstract. This paper is mainly focused on the challenges for the development of the education in rural area of Myanmar. First, I introduced the background information and education system of Myanmar. Actually, the gap of educational development of the urban and rural area is very big. Therefore, I highlight the main challenges for the educational development in rural area and the consequences of these challenges. According to the result of CESR review, the students' dropout rate in rural area is higher than the urban area. The access to education in rural area is also limited. Therefore, in this paper, I discuss some challenges, poverty's effect on rural education, and lack of resources in rural school, power gap, lack of qualified teachers, transportation and communication problems, and impacts of disasters on rural education, low government investment and impact of private school policy on the education in rural school and then if we not solve that problem, what kind of consequences will be faced.

Keywords: challenges, educational development, rural areas, Myanmar

Introduction

Education is very important factor for developing a country. Today, education in rural area is a critical issue to discuss in most of the developing countries. Another issue is the school choice policy. With the advancement of the impact of globalization, the idea of marketisation becomes influence on education directly and indirectly. In a market-based society, privatization of education is one of the popular trends for education. In this trend, school choice policy becomes as a critical issue in most of the developing countries. Most of the families which have the income below the poverty line choose the public schools. Among public schools, rural public schools have many difficulties to get equal opportunities to education.

In our country, most of the public schools don't have enough qualified teachers, facilities, and resources especially in rural area. In our country, 20% of the teachers are unqualified. In rural area, there are other difficulties to have the access to quality education, such as family income, transportation problem. Transportation problem is very serious in the remote areas. Most of the teachers don't want to teach in the remote area. Therefore, the rural schools in remote areas have the teacher shortage problem. And then, as most of the teachers in rural area are novice teachers, they do not have enough qualification and skills. After serving two or more years of teaching experiences, they want to move to the urban schools. Therefore, the rural schools always have the unqualified teachers. To develop country, education is very important sector. And another important factor is to make improvement in rural education in developing countries because in our country, 65% of the total population is rural people. Therefore, I want to discuss what are the challenges for the development of rural education in Myanmar and how can we solve these challenges, and if these problem are not solved, what kind of consequences will be faced.

Background information of Myanmar

Myanmar is also known as Burma. The total population of Myanmar is 53.86 million. Rural population is 65% and the urban population is 35%. Myanmar, officially called the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, is a sovereign state in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is divided into seven states and seven divisions with a total population of 54 million. According to the 2016 human development index (HDI) from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Myanmar stands at the rank of 145 out of 188 countries in human development. This human development index is the geometric mean of the three main dimensions such as health dimension, education dimension, and standard of living dimension. Such low rank of human development can give a striking impact on the rural education and their existence. In Myanmar, rural people face a variety of social problems and risks such as poverty and uneven wealth distribution, migration, cultural attitudes concerning the social position of children, gender inequality, HIV and AIDS, disability, ethnic conflict, displacement, climate change and natural disasters.¹⁾ These adverse conditions can hinder their physical and mental health. Myanmar has a population of over 16 million children whereas the majorities (three quarters of 16 million children) are from rural areas and economically shortage remote areas of the country, and face significant barriers to access to basic requirements and services including: education, health, water and sanitation.²⁾

Myanmar is primarily a Theravada Buddhist society, with about 89% of the population. Most Burmese are very devout, and treat monks with great respect.³⁾

Basic education system in Myanmar

Basic education in Myanmar currently consists of five years' primary education, four years' lower secondary education and two years of upper secondary education. The 5-4-2 structure of the education system is under review and will eventually be replaced by 5-4-3 structure. Pre-school education is also

available, but the pre-school sector is not effectively integrated with the rest of education system and only about one-fifth of all eligible children attend a pre-school, with children in rural areas being the least likely to participate (Fig. 1).

The Ministry of Education is mainly responsible for the provision of basic education in Myanmar. Two other Ministries also involved are the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Broader Affairs (Hayden & Martin, 2013).

Myanmar education system is in a much weakened state. Prior to the imposition of military rule, Myanmar (then known as Burma) had of better education system in Southeast Asia. Now its education system must undergo a prolonged process of recovery that will present challenges.

The vast majority of children in Myanmar attend government-run schools, beginning formal classes each June once they have reached five years of age. Children currently spend five years at primary school, four in lower secondary and two in upper secondary. But now, we are launching 5:4:3 systems.

Most of the children in Myanmar attend government-run schools, beginning formal classes each June once they have reached five years of age. In primary level, children currently attend five years, fours in lower secondary and two in upper secondary schools. According to Ministry of Education, in the academic year of 2015/2016, Myanmar had 45387 schools for 8.85m children. Among them, some 63% or 28,519 of infrastructures were primary schools (with 5.18m students) and 14%, or 6224, were lower secondary schools (enrolling 2.8m students). The country had a total of 322, 514 teachers, with a teacher-student ratio of one teacher for every 27 pupils.⁴⁾

The primary school education is compulsory and the curriculum emphasized on the basic, such as mathematics, science and English. In the final two years of secondary school, the subjects of science and technology are conducted in English. But, one in five children between the ages of 10 and 17- about 1.7m young people were working instead of attending school. Many families need

children to earn an income, and often parents cannot afford the cost of books, uniform and other school-related fees.

According to UNESCO data⁴⁾ there were 284, 278 young children not enrolled in school in 2014, compared with 649, 341 in 2010. Thus, it is clear the nation's net enrolment rates have been improving since the country embarked on its political reforms. At the primary level, the net enrolment rate was 94.5% in 2014, compared with 87.8% in 2010, while the secondary level the rate was 48.3% in 2014, up from 45.1% four years before. Although school enrolment rate was increased, we still have school drop-out rate especially in rural areas. There are many reasons of still having drop-out rate. Among them, in this paper, the challenges for the development of education in rural area will be discussed.

In Myanmar, both boy and girl are equally remaining in the schools until the final years of secondary school. But girls can perform better result than boys and until high schools' examination. For example, 60.1% of higher education students are female.

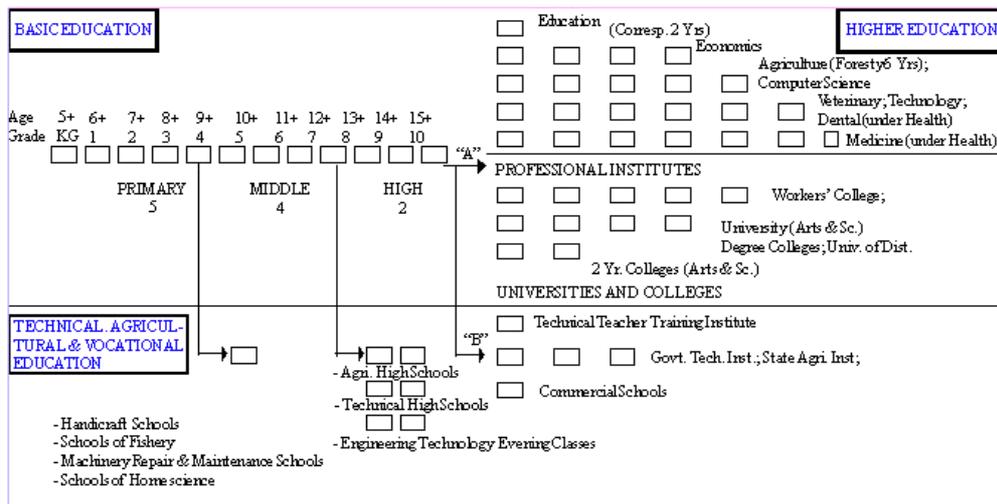


Figure 1. Education system in Myanmar

Dropout rate

According to the official data for academic 2006-2007 to 2010-2011, dropout rates were highest in Grade 1, Grade 5 and Grade 11, at 14 percent, 21.7 percent and 17.6 percent respectively. Dropout rates were greater in rural areas than in urban areas, and dropouts were more prevalent in the final grades of the primary and upper secondary levels. A study of IHLCS data by a senior education economist from ADB indicates that 1 out of every 4 primary graduates left school early, as did 3 out of every 5 Grade 11 students (Table 1).

Table 1. Average dropout rates (Academic 2006-2007 to 2010-2011)

Areas	Dropout Rates		
	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Urban	1.9%	0.8%	33.8%
Rural	13.9%	22.7%	42.9%
Total	11.1%	12.8%	37.0%

Rural and urban differences in education

The gap between rural-urban divide is prominent in Myanmar. All developing countries have the inequalities and higher dependence on agriculture activities. The education gap between rural and urban divide is also evident though the country has a literacy rate of 89.7%. While every village does have at least one school, in remote and border areas, the number reduces to one school for five villages. The presence of monastic schools helps bridge the gap. Enrollment into primary schools is high, with 85% of children of primary school age attending school in urban areas, compared to 76% in rural areas. However, all the enrolled children do not complete primary school education. The dropout rate is higher in rural areas due to problems of transportation and access to schools, among other reasons. Attendance in secondary schools is lower with 69% of secondary school age children attending school in urban areas, compared to only 34% in rural areas. The 156 institutes of higher education are all in cities.

Training facilities for teachers and availability of school supplies in rural schools are much lesser than their urban counterparts.⁵⁾

Poverty's effect on rural education

Now, the primary education and secondary education is free and compulsory in our country. Government also provides school uniform and textbook. But we still have the school dropout problem in primary and secondary education. The main reason of still having school dropout rate is poverty especially in rural area. The prominent issue in my country is that in some region, some children cannot attend school regularly because they help their parents' works. The basic cause of this problem is the parental economic background. Even they have free education for their primary education, they face this problem. And, some parents do not value the importance of education. Especially in rural area, children want to go to school but their parents want children to help their works such farm, fishing and workers. These problems are based on the parents' education background and economic background. The possible solution is the providing more investment in agriculture and providing job opportunities for local people. If we can reduce poverty rate, the school enrollment rate will be increased.

Lack of resources in rural school

In addition, as the shortage of learning resources, the children can't do the practical activities and focus on memorization facts. But most of the urban schools have the adequate learning resources because the parents and school communities support for having access of learning resources. Especially in rural area, they do not have enough learning resources. As a result, the children do not have the equal opportunities to learn. The teachers can to use the computer. And some school do not have computer. It is one of the barriers to access to quality education. For example, if even the science teachers cannot teach with the real laboratory apparatus, they can use the video lesson form online. But if

they do not have the computer and overhead projector and some teachers do not have technological skills in rural area. The parents (with high income) want to choose the urban school and some choose the private school. Therefore, the government should invest in education sector and provide for having equal access

Another problem is the lack of reading materials. Although the government provides the textbook and notebook, the other extra reading materials are needed to support for understanding the context in the textbook, for example, dictionaries, stories and science practical guide. In urban area, there are many bookshops where a lot of supporting reading materials can be got. Also, the online access is one of the ways to get the information and knowledge, but especially in some rural and remote area, they do not have internet access.

Power gap

Another problem is the power gap. The power gap – the electrification ratio in Myanmar, is much lower than that of its neighboring Asian countries in both rural and urban areas. Per capita electricity consumption is about one-twentieth of Thailand. Only 60% of the total power supply is reliable. The use of renewable energy sources like hydropower for approximately 70% of the total supply, makes it vulnerable to the vagaries of nature, and a dry spell leads to major shortages. Rural access to power is more disturbing with over 72% villages still un-electrified, according to the Ministry of Electric Power's report on rural electrification in Myanmar. Villages see only a small number of households connected with a tangle of wires to electricity poles. With only 16-18% of the rural people having access to power, the setting sun plunges the countryside into blackness. In sharp contrast, 89% of the urban population has access to electricity, which facilitates industrial production as well. With foreign investment being allowed, the power situation is expected to improve in the next 3-5 years

Power gap is also the barriers to access the quality education in rural areas. For example, when I was serving senior assistant teachers, I taught biology subjects. We do not have laboratory apparatus and learning resources to teach science lesson. Therefore, I downloaded the science lesson video. But, there is no electricity to use computer and overhead projectors. This is the main barriers to access effective education in rural schools. Lack of electricity also affects on the students' studying time. For example, most of the students in rural area use the candles to get the light at night study. Sometimes, some families cannot buy candles. So, the children cannot study in some days. There are so many differences in rural and urban education.

Lack of qualified teacher

In our country, 20% of the teachers are unqualified. Especially in rural areas, the schools have unqualified teachers. In some schools, they don't have enough teachers, so they use local people to teach the primary and secondary school. In some schools, some teachers are just passed the high school. They are even not graduated from the University. They do not have teacher training. It is the serious problem in remote areas.

Another reason for having unqualified teacher is the promotion and transfer system. In our country, the promotion system is from primary to secondary and to high schools. In rural schools, most of the primary teachers are novice teachers. They do not have experiences and skills at the beginning of their teaching profession. But, when they had teaching experiences and teaching service, they want to get promotion and to be secondary teachers. So primary levels always have the novice teachers and do not have qualified teachers.

Transfer system is also one of the reason to have unqualified teachers. In our country, the transfer is not balanced because of a lot of bias and corruption. As mentioned above, the rural teachers are novice teachers. When they had teaching experience and skills, they want to move the urban school and their

home town. Therefore, only local people want to stay in schools without transferring to another school. Some local teachers do not go to schools punctually because they work their family income before going schools, for example farming and another job. This transfer system also effects on rural educations.

Transportation and communication problems

Transportation is one of the important factors for developing a country. In our country, transportation is very bad in remote areas. In this area, they also don't have enough school. In remote areas, there is only one school for the five villages while there is one primary school for each village in the central areas. As a result of lack of schools in each village, the dropout rate is higher than in rural areas of the remote areas. Because of the transportation problems, all children in remote areas cannot go to school. Therefore, the government should focus on the increasing numbers of school building in the remote areas. If they have primary school at their village, they can finish at least primary education level. And better transportation system should be provided in remote and rural area. If they had good transportation, they can go to another village school to attend secondary or high school.

Impacts of disasters on rural education

Disasters issues seriously occur in rural area and remote area in Myanmar. One of the reasons of facing the disaster issue is the negative effect of natural resources. Myanmar has the rich natural resources. But, we can't use these natural resources effectively and efficiently because we do not have modernized technology. This may cause the disaster issue especially in raining season such as over flooding. And another problem is the deforestation. We don't have systematic plan for keeping deforestation. Environment conservation is one of the important sectors that should be done by governments and local people. In recent three years, most of the schools in rural area and remote areas

close due to the flooding in July and August for nearly two weeks. This is the impact of disaster on the education in rural and remote areas.

Low government investment

To get the social equality in a country, the government should invest equally in every part of the country. In some rural area of our country, the government organization did not come to see the situation of that part because of the transportation problem; as a result, they do not know the real situation and don't do any investment or donation. Mostly, they invest in urban school. This is the real situation, the transportation and communication is very poor in my township, so the ministry of inspection never comes to our school, all of the teachers go to the township office to be evaluated by the organization of inspection. As a result, they do not know the real situation and never do any support.

Impact of private school policy on the education in rural school

Privatization of education is the new term in the market-based society. In marketisation of education, private sector also influences on education sectors. School choice policy is the very popular in our country. Most of the rich families send their children to private school. The school tuition fee is too high and also they accept only good students. As a result, the public school accepts the poor students. In rural areas, some of the school has many challenges because most of the good students transfer to private school, so the school performance becomes low and low. In some school, no student did not pass matriculation exam. The society complains and blames on the teachers.

Consequences of these problems

If the above mentioned problems are not solved, the following consequences will be faced. The lack of resources causes the low performance of student's rural areas. If we compare the performance result of rural and urban, we can see the differences.

Transportation is main problem in my country. Poor transportation may cause the high school dropout rate. Some parents worry about their children when they go to school, because the school is very far away from their village and also they have to pass the river or stream.

Government and non-government investment is also important factor. Generally, they government support the school that already have enough resources, these school and students in these school have more and more opportunities. As a result, the gap of social inequality will become higher.

Conclusion

The government should have a special plan for rural area, for example, the local library and rural education development organization. And for the teachers, there should have the training program for the rural teachers.

In order to solve the transportation problem, the government should provide a school (at least primary school) in each village and these schools should have the enough teachers because although some villages have the schools, they do not have the enough teachers. Therefore, one teacher teaches several classes.

And the teachers' salary is very low in our country. So, most of the teachers think about the money for their family, and want to do extra job outside the school. They cannot focus on the teaching. In urban schools, teachers can get extra money if they do private tutoring because most of the parents in urban can provide their children. Unlike, although rural school teachers do private tutoring, they cannot get money too much because most of the parents in rural areas are not too rich and the majority of them are farmer and workers. Therefore, the government should provide the extra salary for rural teachers. The government's recognition is that education is a crucial part of its long-term goal of creating a more prosperous and inclusive nation is only one component of a multifaceted effort.

PICTURES



NOTES

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2. <http://themimu.info/census-data>
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