EDUCATION RESEARCH AGENDA IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS OF MYANMAR 2024

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a research agenda on education in conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar. It builds on the research gaps that were identified through a rigorous review of existing educational research across three key parallel systems: ethnic education, refugee education in camp settings in Thailand, and educational provisions for Myanmar migrant learners (Rinehart et al., 2024). The study employed a bottom-up, participatory approach involving a series of consultations with key educational stakeholders from these three educational settings as well as representatives from donors and development partners supporting education in Myanmar. Seven research themes were initially developed by synthesising data from consultations. These were then shared with 32 interviewees from donor and development partner organisations, and ethnic, migrant and refugee communities to gain their further perspectives and to determine research priorities based on urgency, feasibility and the benefits of the themes in their educational contexts. The final research agenda was presented to 24 selected educational stakeholders for validation. The finalised agenda includes four research areas: (i) teacher management, professional development and wellbeing; (ii) access to quality education; (iii) community engagement and participation; and (iv) envisioning an inclusive national education system. Additionally, we identified three cross-cutting research themes that underpin all four research areas: (i) inclusion, equity and justice in education; (ii) safety and wellbeing in and through schooling; and (iii) policy framing, formulation and enactment towards systems strengthening. This process exemplifies a rigorous approach to research agenda development involving the potential users of the research evidence, and makes a major contribution to the field of education research in conflict-affected contexts of Myanmar. Hence, it should serve the research community in Myanmar in its aim to produce policy-relevant and actionable evidence in education.

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ACRONYMS

CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
EAO	Ethnic armed organisation
EEP	Ethnic education service provider
EiE	Education-in-emergencies
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis
KII	Key informant interview
LAYS	Learning adjusted years of schooling
MLC	Migrant learning centre
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTB-MLE	Mother tongue-based multilingual education
NUG	National Unity Government
SAC	State Administration Council

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Education in conflict and protracted crisis: The Myanmar context

Since its independence from British rule in 1948, Myanmar has maintained diverse educational provisions that are managed by different educational authorities. These provisions operate in parallel with the centralised state education system. Children and youth living within territories controlled by non-state ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) receive education services from a range of ethnic education service providers (EEPs), many of which are education departments of their respective EAOs. EEPs also provide services in areas of mixed control, where both an EAO and the central state have an administrative presence.

The provision of ethnic education aims to preserve and promote the languages, cultures, histories and traditions of specific ethnic communities. EEPs aim to achieve these goals while providing basic education and credentials for economic livelihoods, though promotion of language and culture is generally their primary goal. In many ways, EEP systems represent acts of resistance against the public education system, which has long pursued a policy of cultural assimilation around the language, history and culture of the majority Bamar ethnic group, who control the political power in the centre (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016; South and Lall, 2016a; Kipgen, 2022). EEPs are diverse in terms of size, language of instruction, financing and resourcing, infrastructure and their relationships with the central state and proximal EAOs. The Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Kayan, Mon, Shan and Ta'ang are among the ethnic minority groups that have notable EAOs and parallel ethnic education systems. It is estimated that the ethnic education sector had around 300,000 enrolled students in 2019, compared to just under 9 million enrolled students in the public education system (Lall, 2020). Specific figures on the number of students, schools and teachers within each EEP system have never been publicly available due to their politically sensitive nature.

In Thailand, parallel education services are provided to refugees and migrants of Myanmar origin. Across the nine refugee camps, education is administered in seven camps by the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity and in two camps by the Karenni Education Department (Oh, 2010). Outside of this provision, refugees are legally barred from accessing other schooling opportunities, as Thailand – which is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol – acts more as a transit country than a host country for refugees. As of July 2024, the total population of refugees across these camps was over 103,000, with 92% identifying as either ethnic Karen or Karenni and 33% being school-aged children and youth.[1]

Thailand also hosts a substantial number of migrants. The International Organization for Migration estimates that 334,000 persons from Myanmar are residing in the Thai Provinces along the border, with nearly one-fifth (63,000) reportedly arriving since the coup in February 2021.[2] Rather than a cohesive system, migrant education exists as a constellation of independently run migrant learning centres (MLCs) that are not recognised as schools under Thai law and adopt different approaches to education provision. In general, their education is more Myanmar-leaning, often adopting the national Myanmar curriculum or the curriculum of another provider from Myanmar (such as an EEP) and using a language from Myanmar as the language of instruction (Burmese or an ethnic minority language).

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[1] Refugee Camp Population: July 2024, The Border Consortium, July 2024
[2] Mobility Tracking Myanmar Migrants: October 2023, International Organization for Migration, October 2023

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Myanmar's 2021 military coup d'etat interrupted a decade of education reforms. Against the backdrop of ongoing civil war between numerous armed actors and the State Administration Council (SAC) military junta, many educational provisions have become heavily politicised and are increasingly used to serve the ideologies and political visions of armed groups. These armed actors vary in size, resources they are able to mobilise. Even though their long-term political goals do not always converge given their diverse histories, military strengths and political dynamics within these groups, there appears to be a broad consensus that they are fighting a revolutionary war to unequivocally defeat the SAC that is in power post-2021 (Brenner, 2024). Following the 2021 coup, civil servants, including many government teachers, launched a nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which has hamstrung the provision of social services, including education. Teaching and learning in state schools have been adversely affected by the CDM and ongoing armed conflict in school surroundings. Consequently, households have often needed to turn to parallel non-state education provisions, where these are available, which operate as education-in-emergencies (EiE) models.

Large swathes of the Myanmar periphery are now contested, with territories held by a variety of non-state armed actors who frequently clash with the Myanmar military. Since the coup, much of the country has been engulfed in violent conflict. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that nearly 36,000 conflict events have occurred across 319 of Myanmar's 330 townships (96.6%) as of August 2024.[3] Also as of August 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that over three million people have been internally displaced.[4] In its 2024 conflict index, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project lists Myanmar as the most violent and fragmented country globally in terms of the number of conflict incidents and the active presence of hundreds of armed actors.[5]

The Peace Research Institution Oslo (Østby et al., 2022) suggests that 87.9% of children in Myanmar are at risk of armed conflict. Valenza and Stoff (2023) estimate that 98% of Myanmar children – including roughly 11.4 million school-aged children – are affected by the ongoing crisis, with over 3.5 million being out of school and 6.5 million attending school but experiencing learning deprivation. Consequently, it is estimated that only 12% of the school-aged children affected by the conflict in Myanmar are learning to an adequate level. Myanmar is experiencing an educational crisis on a scale unprecedented in its tumultuous post-colonial history. A robust knowledge base is needed to respond productively and constructively to this educational crisis.

B. ERICC Myanmar research agenda development

The co-constructed research agenda for Myanmar has been informed by a rigorous evidence review, multiple consultative workshops with key participants from ethnic, refugee and migrant education, and interviews with representatives of international organisations who are supporting education in the context of Myanmar (Figure 1).

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[3] Myanmar Conflict Map, International Institute for Strategic Studies, August 2024
[4] Operational Data Portal - Myanmar, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, August 2024
[5] ACLED Conflict Index, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, January 2024

Figure 1. Co-construction of research agenda
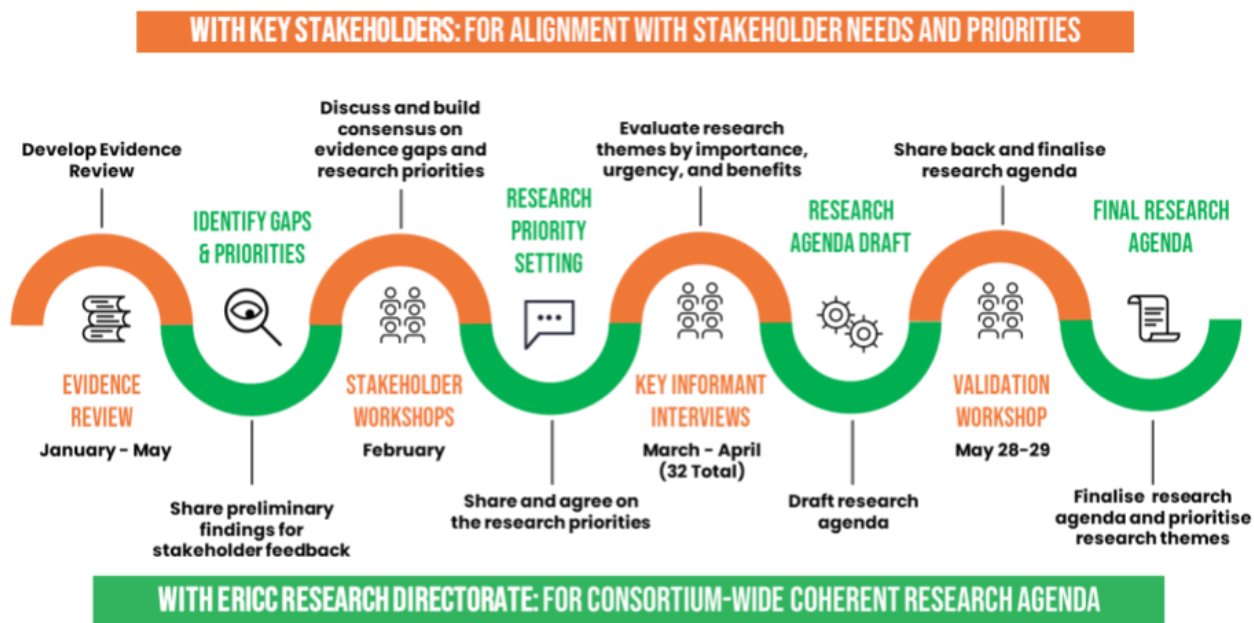
In January 2024, members of the ERICC Myanmar team led a three-day consultative workshop with representatives from refugee and migrant education organisations to help identify priority research areas for these two contexts in Thailand. Thirty-five education participants from eight civil society organisations took part in discussions about the key educational challenges faced by actors in the context of mass displacement and the urgent needs around contextually relevant professional development for teachers. During the workshop, participants identified areas of educational research that could support policies and practices within refugee and migrant education provision. Data was collected using the Mentimeter tool, which allowed participants to share their comments bilingually and anonymously. The data was analysed and developed into the following seven key research questions:

1. How do education providers enable learners to make sense of the contexts of conflict, crisis and displacement in which they find themselves?

2. How do education providers in migrant and refugee settings develop pathways for teacher certification in contexts of conflict, crisis and displacement, including recognition of teachers' professional experience when they do not have formal teaching qualifications?

3. What are the longer-term education and wellbeing outcomes of learners who go through the educational pathways that are set out by the current provisions?

4. How can education providers promote wellbeing for teachers and learners in contexts of conflict, crisis and displacement?

5. What are the factors that promote or hinder teachers' motivation and commitment in these contexts?

6. What are the possibilities and limitations of using digital technologies in contexts of conflict and displacement?

7. How can teachers be best supported to gain subject-specific knowledge?

These questions were then presented to the participants, who were asked to rank them in order of priority. They rated the question on pathways for teacher certification and recognition in contexts of conflict, crisis and displacement as the top priority, followed by the question of how to promote the wellbeing of teachers and learners in contexts of displacement. This activity provided us with initial insights into research priorities in migrant and refugee communities on the Thai-Myanmar border. The workshop also served as a pilot in the first stage of the stakeholder consultation to co-design the research agenda, helping us to adapt the approach in subsequent consultative workshops.

In February 2024, we led two 90-minute consultative workshops at the Myanmar Ethnic Education Conference attended by a range of representatives from ethnic education providers, with over 40 participants attending each workshop. The workshops aimed to identify research gaps and priorities for education research in ethnic minority and conflict-affected areas. The first workshop identified the key challenges faced in educational contexts, any current research occurring in these contexts, and the types of knowledge and understanding that are needed to address these challenges. Based on the insights shared by the participants via the Mentimeter tool, we developed seven indicative research themes, as follows:

1. Teacher Wellbeing and Professional Development
2. Inclusive Education
3. Language and Multilingual Education
4. Educational Policy and Systems Strengthening
5. Access to Quality Education
6. Community Engagement and Participation
7. Education Leadership and Management

During the second workshop, the indicative research themes were presented to participants, along with indicative research questions. In groups, participants discussed the relevance of each theme, adding clarification, insights and suggestions for revising themes and questions. We used this information, alongside insights from the January workshop, to confirm and refine the research questions under each theme. No themes were added or changed at this time.

Following these workshops, 32 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with representatives from a range of national and international organisations involved in ethnic, refugee and migrant education. Each interviewee was asked to review the indicative research themes and research questions, select two themes to discuss during the interview, and complete an anonymous Google Forms survey in which they rated each of the seven themes on four criteria: (i) urgency; (ii) feasibility; (iii) potential benefit to teachers, students and schools (local systems level); (iv) potential benefit for policymakers and decision-makers (policy systems level). Of the total 32 interviews, 18 interviewees were representatives from local organisations and 14 were representatives from international organisations supporting educational programmes in the context of Myanmar. The survey used a scale from zero (lowest/least) to five (highest/most) for rating each criterion (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Ratings of Research Themes by Local Actors

Research Themes	Average Rating of Criteria (n=18)				Sum Total Rating
	Urgency	Feasibility	Benefit (local system)	Benefit (policy system)	
1. Teacher wellbeing and professional development	4.1	4.2	4.2	3.9	16.4
2. Inclusive education	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.1	15.6
3. Language and multilingual education	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.9	15.7
4. Educational policy and systems strengthening	4.4	3.8	4.3	4.2	16.7
5. Access to quality education	4.4	3.9	4.3	4.3	16.9
6. Community engagement and participation	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	15.3
7. Education leadership and management	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.9	15.4

Note: Highlighted rows represent research themes that we identified as highest priority based on KIIs, based on both their rating and the frequency with which they were selected as the two research themes for discussion (see Table 3 for data on the frequency of selection).

Table 2. Ratings of Research Themes by International Actors

Research Themes	Average Rating of Criteria (n=15)				Sum Total Rating
	Urgency	Feasibility	Benefit (local system)	Benefit (policy system)	
1. Teacher wellbeing and professional development	4.3	4.3	4.5	3.7	16.8
2. Inclusive education	3.9	3.7	4.3	4	15.9
3. Language and multilingual education	3.5	3.3	3.7	3.6	14.1
4. Educational policy and systems strengthening	3.5	3.1	3.9	4.1	14.6
5. Access to quality education	4.7	3.7	4.5	4	16.9
6. Community engagement and participation	4.4	4	4.4	4.5	17.3
7. Education leadership and management	4.1	3.5	4.2	4.3	16.1

Note: Highlighted rows represent research themes that we identified as highest priority based on KIIs, based on both their rating and the frequency with which they were selected as the two research themes for discussion (see Table 3 for data on the frequency of selection).

During the KIIs, each interviewee was asked to respond to a series of questions about the indicative research themes they had chosen. These questions aimed to investigate nuanced understandings of each theme, which helped us gain a deeper understanding of how different participants

conceptualised each of the themes. The interviews helped qualify participants' general priorities and the survey helped quantify their priorities based on each criterion.

Each interview was transcribed and coded, and – based on the deeper understanding of participants' perspectives – the indicative research themes and research questions were further revised. During internal discussions within the research team and based on the analysis, we identified four themes of highest priority according to the frequency with which a theme was discussed during KIIs and its sum total of all ratings (Table 3):

Access to Quality Education had the highest composite score from both national and international actors (33.8) and was one of the more frequently discussed themes during KIIs. Although research under this theme was rated as the most urgent, it was also rated as relatively less feasible.

Teacher Wellbeing and Professional Development similarly had high composite scores from both national (16.4) and international actors (16.8) and was the second most frequently discussed. Research under this theme was rated relatively low in terms of policy systems impact but was rated high on all other criteria. This theme was later reworded as **Teacher Management, Professional Development and Wellbeing** to better capture considerations around teacher recruitment, incentives and retention.

Community Engagement and Participation had the highest composite score from international actors (17.3) but the lowest from national actors (15.3). However, it was chosen for discussion on five occasions with national actors, and, given the high level of qualitative emphasis given by the interviewees, this theme was ultimately included as one of the priority research themes.

Educational Policy and Systems Strengthening was the most frequently discussed theme by a large margin, with a total of 33 KIIs. It had the second-highest composite score by national organisations (16.7) but the second-lowest score by international organisations (14.6), which rated the feasibility of research under this theme as low. During our analysis of this theme, we found many instances of participants contemplating the possibility of a future federal education system for Myanmar and how the diversity of parallel providers might imagine and prepare for such a future. Given the significance of this topic, we therefore chose to make it the fourth research theme: *Working towards a Federal Education System*. This replaced the broader theme of *Educational Policy and Systems Strengthening*, which was adapted into a cross-cutting theme.

Table 3. **Summary-Comparison of Research Themes**

Research Themes	Local Actors		International Actors		Total # Times Discussed in KIIs	Sum Total of All Ratings
	Sum Total Rating	# Times Discussed in KIIs	Sum Total Rating	# Times Discussed in KIIs		
1. Teacher wellbeing and professional development	16.4	10	16.8	4	14	33.2
2. Inclusive education	15.6	2	15.9	2	4	31.5
3. Language and multilingual education	15.7	5	14.1	2	7	29.8

4. Educational policy and systems strengthening	16.7	13	14.6	7	20	31.3
5. Access to quality education	16.9	7	16.9	5	12	33.8
6. Community engagement and participation	15.3	5	17.3	2	7	32.6
7. Education leadership and management	15.4	1	16.1	2	3	31.5

We were surprised to see *Language and Multilingual Education* had the lowest overall composite score, given that language-in-education has been a significant historical grievance and that mother-tongue education has long been a priority for non-state actors across the Myanmar context. Several representatives of development partners reported during the workshop that they had prioritised research into the language of instruction in collaboration with ethnic education providers. The low score for urgency by both national and international organisations suggests that sufficient research on language-in-education may already exist or be underway.

During our internal discussions, we decided to adapt several indicative research themes and amalgamate them into three cross-cutting themes, which capture broader concerns and expectations from the diverse participants and are intended to be examined across all four priority themes:

> ***Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education*** reflects participants' interest in gender equality, disability and social inclusion specifically, and inclusive education more generally. It also reflects their aspirations for education to address historical grievances and contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

> ***Safety and Wellbeing in and through Schooling*** reflects the importance that participants place on education's role in offering protection to students and teachers during times of conflict and crisis, and promoting their wellbeing more broadly.

> ***Policy Framing, Formulation and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening*** reflects the emphasis many participants place upon the processes of creating and implementing contextually appropriate policies, and their aspirations for such policies to positively impact the stability, sustainability and effectiveness of their respective education systems.

In May 2024, we led a two-day validation workshop with representatives from 14 organisations, encompassing ethnic and refugee education providers, civil society organisations, international donors, grant agents and development partners for ethnic, refugee and migrant education. The purpose of this workshop was to co-create the research agenda from the four research themes prioritised from previous workshops and KIIs. We presented a working draft research design for each theme, which included research aims and accompanying research questions. Participants engaged with each research design and provided feedback on the clarity of ideas and language as well as the relevance and feasibility of the design for their specific educational context.

At the end of the workshop, participants endorsed each research theme – for the most part, without reservation and without negative responses (see Figure 2). Endorsements with reservations were given on the understanding that the ERICC Myanmar team would revise themes based on feedback from the validation workshop, and most revisions were to research questions. However, we did significantly revise the theme *Working towards a Federal Education System* by reframing it as *Envisioning an Inclusive*

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National Education System in order to be less prescriptive about what particular administrative model a future education system for Myanmar may take. The research themes, questions and suggested research designs described in this report reflect the feedback from the validation workshop participants.

Figure 2. **Participant endorsement of four priority research themes and three cross-cutting themes**

Do you endorse this research agenda?

Theme	Yes, without reservation	Yes, with reservation
Teacher Management, Professional Development, and Wellbeing	16	5
Access to Quality Education	16	5
Community Engagement and Participation	14	7
Working towards a Federal Education System	10	11
Inclusion, Equity, and Justice in Education	18	4
Safety and Wellbeing in Schooling	20	1
Policy Framing, Formulation, and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening	14	8

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A. The ERICC conceptual framework

The research agenda for Myanmar is theoretically anchored in the ERICC conceptual framework (Figure 3). Prior to developing the research agenda, we used the framework to identify the existing knowledge and the evidence gaps for education in conflict and protracted crises in the Myanmar context (Rinehart et al, 2024). This research agenda builds upon findings from this evidence review.

The ERICC conceptual framework is designed to organise the research knowledge in conflict and protracted crisis settings (Kim et al., 2024). It is based on the well established research evidence that conflict and protracted crisis adversely impact educational provisions, children's safety and their academic achievements, and socioemotional well being. The framework recognises that the provisions of education are influenced by the historical legacies of conflict as well as the political economy of education systems operations at global, national, regional and local levels. In this process, education is implicated multitudinously: a) as a target of violence; b) an instrument, fuelling social and political divisions and conflict drivers; c) as a domain for cultivating critical consciousness and aspirations for

autonomy and freedom; and d) as a process of promoting peace with justice, social cohesion and prosperity (Pherali, 2022). The framework works as a theory of change, aiming to help researchers, policy makers and practitioners to critically identify and analyse conditions that facilitate or hinder the drivers of learning and investigate the effects of educational interventions at policy and programme levels to establish what works to achieve equity and achievements of holistic child outcomes. Essentially, it hypothesises that the most effective ways to improve children's academic, socioemotional, physical and mental health outcomes and broader societal outcomes such as peace with justice, social cohesion, security, prosperity and environmental sustainability is to improve access to, quality of, continuity and coherence in education considering the political economy of education.

This research agenda intends to build a stronger foundation of evidence for understanding how education provision operates within the Myanmar context. It uses the ERICC conceptual framework to situate the research themes and aims, ensuring that knowledge generation is intentionally organised within a theoretical understanding of education provision within conflict and crisis settings.

Figure 3. ERICC Conceptual Framework
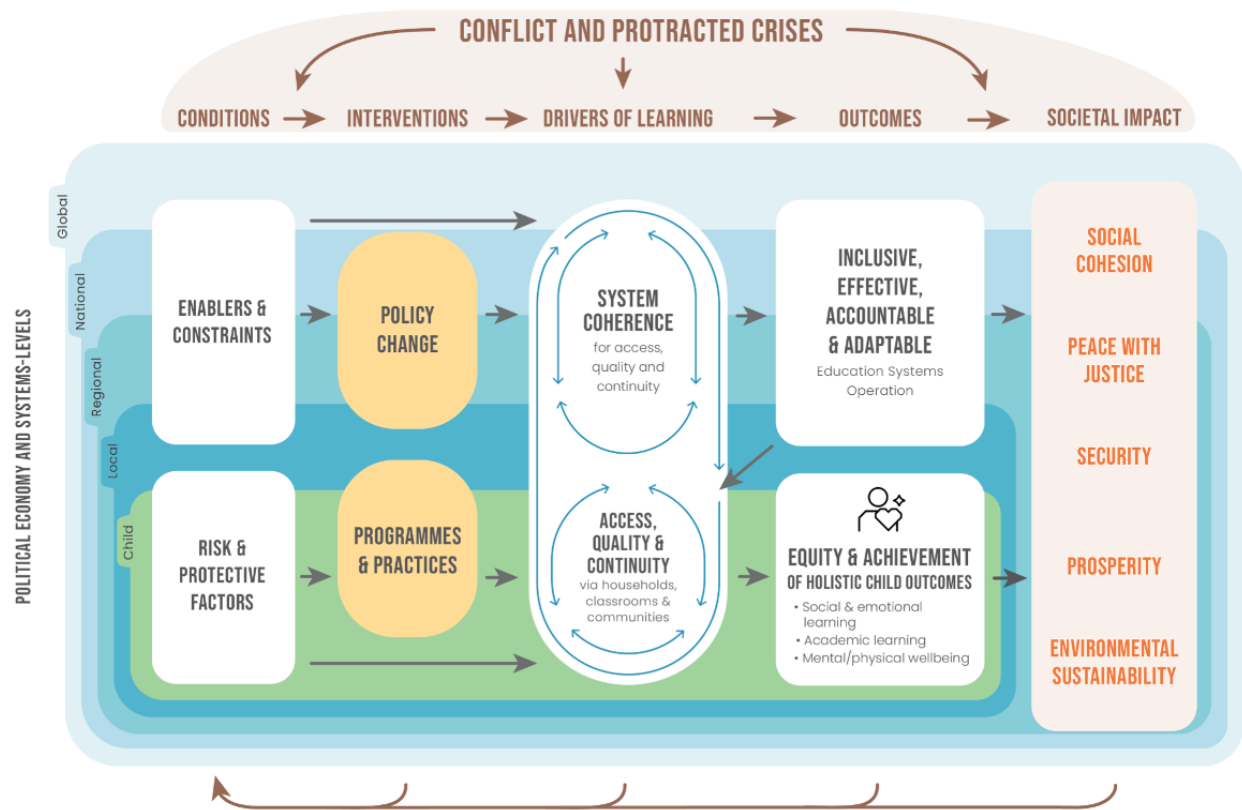
B. Types of research

The ERICC programme recognises that a variety of evidence is needed to provide helpful guidance to inform donors, policymakers and practitioners in addressing critical education issues in conflict and protracted crises. ERICC employs a systematic research methods approach to determine the type of study that is needed in a given setting, based on the state of the evidence. This includes:

1) **Formative research** to understand pre-existing practices, identify needs and diagnose problems.
2) **Design research** to develop solutions (policies, programmes or strategies) to address existing needs in ways that are feasible, desirable and culturally relevant.
3) **Implementation research** to assess the degree to which existing solutions are being implemented as intended, with strong levels of quality, fidelity and uptake.
4) **Effectiveness research** to determine through causal inference whether interventions achieve the desired changes in outcomes.

ERICC also uses a **political economy analysis** (PEA) approach to obtain a deep contextual understanding of education systems and their settings. The PEA approach reveals how competing goals, incentives, capacities and normative assumptions of the key actors delivering and receiving education services can enable or undermine the system-level coherence of education and the implementation of interventions.

ERICC encourages the use of **cost-efficiency analysis** to compare the costs of a programme to the outputs it produces and **cost-effectiveness analysis** to compare the costs of a programme to the outcomes it produces. Both cost analyses estimate the costs of resources required to implement programmes designed to achieve specific outputs and outcomes.

The first type of requisite evidence relates to the context of conflict and crisis, the nature of education problems and associated factors, and the political economy that regulates education in a particular setting. Once this information is available, it is crucial to obtain evidence about the educational interventions that are being implemented in a particular setting. This evidence should assess the degree to which interventions respond to the needs, values and priorities of local stakeholders, in ways that are feasible, desirable and culturally appropriate.

It is then important to obtain evidence that confirms that educational interventions have appropriate uptake and are being implemented with high levels of quality and fidelity. Finally, when evidence has ascertained that interventions are being implemented as intended, it is appropriate to conduct effectiveness studies to assess the impact that education interventions have on key outcomes of interest.

C. Co-creating research with stakeholders

The creation of this research agenda was underpinned by principles of co-construction, co-production, co-design and iteration. To this end, we engaged with a range of ethnic, refugee and migrant education stakeholders, as well as representatives from the international community, on multiple occasions. Throughout our series of workshops and KIIs, we regularly reviewed and revised the indicative research themes and questions based on the insights received.

Moving forward, the intention is to promote a collaborative, participatory research approach wherein, as much as possible, the research project is co-designed with local actors and then co-conducted with local researchers with the requisite language skills, contextual understanding and access to sample populations. Employing a collaborative research approach also assists in building trust between external researchers and local actors, helping to address concerns around the sensitivities of data collection, analysis and sharing. Furthermore, ethnic, refugee and migrant education providers aspire for research to contribute to their ongoing work, especially in terms of documenting successes and insights, addressing problems, and providing direction for improved education provision. As noted by a participant during the validation workshop:

"There is a strong sense that local organisations possess some strong capacity to do research. If they can be supported to do a research project together [with external researchers], that would make research more feasible."

D. Selection of research partners

The Myanmar context is home to many diverse ethnic, refugee and migrant education actors. Of the three, refugee education has the fewest number of distinct actors: there are just two main education providers serving the nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. Ethnic education, on the other hand, consists of various providers who manage systems of different sizes, both in terms of the quantity of schools and the scale of geographic coverage. These providers are at different stages of organisational development, with varying degrees of capacity and experience, and have a range of evolving education policies regarding teacher management, language-in-education, and curriculum and assessment that are unique to their context. Moreover, ethnic education providers have a variety of different formal and informal relationships with EAOs. Finally, migrant education is made up of a constellation of independent MLCs in Tak Province. Each MLC likely has its own educational and political prerogatives, based largely on the interests and values of their founders/leaders.

During consultations throughout the co-creation of the research agenda, the importance of selecting the right type of research partners was highlighted on numerous occasions. It is very likely that research into a particular context and with a particular actor/system will not be applicable more generally, given the differences in characteristics across contexts, actors and systems. Secondly, the feasibility of research is likely to differ from setting to setting, chiefly due to safety, security and cost variables around access to sample populations. Ethnic education providers operate in settings affected by varying degrees of conflict. Refugee and migrant education providers are under the surveillance of the Thai government, so research within these settings may involve risks to the participants as well as to the organisations who are supporting education. Lastly, multiple participants highlighted concerns around selection bias and gatekeeping by education actors, which could make it difficult to ensure authentic, inclusive and equitable participation in research. As observed by one participant at the validation workshop:

"Research, especially effectiveness research, could be difficult because some [service providers] might not want to risk negative findings. They might not be willing to engage with this kind of research."

E. Cross-cutting themes

The coding of 32 KII transcripts and analysis of findings strongly suggested revising the indicative research themes to include three core cross-cutting themes.

Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education, the first cross-cutting theme, refers to values and practices aimed at ensuring fair access to opportunities in education regardless of background, identity or circumstance. This involves examining disparities in access, quality and continuity of education, as well as achievement outcomes, with regard to gender, (dis)ability, ethnolinguistic identity, displacement status, geography, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and school enrolment status (i.e. out-of-school children). Moreover, it considers the ways in which resources and opportunities are distributed to different groups among the community, the cohort of teachers and the cohort of students. Finally, it also explores the extent to which (if at all) structural inequalities and historical grievances are addressed through education.

Safety and Wellbeing in and through Schooling refers to the policies and practices that ensure that everyone involved in education feels safe, supported and healthy – both physically and emotionally. This includes protection from violence, the promotion of physical and mental health and wellbeing, and the creation of positive and inclusive learning environments. It also reflects the idea that the provision of quality educational services improves the long-term safety and wellbeing of young people and communities as a whole.

Policy Framing, Formulation and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening, the third cross-cutting theme, refers to the processes of developing, adopting and implementing plans, strategies and proposals (including budgets and data systems) to address specific issues or achieve particular goals in education. This also involves considering how information and issues are framed in public discourse and policy debates as well as the decision-making processes that produce policies, budgets and data systems. Policy framing, formulation and enactment are situated within the broader context of systems strengthening, exploring the extent to which policies, budgets and data systems lead to positive changes to support quality, access, continuity and coherence across the entire education system.

III. RESEARCH THEMES AND DESIGNS

A. Teacher management, professional development and wellbeing

Teacher management and professional development refers to the policies and practices used to identify, recruit, hire, deploy, pay, train, retain and provide accreditation, career progression and advancement opportunities for teachers. The term 'teacher' encompasses individuals directly responsible for the learning of children, youth and adults. This category includes classroom teachers, early childhood or preschool educators, higher education faculty, special education instructors, subject matter experts, vocational trainers, religious educators, head teachers, principals and community volunteers (INEE, 2024). During times of crisis, teachers are often described as "spontaneous and tentative" (Kirk and Winthrop, 2007). Many may have entered teaching spontaneously, driven by necessity rather than by choice. Consequently, they may feel tentative about their roles, uncertain of their abilities, and unsure of their long-term commitment to teaching.

A. 1. Background and existing evidence

During the 2010s reform era, investments in teachers in parallel systems were largely outpaced by investments in teachers in government schools. The overall precarity of funding for parallel systems often meant that teachers were underqualified, undertrained and under-compensated, and faced shortages of material resources and adequate infrastructure (Speers Mears et al., 2015). Teachers in EEP systems have demonstrated a strong commitment to educating disadvantaged communities, but they have misgivings around their professional identities when comparing themselves to government teachers (Niskanen and Buske, 2019). The relative lack of professionalisation within their work means that many are left feeling underprivileged and inferior. At times, these feelings may be outweighed by a strong motivation rooted in teaching as an act of service, which is also linked to a desire to use education to protect one's ethnic identity.

Generally, education across all systems of Myanmar has provided little or no freedom for teachers to exercise their own agency in shaping their professional practice and promoting peacebuilding in and through education. Under the centralised monolithic vision of education, teachers in Myanmar have

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historically performed the role of 'hegemonic intellectuals' – as described in the work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) – whose professional practice is monopolised by the state that has promoted hegemonic ideologies of the dominant ethnic group. Consequently, they are, intentionally or not, complicit in reproducing existing systems that nurture social, cultural and political inequalities. At best, teachers in the government and parallel systems fulfil exam-related expectations, as obedient civil servants, by following what has been prescribed in the curriculum without being able to critique curricular content and enable their students to develop critical consciousness about social inequalities, political exclusions, and systemic injustices (Maber et al., 2019). In some instances, teachers may recognise the potential contributions of critical history teaching to peacebuilding but are constrained by prescriptive curricular frameworks and their own attachments to more sectarian approaches to history.

Disruptions to public education following the coup have led more children to parallel education and EiE provisions. This has increased the demand for a non-state teacher workforce, often staffed by 'volunteer teachers' or 'community educators' – young, underqualified and inexperienced in terms of teaching, and mostly female instructors motivated by altruism. The quantity and quality of teacher professional development investments largely depends on the availability of financial, material and human resources. The current crisis has, in many cases, significantly limited the frequency and duration of teacher education provisions, which is particularly problematic in EiE contexts reliant on new teachers in especially challenging teaching conditions.

The overall status of teacher management and professional development in ethnic, refugee and migrant contexts is underreported in the literature, but our KIIs suggested that many providers have begun to emphasise an importance on teacher competency frameworks. These vary from provider to provider and reflect contextually relevant concerns, such as mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) and conflict sensitivity. It is unclear, however, how these frameworks are being used to support teacher management and professional development decision-making.

A. 2. Evidence gaps

There is limited evidence on how ongoing conflict and protracted crisis have affected the teaching profession in ethnic, refugee and migrant education contexts. Specifically, there is a lack of formative research regarding teacher management and professional development policies and practices in these settings. The wellbeing needs of teachers are significantly underreported, and there is no evidence of interventions designed to support their wellbeing. More implementation and effectiveness research are needed on the use of teacher competency frameworks, particularly if parallel education providers see significant value in designing their own frameworks. Finally, there is limited formative research on how the coup has affected the identity of teachers, including government teachers who have joined the CDM, 'volunteer teachers' working in EiE contexts, and teachers who continue to work in parallel systems.

A. 3. Research aims and questions

The research design under this theme is expected to engage with ethnic, refugee and migrant educational decision-makers at the policy systems level, and teachers and teacher educators/trainers at the local systems level. This theme explores enablers and constraints to teacher-related policy formulation and enactment, the working conditions of teachers, the quality of teachers, and interventions related to teacher management and professional development. It assumes that coherent teacher management and professional development policies and quality teachers contribute to positive and equitable student outcomes.

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Table 4. Cross-cutting Themes for Theme 1

Cross-Cutting Themes	Teacher Management, Professional Development and Wellbeing
Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education	• Equitable teacher recruitment, incentives and professional development • Teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' for social justice (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985) • Use of inclusive pedagogies
Safety and Wellbeing in and through Schooling	• Teacher safety and wellbeing • Teachers' role in promoting the safety and wellbeing of students
Policy Framing, Formulation and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening	• How the role of teachers is framed in policy documents • Development of teacher-related policies and regulations • Teacher competency frameworks • Data systems for teacher management

Aim 1: Understand how teachers are currently managed and supported through professional development.

Formative research is needed to understand the teacher management and professional development policies and practices across all parallel systems, and how these are experienced by teachers. Indicative formative research questions include:

- What is the status of teacher management?
  - What teacher management policies are used? How are they formulated? Who are the actors formulating these policies? What factors hinder or enable the implementation of these policies? To what extent are these policies coherent within and across different education providers?
  - What challenges do education providers face in recruiting and retaining teachers? Why do teachers choose the profession and decide to remain in it? What are the main factors behind teachers leaving their jobs?
  - What data systems are used for teacher management? How is data collected and to what extent is it shared between actors for policy decisions?
  - What interventions are underway to support teacher management? How do these interventions relate to teachers' professionalisation, management and wellbeing?
  - What are believed to be the key determinants of teacher retention?
- What is the status of teacher professional development?
  - What teacher professional development policies are used? How are they formulated? Who are the actors formulating these policies? What factors hinder or enable the implementation of these policies? To what extent are these policies coherent within and across different education providers?
  - What teacher competency frameworks are present? Who is involved in designing these and how are they designed?
  - What challenges do education providers face in training, evaluating and supporting teachers?
  - What data systems are used for teacher professional development? How is data collected and to what extent is it shared between actors for policy decisions?

- How is teacher quality measured? To what extent are teacher competency frameworks implemented in teacher qualifications and continuing professional development?
- What interventions are underway to support teacher professional development?
- What are believed to be the key determinants of teacher efficacy?
- How are teachers impacted by conflict and how (if at all) are they involved in education-related decision-making?
  - What challenges do teachers face in meeting their basic livelihood needs amid ongoing violence and crisis situations? What factors, including their background characteristics, support or prevent their basic needs from being met?
  - What wellbeing challenges are teachers facing? What is the impact of policy and resourcing decisions on teachers' wellbeing?
  - How do teachers navigate conflict-related disruptions of education to maintain the provision of education and promote the wellbeing of learners?
  - To what extent are teachers involved in policy formulation and decision-making around teacher management and professional development?
  - What normative beliefs exist, generally and related specifically to the teaching profession, which affect the extent to which teachers participate in education-related decision-making?

Aim 2: Create feasible and desirable interventions (strategy, policy or programme) to improve teacher management and professional development practices.

Design research is needed to develop contextually relevant solutions to improve the recruitment of, retention of and professional support for teachers. Indicative design research questions include:

- What is the overall policy framework for teacher professionalisation and support within the ethnic, refugee or migrant education system? How are the policies formulated and how do organisations engage with these policies?
  - What factors hinder or enable the recruitment and retention of teachers?
  - What factors hinder or enable the quality of teaching and the evaluation of teacher competency?
  - What factors hinder or enable professional support and development opportunities for teachers?
  - What factors hinder or enable the wellbeing of teachers?
- What are the most feasible and desirable teacher professionalisation and support interventions for education providers, teachers and development partners?
  - What policy interventions are feasible and desired? How do they relate to the coherence of teacher management and professional development?
  - What programmatic interventions are feasible and desired? How do they relate to the access, quality and continuity of education?

Aim 3: Assess the implementation of teacher management and professional development programmes.

Implementation research is needed to capture the degree to which existing teacher management and professional development solutions are feasible, cost-efficient and being implemented as intended. Indicative implementation research questions include:

- How is teacher management operationalised across different education systems?
  - To what extent is teacher management equitable by gender, ethnicity, location and disability status?

- To what extent do teacher management practices align with the professional needs and challenges faced by teachers?
- To what extent are teacher management practises coherent with educational policies?
- How do teachers experience teacher management practices? Does teacher management engage with the wellbeing of teachers? To what extent can teachers participate in decision-making for teacher management?

- How are teacher professional development opportunities operationalised across different education systems?
  - Who are the key actors leading teacher professional development programmes?
  - To what extent are professional development opportunities equitable by gender, ethnicity, location and disability status?
  - To what extent do teacher professional development programmes align with the professional needs and challenges faced by teachers?
  - To what extent are professional development practises coherent with educational policies?
  - How do teachers experience professional development opportunities? Does professional support engage with the wellbeing of teachers? To what extent can teachers participate in decision-making for professional development?

- How do education providers use teacher competency frameworks, if at all, to support teachers' professional development?
  - How are teacher competency frameworks designed by different providers? How (if at all) do they satisfy the education needs that emerge from different context-specific challenges that teachers are facing? What educational norms and values do they reflect? To what extent do they align among different education providers?
  - How are teacher competency frameworks implemented by different actors? How accessible are they to teachers and other education personnel? What hinders and enables their implementation?
  - How do teacher competency frameworks affect teacher attitudes and practices?
  - To what extent do teacher competency frameworks cohere with the provision of teacher professional development and the wellbeing of teachers, both within a particular education system and across systems?

- How do different actors use data systems to inform teacher management and professional development practices?
  - What data is collected? How is it collected?
  - Who uses the data? How is it used? How is it shared?

Aim 4: Evaluate the impact of teacher management, professional development and support programmes.

Effectiveness research is needed to determine what outcomes are achieved by teacher management and professional development policy changes, programmes and practices. Indicative effectiveness research questions include:

- What is the quality of teacher management and support programmes?
  - How do teacher management and support interventions affect the recruitment, deployment and retention of teachers?
  - How do different stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators and policymakers, perceive the effectiveness and relevance of teacher management and support practices?

- o How does teacher management affect teacher wellbeing?
- o What are the unintended consequences, if any, of teacher management practices on education systems and teacher-community dynamics?
- o How do variations in programme design, implementation strategy and contextual factors influence the impact of teacher management programmes across different educational settings?
- What is the quality of teacher professional development programmes?
  - o How do teacher professional development interventions affect teacher efficacy, teacher quality and student outcomes? What changes in teacher attitudes, practices and professional competency result from participating in professional development programmes?
  - o How do different stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators and policymakers, perceive the effectiveness and relevance of teacher professional development practices?
  - o How does professional development affect teacher wellbeing?
  - o What are the unintended consequences, if any, of teacher professional development practices on education systems and teacher-community dynamics?
  - o How do variations in programme design, implementation strategy and contextual factors influence the impact of teacher professional development programmes across different educational settings?

A. 4. Expected impact on education policy and programming

There is limited knowledge about how teachers' personal safety and wellbeing, the management of teachers, and their professional development processes are affected by conflict and protracted crisis in the contexts of ethnic, refugee and migrant education. Generating a stronger evidence base will inform the design of contextually appropriate interventions to enhance teacher management and professional development. Furthermore, evidence is needed about any relevant interventions that are taking place, how they are being implemented and what their impact has been, most especially on teacher recruitment, retention, professionalisation and wellbeing.

Participants in our validation workshop recognised that quality teachers are an essential resource, but in many contexts, it can be increasingly difficult to recruit, retain and invest in teachers. Moreover, education providers noted that following existing teacher-related policies may actually inhibit flexibility when recruiting and supporting teachers during times of emergency. They felt that it was vital to develop an understanding of teacher quality and were interested in exploring methods to evaluate teacher quality and teacher wellbeing within their respective systems.

Most education providers had a clear sense of the kinds of challenges they faced in relation to teacher management and professional development, as indicated by a lower relevance score – although this is not sufficiently reported in the publicly available literature. Consequently, there is consensus that design, implementation and effectiveness research would be most useful (Table 5). As one participant reflected:

> "Education-in-emergencies is needs-based. We expect a certain level of teacher competency according to our policy, but conflict makes it difficult to recruit according to this. We just recruit whoever we can. How can we upgrade these teachers? How can we recognise them, provide appropriate training for them, and enhance their teaching skills?"

Most participants operate in resource-scarce settings, which makes decision-making particularly challenging and often entails significant trade-offs. Participants are therefore interested in leveraging evidence to inform decision-making in designing and implementing teacher management and professional development programmes, particularly towards greater support of teachers' basic needs, their wellbeing, and their teaching quality. This necessitates a stronger evidence base.

Table 5. **Validation Workshop Rating of Theme 1 Aims**

Aims	Scale of 0-5		Scale of 0-10
	Relevance (Average)	Feasibility (Average)	Relevance and Feasibility Score (Weighted)
1: Understand teacher management and professional development (Formative Research)	3.90	4.25	7.47
2: Create teacher management and professional development interventions (Design Research)	4.60	3.85	7.84
3. Assess teacher management and professional development programmes (Implementation Research)	4.40	3.85	7.64
4. Evaluate the impact of teacher management and professional development programmes (Effectiveness Research)	4.50	3.70	7.61

B. Access to quality education

Access to quality education refers to households' and learners' awareness of, opportunity for and capacity to participate in relevant educational experiences that contribute to their development. This includes academic achievement, social emotional learning, physical and mental development and wellbeing outcomes. Foley (1999) suggests that a broad conception of education and learning includes formal education (taking place in educational institutions, which leads to recognised certification and qualification), incidental learning (taking place as we live, work and engage in social action), informal education (unstructured and spontaneous learning that occurs through daily activities in workplaces, families, communities, social movements) and non-formal education (structured systematic teaching and learning in a range of social settings outside the formal education system that may support formal education but does not lead to accredited qualification).

In conflict and protracted crisis settings, barriers to access include a lack of schools, the distance to schools, safety issues in and around schools, poor infrastructure, limited alternative learning pathways, the costs of education, and discriminatory policies and practices around enrolment. Fulfilling the right to education often becomes more difficult in these settings, especially for displaced populations. Equitable access requires identifying individuals or groups that may be excluded from education, who may require different types of educational experiences based on needs and conditions. Ultimately, during conflict and crisis, learners require a safe and protective learning environment that prioritises their safety and psychosocial wellbeing (INEE, 2024).

The quality of education depends on the quality of available resources and the quality of support within classrooms and schools, households and communities, as well as the relationships, norms, practices and interactions that occur within and around education (Kim et al., 2022). During conflict and crisis,

barriers to quality education include a lack of quality teaching and learning resources, a shortage of trained teachers, the language of instruction, and inadequate curriculum that lacks conflict sensitivity. Learners require a curriculum that is relevant and inclusive, and teaching that supports both learning and wellbeing outcomes. In some cases, this might necessitate alternative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, especially when education is experiencing regular disruptions (INEE, 2024). Continuity of quality education is also crucial, allowing sustained schooling and progression in learning as well as grade and school transition.

B. 1. Background and existing evidence

Myanmar is currently experiencing an acute schooling and learning crisis. In 2022, the UN Human Rights Council reported that 7.8 million children in Myanmar were out of school,[6] and in 2023, Education Cannot Wait estimated that over 3.5 million out-of-school children were living in emergencies (Valenza and Stoff, 2023). This amounts to just over 31% of the estimated 11.4 million children experiencing crises in Myanmar, of whom 6.5 million children (57%) are attending school but experiencing learning deprivation and only 1.3 million (12%) are in school and learning to an adequate level.

Before the disruptions caused by Covid-19 and the coup, the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics assessed a nationally representative sample of Grade 5 students and found that only 11% were proficient in Burmese literacy, 5% in Burmese writing, and 12% in mathematics (ACER, 2021). Early-grade reading assessments in ethnic education schools found that first language literacy (in a local language) was stronger than national language literacy (in Burmese), but most children did not have foundational skills in either language (Johnston et al., 2019). Due to disruptions, it has been estimated that the average learning adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) will decrease by 1.9-2.2 years, and the learning poverty rate will increase to 100% (Bhatta and Katwal, 2022). The LAYS in Myanmar had previously been just 6.8 years of learning over the course of basic education.

During our KIIs, education providers who operate in protracted conflict and crisis settings emphasised the resilience of their systems and the flexibility of their response strategies. However, many parallel providers depend on international aid and assistance for financing their education provisions. This dependence has meant that providers have historically faced (i) challenges in hiring, retaining and adequately compensating quality teachers, (ii) deficiencies in providing basic school materials, textbooks and furniture, and (iii) issues in maintaining some schools and supporting an adequate number of schools to meet demand (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). These material and human resource challenges are compounded during times of conflict and crisis. Nonetheless, providers are committed to ensuring that students can access schooling during times of conflict. Participants in our KIIs often framed quality education as the provision of holistic learning experiences that engage academic, social and emotional development, and support the wellbeing of children in as safe a space as possible.

B. 2. Evidence gaps

There is limited evidence on the impact of conflict and protracted crisis on education generally, as well as the impact of the resilience, flexibility and adaptability of some of the ethnic educational provisions on access, quality and continuity of education. The specific risk-mitigation strategies of providers are underreported in the formative research. More formative research is also needed on academic outcomes and social emotional and wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, there is limited evidence on the presence and impact of data systems in ethnic, refugee and migrant education. There is very little

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

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evidence on the implementation and effectiveness of interventions designed to improve access, quality and continuity of education. Lastly, the ways in which 'quality education' itself is conceptualised by education actors is underreported, particularly as it might relate to notions of equity, justice, peacebuilding and social cohesion.

B. 3. Research aims and questions

The research design under this theme is expected to engage with ethnic, refugee and migrant educational decision-makers at the policy systems level, and students, parents, teachers and community members at the local systems level. This theme explores enablers and constraints to educational policy formulation and enactment, risk and protective factors within the community, the norms and assumptions around quality education, and interventions related to the four drivers of learning (access, quality, continuity and coherence). Consequently, it relates to all drivers of learning, recognising that impactful education requires certain degrees of access, quality, continuity and coherence.

Table 6. **Cross-cutting Themes for Theme 2**

Cross-Cutting Themes	Access to Quality Education
Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education	- Equitable access to relevant education by ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, displacement status, disability and geography - Quality of educational provisions (infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy, accreditation and teacher quality) - Quality education as a vehicle for addressing inequities and injustices
Safety and Wellbeing in and through Schooling	- Protecting schools from violent conflicts and disasters - Schools as zones of peace - Policies and programmes that provide mental health and psychosocial support
Policy Framing, Formulation and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening	- Coherence between policies and programmes - Sustainability of quality education (financing and resourcing) - Data collection and data sharing for quality education

Aim 1: Understand how different stakeholders conceptualise the quality of education.

Formative research is needed to understand how quality education is understood by different stakeholders in conflict and protracted crisis settings. Indicative formative research questions include:

- How do different stakeholders – including providers, teachers, parents, students, political actors, religious and cultural actors, development partners, and donors – define and prioritise 'quality education'?
  - How do different stakeholders prioritise educational outcomes, such as academic achievement, social emotional development and preparation for future success, in their conceptualisations of quality education?
  - How do contextual factors, such as cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, political landscapes and educational policies, influence stakeholders' perceptions and expectations regarding educational quality?
  - What indicators do education providers monitor to measure the quality of educational services? To what extent do existing data systems capture these indicators?

- To what extent are conceptualisations of quality education linked to notions of inclusion, equity and justice?
- To what extent are conceptualisations of quality education aligned across ethnic, refugee and migrant contexts?
- How do parents and caregivers make decisions about the education their child should receive?
- How (if at all) does conflict and protracted crisis affect how quality education is defined and prioritised?

Aim 2: Create feasible and desirable interventions (strategy, policy or programme) to improve the access, quality, continuity and coherence of education during times of conflict and crisis.

Design research is needed to develop contextually relevant solutions to improve the access, quality and continuity of education as well as coherence between the policy systems and local systems levels. Indicative design research questions include:

- How do different actors respond to conflict and crisis? What policies and strategies exist to design educational provisions that help navigate conflict-related disruptions in education?
  - What is the status of access, quality, continuity and coherence of education during times of ongoing disruptions to education? What are the primary barriers that hinder access, quality, continuity and coherence? What factors contribute to maintaining or improving access, quality, continuity and coherence of education?
  - What policies enable or constrain decision-making during a crisis?
  - How are decisions made around resourcing?
- What programmatic and organisational features within a system support continuity of education?
  - How do existing education policies and programmes align with the needs and challenges faced by education systems during crises?
  - How do education providers design their educational programmes when disruption is a regular occurrence? What strategies are in place to keep schools and other learning environments safe from armed conflict and students safe on their journey to/from school?
  - To what extent does the school routine contribute towards student safety and wellbeing or increase risks during times of ongoing violence and other emergencies?
  - What causes students to drop out of school? What constrains out-of-school students from returning to school?
- What are the most feasible and desirable interventions for education providers, education personnel, community stakeholders and development partners to promote access, quality, continuity and coherence of education?
  - What measures and investments are needed to build the crisis-preparedness and risk-mitigation of ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems?

Aim 3: Assess the implementation of interventions to support quality education during times of conflict and crisis.

Implementation research is needed to capture the degree to which existing solutions to address the access, quality, continuity and coherence of education are feasible, cost-efficient and being implemented as intended. Indicative implementation research questions include:

- What are the levels of financial, material and human resources available to contribute to quality education?

- How do providers overcome challenges related to a lack of available resources?
- Do resource provision mechanisms adequately respond to the needs of the education system during crises?
- What are the trade-offs when resourcing decisions are made?
- How are interventions being implemented by education providers to maintain access, quality, continuity and coherence of education during times of conflict and crisis?
  - To what extent do interventions provide physical and emotional safety and wellbeing support to teachers and students who have been affected by crisis?
  - To what extent have interventions been adaptable and responsive to changing crisis dynamics, including shifts in displacement patterns and security conditions?
  - What mechanisms or platforms have facilitated collaboration and communication among stakeholders to ensure or enhance the implementation of interventions?
- How do different actors use data systems to inform the implementation of interventions?
  - What data is collected? How is it collected? How often is it updated?
  - Who uses the data? How is it used? How is it shared?

Aim 4: Evaluate the impact of interventions that support quality education during times of conflict and crisis.

Effectiveness research is needed to determine the outcomes achieved by interventions that target access, quality, continuity and coherence of education. Indicative effectiveness research questions include:

- To what extent are interventions effective in addressing access, quality, continuity and coherence of education during conflict and protracted crisis?
- In what ways (if at all) do interventions lead to positive and equitable academic and/or learning outcomes?
- In what ways (if at all) do interventions equitably contribute to outcomes related to physical and emotional safety, wellbeing and social emotional learning?
- How (if at all) have conflict and crisis affected academic and/or learning outcomes, and outcomes related to physical and emotional safety, wellbeing and social emotional learning?
- To what extent have interventions contributed to the enhancement of knowledge, skills and values to address drivers of conflict?
- How do stakeholders, including parents, students and community leaders, perceive the qualitative improvements in education provision resulting from interventions?

B. 4. Expected impact on education policy and programming

There is limited knowledge about how violent conflicts and disruptions caused by other types of crises affect access, quality, continuity and coherence of education in ethnic, refugee and migrant settings. Generating a stronger evidence base will inform the design of contextually appropriate interventions to enhance these four drivers of learning, potentially leading to greater and more equitable outcomes in education. Furthermore, more evidence is needed about existing interventions that target the drivers of learning, how they are being implemented, and what their impact has been.

Participants in our validation workshop expressed a strong interest in better understanding the meaning of 'quality education' within their respective systems. There is a consensus that education needs to be linguistically and culturally appropriate and promote not only high levels of academic learning, but also pay attention to equity, diversity and inclusion in its processes. These social justice dimensions in education are perceived as vehicles for promoting peace and reconciliation. However, the participants were uncertain if this view was shared throughout their systems. To adequately qualify and quantify the

impact of education, participants agreed that it is important to first determine what the intended characteristics and outcomes of education are. As noted by one workshop participant:

> "We've been investing a lot in education, but we hardly assess the quality. As we all know, education can be good or bad. It can exacerbate the [conflict] situation or create harmony and peace. It can be different for different people. We need to understand what quality education means in our situation so we can design a new programme to promote more harmony and peace."

Even though monitoring access to education in terms of school attendance was important, many participants argued that monitoring education quality was equally important to ensure that children are learning at the levels required for each grade. Towards this, they are interested in building data systems that capture the learning progress of students and help educational decision-makers to formulate adaptable policies during conflict and protracted crises.

Finally, participants want to know what works in terms of providing quality education amidst armed conflict, forced displacement, and protracted crisis situations. There is also some interest in conducting longitudinal studies that causally determine the impact of interventions. However, the feasibility of implementation and effectiveness research is rated relatively low (Table 7). Overall, it is hoped that evidence from design, implementation and effectiveness research can be used to advocate for support from the donor community. This recognises that many interventions in ethnic, refugee and migrant contexts are and will continue to be donor-funded.

Table 7. **Validation Workshop Rating of Theme 2 Aims**

Aims	Scale of 0–5		Scale of 0–10
	Relevance (Average)	Feasibility (Average)	Relevance and Feasibility Score (Weighted)
1: Understand how quality education is conceptualised by different stakeholders (Formative Research)	4.60	4.28	8.19
2: Create interventions to improve access, quality, continuity and coherence of education (Design Research)	4.50	4.06	7.91
3. Assess implementation of access, quality, continuity and coherence interventions (Implementation Research)	4.65	3.78	7.82
4. Evaluate the impact of access, quality, continuity and coherence interventions (Effectiveness Research)	4.65	3.22	7.36

C. Community engagement and participation

Community engagement and participation refers to the ways in which community members and groups become involved in education, and how this affects the access, quality, continuity and coherence of education. A community is a complex network of individuals and relationships, which are dynamic over space and time. Understanding a community requires understanding the social,

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economic and cultural differentiation of localities and peoples, without assuming that a community will necessarily have a shared sense of identity or be inclusive, harmonious and committed to cooperation (Head, 2007).

There are various theoretical lenses through which community participation can be analysed. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation offers a gradient of power-sharing between citizens and service providers, ranging from non-participation to tokenism to citizen power. This model has been frequently used in higher-income countries, as has the spectrum of participation from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which has shaped many public participation plans globally. The most recent version of the IAP2 spectrum (2018) identifies five main levels of public participation: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering the public.

Choguill (1996) modifies Arnstein's model for low- and lower-middle-income countries, giving greater emphasis to governmental (service provider) attitudes and willingness. White (1996) highlights the politics of participation, raising questions about who is involved, how and on whose terms. In her view, participation has the potential to challenge patterns of dominance but can also entrench and reproduce existing power relations, exacerbate community inequalities, and perpetuate the marginalisation of some community members. Community participation is often influenced by a range of social, political and psychological factors that must be taken into account when analysing the relative success of community participation models.

Within the context of education, community engagement suggests the active participation of parents, community leaders, and private sector and civil society members in planning, decision-making and action-taking on educational programmes. The evidence generally suggests that community participation favourably affects students, schools and communities. For example, a review of evaluations in low- and lower-middle-income countries by Russell (2009) concluded that community participation in education focuses primarily on building, maintaining and resourcing schools, and monitoring teachers and budgets, and often contributes to improved school facilities, increased accountability among school personnel, and improved capacity of community participants. The most common methods for community participation are through school management committees and parent-teacher associations. Notably, participation was limited when it came to pedagogy, student monitoring, and policy and planning. The review found that efforts to increase community participation were usually driven by motivations to address pressing issues, including expansion of access to remote locations, challenging financial conditions, poor or declining quality of education, and social pressures to improve democratic school governance.

In emergency settings, it is often argued that the community should be involved in educational decision-making, planning and implementation, in order to help develop greater community ownership of educational activities (INEE, 2024). However, as noted by Burde et al. (2015) in their literature review, community involvement during emergencies must consider the extent to which communities are expected to bear the costs of education – such as salaries and textbooks – and the ways in which participation may reinforce local power structures.

C. 1. Background and existing evidence

There are concerns that policy debates within ethnic and refugee education systems typically include only the perspectives of elites and, consequently, do not sufficiently reflect the needs, aspirations and realities of the local community (Oh and van der Stouwe, 2008; Lall and South, 2018; Le, 2021). When community-level consultations occur, there is a risk that they do not adequately capture a plurality of perspectives or that local voices may be manipulated by elite members of the decision-making bodies.

Schools in parallel education systems are sometimes described as being community-based, with extensive resources provided by local communities. Community participation includes the raising of funds for teaching stipends and other running costs, as well as school management and maintenance responsibilities, typically led by school management committees or parent-teacher associations (Jolliffe and Speers Mears, 2016). Community support is often encouraged and organised by local religious leaders, EAO or political leaders, and other influential local elites. On the one hand, community involvement in school administration provides a sense of ownership, but on the other hand, it can place a burden on parents - particularly when there is an overreliance on the community to support the running costs of education.

The KII data revealed a belief that community engagement in education is essential for ensuring the stability and sustainability of education. Religious leaders are important for mobilising households, organising fundraising efforts, and facilitating the establishment of school management committees. Parental involvement is seen to contribute to greater student enrolment, stronger continuation through schooling, and improved teacher retention. Household financial contributions are often used to improve physical infrastructure (such as building classrooms) and compensate teachers. However, there was little mention of parental involvement in children's learning at home given that many households are grappling with multiple displacements and economic hardships due to the loss of their livelihoods.

Many KII participants aspire to practise more bottom-up, participatory approaches to educational decision-making, although there is some debate about the kinds of involvement that should be expected during times of conflict and protracted crisis. Some participants would like communities to be consulted in all curricular, linguistic and pedagogical decisions. In Myanmar, some EEPs have relatively sophisticated networks at the township and district levels for facilitating bottom-up decision-making through community consultation. Nevertheless, local elites are, on the whole, reported to dominate decision-making.

C. 2. Evidence gaps

Existing evidence is insufficient to address a number of important questions on the topic. First, aside from anecdotal accounts we obtained through stakeholder engagement, few studies provide systematic evidence on the political economy of community engagement (such as the varying perceptions of 'community' among stakeholders or possible models of community engagement), the perceived role of education, or the motivating factors behind participation. There is limited evidence on how policy framing, formulation and enactment occur in ethnic, refugee and migrant education, and the extent to which these align with the needs of children and communities. Consequently, formative research is needed. Moreover, it is unclear what models of community engagement and participation are being implemented by different providers, what types of participation are being encouraged, and how these impact access, quality and continuity of education. The power dynamics underpinning who participates and how decisions are made are largely underreported.

C. 3. Research aims and questions

This theme explores enablers and constraints to community involvement in education – an area in which political economy drivers play a central role. It relates to all four drivers of learning (access, quality, continuity and coherence) and is especially interested in how improving these drivers through community involvement can positively impact the stability and sustainability of education provision; and how decision-makers in parallel systems engage with local communities to formulate policies and implement educational programmes.

Table 8. **Cross-cutting Themes for Theme 3**

Cross-Cutting Themes	Community Engagement and Participation
Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education	• Equitable participation by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geography, socioeconomic status and displacement status in educational decision-making
Safety and Wellbeing in and through Schooling	• Engagement of parents and community members in designing school safety programmes during times of conflicts and disasters
Policy Framing, Formulation, and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening	• Equitable participation of community members in formulating education policies around curriculum, teacher issues and financing • Participation of parents and community members in education programme delivery and policy feedback

Aim 1: Understand community perspectives of and involvement in education.

Formative research is needed to understand the ways in which communities participate in different education provisions in conflict and protracted crisis settings. Indicative formative research questions include:

- What are the political economy-related factors that shape community participation in education?
    - How is 'community' defined?
    - What are the relationships of political, economic and religious power within the community?
    - Who are the actors involved in education policymaking and delivery at the community level?
    - How do community members perceive the role of education during times of conflict and crisis? What are their priorities regarding the provision of education?
- What are the expectations of different stakeholders regarding community participation and engagement in education?
    - How do policymakers, school leaders and teachers wish for communities to participate?
    - How do parents wish for themselves and for their communities to participate?
    - How do other members of the community, including religious and cultural bodies, wish to participate?
- What motivates individuals and groups in the community to participate in education?
    - What roles do community leaders, parents and local stakeholders play in advocating for and participating in educational activities?
    - What factors hinder and enable participation and engagement?
    - To what extent, and how, are civil society organisations and community-based organisations involved in education?
- What processes of community participation and engagement are occurring?
    - Who is included and who is excluded from the process of community participation? Why does this inclusion/exclusion occur? What formal and informal mechanisms encourage inclusion or exclusion? What (if any) effects do practices of inclusion or exclusion have?
    - How are decisions made in the process of community participation?

o What are the intended changes in policy and practice as a result of community participation and engagement?

o How are these processes maintained in fluid contexts wherein there are frequent movements in/from the community?

Aim 2: Create feasible and desirable interventions (strategy, policy or programme) to improve community engagement and participation.

Design research is needed to develop contextually relevant solutions to improve community engagement and participation in education. Indicative design research questions include:

- How do decision-makers engage with individuals and community groups when making decisions around policies, such as teacher recruitment, resource allocation, and activities within schools and other learning settings?
- To what extent is there coherence between community expectations for access, quality and continuity of education and policy-level decision-making?
- What interventions promote equitable community participation and decision-making regarding education policy and implementation?

Aim 3: Assess the implementation of different models of community engagement and participation.

Implementation research is needed to capture the degree to which existing solutions to address community engagement and participation are feasible, cost-efficient and being implemented as intended. Indicative implementation research questions include:

- In what ways are communities participating and engaging in education?
  - o How are different groups involved in education? What enables or constrains this involvement?
  - o Which groups tend to play more active roles in education policy formation and programme design? Which groups are likely to be excluded and why?
  - o What types of participation are being enabled or constrained?
  - o What factors enable or constrain the implementation of community engagement models?
- How does community participation respond to safety and security concerns in areas experiencing conflict?
- To what extent is the model of community engagement and participation top-down versus bottom-up?

Aim 4: Evaluate the impact of different models of community engagement and participation.

Effectiveness research is needed to determine what outcomes are achieved by interventions that target community engagement and participation. Indicative effectiveness research questions include:

- What are the effective models of community participation in the delivery of quality education?
  - o What levels of community participation are being enabled or constrained?
  - o What are the social, cultural and psychological impacts of community engagement models on communities' perceptions of education and wellbeing?
- How (if at all) does community involvement in education support child protection, safeguarding and student wellbeing?
- In what ways (if at all) does community involvement in education strengthen the overall education system?

- How (if at all), does community involvement affect policymaking, resourcing and data systems?
- How (if at all) does community involvement affect access, quality and continuity of education?
- How (if at all) does community involvement contribute to improved, equitable outcomes for students?
- How (if at all) does community involvement contribute to the crisis-preparedness, risk-mitigation and sustainability of the education provisions?

C. 4. Expected impact on education policy and programming

There is limited knowledge about how individuals and groups within the community become involved in educational activities during times of conflict, crisis and ongoing disruption of educational activities. Generating a stronger evidence base will inform the design of contextually appropriate interventions to leverage community engagement and participation. This stands to enhance access, quality and continuity of education. Furthermore, evidence is needed about what relevant interventions are already underway, how they are being implemented, and what their impact has been, particularly on the stability and sustainability of education provision.

Participants in our validation workshop note that community involvement in education varies across place and time, with different models occurring within and between systems. There is a desire to capture what models exist and how those involved in the process judge these models. There is also interest in taking a systems thinking approach to identify the feedback loops present in the community-education system. Overall, participants agree that a political economy analysis would greatly benefit their understanding of community positions and relations.

Education providers recognise that community members may feel disempowered during times of crisis, which negatively affects their willingness and agency to participate in educational activities. It is thought that a better understanding of what works well in terms of community involvement will lead to improved intervention design and have tangible benefits, including improved resource allocation and child protection, and support for the re-enrolment of out-of-school children. In some cases, during crises, education is initiated and maintained by communities themselves, with the so-called resilience of schooling attributed to community involvement. However, this has not been sufficiently studied, and therefore participants would like to build a stronger evidence base (Table 9). As noted by a workshop participant:

> "In emergency contexts, communities mobilise resources for schools. What kind of community-led and community-driven governance system works [is less known]."

Table 9. Validation Workshop Rating of Theme 3 Aims

Aims	Scale of 0-5		Scale of 0-10
	Relevance (Average)	Feasibility (Average)	Relevance and Feasibility Score (Weighted)
1: Understand community perspectives of and involvement in education (Formative Research)	4.79	4.28	8.38
2: Create interventions to improve community participation and engagement in education (Design Research)	4.58	3.83	7.80

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3. Assess implementation of community engagement and participation models (Implementation Research)	4.47	3.89	7.74
4. Evaluate the impact of different models of community participation and engagement (Effectiveness Research)	4.37	3.44	7.26

D. Envisioning an inclusive national education system

The inclusion of this theme in the research agenda speaks to the stated aspirations of many parallel education providers to create a national education system for Myanmar that is inclusive of the country's ethnolinguistic diversity. For many education providers, but crucially not all, visions of a future education system have been framed around federal education. This theme is intended to include considerations around a possible federal national education system, but it is also open to other possibilities, recognising the ongoing contestation and uncertainty around Myanmar's future political settlement. This theme seeks to examine what discussions are taking place across diverse education communities about the nature of political settlements, implications for a future national education system, and what promising headway has been made in this direction.

An **inclusive education system** refers to the provision of a national system that caters to the educational needs of all learners, regardless of their backgrounds. Educational authorities must promote a system that mitigates linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers that might prevent equitable access to, quality of and continuity in education for every child. An inclusive national education system can contribute to not only the achievement of holistic outcomes for all learners, but also to broader societal impact by reducing inequalities and strengthening social cohesion and peace with justice.

The multiplicity of education authorities across ethnic regions has resulted in fragmentation of educational provisions, which limits student mobility across systems and the progression of students and accreditation of their qualifications. In recognition of these challenges, as reported by workshop participants, many authorities are discussing a possible future national education system that could address the deeply rooted historical grievances of ethnic communities. Many of such discussions are reported to be framed around the possibility of designing and working towards a federal education system, and in some instances "bottom-up" federating of education might be underway, albeit in its nascence (South et al., 2024).

In the context of Myanmar where non-state education authorities are actively involved in expanding educational provisions outside the government education system, the debate about the federal education system is inseparably linked with the kind of political settlement that would deliver peace, justice and reconciliation. Aspirations for and debates around federalism in Myanmar significantly predate the coup to the 1947 Panglong Agreement, one year before independence (Kipgen, 2018; South, 2021; Lian, 2023). Demands for federalism have regularly been a key component of the peace processes during Myanmar's modern history (Crouch, 2020), with the achievement of "genuine federalism" hypothesised to end civil conflict between the Myanmar state and armed non-state actors (Breen, 2022). In this spirit, federal education refers to the way in which a country's educational policies, funding, administration and regulations are managed through collaboration between the national government and subnational governments. It assumes the existence of a federal democratic system, guaranteeing

local autonomy in education policies and programming. Stepan (1999) offers a continuum of the formation of federalism: on one end, "coming together" federalism represents relatively autonomous units voluntarily pooling their sovereignty, while retaining their individual identities; on the other end, "holding together" federalism represents an existing unitary state introducing federalism to its constituent units. In some cases, federalism has been introduced to hold divided societies together, as a tool for conflict resolution in settings experiencing violence between groups (Keli, 2019). However, challenges may remain in constructing a conflict-sensitive, reconciliatory federal education system within post-conflict federal democracies, as evidenced in the cases of Nepal and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hill, 2011; Pherali, 2022).

D. 1. Background and existing evidence

Breen (2018) observes Myanmar as having had a quasi-federalist structure under its 2008 Constitution, with a defined federal state but with centralised leadership. Before the coup, this was an example of "holding together" federalism, due to the high risk of secession,[7] which inhibited the shift from a unitary to a democratic federal state. Given the historical legacies of political resistance by armed non-state actors, the fragility of the SAC-controlled state, the shaky legitimacy of the National Unity Government (NUG), and the capture of significant territory by EAOs, a future federal political settlement for Myanmar would likely need to be one of "coming together."

Many ethnic minority communities and elites have regularly campaigned for greater federalism in Myanmar, with many viewing it as a means for achieving self-determination (South, 2021). Since the coup, calls for federalism have expanded beyond these two groups. Noting the diverse makeup of NUG institutions and discussions occurring amongst the general Myanmar populace online, Myat et al. (2023) argue that since the coup, overall political discourse has shifted from democratic federalism (with a focus on centralised control) to federal democracy (with power moving away from the centre). This has implications in the realm of education, which has become increasingly politicised and used to serve the ideologies and political visions of different armed and political actors. As a result, power over educational provisions has been moving away from the centre to parallel authorities, largely in the country's peripheries.

Myanmar has long had a range of EAOs playing governance, administrative and service delivery roles, sometimes in partnership with civil society. They act as the de facto government in the territories they administer and, prior to the coup, have had influence and have provided services in areas of mixed administration, where the Myanmar state also maintains authority. In some ways, federalism has been enacted through EAO service provision. In practice, locally owned schools under the administration of EEPs exhibit a form of self-determination: 'federalism from below' or 'emergent federalism' (South and Lall, 2016b). Since the coup, many EAOs and newly formed ethnic coordination bodies have been observed to continue bottom-up federalist practices (South, 2022).

The 2010s reform era saw some degree of decentralisation and the emergence of subnational governments as decision-makers in public education. The 2014 National Education Law and its 2015 Amendment attributed multiple functions for the education sector to the subnational State and Region governments. Notably, subnational governments were given the authority to develop local curricula and provide mother-tongue instruction in government schools (Salem-Gervais and Raynaud, 2020). However, their success was hindered by the legacies of the centralised education system and issues around selecting which languages and what curricular content should be provided for in schools and classrooms. Additional elements of decentralisation in education were more often seen as an act of

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[7] Breen (2018) defines a secession risk as the combination of three factors: (i) the relative homogeneity of a given area; (ii) the breadth of non-state military power; (iii) the presence of a supportive international environment, especially sympathetic neighbours

de-concentration, limited by the top-down institutional culture of the MoE (Zobrist and McCormick, 2017).

Overall, and with some exceptions, convergence and collaboration between the central state MoE and EEPs, and between EEPs themselves, has been limited (South and Lall, 2016b). This has led to a more siloed, contentious and politically fragmented approach to education, especially regarding stances on how ethnic education might converge with the public system in a future political settlement. In 2023, the National Unity Consultative Council approved a Federal Democracy Education Policy, drafted by the NUG, that envisions a largely decentralised education system and exhibits a willingness to work more closely with EEPs towards a federal future.[8] However, anecdotal evidence suggests some EEPs did not agree with the process through which the policy was drafted, though it is unclear to what extent they disagree with the actual contents of the policy. It has also been argued that the federal education vision put forward by the NUG ignores the contributions EEPs are already making towards federalism-from-below ('federating') processes (South et al., 2024).

The data gathered from the KII interviews reveals a greater awareness of and appreciation for the diversity of education provisions in Myanmar. This appears to be motivating aspirations for an inclusive, national education system that promotes peace, social harmony, and inclusion. However, it is unclear to what extent collaborative policy work is taking place between educational bodies. It has been observed that 'federalism' itself, in some instances, might be a particularly sensitive term, especially for education bodies operating under EAOs that may not themselves desire a federal future, fearing that it could undermine their vision of education as a means of preserving and promoting their particular ethnic identity, language, history, and culture. Discussions and actions towards a national education system and federal education therefore vary regionally.

D. 2. Evidence gaps

There is a lack of literature on the political economy of education following the coup, which has altered the dynamics of the preceding reform era. It is also unclear the extent to which there is alignment of education aspirations across the diversity of education providers and if or how providers may be coordinating and collaborating. Additionally, the extent to which education systems promote peace, democracy and reconciliation remains unclear. More formative research is needed on the prospects of envisioning and realising a future national education system, and on the intersection of education with peace and justice in Myanmar.

D. 3. Research aims and questions

The research design under this theme is expected to engage with ethnic, refugee and migrant educational decision-makers as well as political leaders across a diverse spectrum. This theme explores enablers and constraints to designing and realising an inclusive education system that aligns with the future political system that is still in formation. It relates especially to the coherence of education as a driver of learning, focusing particularly on how policies and practices related to teachers, language-in-education, accreditation and curriculum cohere with inclusive (perhaps federal) education principles and align across systems. This theme includes only formative and design research as it assumes that specific interventions to realise a re-envisioned national education system in Myanmar are yet to be fully sketched out.

Table 10. Cross-Cutting Themes for Theme 4

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

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Cross-Cutting Themes	Envisioning an Inclusive National Education System
Inclusion, Equity and Justice in Education	• Recognition of diversity in education provision across education systems in the Myanmar context • Coordination and collaboration across different education systems for coherence and recognition of educational qualifications
Policy Framing, Formulation and Enactment towards Systems Strengthening	• Diverse education systems contributing to the creation of an inclusive national education system • Education policies that are aimed at recognising diverse needs and aspirations of the ethnic communities with the view of promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation • Local education systems implementing the visions of an inclusive national education system

Aim 1: Understand how different stakeholders conceptualise a national education system for Myanmar.

Formative research is needed to understand how different stakeholders across ethnic, refugee and migrant education envision a national education system for Myanmar. Indicative formative research questions include:

- What are the aspirations and expectations of different stakeholders – including parents, educators and students – regarding the outcomes of education in Myanmar?
  - What are the main priorities and values identified by various stakeholders when conceptualising a national education system for Myanmar?
  - How do different stakeholders perceive the current strengths and weaknesses of the education system in Myanmar?
  - How do stakeholders envision the role of education in fostering national unity, cultural preservation and social cohesion in Myanmar?
- What are the possibilities for systems coherence within the current situation of education fragmentation?
  - Are there core principles and values related to education that enable coherence?
  - To what extent are the goals of different ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems in alignment?
  - To what extent are policies (i.e. accreditation, teacher-related, language-in-education, curricular) coherent across diverse education systems?
  - To what extent is collaborative policy work taking place between educational bodies?
  - Are there points of programmatic coherence across diverse education systems?
  - What are the perceived enablers and barriers to achieving a national education system in Myanmar?
- What is the status of governance structures and educational policies in ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems with regard to the wider educational context of Myanmar?
  - How do historical, cultural and socio-political factors influence educational governance and decision-making?
  - Who are the actors participating in policy framing and formulation? How are policies framed? How are they formulated and to achieve what political, economic and social goals? How are they enacted?
  - What values underpin educational decision-making and planning?

- o What hinders and enables policymaking? How can policymaking processes be strengthened to achieve the wider goals of sustainable political settlements?

Aim 2: Create feasible and desirable pathways for an inclusive national education system.

Design research is needed to develop contextually relevant pathways towards an inclusive national education system. Indicative design research questions include:

- What are the possibilities for an inclusive national education system?
    - o How does strengthening diverse ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems contribute to building a coherent national education system?
    - o What lessons can be learned from previous education reform processes in Myanmar with regards to building a coherent national education system?
    - o What evidence exists outside of the Myanmar context, and what lessons can be learned?
    - o What enables and constrains the formation of an inclusive national education system in Myanmar?
    - o What enables and constrains federal education in Myanmar?
- What are the perspectives of various education actors about the prospect of an inclusive national education system in Myanmar?
    - o To what extent are ethnic, refugee, and migrant actors currently rehearsing an inclusive national education system?
    - o To what extent are ethnic refugee, and migrant actors currently rehearsing federalism?
    - o To what extent are collaboration and coordination taking place among diverse educational communities to formulate policies, share knowledge and practices, and imagine a socially just education system for Myanmar?
    - o How do stakeholders perceive the benefits and challenges of transitioning to an inclusive national education system?
- How might the proposition of an inclusive national education system address the challenges around inter-ethnic and political reconciliation in Myanmar?
- What kind of education system in Myanmar is perceived to maximise continuity and coherence across different ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems?
    - o What models and frameworks of accreditation, recognition and equivalency exist across diverse education providers to support displaced or mobile communities in terms of access, quality and continuity of education?
    - o What are the necessary legislative and policy changes required to establish a federal education system?

D. 4. Expected impact on education policy and programming

There is limited knowledge about what type of future national education system different ethnic, refugee and migrant actors value, whether it might be organised as a federal system or otherwise. Moreover, there is limited evidence on how existing policymaking and programmatic activities might already be contributing to building an inclusive national education system. Generating a stronger evidence base will inform the design of contextually appropriate interventions to support efforts towards an inclusive national education system.

Participants in our validation workshop found research into federal education specifically to be highly relevant, but shared concerns about its feasibility (see Table 11). This relates to sensitivities around who

participates in the research – their position of relative power – and what participants can discuss, given the ongoing contestations around what a future political settlement for Myanmar might look like.

Nonetheless, there is consensus that building a better understanding of key actors' positions vis-à-vis federal education would assist collaborative efforts between education providers. Validation workshop participants believe this evidence will help them explore the possibilities for co-designing a future national education system and better advocate for resources from external agencies and experts, which are likely to be needed to realise any large-scale, inclusive design. While the participants believed the existence of an inclusive national education system to be important, they also highlighted the importance of respecting the rights of ethnic minority communities to preserve the ideals that they strive to promote through parallel education provision, recognising that contributions to a future national system should be an option but not an expectation. This reflects key ethnic actors wanting to continue their own independent education system, if they so choose, under principles of self-determination. Consequently, the research needs to be designed sensitively to respect their longstanding struggles for autonomy and political freedoms.

Table 11. **Validation Workshop Rating of Theme 4 Aims**

Aims	Scale of 0–5		Scale of 0–10
	Relevance (Average)	Feasibility (Average)	Relevance and Feasibility Score (Weighted)
1: Understand how different stakeholders conceptualise a national education system for Myanmar (Formative Research)	4.84	4.21	8.38
2: Create pathways for a national education system (Design Research)	4.63	3.68	7.73

IV. CONCLUSION

This research agenda was designed through a comprehensive co-creation process with a range of ethnic, refugee and migrant education stakeholders, including members of local civil society and the international community. We have presented four comprehensive research themes that have emerged from our extensive collaborative design process:

> (i) teacher management, professional development and wellbeing;

> (ii) access to quality education;

> (iii) community engagement and participation; and

> (iv) envisioning an inclusive national education system.

Each of the four research designs encompasses relevant aims, research methods and indicative research questions. They are linked in different ways to the ERICC conceptual framework, engaging at both the policy systems and local systems levels to examine the pre-existing conditions present within

a particular context, the four drivers of learning (access, quality, continuity and coherence), ongoing educational interventions, and the various outcomes of education.

The four research designs are complemented by the following three cross-cutting themes that emerged from our KIIs:

(i) inclusion, equity and justice in education;

(ii) safety and wellbeing in and through schooling; and

(iii) policy framing, formulation and enactment towards systems strengthening.

As much as possible, these themes should be integrated into any research studies designed under the four priority themes.

This agenda is intended to guide education research undertaken within the Myanmar context, ensuring that it is designed to address the concerns and priorities of actors within ethnic, refugee and migrant education systems. The Myanmar context is marked by ongoing armed conflict, multidimensional crises, mass displacement and disruptions to education. As observed by a participant in our validation workshop, collaboration with local education actors is key to producing research evidence that can be used by education providers to improve access, quality, continuity and coherence in education:

"Any research in any area, even when paired with local organisations, will always have risks, and these risks are manageable [through] collaboration with local partners."

Research should therefore be planned as a collaborative endeavour, contextually relevant, conflict-sensitive, and leverage local resources where possible. This research agenda is aimed at broadly serving the research community that engages in policy-relevant and actionable research to support ethnic education systems, migrant education provisions and refugee education in the context of Myanmar. In this sense, this research agenda has been developed as a resource for donors, civil society organisations, and the broader community of researchers beyond the ERICC Myanmar team. It also aims to encourage coordination, partnership and collaboration between different donors who fund research studies and to build a coherent body of educational evidence to benefit policy and programming decisions within the Myanmar context, allowing us to enhance the quality of learning amidst ongoing violence, protracted crises and political instability.

Given the significant political upheaval since 2021 and the escalation of armed conflict across many regions of the country, the education sector in Myanmar has experienced multifarious challenges with regard to policy and programme interventions. Hence, the ERICC programme plans to advance formative research under all four themes outlined in this agenda. In particular, we will design and implement a comprehensive political economy analysis of education to reveal how education interacts with security, political, social and economic dynamics in the post-coup context. This study will also investigate the political economy of education sector coordination, considering the (in)coherence of different actors horizontally in the planning and delivery of education as well as vertically at the international, national and local levels.

Secondly, we will examine the theme on access to quality education in terms of equity, social cohesion and peace with justice, specifically paying attention to policy-level debates around how to establish an inclusive national education system that accommodates cultural diversity. Additionally, we will investigate the role of mother tongue-based multilingual education in addressing grievances of multilingual ethnic communities and in promoting the wider agenda of peace, justice and reconciliation in Myanmar.

Finally, the ERICC programme will engage in implementation research on teacher professional development and wellbeing, focusing in particular on a co-designed massive open online collaboration - or 'CoMOOC' - led by the Inclusive Education Foundation and University College London. This study will evaluate the intervention's feasibility, acceptability and sustainability to address teacher crisis in the context of mass displacement and will establish the context for effectiveness research.

We conclude by encouraging other actors working in educational contexts in ethnic, refugee and migrant settings in Myanmar to advance design research in all themes and implementation and effective research on relevant interventions, as is appropriate.

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ABOUT ERICC

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

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

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

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

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