Challenges in Access to Quality Secondary Education in Myanmar after the 2021 Military Coup

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Abstract

Improving education quality and accessibility is essential for reducing poverty, developing human capital, and fostering a peaceful and prosperous future. Armed conflicts inflict severe disruptions on children's access to education, leading to the destruction of school infrastructure, displacement of students and teachers, and the closure of educational institutions. In 2021, the military coup in Myanmar resulted in many negative consequences and one of the sectors deeply affected by the aftermath was the education sector, which had devastating effects on access to a quality continuous education system, particularly secondary education in Myanmar. The coup worsened the existing challenges and created new barriers to access quality secondary education for approximately 200,000 children in Myanmar (Burmese, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate challenges faced by students, teachers, and secondary educational institutions related to access to quality secondary education in Myanmar. Moreover, this study examines the impact of technology integration in secondary education, investigating how digital tools and online resources affect teaching and learning outcomes.

Qualitative data collection methods used for this study include interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions from four schools in conflict areas like Bago, Sagaing, Mon, and Magway. These methods allow us to get a deeper understanding of the challenges students face in accessing continuous and quality secondary education in conflict areas

The findings reveal the primary challenges of access to quality education faced by students in Myanmar after the 2021 military coup and the impact of technology integration, using digital tools and online resources, on teaching and learning outcomes in secondary education. By exploring the primary challenges faced by secondary students in conflict areas and accessing the role of technology, this research aims to highlight the education crisis in Myanmar and provide insights into potential solutions to address this issue.

Keywords: Secondary Education, Education in Emergencies, Military Coup, Conflict Challenges, Online Education, Learning Outcomes, Teaching Outcomes

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Introduction

According to Poirier (2011), the immediate victims of war are often children, with millions in the region succumbing to injuries or losing their lives due to armed conflicts. Furthermore, armed conflicts inflict severe disruptions on children's access to education, leading to the destruction of school infrastructure, displacement of students and teachers, and the closure of educational institutions (Davies, 2003). The military coup that took place in Myanmar on February 1, 2021 has had negative consequences and one of the sectors deeply affected by the aftermath was the education sector. The coup exacerbated ongoing challenges and introduced new obstacles, affecting around 200,000 children's ability to access quality education in Myanmar (Burmese, 2022).

When the military attacked with armed forces, schools became targets of attacks, resulting in tragic incidents that left children and teachers injured or killed. The disruptions caused by the military coup in Myanmar, displacement, and the targeting of schools and educational personnel have severely impacted the educational landscape, particularly post-secondary education in Myanmar. This research aims to identify and analyze challenges faced by students, teachers, and educational institutions in the realm of secondary education, including issues regarding access to quality post-secondary education. Additionally, this research aims to examine the impact of technology integration in post-secondary education and investigate how digital tools and online resources affect teaching and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, this research explores the primary challenges students face in accessing quality education in Myanmar after the 2021 military coup. It also explores the impact of technology integration, using digital tools and online resources, on teaching and learning outcomes in post-secondary education. By exploring the primary challenges faced by post-secondary students in conflict areas and accessing the role of technology, this research aims to highlight the education crisis in Myanmar and provide insights into potential solutions to address this issue.

Methods

This research used qualitative methods to measure various variables, including survey questionnaires, interview responses, and focus group discussions regarding the challenges of access to quality secondary education in Myanmar. The purpose of this approach is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges in accessing quality secondary education in Myanmar after the 2021 military coup.

For the surveys, this research used an open-ended questionnaire to define the challenges secondary students face. A total of 47 students participated and completed the Google form survey anonymously. For the interviews, this research used six primary questions and other follow-up questions. These interview questions allowed the participants to express their experiences, perspectives, and feelings. A total of three teachers participated in an interview. For the focus group discussion, this research used six questions and other follow-up questions. A total of five teachers, school officers, and administrators participated in the focus group discussion. Therefore, this research's target population is students and teachers from conflict zones, especially in Sagaing Region, Bago Region and Mon State.

The first step in collecting data began with creating interview questions that were refined and finalized after discussions with research trainers, peers and colleges. We sent invitations via email to selected institutions and followed up with phone calls to schedule the interviews. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for precision. These transcripts were color-coded by different categories, which guaranteed both accuracy and reliability of the data. The themes and interview questions were organized in a word file based on main areas such as the internet, contentious electricity problems, security related issues and financial difficulties from the sides of school, teachers and parents, and support from schools and parents for the students in conflict areas. Finally, all the data from the surveys, individual interviews and focus group discussion were grouped under key themes and organized by a color-coding system. Only the key points and quotes were highlighted and a part of the same was taken into account while coding. This approach guaranteed that all of the parts were in sync with the research objectives and could explicitly enhance the study's validity and reliability.

Key findings from this study help to explain the primary challenges of access to quality secondary education and reveal an urgent need for policies to address this issue. Data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to define the challenges faced by students in the conflict zones. Qualitative data synthesized from existing literature and interviews were also used to contextualize and help interpret the findings from the student surveys.

Results

Demographic Data
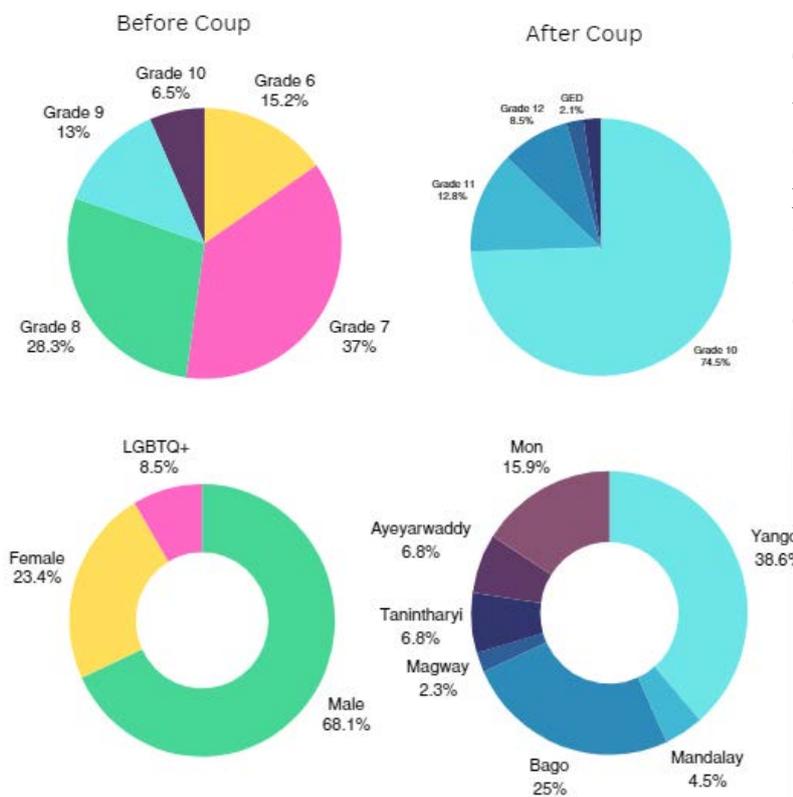
Total respondents are 47. Among them, 32 (68.1%) are male, 11 (23.4%) are female and 4 (8.5%) prefer not to say. They all come from different regions and they are secondary students from online community schools.

The data shows that before the coup, the majority of the students were in Grade 8, followed by Grade 7 with 17 students. There were also smaller numbers of students in Grades 6, 9, 10, and only one student in Grade 5. After the coup, the distribution of students' educational status changed. The majority of students were in Grade 10, followed by Grade 11 and Grade 12. Moreover, one student was pursuing the General Educational Development (GED) program and one student had dropped out without specifying current educational status. The coup led to changes in the curriculum and school schedules, which could have affected students' academic progress. Additionally, the coup caused some students to drop out of school due to safety concerns, which could have contributed to the increase in the number of students in Grade 10 and the decrease in the number of students in lower grades. The data shows that the coup had an impact on the educational journey of the students. However, it is important to note that this data shows a limited sample size and does not reflect on the entire population's educational status in Myanmar after the coup. In the next section, the research delves into the primary challenges faced by secondary education students in conflict areas, specifically in Myanmar. The identified challenges include internet connection, electricity, security concerns, financial problems, lack of student support, and other minor challenges.

The Impact of Internet Connectivity on Secondary Education

In Myanmar, the influence of internet reliability on higher education is noticeable. According to Athan, a freedom of expression organization, the military junta in Myanmar disconnected internet and telephone services in approximately 80 townships across the nation (Irrawaddy, 2024). Students and educators faced difficulties in adapting to online learning platforms due to the ongoing national crisis. The closure of schools because of the pandemic and political instability emphasizes the crucial need for dependable internet access for effective online education (Teacircle MM, 2023). The finding shows that the impact of poor internet connectivity on post-secondary education is profound and pervasive, significantly impeding students' ability to engage effectively in online learning environments. As one participant expressed, *"The Internet is challenging for me because it has a high potential to miss class when there is a terrible internet connection."*

The challenges stemming from unstable internet access extend beyond missed classes to disrupted exams and hindering participation in group discussions and projects. Another participant lamented, *"I am often out of the zoom due to poor internet connection, making it difficult to participate fully in the class activities."*

These interruptions not only disrupt the flow of learning but also contribute to feelings of frustration and isolation among students. Furthermore, the lack of reliable internet access disproportionately affects students from marginalized communities, widening existing socioeconomic disparities in educational outcomes. Participants recounted having to resort to extreme measures such as climbing mountains or relocating to urban areas just to access reliable internet connection, underscoring the lengths students must go to pursue their education. These first-hand experiences underscore the urgency of addressing the digital divide in education as access to reliable internet becomes increasingly essential for academic success.

The disruptions not only hinder the continuity of learning but also exacerbate socio-economic disparities, disproportionately affecting students from conflict areas.

In addition, the challenges posed by internet connectivity from the perspective of teachers are significant and multifaceted, as well. As one educator highlighted, *"If I have a bad internet connection, they cannot hear my voice and when they get a bad connection, I cannot hear their voice."*

This underscores the crucial role of stable internet access in facilitating effective communication and instruction between teachers and students in online learning environments. Furthermore, the geographical disparities in internet accessibility exacerbate these challenges, with varying rates of connectivity depending on the location of students. Teachers are compelled to adapt to these circumstances, often needing to take leave when faced with poor internet connectivity and subsequently having to compensate by re-teaching missed material multiple times to students who also face connectivity issues.

Moreover, according to Haffner (2022), following the coup, there was a significant surge in the cost of internet access, resulting in a doubling of mobile data prices within a mere two-month period. This increase posed challenges for individuals in staying connected and impacted their daily work routines. As reflected in one teacher's account,

> *In the years 2018-2019, electricity rarely went off. We don't need to worry to charge our devices. At that time, about 5 Gbs could be bought with one thousand kyat. But after the coup, we can get about 488mb with one thousand kyat.*

This drastic reduction in affordable data packages exacerbated the financial burden on teachers who spent significantly more to sustain online teaching sessions. The combination of rising internet bills and electricity costs emerged as a major challenge for educators navigating the transition to online instruction. Thus, the internet connectivity issues faced by teachers and students not only impede effective communication and instruction but also pose significant financial challenges for both educators and students.

The Impact of Electricity on Secondary Education

Another pressing challenge is the unreliable electricity supply. Frequent power outages in conflict areas hinder students' educational pursuits. Without electricity, they cannot use electronic devices for learning purposes, which disrupts students' study time. A teacher from Bago stated,

> *If the electricity is cut off, both teachers and students have to cancel the classes. We cannot do anything when our devices are out of battery. If the students cancel the class, teachers can replace classes. But students are aggrieved when the teachers cancel the class. So, for me, I prepared a power bank for Wi-Fi and a power bank for my laptop.*

Access to electricity is essential for online classes and communication platforms. A lack of electricity hinders students' access to online educational materials and information necessary for their studies. When the electricity goes off, sometimes up to 10 hours a day, the students cannot use Wi-Fi even though they have a power bank. These power outages lead to significant

disruptions to their learning routines and overall academic progress. One of the school officers from the focus group discussion also said, *"We had to postpone two or three times to hold a meeting."* The power outages and unstable internet can lead to delays in essential meetings, impacting decision-making and planning for educational initiatives.

Moreover, a teacher from the online school in Sagaing Region also highlighted,

> *Another main teaching resource challenges that we are facing are being cut off electricity and the internet. In these cases, the teachers cannot help the students. What the teacher can do is to teach back the lessons the students missed and share the lesson recordings.*

The reliance on electricity for both teaching and learning is a significant challenge for online classes. The power outages disrupt education and prevent teachers from conducting regular classes. This leads to missed lessons that must be re-taught or lessons that must be recorded and shared with students. Unfortunately, this is a reflection of the additional effort required from both teachers and students to overcome such disruptions.

The Impact of Security Concerns on Secondary Education

Security concerns are also a substantial barrier to accessing quality secondary education in conflict regions. In conflict regions like Myanmar, the displacement of families due to the ongoing conflicts is a significant threat to accessing quality secondary education for students. The students said if they are homeless, they must earn money first. Even if they want to learn, they will not be able to focus on education. One student said,

> *Due to the conflict, we have to flee. When we lose families, we cannot focus on education. Because of the homeless, we cannot think about education. In addition, there is an ongoing conflict where we live, we have to worry about when the battle will start. So, we think those factors can affect access to quality education.*

Moreover, the threat of violence and uncertainty surrounding the conflict also hinder students' access to quality secondary education. The fear and anxiety that come from living in a conflict zone create an environment of stress, which makes it difficult for students to engage in learning effectively. One teacher said,

> *Some students ask to leave the class as they hear the loud sound of the weapon or bombardment. Some students did not learn when the officers came to their houses for guest registration. For me, I have to hide that I am teaching in the school under NUG due to security issues. All of the staff, teachers, supporters, and students do care about security. I think security will be the biggest issue for us.*

In one of the individual interviews, another teacher also highlighted the importance of hiding his identity due to security concerns, saying, *"Due to security, teachers have to hide their identity that can hinder communication interactively with the students."*

Security concerns force teachers to conceal their identities, which affects the quality of teacher-student engagement. This creates a barrier to building trust, open communication, and a productive learning environment, all of which are essential for secondary education.

The teacher from Sagaing online school also added,

> *The main challenge that teachers encounter are security issues as long as most of the teachers in our schools are CDMer. They have to move from one place to another due to security concerns.*

Specifically, the teachers who were involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) encountered severe security concerns and faced constant threats to their safety, forcing them to relocate frequently. This instability disrupts their teaching and affects the continuity of education for their students. Teachers must prioritize their safety over their professional duties, leading to interruptions in lessons and a lack of stability in students' learning environments. The situation also places an emotional and financial strain on teachers, as they must continually adapt to new locations while receiving little to no income. The issue of security goes beyond the immediate safety of teachers and students. It affects education quality, accessibility, and teacher retention in conflict zones.

Moreover, a school administrator from the focus group discussion mentioned, "*Sometimes, connections with the board members fail due to unstable internet connection, security and displacement.*"

Unstable electricity, lack of internet access, and security concerns of students, teachers and school administrators all create barriers to effective communication and learning environments. In the context of online education, especially after the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, security concerns added a big layer of difficulty for educators and administrators. This hampered the ability to plan effectively, share updates, and implement timely responses to challenges in the education system.

Furthermore, the recent military conscription law intensified the students' security concerns. There is a sense of hopelessness and perception that their lives could be cut short. One of the responses from the survey answered, "*Now the military announced the military service law. Thus, we are worried when we enter the military and I think our life will end like that.*

Security concerns due to the loss of homes, the struggle for survival and the fear of violence all contribute to a challenging environment that affect students' access to quality education and hinders their concentration on their studies.

The Impact of Financial Problems on Secondary Education

The economic hardships stemming from the political coup severely impact postsecondary education. Many families struggle financially, making it difficult for students to afford school fees and textbooks. Moreover, most students living in rural areas are faced with education disparities. They are losing their education rights and working alongside Thailand and Malaysia. Socioeconomic factors and limited resources in rural areas underscore the education gap resulting from the coup, highlighting the hardships in these students' lives. On the other hand, many say they have found "true education" and are gaining a meaningful and valuable experience that goes beyond academic knowledge.

Additionally, the financial challenges faced by the schools directly affect the teachers who rely on it for their livelihood. When the school operates independently, some teachers depend on the school fees collected from students to sustain their salaries. One teacher said,

> *From next year, we will collaborate with NUG's MOE[25]. NUG's MOE declares free education. If our school asks for the school fees from the students, our school will deviate from the policy of NUG's MOE. Thus, there is potential to reduce the salaries of teachers as the school relies only on donations from the students' parents. This policy is good for students, but it will be more difficult for teachers' living. If there is not enough financial support, an organization will not run well. Some teachers cannot work beyond the school, as they are CDMers. If the teachers are not able to depend on their salary for their living, they will find other alternative work, giving up their passionate job.*

Moreover, one teacher from Bago also mentioned,

> *I only take my duty in the morning because I have to work in the afternoon for my living. Other teachers are also the same as me. Most of the teachers have to find other jobs beyond the class time.*

Teachers are not financially secure and must find supplementary income outside of their teaching roles. Thus, teachers may not be able to dedicate their full attention or energy to their teaching duties. This can impact the quality of instruction and support that students receive, especially in online or conflict-affected settings. Financial problems are a widespread issue among teachers.

In his individual interview, the teacher from Sagaing online school also highlighted the financial difficulties of CDM teachers, who are his colleagues. He stated,

> *Since they decided to participate in CDM, they do not receive their salary anymore and have to struggle a lot for living. Those teachers cannot work outside jobs due to CDMers status. I can say that financial problems will be the second most challenging problem for teachers.*

By refusing to work under the military regime, these teachers forfeit their government salaries, causing them economic hardship. Additionally, their status as CDM participants prevents them from taking on other jobs, further compounding their financial difficulties. According to the research result, financial problems are the second most significant challenge for these educators, after security concerns. Financial problems are a great barrier for teachers to support themselves and effectively contribute to students' learning.

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[25] Abbreviations
NUG**:** National Unity Government
MOE**:** Ministry of Education

The Crucial Role of Parental Support in Online Education Success

The role of parents' assistance is essential in helping students emotionally, financially, and practically to overcome the challenges of online education and create an atmosphere that nurtures holistic growth. Roy et al. (2023) mentioned that the importance of parental support in the success of online education in Myanmar is underscored by the obstacles encountered by students in accessing quality online learning tools and the discrepancies in parental engagement influenced by economic status. While a considerable proportion of households in Myanmar possess mobile phones, merely 4.1% of children between the ages of 6 and 17 utilize online resources, with enrolled students being twice as inclined to utilize online education compared to their counterparts who have discontinued their studies. The results of this research state that the role of parental support in facilitating students' engagement with online education is paramount, as evidenced by the experiences shared by participants. One student highlighted the invaluable mental and emotional backing provided by their parents saying,

My parents especially support me mentally. They allow me to join the courses I want. When I feel depressed, they always encourage me by telling me that I could do it. They appreciate every little success and always guide me to do critical thinking in my school's lessons based on my life experiences. Moreover, they give me time to listen to my opinion. These are the warm support I get from my parents.

This nurturing environment not only fosters resilience but also empowers students to navigate academic challenges with confidence. Moreover, financial support emerges as a significant aspect of parental involvement in students' education. Another participant recounted the sacrifices made by their father to ensure access to essential resources for online learning, stating,

My father said not to worry about financial problems. He would try to support all the necessary things somehow. He sold a cow on our farm to buy me a phone for online learning as well as books and ball pens. He always tells me that all my responsibilities are to do my best to be an educated person one day.

This anecdote underscores the unwavering commitment of parents to invest in their children's education, even in the face of financial constraints. Furthermore, practical assistance provided by parents plays a crucial role in facilitating students' participation in online education. As one participant shared,

My parents do care about me dealing with my education. A Wi-Fi was fixed in our house as I decided to join online school. They help to charge my devices and to fill my mobile phone data too.

Parental support in emotional, financial, and practical aspects stands as a fundamental pillar for students' success in maneuvering through the challenges of online education. In addition, parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's education, even when they are unfamiliar with the digital learning environment and concerned about their children's safety. One student participant from the survey mentioned,

> *My mother does not understand online learning, as she is not familiar with it. But they support me with mobile data for continuous learning. And then, my parents do care about my security as I attend an online school by NUG.*

Although this mother did not fully understand online learning, she provided the necessary resources like mobile data to ensure her child's continued education. Moreover, when parents send their students to online schools under NUG, not only do the students have security concerns but the parents have them also. The parents support their children's education despite the limitations in their own technological knowledge. The challenges of adapting to new forms of education and navigating safety concerns reflect the resilience of families under difficult circumstances.

Moreover, parental support extends beyond financial assistance and encompasses both emotional and physical care, especially in times of instability. One of the participants highlighted,

> *Although I study by myself dealing with my education, my parents mainly support me financially. Furthermore, when I have to move to new places due to security concerns, they come along with me.*

The role of parents goes beyond simply providing financial support; they also ensure their children's safety and stability during times of conflict. In unstable environments, this form of support is crucial in helping students continue their studies despite the disruptions caused by ongoing conflicts. This support not only boosts students' academic achievements but also fosters a nurturing environment that facilitates holistic development.

Support from Teachers and Schools for Students Continuing Secondary Education in Conflict Areas

Support for secondary education students from conflict areas is a paramount concern for both teachers and school administrations, as highlighted by various initiatives aimed at ensuring continued learning amidst challenging circumstances. The Students Affairs Office plays a crucial role in overseeing the attendance of students from conflict areas, recognizing the unique challenges they face in attending classes regularly. As one teacher noted, *"The office thinks lightly about their attendance based on their pleading to class teachers."*

This flexible approach to attendance management acknowledges the unpredictable nature of their circumstances while ensuring inclusivity in education.

Moreover, teachers actively engage in providing additional support to students who miss significant classroom time due to conflict-related disruptions. Through measures such as revisiting missed lessons, sharing recorded lesson videos, and offering extra instructional time, educators strive to mitigate the impact of prolonged absences on students' academic progress. As expressed by one teacher, *"Teachers have to teach back the lessons the students missed and share the lesson recordings, etc."*

These efforts underscore the commitment of teachers to facilitate continuous learning for students, despite challenges posed by electricity and internet disruptions. One of the teachers

from Bago online school emphasized the significant efforts made by educators to support students from conflict areas in continuing their education despite the challenges they face. She mentioned,

> *When a student informs the class teachers that they have to be displaced, teachers firstly check the safety of the students. At that time, teachers and students negotiate the available time for replaced classes. Moreover, teachers tend to do revision for those students in order to catch up with the lessons they missed.*

The dedication of teachers ensures that students in conflict areas receive the necessary support to continue their education, even under difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, the safety and well-being of students from conflict areas remain a top priority for teachers, who maintain constant vigilance over their circumstances and provide necessary support and reassurance. Teachers actively monitor the situation of these students and collaborate with them to find suitable solutions to any challenges they encounter. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on fostering a supportive and empathetic environment within the school community, where teachers and students share their difficulties and provide mutual encouragement, as described by one teacher:

> *During one hour of teaching, teachers always investigate students' feelings and encourage each other.*

The commitment to supporting students from conflict areas extends beyond academic considerations. Efforts are made to ensure the continuity of their educational journey even if they temporarily leave the school due to conflict-related displacement. School administrations maintain academic records for these students and facilitate their reintegration into the educational system when they return to a safe environment. As Officer 1 highlighted,

> *Even if the students from our school dropout due to serious conflicts, we keep their academic records.*

It reflects a holistic approach to supporting students' educational needs amidst challenging circumstances. Schools show their dedication to maintaining the educational progress and welfare of students from conflict-affected areas by keeping thorough academic records and assisting in a smooth reintegration into the educational system upon their return to safety.

Minor Challenges for Adapting to the Digital Classroom:
Student and Teacher Perspectives on Online Learning Challenges

From the students' perspective, minor challenges arise predominantly from the transition to digital learning formats. With physical textbooks often unavailable in the market, students must rely on PDF files, and although it is accessible, it presents drawbacks such as increased screen time. As one student noted,

> *Since I am joining an online school, I have a lot of screen time. When I have four periods of classes, at least I spend about eight hours a day in front of the screen.*

Consequently, students must strain their eyes and deal with other associated health issues. As a result, they must learn effective time management strategies to mitigate these effects. Conversely, teachers face their own set of challenges in adapting to online teaching methods. The primary concern revolves around classroom management in the virtual setting, particularly difficulty in assessing student comprehension when many students opt to keep their cameras off for security reasons. As one teacher expressed,

> *I was not satisfied with online teaching, as it was hard to assess whether the students understood or not because most of the students closed their cameras due to security.*

And in another interview, one of the teachers from Sagaing online school also highlighted,

> *We cannot get the necessary resources for teaching easily. Due to the security, teachers have to hide their identity that can hinder communication interactively with the students. Consequently, teachers cannot show their identity and cannot share teaching resources like training in the public.*

Everyone who is dealing with online schools under NUG have to hide their identity in public due to security concerns. This hampers teachers' ability to obtain necessary resources and navigate security concerns, ultimately hindering their effectiveness in delivering quality education online.

Additionally, taking attendance, which significantly impacts students' overall scores presents logistical challenges in the online environment. Moreover, the transition to digital teaching resources introduces both advantages and challenges. While the use of keyboards and PDFs streamlines access to curriculum materials, some students face difficulties due to the small font sizes on mobile phone screens.

However, perhaps the most pressing concern for teachers lies in the lack of effective leadership and support systems to address their needs. As one teacher lamented,

> *Another main problem we encounter is strong leadership that draws effective policies and strategies that can support the teachers' living. We lack this kind of support for teachers approaching to solve the teachers' problems.*

There is a need for a collective and strong leadership to solve the problems faced by teachers and students. There is no strong and responsible leadership in charge of the students' and teachers' problems, and as a result, the students, teachers, parents and school officers have to solve problems on their own.

The experiences shared by both students and teachers underscore the multifaceted nature of challenges encountered in the transition to online education, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems and innovative solutions to ensure the continued success of remote learning initiatives.

Discussion

The results of this primary investigation illuminate the diverse hurdles encountered by individuals involved in secondary education in Myanmar, especially amid ongoing national turmoil, and the shift towards online learning modalities. The discourse encompasses a range of factors, including difficulties with internet access, inconsistencies in electricity supply, apprehensions regarding safety, economic limitations, and the pivotal significance of parental assistance. Security concerns hinder teachers' ability to manage online classrooms as students turn off their cameras, fearing surveillance. This limits engagement and open discussion, especially in conflict zones where students prioritize privacy. School leaders face the challenge of securing online platforms while ensuring a safe, interactive environment for learning. Unreliable internet and electricity further disrupt education, affecting both students' participation and teachers' ability to manage classes effectively. Political instability also worsens economic hardships, raising concerns about the sustainability of education. However, parental support plays a crucial role in helping students overcome these challenges by providing emotional, financial, and practical aid. Overall, this primary research contributes to a better understanding of the challenges surrounding secondary education in Myanmar and underscores the importance of addressing systemic barriers to ensure all students have access to quality learning opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographical location. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and educators can work towards building a more inclusive and resilient education system.

A significant finding from this research is how a school's decision to collaborate with the National Unity Government's Ministry of Education (NUG's MOE) and adopt its policy of providing free education presents both opportunities and challenges. While the policy aims to benefit students by eliminating financial barriers to education, it introduces significant concerns regarding the sustainability of teacher salaries and the broader viability of schools. One of the online schools has not been recognized by NUG and is trying to register under the MOE of NUG for the recognition of their education. From a student-centric perspective, the policy is commendable. Free education ensures that students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to learning without the burden of school fees. This aligns with the NUG's vision of an equitable education system in a country marked by conflict and inequality. In such contexts, education becomes a critical tool for social mobility and long-term national development, and free education is a step towards inclusivity.

However, the implications for teachers, especially those involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), are far less promising. Many teachers rely on their salaries to support themselves and their families. With schools increasingly dependent on donations from parents to cover operational costs, teachers face the possibility of reduced wages. This threatens not only their livelihoods but also the quality and consistency of education delivery. Teachers, particularly those participating in CDM, are already in vulnerable positions, as they cannot seek alternative employment without risking their safety. Thus, for many, teaching is their only option for earning a living.

Moreover, the sustainability of the policy is questionable due to the free education policy of NUG's MOE. Education systems require stable funding to function effectively. According to the result of the schools, under NUG's MOE the school does not receive any financial support from NUG. Once a school has been recognized by NUG, it cannot ask for school fees from the students. For the sustainability of the schools, school leaders ask the parents to donate to the school. When schools are forced to rely solely on donations, their financial future becomes precarious. Donations, by nature, are unpredictable and insufficient to guarantee the long-term success of the school. If schools are unable to provide competitive salaries or basic financial security for teachers, it is likely that many educators will seek alternative employment, thereby depleting the system of skilled and passionate professionals. This outcome would not only compromise the quality of education but also undermine the long-term goals of the NUG's MOE.

The dilemma here reveals a tension between the policy's noble intentions and the harsh realities of resource constraints. While the goal of free education is admirable, the lack of sufficient financial support for teachers risks creating an unstable education system where both students and educators suffer. Policymakers must recognize that the success of free education initiatives relies heavily on the support structures in place for teachers. Without addressing these underlying issues, the very foundation of the policy, providing quality education may be undermined.

One limitation of this research is the lack of information on how the National Unity Government (NUG) distributes its education budget at the national level, though the schools under study receive no financial support. Additionally, since only three schools were selected, and the research relies on qualitative methods, the results may not reflect the situation at the national level. Another challenge is the scarcity of secondary sources on Myanmar's secondary education system following the coup. Further research is needed to develop better solutions.

In conclusion, while the NUG's MOE policy of free education is a progressive step for students, it raises significant concerns about the financial well-being of teachers and the sustainability of schools. Balancing the need for accessible education with the necessity of supporting educators should be a priority for the government and stakeholders, ensuring that both students and teachers can thrive within this new framework.

Conclusion

The overall findings of this research underscore the complex array of challenges facing secondary education in Myanmar, particularly amidst ongoing national crises, and the transition to online learning platforms. From internet connectivity issues to security concerns and financial constraints, stakeholders across the educational landscape grapple with multifaceted obstacles that hinder equitable access to quality education. Addressing these challenges demands concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, parents, and other stakeholders. By implementing targeted interventions such as financial assistance and support programs for students in conflict-affected areas, Myanmar can work towards fostering educational equity and resilience in the face of adversity. Furthermore, future research endeavors should focus on exploring innovative solutions and evaluating the effectiveness of

interventions to ensure sustainable progress toward inclusive and accessible education for all. Through collaborative action and ongoing inquiry, Myanmar can pave the way toward a brighter future for its educational landscape, where every student has the opportunity to accept a post-secondary education.

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