Myanmar's Initial Teacher Education Reform: Efforts Made by Universities Of Education

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All education systems are currently facing a challenge: how to to transform themselves so that they can equip learners with the necessary competences to cope in the 21st century. The prerequisite of a successful transformation is a thorough reform of teacher education. The challenge looms especially large for developing countries. This paper aims to explore how teacher education reforms at Myanmar's two prestigious Universities of Education (UoEs) starting in 2012 played out. To be able to give an overview of the reform efforts, besides consulting the professional literature, curriculum documents were analysed, and three semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data shows that the reforms implemented by the two institutions, although positive overall, were not sufficient, especially in terms of assessment, teaching practices, university and school partnerships, and teacher educators' capacity building. Unfortunately, the 2021 military coup and the ensuing crisis makes it highly unlikely that the much needed further reforms will be implemented any time soon.

Keywords: curriculum theories, models of teacher education, teacher education reform, Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021

Introduction

Education is at the cross-roads – many claim – and should brace itself for the 21st century. With the rapid spread of information technology, conditions for acquiring knowledge have changed in such a fashion and to such an extent that education needs to transform itself thoroughly to be able to adapt. '...most 21st century students are still being taught by teachers using 20th-century pedagogical practices in 19th-century school organisations (Schleicher, 2018, quoted in OECD, 2019, p. 5).

Clearly, bringing both pedagogical practices and the organization of education in line with the needs of 21ˢᵗ century students is a must. As Schleicher summarizes, 'So schooling today needs to be much more about ways of thinking (involving creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and judgement, ways of working including communication and collaboration, tools for working including the capacity to recognize and exploit the potential of new technologies) and about the capacity to live in a multi-faceted world, as active and responsible citizens.' (2018, p. 31) This calls for curriculum reform, as curriculum in the most general sense is a set of guidelines regarding what should be taught and learnt at schools (Gouëdard, P., et al., 2020, p. 8.).

Reforms in the curriculum of any part of the education sector calls for changes in the curriculum of initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD), which must be aligned with reforms implemented in the schools. Implementing such reforms are difficult everywhere and are especially demanding in a developing country. A case in point is Myanmar which embarked on a comprehensive education reform in the 2010's.

Myanmar had a well-functioning education system at the end of the colonial period, 1948, (UNESCO 2006, cited in Borg et al, 2018, p. 75), but then ceased to keep pace with international developments in the field of education due to the isolationist politics of the military regime after the 1962 military coup. It was not until 2004 that foreign academics were permitted to teach at Yangon University. There were no up-to-date books and resources available, either (Lall, 2020, pp. 132–133).

However, starting from the early 2000, the regime became more open to reforms. In November 2010 an election was held and won by the military supported Union Solidarity and Development Party, and in 2011 the first civilian president and government took office, although still under the overwhelming influence of the army. However, a new reform era started in the field of education. After carrying out a Comprehensive Educational Sector Review (CESR) in 2012, a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) was drawn up, and a new National Education Law (NEL) was approved by the Parliament in 2014. When in 2015 the next election was won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, NEL was amended, but overall left in place, and NESP was largely accepted unchanged by the new government, so the NESP 2016-2021 reform plan could then move ahead. (NESP Summary, 2016, p. 14). Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan, NESP (2016-2021) aimed to reform all areas of Myanmar education, at all levels, to

achieve a breakthrough. It involved nine transformational shifts. Six out of seven transformational shifts concern the major sectors of education: pre-school and kindergarten education, basic education; alternative education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education. NESP (2016–2021) was highly ambitious, but rightly so: the education sector is an integrated whole, which can only be successfully reformed in an integrated fashion. However, it must be noted here that the NESP reforms did not get implemented in a consistent and coordinated fashion (Lall, 2020, p. 187), as the different aid agencies followed their agenda and timetable.

Of the nine shifts, Area 5 concerns teacher education (NESP Summary, 2016, p. 12). Regarding Area 5, the document lists three major challenges. The one that concerns initial teacher education is as follows:

> *Major changes are needed to improve the quality of teaching, learning, infrastructure and management in teacher education institutions (TEIs), Education colleges (ECs), universities of education (UoEs) and the University for the Development of National Races (UDNR) (NESP Summary, 2016, p. 20).*

However, the two flagships of Myanmar teacher education, the two Universities of Education (UoE), had started reforming their curriculum in 2012, when the military regime loosened its grip on the country and reforming the education sector gained prominence, disconnected from the comprehensive NESP (2016–2021) reforms. This article is going to focus on UoE curriculum reform efforts, starting from 2012, as there is a conspicuous research gap in this respect, while the reforms of the Education Colleges are quite well-documented (for example, Lall, 2020, UNESCO, 2020, Borg, et al.,2018).[1]

This article will first discuss the concept of curriculum, and the major curriculum theories that underpin curriculum design. Second, the conceptions and models of teacher education will be presented, followed by the theoretical framework for our analysis, namely a cyclical and dynamic model of curriculum design. Third, the aims of the 2016 reforms and the research context will be described and research questions and methods will be spelt out. Next, our findings and the ana-

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[1] Yet another university is involved in ITE in Myanmar: the University for the Development of National Races (UDNR). UDNR gained a university status in 1991 and is responsible for providing teacher education to ethnic groups in the border areas, free of charge. (JICA, 2013, p. 45) However, due to the special position of UDNR, its evolution falls beyond the scope of this paper.

lysis will be presented, including our conclusion regarding to what extent the reform effort embodied in the 2012 curriculum and later at the two UsoE aligned with the comprehensive reform agenda of NESP (2016–2021), and what further reform efforts would be needed. As far as the implications of the research are concerned, it is going to be discussed what lessons can be learnt from the Myanmar reforms in other countries.

The concept of curriculum and the main curriculum theories

The word curriculum originates from the Latin word ' currere', meaning the 'to run', and the word literally means the racecourse one has to run to achieve a goal. (Leyendecker, 2012). The word curriculum has a number of different definitions in the literature. (See for a summary Yasar and Aslan, 2021, pp. 238–240). In its narrowest definition, it simply refers to 'what is taught,' (Squires,1990, cited in Yasar and Aslan, 2021, p. 238). However, if it is conceptualized, as many do, a document that answers the questions 'What should be taught, to whom, under what circumstances, how, and with what end in mind?' as Null (2016, p. 5) claims, then the curriculum can be regarded as the heart of education.

It is not only the definition of curriculum that varies substantially in the literature, but also the names different authors use to describe the different types of the curriculum. The types of curricula differ from each other based on how they conceptualize the aims of education. Yasar and Aslan (2021, p. 241) use the term curriculum theory to refer to these different conceptualizations. As the following summary is based on Yasgar and Aslan (2021), the term curriculum theory will be used here, although the word value orientations or vision would perhaps be better.

Yasar and Aslan (2021, pp. 243) after reviewing the different curriculum theories described in the literature arrive at the conclusion that after all, although the names differ, there are four main types of curriculum theories. The name that will be used in the subsequent parts of this paper will be italicised.

1. The first is called technological, social efficiency, behavioural, *social behaviourist*, managerial, system and systematic curriculum theory in the literature. Its main objective is to prepare students for future life by equipping them with the necessary skills and competences. This approach necessitates describing the objectives of the curriculum as observable skills, performance standards regarding each must be drawn up, to orientate curriculum design.

2. The second type of curriculum theory is called *humanistic,* self- actualization, experiential, constructivist, learner-centred, pragmatic, or existential. It gives priority to the pupils' interests and needs in curriculum design, as the assumption is that any meaningful learning can only stem from the individual's inner motivation to learn.

3. The curriculum aiming to change society through educating individuals who are aware of social problems and willing to intervene in the interest of marginalized groups is termed as the curriculum theory of *social reconstruction*, critical reconstruction, social meliorism, or society-centred, or radical curriculum in the literature.

4. The curriculum theory called *academic rationalism*, academic disciplines, intellectual traditionalist, scholar academic, humanist, knowledge-centred or liberal aims to educate pupils in the main disciplines, initiating them into the cultural heritage of humankind and their nation. This type of curriculum is the reflection of the disciplines.

Yet another theory or, as he calls it, curriculum tradition is identified by Null (2016, pp. 211-233), the *deliberative tradition*, which falls beyond the above classification, as it does not aim to describe what should be in the focus of the curriculum, but on how the curriculum should be designed. Those who design curriculum following the deliberative tradition consider this to be a practical, yet principled undertaking. The aim is to create a principled, theory-informed yet flexible document that can orientate practice, without limiting it dogmatically to one curriculum theory.

The change in the curriculum theory of basic education and teacher education in Myanmar

Out of the models above, the curricula of both basic education and teacher education were rooted in the theory of academic rationalism in Myanmar. This follows from the epistemological beliefs dominant in the society. As Borg et al (2018, p. 76) explains in Myanmar it is a widely held belief that the aim of education is the accumulation of knowledge, the aim of assessment is to establish if knowledge has been acquired or not, and the role of learners is receptive, while the role of teachers is to transmit knowledge. Unsurprisingly, the dominant model of teacher education in Myanmar was the applied science model, which is also rooted in the curriculum theory of academic rationalism. The model of TE assumes that there is

a tried and tested body of theoretical knowledge that has all the answers to the problems of practice. Student teachers master this body of theoretical knowledge in higher education, and learn to apply it during their practicum (Robinson & Mogliacci, 2019, pp 10–12). It follows form the above that the transmissive, teacher-centred mode of education was used in basic education and in teacher education alike, coupled with a strong focus on exams (CESR, 2013, p. 10, JICA 2013, p. 49).

NESP (2016–2021) aimed to shift the curriculum of basic education and teacher education alike, from a curriculum underpinned by the theory of academic rationalism to a curriculum underpinned by the theory of social efficiency. This shift, which has been recently taking place globally, is also called the shift from a content–based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum (Gouëdard et al, 2020, p. 13). This means in effect that NESP (2016–2021) aimed to equip learners with 21st skills and competences, as it is clearly spelt out in the Foreword to the document, written by the then-national leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. 'Quality, equitable and relevant education is essential if we are to provide our children with new knowledge and competencies, creativity and critical thinking skills and cultural and ethical values that will enable them to excel in their chosen careers and contribute to Myanmar's socio-economic development in the 21st century' (NESP, 2016, p. 7).

Equipping learners with 21st century skills and competencies also calls for a different, a learner-centred, constructivist mode of teaching and learning, interactive lessons, active learners, and a different way of assessment. Clearly, to be able to implement these reforms in basic education successfully necessitates that a similar shift takes place in the curriculum of teacher education as well, from an applied science or content-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum. A competence-based curriculum presumes that the competences teachers need so as to be able to operate in the classroom effectively can be mapped, described and set as the end goals of ITE. If competences are understood – as they were in the 1970's – as mere skills/behaviours prescribed for ITE to train student teachers to emulate, the competence-based approach denies agency to student teachers and practitioners. No wonder Kaya (2016, p. 47) regards this approach as a fundamentally behaviourist one. However, if competences are understood more broadly, comprising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, they may serve as a

comprehensive framework for teacher education programmes. (Robinson and Mogliacci, 2019, pp. 15–17).

The fact that in Myanmar one element of the ITE reforms was creating the Teacher Competency Standards Framework proves that they aimed to shift to competence-based teacher education. Previously, there had been no overarching learning objectives and outcomes specified for teacher education (Montrose, 2016a, p.4). The first version of the Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) was issued in 2016, and the second version, after an extensive field testing, in 2017. Between 2018 and 2020 a large-scale validation study took place (Dabrowski & Spink, 2020). The standards describe the minimum requirements for beginner teachers in four domains (Teacher Competency Standard Framework, 2017), separately for novice teachers qualified to teach at different levels of education from kindergarten through upper-secondary.

A cyclical and dynamic model of curriculum reform

It transpires form the above that the most determining element of a curriculum is its theory, called 'vision' by Anderson and Rogan (2011, p. 69) in Figure 1 below. The other elements of the curriculum, that is the structure and contents of the curriculum and the resources needed to teach it (C2, called Operationalization in figure 1), the mode of delivery (C3 in figure 1) i.e. the teaching-learning processes and assessment of learning flow or should flow from the 'vision'. It is important to note here the washback effect of assessment: what and how teachers teach and learners learn depends to a great extent on what and how is assessed. The last component (C4 in Figure 1. below) refers to the ongoing nature of curriculum development: the outcome of regular monitoring should impact on the other 3 components, and help to keep the curriculum updated. As the authors, Anderson and Rogan (2011) point out, curriculum making is a dynamic and cyclical process, or at least in an ideal case, it should be.
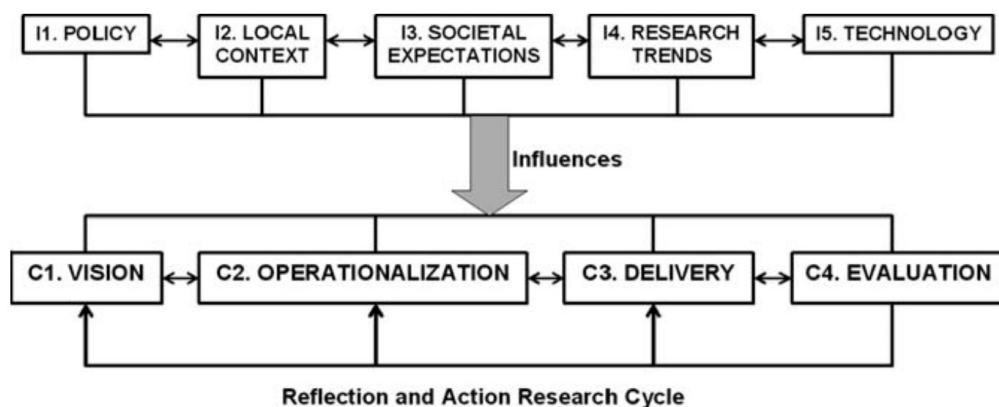
Figure 1. A flow diagram illustrating the dynamic and cyclical relationship between key components (C 1-4) of curriculum and related influencing factors (I 1-5). (Anderson and Rogan, 2011, p. 69. figure 1.)

The influencing factors in Figure 1 are also of interest. Each and every influencing factor impacts on the other as well as on the curriculum. The first one is policy, which may exist at the international, national and institutional levels (Anderson and Rogan, 2011, p. 71.) Of these, government policies may have the strongest positive or a negative impact on the curriculum. The local context also has a major impact on curriculum design: namely, the composition and the needs of the student body, the faculty and their qualifications, the available resources, human and financial alike. Thirdly, the expectations, norms and values of the societal context where the institution operates may have a major impact on what kind of innovations may be successfully implemented in the curriculum. Furthermore, an institution of higher education should regularly update its curriculum both in its content and in its methodology in light of the latest research trends. Last, needless to say that technological advancement is exerting a tremendous influence on the curriculum, as e.g., ICT and AI open up new vistas for teaching and learning.

The paper will focus mainly on the components of the 2012 curriculum reform at UsoE in Myanmar, that is on the elements from C1 to C4. First, however, the research context will be discussed in more detail, pointing to the influencing factors that supported the curriculum reform in 2012.

The research context: Universities of Education in Myanmar

From among the influencing factors above, the one that had the most substantial impact on the curriculum reforms at UsoE starting from 2012 was the change in the educational policy of the regime. The University Education Law of 1973 deprived all higher education institutions of their autonomy, educational and financial alike. The Ministry of Education (MoE) tightly regulated and controlled all aspects of the lives of higher education institutions. (CESR, 2013, pp. 6-7.) No reform was possible without the blessing of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Once government policy changed, new opportunities opened up.

A second influencing factor which made the UsoE reforms possible before the launching of NESP in 2016, starting from 2012, was the context: the two UsoE enjoyed high prestige. The system of ITE in Myanmar consists of two tiers: the two Universities of Education, in Yangon and Saigang, which serve Lower and Upper Myanmar respectively (Montrose, 2016a, p.12), and Education Colleges (ECs.) Teachers for elementary schools and lower primary schools are trained at Education Colleges, which prior to 2019, provided one-year or two-year long and awarded only certificates and diplomas, but not proper B.Ed degrees like UoEs. Therefore, they '…..have been perceived as second-class institutions within Myanmar's educational hierarchy,' (Lall, 2020, p. 163). There is a status difference between the two UoE as well: Of the two universities, Yangon is the more prestigious. It was founded in 1931, as an Institute of Education (IoE). It obtained university status in 1964, although kept the name IoE. In contrast, Saigang IoE was established in 1992, as part of Mandalay University. The rector and most of its staff were invited from Yangon (JICA, 2013, 43–44).

The prestige of the two UsoE partly stems of the fact that a considerable number of the staff at both UoEs hold PhD degrees (JICA, 2013, p. 43). In contrast, a JICA report in 2002 found no PhD holders at ECs. (JICA, 2002, p. 7–15). Although this latter data is outdated, it can safely be said that prior to the start of the 2016-2021 NESP reform efforts, most PhD holders in the field of education probably worked at the two prestigious universities, especially at Yangon. Having said this, it is important to note, that teacher educators at both ECs and UoE were reported to be heavily overworked, having tight timetables and large classes upto 50 students per class (JICA, 2002, 7–15, Lall, 2020, p. 163, Ulla, 2018, p. 72, p. 74).

Institutions of ITE did not fare well with regard to material resources, either. Since the 1960's, when the military took over power, '…Myanmar's education sys-

tem has fallen into disrepair, largely but not entirely because of an ongoing lack of public funds,' (CESR, 2013, p. 3.) ECs had scarce resources, out-dated and over-crowded curricula and textbooks. Internet access was limited and computers were mostly available in offices (UNESCO, 2016, pp. 30–31; Lall, 2020, pp. 162–163). It must be noted, though, that according to the 2013 JICA report (p. 43) Yangon UoE was better equipped in terms of Internet access.

As far as the student body is concerned, students were admitted into the B.Ed programmes of the two universities either through the so-called Direct intake, after the matriculation exam, and through the regular selection procedure or through the so-called Bridge Programme, open to the best graduates of ECs. Since the graduates of the two B.Ed. programmes usually easily found secure teaching jobs at upper secondary schools or as school administrators, those arriving through the Direct Intake were among the high achievers of their cohort (JICA, 2013, p. 44). This certainly contributed to the high prestige of the university programmes.

The faculty, especially at Yangon, kept abreast of the research trends in the world as much as it was possible under the circumstances. The fact that the two UoEs also ran two-year M.Ed. programmes and, as of 2013, and Yangon IoE offered PhD programmes in methodology, educational psychology and education theory for those aspiring to pursue an academic career (JICA, 2013, p. 43.). shows their academic ambition. In contrast, societal expectations, beliefs about what constitutes knowledge, what it means to learn and to know, and what the roles and responsibilities of learners and teachers ran counter to the reform initiatives in Myanmar, while technological changes did not seem to play a role in influencing the reforms.

If we consider the influencing factors from Figure 1, it is clear that both UoE, especially Yangon, were relatively well-prepared to engage in a curriculum reform. Both UoE had a faculty with the relevant qualifications, and thus knowledge of the most recent research trends. Their student body included the best and brightest of their cohort in the country. They were also better equipped than ECs. The two UsoE were relatively well-positioned to design and implement a new ITE curriculum, once government policy allowed for it.

Research Methodology

Research Aims

While the upgrading of ECs to four-year degree programmes is widely documented and discussed in the literature (Borg et al., 2018; Lall, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Ulla, 2018), UsoE are hardly mentioned. As there is a gap in research regarding the curriculum reform of the two UsoE, this paper is going to analyse the 2012 curriculum reforms of the two UsoE, in terms of the components of a curricular document:

1. Vision: What does the curriculum say about its vision, aims and objectives?
2. Operationalization: a. What is the composition, structure and content of the new curriculum like, including the teaching practicum? b. Did teaching the new curriculum call for capacity developing? If yes, was it provided and if yes, how?
3. Delivery: Have the teaching and learning processes and assessment practices changed at the two UoE? If yes, how?

Evaluation: a. Did the two UoE evaluate how the curriculum and revised it in light of the data collected? b. Did the UoE make an effort to establish if their new curriculum was in line with NESP (2016) and TCSF (2016) c. Is the 2012 curriculum in line with the goals defined for ITE by NESP or is it in need of further update?

Research Method and Tools

This study employed qualitative research methodology which involves document analysis and semi-structured interviews. To be able to map the reforms introduced at the two Universities, the following research tools were used:

Curriculum documents

The old and the new curricula and syllabi for the Bachelor of Education programmes offered by UoEs were analysed by using document analysis to answer the research questions in the aforementioned four key areas. The old curriculum document was published in 2007 before the NESP reform and the new one was published in 2012, as the previous 4-year B.Ed programme was transformed into a 5-year programme.

Semi-structured interviews

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with three lecturers from UoEs, who had from 8 to 10 years of teaching experience each at their university of education. The aim was to investigate the practices related to school partnerships and practicum both before and after the implementation of NESP. The interviewees were selected by using convenient sampling technique from the population of teachers at UoEs. Lecturers 1 and 2 were university teachers from Sagaing University of Education (SUoE), while Lecturer 3 was from Yangon University of Education (YUoE).

The interview questions were:

- How does the 5th year research work take place at your UoE?
- How did your university cooperate with its practising school before and after the NESP reform launch, 2016?
- How did your university cooperate with other schools before and after the NESP reform launch, 2016?
- Who attended the EfECT training from your UoE?
- How did you benefit from this training?

Professional literature

On the EfECT Project, which was a British Council led capacity building initiative for teacher educators, the available professional literature was also consulted. This project focused on upgrading the English proficiency as well as the teaching skills of teacher educators in Myanmar. Although the project focused mainly the staff of Education Colleges, teacher educators of UoEs were also heavily involved.

Curriculum reform implementation at Universities of Education

In this section, the reform efforts made at Universities of Education are going to be discussed based on the curriculum documents and the interviews with the lecturers from the UoEs. First the vision, then the operationalization, delivery and evaluation of the new curriculum will be discussed.

Vision

Prior to the release of the first version of the TCSF in 2016, there was no clearly defined overarching vision for either ECs or UoE, as evidenced by the quote, "There is no teacher education policy in Myanmar that defines specific goals and expectations of the teacher education system. National Education Law (2014) is currently the main documented directive" (Montrose, 2016a, p. 4). The curriculum documents did not explicitly articulate the vision, aims, and objectives of either the old (2007) or new (2012) curriculum. Instead, they only provided the aims of certain courses, such as developing students' knowledge of Educational Psychology and human development in the "Educational Psychology Course for BEd first year (semester 1)" or helping students become better consumers of educational research studies in the "Educational Research Course for BEd fifth year (semester 1)" (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2012). In some cases, course descriptions did not even mention their aim. This absence of a clear 'Vision' indicates that the reform lacked an overarching curriculum theory, which, in turn, explained why the reforms were not comprehensive but more akin to making adjustments within the system.

Operationalization: the composition, structure and content of old and new curricula

To answer the research question 2(a), the composition, structure, and content of the new curriculum will be presented in comparison with those of the old one. UoEs previously provided a 4-year B.Ed. programme but upgraded it to a 5-year programme in 2012. Figure 2 below is based on the curriculum documents (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2012) and provides an overview of both the old and the new ITE programmes (first author's emphasis), that is it shows that the basic structure was left untouched.
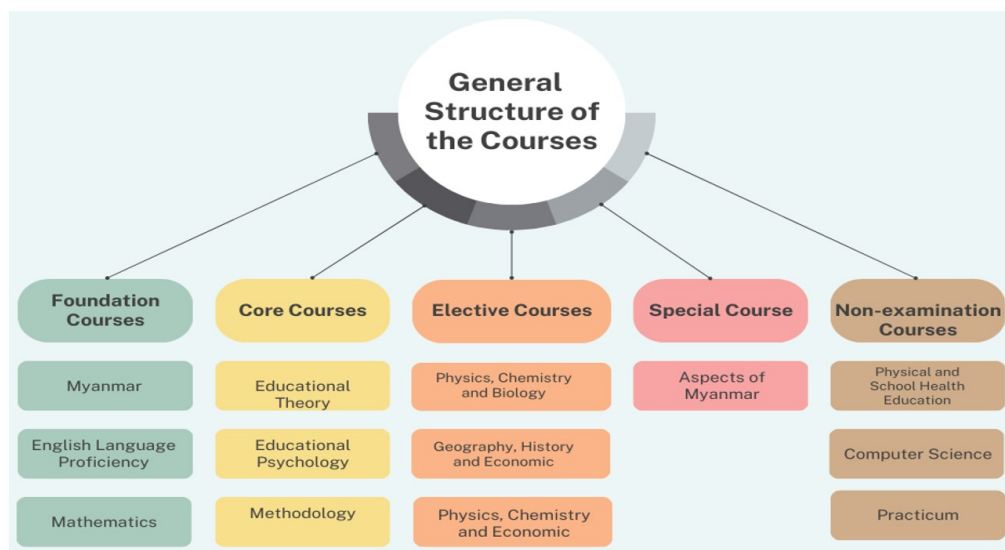
Figure 2: The general structure of courses at Myanmar UoEs (Source: Ministry of Education 2007; 2012)

Both the old and revised curricula require first-year student teachers major in two subjects from among the elective courses, subjects they specialized in during high school. In their third year, students must choose one additional specialized subject from among the foundation courses. This means that from year three onwards, they specialize in three subjects.

The Four-year (old) B.Ed Programme's Course Structure

The courses in the 4-year B.Ed programme could be classified into two groups: examination courses and non-examination courses. All courses were examination courses, except for Physical and School Health Education, Computer Science, Co-curricular Activities (music, art, life skills, etc.) and (Teaching) Practicum. During the first semesters of the third and fourth years, students had to participate in practice teaching and block teaching, which served as practicum in basic education upper secondary schools for the duration of 2 weeks respectively. Practice teaching could be done in any public high school[2] of their choice in their third year first semester, while block teaching was managed by the university during their fourth year first semester and they had no say in school allocation.

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[2] Upper secondary schools are also called high schools in Mynmar. Therefore, in this paper we use the two terms interchangeably.

The old B.Ed. programme indicates that approximately 50% of teacher education was delivered through lectures, which were followed by summative exams (Ministry of Education, 2007). The remaining 50% of the programme comprised tutorials and practicals, which were given less weight in assessment (only 20%). This highlights the fact that teacher education in Myanmar was predominantly focused on theoretical knowledge transmission, with an instructional methodology that relied heavily on traditional or transmissive approaches to teaching and learning (such as lectures), and summative assessment methods like written exams, where the focus was mainly on how much knowledge students learned.

The Five-year (new) B.Ed Programme Course Structure
Although in 2012, when the new 5-year B.Ed. curriculum was introduced, NESP was still in the pipelines. UoEs still made an effort to modernize their curriculum. The new, revised, five-year curriculum of the B.Ed programme has improved on the previous four-year curriculum in several respects. The longer programme facilitates a more comprehensive study of the subjects by increasing the total credit units for examination courses from 192 to 200. Another improvement involves increasing the time dedicated to practical sessions, adding an extra two hours per week, while also reducing the number of lecture hours by 3 to 9 hours per week. This adjustment aims to address the problem of overcrowded lectures and create more opportunities for reflection and practical application of acquired knowledge and skills development. In addition to restructuring the curriculum, course contents were enriched with more relevant material and recent references. For instance, a new topic, 'the role of teachers and schools in society,' was added to the syllabus of the Educational Theory Course for BEd first-year students in semester 1. Furthermore, references were updated and supplemented with literature from the 2000s replacing the older ones. Furthermore, in the final, fifth year, student teachers have to take Educational Research courses and are also required to undertake research projects, such as classroom-based action research and research-based projects. The focus on research aims to make teacher-trainees familiar with research work as it was described in the course structure of the new BEd programme (Ministry of Education, 2012). While introducing students to research is valuable for potential future independent classroom research and professional development, the stated aim of teaching research doesn't explicitly focus on enhancing their teaching competencies. This misalignment could be seen as a missed

opportunity to directly address the improvement of teaching skills and effectiveness, as well as the essential connection between theory and practice, which is a fundamental aspect of teacher education.

Based on the interviewees' reports on the practical aspects of these research projects, the student teachers need to conduct research following their interests in groups of up to five students depending on the number of fifth year students and the capacity of the education departments to supervise their research work. At the end of the 10th semester and before the final exam, the student teachers have to present and defend their research projects. After the defence, the research projects are submitted as term papers. Although no credit is allocated in the curriculum documentation for undertaking the research work, the submission of the term paper is a prerequisite for taking the final exam.

The lack of explicit credit allocation for research in the curriculum documentation, the unclear alignment of research with program learning outcomes, the timing of research presentation and defence just before the final exam, the variable group sizes for research projects, and the requirement of term paper submission as a prerequisite for the final exam all raise concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of this approach. These issues necessitate a re-evaluation of the role and recognition of research in the curriculum, as well as the timing and requirements for research projects, to better support student learning and development.

The teaching practicum and the school partnership between the UoEs and the practising schools

The curriculum changes do not seem to reflect the importance of the practicum. The practicum is a compulsory component of the B.Ed. programme, yet it is not presented as an independent module or course within the programme. Neither pre- nor post reform curriculum documents provide specific information on the credit numbers or hours associated with the practicum. The length of practice teaching and block teaching has not changed: both take two weeks, a dismal total of 28 days in a 5-year programme. In contrast, the revised, 4-year curriculum of ECs prioritize the practicum component, providing a substantial 170 days of practical experience (Montrose, 2016b).

Nothing seems to have changed in terms of organizing and conducting the teaching practices, either. The 3rd year 1st semester practice in the Universities of Education B.Ed programmes is conducted at a school chosen by the student teacher. The information received from the interviewees regarding the 4th year 1st

semester practicum reveals that it is organized by the Universities of Education, in collaboration with K-12 schools. Student teachers are assigned to do this practicum either at the practising school of their university or at other high schools. Collaboration means that formal communication regarding the practicum arrangement is sent to school leaders by the University. Futhermore, in addition to student teachers, headmasters and the teachers, mainly the subject deans from school placement also take part in the practicum, playing the role of the so-called mentor teachers (Chaw & Kopp, 2021). The assessment issues of both teaching practices will be discussed in the delivery section. In summary, it seems from the document analysis that regarding the practicum nothing much has changed in or since 2012. (See further details regarding both 3rd and 4th year practices later.)

When examining the cooperation between practising schools and UoEs, a distinction must be made between Yangon UoE (YUoE), which is a prestigious and well-established UoE, and Sagaing UoEs (SUoE), which is a comparatively newly established UoE. YUoE in Lower Myanmar had been running its practising school long before the recent reform initiative in 2012 was launched (Yangon University of Education, n.d.). YUoE used to operate its practising High School independently, jointly with the Ministry Higher Education Department, while all other basic education schools in the country were operated by the Department of Basic Education. As a result, the practising school of Yangon UoE stood out as a significant school of notable size outside the Basic Education School network.

On the contrary, it was only in June 2014 that Sagaing University of Education established its own practice school by affiliating with Shwe Min Won High School, a nearby public upper secondary school. This significant development occurred outside the scope of the 2012 curriculum reform, highlighting the piecemeal nature of reforms at both UoEs, initiated at the discretion of the authorities rather than following a unified plan. The staff and teachers at both YUoE and SUoE practising schools are appointed and managed by the Department of Higher Education through the University's administration. Based on the interviews with the two SUoE lecturers, the headmaster of the practising school can request the University to send university teachers to teach at the school if it suffers a shortage of teachers. The interviews revealed other areas of cooperation between SUoE and their practising schools: apart from serving as sites for teaching practice, practising schools also serve as research sites, sites of in-service training and sites of observation.

"The practicing schools also host research activities of university teachers. For example, the teachers from the UoE conduct classroom research and often use the practising school as a research context. I have personally participated in an international project, supported by the Japanese Government and involving six countries, where we provided a short training to in-service teachers and investigated the training's impacts. The practising school was selected as the training site, and we invited teachers from both the practising school and other schools." (Lecturer 1, SUoE)

"One of the visible reform efforts done at the UoE is the stronger collaboration between the practising school and the UoE. As a result of it, apart from performing block teaching, the student teachers can benefit from classroom observations in their initial years at UoE before they have to teach at the schools for practicum. For instance, in the five-year programme, first-year student teachers are required to conduct real classroom observations." (Lecturer 2, SUoE)

The interviews with the lecturers from SUoE highlighted a strong school-university cooperation between SUoE and its newly affiliated practising school. These excerpts demonstrate that the relationship between UoE and the practising schools is multifaceted. It extends beyond traditional student teaching and involves active research collaboration and joint participation in international projects. The goal seems to be to provide a richer and more comprehensive educational experience for student teachers, while also contributing to the broader field of education research.

On the other hand, the lecturer from YUoE expressed a different perspective, stating that no significant changes or improvements took place in the cooperation between YUoE and its practising school. This was attributed to the long-standing and well-established relationship between the university and the practising school. Student teachers from YUoE have consistently been engaged in observing and practicing their teaching activities at the practising school before and after the reforms. Furthermore, the school's role as a valuable research site for the university has also remained unchanged.

School partnership between the UoEs and the other schools

While the partnership between the universities and their affiliated practising schools is well-established and self- evident, there appears to be a lack of cooperation between the basic education high schools which receive student teachers for their practicum and the Universities of Education both before and after the reforms. The infrequent collaboration is limited to ensuring the practical aspects of ITE and to providing in-service professional development training aligning with national or state-level plans. All interviewees gave the same answer to the question: How does your university cooperate with other schools?

> *"As far as I know, the University does not have the regular cooperation with other schools. Only during the Block teaching, the University and the schools cooperate. The University sends the formal letters to the schools to request for fourth year student teachers' practicum and, moreover, asks the school teachers to mentor the student teachers and do some evaluation on their teaching by using the evaluation form developed by the University... The schools which are geographically close to the University are selected for the practicum and the University teachers go to the respective schools and supervise student teachers randomly." (Lecturer 2, SUoE)*

> *"I do not see changes or improvements in the cooperation between the UoE, and the schools in general. The only cooperation is initiated by the UoEs when the student teachers need to do their practicum in the first semesters of third and fourth year both in the old programme and the new one. In the third-year practicum, students choose a public school for a two-week practice teaching period during a semester break, without university teacher supervision. In the fourth year, the practicum occurs during the semester, and university teachers visit high schools to support and motivate student teachers, rather than supervising their practicum." (Lecturer 3, YUoE)*

It transpires from the excerpts that there is no supervision from the university in the 3rd year practicum, with the only involvement being a formal request sent to the school where the student teachers practice their teaching. The headmasters from the schools provide evaluation for the student teachers' teaching practice,

which is a requirement for student teachers to be able to take the final exam, but it does not contribute to the assessment.

In contrast, the practicum in the fourth year is arranged by the UoEs. The subject deans from the schools are assigned as mentor teachers to guide and support the student teachers throughout their teaching practicum. Teachers from the universities visit the schools where student teachers are conducting their practicum to offer support and address any management issues that may arise. It is crucial to acknowledge that the existing supervisory approach lacks the provision of formal and structured feedback and guidance by UsoE teachers during practicum. The headmasters provide evaluation forms for the student teachers' practicum, similar to the 3rd year teaching evaluation form, but it is not factored into the final assessment, just like in the case of the 3rd year practicum.

The interviews have revealed that Sagaing University of Education has taken concrete measures to establish robust partnerships with its practising school. However, it is evident that further enhancements are needed in terms of expanding partnerships with other schools and advancing practicum reforms. Apart from this development, both the analysis of curriculum documents (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2012) and the interview data indicate that there have been no substantial changes in school partnerships and no reform of block teaching and practicum. Most importantly, in both the old or new programme, student teachers undergo practicum for four weeks in total. Student teachers would clearly need longer teaching practice and a lot more support and supervision to be able to develop their competences and meet TCSF standards. The reform of the practicum is badly needed for the B.Ed curriculum at UoEs if they are to achieve the NESP goals of improving the quality of teacher education and their graduates to meet TCSF standards.

Implementation of the new curriculum: A capacity building programme
Although the teachers of the educational departments at UoEs have teacher training and teaching experiences in public high schools, almost all the teachers of the academic departments barely have any pedagogical training, apart from a refreshment training. This is not a specific pedagogic training and is delivered for 3 months when the lecturers first join the higher education institution. Furthermore, they do not have experience in teaching at high schools. These factors underscore the findings in the JICA's 2013 report that 'UoE and EC provide lecture-

oriented and standardized lessons' (p. 49). The literature also suggests that in higher education, including ITE, teaching predominantly involved lecturing (Lall 2020, p. 162; Montrose, 2016a; Aung et al, 2013). Therefore, to improve the quality of teacher education, to implement the curriculum reform, the UoEs also needed to develop the capacity of their staff, especially the capacity of their academic teaching staff. However, it was only in 2014 that tutors at UoEs were provided with a professional development opportunity within the EfECT project designed primarily for the staff of Educational Colleges.

The English for Education College Trainers (EfECT) project was conducted by the British Council-Myanmar in partnership with the Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and co-funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The goal of the project was to enhance the competence of initial teacher educators in Myanmar. To achieve this goal, four objectives were laid out:

- To improve the English language proficiency of teacher educators in Myanmar's state training colleges;
- To develop the classroom teaching skills of Myanmar's teacher educators;
- To develop the teacher training competence of Myanmar's teacher educators;
- To give teacher educators in Myanmar greater access to and a better understanding of how to utilise modern training resources and materials (Borg et al, 2018).

The EfECT project was a two-year programme and run in twenty Education Colleges, two Universities of Education, the National Centre for English Language and the University for the Development of the National Races of the Union (UDNR) from August 2014 to August 2016. All the teaching staff and higher administrative staff from SUoE participated in this project whereas the university lecturers and some Master of Education students from YUoE attended the said project (Ulla, 2018).

As the materials for the university courses and the high school subjects except for the Myanmar Language are in English, improving the English language proficiency of the teacher educators took priority. The baseline study of the EfECT project found that 88% of the future participants had elementary level English, which justified the English language focus of the first year (Lall, 2020, p. 184). The second year of the project emphasized teaching methodologies to equip teacher educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively train stu-

dent teachers through the medium of English. According to the interviewees, the project offered a series of workshops, seminars, and training sessions tailored to the specific needs of teacher trainers. It covered various aspects of teaching methodology, including language skills development, effective classroom techniques, lesson planning, assessment strategies, and incorporating technology into teaching. It included components such as language proficiency assessments, pedagogical workshops, interactive teaching practice, and opportunities for reflective feedback and professional networking. Although this project did not directly aim for capacity development for the new 2012 curriculum at UsoE, it may partially answer the research question 2(b) and contributed to the development of the UsoE teachers' teaching-learning practices. Although the first author is not in Myanmar to provide testimony on the program's effectiveness, it is hopeful that it has contributed to a more interactive teaching approach for teachers at UsoE.

Delivery: Teaching-Learning Processes and Assessment Practices

Based on the experience of the interviewees and the available professional literature, it is evident that the "English for Education College Trainers" (EfECT) project provided valuable opportunities for teacher trainers to reshape their traditional teaching methods and adopt more student-centred approaches (Ulla, 2018). This project effort contributed to address research question 3. However, the project occurred well after the 2012 curriculum reform and appears to align more closely with the NESP reform of ECs. This highlights the inadequacy of the 2012 curriculum reform of UsoE, as critical adjustments such as assigning a practising school to SUoE and providing capacity building only occurred when an opportunity presented itself much later.

As reported by Ulla (2018), teachers from UsoE learned student-centered teaching methodologies from foreign trainers and were expected to apply them in their own classrooms. As a result, hopefully the project contributed to the development of teachers for basic education who are capable of delivering interactive teaching in basic education schools and meeting the required Teacher Competency Standards. Its success led to the launch of another capacity building project, Towards Results in Education and English (TREE) 2019–24, which aims to further improve the quality of teaching at teacher education institutions (Lall, 2020, p. 185). Unfortunately, the military coup of 2021 disrupted its operation.

Regarding the assessment system in both the old and the new curricula, it is mentioned that there is a semester-end examination at the end of each semester.

The examination consists of a three-hour paper for each examination course, except for Aspects of Myanmar, which lasts two hours. Additionally, assessments of students' performances on tutorials and practicals, which can be regarded the same as seminars in Hungary, take place prior to the examination period. The allocation of marks for the assessment was 80% for the written examinations and 20% for the tutorials/practicals, with a total of 100 marks. The pass mark for the examinations was set at 50%.

The assessment system described in both curricula is traditional and focuses heavily on written examinations, allocating a significant weight to them. While it is important to have summative assessments, the limited diversity in assessment methods and the overwhelming emphasis on written exams may not fully capture and promote students' competencies, critical thinking, and practical skills. It could benefit from a more balanced approach that incorporates various forms of assessment to better align with NESP goals.

Furthermore, as the teaching practicum was categorized as one of the non-examination courses, the grades the students earned during the practicum were not counted in the final assessment. However, student teachers were required to complete non-examination courses to be able to take the end-of-semester exams. Practicum and research practice should be the two crucial elements aimed at equipping student teachers with the necessary skills to meet the Teacher Competency Standards, but the assessment system does not seem to reflect their importance. Neither credit points nor assessment scores for these two components contribute to the final assessment. This observation highlights a significant gap that needs to be addressed.

Evaluation of the 2012 curriculum reform at the two UsoE

Ideally, any higher education institution should revise and update its curriculum regularly, by collecting data about its efficiency, and also by being alert to the influencing factors which make further updates or reforms necessary. If nothing else, in the case of Myanmar, the launching of NESP (2016-2021) and the publication of TCSF in 2016 would have necessitated a thorough curriculum review at both UoEs for the following reasons.

One of the expected end outcomes of NESP's teacher education and management transformational shift is graduating teachers who deliver interactive teaching in basic education schools (NESP, 2016, p. 20). Such graduates will also meet the requirements of the Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF 02,

2017). The traditional summative assessment cannot help future teachers achieve what Domain B, 'Professional Skills and Practices' one of the TCSF domains, requires. For example, the minimum requirements for Competency Standard B1, 'Teach curriculum content using various teaching strategies', are outlined as

- B1.1 Demonstrate capacity to teach subject-related concepts and content clearly and engagingly;
- B1.2 Demonstrate capacity to apply educational technologies and different strategies for teaching and learning;
- B1.3 Demonstrate good lesson planning and preparation in line with students' learning ability and experience. (Dabrowski & Spink, 2020, p. 65).

The 2012, revised B.Ed curriculum at the two UoEs introduced improvements on the old, 2007 one, for example it features a longer programme, increased credit units, a shift towards practicals, and the inclusion of research seminars and research projects to help student teachers better connect theory and practice. However, there was a need for further updates to achieve full alignment with the above goals spelt out in NESP (2016-21) and TCSF (2016).

For example, the revision in the assessment system at UoEs is due urgently, as it still concentrates heavily on written exams, where the student teachers are assessed based on the quantity of theoretical knowledge they have learned. This kind of assessment goes straight against the NESP's goal of reforming student assessment and examinations in basic education and higher education alike. The key focus of the reformed assessment should be moving away from a system focusing on accurate repetition of acquired content knowledge to being able to use the acquired knowledge, skills and new attitudes in practice (NESP Summary, 2016, p. 36).

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for attention and reform in the areas of school partnerships and practicum within the Universities of Education. To align with the focus on practicum in ECs and meet the requirements of NESP's basic education reform and TCSF standards, it is necessary to incorporate a more thorough and extended practicum period into the UoEs curriculum. This adjustment would allow student teachers to have sufficient time to enhance their teaching abilities, apply theoretical knowledge in authentic classroom environments, and effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice. While revising the structure of the practicum is essential, it is equally important to establish appropriate assessment methods, provide mentoring support, and offer constructive feedback

for the teaching practicum. These elements are crucial for the overall success and growth of student teachers during their practical teaching experiences.

To ensure the production of quality teachers for basic education, it is crucial not to overlook the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) and capacity building for teacher educators at UoEs. By investing in the professional growth of teacher educators, UoEs can effectively implement the reforms and ensure that the teachers they produce are equipped with the necessary competencies to meet the goals of NESP 2016, and the standards outlined in the TCSF. The above listed changes, although badly needed to meet the goals of NESP (2016-21) and TCSF (2016) do not seem to have taken place based on the evidence available to the authors.

Conclusion

Starting from 2012, the Universities of Education participated in the reform effort by revising their ITE curriculum and, in the case of Sagaing UoE, by establishing a strong partnership with its newly affiliated practising school. Later, UsoE staff could join the EfECT project to update their teaching and assessment skills. However, the reform efforts seem to have taken place in a piecemeal fashion, not in the comprehensive, dynamic, cyclical way it would be ideal, as depicted in Figure 1. It is no wonder then that while the 2012 curriculum changes were overall beneficial, they were insufficient from the point of view of meeting NESP (2016-21) goals or equipping student teachers with the competences prescribed in the TCSF (2016), for the reasons listed in the previous section.

Sadly, the current political situation in Myanmar, specifically the military coup that occurred in February 2021, has had significant consequences for the education sector, including teacher education. In response to the coup, many civil servants, including teachers and teacher educators, expressed their opposition by participating in the "Civil Disobedience Movement" (CDM). As a result of their involvement in the CDM, civil servants, including those in the education sector, were dismissed from their positions. This has had a profound impact on the staffing of schools, as well as the Universities of Education. The mass absence of teaching staff has created significant challenges in delivering quality education and maintaining the necessary infrastructure for teacher training and professional development. In the absence of experienced and qualified teacher educators, UoEs have limited capacity to provide effective instruction and support to as-

piring teachers, let alone implement further, much needed reforms. Efforts to restore stability, ensure the safety and rights of educators, and rebuild the education infrastructure are crucial steps in revitalizing teacher education and securing the quality of education for future generations (See Htut, et. al., 2022).

Limitations

In addition to time constraints, this study faces challenges related to accessibility and transparency. Accessing policy documents, if there is any, related to curriculum revision or updates by the UsoE is extremely difficult. This problem was highlighted by Esson and Wang (2016), who encountered obstacles when researching the University of Yangon after it had been appointed a centre for excellence by the government. Their experience included beingdenied access to certain policy documents and facing refusals from Ministry officials and the Rector, the main actors in the reform process, for interviews. Their findings also shed light on the fear, uncertainty, and stress within the university environment, stemming from an authoritarian leadership style and a lack of proper communication (Esson & Wang, 2016, p. 12, p. 14, p. 23). This lack of transparency in the administration makes research in this context challenging to conduct and arriving at definitive conclusions difficult. Despite our efforts, we could not find any evidence of post-2012 reforms or curriculum updates at UsoE, even after the launch of NESP in 2016, in curriculum documents. According to the interviewees, there have been no further changes in the UsoE curricula since 2012.

Lessons learnt for other contexts

Although one may argue that whatever has happened in Myanmar is far removed from the European context, there are still some lessons that can be learnt from Myanmar reform efforts, especially since the shift from a content-based teacher education curriculum to a competence –based done seems to be the global trend. First of all, it is a reasonable conclusion that tweaking the educational system here, in a strictly top-down fashion, is not a commendable way of reforming it. The UoE curriculum reforms had been implemented well before the NESP reforms were launched. They do not seem to have informed NESP, and they do not seem to have been updated in light of NESP, based on the available evidence. Secondly, prestigious teacher education institutions are inclined to insist on a curriculum based on the theory of academic rationalism. In this case, the UsoE seem to have

basically preserved a theory-driven, applied science model of teacher education, rooted in the curriculum theory of academic rationalism, by making only scarce efforts to change to a competence-based teacher education mode rooted in the theory of social efficiency. This seems to be revealed by their willingness to devote a whole academic year to teaching research methodology, while leaving the practicum component, essential for teaching competence development untouched. While the importance of research is undeniable, it would be essential for all ITE institutions to acknowledge the importance of practice and make efforts to connect the two.

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Mianmar tanárképzési reformja: a tanárképző egyetemek erőfeszítései

Jelenleg minden oktatási rendszer nagy kihívás előtt áll: hogyan alakuljanak át úgy, hogy képesek legyenek felvértezni a diákjaikat a 21. századi boldoguláshoz szükséges kompetenciákkal. A sikeres átalakulás előfeltétele a tanárképzés átfogó reformja. Ez a kihívás különösen nagy feladat elé állítja a fejlődő országokat. Jelen tanulmány célja azoknak a tanárképzési reformoknak a feltárása és bemutatása, amelyek 2012-től kezdődően Mianmar két nagy presztízsű pedagógusképző egyetemén zajlottak le. Annak érdekében, hogy teljes körűen be tudjuk mutatni a reformfolyamatokat, tanulmányoztuk a rendelkezésre álló szakirodalmat, az intézmények tanterveit, és három félig-strukturált interjút is lebonyolítottunk. Az adatok azt mutatják, hogy a két egyetem által végrehajtott reformok alapvetően pozitívnak tekinthetők, de nem kielégítők, különösen a tanulás értékelése, a tanítási módszertan, az egyetemek és partneriskolák viszonya és az oktatói gárda kompetencia fejlesztése vonatkozásában. Sajnálatos módon a 2021-ben bekövetkezett katonai puccs és az azt követő válság valószínűtlenné teszik, hogy a további szükséges reformokra a közeljövőben sor kerülhet.

Kulcsszavak: *tantervelméletek, a tanárképzés modelljei, a tanárképzés reformja, Mienmar Nemzeti Oktatási Stratégai Terve 2016-2021*