

Papers

Ms. Aye Pa Pa Myo

An Investigation into Tertiary Level Education Reform in Myanmar towards Inclusive and Accessible Quality Higher Education through Analytical Approach

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Ms. Aye Pa Pa Myo*

Department of English, Yangon University of Education, Myanmar
ayeayel34719@gmail.com

***Abstract:** It is generally said that it is very essential for a country to be able to produce many educated persons who have already obtained the degrees for respectively specialized subjects. As it is essential to produce educators who can be beneficial in multi-sectors for being able to build a modern and developed country, producing lots of scholars in one sector would cause unbalance in human resources. In the same way, to produce much more educated persons in a country, the higher education system using in this country needs to be qualified inclusively and accessibly. In our country, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the education system is being reformed for tertiary level under the leading of the present government for the purpose of letting all citizens to learn inclusively and accessibly to be the graduated persons. This research paper has an attempt to investigate into the educational reform for tertiary level in Myanmar towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. The main aim of doing this research is to monitor and evaluate the educational reform that is being done by the current government can attain the inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small-scale research. This research took four weeks. In this research, there were five participants from Higher Education Sector in Myanmar were involved as the targeted population or sample. This research was conducted through analytical approach by making observation and interviewing as research tools. Data was collected and analyzed with the qualitative method. The outcomes from this research show that most of the reforming sectors in higher education system in Myanmar are initiated to inclusive and accessible quality higher education to more extent. In brief, all outcomes will be supportive for further research related to higher education.*

Keywords- Analytical Approach, Educational Reform for Tertiary Level, Inclusive and Accessible Quality Higher Education, Interviewing

Introduction

It is true that human resources in a country play an important role to develop this country. Otherwise, HR or human resource is the foundation to build a modern and developed country. Human resources in this country need to be well-qualified for building such kind of a country. In the same way, one of the major productive areas of human resources, it is required to upgrade educational sector consistently with the international norms so that it can be breast with the internationals. Furthermore, there has a close relation between development power of a country

and the developmental force of human resources of this country. In order to sustain such forces, the education system of this country is necessary to be reformed with norms and values of education system. With the aim of developing human resources, Myanmar's education reform began in 2011 when the country's government system changed from a military government to the public government. Now the new civilian-led government is having a great attempt to set up the modern and well-qualified society with the adequate and precise policies and plans. Among them, it is vividly seen in reforming sectors being done by the civilian-led government. Of all these reforming sectors, the reforms related to education system becomes the driving key for going towards a new modern and developed country that can cooperate with regional and global organizations. Generally, education provides individuals with the opportunity to improve their lives, become successful members of their communities and actively contribute to national socio-economic development.

In Myanmar society, education is traditionally valued as a key determinant for social mobility and it is widely recognized as a critical building block for nation building, national unity and sustainable development. Thus, as the national priority, the civilian-led government is endeavoring to do the reforms of education system in Myanmar from the beginning of the Basic Education System to the Higher Education System by the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021). This research paper has an attempt to investigate into tertiary level educational reform in Myanmar towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. The general objective of this study is to monitor and evaluate the educational reform that is being done by the current government can attain the inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small-scale research through analytical approach. The specific objectives of this study are to observe tertiary level education in Myanmar, monitor tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government, and evaluate tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government into inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small scale research through analytical approach. It took four weeks. It was conducted through analytical approach. Data resulted from this research was collected and analyzed with qualitative method. Findings from this research will be supportive for further research related to higher education.

Research Questions

- ✓ How do we observe tertiary level education in Myanmar?
- ✓ How do we monitor tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government?
- ✓ How do we evaluate into tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government into inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small-scale research through analytical approach?

Rationale

- To observe tertiary level education in Myanmar
- To monitor tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government that can decentralize in decision making and so on
- To evaluate into tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government into inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small-scale research through analytical approach

Significance of the Study

This study emphasizes on tertiary level education reform in Myanmar being done by civilian-led government consistently with National Education Strategic Plans (NESP) (2016-2021) under National Education Policy (2015) towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. This study has a focus on distance education and its reforms and consequential benefits, and conventional education and opportunities for learning such kind of education being supported by all universities, institutes and colleges, and local schools in Myanmar.

Literature Review

According to Wallace & Pockington (2002), the actors who play a major role in the educational change make the educational reform more complex even though they are not intended to be. The wants of individuals and groups who are in the educational reform can be varied depending on their particular goals and the past experiences. According to Wallace (2004), the process must involve dialogue between stakeholders based at different public service levels wherever a change

is initiated centrally, or at a regional system level, for implementation at a more local level'. Though this dialogue between stakeholders positioned differentially within the system does not take place systematic change. Furthermore, concerning Fullan (2001), the problem of meaning is central to making sense of education change. He suggested that the state holder must complete both the small and the big pictures in order to achieve greater meaning. He presented that the small picture concerns the subjective meaning or lack of meaning for individuals at all levels of the educational system. Fullan also mentioned that educational change after all is a sociological process. Carr-Chellman (1999) stated systematic change as the interrelationships and interdependencies among the parts of the educational system with the consequence that desired changes in one part of the system are accompanied by changes in other parts that are necessary to reach an idealized vision of the whole. Hence, he referred to a systemic change as to recognize the interrelationships and interdependencies between the educational system and its community, including parents, employers, social service agencies, religious organizations and much more, with the consequence that all stakeholders are given active ownership of the change effort. OECD-DAC (2002) defines monitoring as "the ongoing, systematic collection of information to assess progress towards the achievement of objectives, outcomes and impacts," and it defines evaluation as "the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program policy, its design, implementation and results, with the aim to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability."

Research Methodology

Sample

In doing this research, five higher academic staff from English Department, Yangon University of Education were requested as the sample or targeted population.

Instrumentation

As the research tools, observing and interviewing were used in this research. Five higher academic staff, five participants were interviewed based on thirty items related to higher education reform being done by civilian-led government and the opinions on conventional education and distance education towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education.

Research Procedure

There are three steps in the research procedure. They are as follow:

Observing Higher Education System in Myanmar

In Myanmar, tertiary level education has been regarded as higher education. Higher level education has experienced a large expansion since 1988 but it has been ranked as one of the globally lowest for the universities. The student's protest in 1996 and 1997 caused universities to be closed for another 3years. The Ministry of Education administers all higher education in Myanmar. The Ministry of Education implements short and long-term education development plans to improve quality, access and diversity of education.

The government envisions higher education as an avenue for empowering people to make educated decisions and capitalize on economic opportunities in Myanmar and therefore, foresees investment in education as a fruitful investment for the people of Myanmar. Universities in Myanmar remain highly centralized and state- run. In Myanmar, there are two kinds of higher education: conventional education and distance education. Students can study conventional education from all colleges, institutes and universities specialized in Arts and Science, Computer, Technology, Education and other professional studies Student enrollment in conventional universities including Arts and Science, Computer and Technology from 2016 to 2018 was 569,999. Universities offer bachelor's degree programs, master's degree programs and doctorate degree programs. The higher education system follows a 4-1-3 year program with 4 years for a bachelor's degree, one year for qualifying classes and 3 years for master's degree. In addition to conventional higher education, there are two branches of the department of Higher Education- one for Lower Myanmar and the other for Upper Myanmar. The branches are responsible for the administration and coordination of Higher Education in Myanmar. There are 163 higher education universities.

All of the universities are state-funded with a funding for higher education for a fiscal year. The Ministry of Education provides and operates two distance learning universities for learning universities for students who cannot attend conventional university from the remote areas. University of Distance Education, Yangon in lower Myanmar was established in 1992 and

University of Distance Education, Mandalay in Upper Myanmar was established in 1994. Student enrollment in two Universities of Distance Education 2016 to 2018 was 863,774. Comparing the student enrollment per year from University of Distance Education to those from other colleges, institutes and universities, the number of students who enroll the two universities of distance education (Upper and Lower Myanmar) are more than those in other high education institutes. There are 19 available disciplines offered by these universities. Students can transfer credits from conventional universities to Universities of Education and vice versa. The Universities of Distance Education use modern technology to facilitate learning.

By using Satellite Data Broad casting System, distance education lessons can be transmitted to learning centers that are located most conveniently for students. . In fact, distance education is like a bridge between the educational life and the vocational one. Furthermore, distance education is the main stream for pursuing higher education and earning for life at the same time. In brief, distance education can be regarded as the inclusive and accessible quality higher education The Ministry of Education established the National Centre for Human Resource Development to provide students with more flexible options for higher education. The centers create vocational, technological, and professional courses to meet students 'demands. University entrance derives from students' tenth grade standard examination marks. The Ministry of Education runs the Matriculation Exams which are annually held at the same time around the country. About 300,000 students take the matriculation exam each year. Some universities set a minimum exam score for students' acceptance in the university. Minimum scores vary depending on the university, but medical schools demand the highest scores.

Monitoring Tertiary Level Education Reform in Myanmar

With the vision of creating the education system which can generate a learning society capable of facing challenges of the Knowledgeable Age, building a good education system is a long-term process. The Myanmar Government is implementing short-term and long-term plans to improve the country's education system. As the educated population and workforce are demanding economic growth and poverty reduction, the Myanmar Government has made many efforts to strengthen the education sector. Since 2011, the civilian government led by the former President made nation-wide reforms particularly in the education sector to upgrade human resources. The newly democratic government of Myanmar which was formed in March 2016 has made the

overhauling of the education system as a national priority with the purpose of meeting the increasing need for human capital. In Myanmar, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is the main provider of education.

The MoE formulated the Special Four-Year Education Development Plan from the 2000-2001 Fiscal Year to the 2003-2004 Fiscal Year (FY) to develop the education sector and to strive for the development of highly qualified human resources. In addition, in 2001, as a long-term plan, the Myanmar government set up the 30-year Long Term Basic Education Plan (FY 2001-02 to FY 2030- 2031) to be implemented in six phases five year education. The 30-year Long-Term Education Developmental Plan contains 10 programs for the basic education with the purpose of promoting greater access to and the quality of basic education and 36 programs for the higher education and contributes to national development and endeavors the preservation of national identity and culture. The plan aims to inspire creativity and analytical thinking among students to encourage them to have the desire to learn. According to the plan, all subjects and disciplines are being reviewed as well as new assessment techniques are being administered to test the students depth and breadth of knowledge associated with critical thinking skills to replace the old assessment techniques of rote memorization and fact regurgitation. A large task of Thirty-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan is to change teaching methodology in higher education from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches such as project-based learning, problem-based learning and fieldwork. However, it can be seen that there are four major challenges facing higher education. These challenges are that the traditional centralized model of governance needs to be substituted with a more corporate model that focuses on performance, accountability and autonomy, Myanmar's higher education system needs significant improvement in terms of quality-related dimensions such as curriculum, learning environment, research and teaching processes, issues of affordability and accessibility both impact access to higher education. Support programs are needed to help students to overcome cost barriers for higher education and Myanmar's higher education institutions need to improve their research capacity in order to foster the development of new ideas and innovations.

Much progress is being achieved by the Myanmar Government's Education Reform Progress since it has been in operation for six years. For example, the government has a commitment to a sustainable increase in the overall education budget since 2011. The government expenditure on

education in fiscal year 2015-2016 was four times that of fiscal year 2011-2012. This rapid rise in government. Now the civilian-led government is endeavoring to develop the basic education sector, in the same ways, the role of higher education is being upgraded by doing reform in all sectors based on National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) due to National Policy (2015). In 2017-2018, the government spent MMK 228, 348,82 for Higher Education. In detail, the government used MMK 2,998, 447 to administer higher education and management, MMK 30, 248,83 to improve the quality and consistency of Higher education, MMK 88,417,357 to expand the equal opportunities for learning education as well as MMK 106,684,163 to implement National Education Strategic Plan. In brief, in Myanmar, the Education Management Information System (EMIS), run by the Ministry of Education, is responsible for supplying the education sector with comprehensive, shared, accurate and up-to-date information for planning, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation to support decision-making.

Evaluating tertiary level education reform in Myanmar into inclusive and accessible quality higher education as a small-scale research through analytical approach

Through analytical approach, it can be seen that tertiary level education reform in Myanmar that is being done by civilian-led government is moving towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. To begin with, in Myanmar, there are two kinds of tertiary level education: the first one is Conventional Education that is obtained from Arts and Science Universities, Science and Technological Institutes, Educational Colleges and Universities as well as the Distance Education that is delivered from Yangon University of Distance Education and Mandalay University of Distance Education. Every student who has passed the Matriculation Examination can learn his suitable education and choose any college, institute or university depending on his interest, his scores obtained from Matric Exam or the economic background of his parents. Every citizen in Myanmar can access higher education inclusively after studying basic education from the respective High Schools. Now the civilian-led government is striving for tertiary level educational reform being implemented in accordance with the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021). One of the most significant reforms related to higher education reform is that some responsibilities of both Universities of Distance Education from Upper and Lower Myanmar have been allocated to all Arts and Science Universities. As a result, both universities

can reduce their responsible tasks and they can open human resource development (HRD) courses such as computer training courses, language proficiency courses and so on more than before. Vice versa, each Arts and Science University has more rights to provide more effective teachings to students in its own ways. As other reforms, in Yangon University, Yangon University of Foreign Languages and Dagon University in Lower Myanmar as well as in Mandalay University and Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, HRD courses can have been more opened to produce qualified and effective human resources. Furthermore, the civilian-led government invested finance at most for reforming higher education to set up educational infrastructure by opening new Arts and Science, Education, Science and Technological Colleges, Institutes and Universities in remote areas so that every citizen not only in urban areas but also in remote areas can study quality higher education inclusively and accessibly. It has earlier been mentioned in above sections, higher education is very fundamental need to for a country's social and economic development. Furthermore, higher education is responsible for nurturing skilled human resources needed in government. Higher education institutes (HEIs) are incubating innovative and creative thinking for globally and economically competitive society. In order to sustain economic growth and compete in global economy, the civilian-led government is doing transformational shift in higher education by three complementary and linked strategies and programs in National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data obtained from interviewing based on thirty items, is collected and analyzed with qualitative research method. All interviewing questions are related to higher education reform being done by civilian-led government and the opinions on higher education system: conventional education and distance education towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education which was given to my participants from Yangon University of Education, most of my colleagues agree that not only conventional education system but also distance education system is good for all classes of society in Myanmar. In addition, they can be beneficial for developing human resources. And also, they can give us the sustainable life insurance. They can be supportive for flourishing human resources in different sectors. They have produced several graduated persons serving duties of our nation. Both of them can create job opportunities for people in Myanmar. In the same way, most of them think that distance education can be accessed

by all citizens at different ages in Myanmar and it is like a bridge between educational life and vocational one. And also, distance education is the key for seeking both education and earning for life at the same time. Distance education is the main stem for pursuing higher education by saving time and money. Online learning system of distance education is very useful for all learners who cannot attend day-classes at universities. Generally, distance education can bring inclusive and accessible higher education. Some suggest that distance education should be more improved than before. But, some disagree that distance education can be regarded as the qualified educational system in Myanmar. All my participants deeply welcome the reform related to tertiary level education including distance education reform in Myanmar that is moving towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. Most universities welcome to workshops and seminars related to higher education system being encouraged by the civilian-led government. Besides, most of them think that the civilian-led government should find out the better ways to inclusive and accessible quality higher education as well as the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) initiated by the civilian-led government can be powerful inclusive and accessible quality higher education. They think that all universities in Myanmar via distance education system should have autonomy for conducting inclusive and accessible quality higher education system. They also think all agreements and proposals laid down due to National Education Policy should be implemented as well as all universities and institutes in Myanmar should do cooperation with International Institutes. Their responses also inform that not only all universities and campus in Myanmar should be highly upgraded to be breast with Internationals but also all universities and campus should be places for students to learn real life situations.

Findings

Due to the analysis of the data obtained from the research conducted by observing and interviewing through analytical approach, the tertiary level educational reform that is being implemented by civilian-led government consistently with National Education Strategic Plan (NESC) (2016-2021) for higher education drawn by National Education Policy (2015) is moving towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education to some extent. Because this plan is an ongoing process, the reform for higher education will be able to be implemented owing to three strategies and techniques based on relevant program components mentioned in NESC.

Furthermore, according to opinions of my participants from interviewing questions based on tertiary level education reform that is being implemented by civilian-led government, tertiary level education reform not only for conventional education but also for distance education is valuable for all classes of society in Myanmar. In addition, they can be beneficial for developing human resources. So this reform can lead to inclusive and accessible quality higher education. Due to expected outcome 2021, the strengthened governance and management by officials from the Ministry of Education, line ministries and managers of High Education Institutes will be able to improve access to quality higher education. Non-academic staff can deliver effective administration. Academic staff will deliver effective teaching and undertake quality research. Regardless of their socio-economic background, students not only from urban areas but also from remote areas can have equitable access inclusively and accessibly to the quality education provided by Higher Education Institutes.

Discussion

Similar to the opinions of my participants that I have earlier mentioned above, it is thought that the civilian-led government should find out the better ways towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education as well as the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) initiated by the civilian-led government can become the driving force towards inclusive and accessible quality higher education. All universities in Myanmar via distance education system should have autonomy for conducting an inclusive and accessible quality higher education system. In accordance with all agreements and proposals laid down due to National Education Policy, all universities and institutes in Myanmar should do implementation and cooperation with international institutes. Besides, not only all universities and campus in Myanmar should be highly upgraded to be breast with Internationals but also they should be the places for students to learn real life situations. In addition, it is my belief that tertiary level educational reform will be able to be more implemented in 2021 owing to expected outcome of NESP in 2021.

Conclusion

In Myanmar society, education is traditionally valued as a key determinant for social mobility and it is widely recognized as a critical building block for nation building, national unity and sustainable development. This education system should be standardized with the international

norms so that the higher educational level of this country can be upgraded and reformed to be the better system. Now the civilian-led government is striving for education reform from basic level to higher level by setting up National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) as the national priority. In this research, the tertiary level educational reform being done by civilian-led government was observed, monitored and evaluated as a small-scale research through analytical approach in order to investigate into the tertiary level educational reform whether it is moving towards the inclusive and accessible quality higher education. The outcomes from this research have revealed that the tertiary level educational reform is moving towards the inclusive and accessible quality higher education to some extent due to some limitations to do this research in collecting data related to student enrollment to colleges and universities in remote areas for 2019. Nevertheless, this reform will be more implemented towards the inclusive and accessible quality higher education in future because it is an ongoing process according to expected outcome of NESP in 2021. In brief, all findings and discussion from this research will be supportive for further research related to higher education.

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