

INEE Guidance Note on Teacher Wellbeing in Emergency Settings

Domain 3 - Teaching and Learning

Myanmar Contextualization

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About the Context: Non-State, Online Universities in Myanmar

In February 2021, a military coup upended Myanmar's democratically elected government and resulted in widespread violent attacks that have left over 1,400 people dead and 240,000 displaced (Soe 2021). The coup reversed a decade of democratic reforms and threw the nation's economy into crisis impacting every part of society, including education. To quell country-wide protests, the military attempted to open schools in June of 2021, but the intimidation of students and teachers, including the suspension of 11,000 academic staff and university workers and 125,000 schoolteachers, have dissuaded many from participating in the public educational system. Further worsening the state of education, military troops have used university campuses and basic education school compounds as base camps. In March of 2021, security forces had occupied more than 60 schools and university campuses and beat two teachers and injured others (UNICEF 2021). In June of 2021 only twenty-five percent of university-level students had returned to school, and those who did attend reported being interrogated, scrutinized and restricted. Moreover, it is estimated that over 300,000 teachers and educational department personnel resigned from public schools in protest and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). To delegitimize and defeat the CDM, the military have continued to harass, torture and arrest educators and students throughout the country.

The demise of Myanmar's public higher education system has promoted the emergence of non-state, educational institutions, most of which provide courses online. This has largely been led by those involved with the CDM in several ways. First, in protest against the military government, many teachers refuse to teach in the public sector. Second, by leaving the public sector, these educators are actively seeking to disable the military government. Third, many students and parents who support the CDM movement refuse to attend school in the public sector, thus creating further demand for alternative education spaces. Thus, the provision of non-state education services is viewed as an act of resistance against the military government.

These non-state institutions of higher education aim to support the democratic reform movement in Myanmar and to provide continuing learning opportunities for Burmese students whose education has been disrupted due to COVID-19 and the coup. They do so by offering high quality, equitable and accessible online academic programs and courses. Many of these institutions also provide professional development and teaching opportunities for Burmese higher education instructors and emerging leaders, and help to build structures and systems for future democratic institutions, including educational institutions across K-12 and higher education. They are designed to serve as hubs for academic research, intellectual inquiry, debate and dialogue within Myanmar, thereby generating ideas that will help shape the future of Myanmar.

Contextualizing the Guidance Note

To contextualize this guidance note, we conducted focus groups with instructors in one Burmese non-state, online university and interviews with administrators in the same institution. The process was conducted by a team of 11 people: 2 lead researchers who facilitated the process, 1 project director who oversaw the logistics of the process, and 8 action researchers (who are also instructors in the institution) who conducted the focus groups and interviews. For a full account of the process, see the [contextualization plan](#).

Teacher Wellbeing in Myanmar

In the context of Myanmar, the term “wellbeing” is not commonly used or understood. Instead, we used the phrase “physical, emotional, and/or social satisfaction” to express the concept of wellbeing. To further clarify what is meant by “physical, emotional, and/or social satisfaction,” we operationalized the term to include:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Isolation
- Acceptance
- Fear
- Feeling out of control
- Trauma
- Economic hardship

Underlying this guidance note are the following 3 principles:

1. Promote teachers’ access to mental wellbeing
2. Create enabling work environments for teachers
3. Enhance teacher voice, agency and leadership

The three principles are interrelated. For example, to promote mental health and wellbeing of teachers (Principle 1), teachers must have access to safe and secure work environments (Principle 2), and they should be part of the process (Principle 3) for determining how to support teacher wellbeing to ensure its relevance, effectiveness, and satisfaction. The opposite is also true: for teachers to engage in co-creation and leadership processes (Principle 3), work environments must compensate them fairly to do so (Principle 2), and teachers must be psychologically well to contribute meaningfully (Principle 1).

Principle 1: Promote Teachers’ Access to Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing includes processes, approaches, and interventions that can promote and protect mental wellbeing, reduce stress, and support teachers’ emotional state. Addressing

mental wellbeing is critical to supporting the physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers.

Mental wellbeing can be addressed in a variety of ways, including:

- Meditation
- Eating tea leaf salad
- Trainings
- Opportunities to build relationships among teachers
- Counseling and healing sessions with a trained facilitator

Principle 2: Create Enabling Work Environment for Teachers

Ensuring teachers are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and resources to be able to perform their job effectively and with confidence is critical to promoting physical, emotional, and social satisfaction. In a survey conducted among university instructors in Myanmar, safety, financial instability, unreliable internet access, and limited training in online teaching methods were the most common stressors reported. Instructors recognize the security risks they and their students take by even participating in these non-state universities. One instructor explained, “It is very stressful knowing that students in Myanmar are exposed to risk and danger.” To mitigate some risk, instructors and students use pseudonyms and keep their cameras off. While this is a necessary protocol, this makes it difficult to connect with other instructors and students.

Instructors explained that the frequent power outages and unreliable internet connection means that students’ attendance and participation is limited, and instructors worry about the students’ education as well as their wellbeing. One instructor explained, “seeing my students drop out from a course due to electricity and internet connection really makes me feel guilty and stressed.” Additionally, the weak internet connections and power outages also means that instructors are sometimes cut off from the internet and can’t teach their classes. It also impacts instructors’ abilities to collaborate with each other. While collaboration could be a tool to reduce stress and improve physical, emotional, and social satisfaction among instructors, one instructor noted that they went over 3 weeks without being able to connect with their co-instructor because of the internet connection. Instructors also noted that the issues around electricity and internet, combined with security issues, makes it difficult to include “activities that encourage active engagement and collaboration with others in the classroom.”

Principle 3: Enhance Teacher Voice, Agency, and Leadership

Principle 3 focuses on three key areas: teacher voice, agency, and leadership. It encourages an asset-based approach to teacher policy and programming, which builds on teachers’ strengths and positions them as skilled professionals, capable of making decisions over their

own practice. This principle addresses the need for teachers to be provided spaces and opportunities to voice their opinions regarding the policies or programs that affect them.

A survey conducted with university instructors in Myanmar found that instructors wanted to be involved in decisions regarding:

- The curriculum and syllabus to use in their class
- The textbooks to use in their classrooms
- The kinds of training opportunities available to them
- The development of university policies regarding instructors

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning

From our research, we have identified many challenges that impact teachers' physical, emotional, and social satisfaction. We have shared them below according to each standard under Domain 3. The reader will note the following recurring themes:

- Concerns regarding safety and security and its impacting on teaching and learning
- Frequent power outages and unstable internet connection
- Difficulties related to online teaching and learning

Standard 1: Curricula

What is curricula and how does it contribute to promoting physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers?

In the context of non-state higher education in Myanmar, curriculum refers to the content and learning objectives outlined in a course syllabus.

When teachers are asked to implement a curriculum that is outdated, unaligned to the cultural or cognitive needs of their students, or that does not include supplementary materials and teaching and learning resources that can be used to implement it – teachers must grapple with these challenges, ultimately increasing their likelihood of facing stress and job burnout. In emergency settings, it is critical that curriculum design and reform not only consider these individual needs of teachers and students, but also that they prepare these actors with relevant skills for emergency response, including social and emotional competencies, psychosocial wellbeing, hazard awareness, disaster risk reduction and 21st century skills, values, and attitudes, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, or diversity and inclusion. Integrating these aspects into the curriculum will cultivate a more open, welcoming, and thoughtful learning space that can improve physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers.

Challenges, Their Impact on Teacher Well Being and Recommendations Related to Curriculum in Non-State, Online Higher Education in Myanmar

Challenges Related to Curricula	Impact on instructor Wellbeing in Myanmar	Recommendations Related to Curricula
Instructors have limited experience developing syllabi	<p>This causes stress for instructors</p> <p>Instructors worry about the quality of their syllabi</p>	Provide training for instructors on syllabus development
Instructors have limited experience teaching in the particular area they are assigned to teach	<p>This causes stress for instructors</p> <p>Instructors are unsure what to include in their syllabus</p> <p>Instructors have to put in extra time in order to properly develop their syllabus</p>	Less experienced instructors should be assigned to co-teach with veteran instructors
Instructors live all over the world and the time differences make it difficult to collaborate on curriculum development	<p>This causes stress for instructors</p> <p>Instructors have to work at odd hours in order to collaborate with co-instructors</p>	Instructors should be paired to co-teach with other instructors who live in a similar time zone
Instructors have limited contact with other instructors	Instructors do not have relationships with colleagues and, thus, cannot turn to them for support in developing their syllabi	The institution should offer regular meetings so instructors can easily communicate with each other to discuss challenges

Many of the textbooks and teaching materials used by instructors are only available online. Instructors and students cannot access these materials offline, which is difficult given the unreliable internet.	This causes stress for instructors	<p>The institution should provide teaching materials that can be downloaded onto a device</p> <p>The institution can provide open-access resources</p> <p>Provide an online library</p>
Instructors do not always have materials to use in their classrooms	This causes stress for instructors and they worry about the quality of their teaching	Provide access to an online library
Instructors do not know how to support social and emotional satisfaction of students through teaching and learning activities	This causes instructors stress and anxiety	The institution should provide a curriculum framework that addresses student social and emotional satisfaction
The administration has limited experience in curriculum development	As a result, the administration is unable to provide support to instructors in this area	The institution should provide curriculum training to instructors and administrators
Instructors find it difficult to teach certain subjects like the history or politics of Myanmar because a) they are not sure whether they have received accurate training in these areas and b) there are limited resources to learn about this topic from different perspectives	This causes instructors to feel guilty and a bit stressed.	<p>Instructors should look to comparable contexts within ASEAN countries</p> <p>The institution should assist instructors to find the updated published articles in reliable sources.</p>

Standard 2: Training, Professional Development, and Support

What is training, professional development, and support and how do they contribute to promoting physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers?

Providing teachers with high quality, school-based and continuous teacher professional development (TPD) is essential to equipping them with the skills and knowledge to perform their job effectively and overcome challenges within their work environment. This is directly related to physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers, and can support teachers in developing social-emotional competences, or mechanisms to cope with burnout and stress. At the same time, obliging teachers to participate in TPD opportunities that are irrelevant or misaligned with their needs and contexts, can exacerbate stress, anxiety, and overall dissatisfaction.

Challenges, Their Impact on Instructor Well Being and Recommendations Related to Training, Professional Development, and Support for Instructors of Non-State, Online Higher Education in Myanmar

Challenges Related to Training, Professional Development, and Support	Impact on instructor Wellbeing in Myanmar	Recommendations Related to Training, Professional Development, and Support
Trainings are held at times that are difficult for instructors to attend	The trainings take away from instructors' time to prepare for class	Training should be in line with the academic calendar Offer asynchronous trainings so instructors can attend them at times that are convenient for them
Many trainings provided are general, and instructors do not have enough	Instructors are worried about their careers and professional advancement	Provide trainings in specific academic areas

training and professional development in their specific academic field		Help instructors make connections to peers (within Myanmar and beyond) with similar expertise so they can support each other
Part time instructors struggle to make time for trainings	Instructors have added stress	Provide compensation for instructors to attend trainings and professional development
Trainings do not always align with the needs of the instructors	Instructors worry about their students' learning, and both their intellectual and professional development	Conduct a survey among instructors to assess what sort of training and professional development they want
Instructors need more training to feel competent in their work	Instructors feel unsure about themselves	Offer facilitated time for instructors to gather, share challenges, and support each other

Standard 3: Instruction and Learning Process

What are instruction and learning processes and how do they contribute to promoting physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers?

Teachers working in Myanmar have the responsibility of providing quality, inclusive, teaching and learning opportunities for their students. Yet they are often asked to do so in unfavorable environments, with challenges including electricity and internet outages and limited teaching and learning resources or pedagogical support and supervision. In addition, many instructors have not received sufficient training and professional development, often resulting in low levels of pedagogical knowledge. These compounded challenges magnify teacher stress and work burnout, ultimately leading to increased job dissatisfaction. Supporting teachers' instruction and pedagogical processes is thus paramount for supporting the physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers.

Challenges, Their Impact on instructor Well Being and Recommendations Related to Instruction and Learning Process for Non-State, Online Higher Education Instructors in Myanmar

Challenges Related to Instruction and Learning Process	Impact on instructor Wellbeing	Recommendations Related to Instruction and Learning Process
Instructors spend significant time writing out their teaching scripts and preparing for class.	This demands a lot of the instructors time and does not always align with the amount of compensation they receive for doing the work	The institution should provide teaching materials including textbooks, instructor guides, or curriculum framework for curriculum development
Because of power outages, only a small percentage of students come to class	<p>Student absenteeism is demoralising and discouraging for instructors.</p> <p>They often set up additional meeting hours to accommodate students, which adds to their stress and time commitment</p> <p>Instructors have to use extra class time to repeat things that have already been taught, which is stressful and inefficient</p>	<p>We are unsure how to address this issue.</p> <p>One option might be to offer more classes at night as there is usually electricity then. However, that may add to safety issues for students who have to travel to locations with internet access</p>
Because of power outages and limited internet, often very few students attend class. As a result, instructors struggle to run engaging teaching and learning activities that rely on small group work	Instructors feel frustrated	The institution should cover the cost of internet fees for students
Because of power outages and limited internet, students send assignments in at different times, as for extensions on	Instructors spend a significant amount of time tracking the moving due dates and creating alternative assignments,	Instructors should receive training in time management

assignment deadlines, or ask for make-up assignments	which can be difficult and overwhelming for them	
Instructors do not know what to do when obstacles like power outages impact their teaching	This makes instructors feel helpless	<p>The institution support team should help instructors brainstorm ways to address these situations</p> <p>The institution should have an assistant instructor in each class so that if the instructor loses power, the assistant can continue teaching</p> <p>The institution could create a unified policy for how instructors should deal with power outages</p>
Power outages and bad internet connection makes students unmotivated	This frustrates, upsets, and discourages instructors	Cover the cost of internet fees for students and instructors.
Some instructors are unfamiliar with how to use the learning management system effectively	If the instructors are not skillful in learning management system, online teaching is not effective and instructors are frustrated.	Provide training for instructors on using the learning management system effectively
Some instructors require additional training in teaching methods for online teaching and learning	It impacts instructors' ability to provide high quality instruction.	Provide training for instructors on effective ways to teach online
For courses taught in English, there can be a language barrier for some students. As a result, students may hesitate to ask or answer questions in class	The instructor does not know if students understand the course content	Encourage instructors to use multiple languages in the class so that students can understand and participate effectively

Security: Many instructors are concerned for their safety, and the community as a whole feels insecure when basic needs are not met.	It impacts instructors' ability to provide high quality instruction, and they feel bad.	Allow instructors to use pseudonyms when teaching and keep their cameras off so they can not be identified.
Instructors do not have current textbooks and teaching materials so they are not providing the most up-to-date content in their subject area	This is frustrating for instructors and they feel bad	Secure and share access to an online e-library with updated textbooks and other teaching materials
Instructors are isolated from each other and cannot turn to each other to enhance their teaching skills and resolve teaching-related challenges	Instructors are lonely and missing out on valuable professional development opportunities	The institution can offer facilitated gatherings for instructors to network and collaborate with each other
STEM instructors are unsure how to provide the hands-on practice experience necessary for their subject area in an online teaching and learning environment	It made the STEM instructors' teaching difficult.	More guidance and training on STEM teaching online.
Many students are weak in academic skills such as reading and writing	Instructors need to support them in developing academic skills. This can be stressful for instructors	<p>Provide a course for students on academic skills so that instructors do not need to include this material in their syllabus</p> <p>Provide training to instructors on how to support academic skill building and how to incorporate that into instructional practices</p> <p>Develop a writing center to support students</p>

Some students don't know how to use the learning management system	Instructors have to spend extra time in class teaching about the LMS and it takes away from instructional time. This causes stress for instructors	Offer instructions for students on how to use the LMS as part of an orientation
Some instructors do not know how to offer interactive and engaging learning online	Instructors worry that students are not satisfied with the course	Provide training in online pedagogy

Standard 4: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

What is assessment of learning outcomes and how does it contribute to promoting physical, emotional, and social satisfaction of teachers?

Teacher effectiveness often boils down to teachers' ability to improve student learning. Therefore, assessment tools and approaches become vital in measuring whether or not teachers are able to perform their jobs adequately. When student assessments are not aligned to curricula, or do not consider the diverse cognitive, cultural, and social needs of students, this may lead to poor assessment results, and ultimately the perception that teachers are underperforming. In emergency settings, where teachers are faced with myriad challenges, this inevitably results in increased pressure on teachers, resulting in heightened tension and stress, and potentially job dissatisfaction.

Challenges, Their Impact on Instructor Well Being and Recommendations Related to Assessment of Learning Outcomes for Non-State, Online Higher Education in Myanmar

Challenges Related to Assessment of Learning Outcomes	Impact on Instructor Wellbeing	Recommendations Related to Assessment of Learning Outcomes
Because of increased power outages, limited internet connection and increased internet price, students sometimes cut out of class during assessments, thereby making it difficult to conduct appropriate assessment. And also, student drop out rate is increased.	This makes the instructors demotivated, discouraged, anxious.	<p>The institution should cover the cost of internet fees for students</p> <p>The institution should develop protocols and procedures for how to address this issue</p> <p>Instructors should provide recordings of class for the students when they cannot attend</p>
Instructors are unclear on the best ways to assess students	This causes stress to instructors because they don't know exactly what are the best assessment for all students.	<p>Provide trainings in student assessment</p> <p>Provide a platform for instructors to meet and discuss challenges with each other</p>

Other areas:

Other Challenges	Impact on Instructor Wellbeing	Recommendations
Instructors aren't clear on student policies, and do not know who to ask from the institution.	Instructors don't feel they can appropriately support their students and worry that the institution's image would be tarnished	<p>The institution should clarify their policies and develop documents that outline those policies</p> <p>The institution should make policies clear to instructors</p>

		The institution should have clear organizational chart so students and instructors know who to turn to for what issues
Instructors are not clear on institutional hierarchy and who to address for different issues	When instructors need help or support, they don't know who to turn to	Clarify organizational hierarchy and identify who is responsible for what within the university administration
Instructors face financial and mental stress from the coup and the years afterwards	Instructors feel unsatisfied from teaching and unsafe.	Provide additional opportunities for instructors to earn money.
Instructors do not notify students when they cannot attend class	This causes anxiety for instructors	Require students to notify instructors when they cannot come to class (even if it is after class, when electricity has returned)