Monastic Education Study Report

Written as a Submission for the

Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan

December 2020



Acknowledgements

The Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) staff who conducted this study would like to acknowledge the support of the many monastic school leaders, teachers, parents and students who contributed to the study. We have appreciated the openness and candour of all who answered the many questions they were asked.

We would also like to thank the donors who made this study possible, the Ministry of Education of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, UNESCO, the Myanmar Education Consortium and ultimately their funders, the Global Partnership for Education, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), the Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (UK) and the Danish International Development Agency.

The MEDG would also like to thank the members of the Reference Group which was formed to oversee the study and provide advice on its different components:

1. Dr.Tin Maung Win, Deputy Director General, Basic Education Department, MoE
2. U Hla Htay, Director from department of promotion and propagation of Sasana, MoRAC
3. Dr.Seinnitalinkara Chair-monk of the Central Monastic Education Supervision Committee
4. U NaYaKa Secretory - Monk of the Mandalay Regional Monastic Education Supervision Committee.
5. Daw Ngu War Zan (Representative of DFAT)
6. Mr. Anders Lee (Representative of UNESCO)
7. Bethany Ericson, Director, MEC

It was very positive to see a strong working relationship develop amongst the various stakeholders and this bodes well for future cooperation around the monastic sector.

***U Than Htet Soe, National Consultant, Monastic Education Development Group***

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# Acronyms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CCA | Child Centred Approaches |
| CPD | Continuous Professional Development |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MEC | Myanmar Education Consortium |
| MEDG | Monastic Education Development Group |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| MoRAC | Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture |
| NESP | National Education Strategic Plan |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| PTA | Parent Teacher Association |
| SC | Steering Committee |
| SIP | School Improvement Plan |
| SLORC | State Law and Order Restoration Council |
| TCSF | Teacher Competency Standards Framework |
| TEO | Township Education Office |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

# Executive Summary

Monastic schools have been in existence in Myanmar since the Bagan Era (1044 – 1279 CE). They provided education mostly around Buddhist scripture, but also basic skills such as reading and writing—and for some students, usually those from royalty, an education in the maths and sciences. Since that time, they have been a fundamental component of the Myanmar education system. Closing briefly during the Ne Win era, they reopened under the State Law and Order Restoration Council and from the early 1990s grew in number from a few schools to over 1,500 schools today, covering every state and region. The majority of these schools are officially registered to primary level, however just over one hundred schools are registered to middle school level and two to high school level.

Monastic schools teach the government curriculum but are not religious schools. They have a rich legacy of supporting education for especially vulnerable children in Myanmar including children affected by armed conflict. They not only provide education but often a range of other social services, including the opportunity to board, where access to education in their homes is impossible.

With Myanmar’s democratic and economic reform over the past decade, increasing demand has been put on the education sector to develop from traditional to more contemporary educational practices. This has presented both challenges and opportunities to the monastic school sector which has increasingly recognised the need to integrate more with the changes being undertaken in the state education system. In the first National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) a modicum of support was provided to monastic schools. However, significant challenges remain both at school level, where schools sometimes struggle to find the necessary funds to continue to evolve, and at national level where the educational infrastructure necessary to support school development is virtually non-existent.

In order to identify ways of supporting the monastic school sector in the new National Education Strategic Plan (2021-30), this study was undertaken through a desk review and by carrying out quantitative and qualitative data collection in a random sample of schools from around the country. In total, principals and teachers from 132 schools responded to a questionnaire and staff, parents and students from 16 schools were interviewed to provide qualitative insights. Drawing from the findings of the study, a number of key recommendations are made. They can be summarised under three priority areas:

1. Focus on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning
2. Develop a State/Regional Education Office Infrastructure
3. Build the Capacity of National Leadership

The study had some significant limitations, not least of which was dealing with the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions on movement and face-to-face meetings. However, through the use of phones and the internet, MEDG was able to complete the majority of work in the time given. Where there are oversights due to this situation, we ask your understanding.

The monastic sector is one of the oldest formal education systems in the world. It has changed through time and remains a relevant and dynamic provider of education in Myanmar. Our hope is that this study contributes to usher in a new phase of monastic education, one that will equip students for the challenges and demands of the 21st Century.

## Introduction

The overall aim of the study was to understand the current situation of education in monastic schools and document their priorities to improve both quality and access.

The Objectives were to:

1. Document and describe the current situation of monastic schools and monastic system support structures.
2. Clearly outline the needs and priorities of monastic schools and monastic system support structures for the next 5 years to improve quality and expand access to monastic education.

The report is to Inform the design of the National Monastic Education Program for listing under the NESP 2021-2030 as well as be of use to the monastic sector in its own strategic planning.

The main limitations to the research stemmed from the Covid-19 Pandemic which meant interviews and questionnaires had to be delivered over the phone or online. Focus group discussions planned for qualitative data collection were scaled back significantly.

There were two components of the study a desk review of available literature and previous research on the monastic sector and the collection of empirical data from 132 schools from around the country.

## Desk Review Summary

It is important to understand why there are monastic schools. Historically, they are fist noted in the Bagan Era (though some scholars suggest even earlier), teaching secular education in addition to religious instruction. Around 90% of the Myanmar population are Buddhist, and teaching is a Buddhist ‘charity’. More recently monastic schools have appealed due to:

1. Poverty and vulnerability of students and their families
2. Access – and the absence of other schools to choose from
3. Choice – many parents find monastic schools offer better educational opportunities and/or like the values of monastic schools.

The number of monastic schools and students has grown substantially from when they were first reopened in the early 1990s. The past three years show steady numbers:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Students** | **Total Teachers** | **Total Schools** | **Primary Schools** | **Post Primary** | **Middle Schools** | **High Schools** |
| **2019-20** | 304,461 | 7,734 | 1,506 | 814 | 588 | 102 | 2 |
| **2018-19** | 309,938 | 7,872 | 1,527 | 878 | 545 | 102 | 2 |
| **2017-18** | 308,969 | 7,842 | 1,557 | 909 | 544 | 102 | 2 |

Table 1 - Monastic School numbers over the past three years

### School Quality

Monastic school quality seems generally on par with their state school counterparts. The quality of monastic schools can be summarised by the following:

1. They teach government curriculum but often complement with practical and vocations courses.
2. There has been a large-scale uptake of child-centred approaches.
3. There is a high proportion of teachers are studying at distance university or are new graduates (77%). Of the remainder, majority are high school graduates.
4. School facilities vary, many not having sufficient classroom space or furniture and it is common for grades to share the same classroom.
5. Seventy-nine per cent of schools had adequate handwashing facilities.
6. Sixty-eight per cent had a PTA or Committee.
7. There is a lack of school policies and procedures

### Monastic System Governance

Monastic system governance can be summarised in the following diagram:

Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated

Figure 1 - Monastic system governance

The committee system that has the largest role in monastic system oversight exists at National, State/Region and Township Levels. Essentially, committees have no influence over educational standards or quality and there is no educational technical expertise or school system development expertise within the monastic system per se, apart from the experience that monks and nuns have gained in the practice of running schools.

The governance system is characterised by:

1. High degree of autonomy of school principals
2. Very little bureaucracy
3. Few centralised minimum standards
4. Few mandated policies or procedures
5. Little central educational leadership or support
6. Limited direct involvement of either MoRAC or MoE

The leaders of monastic education are often highly committed although with limited educational or systems development knowledge. The committee system is anachronistic and is not designed to specifically support educational improvement although there are elements within the body of principals that are keen to change and ensure the development and sustainability of the monastic sector.

### Teachers

Teachers, arguably the most important part of an education system, enter monastic schools for many reasons, mostly out of obligation to monk or community, but not as a long-term vocation or professional career choice. Teacher retention is one of the greatest challenges faced by schools. This is due to a number of reasons including the lack of system-wide pay scales or professional development pathways and low salaries in general. There are no minimum standards for teachers and no guidelines for promotion on a system level (some schools do have these). There is no system-wide professional development system or teacher registration body.

### School and System Costs

According to data collected from over 600 schools in 2017 at the National Monastic School Conference held in Naung Taung, Shan State, with the estimated contribution from the Decentralizing Funding to Schools Project[[1]](#footnote-2) (800 million kyat) and subsidies for teacher salaries (3,600 million kyat) the **outstanding** cost for a school per year (including only salaries and boarding costs) is just under 26.5 million kyat (around $20,000) and for the entire system 39,631 million kyat (nearly $US 30.5 million). Currently, funding for this majority shortfall is raised by schools.

There was no literature relating to other costs of running the monastic system.

## Empirical Data Collection Summary

A number of tables illustrate the overall findings of the empirical data collection.

### General Data

1. Schools studied came from the following states/regions:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **STUDY SCHOOLS** | | | | |
| **State/region** | School Level | | | Grand Total |
| Primary | Post-primary | Middle |  |
| **Kachin** |  | 3 |  | **3** |
| **Sagaing** | 7 | 8 | 4 | **19** |
| **Naypyidaw** |  |  | 1 | **1** |
| **Magway** | 6 | 2 | 3 | **11** |
| **Mandalay** | 21 | 14 | 2 | **37** |
| **Mon** | 2 | 2 | 1 | **5** |
| **Yangon** | 16 | 9 | 1 | **26** |
| **Shan (South)** | 2 | 1 |  | **3** |
| **Shan (North)** | 3 | 2 |  | **5** |
| **Shan (East)** | 1 | 1 |  | **2** |
| **Ayeyarwady** | 11 | 6 | 3 | **20** |
| **Grand Total** | **69** | **48** | **15** | **132** |

Table 2 - Study Schools by State/Region

1. Students can be broken into the following categories:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Students in 2019-2020 AY (N=113 Schools)** | | | | | | | | | |
| **State/ Region** | Total No. of School | Total Primary Students | Total Middle Students | Total High Students | Total Novice Monks | Total Boys | Total Novice Nuns | Total Girls | **Grand Total** |
| **Kachin** | 3 | 278 | 167 | 12 | 71 | 147 | 84 | 155 | **457** |
| **Sagaing** | 16 | 1,482 | 887 | 84 | 358 | 1,020 | 96 | 979 | **2,453** |
| **Magway** | 11 | 897 | 611 | 29 | 83 | 726 | 23 | 705 | **1,537** |
| **Mandalay** | 35 | 5,291 | 2,202 | 236 | 677 | 3,527 | 132 | 3,393 | **7,729** |
| **Mon** | 4 | 304 | 262 | - | 23 | 271 | 5 | 267 | **566** |
| **Yangon** | 18 | 3,283 | 2,163 | 291 | 823 | 1,747 | 1,638 | 1,529 | **5,737** |
| **Shan** | 8 | 1,551 | 401 | 53 | 292 | 684 | 322 | 707 | **2,005** |
| **Ayeyarwady** | 18 | 1,999 | 1,875 | 542 | 301 | 1,890 | 27 | 2,198 | **4,416** |
| **Total** | **113** | **15,085** | **8,568** | **1,247** | **2,628** | **10,012** | **2,327** | **9,933** | **24,900** |

Table 3 - Students by State/Region

1. Teachers from the study schools as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Total number of teachers 237 from 132 schools** | | | | | |
| **States/Regions** | Male | Female | Monk | Nun | Grand Total |
| **Mon** | 1 | 9 |  |  | **10** |
| **Ayeyarwady** | 4 | 33 | 1 |  | **38** |
| **Kachin** |  | 6 |  |  | **6** |
| **Magway** | 1 | 19 | 1 |  | **21** |
| **Mandalay** | 8 | 56 | 5 | 1 | **70** |
| **Sagaing** | 5 | 21 |  | 3 | **29** |
| **Shan** | 3 | 15 |  |  | **18** |
| **Yangon** | 7 | 38 |  |  | **45** |
| **Grand Total** | **29** | **197** | **7** | **4** | **237** |

Table 4 - Teachers by State/Region

1. Many monastic schools have boarding students, mostly novice monks but large numbers of novice nuns and also students who board but are not novices:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Boarding Students (94 of 113 schools had boarding students - 83%)** | | | | | | | |
|  | NOVICE  Monks | BOYS | NOVICE  Nuns | GIRLS | TOTAL  BOARDING | TOTAL STUDENTS | **Percentage Boarding** |
| **YANGON** | 589 | 200 | 757 | 53 | 1,599 | 5,737 | **28%** |
| **MANDALAY** | 732 | 131 | 76 | 141 | 1,080 | 7,729 | **14%** |
| **SHAN** | 280 | 156 | 399 | 166 | 1,001 | 2,005 | **50%** |
| **AYEYARWADY** | 246 | 160 | - | 131 | 537 | 4,416 | **12%** |
| **SAGAING** | 259 | 16 | 42 | 22 | 339 | 2,453 | **14%** |
| **KACHIN** | 51 | 10 | 88 | 57 | 206 | 457 | **45%** |
| **MAGWAY** | 127 | 58 | - | 12 | 197 | 1,537 | **13%** |
| **MON** | 26 | 67 | 2 | 61 | 156 | 566 | **28%** |
| **TOTAL** | **2,310** | **798** | **1,364** | **643** | **5,115** | **24,900** | **21%** |

Table 5 - Boarding Students by State/Region

1. Retention rates for primary education in monastic schools is similar to state schools as illustrated by the following data:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **GROSS ANNUAL RETENTION RATE** | | | |
| **Academic Year** | Male | Female | Total |
| **2019-20 AY** | 98% | 98% | 98% |
| **2018-19 AY** | 98% | 98% | 98% |
| **2017-18 AY** | 97% | 97% | 97% |
| **2016-17 AY** | 97% | 98% | 98% |
| **2015-16 AY** | 96% | 98% | 97% |

Table 6 - Gross Annual Retention Rate

### School Systems and Procedures

School systems and procedures were studied and can be summarised in the following tables:

1. School Systems

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SCHOOL SYSTEMS | Number | Out of | Percentage |
| Schools with established Organisational Structure | 102 | 132 | 77% |
| Schools running according to Organisational Structure | 73 | 102 | 72% |
| Schools where staff have job description | 70 | 132 | 53% |
| Schools with staff leave system in place | 52 | 132 | 39% |
| Schools that maintain staff profiles | 113 | 132 | 86% |
| Schools that keep staff attendance records | 111 | 132 | 84% |
| Schools with PTA's and/or Committees | 121 | 132 | 92% |
| Schools with only committees | 60 | 132 | 45% |
| Schools with only PTAs | 2 | 132 | 2% |
| Inactive Committees | 16 | 119 | 13% |
| Inactive PTAs | 10 | 61 | 16% |

Table 7 - Summary of School Systems Findings

1. Student Records

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| STUDENT RECORDS | Number | Out of | Percentage |
| Use of student enrolment form | 126 | 132 | 95% |
| Keeps student admission register | 131 | 132 | 99% |
| Keeps student school attendance register | 132 | 132 | 100% |
| Keeps record of student transfer certificates | 132 | 132 | 100% |
| Keeps record of issuing student transfer certificates | 126 | 132 | 95% |
| Keeps record of receiving student transfer certificates | 128 | 132 | 97% |
| Keeps record of yearly student exam results | 131 | 132 | 99% |
| Issues student identity cards for students | 28 | 132 | 21% |
| Has rules and regulations set for students | 82 | 132 | 62% |

Table 8 - Summary of Student Records Usage

1. School Improvement Planning

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING | Number | Out of | Percentage |
| Schools with School Improvement Programs (SIP) | 34 | 132 | 26% |
| Schools that have found financial resources for SIP | 20 | 34 | 59% |
| Schools that keep financial records of SIP expenditure | 33 | 34 | 97% |
| Schools that have meetings to review implementation of SIP | 29 | 34 | 85% |
| Schools with long-term strategy and vision | 40 | 132 | 30% |

Table 9 - School Improvement Planning Progress

### School Facilities

School facilities varied widely from school to school and are summarised in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SCHOOL FACILITIES | Number | Out of | Percentage |
| Schools with libraries | 82 | 132 | 62% |
| Schools with play areas | 112 | 132 | 85% |
| Schools with play equipment | 122 | 132 | 92% |
| Schools with fenced compound | 82 | 132 | 62% |
| Schools with separate female/male toilets | 113 | 132 | 86% |
| Schools with sufficient water for toilets | 128 | 132 | 97% |
| Schools with handwashing area | 121 | 132 | 92% |
| Hand-washing area accessible for disabled children | 117 | 132 | 89% |
| Sufficient drinking water | 126 | 132 | 95% |
| Drinking water accessible by disabled children | 125 | 132 | 95% |
| Classrooms suitable for all seasons | 125 | 132 | 95% |
| Sufficient classroom furniture | 99 | 132 | 75% |
| Adequate whole-school drainage | 53 | 132 | 40% |

Table 10 - Summary of School Facilities

### Teachers and Teaching

Data collected on teachers and teaching explore a range of aspects:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TEACHERS & TEACHING | Number | Out of | Percentage |
| Teachers who receive salary from school | 217 | 237 | 92% |
| Teachers fairly or very satisfied with salary | 169 | 237 | 71% |
| Teachers who have received some in-service training in past three years | 229 | 237 | 97% |
| Teachers who complete daily lesson planning | 119 | 237 | 50% |
| Teachers who use teaching aids 2-3 times a week | 147 | 237 | 62% |
| Teachers who get support from parents in making teaching aids of helping in class | 59 | 237 | 25% |
| Teachers who feel moderately or very comfortable using group or pair work in class | 222 | 237 | 94% |
| Teachers who regularly assess students learning | 210 | 237 | 89% |
| Teachers who feel moderately or very confident in assessing children's knowledge | 217 | 237 | 92% |
| Teachers who always or often assess student's achievement during lessons | 222 | 237 | 94% |

Table 11 - Summary of Teachers & Teaching Data

Teachers had a range of qualifications. None had a teaching or education degree.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Teacher’s Education | | | | | | | |
| State/  Region | Uni graduate | Diploma holder | Master | other | High school level (below matriculation) | High school graduate (or) undergraduate | Grand Total |
| Mon | 4 |  |  |  | 1 | 5 | 10 |
| Ayeyarwady | 17 | 1 |  | 1 | 6 | 13 | 38 |
| Kachin | 5 |  |  |  | 1 |  | 6 |
| Magway | 11 |  |  |  | 2 | 8 | 21 |
| Mandalay | 41 |  | 1 |  | 10 | 18 | 70 |
| Sagaing | 20 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 7 | 29 |
| Shan | 11 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 5 | 18 |
| Yangon | 34 |  | 2 |  | 4 | 5 | 45 |
| Grand Total | 143 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 61 | 237 |
|  | **60%** | **0%** | **1%** | **1%** | **11%** | **26%** | **100%** |

Table 12 - Qualifications of Teachers

### Curriculum and Assessment

The new government curriculum has been taken up by monastic schools with enthusiasm. The following graph shows how many schools are already implementing the various new-curriculum subjects:

Figure 2 – New Curriculum Subjects Taught

Many schools also teach about non-curriculum related issues to community members and are engaged with non-educational community activities as show in the following diagram:

Figure 3 – Monastic School Community Activity

Teachers seemed well-versed with various forms of assessment:

Figure 4 – Types of Assessment used by Teachers

And used assessment in a variety of ways:

Figure 5 – How Teachers Use Assessment Results

### School Costs

Getting accurate data on school costs was difficult over the phone and not all schools provided all information that was requested. However, from the data it was possible to calculate the average monthly and yearly costs for an average school (around 200 students, with just over five teachers and around 40 boarding students). The costs only included four categories: teacher salaries, boarding student costs, teaching expenses and health costs. There was not record of any other school costs, e.g. maintenance, recurrent costs such as electricity and water, constructions costs etc.

The average expenditure for one school was as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| EXPENDITURE (Kyat) | | | | | |
| AVG School | Number | Cost per month | Months | TOTAL |
| Teachers | 5.24 | 74,721 | 12 | 4,698,456 |
| Boarding Students | 42 | 45,000 | 12 | 22,680,000 |
| Teaching expenses | 1 | 35,174 | 9 | 1,216,566 |
| Health costs | 1 | 54,477 | 12 | 653,724 |
| **TOTAL** |  |  |  | **29,248,746** |

Table 13 - School Expenditure

School income from the regular teacher stipend provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MoRAC) and small grants provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE)[[2]](#footnote-3) consisted of the following:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| INCOME (Kyat) | | | | |
| AVG School | Number | Income per month | Months | TOTAL |
| Teacher's Stipend[[3]](#footnote-4) | 5.24 | 38,127 | 12 | 2,397,426 |
| Small grants | 1 |  |  | 2,933,600 |
| **TOTAL** |  |  |  | **5,331,026** |

Table 14 - School Income

The gap in funding, which is made up from a wide range of sources including community funding, private donors, parents, school income generation programs, or even through borrowing money, is as follows (figures show one school and all (1,500) schools:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ONE SCHOOL | | ALL SCHOOLS | |
| KYAT | USD | KYAT | USD |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 29,248,746 | 22,499 | 43,873,119,720 | 33,748,554 |
| TOTAL INCOME | 5,331,026 | 4,101 | 7,996,538,640 | 6,151,184 |
| DIFFERENCE | (23,917,721) | (18,398) | (35,876,581,080) | (27,597,370) |

Table 15 - School Funding Shortfal

l

### Discussion

There are a number of significant strengths of the monastic education sector:

1. Community base – very strong presence in the community.
2. Sustainability – schools have been around for many years and have been extremely resourceful in finding needed funds
3. Independence – the independence of schools means that they can adjust to local circumstances
4. Deep commitment – on the whole principals and teachers are deeply committed to community and to teaching
5. Flexibility & relevance – not hampered by excessive bureaucracy means that schools can adopt new ideas and make improvements quickly.

However, there are, equally, significant challenges:

1. Lack of clear and united vision for the future
2. Limited (technical and management accountability at all levels of the system
3. Lack of accurate and relevant national or local level educational data
4. No national system for teachers’ employment and professional development pathways
5. No standardisation of school systems, policies and procedures

In terms of the teaching force:

1. Teachers are, on the whole, highly motivated and enthusiastic but young and not looking at teaching as a long-term profession.
2. Teachers are not sufficiently qualified to meet the needs of a modern education system although they are very highly motivated to learn.
3. There are no national systems for employment, registration, salary & benefits, nor for continuous professional development (CPD).

Regarding school leadership:

1. More than half of school principals are aged between 61-68. This is an aging population with no clear succession planning.
2. The majority of principals have no or under five years teaching experience.
3. Monks are held in high esteem and it is difficult to question them.
4. Given the demands of education in the 21st century is it possible to conceive of monks as directors or patrons of schools and qualified educationalists or senior teachers as principals?

Regarding school financing and financial management:

1. Most schools do not have yearly budgets
2. Schools lack funding to pay for even basic necessities
3. Teachers are significantly underpaid
4. Amazing community and private donor support
5. Boarding students are a substantial financial burden but without boarding many students would drop out and often be at risk

In summary, the three major challenges facing the monastic school sector are:

1. Insufficient funding – there is just not enough money for the monastic system to continue to develop to the degree required in the 21stCentury
2. Willingness to change – there are certain parts of the system and its governance that are not fully committed or agreed upon the best way to develop the monastic sector.
3. Capacity to change – despite some very positive movements for change within the sector, there is limited capacity and understanding of educational systems and the requirements of contemporary education.

### Recommendations

#### Recommendations for Monastic Education Leadership

1. Agree upon and implement a long-term plan
2. Work with the MORAC and the sangha to ensure at least 70% of the budget of the monastic system is covered through the national budget process
3. Support the development of state/regional education offices
4. Support the development of a national monastic education office
5. Strengthen the capacity of the state/regional and national monastic education supervision committees
6. Conduct a thorough assessment of the cost of running a school

#### Recommendations for School Principals

1. Appoint head teachers to manage and direct the educational programs of schools
2. Continue to develop systems and policies in line with government policy and good practice
3. Engage parents more in school leadership and decision making

#### Recommendations for MoRAC

1. Provide increased and ongoing national budget allocation for the support of monastic schools and for the development and operation of state/regional monastic education offices.
2. Increase understanding and collaboration and bring the monastic system into greater alignment with the MOE systems, structures, procedures and policies.
3. Support the development of a teacher education and continuous professional development system
4. Develop and oversee a national teacher’s registry, advancement and remuneration system

#### Recommendations for MoE

1. Support the development of a monastic system capacity to provide pre- and in-service training for teachers
2. Develop a dedicated department or unit within the MoE responsible for inter-system planning and collaboration
3. Work with monastic leadership and MoRAC to ensure adequate financing of the monastic sector
4. Collaborate with the monastic sector to ensure that data from monastic schools is fed into the national education management information system
5. In the short term, allow the registration of monastic schools that meet criteria to open to middle and high school level.

From a systems development perspective, a future monastic system could focus on:

1. Building the educational support capacity of the system by establishing state/regional and township Monastic Education Offices that would have the technical capacity to support school and system development and collaborate more with counterparts in the state system;
2. Building the capacity of the national supervision committee to ensure that it had increased capacity for policy and standards development and that collaboration occurred across the MoRAC and MoE for budget and the operationalisation of national quality standards;
3. Building the capacity of the current state/regional and township committee system to develop a more united vision and approach of the monastic sector.

The system could look like this:

A picture containing timeline

Description automatically generated

Figure 6 – Suggested Structure for Monastic Education System

### Implementation Priorities

With the many significant recommendations being made, prioritising is challenging. It suggested that three implementation priorities guide the next steps:

1. Focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning
2. Develop a state/regional education office infrastructure
3. Build the capacity of national leadership

# Background of Study

## Introduction

Following discussions between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MoRAC), the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) and the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) a study was proposed to look at monastic education schools and support structures within the monastic system for the development of the second National Education Strategic Plan (2021-2030). This study has been funded through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) support to the MoE as part of the Education Strategic Plan Development Grant (ESPDG) and by MEC, a program implemented by Save the Children Myanmar and funded by the Australian, British and Danish aid programs in Myanmar.

The overall aim of this cross-sectional study is to understand the current situation of education in monastic schools and document their priorities to improve both quality and access. The two objectives of this study are to:

1. Document and describe the current situation of monastic schools and monastic system support structures (this includes Monastic Education Supervision Committees at Township, State/Regional and National levels along with various formal and informal mechanisms that have been already developed within the current monastic system);
2. Clearly outline the needs and priorities of monastic schools and monastic system support structures for the next 5 years to improve quality and expand access to monastic education.

This study will inform the design of a national Monastic Education program for listing under NESP 2021-2030, under the BE Chapter in the NESP. The findings from the study will be analysed and applied nationally to assess the needs and priorities of all monastic schools and relevant monastic system support structures for the next 5 years to improve quality and expand access to monastic education.

A Reference Group was set up to oversight the entire process of the study and to ensure it met the needs for NESP 2 planning. It consisted of:

1. Dr.Tin Maung Win, Deputy Director General, Basic Education Department, MoE
2. U Hla Htay, Director from department of promotion and propagation of Sasana, MoRAC
3. Dr.Seinnitalinkara, Chair-monk of the Central Monastic Education Supervision Committee
4. U NaYaKa, Secretory - Monk of the Mandalay Regional Monastic Education Supervision Committee.
5. Daw Ngu War Zan (Representative of DFAT)
6. Mr. Anders Lee (Representative of UNESCO)
7. Bethany Ericson, Director, MEC

## Methodology

### Data collection method:

The study employed mixed methods. Due to the covid-19 situation, which prevented field visits to schools, data were collected only through phone calls.

This study had two elements:

* Firstly, a desk review that drew on previous studies and data about monastic schools from various historical sources.
* Secondly, empirical data that divided into:
  + Quantitative data collected from 132 schools composed of interviews with 237 teachers and 132 school principals.
  + Qualitative interviews conducted with principals, teachers, parents, and students from a sample of eighteen schools.
  + Qualitative interviews conducted with key informants from the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Religious Affair and Culture (MoRAC), and monastic system leadership at state/regional and township levels.

### Recruitment of study population:

There are 1506 monastic schools in total around the country, according to the most updated list of monastic schools published by MoRAC (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 2020). This list was used as the complete sampling frame for the study.

Geographic area was considered by random selection of two areas per each type (Metropolitan, Plain, Hilly and Coastal). Then, by using the sampling frame, stratified random sampling was applied to select 10% of schools from each of the selected states and regions. This number was inflated by 10% to allow for non-response (e.g., refusal to participate, schools no longer running etc.). The total number of selected schools was 132, as shown in the table below. MEDG Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) staff contacted schools to confirm participation. Schools unable to participate were substituted with other schools closest within the same state or region (same geographic area) from the sampling frame.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Geographic Area** | **State/Regions** | **Total. No. School** | **Selected sample (10%)** | **Inflated (10%) for non-responses** |
| Metropolitan | Yangon | 234 | 23 | 2 |
| Mandalay | 347 | 35 | 3 |
| Plain Area | Magway | 107 | 11 | 1 |
| Sagaing | 172 | 17 | 2 |
| Hilly | Kachin | 30 | 3 | 0 |
| Shan | 89 | 9 | 1 |
| Coastal | Ayeyarwady | 170 | 17 | 2 |
| Mon | 47 | 5 | 0 |
|  |  | 1196 | 120 | 12 |

Table 16 - Sampling of Schools for Quantitative Survey

Qualitative data collection required in-depth investigation in 16 of the 32 schools. These were selected with the following three criteria:

* + School level (Primary or Post-primary/Middle)
  + School size (Number of students whether <100 or >100)
  + Geographic area (Rural or urban)

Schools were matched into groups according to the criteria:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Group-1 | Rural |  | Group-2 | Rural |
|  | Primary |  |  | Primary |
|  | <100 |  |  | >100 |
| Group-3 | Rural |  | Group-4 | Rural |
|  | Middle/Post-Primary |  |  | Middle/Post-Primary |
|  | <100 |  |  | >100 |
| Group-5 | Urban |  | Group-6 | Urban |
|  | Primary |  |  | Primary |
|  | <100 |  |  | >100 |
| Group-7 | Urban |  | Group-8 | Urban |
|  | Middle/Post-Primary |  |  | Middle/Post-Primary |
|  | <100 |  |  | >100 |

Table 17 - Selection of Schools for Qualitative Data Collection

Then, two schools per group were randomly selected.

Furthermore, two more schools from Rakhine State were also selected for the qualitative study since the context of this state is quite different to other selected regions/states.

Thus, total of 18 schools were recruited for qualitative in-depth investigation.

### Data collection tools:

The following study tools were developed for quantitative survey data collection.

* + Survey Questionnaire with School Principal
  + Survey Questionnaire with Teacher

The following interview guidelines were developed for qualitative data collection.

* + Key Informant Interview with School Principal
  + In-depth Interview with Teacher
  + Focus Group Discussion with Parents
  + Focus Group Discussion with Students

### Recruitment of data collectors:

In order to maintain objectivity, an external data collection agency, Zen Research Myanmar, was hired to collect data. Zen was selected according to MEDG’s procurement policy which required quotations from three agencies outlining value for money and their expertise. The thirteen data collectors from Zen were provided with two-days training to introduce them to the study, tools, context of monastic schools, research ethics and MEDG’s child protection code of conduct. Piloting the tools with six monastic schools and revision of the tools was also completed during the pilot period.

### Data collection:

Quantitative survey tools were scripted onto MEDG’s MeConnect Web platform for real time data entry to be done by data collectors concurrently while collecting the data through phone calls.

For qualitative interviews, data collectors recorded telephone conversations and later transcribed them.

Prior to data collection data collectors introduced the study and asked for participants’ informed consent.

### Managing and analysing data:

The quantitative survey data entered by data collectors were stored at MEDG’s website and the data were exported into Microsoft Excel. The MEDG M&E team checked for data errors or missing data and further clarified with data collectors or, when required, with the respondents. After the data cleaning process, Microsoft Excel was used for quantitative data analysis.

For the qualitative interview data, voice records were written into transcripts by the data collectors using Microsoft Word. The MEDG M&E Team coded the interview transcripts, gathering participants’ responses by different themes/categories using DocTools ExtractData add-in of Microsoft Word.

All tools and data were originally in Myanmar language. They were translated during the course of analysis to English. The report was written originally in English and then translated to Myanmar.

Eventually, findings from the analysis of desk review and empirical data were triangulated to form conclusions and recommendations.

## Study Limitations

### Empirical Data Collection Limitations

The main limitation of the study was that due to Covid-19, it had to be conducted via phone. Schools were also closed which meant visiting them was not possible. In order to ensure the best possible outcome, Zen Research was contracted to conduct all the quantitative interviews. Zen have a trained group of phone interviewers and expertise in IT related research solutions. The added advantage of using Zen in this capacity was that the company is in no way related to the monastic school sector, thus reducing any potential for bias.

Out of the 132 schools that participated in the study, 59 had previously worked with MEDG. This had the possibility to influence responses, however likely not to a great degree.

As the data collection were done through only phone calls and the behaviours and practices of schools could not be observed, it was consequently not feasible to triangulate with observation data.

Interviews with MoRAC and MoE key informants did not take place due to time limitations.

### Desk Review Limitations

The main limitation to the desk review was the timing of the NESP2 planning. This has meant that the review was not completed prior to the study but that the two ran more or less concurrently. The impact of this limitation is, therefore, more on the survey than the desk review.

Another perceived limitation could be that the desk review and the survey are being conducted by the MEDG. Whilst an independent local NGO, MEDG is very closely aligned to the monastic system through its historical foundation and its current mission (to improve the capacity and quality of monastic schools). To those outside of the monastic sector, this could be conceived as a conflict of interest. However, MEDG feels that this alignment gives greater access to and understanding of the workings of the system.

# Desk Review

The desk review draws on four broad sets of information:

1. Historical information that briefly plots the history of monastic education and establishes why it remains an important, albeit relatively small, education provider in contemporary Myanmar;
2. Recent information that covers the period from the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) which began in early 2012 up to the present time;
3. Available empirical data including that which can be found through the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (MoRAC) and information collected from within the monastic system itself, by monks and by organisations, such as the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG);
4. A draft plan for the development of the monastic system known as the *BaKa Master Plan (BMP)*, currently being developed by a group of senior monks under the authority of the State and Regional and National Monastic Education Supervision Committees.

## Introduction – Why Monastic Schools?

Why are there monastic schools in Myanmar at all? The answers to this question provide an interesting framework for analysis of how or whether to further the development of monastic schools. At a more general level, questions around the relevance of any non-state school system arise. On the one hand, education can be seen as the realm and responsibility of the state and many countries have only government run school systems; an equal and uniform education for all children regardless of where they come from or their social, economic or political status. On the other hand, non-state education providers enable parents and students to choose the type of school they attend, arguably promote greater innovation and creativity and, in the case of many poor countries, add to the overall reach of education services (see for example, 2015; DeStefano & Schuh Moore, 2010; Rose, 2007; Srivastava & Walford, 2016). At the outset, therefore, it is important to understand why there are monastic schools in Myanmar and why it is worth (or not) supporting them.

According to the most recent published census in Myanmar, almost 90% of the population are Buddhist (Department of Population Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2015). Teaching is one of the Buddhist ‘charities’ (an act by which one can gain merit) and The Lokaniti or ‘guide to life’ draws on both Buddhist and Hindu sacred writings and is still used throughout the country as a handbook for parents, teachers and elders when instructing youth (See text box Tu, 1962).

Monastic schools have been in existence in Myanmar since the Bagan Era (1044 – 1279 CE), and some would argue even before (Kaung, 1963). They provided education mostly around Buddhist scripture, but also basic skills such as reading and writing—and for some students, usually those from royalty, an education in the maths and sciences. According to Khammai Dhammasami (2004) the vocation of books (gantha-dhura), the tradition of monastic education and study, became more prominent than that of practice or meditation (vipassana-dhura) during the first century BCE.

Cheesman (2003) describes in detail the importance of early monastic education in Myanmar, both in terms of its role within society as the only means of a formal education and also as a means through which the state could exert its own power, influence and control. He suggests that from early times a relationship developed around education that was both cooperative and competitive but fundamentally one that suited both the Sangha (simply understood as the Buddhist monastic order, although the real meaning is far more complex) and the state:

Evidently, both the state and the Sangha benefited from monastic schooling. It played a vital role in establishing, enhancing and preserving the authority of both the state and the Sangha. It was an explicit link between the people and their religion, and by extension, their state. It transmitted standardised cultural and intellectual matter across all sectors of society. It instilled a valuable sense of discipline that allowed rulers to maintain control over their subjects and reinforced a respect for tradition and hierarchy. It also mandated community participation and support, and was highly valued: proverbially, education became ‘the gold pot that cannot be stolen’.(ibid, p49)

However, this has been an uneasy partnership in many ways as the Sangha has continually exerted its independence and autonomy, whilst the state has regularly tried to rein it in and control it. The historical examples of this are numerous, from the Bagan era, through colonial history and up until the present day. This is an important point to which we shall return later. What is certain though, is that the monastic school tradition is deeply rooted within Myanmar’s history, culture and in the minds of Myanmar’s (Buddhist) population.

A second reason for the importance of monastic schools is that they serve various segments of the community that, otherwise, would not have access to education. There are numerous reasons for this:

1. Poverty and vulnerability

In the past, prior to the recent reforms that have come about through the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) and the first National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 1), many government schools required students, particularly those in middle and high school, to attend fee paying tuition classes. Whilst this practice has greatly diminished, tuition fees made it very difficult for children from very poor families to attend government schools.

A UNICEF commissioned study completed in 2016 concluded that monastic schools in Mon State revealed several examples of good practice in terms of including vulnerable populations by:

accommodating students from very difficult circumstances such as the poorest of the poor, ethnic and religious minorities (including Christian and Muslim children), as well as orphans and vulnerable children, migrants, and children with disabilities.(Montrose & Empower, p.35)

The same report goes on to state that monastic schools and NGO projects are, indeed, the best actors for reaching marginalised and vulnerable populations (Ibid. p.51).

1. Access to school

With the introduction of free and compulsory education in 2011, school enrolment numbers have risen substantially. From 2010 to 2017 enrolment in primary, middle and high school increased by 6%, 19% and 17%, respectively, driven in part by a higher number of rural students with access to education. Rural primary, middle and high school enrolment rates increased by a respective 8%, 21% and 19% over the same period (Oxford Business Group, 2019). According to the World Bank (2020), net primary enrolment rate in Myanmar in 2018 (their latest official statistic) was 98% and net completion rate 95%, equally representative of boys and girls.

With around 10 million school going students (more than half of those in primary school), the monastic system is a relatively small provider of education by comparison, but nevertheless provides education services to over 300,000 pupils. Furthermore, monastic school numbers over the past three years have remained steady as can be seen in the table below (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, 2018, 2019, 2020)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Students | Total Teachers | Total Schools | Primary Schools | Post Primary | Middle Schools | High Schools |
| 2019-20 | 304,461 | 7,734 | 1,506 | 814 | 988 | 102 | 2 |
| 2018-19 | 309,938 | 7,872 | 1,527 | 878 | 545 | 102 | 2 |
| 2017-18 | 308,969 | 7,842 | 1,557 | 909 | 544 | 102 | 2 |

Table 18 - Monastic School Basic Data 2017-2020

A baseline study of the monastic school system (Veale et al., 2014) found that 82% of monastic schools had a state school nearby. Whilst this infers that around 20% of students only have access to a monastic school, proximity in itself, cannot be seen as the only factor that influences access. In a study of a cluster of Shan State monastic schools in Namlam (Jolliffee & Mears, 2016), it was found that despite the existence of government schools, parents and children attended monastic schools as they had teachers who could speak their own language from their own communities. This situation is mirrored in other parts of the country, where ongoing conflict or unrest has made it difficult for the MoE to properly establish schools with local staff. Even when schools have been set up in some areas, they are mostly staffed by teachers who do not understand local areas, customs or language and, therefore, struggle to retain students and teachers alike. Monastic schools that teach in local language are, therefore, often seen as the only choice in certain parts of the country whether or not there is a government school nearby (Ibid).

1. Choice

A third reason for the importance of monastic schools is that, for some parents and students, they are the first preference for education. There are, again, many reasons for this. One well known monastic school, Phaung Daw Oo in Mandalay, has long been the school of choice for many students as it offers a quality of education that many parents believe the local schools cannot match (Pyoe Pin, 2010). Quality is not the only reason that parents might choose to send their children to a monastic school. Anecdotally MEDG has also seen that the religious values of monastic schools appeal to some parents, and that the school plays an integral part of the community, including health care, social services and community leadership, making the local monastic school the most logical choice.

Whilst the monastic school system is not likely to grow significantly, it is not likely to fade away completely either, as it continues to fill a significant gap in the education landscape. The question, therefore, should not be why monastic schools but how to improve them.

## School Quality

It is difficult to judge the quality of schools in Myanmar at the present time. The work being put into the various quality frameworks (Teacher Competency Standards Framework - TCSF and the Basic Education School Quality Assurance Framework – BE-SQASF) will greatly assist in this task; however, with the current lack of nation-wide assessment metrics, describing the quality of monastic schools can be subjective at best. The following analysis draws on various studies that have been conducted and the data that has been collected by the MEDG over the past five years. Perhaps the most complete set of data about the entire monastic sector is that of the *Monastic Schools in Myanmar, A Baseline Study* (Veale *et al.*, 2014) conducted by the Burnet Institute and the MEDG.

### Curriculum

Monastic Schools use the government curriculum as per instructions from MoRAC (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, Chapter 5, Paragraph 32 (e)) however, the main difference between monastic and government schools is the freedom they have to add extra subjects and activities and, arguably, the freedom teachers have in the delivery of the curriculum. A major influence in the way in which the curriculum is taught has been the introduction of child-centred approaches (CCA) to Myanmar which began in the late 1990s. First introduced through UNICEF to government schools, CCA was quickly adopted by both local and international NGOs, in particular those working with the monastic sector. More education philosophy than approach, CCA was seen by some monastic school principals as a better way to teach, through engaging children in classroom activities based on learners’ interests (Lall, 2010). CCA also challenged the then current paradigm of rote learning that was characteristic of most schools in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s and was concordant with Buddhist philosophy as outlined below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Suneya*** Learn what teacher taught  ***Cinteya*** Reflect on what you have learnt  ***Puccheya*** Ask questions to make sure your understanding is correct, and for more information and knowledge  ***Bhasaya*** Learn more from peers through discussion  ***Vicereya*** Explore more deeply, do research by yourself with great effort | ***Likheya*** Keep note and record to ensure you learn and remember well  ***Sikkheya*** Go on action – learning with efforts  ***Dhareya*** Learn by heart and reproduce what you have learnt so that you make sure your memory is refreshed |

Table 19 - Buddhist principles of learning (Ohnmar Tin & Stenning, 2015)

The adoption of CCA has met with mixed results. The 2014 baseline study mentioned above noted that whilst almost all teachers and principals had heard of CCA and 55% of teachers reported attending some form of CCA training, only 16% of schools performed well in using CCA in the classroom. Barriers to greater uptake of CCA included lack of time, resources, space and training (Veale *et al.*, op. cit., p.4.). There are still a number of organisations that support the Monastic Sector with a form of CCA training. MEDG is the largest and most active amongst training organisations having trained a total of about 3500 teachers from nearly 900 schools over the past 8 years. Over time the materials used for training teachers has evolved, most significantly with the development of the Yaung Zin Competency Based Teacher Training Program launched in 2013 and consisting of eight competency-based modules:

1. Learning needs and learning styles
2. Teaching and learning strategies
3. Classroom management
4. Teaching and learning aids
5. Assessment
6. Lesson planning
7. Professional development and the reflective practitioner
8. Working with parents and the community

These modules were designed to fit into the (then) early drafts of the MoE Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF).

Many monastic schools add to the curriculum with a range of programs from life skills to technical and vocational education and training. Phaung Daw Oo school in Mandalay, for example, runs a certified (by the Ministry of Tourism) course in tourism along with a range of vocational education programs including carpentry, sewing and handicrafts. In addition, this school runs academic programs to prepare students for international university entrance. Whilst the most prominent example, Phaung Daw Oo is by no means alone in this kind of innovation.

### Monastic School Teachers

According to the data in Table 1 above, there are around 7,800 teachers across monastic schools, the majority being in primary and post-primary levels. This number has been reasonably stable over the past three years although teacher retention has been a substantial challenge (BaKa Master Plan Monks, 2020; Ohnmar Tin & Stenning, 2015; Veale *et al.*, 2014). Teaching in a monastic school needs to be better understood. Whilst many teachers are highly committed and well educated, many are also young high school graduates who have, themselves, attended a monastic school, have some allegiance to the monastic system and spend some years teaching while they are completing university studies and/or as a means to give back to the school and the principal (gain merit) but are not necessarily qualified to serve as teachers. According to the 2014 Baseline Study (Veale *et al.*), 60% of teachers had a degree and a further 17% were studying for a degree through distance education. Eighteen per cent had only a high school education and 1% had only completed middle school.

There is no system-wide employment structure or process for monastic schoolteachers. As with much of the monastic sector, everything happens at school level. It is up to the school principal monk (in a few cases nun) to attract teachers, provide them with training, set salary and conditions and manage their performance and promotion. This means that schools that have greater resources and effective approaches to school system development, provide a more stable environment and better working conditions and, hence, have a better chance to retain their teaching staff. According to the Baseline Study, 14% of teachers in monastic schools were volunteers, receiving no salary at all.

Remuneration for teachers is another challenge affecting teacher recruitment and retention. Currently, the government (MoRAC) contributes 36,000 kyats to the salary of an elementary school teacher, 41,000 kyats to middle school and 45,000 kyat to a high school teacher (based on a ratio of 40 students to one teacher). Whilst this is a vast improvement on the past where there was no government contribution, the amounts are by no means, liveable wages, requiring schools to find other funds in order to pay teachers. In addition, the contributions value basic education levels differently; with a bias against early years teaching and primary schools. Data collected internally in 2017 following a national monastic school conference[[4]](#footnote-5) (by monks drafting the BaKa Master Plan) indicated that 57% of principals (394 from a sample of 693) cited “teacher salary” as the key requirement for support. It has been MEDG’s experience, also reflected in the 2014 Baseline study, that training teachers has even contributed to their leaving the monastic school system to take up jobs with MoE schools where, with their qualification, they can find a better salary and a career path.

In addition to localised salary system, other terms and conditions vary across schools. Very few schools, for example, have any form of leave structure, apart from the gazetted holidays. Maternity leave, sick leave, study leave etc. are all defined by the school principal.

Once working as a teacher within a monastic school, teachers will often find themselves in a “sink or swim” situation as very few schools have formal teacher induction programs, peer support and professional development approaches and systems. Even staff meetings are not common with only 16% of schools reporting monthly staff meetings (Ibid). Even when there are regular staff meetings, it has been MEDG’s experience that meetings are primarily vehicles for principals to pass on instructions, not opportunities for staff to discuss classroom practice or school management issues.

## School Facilities

As with most elements of the monastic system, the quality of school facilities is largely dependent on local circumstances. Schools must meet the building standards set by the MoE however, this applies to the classroom buildings themselves and not to other aspects of the school. Drawing again on the 2014 Baseline study (Veale *et al.*), the table opposite summarise some of the challenges facing monastic schools. This information was echoed in the Naung Taung data which noted 27% of schools saw school buildings, 10% school furniture, 4% toilets and 6% seeing a library as their main need.

Figure 7- Practical Challenges facing Monastic Schools, 2013

1. Many schools did not have sufficient classroom furniture or teaching and learning materials.
2. Only 29% had a library or books accessible to students.
3. Most schools (70%) conducted several different classes in the same room.
4. Six percent of schools did not have toilets for students, and student-toilet ratios were higher than recommended in more than half of schools. Schools mostly had pour flush toilets (56%). The level of cleanliness and function of toilets varied – only 43% were judged to be clean.
5. Nearly 20% of schools relied on an ‘unimproved’ water source, and one third of schools never treated drinking water.
6. Hand wash facilities were only available in 79% of schools, and only 22% of those had sufficient soap or ash.
7. The majority of schools (67%) had poor water drainage systems, and poor waste disposal (64%).

Table 20 Key Findings on school facilities

Whilst the quality of facilities is largely dependent on the monk/nun principal and the degree of community support, there are exemplary examples of schools, including those that have constructed toilets, classrooms and other facilities with access for students and teachers with disabilities. Indeed, this has been a required component of support for schools that have accepted infrastructure funding from MEDG in the past. Access to monastic schools for students with disabilities has also been noted as a challenge in some studies (e.g. Montrose & Empower, 2016). In summary, then, the number and quality of school classrooms and other facilities, varies widely and is highly dependent on the ability and interest of local communities to support the school and the principal. Rural schools tend more to lack basic infrastructure while urban schools often have buildings but too few (Ohnmar Tin & Stenning, 2015).

It should be noted that all monastic schools have had access to small grants offered by the MoE under the World Bank Decentralizing Funding to Schools Project. Many schools have taken advantage of this, but data collected by the MEDG suggests that principals find the reporting and bureaucratic requirements difficult and the funding limits not always worth the effort.

## Parental and Community Engagement

The involvement of parents in the life of the school and a child’s education is recognised as good practice. It is a growing phenomenon in Myanmar, being encouraged largely through an emphasis on the role of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs).

The 2014 Baseline Study (Veale *et al.*) noted that around 68% of monastic schools had a PTA or school committee (SC) where parents could become involved. Committees in some school had been in place for years (the longest recorded was 28 years). According to more recent data this number is around 90% (BaKa Master Plan Monks, 2020). The role of PTA/SCs varies widely across schools, the majority of them meeting irregularly. They have limited influence over school governance, student wellbeing or educational practice; functioning mainly around school maintenance, the organisation of community religious events and for fundraising. PTA/SCs have between 13 and 50 members. Almost half include the school principal and 87% include other community members. Two per cent of committees included the local authorities. Most committees meet infrequently, with only 7% meeting on a monthly basis. As with most aspects of monastic schools, the key factor for active engagement of PTA/SCs was the principal, although there are a range of other circumstances including the time availability and interest of parents and the cultural attitude that sees education as the role of the school and teacher.

The Baseline reported that some teachers provided monthly student progress report cards to parents, a few reported visiting parents to discuss student progress however most teachers felt that parents did not really “don’t really care and don’t enquire about their children’s education” (Veale *et al.*, 2014 p.36). This attitude is contradicted by some other smaller studies that have reported parents’ interest being high but limited by time availability. The introduction of CCA and the impact that this has had on students motivation to attend school were of particular interest (Lall, 2010).

There is no doubt that parental involvement will become mandatory for schools over time. The Decentralizing Funding to School Project and MEDG’s (previous) small grant program both require PTA/SCs in order to manage the grants process. The formation of PTA/SCs is now an integral part of training provided by MEDG, integral to the Yaung Zin Competency Based Teacher Training Program. MEDG is also working with schools to include child safeguarding into the role of PTA/SCs or to develop stand-alone child safeguarding committees. Currently 29 monastic schools have such mechanisms in place.

## School Systems and Procedures

As with most other elements of the monastic sector, the extent to which schools have put in place adequate systems and procedures is highly dependent upon the principal. The most reliable system data comes from the 2014 Baseline Study (Veale *et al.*, p.25) which stated:

Over 30 different kinds of records were observed in schools including: enrolment forms (94% of all schools), transfer certificates (92%), daily attendance record (91%), comprehensive personal record (CPR) (72%), admission register (69%), monthly report cards (69%), and staff profiles (54%) (Figure 6). Seventy-two percent of schools kept other records including: visitor records, meetings minutes, office attendance record, teachers’ attendance records, exam records, financial records, and mail records. Four percent of schools did not maintain a basic set of records of enrolment forms, attendance records and an admission register.

However, school systems and procedures are much more than forms, filing and administration. One of the main challenges MEDG has identified in most schools is the lack of policies for school management. In particular, schools often lack policy around:

1. Human resource management and development
2. Financial management
3. Child wellbeing, safeguarding and protection
4. Educational practice

It is not that schools do not consider these issues, rather that there is no systematic approach across the sector, with principal monks being the primary arbiter and decision-maker on all matters concerning the school. Whilst this might work for some schools, there are innumerable risks and little transparency.

## Monastic System Leadership and Management

The high degree of autonomy of individual monastic schools is simultaneously their greatest strength and their greatest risk. A strength as schools with dynamic and expert leadership can flourish and provide a high standard of education, a risk as there is no practical higher legal authority if something should go wrong[[5]](#footnote-6). For a school to open a monk (or nun) must seek the approval of the State/Regional Monastic Education Supervision Committee which, itself, is composed of monks. Once approved a school is then registered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture upon meeting the following criteria (Ohnmar Tin & Stenning, 2015):

* The building must be a permanent residence; no rented premises are allowed
* There must be sufficient buildings and facilities
* There must be a sufficient number of qualified teachers (although no minimum qualification is specified)
* The minimum school size is 40 students (in rural areas this minimum is reduced to 20 students)
* The school should be able to sustain operations
* Be primary or post-primary level[[6]](#footnote-7).

The following diagram summarises the various governance bodies for the monastic sector (Ibid. p.15)

Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated

### Supervision Committees

The monastic school system, closed for some time during the Nay Win era, reopened in the early 1990’s under the government of the State Law and Order Council (SLORC). A system for oversight was developed in 1995 (Aung & Yi, 2016) which consisted of Central, State/Regional and Township Committees. At the national level, the three leading monks also sit on the State Sangha Maha Nayaka. Each committee includes monks elected by their peers along with a member of the respective MoRAC level. The national committee meets once a year, and the State/Regional Committees also on a monthly basis. Township Committees, which should also include the Township Education Officer (TEO), often do not meet, although they do function in some areas, but this is largely dependent on the interest of the monks leading the committee. Some State/Regional committees seem very active in supporting schools in their respective areas. Monks will assist their colleagues in many ways including accessing resources and providing training for less well-resourced schools. Informally and during State/Regional meetings, monks will address areas of common concern, such as the need often expressed by primary and middle schools, to expand to high school level. Authority in the committees, as with the Sangha in general, is based on years of experience as the monk. Whilst many monks have obtained university degrees often, they relate to Buddhist studies not usually secular education. Some monks who have managed their school or schools for years, have developed very practical experience in school management; however, they have not, in general, had exposure to modern educational management concepts, ideas and approaches.

Essentially, committees have no influence over educational standards or quality; they were put in place to ensure that the government (at the time) could communicate orders down the hierarchy. As the 2015 report produced by the Myanmar Education Consortium (Ohnmar Tin & Stenning) pointed out, there are obvious gaps resulting in the lack of systematic monitoring (and oversight) including lack of transparency in financial management, lack of accountability to students and parents and limited ability of schools to engage around educational quality issues. This is not to say that all monks and nuns are not aware of such issues, indeed many school principals go to considerable lengths to develop schools of a very high standard. However, nothing is systematised, and, in the end, no one is really accountable. Given the importance of religion in Myanmar and the unquestioning allegiance that monks often command, the degree of responsibility on the monk and the associated risks are, therefore, very high.

### The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture

The MoRAC, formerly the Ministry of Religious Affairs, is legally responsible for monastic schools. However, the relationship between MoRAC and monastic leaders is largely dependent on the individuals rather than the system itself; at times it has been supportive and positive, at times not. According to Tin and Stenning (2015), MoRAC’s role, as outlined in MoRAC’s Rules and Regulations for Monastic Schools, is largely administrative, managing the registration of schools and solving any legal problem that might arise, such as a land ownership dispute. MoRAC is also the communication channel between schools and the government and representatives from MoRAC sit on various education sub-sector working groups.

### The Ministry of Education

Since their reopening in the early 1990’s monastic schools have been required to follow the national curriculum developed by the MoE. Textbooks are provided to monastic schools each year and students enrolled in monastic schools are eligible to sit MoE mandated exams and assessments. In some townships, the TEO monitors monthly end of chapter results from monastic schools although this is not true across the sector. The role of the MoE in the monastic sector has, however, been expanding in recent years:

1. Since the introduction of the new curriculum, the MoE has included a certain number of monastic schoolteachers in training for the curriculum roll-out that has been conducted during the long summer break.
2. Monastic schools are counted in national enrolment figures and schools are eligible to apply for small grants under the Decentralizing Funding to Schools Project.
3. MoE officials have been invited to and taken part in two national conferences held by the monastic sector along with many State/Regional and Township meetings and events;
4. Monastic sector representation was sought in the development of the NESP;
5. Monastic schools were included in the trialling of the Teacher Competency Standards Framework (TCSF) and the Basic Education School Quality Assurance Standard Framework (BE-SQASF);

The intention for the inclusion in the NESP2 of a separate section on monastic education is itself an indication of the growing support for the monastic sector within the MoE.

### School Principals

School principals, mostly monks and a handful of nuns, lie at the heart of the monastic school. Whilst there has been no specific study into the role the principal plays, the Monastic School Baseline highlights many areas where support of the monk is the primary factor in the success of any aspect of a school including the uptake of new teaching methods, the involvement of parents and community members, the introduction of management systems, the pay and condition of teachers etc. As highlighted in the introduction, the monastic school system reflects more deeply some of the ongoing challenges between state and Sangha that have existed for centuries. The role of the monk (as a school principal) is difficult to separate from the role of the monk within Buddhist culture where he is (generally) held in high esteem and beyond question. In a practical sense at school, this means that the principal has ultimate authority in every aspect of the school. The introduction of different governance models, for example, that might include parents and committees will work when the monk supports them but even then, may not function as one might expect as the committees will defer to the monk for any important decision about the school.

The importance of monks in Myanmar culture means that interactions between the various bodies responsible for, or with a vested interest in, Monastic Education, can be challenging. For example, TEO’s may be reluctant to ask monks to conform to standards or provide information about monastic schools in their areas. At a national level, it is very difficult for monks to participate in decision making and advisory education bodies such as the sub-sector working groups as monks, according to Myanmar culture must be treated differently, particular the senior monks who are most influential in the education sector.

## Other Influential Bodies

There are a number of organisations and individuals, internal and external, that have a particular influence over the monastic sector. These can be divided into three main groups:

1. NGOs that work with monastic schools;
2. Private sector individuals and associations;
3. Groups of monks within the monastic sector that fall outside of the committee system.

### NGOs

International and national NGOs have provided considerable support to the monastic school sector since the late 1990s. For many years, international education-focussed NGOs could only work with monastic schools. This situation changed with the onset of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review in 2012 and currently a number of INGOs have agreements with the Ministry of Education and support various elements of the government school system. Major donors too, have shifted their focus to support the MoE, arguably at the expense of support to monastic and community based schools and/or non-formal education programs. The only major formal INGO support to the monastic sector at the present time comes from the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEDG’s major donor). Other INGOs still support smaller initiatives in groups of schools or with individual schools. This includes lesser-known foundations such as the Sprouts Foundation from Hong Kong.

Local NGOs have been at the forefront of considerable support to the monastic sector. On the whole this has been at an individual school level and focussed on meeting practical day to day needs of the school including feeding novices, small building and renovations etc. The 2014 Baseline showed that 33% of school received financial support from outside organisations and 29% non-financial support (Veale *et al.*, 2014).

In addition to the support given to individual schools, a number of local organisations have focussed on teacher training and school leadership development and even systemic reform. Hantha Educators, for example, has spent considerable effort training teachers in Sagaing Region in particular. Pann Thee Foundation builds classrooms for monastic schools and provides scholarships for poor students. Arguably the best-known local NGO at present, is the MEDG itself. MEDG was founded by senior state/regional monks in 2011 and accredited by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2014. In 2018 MEDG was registered as a local NGO. As monks are not able to sit on NGO boards, MEDG leadership became secular although a monks advisory group continues to play an important role. MEDG has supported a range of initiatives within the monastic sector including teacher training, school system development and, at a national level, engagement with education reform processes.

### Private Sector Individuals and Associations

Individual donors play an important role at individual school level, the Baseline study showing that over 70% of schools received financial support and 48% of schools received non-financial support (Ibid). Monks, in general, rely on the support of communities for food and basic needs so this is hardly surprising. Some monks have particularly wealthy patrons who contribute to their school or schools. One such patron, Ken Tun (from the Parami Energy Group) has not only supported individual schools but has sought to address some of the systemic problems facing the monastic sector through developing sustainable funding sources and supporting monastic system leadership in long term planning through the Pyinnyaw Daya Foundation (Parami Energy, 2014).

### Groups of Monks within the Monastic Sector

In addition to the recognised committee structure there are groups of monks that have, over time, united to bring about some kind of sector reforms. Of particular note is the principal of the Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education High School in Mandalay who was the impetus behind the founding of the MEDG. Currently he, along with some other senior monks, is supporting the development of the “Baka Master Plan” (BMP) which aims to articulate the vision and development of the monastic sector into the short to medium term (up to 20 years), linking with the NESP. The BMP monks relate directly to State/Regional leaders[[7]](#footnote-8) who are behind this initiative. The BMP is also supported by the chair of the National Monastic Education Supervision Committee.

## School Funding and Sustainability

### School Costs

According to data collected for the Baka Master Plan (BaKa Master Plan Monks, 2020), the total yearly cost for the monastic system and, by inference on average per school, is as described in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Kyat | USD Cost | No of schools |
| All schools | 44,031,769,182 | 33,870,592 | 1500 |
| One School | 29,354,513 | 22,580 | 1 |

Table 21 - Monastic School Yearly Costs

However, these costs include only teacher salaries and costs for food for boarding students (calculated at around 16% of the total school population). No account is made of maintenance, building or recurrent costs or for any type of infrastructure development that may be needed or planned for, let alone for more education focused activities such as professional development for teachers, curriculum development, teaching aids etc. Moreover, the calculation is based on an average monthly salary of just over Kyat 62,000 which is nowhere near a liveable wage. Even with the estimated contribution from the Decentralizing Funding to School Project (800 million kyat) and subsidies for teacher salaries (3,600 million kyat) the outstanding cost for a school per year (including only salaries and boarding costs) is just under 26.5 million kyat (around $20,000) and for the entire system 39,631 million kyat (nearly $US 30.5 million). Currently, funding for this majority shortfall is raised by schools.

### Human Resources

Human resource management and in particular the management and support of teachers, is vital to the sustainability of any school system. According to the 2014 Baseline, the MEC Situation Analysis and regular communications between monks and the MEDG, teacher retention is one of the biggest challenges for the monastic sector. This is only half the picture, however, as attracting well qualified teachers to the monastic sector is an equal challenge. In addition, most principals (more than half according to the 2014 Baseline) felt that they had insufficient teaching staff.

Teachers enter monastic schools for a multitude of reasons that include:

* Loyalty to the principal (monk) where, e.g., they have attended his school;
* Community loyalty where a high school graduate may be the only academically suitable person to take on a teaching role;
* Ethnic loyalty where schools have been established in ethnic communities and prospective teachers can communicate in local language;
* Identified through community networks close to the principal;
* Graduates of monastic schools who are attending distance university and can live freely in a monastic school during university years in return for teaching;
* A religious belief that dedicating their life to teaching will be a worthy pursuit and bring merit.

There is no particular data that would suggest people become monastic schoolteachers as a career in the conventional sense of the word, however, this is not implausible. Some larger schools, such as the Phaung Daw Oo High School in Mandalay have very clear lines of professional development along with corresponding pay scales that indicate a degree of professionalism in this regard.

Schools do not advertise, interview or process applications for teaching positions in any uniform manner, if at all. The minimum requirement for a teacher is generally high school graduate however in a handful of cases it is not even that. According to the 2014 Baseline:

Eighty-two percent of teachers in monastic schools were female. The median age of teachers was 30 years, with a range of 16 to 80 years. Eighty-one percent of teachers lived nearby to the schools. Sixty percent of the teachers in monastic schools were university graduates, 17% were currently studying at university, and 18% had passed high school only. A small number of teachers had diplomas (1%) or Buddhism Studies degrees (3%), and 1% had only completed middle school. The median number of years’ teaching experience was four, and the median number of years spent teaching in that school was three (Veale et al., 2014 p.33.).

Undoubtably the biggest financial challenge facing schools is the adequate payment of their teaching staff with nearly 60% of principals citing this as their top need in data collected for the BMP (BaKa Master Plan Monks, 2020).

From a systems perspective, starkly lacking when considering this issue are the following:

1. There is no system wide pay structure; each school decides what it can pay a teacher. In general salaries are decided upon by the principal based on their capacity to pay and the teachers’ capacity to negotiate (all done at an individual level);
2. There are no system wide minimum standards for teachers and no guidelines for promotion. In generals, as with MoE schools, high school teachers are paid more and held in higher regard than primary level teachers (something reflected in pay scales as well);
3. There is no system wide professional development system or, indeed, minimum qualification for teachers in monastic schools.

# Empirical Data Findings

## Monastic Schools at a Glance

One-hundred and thirty-two monastic schools were included in the quantitative study from eleven States/Regions. Two schools from Rakhine State were included in the qualitative part of the study. The distribution of quantitative study schools appears in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State/region | School Level | | | Grand Total |
| Primary | Post-primary | Middle |
| Kachin |  | 3 |  | 3 |
| Sagaing | 7 | 8 | 4 | 19 |
| Naypyidaw |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Magway | 6 | 2 | 3 | 11 |
| Mandalay | 21 | 14 | 2 | 37 |
| Mon | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Yangon | 16 | 9 | 1 | 26 |
| Shan (South) | 2 | 1 |  | 3 |
| Shan (North) | 3 | 2 |  | 5 |
| Shan (East) | 1 | 1 |  | 2 |
| Ayeyarwady | 11 | 6 | 3 | 20 |
| Grand Total | 69 | 48 | 15 | 132 |

Table 22 - Study School Distribution

Students number from these schools appear in the following table and show a roughly even percentage of boys and girls:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of Students in 2019-2020 AY (N=113 Schools) | | | | | | | | | |
| State/ Region | Total No. of School | Total Primary Students | Total Middle Students | Total High Students | Total Novice Monks | Total Boys | Total Novice Nuns | Total Girls | Grand Total |
| Kachin | 3 | 278 | 167 | 12 | 71 | 147 | 84 | 155 | 457 |
| Sagaing | 16 | 1,482 | 887 | 84 | 358 | 1,020 | 96 | 979 | 2,453 |
| Magway | 11 | 897 | 611 | 29 | 83 | 726 | 23 | 705 | 1,537 |
| Mandalay | 35 | 5,291 | 2,202 | 236 | 677 | 3,527 | 132 | 3,393 | 7,729 |
| Mon | 4 | 304 | 262 | - | 23 | 271 | 5 | 267 | 566 |
| Yangon | 18 | 3,283 | 2,163 | 291 | 823 | 1,747 | 1,638 | 1,529 | 5,737 |
| Shan | 8 | 1,551 | 401 | 53 | 292 | 684 | 322 | 707 | 2,005 |
| Ayeyarwady | 18 | 1,999 | 1,875 | 542 | 301 | 1,890 | 27 | 2,198 | 4,416 |
| Total | 113 | 15,085 | 8,568 | 1,247 | 2,628 | 10,012 | 2,327 | 9,933 | 24,900 |

Table 23 - Number of Students in Study School

The average school size of schools in the study was 220 students. Yangon had the schools with the highest average student number (319) and Mon State schools had the lowest (142 students):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| State/Region | Total No. of School | Avg School Size (no of students) |
| Kachin | 3 | 152 |
| Sagaing | 16 | 153 |
| Magway | 11 | 140 |
| Mandalay | 35 | 221 |
| Mon | 4 | 142 |
| Yangon | 18 | 319 |
| Shan | 8 | 251 |
| Ayeyarwady | 18 | 245 |
| **Total** | **113** | **220** |

Table 24 - Average Study School Size by State/Region

Of the 18 schools that took part in the qualitative part of the study, all had a school vision and mission statement. These were different across schools but had common themes that included: educating children for a brighter future, imparting good (Buddhist) values and assisting disadvantaged children, e.g.:

*… to improve living standards of rural citizens from this remote and slow developing area. Thus, specific objectives are to promote all-round development of children in education, health, social, and moral. Second one is to generate educated human resources in this area, and the third is children to be well versed in knowledge and thinking skills for their lives*.

Only six schools were opened before 1993, with 57 opening between 1993 and 2000 and the majority (68) opening post 2000.

Figure 8 - Years of Principal's Teaching Experience

School principals were mainly monks (107). There were 11 nuns who were principals and 14 lay people taking the principal role (eight female and six male). The age of the principals varied as did their teaching experience:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Age Range | Number of principals |
| Under 40 | 32 |
| Between 41-60 | 64 |
| Between 61-88 | 36 |
| Total | 132 |

Table 25 - Age Range of Principals

## Access to Monastic Schools

Access to school in Myanmar is high for primary level students with nearly 98% of children enrolling in primary school (The World Bank, 2020). Whilst monastic schools are few by comparison to state schools, they have grown in number since 2010 and continue to play a valuable role, in particular for poor children. According to the empirical data collected for this study, the reasons parents send their children to monastic schools and issues around access (e.g., for disabled students), were not always based on economic circumstances but a range of factors. In fact, the majority of schools (83%) were in areas where children had access to other schools. Of these 104 had access to state schools, 14 to other monastic schools and 10 to private schools. Qualitative data suggested that the free education along with the nutrition and health services provided by the schools were a motivation for parents to send their children to monastic schools. A number of parents interviewed in Shan State mentioned that they felt their children would be safe in the school as schools were in ceasefire areas. Parents in one school liked the fact that the principal was approachable and regularly discussed the educational progress of their children, another liked the school discipline and the fact that the teachers were always at school, unlike their experience with the state school system.

### Students’ Enrolment

As shown in the table below (data collected from only 113 of the 132 schools as some schools did not provide accurate data) there are on average, 220 students in monastic schools, with the largest schools being in Yangon and the smallest in Mon State. Of course, there are exceptions to this with some very large schools, for example Phaung Daw Oo in Mandalay, with over 7,000 students.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number of Students in 2019-2020 AY (N=113 Schools) | | | | | | |
| State/Region | Total No. of School | Total Primary Students | Total Middle Students | Total High Students | Grand Total | Avg School Size (no of students) |
| Kachin | 3 | 278 | 167 | 12 | 457 | 152 |
| Sagaing | 16 | 1,482 | 887 | 84 | 2,453 | 153 |
| Magway | 11 | 897 | 611 | 29 | 1,537 | 140 |
| Mandalay | 35 | 5,291 | 2,202 | 236 | 7,729 | 221 |
| Mon | 4 | 304 | 262 | - | 566 | 142 |
| Yangon | 18 | 3,283 | 2,163 | 291 | 5,737 | 319 |
| Shan | 8 | 1,551 | 401 | 53 | 2,005 | 251 |
| Ayeyarwady | 18 | 1,999 | 1,875 | 542 | 4,416 | 245 |
| **Total** | **113** | **15,085** | **8,568** | **1,247** | **24,900** | **220** |

Table 26 - Number of Students in Study Schools

Despite the fact that there are only two officially registered monastic high schools in the country and 102 middle schools, many schools (25%) continue to cater for middle and high school students, as these students have nowhere else to go. Some of these schools develop local agreements with state schools or local authorities to enable to function in this way.

As is the trend across the rest of Myanmar’s schools, there are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls in monastic schools. The school population can be divided into the following categories:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Novice Monks | Boys | Novice Nuns | Girls | TOTAL |
| 2,628 | 10,012 | 2,327 | 9,933 | 24,900 |

Table 27 - Breakdown of Student Numbers in Study Schools

This breaks down to around 40% of both boys and girls, 11% novice monks and 9% novice nuns. Novices generally board at schools or nearby monasteries and some schools also cater for lay boarding students as can be seen in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Boarding Students (94 of 113 schools had boarding students - 83%) | | | | | | | |
|  | **NOVICE**  **Monks** | **BOYS** | **NOVICE**  **Nuns** | **GIRLS** | **TOTAL  BOARDING** | **TOTAL STUDENTS** | **Percentage Boarding** |
| **YANGON** | 589 | 200 | 757 | 53 | 1,599 | 5,737 | 28% |
| **MANDALAY** | 732 | 131 | 76 | 141 | 1,080 | 7,729 | 14% |
| **SHAN** | 280 | 156 | 399 | 166 | 1,001 | 2,005 | 50% |
| **AYEYARWADY** | 246 | 160 | - | 131 | 537 | 4,416 | 12% |
| **SAGAING** | 259 | 16 | 42 | 22 | 339 | 2,453 | 14% |
| **KACHIN** | 51 | 10 | 88 | 57 | 206 | 457 | 45% |
| **MAGWAY** | 127 | 58 | - | 12 | 197 | 1,537 | 13% |
| **MON** | 26 | 67 | 2 | 61 | 156 | 566 | 28% |
| **TOTAL** | **2,310** | **798** | **1,364** | **643** | **5,115** | **24,900** | **21%** |

Table 28 - Boarding Students

Boarding student percentages were highest in the conflict areas of Shan and Kachin States, however Yangon and Mon State also had high proportions of boarders. Overall, 83% of schools had boarding students and 21% of students in monastic schools board, considerably higher than the baseline study conducted in 2014 that recorded only 46% of school with boarding students and 13% of the student population living as boarders (Veale *et al.*, 2014).

Principals were asked why parents sent their children to monastic schools and there was a variety of answers with the highest number of responses (71) being that schools provide support (meals/nutrition, uniforms, stationery etc) for students at low or no cost. This is in line with the traditional role of monastic schools being a major education provider for particularly poor families. However, the second most cited response (62 principals) was that parents appreciated the values of the monastic school, in particular, the imparting of culture knowledge and behavioural norms. Thirty-one principals said it was due to the quality of teaching in the school. Only 13 said it was due to the absence of a state school and 7 noted that transportation to a state school was difficult. Other responses ranged from conflict in regional areas (7) to the monastic school being nearby (5).

### Students’ Retention

Over the past five years, student enrolment has grown slightly as highlighted in the following graph:

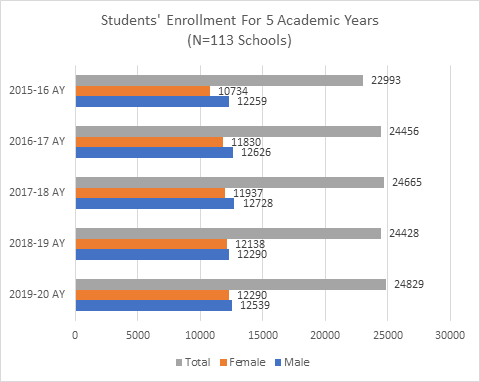


Figure 9 - Enrolment for Previous Five-Year Period

The gross annual retention rate was calculated by dividing the total number of students remaining at the end of academic year with the total number of students enrolled at the beginning of that year:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Academic Year | Male | Female | Total |
| 2019-20 AY | 98% | 98% | 98% |
| 2018-19 AY | 98% | 98% | 98% |
| 2017-18 AY | 97% | 97% | 97% |
| 2016-17 AY | 97% | 98% | 98% |
| 2015-16 AY | 96% | 98% | 97% |

Table 29 - Gross Annual Retention Rate

### Students’ Completion

The study found students dropped out in 31 schools out of the 113 that provided data (just over 27%). Dropouts are presented in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Academic Year | Male | Female | Total |
| 2019-20 AY | 2%  (223 Students) | 2%  (198 Students) | 2%  (419 Students) |
| 2018-19 AY | 1%  (176 Students) | 1%  (160 Students) | 1%  (336 Students) |
| 2017-18 AY | 2%  (209 Students) | 2%  (214 Students) | 2%  (423 Students) |
| 2016-17 AY | 2%  (248 Students) | 2%  (207 Students) | 2%  (455 Students) |
| 2015-16 AY | 2%  (259 Students) | 2%  (211 Students) | 2%  (470 Students) |

Table 30 – Drop-out Rate

The study was not able to calculate the primary completion rate as data on the total population of primary level students was not available.

## Quality of Monastic Schools

In looking at the quality of schools, the report takes into account a range of issues including how schools are managed and run, the quality of teaching and learning and the kind and quality of school facilities.

### Management and Administration

The majority of schools (77%) had an organised departmental structure. Of these, 80 schools had a teaching department, 56 had an administrative department, 36 had a student affairs department and 46 (just under 35%) had a finance department. Out of the 102 schools that had organisational charts, 73 stuck closely to the functions outlined in the organizational chart.

Just over half of the schools (53%) had staff job descriptions with slightly more (57%) saying that they informed teachers about their job description when they were recruited (presumably, some were only verbally informed).

Just over 61% of schools did not have a staff leave system in place. Of those that did (52 schools), nearly all (87%) kept records of leave. Schools allowed for a range of leave types including medical leave (57 schools), maternity leave (53 schools, paternity leave (37 schools) and long service leave (26 schools). The majority of schools (85%) kept records of staff profiles and attendance (84%).

Principals were asked a series of questions about the way in which they managed teaching and learning in their schools. Part of this related to the support they received from the Ministry of Education as described in the chart below. These data would suggest that the majority of monastic schools have benefitted from a range of support including training and financial support (through the provision of teacher stipends and small grants). In particular, nearly all schools have benefitted from training programs for the roll out of the new curriculum along with instructional aids. Likewise, the provision of textbooks and teacher guidebooks has also been high. School grants were provided to 117 (over 88%) schools which shows again, that the MoE support to monastic schools is reaching most schools. Such results reflect well on the MoE and the distribution systems set up within the monastic system. Not quite as successful, however, has been the provision of stipends for schoolteachers with only 88 schools (just under 67%) receiving any money. Overall, the largest gap was the very small number of schools receiving training in office management.

Figure 10 - Type of Support Provided by MoE

Over half of principals interviewed (56%) said they were fairly satisfied with MoE support, 17% stated high satisfaction and 27% stated that they were rarely satisfied with the support they received.

#### School Committees

Schools had a variety of committees that were, in some way, designed to support the school financially or to attend to various administration and management tasks. In the most part, schools had either a School Committee or a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Only 8% of schools had no parental or community committee at all. A small number of schools (6%) had Student Committees. School principals from schools involved in the qualitative study described School Committee and PTA functions in the following way:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| School Committee | PTA |
| * Provides continuous supports for school development activities * Assists in solving challenges and difficulties * Plans for school sustainability * Discusses government’s budget and how it is used * Provides funding support | * Helps in student affairs * Assists in discussing the needs of students with parents * Helps in preparing for school sports, school galas, student awarding ceremonies etc. * Facilitates good communication between parents and teachers |

Table 31 - Role of School Committees and Parent Teacher Associations

Generally, the village administrator and/or village leaders are committee members, donors to the school and parents. The frequency of school committee and PTA meetings was inconsistent across the study schools. According to the qualitative data, school committees/PTAs have mixed relevance, some being very active in the life of the school, others being there only by name, because they have been required by some authority (perhaps a donor).

Figure 11 - Frequency of School Committee Meetings

Most teachers took part in school meetings however these meetings were not really designed to discuss educational matters.

#### School Improvement Planning

Only 34 of the 132 schools (26%) had some kind of School Improvement Planning (SIP) process. For schools that did, the following graph indicates the individual or group involved and the number of schools incorporating that group or individual in the planning process.

From this graph we can see that the majority of SIP development is carried out by principal and teachers but that some schools are involving other elements of the school community, some even bringing students into the process.

Figure 12 - Involvement in School Improvement Planning

In the qualitative data collected, there were mixed views about the value of school improvement planning, with some schools eager to promote the longevity and quality of the school but others seeing little relevance. One principal felt there was little reason to develop a plan as he felt the school would close down soon anyway. It seems the majority of planning for schools is done in an ad-hoc way and short-term.

#### Student Affairs

Principals were questioned about record keeping for student affairs, summarised in the table below.

Figure 13 - Student Affair Records

In general, required record keeping was maintained across all schools, with two exceptions: most schools (79%) did not issue a student identity card and 38% did not have any clearly articulated school rules and regulations.

#### Financial Management

Similarly, basic financial records were kept by schools with 78% having a basic bookkeeping system and similar percentages for petty cash records, staff salary payment records and donation records. Where there was a significant gap was in over 65% of schools not having a yearly budget.

Figure 14 - Financial Management Practices in Schools

Whilst most principals stated that they did have a dedicated finance officer, in the majority of schools (just over 58%) it was the principal who was responsible for keeping financial records. Around 64% of schools produced statements of accounts at some point in the year, mostly yearly but some as often as monthly (just over 17% of schools) however 36% of schools did not produce any financial statement at all.

Qualitative data indicated that in general petty cash expenses were managed by a senior assigned teacher, whilst donations were handled by the monk. The monk, in turn gives this money to the school. Culturally, money donated to a monk is the monks’ to use in any way he sees fit and does not need to be accounted for. This practice could create some challenges in developing robust financial systems in schools, if the school is to be reliant, or even partially reliant on donations.

#### Management and Professional Development of Teachers

Principals’ level of satisfaction with the performance of their teachers varied with only 39% saying they were very satisfied and 58% saying they were fairly satisfied. However only 68 of the 132 schools (just over 51%) had a systematic performance appraisal system in place. Out of this number, 35 schools had a performance-based system in place, rewarding teachers for good performance through provision of financial incentives (extra allowance or pay rise) or awards (such as best staff member of the year).

Regarding continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, all but two schools benefitted from training provided by the MoE for the new curriculum. One hundred and four schools received other pedagogical training and 99 schools ensure that some support was given by experienced trained teachers within the school. CPD resources included library books and teacher reference books (in 109 schools) and computers/internet access in 34 schools.

Figure 15 - Teacher's Professional Development

Teachers also commented on their access to CPD. All but 5 teachers said that they had the opportunity to discuss their teaching with a colleague during the previous academic year and most (73%) on a weekly or daily basis.

More than half (61%) had been observed teaching by a colleague and of those over 60% had been observed more than three times in the previous academic year. Principals most commonly observed lessons in 71% of occasions, followed by head teachers in 24% of occasions. Verbal feedback was given on most observation visits (84% of the time) and focussed, in equal amounts, on lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom management, use of instructional aids and the general classroom environment.

Most teachers interviewed (197 of the 237) had attended some kind of professional training in the previous academic year. Teachers also showed a lot of intrinsic motivation to improve their practice by watching educational programs on TV (39%) reading educational journals (67%), through education focused social media groups (66%) and from online research (60%). Many teachers reported being helped by a senior or more competent teacher (79%).

In the classroom there was a relatively high degree of supervision of teachers. In most cases (77% of schools), this was done by the principal and just over 20% by a senior teacher. Supervision was undertaken daily in the majority of schools (59%) and weekly in 27% of schools with the few remaining schools having monthly (9%) and quarterly (2%).

Feedback (either in personal or staff meetings, and in a few cases in written form) from observations was given sometimes (44%) or often (44%) and focussed on issues highlighted in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Lesson Planning | Teaching Strategies | Classroom Management | Use of Teaching Aids | Assessment | Subject Skills |
| 32 | 86 | 45 | 41 | 85 | 37 |

Table 32 - Principal's Feedback to Teachers

### Teaching and Learning

#### Teachers

From the 132 schools, MEDG collected data from a total of 237 teachers, categorised in the following table:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| States/Regions | Male | Female | Monk | Nun | Grand Total |
| Mon | 1 | 9 |  |  | 10 |
| Ayeyarwady | 4 | 33 | 1 |  | 38 |
| Kachin |  | 6 |  |  | 6 |
| Magway | 1 | 19 | 1 |  | 21 |
| Mandalay | 8 | 56 | 5 | 1 | 70 |
| Sagaing | 5 | 21 |  | 3 | 29 |
| Shan | 3 | 15 |  |  | 18 |
| Yangon | 7 | 38 |  |  | 45 |
| Grand Total | 29 | 197 | 7 | 4 | 237 |

Table 33 - Type of Teacher According to State/Region

The majority of these (92%) were of Bamar ethnicity, all were Buddhist. Amongst the teachers, only 11 (under 5%) were religious (monks or nuns). The majority of teachers (just under 85%) were female.

As shown in the table below, 86% of monastic schoolteachers have an undergraduate degree or have matriculated and are studying for one.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State/Region | University graduate | Diploma holder | Master | other | High school level (not matriculated) | High school graduate or University Undergraduate | Grand Total |
| Mon | 4 |  |  |  | 1 | 5 | 10 |
| Ayeyarwady | 17 | 1 |  | 1 | 6 | 13 | 38 |
| Kachin | 5 |  |  |  | 1 |  | 6 |
| Magway | 11 |  |  |  | 2 | 8 | 21 |
| Mandalay | 41 |  | 1 |  | 10 | 18 | 70 |
| Sagaing | 20 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 7 | 29 |
| Shan | 11 |  |  | 1 | 1 | 5 | 18 |
| Yangon | 34 |  | 2 |  | 4 | 5 | 45 |
| Grand Total | 143 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 61 | 237 |
|  | 60% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 11% | 26% | 100% |

Table 34 - Teacher Qualifications

In total, 149 teachers (63%) had six or more years of teaching experience with 60% of those having more than ten years’ experience. Eighty-eight teachers had between one- and five-years teaching experience. The majority of teachers (77%) lived within the school compound or in the same village as the school.

All but eight teachers had attended some kind of in-service training in the previous three-year period.

The vast majority of teachers (90%) were teaching grades with the new curriculum and most of these (95%) rated the curriculum between three and five on a satisfaction scale of 0-5.

Class sizes in monastic schools was reasonable with a student to teacher ratio for most schools between 21 and 30 or lower:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Under 15 : 1** | **15 - 20 : 1** | **21 - 30 : 1** | **31 - 40 : 1** | **Over 40 : 1** |
| **25%** | 26% | 26% | 18% | 5% |

Table 35 - Student-Teacher Ratio

#### Teaching Approaches

Teachers were asked a series of questions on how they planned their teaching during the previous academic year. Only six said they never planned, with most teachers planning on a daily basis (50%) or a weekly basis (44%). The remainder planned monthly. The majority (76%) spent between 30 minutes and five hours planning per week. Most teachers used the Teacher’s Guide provided by the MoE, spent time preparing teaching aids and thinking about classroom approaches. Over 60% used the lesson plan format in preparing their lessons. Teachers used a variety of teaching aids in their classrooms, ranging from flipcharts to games and puzzles and to items easily accessible around the school. Just over 27% of teachers used ICT in the classroom.

Questions were also asked in order to better understand the teaching approaches teachers used during the previous academic year. Most teachers reflected a confidence with a child-centred teaching/learning approach:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A little | Moderate | Very much | Didn't notice them (or) Unaware of them | Grand Total |
| 10 | 154 | 61 | 12 | 237 |

Table 36 - Confidence in using CCA

Although teachers were not specifically asked for a definition of child-centred teaching and learning, their use of a variety of teaching strategies indicated that they had a general awareness:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all | Rarely | Sometimes | Always | Do not know |
| Individual activity | 10 | 15 | 106 | 106 | 0 |
| Pair Work | 3 | 6 | 57 | 170 | 1 |
| Group Work | 4 | 2 | 45 | 185 | 1 |
| Whole class activity | 4 | 20 | 108 | 105 | 0 |
| Do not know | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 37 - CCA Activities Commonly Used in the Classroom

#### Assessment

Another series of questions was asked about assessment and the majority (89%) said they assessed students learning either ‘always’ or ‘often’, including during lesson time. Most of these (96%) felt confident in assessing children’s learning. A variety of assessment strategies were used by teachers as shown in the graph below

Figure 16 - Approaches to Student Assessment

Teachers took assessment strategies from a variety of sources, including publications from the MoE, training that they had attended and examples from other teachers. The vast majority (95%) assessed students on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Assessment records were kept in a variety of ways but most commonly in a result list, using the government assessment format, in a monthly report card or in a teacher diary. The majority of teachers were familiar with the new curriculum assessment formats prescribed by the MoE although just over 17% of teachers who knew about the formats did not have them.

Teachers used assessment findings for a variety of reasons including:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| To monitor and check the students learning progress and performances | To make a plan for the next level of learning | To specify the students' result levels | To report the students' achievement | To check whether you were able to teach your students effectively. |
| 195 | 180 | 168 | 176 | 206 |

Table 38 - Use of Assessment in the Classroom

Teachers made use of assessment results to communicate student learning progress in the following way:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| With students | With parents | With other teachers (teachers of the same subject) | Other teachers (teachers of other subjects) |
| 149 | 137 | 171 | 203 |

Table 39 - Assessment for Communicating Student Progress

Teachers communicated about assessment through:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * In-class discussion with student | 190 teachers |
| * Writing comments in exercise books or assignments | 85 teachers |
| * During private meetings/discussions with students | 74 teachers |

#### Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning

Teachers from 77% of schools said that principals play an active role encouraging parents to support their children’s education. In turn, parents participated in school in a number of different ways:

Figure 17 - Parent's Support to their Child's Education

In addition, it was noted by teachers support the creation of teaching and learning materials by providing resources, financial support and giving time to assist teachers in making them. Parents also supported teachers in the classroom in various teaching activities, in particular with respect to music, demonstration of traditional crafts and agricultural planting techniques.

#### Curriculum

Given the support provided to monastic schools by the MoE for the rollout of the new curriculum, it was encouraging to see that most schools were actually implementing the new curriculum as shown in the graph opposite. However, confidence in teaching the new curriculum was quite low with only 15% of school principals expressing that they felt the school could teach all the subjects well. In fact, the subject that they felt least confident in was Arts (43%) followed by Myanmar (36%), English and Physical Education (20%) and mathematics (13.5%).

Figure 18 - Uptake of New Curriculum Subject

A strength of the monastic system is that it has the relative freedom to supplement the curriculum and address the needs of specific groups of children and young people. The following graph shows the wide range of extra-curricular activities currently being undertaken in monastic schools. Notably, over 90% were teaching cultural studies but at the other end of the scale just over 6% of schools were teaching any ethnic language and literature. Around 12% of schools offered students vocational subjects and 23% computer classes, showing that a number of schools recognised the importance of providing life/work skills for students.

Figure 19 - Extra-Curricular Activities in Monastic Schools

The role of the principal in educational support to teachers is mixed with 69% of reporting that they required teachers to complete lesson plans in the last academic year but just over 50% actually checking that they did. Most principals were able to provide required teaching aids for schools, either most of the time (38%) or regularly (52%).

Overall, teacher felt confident in teaching subjects they were responsible for although 51 teachers interviewed said they were not confident in teaching English and 25 not confident in Maths.

#### Classroom Management

The majority of teachers (81%) had some kind of classroom rules and many of them had discussed rule setting with children as rules were formulated (92%).

Corporal punishment was still used by around 34% of teachers whereas the most common form of disciplining was scolding students (93%) or getting children to do chores such as cleaning (59%). A small number (15%) used a scoring system for behavioural modification. Teachers used a variety of means to reward children apart from the scoring system such as giving them public praise, posting good work on the walls of the classroom and small presents.

Around 20% of teachers said that they had students with learning difficulties in their classrooms and most were able to provide support to these children through free private coaching, having peers work with students who need support, using different teaching approaches when one way does not work and by putting children into small groups so they can learn with and from each other. Most teachers (93%) felt fairly or very confident that they were able to meet the learning needs of students in their classrooms and all but nine (3%) of the teachers felt students were happy in their learning.

#### Multi-grade Teaching

Thirty-seven teachers (16%) taught multi-grade level classrooms and most of these (86%) felt either moderately or very confident in dealing with this situation. All multi-grade teachers felt the burden of preparing work to cover the various grade levels which was made more challenging with the introduction of the new curriculum. They worried that there would not be enough time to complete all the work for each grade. Some noted an added difficulty in dealing with children with mother-tongue languages other than Burmese.

### School Infrastructure and Facilities

#### Libraries

Eighty-two of 132 schools had a library and of the fifty that did not, 48 had a place to store books such as a cupboard or in boxes. Books include illustrated story books, English books, magazines, short stories, journals and newspapers.

Most schools (82%) had age-appropriate books. Twenty-eight per cent of schools (37 of 130) included a scheduled reading period for students on a weekly basis with the majority (65%) setting no specific reading time but allowing children to access books when they are free. A few schools (6%) did not allow children to access the library.

Figure 20 - Types of Library Books in Monastic Schools

Figure 21 - Schools with Play Areas

#### Play Areas

The majority (85%) of schools surveyed said they had a dedicated play area for students and 93% of schools said they had play equipment such as balls, hula hoops and badminton.

Most schools were fenced (62%) with a number having partial fencing (21%) and only 16% of schools did not have a fence.

#### Water and Sanitation in Schools

Overall, the condition of water and sanitation within schools was quite good. Regarding toilets, most schools (86%) had separate toilets for boys and girls whilst the vast majority (96%) reported sufficient water for the toilets. Hand-washing facilities were also wide-spread with most schools (89%) claiming that the facilities were suitable for young children and disabled students (meaning there were no steps to get to the water supply and that the height was suitable). Likewise, the majority of schools said they had sufficient water for handwashing and drinking however, 58 of the 132 schools (44.6%) did not use water filters or purified water.

Figure 22 - Monastic School Water and Sanitation Conditions

**School drainage** was mixed with a substantial number (15%) having no drainage at all and 41% only having drainage around areas where there were water and sanitation facilities (including kitchen areas). Only 30% of schools said they had good drainage for all buildings.

One hundred and fourteen schools reported having rubbish bins in all classrooms and 109 schools claimed that classrooms were tidy and 95 stating that the school compounds were tidy.

#### Classroom lighting and ventilation

Classroom lighting and ventilation was reported as good in nearly all schools (128 of 132) and 125 principals reported that the classrooms were positioned well in proximity to environmental factors (sun, rain and other seasonal weather factors).

The number of schools with classrooms for each grade was only 77 out of the 132 (58%) surveyed. The remainder of school reported using partitioned rooms (48 schools) and or using halls with multiple grades (72). We did not ask about classroom size or the way in which halls were segregated into grades. Ninety-nine of the 132 schools reported having sufficient desks and chairs for pupils and only two schools at the other end of the spectrum reported that they had no desk and chairs at all and that children had to sit on mats on the ground.

Figure 23 - School Access for Children with Disabilities

#### Disabled Access

Schools reported somewhat surprisingly high ratings of access for children with disabilities with 41% saying that they were wheelchair friendly. However, 55% claimed that they had no disabled children, so it was uncertain as to whether or not they had facilities that were required.

### Role of Schools in the Community

All but 16 of the 132 schools surveyed provided a range of non-educational services to communities, in particular relating to health issues and child protection

Figure 24 - Monastic School Activity in Local Communities

The ‘Others’ category included:

1. Helping the community get drinking water

(well, concrete water-storage tank)

1. Paving or maintaining the roads
2. Providing cultural lessons for children during summer holidays
3. Helping the community get electricity
4. Helping the community on health-related issues
5. Some other activities, including planting trees, opening tailoring class, supporting some money for basic social needs e.g., providing rice, oil for food, and leading the cultural ceremonies, supporting money for funeral services or social service associations

## Sustainability

### Financial Sustainability

#### School Running Costs

As visiting schools was not possible, getting accurate data on the running costs of schools over the phone proved challenging. Principals were asked about the recurrent cost of running a school, however non-recurrent costs (and some recurrent costs) were not included; of note, building and renovation, building maintenance, utilities (electricity, communications etc). Income and sources of income were also recorded. The following table shows the compiled data averaged per school in MMK):

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SCHOOL COSTS (Average per school) | Number | Monthly Cost | Number of Months | Yearly Cost |
| Teacher salary cost across all schools | 5.24 | 747,21 | 12 | 4,698,456 |
| Boarding student costs | 42 | 45,000 | 12 | 22,680,000 |
| Teaching expenses | 1 | 35,174 | 9 | 1,216,566 |
| Student health | 1 | 54,477 | 12 | 653,724 |
| TOTAL |  | 5,435,611 |  | 29,248,746 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| SCHOOL INCOME | Number | Monthly Income | Number of months | Yearly Income |
| Teacher Stipend | 5.24 | 38,127 | 12 | 2,397,426 |
| Small Grants | 1 |  |  | 2,933,600 |
| TOTAL |  | 2,582,782 |  | 5,331,026 |

Table 40 - School Costs and Income

The data does not paint a particularly positive picture of monastic school funding. The reality is that an average school requires around 29.25 million kyat (approximately $US 22,499) per year to cover the major recurrent costs; however, their income is 5.33 million kyat (around $US 4,101).

Most teachers (92%) were paid a salary with 71% of those saying they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the salary amount.

#### Funding Sources

When asked what could be done about the lack of funds for monastic schools (Question 87) there were a number of common replies as summarised in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Suggestions | Frequency |
| To establish educational funding endowment (To keep endowment funding at a bank and use only the increase money) | 40 |
| To run school income generation (e.g., To run loan program in cooperation with committee, to run production of purified drinking water, planting “Tha Nap Khar” trees, agriculture, open shopping centre, transportation to carry goods) | 36 |
| To seek more donors (e.g., organizations, individuals, school should have a plan that all individuals can donate) | 31 |
| To get more supports from Government | 10 |
| To use and manage the school funding systematically | 4 |
| Others (I don’t know, No need because teachers are only volunteers, I will save donation money for the long-term, no sustainable plan yet etc.) | 28 |

Table 41 - Principal's Suggestions for Developing Sustainable Funding Sources

It is interesting to note here that only a small number of principals felt that the government should take greater financial responsibility for monastic schools but that the responsibility for raising funds lay with the school itself. This may reflect the individuality and the sheer independence of these schools along with the strong community foundation that most schools have. However, it is obvious that schools struggle to provide basic services and, for a significant number, rely on volunteerism in their teaching force. This alone present a huge long-term challenge relating to the quality of teachers and the long-term sustainability of a qualified teaching force.

However, Question 142 asked principals specifically about the type of support MoE should provide over the coming five years and answered in the following ways with an almost unanimous call for increased teacher salary support:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Recommended support from MoE | Frequency |
| Increased teacher salary (equal amount as state schoolteachers are paid) | 111 |
| More opportunities for teaching related trainings (to get training courses like state schoolteachers; teachers for arts, physical education in monastic schools etc.) | 57 |
| To provide teaching related materials (to provide sufficient textbooks, more teaching aids, more stationery, playing equipment, school uniforms etc.) | 47 |
| School Building | 20 |
| Support to establish sustainable education fund for monastic schools) | 8 |
| Classroom furniture (benches) | 6 |
| For extracurricular activities such as sport and school events commensurate with state schools | 5 |
| Drinking water purifier | 4 |
| To give permission for upgrading monastic school level | 4 |
| School Library/Playground | 3 |
| Vocational training (Computer, Tailoring) | 2 |
| Toilet | 1 |
| Others (I don’t know what to say; no support is expected from government; supports should be made for schools that have good commitment in providing quality education etc.) | 9 |

Table 42 - Principals Suggestions for Areas of Financial Support

Teacher’s recommendations for MoE support included the following:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Training | Teaching Learning Materials | School Building | Library & Books | More teachers to be recruited | Health related supports/ check-ups | Furniture | Others (Below) |
| 85 | 149 | 130 | 35 | 10 | 28 | 8 | 9 |

Table 43 - Teacher's Suggestions for MoE Support

Some teachers noted the different way in which monastic schools and students in these schools were treated in relation to government schools and students. They said that outstanding students from monastic schools should also have opportunity/right to participate in township/district/region/national competitions, that monastic schoolteachers should not face discrimination when attending new curriculum trainings and that there should be equal provision of new curriculum materials, not just what was left over after MoE schools had received their books.

### Human Resources

Teacher retention was one of the biggest challenges facing schools. Out of a combined total of 1,254 teachers in the 132 schools, the following dropouts were recorded through the quantitative data collection:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. drop-out teachers during last academic year | | |
| State/Region | Male | Female |
| Kachin | 2 | 4 |
| Sagaing | 4 | 13 |
| Naypyidaw | 0 | 0 |
| Magway | 5 | 13 |
| Mandalay | 5 | 19 |
| Mon | 1 | 8 |
| Yangon | 2 | 26 |
| Shan (South) | 1 | 3 |
| Shan (North) | 0 | 4 |
| Shan (East) | 0 | 3 |
| Ayeyarwady | 5 | 9 |
| Grand Total | 25 | 102 |

Table 44 - Teacher Retention

Qualitative data reinforced this with the main reason cited for dropout being salary:

*While state schoolteachers are paid about 200,000 kyats per month, monastic schoolteachers work with only about 50,000 kyats to 80,000 (Principal from one of the qualitative surveys).*

An interesting feature of the monastic system, however, is the reliance on distance university students as teachers. Young undergraduates see teaching as a means to see them through their degree in exchange for teaching in the school. Not only do they receive a small salary but also accommodation, meals and other small benefits.

## Cross-cutting Issues

### Inclusion, Disability, Gender

#### Language of Instruction

Whilst most teachers (88%) reported that the mother tongue of the majority of students in their classrooms was Burmese, a range of other languages groups formed the remainder:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State/Region | Kayin | Chin | Palaung | Pa-oh | Burmese | Shan | Wa | others | Akha | Grand Total |
| Kachin |  |  |  |  | 6 |  |  |  |  | 6 |
| Sagaing |  | 1 | 2 |  | 25 | 1 |  |  |  | 29 |
| Magway |  |  |  |  | 21 |  |  |  |  | 21 |
| Mandalay |  |  | 2 | 4 | 62 | 2 |  |  |  | 70 |
| Mon | 1 |  |  |  | 9 |  |  |  |  | 10 |
| Yangon |  |  | 1 |  | 41 | 2 |  | 1 |  | 45 |
| Shan (south) |  |  |  | 1 | 3 |  |  | 2 |  | 6 |
| Shan (north) |  |  |  |  | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 |  | 9 |
| Shan (east) |  |  |  |  | 2 |  |  |  | 1 | 3 |
| Ayeyarwady | 2 |  |  |  | 36 |  |  |  |  | 38 |
| Grand Total | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 210 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 237 |

Table 45 - Language of Instruction

Overwhelmingly, teachers used Burmese as the language of instruction however fifteen classrooms used mother tongue instruction with their students.

#### Students with Disabilities

Teachers were asked whether they taught students with disability. Disability was classified very broadly under vision, hearing, physical or speech impairment. There was a small but not insignificant number of children falling into each category apart from hearing impairment although the “intellectual” category should be treated with some reservation as principals are not trained to make such diagnoses.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Physical impairment | | | Vision impairment | | | Hearing Impairment | | | Speech impairment | | | Intellectual  impairment | | | Total | | |
| State/Region | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total |
| Kachin | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Sagaing | 1 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 11 | 35 | 50 | 85 | 51 | 59 | 110 |
| Magway | 5 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 14 | 20 | 14 | 34 |
| Mandalay | 6 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 29 | 28 | 57 | 44 | 36 | 80 |
| Mon | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Yangon | 2 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 13 | 12 | 25 | 19 | 18 | 37 |
| Shan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Ayeyarwady | 4 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| **Total** | **19** | **14** | **33** | **10** | **8** | **18** | **4** | **1** | **5** | **30** | **17** | **47** | **89** | **103** | **192** | **152** | **143** | **295** |

Table 46 - Students with Disabilities

### Child Safeguarding

Less than half the teachers (43%) had attended any training on child rights or child protection.

Principals were asked about their child safeguarding approaches and specifically whether they had a child safeguarding policy and code of conduct for teachers. Just under half (49%) had a child safeguarding policy and more than half (67%) had a code of conduct for teachers. The majority of schools (69%) kept records on child safeguarding (although only 65 schools out of the 132 answered this question).

# Discussion & Recommendations

## Discussion

### Crucial Strengths and Challenges

Monastic schools continue to play a relatively small but valuable part of the larger education landscape in Myanmar. The fact that the number of schools has grown since 2012 (although remaining stable for the past three years) indicates that the relevance of schools is not declining despite the government’s introduction of free and compulsory education. Whilst monastic schools continue to provide a viable option for poor families and children in remote communities who otherwise would not have access to school, they are also seen as a preferred option for some parents as they are associated with a parental desire to instil their children with cultural and Buddhist values and, in some cases, because they teach in local language. It is likely, should registration of monastic schools to middle and high school levels be increased, that the number of children attending monastic schools will also increase as many are now forced to enter government schools if they want to continue education beyond the primary level. This continuing relevance and growth potential for the monastic school system, along with the commitment and determination of monks and nuns who are school principals and in positions of leadership, suggests that strengthening monastic education would be a worthwhile investment. The challenge in doing this is knowing where to start and what to prioritise as there are many needs within the system. At the same time, there are many strengths, and it is important to ensure that these are built on in the substantial task of improvement:

1. ***Monastic Schools are Community based.***

The majority of monastic schools are in predominantly Buddhist areas of Myanmar and, therefore, deeply reflect the values and norms of the community. Many schools have been founded by monks or nuns at the request of the community. There is, therefore, a deep religious and cultural connection between the monk, the school and the community which adds a unique element to the idea of education; education not only for skills and knowledge but for values and life. In turn, this underlying energy encourages community support in very practical ways from raising money to school maintenance and even to teachers working for way below the salary and conditions of the state school counterparts.

1. ***Sustainability***

Closely linked with the community-based nature of monastic schools is their long-term sustainability. Monastic schools in one form or another, have been around for more than a thousand years. In their latest iteration (since the SLORC era), they have grown and developed in number and, arguably, in quality. Despite the considerable financial challenges, monastic schools have shown that they can continue to provide a viable alternative to the state school system.

1. ***Independence***

The independence of Monastic schools has enabled education services to be provided in areas where government schools have not been possible and in a way that meets local community needs. Many schools augment their curriculum with subjects needed for students’ vocations or adjust their hours to fit into the needs of students who work. Many schools take on borders in the school compound from distant, often conflict affected areas. Decisions about these types of issues are made by school principals, based on the needs he/she sees in the community, something not possible in the state sector.

1. ***Deep commitment***

Overall, there seems to be a deep commitment to monastic schools. Firstly, by the principal (monk or nun) who starts and manages the school, secondly by the community in which the school is based and thirdly but perhaps most importantly, by the teachers who work in the school, despite often being paid way below their market value and sometimes as complete volunteers.

1. ***Flexibility and Relevance***

Monastic schools, due to their independence and lack of bureaucratic requirements, are able to adapt to local needs through the introduction of extra-curricular classes and activities, changing school hours, trying new teaching approaches etc. The ability to change and adapt means that schools can be much better attuned to the needs of their students and can be ahead in the introduction to new educational ideas.

Somewhat ironically, these strengths also contribute to some of the biggest challenges facing the monastic sector:

1. ***Lack of a clear and united vision for the future of monastic education***

Monastic schools reopened, after many years of closure, in the early days of the SLORC government with a clear agenda; to ensure that poor and disadvantaged children and children in remote areas had access to education. In those days, this goal was enough, and it provided the impetus and inspiration for many monks and nuns to open schools with a shared, although mainly unspoken, unity of purpose. The number of monastic schools grew rapidly but since 2011, reforms in the state school sector and the gradual liberalisation of the educational landscape allowing private schools (some of them very low cost) has meant that the original purpose of the monastic school has greatly diminished. State schools have improved greatly along with the process of democratisation in Myanmar and some of the early deterrents of education that most impacted poor families, such as costs of after school tuition and school fees, are no longer an issue and, therefore, no longer a motivational factor for parents to send their children to monastic schools. Monastic leadership has been slow to respond to this changing environment and this has resulted in some areas of the country, in the closure of schools due to dwindling numbers as parents find more suitable options in state schools or the private sector. A new vision for the monastic sector is required, one that brings together the considerable number of schools around the country with a clearly articulated mandate, rationale and purpose.

1. ***Limited (technical and management) accountability at all levels of the system***

During the SLORC government era, it was advantageous for monastic schools to have limited hierarchical controls. The committee system put in place at that time was more about political oversight and control rather than educational quality and oversight. Since that time, nothing has changed within the system, but a lot has shifted outside: a new curriculum, considerable government investment in state schools, the development of a new set of standards for schools and teachers, and the reformation of the education bureaucracy, with an increased focus on lifting standards and outcomes for students across the country. The same changes have not occurred uniformly in the monastic sector; where change and development has occurred, it has been due to the leadership and vision of an individual monk or nun for his/her school, not for the entire system. National leadership has no infrastructure for the technical support of schools or for holding schools accountable for meeting standards of any sort apart from at a very basic level. Unlike the MoE, there is no national, state/region or township management system, quality oversight or support within the monastic sector. Rather than a system per se, this is more an association of schools, held together by a traditional hierarchy designed to reinforce itself, rather than one designed to grow, develop, improve and maintain its educational relevance.

1. ***Lack of accurate and relevant national or local level educational data***

Only the very basic school data is collected by MoRAC about monastic schools on a national level and even this may be questionable as it is not verified. At the school level, the type of data being kept is inconsistent across schools and the data that is being kept is at an administrative functional level, not data that might inform relevant and interested parties of the educational quality or achievement of individual schools or the system as a whole. Such data is vital to inform school improvement planning and the overall improvement of the monastic sector.

1. ***No national system for teachers’ employment and professional development pathways***

Teachers, although enthusiastic and dedicated to their work, are underpaid and do not have clear professional development pathways within the monastic school system. Many teachers are undergraduates studying at distance university and once they complete their degree, will look for other work. The current stipend system provided by MoRAC is appreciated but it is insufficient, and it encourages schools to have large classes which puts further pressure on teachers. There is no system-wide pay and remuneration system and no pathways set up for promotion at a system level (although individual schools do develop their own approaches).

Whilst the teaching staff in monastic schools was found to be extremely dedicated and often enthusiastic to improve their teaching, the lack of a qualification’s framework (linked to pay and career development) means that many monastic schools are unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing world around them that demands higher and higher qualifications for teachers in order to meet the needs of the 21st Century.

1. ***No standardisation of school systems, policies and procedures***

The school principal (monk or nun) is highly revered in Myanmar and Buddhist culture. In many respects, monks have absolute and unquestionable authority. Whilst this can lead to things getting done (fast) there are some significant disadvantages:

* Questionable transparency around all kinds of decision making within the school;
* No adherence to a set of national policies and procedures that ensure schools meet certain standards and that might, therefore, give confidence to parents, students and school employees;
* The risk that schools which are underperforming are allowed to continue operating without being required to change or improve;
* Dealing with sensitive issues such as child protection become very difficult where it may be to the principal’s benefit to keep things quiet.

Apart from the above, the desk review and the empirical data collection uncovered some crucial findings and issues regarding the monastic school system:

### School financing and financial management

Most schools do not have a yearly budget or a longer-term development and financial plan. They live almost from day-to-day relying on the goodwill of the community and other donors. This has benefitted some schools enormously but, where schools are in poor communities, creates challenges in financial viability. On the whole school principals are not trained in financial management and as monks or nuns, this would be uncustomary. The fact that they are responsible for the financial management of a school, therefore, creates some significant barriers to the development of clear, transparent financial systems and procedures that meet national standards.

On the whole, schools have insufficient funds to be able to run effective education programs. They are continually struggling to support their most vital resource, the teachers. Long term planning is difficult for most schools as they are too focussed on finding money to cover ongoing weekly and monthly expenses.

The data on school running costs that was collected during the survey was confusing. Many schools gave only partial data, and some did not share any financial information at all. To extrapolate properly, therefore, was impossible. The approximate yearly cost of a school from the study was **Kyat 29,248,746**. This was almost about the estimated cost mentioned in the BaKa Master Plan (Kyat 26,250,492). However, the BaKa data looked only at teacher salaries and the cost for boarding students. There are some significant findings whichever data is used though:

1. Teachers are significantly under-payed with an average salary of around Kyat 800,000 per year.
2. Boarding students are a substantial expense for schools. We estimate that around 80% of schools have boarders and at a minimum to feed a child a daily cost of Kyat 1,500 is needed. Across the system there are roughly 48,000 boarding students (around 20%). The total boarding costs across the system, therefore, is over kyat 25,000,000,000. This works out to approximately Kyat 21,000,000 per year per school with boarding students.
3. Most schools do not have budgets and the data we collected only asked costs for a few areas (teacher salaries, boarding costs, teaching costs and school health). There was no exploration of maintenance, recurrent, development of any other kind of costs.
4. There is a significant gap between income from the teacher stipends and the MoE grants (the only government funding provided to monastic schools) and the real costs of running a school. Our data showed that to be around half, meaning that schools had to find the remainder through donations from parents, income generation programs or even by borrowing money. We must assume that the actual costs are more, however, so the real gap in funding is likely to be considerably larger.

### Teachers and Teaching in Monastic Schools

Good teachers are a vital part of a quality education system. From the study it is clear that monastic schoolteachers are often highly motivated and committed, able to integrate new ideas into their teaching and adapt to changes, such as the introduction of the new curriculum. Most monastic schools manage to maintain a reasonable student teacher ratio and few teachers need to manage multi-level classrooms. Some teachers are able to use mother tongue instruction, although none have received formal training in this area. Many teachers have received instruction in the new curriculum and an increasing number have had access to some sort of basic teacher training. Many teachers work in very difficult conditions, some even volunteering their time or teaching in exchange for food and board. Whilst the dedication of monastic schoolteachers is commendable, however, it is not an adequate premise on which to build a long-term professional workforce which is, increasingly, what is required if monastic schools are to remain a viable education option for Myanmar’s children.

It is no longer sufficient for teachers to move straight from the completion of high school (or in some cases not even that) into a classroom and be responsible for the education of twenty young lives; a basic pre-service teaching qualification is required. However, this should only be the beginning of a far more robust system of teacher education and continuous professional development that is integrated with professional development pathways and a salary and benefits structure applied across the entire sector. Individuals wishing to teach in a monastic school need access to a teacher qualification prior to setting foot in the classroom. Ideally this would be an undergraduate degree however, in the short to medium term this is highly unlikely. A shorter six month to one-year teaching certificate or diploma would be a good start. The question is how this might be implemented and enforced and, of course, how to provide the significant financial and systems level implications of this.

Currently there are a number of agencies providing teacher training in the monastic sector, including Phaung Daw Oo, MEDG and Salay Monastic School in Mandalay. Their training programs are based on the Yaung Zin Competency Based Teacher Training Program but have been modified and brought more up to date. Yet there is no system-wide management or academic oversight of the courses.

A system-wide human resource management system could be put in place to ensure that teachers meet required criteria and performance benchmarks. This would be linked to a coherent, national remuneration and professional pathways system within the sector.

In addition to these monastic sector-specific issues, there are other challenges facing the professionalisation of the teaching force, including the view that lower grades are for least qualified teachers and, conversely, that the most important teaching position is in high school.

### Integration with the state education system

Even though the monastic and state education systems, are both theoretically administered by a government ministry the two have little to do with each other. As the state system moves ahead with a new curriculum, new standards frameworks and new professional development programs (both pre and in-service), the monastic sector is being left behind. It is at township level (through the Township Education Office – TEO) where the MoE conducts the majority of its educational development support to state schools and despite the fact that Township Monastic Education Supervision Committees are meant to include the TEO, they seldom meet at all. There are many reasons for this lack of coordination and cooperation; two stand out:

* There are historical trust issues with the government that play out in this relationship;
* There are cultural and religious requirements that make it difficult for TEOs to speak directly and openly to monks about educational quality issues;

These issues multiply up through state/region and to national level. This divide is sometimes addressed by monastic school principals seeking to be more collaborative however, this does not seem to be the norm. Since NESP1, the Ministry of Education has made some significant steps towards addressing some of these issues, including giving access to small grants to monastic schools and ensuring that all schools have access to teacher training for the new curriculum as it is rolled out. However, the lack of formal discussion around educational issues continues and will only cause the deterioration of quality in monastic schools, as the state system moves ahead without them.

### Monks and nuns are leaders but may not be the best educational director of a school

More than half the school principals in the monastic sector are between the ages of 61-68. Thirty-one per cent of school principals have no teaching experience at all and a further 26% have under five years. This means that the majority of schools in the monastic sector are being led by people with no formal education in school administration and educational leadership and no experience in teaching. On the other hand, monks and nuns have shown that they can mobilise community support and create schools out of few resources that have a heart and mission to support vulnerable populations. This is a real conundrum for the monastic sector. Some schools seek to address this by appointing head teachers who manage the educational side of the school, to a degree (as final authority always rests with the monk), but most schools do not. As education becomes increasingly important for the development of the country, schools must provide the highest possible quality of education to their students and this requires qualified educational professionals of all levels of school administration and oversight. Monks may not, in future, be the best school principals, assuming the principal’s responsibility is for the educational standards of the school. However, they are well placed to play to role of patron or school director, where the role is to provide strategic vision and leadership.

### Excellent but limited parental support

Many schools have support from the parents of students and the broader community. In fact, schools rely on this to meet their survival needs. There are sometimes multiple committees within schools (PTAs, School Committees) however essentially, they play similar roles. To a great extent, it seems that the contribution made by parents is as much part of their religious observance as it is part of their desire to support the education of their children. This is, perhaps, why community members with no school aged children continue to support schools. Increasingly, schools are seeing the value of involving parents in other ways, but this is largely due to encouragement from NGO programs. An example of this is the development of child protection committees or responsibility for child protection being integrated into school committees or PTAs.

Given the cultural dynamics, parental involvement is generally confined to carrying out the requests or meeting the needs of the monk/nun principal; parent committees taking on real school leadership roles is uncommon. There is, however, potential for this to happen and, indeed, it has been MEDG’s experience that where school committees have been required to take on leadership or management roles in the distribution of small grants, for example, that these committees have performed effectively.

### Inclusion

Monastic schools, despite their Buddhist foundation, are open to children from all religious and ethnic origin. Schools do not teach religion although some schools run dhamma classes for children on weekends and students who are novice and live within the school grounds undertake the usual religious observances. Most monastic schools are, however in majority Buddhist areas and, therefore, the majority of students are Buddhist. Many parents send their children to monastic schools in order for them to learn Buddhist values.

Girls and boys are equally represented in monastic schools as is the case throughout Myanmar schools. The study did not look deeply into understanding of gender or the impact of gender bias on the way teachers approached their work in the classroom.

Schools had a relatively high appreciation of the needs of disabled students with almost half having wheelchair friendly toilets and facilities. Many teachers had at least some appreciation that children might have some visual, aural, speech or physical impairment. The study did not explore how they dealt with this in the classroom however and this could form the basis of a stand-alone research project.

Monastic schools cater to a large number of children from ethnic areas, particularly Shan State. This is especially true of schools that provide boarding, either through hostels or, more likely, through children becoming novices and living in schools. Palaung children alone make up a substantial part of the monastic school sector (around 10%) with many of these children living away from their homes as novices in Mandalay, Yangon or Sagaing. In some ethnic areas, teachers are able to communicate and teach in local language creating a bond of trust between schools and families. Again, Shan State is a notable example.

Whilst inclusion is ‘happening’ to some degree in many schools, it is not planned, nor is it required through a policy framework or in order to reach a certain school standard. Like many things in monastic schools, the organic nature of a lot of what makes a monastic school good, in this case inclusion, could be complemented by carefully designed policies and procedures applied across the system.

### Children in Difficult Circumstances

Monastic schools have always provided safe shelter and opportunity for children living in difficult circumstances. Traditionally, the way such children have been provided for is through them becoming novice monks or nuns for the duration of their education. The number of novices has increased over the past five years, indicating that the number of children living in risky situations around Myanmar has also increased. There are a number of complex outcomes to this situation. More children become separated from their families and communities and cultures. Whilst the importance of schooling is often recognised by parents, it is difficult to weigh the costs of family and community separation, particularly of very young children, with the value of an education. Yet parents do this frequently and many decide to send their children away to school. Factored into this decision are also the reality of military conflict, the risk of trafficking and the exposure to drug use at an early age. For many children in Myanmar a monastic school is a safe haven and an opportunity for a brighter future. Yet there are also risks associated with this. Life in a monastery may not provide the best results for children and there are numerous studies on institutionalisation of children that attest to the many issues inherent here. There is no easy answer to this situation. The cessation of conflict will be a huge step forward, but it will not be the only one.

### Children with Disabilities

Further study is needed in this area. Whilst teachers and principals seemed to have a growing awareness of the needs of children with disabilities, school policies were not apparent. A considerable number of schools had ensured that certain facilities were accessible (such as toilets and drinking areas) which was a positive sign. There were not many children with disabilities recorded by schools. This could mean a multitude of things, e.g., that there are disabled children in the school but not with obvious disabilities or that disabled children are not being sent to school. It is clear that the understanding of disability and the school system’s approach to disability are limited but that there is likely to be a willingness to improve, given the focus of monastic schools on disadvantaged students in general.

### There is recognition within the system of the need to change

There is a growing realisation from within the monastic system and from government and non-government stakeholders of monastic education (including the MoE) that the monastic school system, whilst it has played a significant role in the past, requires some fundamental reform. Change from within is often the most powerful and sustainable. The emergence of a group of younger monks who are developing long term plans for monastic sector development is extremely positive, made more so by the fact that they have support of state/regional monastic leadership. However, whilst there is an eagerness to modernise the system, the skills and ability to make this happen may lie outside the capacity of the current monastic system leadership. Such change will require, not only technical expertise, but considerable financial support as well.

### Three BIG Challenges

To synthesise the three major challenges facing the monastic school system is simultaneously straightforward yet highly complex. The first challenge is money; there is simply not enough of it. School principals are amazing fundraisers and the fact that any monastic school has continued to survive, let alone grow and prosper as many have, is credit to the principal and the community that supports him/her, including the unwavering support of many teachers who often commit to the school on virtually a volunteer basis. The study found that monastic schools barely ‘scrape by’ financially, paying a small salary to teachers, providing living expenses for novices and other boarding students, and supplying the most basic of teaching/learning needs. Beyond individual schools, funding and programming for a professional workforce and system that supports monastic school quality development, simply does not exist.

However, money alone is not the answer, the second BIG challenge is the willingness to change. Previous studies of monastic sector leadership suggest that it is extremely hierarchical and fixed in its ways. A number of initiatives for change have come and gone over the past 15 years, struggling, on the whole unsuccessfully, to bring in new ideas and approaches to development. Essentially, the system put in place by the SLORC in the early 1990’s is the same system that governs monastic schools today and it is out of date and out of synch with the many changes and challenges facing Myanmar in the 21st Century.

The third BIG challenge, given that there is a growing awareness of the need to change in some of the younger monastic school principals, is the lack of skill and understanding of educational systems development. Despite the many challenges facing the system, the monks and nuns that lead it are rightly proud of what they have been able to achieve. Changing the system; growing and developing, must begin from within, and this will require a significant investment (both time and money) in building the capacity of monastic leaders to understand the needs of the coming century and to develop their own plans and directions for the future.

## Recommendations

### General

The following section is broken down into recommendations for major stakeholders. However, there are three general recommendations that are also important, underlying principles for increasing the capacity and quality of the monastic sector:

1. ***Build trust***

When monastic schools were allowed to reopen under the SLORC government, it was with the condition that the SLORC would not provide any money for schools. Monastic school leadership at that time accepted the condition, and perhaps would not have accepted support even if it was offered. From that point onwards, there has been a high degree of autonomy within the monastic system and, arguably, a sense of suspicion or mistrust of anything seen to be emanating from “the government”. This dynamic has impacted the relationship the monastic system has with MoRAC and with MoE. Whilst recent changes have smoothed relationships to a great degree, there is still a need to find ways to build trust and mutual respect amongst the three parties. Findings from this study are not sufficient to make specific recommendations on how this might be done, however, ***appointing a sympathetic yet neutral body to facilitate a series of high-level dialogues designed to bring these relationships to an effective working state, would be of significant value***.

1. ***Maintain the autonomy of the monastic school sector***

A great strength of monastic schools is that they can innovate and are not tied down by the, arguably, restrictive bureaucracy that at times overwhelms state schools. There are numerous examples of monastic schools that have made significant academic and vocational educational advances. These should be recognised, applauded and encouraged to continue.

Whilst at times controversial, having non-state (but state funded) education systems is quite common, e.g., Catholic schools in Australia and charter schools in the US. In resource poor settings, non-state education providers are often better placed to reach poor and marginalised communities and are more cost-effective in doing so (Batley *et al.*, 2008). Monastic schools have shown this to be the case in the past and they continue to operate in areas of unrest as well as supporting students from conflict areas in schools around the country, as boarding students or novices.

The autonomous nature of monastic schools means they are more able to innovate. There are multiple examples around the country where schools have introduced different teaching approaches, complementary educational initiatives including skills and vocational training for example. With the support of MEC and other donors, MEDG has introduced the MeConnect online learning community which has been embraced by monastic schools in the current covid-19 restrictions as a means to provide support to teachers and principals as they seek to continue professional development and to ensure children have access to education.

For all these reasons, it is important that, ***an underlying principle of any change within the monastic system, should be to maintain its autonomy whilst simultaneously, creating ways and means through which monastic schools and the system that manages them, be brought into greater alignment with the systems, standards and policy framework of the MoE***. This means, for example, that training for the use of the new curriculum, should be provided through the monastic sector by qualified experts, or that the monastic sector develops its own capacity to provide pre-service education degrees and diplomas.

1. ***Build on Strengths and build from within***

As highlighted throughout this report monastic schools have many strengths in particular their strong community base, their agility (ability to innovate and adapt) and their commitment to disadvantaged and vulnerable students. In the process of systematising and bringing greater alignment with MoE quality frameworks, it is important that building and reforming the system builds on these pillars and respects the leadership of the monks and nuns that have brought monastic schools to their current state. This means, strengthening the role of the committee system but augmenting it with educational expertise. Detailed recommendations on a possible approach to this is covered below.

### For the leaders of Monastic Education

1. ***Agree upon and implement a long-term strategic plan***

School principals, state/regional and national leaders of the monastic school sector should feel proud of what they have achieved with very little. During times of political and economic challenge, monastic schools have provided safe haven to many children from areas of Myanmar suffering conflict and for poor and vulnerable children in all parts of the country. They should continue to play this role however monastic schools also need clear leadership which includes a long-term education focussed strategic plan. The BaKa Master Plan currently being developed and already tentatively approved by the National Monastic Education Supervision Committee should be considered. Following this plan will require the support of all State/Regional leaders and principals in schools as it will require significant change but for the monastic sector to survive and thrive, change is urgently needed.

1. ***Work with the MoRAC and the Sangha to ensure at least 70% of the budget of the monastic system is covered through the national budget process.***

This is a recommendation for both MoRAC and monastic system leadership. A national budget is required for monastic schools and to cover the costs of an education support infrastructure (see the following recommendation). Monastic schools, whilst independent, sit under the auspices of the MoRAC much in the same way state schools sit under the MoE, yet they have no national budget support. Whilst this was part of the early agreement with the government of the time when monastic schools reopened, the current system is anachronistic and must change. In order to properly fund and support monastic schools a more thorough financial analysis is required of school and system costs. At the same time, fundraising for schools has been a vital part of the rich community support they have received. It is recommended, therefore, that any national budget includes a requirement for schools to continue to raise between 20-30% of their own funds.

1. ***Support the development of State/Regional Education Offices***

A phased introduction of State/Regional Education Offices is recommended. These offices will provide educational technical support and oversight in much the same way as the current Township Education Office does in the state system. Such offices should be staffed by qualified educational and technical specialists and be managed separately to the monastic supervision committee system, although they need to would need to work closely with them. In the same way these State/Region Education Offices would be managed and coordinated through a national office that works at high level to ensure educational quality throughout the system, manage national budgets and ensure that data on the system is collected, analysed and used for budgeting and for improving educational outcomes for students in monastic schools.

1. ***Support the development of a National Monastic Education Office***

A national capacity to support State/Regional Education Offices is recommended. In addition to coordination of the State/Regional Offices, the National Office would be responsible for the development of policies and procedures that would help systematise important elements of the monastic school system, including the promotion of national standards in education and school management. A National Office would be able to engage at senior level with counterparts in the MoE on educational technical matters.

1. ***Strengthen the Capacity of the State/Regional and National Monastic Education Supervision Committees***

The existing Supervision Committee system is tired, but it plays a valuable role for monastic schools. It is recommended that clear roles and responsibilities for the Supervision Committees at all levels are drawn up to focus more on the strategic direction and overall leadership of the monastic system. One significant challenge for the Committees is that they are male dominated. Whilst this is understandable from a religious and cultural perspective, half the population of monastic schools are girls, and the overwhelming majority of teachers are women. Finding some way in which women are represented in the formal management and leadership of the system should be a priority when strengthening the committee system.

1. ***Conduct a thorough Assessment of the Cost of Running a School***

It is vital to have a complete understanding of the true costs of running a school. This is the basic financial unit from which so much else can be planned. It is recommended that a consultant be employed to undertake this task as soon as possible, in order to better inform current planning.

### For School Principals

Schools are the heart of the monastic school system. Up to this point in time, they have struggled and achieved often remarkable results more or less on their own.

1. ***Appoint Head Teachers to manage and direct the educational programs of schools***

An increasing number of monastic schools are already appointing lay teachers to positions of leadership within the school. It is recommended that this practice be applied across all schools with the intention of having a qualified lay head-teacher (or principal) responsible for the school’s educational program. This role would work very closely with the monk or nun responsible for the overall management and leadership of the school who could then be seen as the School Director.

1. ***Continue to develop systems and policies in line with government policy and good practice***

Schools must develop more robust systems and procedures at all levels (financial, management, school safety, educational quality, human resources etc.). It is recommended that national leadership develop clear requirements in this regard and that a training and support program for schools is rolled out across the country over the coming five years. It is then up to the monks and nuns who lead individual schools to ensure that these policies and procedures are put in place.

1. ***Engage parents more in school leadership and decision making***

Monastic schools have long relied upon parental and community support however the way in which this happens is up to the discretion of each individual principal. It is recommended that a more uniform school committee system be developed that clearly identifies the role and responsibility of parents in the support and management of school affairs. A working group of school principals could be brought together to undertake this task within the coming year, and school committees could then be systematised over the coming five-year period.

### For the MoRAC

In general, MoRAC must work with the various levels of the Monastic Supervision Committee system and recommendations should be read with that understanding. Likewise, recommendations made above to monastic leadership and principals, link to those outlined below:

1. ***Provide increased and ongoing national budget allocation for the support of monastic schools and for the development and operation of State/Regional Monastic Education Offices.***

The development of a national budget for the monastic education system would be a huge step towards improving the quality and sustainability of the monastic sector. There are different models for support of complementary education systems around the globe and some of these could be considered for supporting the monastic sector, e.g. the Catholic education system in Australia that receives around 70% of funding from the Australian government, some schools up to 90% depending on the socio-economic status of their students (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). A national budget would, in addition to covering a large percentage of school costs (including teacher salaries) enable many of the other recommendations.

1. ***Increase understanding and collaboration and bring the monastic system into greater alignment with the MoE systems, structures, procedures and policies.***

The inherent autonomy of monastic schools should not lead to compromise in national standards and quality. It is, therefore, imperative that the monastic school system aligns itself with the various standards frameworks being introduced by the MoE. MoRAC staff at National and State/Regional ministry-to-ministry level could play a pivotal role in promoting this alignment. MoRAC, therefore, needs to identify, train and support staff with clear job descriptions focussing on the alignment of the monastic system with the MoE.

1. ***Support the Development of a Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development System***

Coherent with maintaining the autonomy of the monastic system, it is recommended that MoRAC take the lead in developing a teacher training and CPD system to ensure that all monastic teachers have access to pre- and in-service education. Further study is required to articulate the best way to do this, however, the draft BaKa Master Plan that describes a phased introduction of monastic teacher training colleges around the country would be a good starting point.

1. ***Develop and Oversee a National Teacher’s Registry, Advancement and Remuneration System***

Whilst the employment and management of teachers should remain the responsibility of individual schools, it is recommended that all teachers should be registered with a national body responsible for ensuring that teachers meet certain standards. This national body would also be responsible for the development and oversight of a national remuneration system that pegs teacher salary and conditions to qualifications, school role and performance. Individual school principals would need to adhere to these guidelines. The uptake of this recommendation would see the gradual professionalisation of a teaching career within the monastic sector and ensure that all teachers are properly qualified and paid.

### For the MoE

Many of the recommendations made above will require the support or direct involvement of the MoE. However, there are particular ways in which the MoE can support the development of the monastic sector:

1. ***Support the development of a Monastic System capacity to provide pre- and in-service training for teachers***

The opening of teacher training colleges and a continuous professional development system within the monastic sector will require the approval and support of the MoE. All courses for teachers or school administrators should be part of a national qualifications framework that is approved by the MoE or, in the case of university level Diploma or Degree courses, the Rectors Committee. Likewise, teacher training colleges opened within the monastic sector, should be able to meet national standards and seek official MoE accreditation and recognition.

1. ***Develop a dedicated department or unit within the MoE responsible for inter-system planning and collaboration***

Ensuring the alignment of the monastic system and working more closely with monastic system leadership (including assigned staff in MoRAC) will require an expanded capacity within the MoE. Whilst there already is a small unit within MoE responsible for monastic schools, their existence is not well known and their role currently not well articulated. A more robust and influential department or unit needs to be established with a clear Terms of Reference and accountabilities, aimed at ensuring that the relationship between the two systems develops, and that the alignment is progressively planned, implemented and reviewed.

1. ***Work with Monastic Leadership and MoRAC to ensure adequate financing of the monastic sector***

Aiming to cover 70-80% of monastic school and system costs, it is recommended that the MoE include monastic school planning in their yearly budgets. This will build over the coming five years as the monastic system itself gradually reforms, in particular, as State/Region and National Monastic Education Offices are phased in. Along with a national budget, accountability and reporting mechanisms must be put in place to ensure appropriate use of funds.

1. ***Collaborate with the monastic sector to ensure that data from monastic schools is fed into the national education management information system.***

Monastic schools are an integral component of the national education framework and data from monastic schools needs to be included in national systems to record progress and identify challenges as the country moves ahead.

1. ***In the short term, allow the registration of monastic schools that meet criteria to open to middle and high school level.***

Enabling schools to register higher levels of basic education will meet the needs of over 20% of schools that struggle to support students once they leave the primary level. This would significantly benefit students who currently struggle to relocate to attend high and middle schools due to prohibitive costs. Also, it could reduce any associated risk of children leaving home at an early age.

# Implementation Priorities for Monastic Schools

There are many interdependent recommendations above and identifying priorities may not be straightforward however, three priorities should guide the consideration of recommendations:

1. ***Focus on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning***

Good teachers and a positive learning environment are most important for improving outcomes for students. Recommendations listed above that contribute to this are the development of teacher training and continuous professional development along with a national system for pay/remuneration and professional development pathways.

1. ***Develop a State/Regional Education Office Infrastructure***

Schools and teachers need the support of education experts in order to help them meet the quality requirements being introduced to the Myanmar education system. The phased establishment of State/Regional Monastic Education Offices will be the key driver for this.

1. ***Build the Capacity of National Leadership***

It is vital to increase collaboration and cooperation across the main national stakeholders of monastic education; monastic leadership, the MoRAC and the MoE. Each of these entities require support in order for the system to improve and integrate.

# Possibilities for Further Research

There are always areas of possible research from a project like this. Priority areas include the following:

1. ***The benefits and challenges of the monastic school boarding system***

The number of boarding students has increased over the past five years. Boarding students (who are mostly novices) represent a substantial financial cost and more importantly, mean that many children are separated from their families and community. Yet for many, this is the only option for an education, and safety. A clear articulation of the challenges and benefits to this system would help the monastic sector plan more effectively to meet the needs of boarding students and identify ways to reduce this phenomenon.

1. ***The role of community support and the private sector in monastic education***

The ongoing community and private sector support to monastic schools has had a powerful impact on hundreds and thousands of children. Can this be further harnessed for even greater benefit?

1. ***The value and challenges of educational technology in the monastic school sector***

The monastic system has been quick to incorporate educational technology into their schools. Partly this has been driven by external organisations such as the MEDG; however, many teachers and principals now see the value and necessity of educational technology in preparing students for the 21st Century. Research could look at case studies where EdTech has been successfully integrated to provide scalable interventions throughout Myanmar.

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1. A project managed by the World Bank [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The size of the grant depends on the size of the school [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Please note the stipend does not cover the entire salary of a teacher, schools add to this to make a more livable wage [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Held in Naung Taung, Shan State in May 2017 and attended by 90% of school principals [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. It should be noted that there is potentially a high degree of accountability within the Sangha as a monk accused of wrongdoing by his peers could be admonished, expelled from the Sangha or handed over to the secular authorities. This is unusual, however. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Middle schools set up before or during 1998-1999 academic year are recognised along with two high schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. A few State/Regional leaders have not been part of this [↑](#footnote-ref-8)