

SUMMARY

Improving Post-Primary Education Outcomes in Myanmar



Secondary education poses a critical "choke point" in Myanmar's education system and requires reforms of curriculum, teaching, and student assessment.

Overview

Problems with post-primary education pose an increasingly binding constraint to the flow of skills into society and the economy. In particular, secondary education is marked by high rates of student dropout and failure to graduate, leaving the majority of youth without access to most forms of technical and vocational education training (TVET) or higher education.

This study analyzes the issues affecting enrollment levels, grade progression, and exit from education, and provides insights into the links between education quality, management, and attainment.

Analysis in the report principally draws on data from three sources: the Education Management Information System of Myanmar's Ministry of Education; the Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey; and an ADB-funded survey of nearly 800 post-primary and secondary schools of different types in selected townships spanning all states and regions.

Key Findings

The study notes that, despite relative gender parity, gaps across urban-rural and socioeconomic dimensions widen dramatically at the secondary education level. Children from rural families and from poor or otherwise disadvantaged groups are significantly less likely to transition from primary to secondary school or to successfully complete their secondary education.

The analysis demonstrates that "low quality drives low quantity" in Myanmar's education system. In particular:

- While direct costs (e.g., fees) and opportunity costs (household income foregone by a child attending school instead of working) are important, "lack of Interest" is the lead reason for dropout within secondary education. This stems from perceptions that the education offered is not relevant to the real world or finding a decent job;
- Private tutoring fees are the leading component of household spending on education in Myanmar;
- Every year, two-thirds of the minority of youth reaching the end of upper secondary fails the final matriculation exam, leaving them without access to higher education and many forms of TVET.

Other factors that have depressed educational outcomes include:

- The impacts of rote-based instruction and classroom overcrowding which have seen children with weaker academic and socioeconomic backgrounds slip behind and drop out;
- The concentration of secondary schools, higher education institutions, and TVET providers in urban areas, and a lack of needs-targeted stipends, free dormitories, etc.;
- The focus of public TVET provision on multiyear programs targeted at matriculation exam passers, and TVET providers targeting more affluent urban youth and niche skills like computers and languages rather than basic skills.



Rote-based instruction and classroom overcrowding cause children with weak academic backgrounds to drop out. Photo credit: Myo Thame.

Conclusions

The study finds that systemic issues and quality-related challenges have undermined the ability of the education system to equip youth with foundational skills needed in a modern economy. Key reform priorities include:

- Changes to **secondary education** curriculum content, pedagogy, and student assessment to address the "lack of interest" factor and to refocus learning on soft skills;
- Reform of **TVET** to improve relevance to employment and equitably expanding access to courses and programs that provide basic skills to disadvantaged youth;
- Quality and management-related reforms needed in **higher education**;
- Enhancing post-primary education outcomes also requires initiatives to address:
 - supply-side constraints, including expanding secondary school networks to underserved rural areas;
 - demand-side constraints, including through targeted needs-based stipends; and
 - strengthened learning pathways linking general education and TVET.



A relevant curriculum and reformed teaching and student assessment methods are needed to improve Myanmar's secondary education system. Photo credit: Eric Sales/ADB.

Resources

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. 2015. *CESR Phase 2 Supplementary Annex: Updated Analysis of Education Access, Retention, and Attainment in Myanmar, with a Focus on Post-Primary Education*. Consultant's Report. Yangon. (TA 8385?MYA)

See also other ADB-supported inputs to Myanmar's Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), including:

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on the Secondary Education Subsector*. Consultant's Report. Yangon. (TA 8385?MYA)

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. 2014. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on Secondary Education Curriculum, Textbooks, and Learner Assessment*. Yangon.

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. 2014. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on Secondary Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development*. Yangon.

CESR, ADB, and GIZ. 2015. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Subsector*. Consultant's Report. Yangon. (TA 8385?MYA)

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. 2014. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on the Higher Education Subsector*. Consultant's Report. Yangon. (TA 8385?MYA)

CESR, ADB, and Australian Aid. 2014. *CESR Phase 2 Technical Annex on Analysis of the Impact of ASEAN Integration on Labor Markets and Skill Needs in Myanmar*. Consultant's Report. Yangon. (TA 8187?MYA)

Five additional ADB-supported input reports for CESR Phase 1 can be accessed [here](#).

Meet the expert



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Chris Spohr joined ADB in July 2000 after completing his PhD in development economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition to serving as social sector focal point in ADB's resident missions in Myanmar, Spohr's principal country focus has included the People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Philippines, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam. His role spans project-related and analytical work on education, social protection, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDs, poverty, gender, civil society, and ICT.

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