

STUDENTS' ACCESSIBILITY AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION COLLEGES IN MYANMAR

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Abstract: *In Burmese society, access and equity issues continue to manifest in education colleges (ECs) and even at work places, which curtails balanced education development and equal job opportunities across states. This paper provides in-depth understanding of the access and equity issues as well as identifies gaps in management capacities in education colleges in Myanmar. Using trend analysis on nationally representative education statistics data complemented by primary information collected from 4 ECs, the study revealed that students' access to ECs is much centrally determined by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and mostly depends on the matriculation examinations, number of applicants, and the available slots in the ECs. One tenth of students admitted to ECs come from economically disadvantaged families implying that inequities are evident albeit in an ever shifting landscape. There are no initiatives to cater for needy but potential students instead, some social welfare foundations contribute to support those who are poor. The findings suggest that ECs' preparedness for better accessibility and equity is still weak and wanting. The difficulty is further compounded by a centralised system of managing institution affairs that places EC management in a weak position of influence as most decisions and policies are centrally determined.*

Keywords: access, equity, education college, Myanmar

BACKGROUND

In recognition of the crucial role education plays in Myanmar's effort to attain sustainable development and in preparing Myanmar society to be able to face the challenges of the knowledge age as a learning society, the government has laid special emphasis on the education sector and implemented the Special Four-Year Plan for Education in Fiscal Year 2000–2001. This was followed by the implementation of the 30-Year Long Term Education Development Plan in Fiscal Year 2001–2002 with which the Four-Year Plan has been integrated. The Ministry of Education is undertaking the long-term education development plan with the bold vision: To create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the knowledge age. In keeping with this vision of education, the theory and practice of education have undergone discernible change. The whole education system has become more flexible, open and diversified, with learners being given more chance and more choice. According to 1973 University Education Law (Amended in 1998), all the ministries that manage universities in Myanmar must; (a) engender able individuals imbued with outlook and morality commensurate with socialist ideology for the construction of a Burmese socialist society; and (b) engender individuals capable of developing socialist economy, public administration and social undertakings. Although gender is regarded an important issue in education, disparities are still evident both among students and at workplaces. For instance, the admission rate to higher institutions especially education colleges is inequitably biased against males than female students and some states with minority ethnic population in Myanmar republic is disadvantaged in accessing higher education which violates universal human rights. Elsewhere in the world, Yelfign (2001) found that in teacher education and training, there is evidence of wide gender disparity especially in countries where there are more or equal numbers of female and male enrollees. In such circumstances, girls than boys are encouraged to take up and succeed in the teaching profession. In context, culture, language and ethnicity are partly to blame for increased discrimination and poverty in some of the developing countries (Reyes, 2010; Sparks, 1994). In Myanmar, despite the society perception that teaching is noble duty, the profession attracts mostly the females than the male counterparts. On the contrary, whilst most school teachers in Myanmar are females, Township Education Officers and school heads are males. More than 80% of teachers are females (Primary school: 82.4%, Middle school: 88.7%, High school: 86.9%). But female percentage of head teachers are lower (Primary school: 62.5%, Middle school: 54.7%, High school: 68.0%) (Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), 2013a). Given the background, the study is set to address the following objectives: (1) to develop a clear understanding with evidence on access and equity in teacher education,

and (2) to identify gaps in capacities and capacity development needs of the ECs management.

There have been attempts by government to compile general routine statistics on access to tertiary education. But there has been no in-depth analysis on access and equity issues, specifically in teacher education in Myanmar. Therefore, understanding the teacher education issues on access and equity in Myanmar may rejuvenate and trigger the country's long term education development agenda at a time when the country is undergoing dramatic policy reforms in higher education. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section two provides a snapshot on access to teacher education from international perspective, section three presents the data and methods employed for achieving the study objectives, section four presents and discusses the findings, and section five concludes.

ACCESS TO TEACHER EDUCATION FROM INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

From regional perspective of the ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Lao PDR, Indonesia, and Cambodia, teacher education and specifically teacher professional development has attracted attention in the education arena. This was a global call to address the need of quality teachers required in education “massification” around the world as a result of the EFA and MDGs, and now the SDGs. It was a necessity in universal education to provide adequate and quality teachers necessary to meet the demand of current education trends. This implies that globally, teacher education just like basic education has undergone certain transformations. In this new era of universalisation of teacher education, becoming an effective teacher requires more than developing socio-political awareness and teaching skills. Moving from theory to practice also requires the courage to create institutions that look very different from those we have now (Kugelmass, 2000). For instance in Thailand, teacher education has undergone dramatic changes during the past two to four decades reflecting major global trends in massification, privatization, and internationalisation. There has been universalisation of higher education with over 150 higher education institutions (both government and private) and community colleges (UNESCO, 2008; UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2011). Besides, the ratio of female to male student teachers as well as teacher educators is neither underscored especially in the ASEAN countries.

Gender equity in teacher education is a logical and vitally important factor for examining key issues that impact schooling and education outcomes especially in the situation of universal education, as a global concern (e.g., Oswald, Best,

Coutinho, & Nagle, 2003). Other scholars have noted that multicultural education has become a thriving component of teacher education nationwide (e.g., Kaur, 2012; Sanders, 2002). According to UNESCO (2012), in order to address the gender disparity in teachers, and thereby contribute to the chance of girls' enrolment and success, one has to ensure that teacher development policies are gender responsive, in that they address the gender issues that constrain men and women from getting trained as teachers and progress in their career. It is with this in mind that the current assessment on access and equity of teacher education and training was conducted.

DATA AND METHODS

A range of data was collected and analysed using mixed methods. Document review was conducted to identify gender and inequity issues in teacher education from national and international perspective. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from four (4) Education Colleges (ECs) purposively selected from 20 ECs among Myanmar's five states and nine administrative units. The selected institutions are: Yankin EC in Yangon region (lower region, founded in 1947), Mawlamyaine EC in Mon State (south region, founded in 1953), Pakokku EC in Magway region (central region, founded in 1982), and Hpa-an EC in Kayin State (South region, founded in 1996).

The key respondents were the 4 EC principals, 8 vice principals, 12 teacher educators, 84 student teachers, 4 township education officers as well as 6 officials from Department of Education Planning and Training (DEPT) as presented in Table 1. The majority of the respondents were largely student teachers (71.2%) and teacher educators (10.2%) selected based on proportion to size of the EC enrolment as well as using stratified simple random sampling. The rest of the respondents were key informants selected purposively.

Data collection tools targeting each of the EC stakeholders were developed, mainly to capture information on enrolment by course of offer, year of registration and student gender. Further information regarding perceptions, experiences as well as opinions on student access and equity issues were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and key informant interview guides. The quantitative data was subjected to trend analysis complemented with computations on admission and reporting rates as measures of internal efficiency. The analysis further decomposed the data by gender, courses offered, year of study as well as ethnicity of the EC students using the percentage and frequency distributions. On the other hand, content analysis was employed on qualitative data.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents by gender and college of study

Type of respondent	Yankin		Mawlamyaine		Pakokku		Hpa-an		Total (%)
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Principal	1	0		1	1	0	1	0	3.4
Vice Principal	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	6.8
Teacher Educators	0	3	1	2	0	3	2	1	10.2
Student teachers	10	11	10	10	9	14	10	10	71.2
Township Education Officers	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3.4
DEPT									5.1
Total									100

Note: M = Male; F = Female; DEPT = Department of Education Planning and Training

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Enrolment Trends, Application and Acceptance Rates

This section presents enrolment trends in the past five years (2008/09–2012/13) for the four ECs (Table 2). The results indicate relatively stable enrolment trend in Pakkoku and Hpa-an ECs but declining trends among female students in Yankin and Mawlamyine ECs. Apart from Hpa-an EC, which is a girls' Teacher College, the other three colleges are co-educational.

From the background data, teacher training colleges in Myanmar were upgraded in 1998 to the level of education colleges, and pre-service training courses were expanded. As a result of upgrading Education Colleges, pre-service training courses such as Diploma in Teacher Education (DTEd) were offered to those who have passed the matriculation examination and the Diploma in Teacher Education Competency (DTEC) courses catered for university graduates. The JATC program was also launched in some selected ECs to train students in junior certificate teaching through distance learning complemented with face-to-face sessions. Upon successful completion of the course, the graduates are appointed as primary school teachers.

Apart from Pakkoku EC with low enrolment (because it is among the two ECs located in Magway region-upper Myanmar), all the other three ECs have relatively high and increasing enrolments. Even in terms of status, the Pakkoku EC is ranked low compared to Mawlamyine. This is partly because Yankin EC enjoys city status (i.e., Yangon region), while Mawlamyine and Hpa-an are the only ECs in Mon

Table 2. Students' enrolment trend in the past five years for the 4 ECs

Year	CTEd-1st year		DTEd-2nd year		DTEC		JATC		Total		% of male
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Mawlanyine EC											
2008/09	70	112	90	147	3	153	12	327	175	739	19.1
2009/10	99	59	59	106	12	139	17	301	187	605	23.6
2010/11	109	160	97	58	8	158	28	349	242	725	25.0
2011/12	65	170	83	101	9	156	4	189	161	616	20.7
2012/13	74	188	58	166	46	152	9	126	187	632	22.8
Pakkoku EC											
2008/09	39	108	68	132	18	121			125	361	25.7
2009/10	52	85	39	101	22	156			113	342	24.8
2010/11	38	116	48	81	17	156			103	353	22.6
2011/12	41	108	38	107	19	171			98	386	20.2
2012/13	59	166	38	96	36	71			133	333	28.5
Yankin EC											
2008/09	94	114	77	272	25	227	68	477	264	1090	21.9
2009/10	77	89	87	113	26	151	56	472	246	825	23.8
2010/11	78	85	75	87	35	176	26	597	214	945	18.5
2011/12	71	84	75	83	22	145	16	88	184	400	31.9
2012/13	82	85	69	81	99	120	4	318	254	604	35.9
Hp-an EC											
2008/09	0	227	0	170	0	154			0	551	0.0
2009/10	0	170	0	157	0	144			0	471	0.0
2010/11	0	157	0	158	0	139			0	454	0.0
2011/12	0	199	0	157	0	236			0	592	0.0
2012/13	0	269	0	197	0	158			0	624	0.0

Source: Created by authors based on survey data (2013)

state and Kayin state, thus making EC admissions to be competitive, which partly disadvantages able but poor students to join access to the teaching profession (UNESCO, 2012). In addition, the evidence from the four ECs show that admission to fulltime courses in teacher education colleges in Myanmar have been relatively constant over the past five years partly because of limited facilities and funding to the ECs.

For instance in Mawlanyine EC, student enrolment to full time courses (i.e., CTED, DTED, and DTEC) has been constant with most students being admitted to certificate in teacher education and diploma in teacher competency courses, but with gradual decline in admission to Junior Teacher Certificate in Correspondence Course (JATC). As a correspondence course, the JATC is hosted by selected ECs as coordinating centers. In this particular case, only Mawlanyine and Yankin ECs offer this study program. The enrolment trend for JATC indicates that admission rate was high in academic year 2010/11 but suddenly declined in the following year (2011/12), partly because of the small number of applicants and the limited ECs resources. The enrolments to Pakkoku EC have been relatively stable and low especially for male students compared to females. Moreover, there is greater number of female graduates attending DTEC as compared to few male counterparts, which finding was also noted in JICA (2013a) report that emphasizes the need to engender teacher education in access, training and deployment.

Gender Issues in Access to Teacher Education

In Myanmar, gender issues in Teacher Education continue to manifest themselves, albeit in an ever-shifting landscape. Gender parity, for example, continues to be a concern. According to data collected from Mawlanyine, Pakkoku and Yankin ECs, the ratio of male to female is just 1:4. This quantitative measure indicates that females are overrepresented in teacher education, particularly in education colleges which may partly have an impact on schooling and education outcomes in basic education. As noted by Sanders (2002), equity in education is pertinent at all levels as a global concern which would also suggest that attention to gender issues should be infused into both pre-service and in-service teacher education across all disciplines and levels (Oswald et al., 2003).

It can also be stated that in Myanmar education policy, gender equality has been promoted, but at low pace, where there is a right to education for every citizen without discrimination of sex—either general education or professional—at their will. In basic education, the gender parity is in favour of the females with national enrolment figures indicating that females outnumbered their male counterparts, and they have steadily increased their numerical advantage over time. This is due

to the fact that Myanmar families give emphasis on education as assurance of a good livelihood for their daughters (JICA, 2013b). Apparently, although the government's education policy "Education for All" occupies greater area for girl students and has wider scope for promotion of education standard of girl students, there is a need to devise mechanisms to encourage the male students in the teaching profession. What was observed from the four ECs is that enrolments to DTEC and JATC fluctuate year in and year out. The factors relating to the above issues, especially for the correspondence course, probably could be gender, years of services, location of schools, positions or ranks, teaching experience, economic difficulties, travelling, time arrangement, family and results of studying.

Application and Acceptance Rate in the ECs

Like in any education level, not every student who expresses interest for a particular course can be accepted, but only after satisfying certain admission criteria that is when a student can be admitted in the EC. In Myanmar's education system, all admissions to education colleges are centrally managed by DEPT in collaboration with EC principals and vice principals. The selection of the students is usually dependent on the state/region, the matriculation examination marks, number of applicants as summarised in Table 3.

In most cases, medical or general physical fitness tests are conducted on students upon admission to the EC. The students with physical disabilities and other sicknesses (e.g., mental illness) are not admitted to the EC. Given these criteria, there is also a ceiling on admission slots based on the available EC infrastructure and teaching resources. Results from Table 3 indicate that admission or acceptance rate to CTEd and DTEd courses is high (>80%) in Mawlanyine EC as compared to Pakkoku EC, which is very low ($\leq 15\%$). Two issues arise from this scenario; first is that there are a high number of applicants to Pakkoku EC though just a few of them are admitted. This implies that most of the applicants are edged out because of competition and/or the EC facilities are not adequate for a large number of students. It is also clear from the results that almost all students admitted to all courses in ECs actually register at the ECs for study and there seems to be high attendance rates registered in Mawlanyine EC (than other ECs) for all the four courses. On the other hand, nine for every 10 students admitted for DTEC actually report in Pakkoku EC.

Table 3. Trends on number of applicants and acceptance rate by course

Course	2011/2012				2012/2013					
	Applied	Admitted	Reported	Adm. rate (%)	Report rate (%)	Applied	Admitted	Reported	Adm. rate (%)	Report rate (%)
Mawlanyine EC										
CTEd	909	290	237	32	82	1680	287	262	17	91
DTEd	187	185	184	99	99	227	224	224	99	100
DTEC	730	172	167	24	97	1076	201	198	19	99
JATC	237	196	193	83	98	151	135	135	89	100
Pakkoku EC										
CTEd	1590	238	225	15	95	1114	167	149	15	89
DTEd	134	134	134	100	100	145	145	145	100	100
DTEC	846	116	107	14	92	1356	204	190	15	93
JATC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: Created by authors based on survey data (2013)

Opinion and Discussion on Enrolment and Competitiveness of the EC Participation

The high held view from majority (78%) of the respondents was that the decision to admit new students is centralised and the authority is vested in DEPT. There was majority opinion that though male students' enrolments are low compared to their female counterparts, the trends are increasing over the years. Opinions from respondents indicated that traditionally in Myanmar, teacher education is regarded as a noble duty but has been of less preference to males than females. One explanation was that the incentive structure in teaching service is low, which makes the teaching profession less attractive to males. Instead, most Myanmar male students opt for training in lucrative jobs such as in political, economic, administration, judicial and social spheres according to the law. The EC admission process and rewards to the teaching profession seem to be favourable to female applicants and the quality of admitted students may not be so guaranteed.

The field findings also indicate that DEPT is not only at the centre of every step in the admission process, but its dominance renders the EC involvement minimal. Having a collaborative arrangement between the EC and DEPT in the admission process cannot be understated since the ECs bear the greater burden of hosting and training the students. The latter arrangement can assist both EC and DEPT to make projection on enrollments based on available resources, and improve on admission criteria or system especially by addressing equity issues in access to the teaching profession. There was general opinion that since matriculation examination marks are used as major criterion at admission, quite often students from remote area, who often score low examination marks, are disadvantaged.

Regarding gender issues in teacher deployment, due to the need for male teachers, selection criteria for males are slightly lower than that for females as a way to interest male job applicants and therefore reduce the gender gap. At every school visited, more than 80% of teachers are female. The fact that male students only see female teachers in their schools also reinforces this view and may further discourage males to consider teaching as a desirable job for them. On the other hand, management positions, which tend to be occupied by more male than female teachers, are also not a fair representation of gender roles and responsibilities as there is no strong reason for male teachers, than female to be more suitable as head teachers (JICA, 2013b).

Equity Issues in Access to ECs

Ethnicity and region disparities in access to education colleges

The terminology ethnicity in the field of race is very sensitive because it carries with it the notion of cultural distinct values. Ethnicity from multicultural point of view denotes its contested and socially constructed nature (Gillborn, 2002). In Myanmar, ethnic minorities constitute about 15% of the total population, while two-thirds of people live in rural areas (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2011). Desk review findings reveal that most dominant groups around urban centers like Yangon have an effect on the social set up, resources distribution, economic advantage and overall economic development of Myanmar. The Myanmar government has responded to the ethnicity issues holistically. The government has introduced the University for the Development of the National Races (UDNR) to provide education to the minority ethnicity races. Similar initiatives have been launched in basic education as well as education colleges where inter-cultural factors are sometimes considered in admission to ECs, in favour of the minority and the poor. To better prepare teachers in such a multi-ethnic society, teacher education programs must be comprehensive to provide opportunities for discussion and debate around the issues of race, ethnicity and the disadvantaged.

In Myanmar, there are some regions/states without ECs. For example, Chin and Kayah states lack teacher education colleges, and students from these two states are admitted to ECs in other regions/states. For instance, students from Chin state are admitted in Pakkoku EC located in Magway region. This could be one reason why the number of applicants to this EC is quite high with just 15% acceptance rate as discussed in the previous section. Moreover, Yankin EC is located in Yangon region but admits students from other states—from Yangon region and the other three regions (e.g., Bago Region, Mon State, and Kayah State) as illustrated in Table 4. Generally, it is noted that apart from Hpa-an EC that admits students from Kayin state, the other three ECs admit students from several states or regions. Thus, it is possible that students from different states or hometowns find it difficult to not only attend schooling in other states but also make a decision to further their education at an EC in a different state. This challenge is so evident to students in not only learning but also during practicum teaching where the language used in school is different from that used in the home state.

Table 4. Students enrollment by course, gender and region/state of origin (in 2012/2013)

Region/State	EC	CTED		DTED		DTEC		JATC		% of male
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Mandalay Region										
Magway Region ¹	PK			30	74	15	46			27.3
Sagaing Region										
Kachin State										
Shan State										
Chin State ¹	PK	59	166	8	22	21	25			29.2
Kayin state ^{2/3}	MW	43		29		38		4	60	18.9
	HP	0	270	0		0	160	0	0	
Thaninthaye Region										
Bago Region ⁴	YK	64		44		39	20			88.0
Mon State ^{2/4}	MW	30	186	29	166	7	150	5	66	10.4
	YK		45							
Rakhaine State										
Ayeyawady Region										
Kayah State ⁴	YK	18		5		2	28			47.2
Yangon Region ⁴	YK		40	20	81	41	57			25.5

Note: PK- Pakkoku; MW- Mawlamyine; HP- Hpa-an; YK-Yankin
 Source: Created by authors based on survey data (2013)

Gender and economic disparities in access to teacher education

From a gender perspective, based on the analysis from the four ECs, it can be noted that male students' enrolments across the regions/states of Myanmar are still low but beginning to rise partly because in some ECs, male students' entry requirements are sometimes lowered relative to their female counterparts. It can be noted that students admitted in Mawlanyine EC for CTed, DTed, and DTEC are all male students possibly because male students from Kayin state cannot be admitted in Hpa-an EC and instead opt for Mawlanyine EC as the closest EC. It is worth noting that Bago region with two ECs (i.e., Taungoo EC and Pyay EC) sends most of the male students in Yankin EC.

However, according to Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) (2013) report, male and female trainees who apply to attend education college pre-service teacher education diploma course are selected at a 1:3 ratio based on their high/low matriculation examination scores. In selecting students from districts, states, and regions, home-based ethnic groups are picked up. In selecting trainees for BEd (Direct Intake) course, students are chosen according to their high/low matriculation marks. To balance out the male and female ratio, males who achieve lower scores than females are given priority. In Pakkoku EC, the gender balance is about 1:4 (male: female) and there was a common view that selection of the students should be based on the appropriate ratio of the number of male applicants in each region. Besides, special incentives should be provided to attract more male applicants albeit not necessarily economically disadvantaged students.

Children and more specifically students with disability in Myanmar are found to be economically, socially, and educationally disadvantaged (MoNPED, 2012). Almost half the people with a disability never attended school compared to the national average enrolment rate of 84%, and only 2.2% of people with disability had completed university education, compared to 12% of the non-disabled population. This study found out that there are no disability cases in the teaching profession, largely due to the current regulations that prohibit disabled students from joining the teaching profession.. Some areas have higher rates of disability among children than others, notably Mon and Kayin states, and in Ayeyarwaddy and Tanintharyi regions. As much as 60% of childhood disabilities are likely to be affected by intellectual or hearing impairment. In the absence of more comprehensive data, it is reasonable to conclude that a very large number of disabled children have not yet been included in education. Although this information refers primarily to adults, it is a strong indication of the future opportunities of children with disabilities.

The study sought information on the proportion of students in the ECs with economically disadvantaged homes. It was found that generally different ECs have different proportions of economically handicapped students. For instance, the study found that in Mawlanyine EC, approximately 10% (or less) of students comes from economically disadvantaged homes which are out of the study districts. More than 50% of the students from Pakkoku EC come from rural homes that are also characterised in the bottom poor. Moreover, 26%–50% of students from Yankin and Hpa-an ECs are economically disadvantaged. These proportions indicate the variability in economic well-being of not only students but also their families. On the other hand, it was established that Mawlanyine, Pakkoku, and Yankin ECs all have approximately 26% to 50% of students who come from economically affluent district homes as compared to Hpa-an with a relatively small proportion (i.e., 11% to 25%).

Current Programs and/or Initiatives for Students in Difficulties

Apart from general bursaries offered to all students, currently there are no programs or initiatives in place to support students who are economically handicapped and/or with learning difficulties such as disability cases. The results from the key informant interviews indicated that even though there are no clear measures to increase male students or support students from economically disadvantaged families, currently each student teacher receives a stipend of 10,000 Kyats per month (to cater for breakfast and dinner) from the government, and the respondents think this stipend is just enough. With regard to students from poor families, there are some education foundations like NGOs that support such students. Some respondents revealed that ECs have a system of stipend to support economically troubled students but in most cases students do not apply to benefit from such an incentive. The other side of the incentive is that it provides too small of an amount, and there is a condition of having to serve at least about 10 years for the government.

In some instances, the EC principals mobilise support from their offices or from teachers and students and provide such assistance to the needy students; in most times these are rare cases. Generally, on case-by-case basis, the EC can support students financially by collecting money and providing some in-kind support from teachers and students. There is anticipation from respondents that since government may not be in position to address all the EC challenges and needs in this current centralisation system. There would be need for public-private partnership framework where community participation in the management of the EC should be encouraged. For instance, they felt the need for support from education foundations such as NGOs, EC community and private sector. The respondents recommend donations in form of teaching materials and staff trainings from NGOs, under streamlined and/or decentralised arrangement.

Readiness Preparation for Better Accessibility and Equity

The importance of gender and ethnicity as a social identity cannot be underscored because of its influence on individual's educational experiences. Thus the attention to equity issues in teacher education is regarded a logical and important place for examining key issues that impact students' learning outcomes. The study results indicate that the readiness preparation for the ECs to address accessibility and equity issues may be somewhat complicated. The centralised system of managing EC affairs puts EC management in a weak position of influence. For instance, according to the standing regulations, the mandate to admit students (either by gender, ethnicity, and course) is vested in DEPT with little influence from EC management. Besides, the policies on EC development implementation and funding are under direct control of MOE and DEPT. In the absence of teacher policy as a regulatory framework to guide teacher training, there is minimal effort by the ECs to better prepare for accessibility and equity in teacher education.

It was established from the survey that other problems encountered in teacher education also stem from basic structural factors. Case in point is the inadequate investment in infrastructure development as a key strategy to increase EC readiness, and incentive has put the teacher education system at a disadvantage. In addition, teacher competence is directly related to the quality of education colleges. These institutions struggle with challenges such as inadequate skills in pedagogical teaching, poor facilities, equipment and information resources, overcrowded curricula and lack of supervision. School management is insufficiently geared towards achieving quality in teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

This investigation was set out to examine students' accessibility and equity issues in teacher education in Myanmar. Specifically, the study established an in-depth understanding of access and equity issues in teacher education, and identified gaps in management capacities and highlighted mitigating measures that would provide a path for the way forward, primarily in terms of capacity development needs and other support for teacher education reform. The study found that students' access to teacher training in education colleges is much centrally determined by the DEPT. The admission rate mostly depends on the matriculation examinations, number of applicants, and the available slots in the ECs implying that access to EC education is really competitive and prohibitive to students with physical disabilities and other sicknesses (e.g., mental illness). It was further noted that gender and equity issues continue to manifest, albeit in an ever shifting landscape and gender issues

need to be infused across all disciplines and levels in teacher education. About one tenth of students come from economically disadvantaged families, and there are no initiatives to cater for students in difficulties; instead, some social welfare foundations contribute to support those who are poor or gifted. All these suggest that EC preparedness for better accessibility and equity is still weak and wanting, and the difficulty is further compounded by a centralised system of managing EC affairs that places EC management in a weak position as most decisions and policies are under the direct control of the MOE and DEPT.

Handling access and equity issues at the ECs require multifaceted approaches. For instance, the provision of infrastructure and other teaching resources should be improved to avail more learning opportunities to those who need teacher training. Besides, to make the teacher profession attractive to male compared with female students, it may require not only the ongoing initiative of lowering EC entry requirements for males but also selecting EC students based on the appropriate ratio of number of male applicants in each region. Regarding regional equity, equalising opportunities to access to teacher education is necessary; the government should consider establishing ECs in all states/regions taking into consideration the socio-demographic features as well as evaluating the demand versus supply of teachers in the regions/states. Considering that Myanmar has the ratified Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, this means that some impairment cases that do not distract teaching should be forgiven and accepted in the ECs. Finally, given the nature of professional development in teaching career, students' quality of education ought to be tested at several levels. For instance, instead of focusing on matriculation scores only, aptitude and attitude tests should also be administered to every applicant before the final selection for admission to the ECs.

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