



SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS:

A STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL, INTERPERSONAL,
AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO EQUALITY
IN KAYIN STATE





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ABOUT AD

Another Development (AD) is a local Myanmar non-profit organization. AD's work focuses on five main thematic areas: Human Rights, Multiculturalism, Decentralization and Federalism, Rural Economic Development and Social Enterprises, and E-Government and E-citizen. AD was set up in 2015 to be part of the solution to the problems and conflicts prevailing in Myanmar by advocating for effective public policy change. AD has four functional departments: Strategic Communication; Policy and Research; Consulting and Professional Services; and Operation Support Department.

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■ ABBREVIATION/ACRONYM

AD	-	Another Development
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
DERPT	-	Department of Education Research, Planning and Training
KHRG	-	Karen Human Rights Group
LGBT	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MoE	-	Ministry of Education
MoPF	-	Ministry of Planning and Finance
NEL	-	National Education Law
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	-	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Funds
OHCHR	-	Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report aims to identify barriers to social inclusion in Myanmar's middle schools. It first explores how teachers and students perceive diversity and issues of social inclusion, and, likewise, how they experience these issues. It additionally examines initiatives and other interventions that can be put in place to address diversity and social inclusion. The study upon which this report is based was conducted in middle schools (grades 5 and 6), from December 2019 to December 2020. Through face-to-face surveys, focus groups, and structured interviews with teachers and students in Kayin State Government schools this research aimed to understand barriers to social inclusion in schools.

The findings of this research reveal the perceived barriers and systemic hurdles that prevent social inclusion in the schools of Kayin State. The following are important highlights from the study's findings:

Biases as Barriers to Social Inclusion in Kayin State Schools:

- Verbal harassment was found to be a commonly occurring phenomenon in school environments, with the nature and form of verbal harassment and bullying differing, but most often focused on cultural identity, ethnicity, skin colour, physical appearance and language fluency.
- The views of students and teachers were also inflected by perceived differences between men and women, with both teachers and students expressing the belief that women are inferior to men.
- Knowledge of the ways in which these biases interact with sexual identity and the concerns of LGBT individuals and communities is not well recognized in the school environment, with information about sexual identity and orientation rarely discussed amongst students and the teachers.
- Topics related to interpersonal differences and that had undertones, allusions, or references of a sexual nature are particularly challenging for teachers to discuss in the classroom.

Systemic Hurdles to Social Inclusion in Myanmar's Education System:

- Within schools, while there are some limited attempts to celebrate differing cultural and religious identities, there remains a lack of a proper educational strategy for imparting value of and respect for different cultures, practices, norms, and customs.

- Proper mechanisms for minimizing harassment, including anti-bullying programs, are rarely found in schools, with the responsibility for responding to harassment falling most often on individual teachers or independent teachers' initiatives

To promote social inclusion in educational settings, the following initiatives are recommended:

- 1) An approach focused on teaching human rights in schools could establish a classroom environment that is more inclusive and responsive to student and teacher concerns. Teaching human rights at schools will promote a shared culture of equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, and participation (Amnesty, 2017). Teachers play an important role in delivering knowledge as well as in nurturing respect for different values and practices (Brett, Mompoin-Gaillard & Salema, 2009). In order to deliver a human rights education, firstly, teachers must be aware of the rights and responsibilities of the child, and relevant knowledge related to international human rights frameworks – such as United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should be taught to students. Secondly, the teachers should be required to adopt a positive attitude towards human rights, one that would enable them to develop a non-discriminatory classroom in which rights are respected, in practice, by all. A non-discriminatory classroom would additionally involve teachers encouraging students to practice their own rights as well as protect others'.
- 2) School lessons emphasizing a cultural perspective could support an inclusive education. Content related to ethnic and cultural diversity should be included in schools' mainstream textbooks with more depth and frequency. The inclusion of ethnic and cultural perspectives in supplementary educational materials such as in visual aids, storybooks, games, and so forth, could also be a way to teach cultural diversity. In addition, using ethnic stories, literature and other materials illuminating ethnic perspectives in school lessons could be an option for diversity friendliness and thus, for inclusive education. This can encourage cultural interaction between students and can improve knowledge and understanding about students' differing cultural perceptions.
- 3) Teachers should attempt to encourage positive interactions and relationships among students through cooperative learning, which could provide students further opportunities to interact and collaborate with their classmates in pursuit of a shared goal.
- 4) A "whole school" approach could also be considered as a mechanism to intervene in cases of bullying at schools. This approach involves the participation of individual students, teachers, parents, and representatives from schools' sur-

rounding communities and should include the following prevention-related and responsive actions:

- **Preventative actions:** A working group, committee, or team should be formed with representatives of teachers and parents, which would then take the leading role in establishing policies and best practices for addressing bullying at school. Teachers could then be assigned to monitor classrooms, playgrounds, and other environments in schools' surrounding areas. Additionally, a monitoring group of students and teachers could be formed to prevent bullying, fighting and other forms of misconduct from happening in the classrooms and school compound. In doing so, however, it is equally vital to encourage every student, regardless of membership in the monitoring group, to report the cases of bullying. This should be done by providing clear information on the procedure for reporting bullying (including where and to who students can report) and for recording reported cases.
- **Responsive actions:** To respond to a student participating in bullying, teachers may, for example, issue an oral warning, call a student's parents/guardians, give detention, or deny them permission to attend classes for a short period, up to suspension from school. Another approach, however, could focus on restoring peace and justice amongst students rather than punishing them. In this latter approach, victims' safety should be ensured, and they could be encouraged to express their experience. Equally, the bully must also become aware of how they have affected others and should be encouraged to do better, and apologize for the damage they caused.

INTRODUCTION

Different forms of discrimination—including discrimination against women, LGBT-identified individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minority groups—have been reported across different sectors of Myanmar society. **Gender stereotypes against women** have been shown to be rooted in religious, cultural, political, and customary practices in Myanmar (GEN & Global Justice Center, 2016), with the traditional perception of women being one that emphasizes childbearing and family caretaking. Even so, social norms and stereotypes depict women as weak and incapable of making decisions in the family, while the wider society has limited women's ability to participate in public life and politics (ibid). Additionally, **discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)** groups is often found in the media, on social media platforms, and in public spaces. LGBT people are looked down on by society and often report being mocked or embarrassed in public (Myint & Htwe, 2017). **People with disabilities** experience various forms of exclusion and discrimination in Myanmar, both within their families and in their broader communities. One of the major challenges faced by people with disabilities is a lack of access to formal education and other vocational training programs (Myanmar ICT Sector-Wide Impact Assessment, 2015), with the 2014 census reporting that 67% of disabled children are not in the formal education system and do not attend school (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014). This lack of access to education is reported to have an impact on discrimination in the workplace, as people with disabilities do not receive the necessary skills for future employment (Myanmar ICT Sector-Wide Impact Assessment, 2015).

Minority ethnic groups have also been discriminated against through the undermining of their culture, education, language and historical narratives (Amnesty, 2017). There are 135 officially recognized ethnic groups in Myanmar and almost 70% of the population is from the dominant Bamar ethnic group (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014). As a result of ethnic armed conflicts, members of ethnic minority groups are often victims of war crimes including human rights violations, abuses, and torture (Amnesty, 2017). Among these conflicts, the long-term civil conflict between ethnic insurgent groups and the Burmese military in Kayin state has resulted in the region lagging behind other areas in Myanmar. At the forefront of this conflict have been human rights abuses, many of which have occurred particularly in Kayin State's rural remote areas which persist outside of the control of the government. As a result of these multiple factors, the education system in Kayin is also less developed than in other regions, is uniquely marked by sensitivity to threats, intimidation, and surveillance given the experiences of vulnerable stakeholders living alongside the several armed groups operating in Kayin.

With these dynamics in mind, from December 2019–December 2020, Another Development (AD) carried out a study focused on the current situation of the social inclusion in the public education system, specifically targeting seven middle schools in Kayin state. In response to the study's findings, AD has also provided recommendations for further study and reflections on the resulting implication for Kayin State schools. As such, this paper is divided into five parts. The first section summarizes the situation in Myanmar's education system before turning to a literature review that establishes the importance of social inclusion in schools. The paper's second section discusses the background of Kayin State and, in the third section, the study design is explained in further depth. The fourth session discusses the study's findings, and the results gathered from the targeted schools of Kayin State. The final section provides recommendations related to the implementation and support of social inclusion-oriented programming already existent in Myanmar's current system of public schools.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MYANMAR THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MYANMAR AND CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL INCLUSION

Myanmar's education system was known as being among the best in Asia after the country achieved independence from the British in 1948 (Htwe, 2018). However, the quality of Myanmar's education system declined after the military government took power in 1962. The total government expenditure on the education sector had consistently fallen since the 1970s (ibid) and as a result of this under-spending on education, Myanmar has seen low school enrolment and completion rates, poor learning outcomes, and inequalities in access to education (Hayden & Martin, 2013), among other weaknesses. In 2011, after Myanmar's first civilian government, led by Thein Sein, took office, a Union Budget Reform for the education sector was initiated. Following 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led government has made the reform of the education system a national priority with the purpose of producing the human capital needed for Myanmar's advancement.

According to the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the Union government's expenditure on education has increased annually over the past decade. From 2011–2012 to 2017–2018, the percentage of the total budget expended on education rose from 3.66% of the total budget (0.71% of GDP) to 7.75% of the total budget (1.85% of GDP). Education has remained one of the five main budget items since 2013–14, followed by the other four largest items: 1) electric power and energy, 2) planning and budgeting, 3) defense, and 4) transfers to local governments.¹ This increased spending and growing prioritization of education has allowed the Ministry of Education to hire new teachers and to improve instructors' professional capacities. With this funding, the Ministry of Education has also introduced free and compulsory basic education and has invested in school infrastructure (National Education Stra-

1 The information was retrieved from Myanmar 2018 Education Brief.
<https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media/1901/file/Myanmar%202018%20Education%20Budget%20Brief.pdf>

tegic Plan, 2016-2021).

Although the government has taken initiative when it comes to upgrading education, advancing budgetary and legal reforms, there are still many challenges remaining including limited expenditures, an uneven quality of education, and weaknesses related to equity and inclusion. Regarding the government's expenditure on education, although expenditure – allocation – on education has been increasing over the years mentioned above, it can be observed that the execution rate of MoE on education has not increased significantly since 2011-12 and has been declining since 2014-2015. The Department of Higher Education and the Department of Basic Education spend the largest proportion of the Ministry of Education Budget: 80% and 16%, respectively, of the total MoE expenditure in 2017-2018. The Department of Higher Education was responsible for the highest percentage of underspending at 42% of the MoE budget, with execution rates of 78% in 2016-17 and 86% in both 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively. The Department of Basic Education, on the other hand, was responsible for 18% of MoE underspending, but averaged near 100% when it comes to its execution rate. And the third largest MoE underspending was the responsibility of the Department of Education Research, Planning and Training, and the Department of Technical, Vocational Education and Training, despite being account for less than 4% of total MoE spending. Overall, according to the World Bank's World Development Indicator, Myanmar's expenditure on education remains the lowest in ASEAN over the period of 2011-2017 (UNICEF, 2018).

Historically, Myanmar education has been known to focused on rote learning or "learning by-heart" as opposed to teaching critical thinking, and student assessments tend to be based on memorization of factual information rather than conceptual fluency. The basic education curriculum has also focused largely on Bamar history and culture, particularly because schools were not allowed to teach other ethnic groups' languages, histories and cultures. Even more concerning is that the basic education curriculum has often included discriminatory messages. For example, in 2018, 100 civil society groups signed an open letter complaining about racism and religious discrimination present in the elementary curriculum, with one example being "We loathe those of mixed blood, for they prohibit the progression of a race". (Aung, 2018)².

In order to reform the education system so as to encourage critical thinking and interactive learning, the government has initiated curriculum reform starting from the 2016-2017 academic year, placing an emphasis on 21st-century skills and aiming to develop learning concepts, problem-solving skills and an understanding of basic principles and reasons behind the knowledge provided (National Education Strategic Plan, 2016-2021). Although the textbooks developed under Myanmar's new curriculum include a small portion on civic ed-

2 The phrase was ordered to remove from the civic education subject in 2019 by The Ministry of Education (Irrawaddy, 2019).

ucation, democracy and basic human rights, they do not necessarily cover lessons to address discrimination against racial, religious and other minority groups.

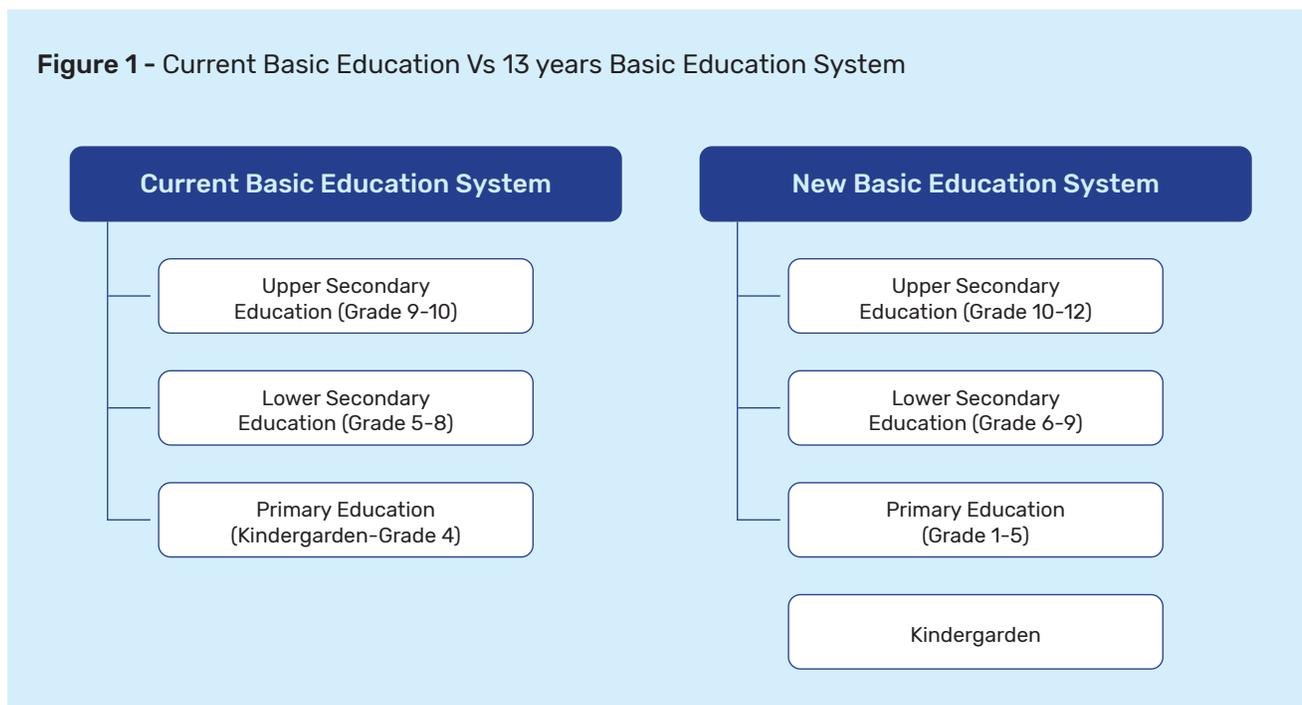
Another remaining challenge to equity and inclusion is disparities in school drop-out rates. According to the Department of Education Research, Planning and Training (DERPT) of the Ministry of Education, there is disparity in school drop-out rates for rural populations, when compared to those students studying in urban environments. For instance, data from DERPT shows, for example, that, from 2014-2015, the drop-out rate at the pre-primary level for students in rural areas was 80.7% while the equivalent drop-out rate for urban areas was only 63.6% (MOE, 2018). A similar disparity in drop-out rates exists at both the primary and lower secondary education levels, with rural children more likely to leave school than urban children (MOE, 2018). The drop-out rate is also significantly higher among children with disabilities, with UNICEF's Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities reporting that 67% of children with disabilities are without formal education (UNICEF, 2016).

Language is another factor which excludes children from formal education, especially as related to students from Myanmar's minority ethnic groups. According to a baseline study conducted by the Myanmar Education Consortium, for children from minority ethnic groups, the inability to speak the Myanmar language is a key barrier to attending government schools (Dantdalun, 2015) where the medium of instruction is Burmese. On the other hand, schools are allowed to teach ethnic language classes as part of Myanmar's recent education reform process but most classes minority language classes are still taught outside of school hours. In addition, the challenge to teaching ethnic languages is the low salary with ethnic language teachers paid only 30,000 Kyats per month for one class (Salem-Gervais & Raynaud, 2019).

In summary, under current and prior government administrations, efforts have been made to increase government expenditure on education and to reform Myanmar's approach to education policy. However, the literature review provided suggests that there is still room for improvement if education in Myanmar is to be inclusive.

THE EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE IN MYANMAR

Myanmar's current basic education system is comprised of five years of primary education (Kindergarten to Grade 4), four years of lower secondary education (Grade 5 to Grade 8) and two years of upper secondary education (Grade 9 to Grade 10). As per the Basic Education Law of 2019, the basic education system will be expanded to take place across 13 years, with a new KG+12 structure (fig. 1)—inclusive of one year of kindergarten, five years of primary education (Grade 1 to Grade 5), four years of lower secondary (Grade 6 to Grade 9) and three years of upper secondary education (Grade 10 to 12).

Figure 1 - Current Basic Education Vs 13 years Basic Education System

Besides government schools, other basic education schools follow the national standard of KG+12 structure and are categorized as basic education schools by the Basic Education Law (2019). These government-funded schools, community, private, monastic, charity, special education, mobile schools, and other schools recognized by respective ministries (ibid). According to this law, ethnic education institutions such as those under the administration of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) are not clearly identified as part of one of the recognized basic education school categories. However, according to the Asia Foundation's report (2016) on education in Myanmar's ethnic areas, ethnic education is included as a form of community schools or ethnic community schools where their funds are provided by various actors, which includes the Ministry of Education, EAOs, and the Ministry of Border Affairs and Security, as well as through donations and other forms of community support (Jolliffe & Mears, 2016).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AT SCHOOLS

Nowadays, school is not only seen as a social agent where students develop their knowledge and learn social roles, values and norms, but it is also as a fundamental institution for the promotion of equality, inclusion, dignity, and social justice. In order to build a just and developed society, it is important that citizens are equipped with an education that teaches them to respect human rights, and to value peace and gender equality (Netragaonkar, 2011). Some have argued that that human rights conflicts could be resolved through "human rights education" (Jayakumar, 2007) which, according to the United Nations, is defined as a form of education that promotes a universal culture of human rights while providing

skills and shaping attitudes that respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, tolerance, equality, and peace.

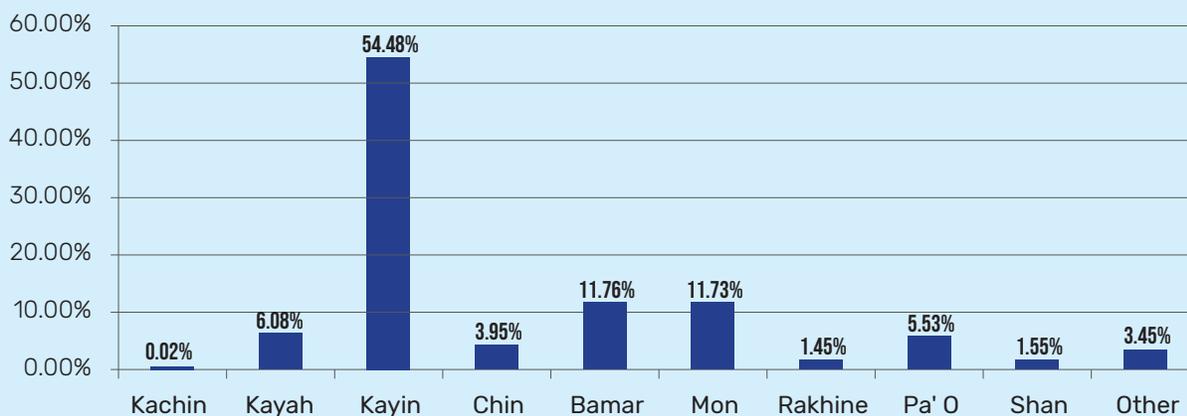
According to Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, schools should equip students with education for the purpose of: (a) the child's personal development, (b) the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, (c) the respect of his or her own identity, (d) nurturing a responsible citizen who respects rights of all, and (e) the respect of the natural environment.³ The teaching of human rights at schools also reportedly helps students and their communities create a happier and fairer school culture that could reduce bullying and other negative behaviors (Wales Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). In addition, it will provide students with essential knowledge about their rights and responsibilities and awareness of social issues. Amnesty International has also asserted that learning human rights at schools will provide the wider community with a shared culture of equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, and participation that are vitally important to achieve a peaceful and just society (Amnesty, n.d).

3 OHCHR, (n.d). Convention on the rights of the child. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

BACKGROUND OF KAYIN STATE

Kayin State is located in southeastern Myanmar and is mainly inhabited by Kayin ethnicities—known as Sagaw Karen, Pwo Karen, Bwe Karen, and Paku Karen—as well as other ethnicities such as the Pa-O, Bamar, Mon, Kachin, Kayah and Shan (fig. 2). Bamar, as the majority ethnic group in the country, are also the second most dominant population in Kayin State (UNHCR, 2014).

Figure 2 - Kayin State Race/Ethnicity Composition

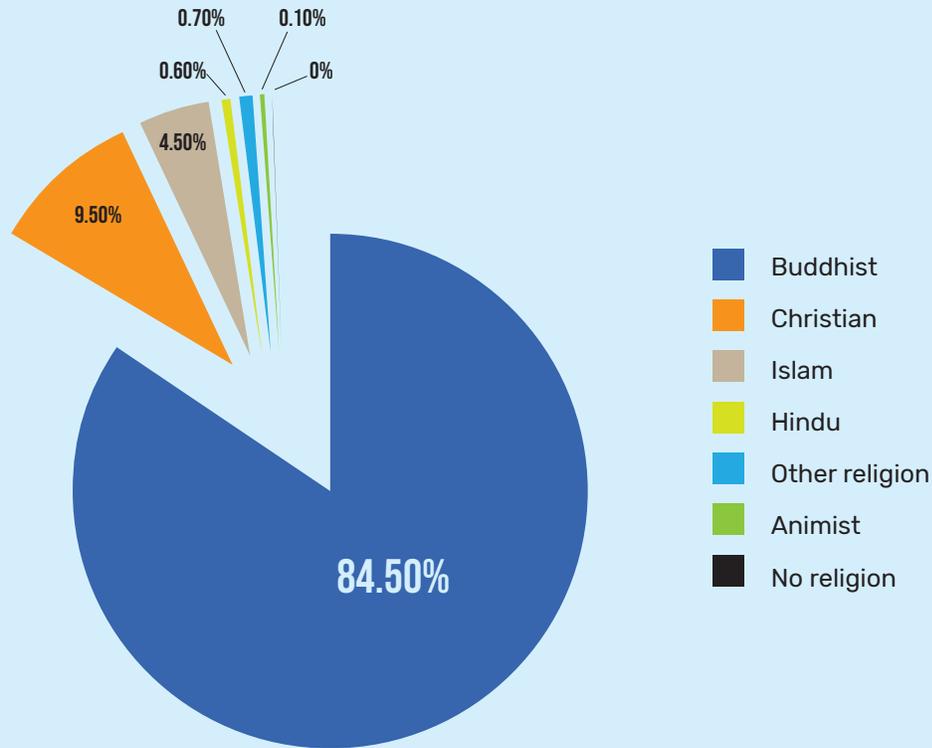


Source - General Administration Department- Kayin State - 2018

In terms of religion, Myanmar's population is composed of 84.5% Buddhists, 9.5% Christians, 4.6% Muslims, 0.6% Hindus, 0.1% Animists and 0.7% other religions (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014) (fig. 3).⁴

Kayin State is one of the most conflict-affected areas in Myanmar as a result of the violence between ethnic armed organizations and the Tatmadaw, ongoing since 1949. This conflict has had a huge impact on Kayin State's economy, education, health infrastructure and on the livelihoods of the people (UNHCR, 2014). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census reports that the literacy rate in Kayin State is 74.4%, lower than the Union literacy rate of 89.5%. The disability prevalence rate is 6.6%, while, nationwide, only 4.6% of the people report having one or more disabilities (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014). As a result of a history of conflict, landmine exposure, under-developed infrastructure and social services, land confiscation, and environmental degradation are some of the key issues facing Kayin State as a result of these conflicts (UNHCR, 2014). This has increased

⁴ A pagoda was built in Christian church's compound in Kun Taw Gyi village in Hlaing Bwe Township in April, 2016. Another pagoda was also built in a church compound in Mezaing village in Hpa-an Township in September, 2015 (Burma News International, 2016).

Figure 3 - Kayin State Religion Composition

Source - The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census

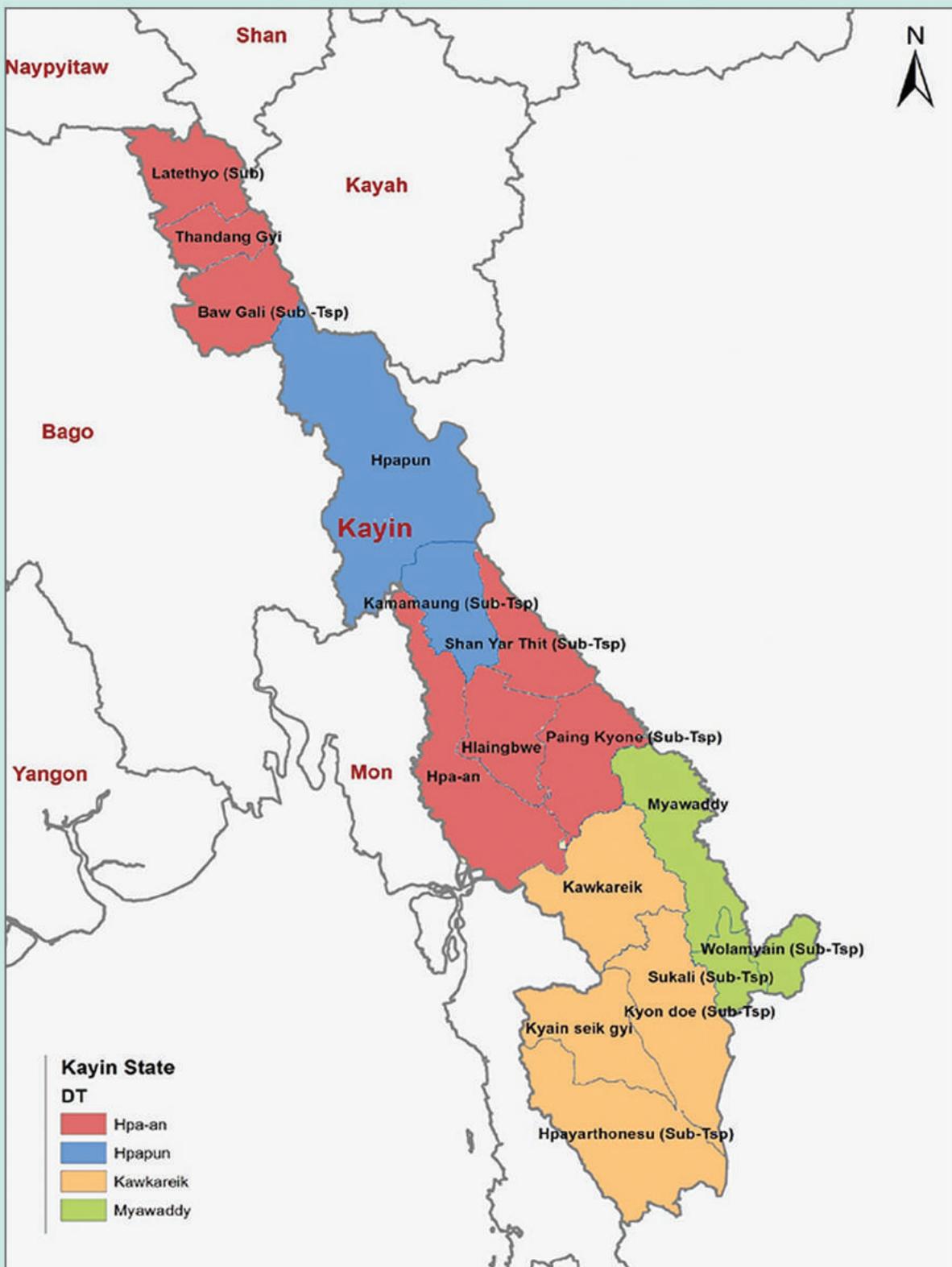
negative perceptions of the Bamar among ethnic groups, given the association of the Bamar ethnic group with Myanmar's military regimes (O'Connor, 2015).

Besides armed conflicts, Kayin State is one of the states of Myanmar that has seen rising religious tensions between Buddhists, Muslims and Christians. This includes an effort led by a prominent Buddhist monk Sayadaw U Thuzana whereby pagodas are constructed in church and mosque compounds across Kayin State.⁵ These incidents spurred public outcry but were nevertheless reported to have affected the previously harmonious and tolerant relationship between Buddhists and Christians in these communities (Burma News International, 2016).

Discrimination against Muslim communities has additionally been observed in districts of Kayin State, according to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG, 2014). In one case, Buddhist monks posted four principles in public areas that sought to prevent interactions between Buddhists and Muslims in Kayin State. The four posted principles are as follows: (1) Prohibition on selling orchards and farms to Muslims; (2) Prohibition on Buddhists marrying

⁵ A pagoda was built in a Christian church's compound in Kun Taw Gyi village in Hlaing Bwe Township in April 2016. Another pagoda was also built in a church compound in Mezaing village in Hpa-an Township in September 2015 (Burma News International, 2016).

Figure 4 - Kayin State Map by Districts and Townships



Source - The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Kayin State Report

Muslims; (3) Buddhists are not allowed to buy and sell things in Muslims' shops; They have to patronize only Buddhists shops; and (4) Prohibition on Buddhists using their name to buy things for Muslims (KHRG, 2014). These instructions reportedly caused regular Buddhist customers to stop buying at Muslim shops. On the other hand, there have also been some anti-discrimination efforts led by local community leaders—including monks and armed actors—to combat religious discrimination (KHRG, 2014).

In Kayin, there is significant sensitivity to issues of human rights, with people reluctant to discuss these points in public and within the formal education system. This hesitancy demonstrates the extent to which such attitudes are systematically rooted in the community, particularly in the public school environment.

OBJECTIVES, STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study pursues three objectives. They are: 1) to explore attitudes towards social inclusion among school teachers and students, 2) to determine if there are initiatives currently in place at the schools to address diversity and inclusion-related issues, 3) to explore opportunities to understand the barriers that prevent social inclusion initiatives and behavior in schools of Kayin state. To meet these objectives, students' and teachers' experiences and observations of discriminatory behavior will be explored, and we will ask how discrimination manifests in schools and what actions the school or teachers are taking to address the discriminatory behavior. Answers will be provided from the perspectives of both teachers and students. Finally, questions about the scope of influence, the power of schools, and their responsibilities will be explored so as to analyze the opportunities and flexibility needed promote social inclusion.

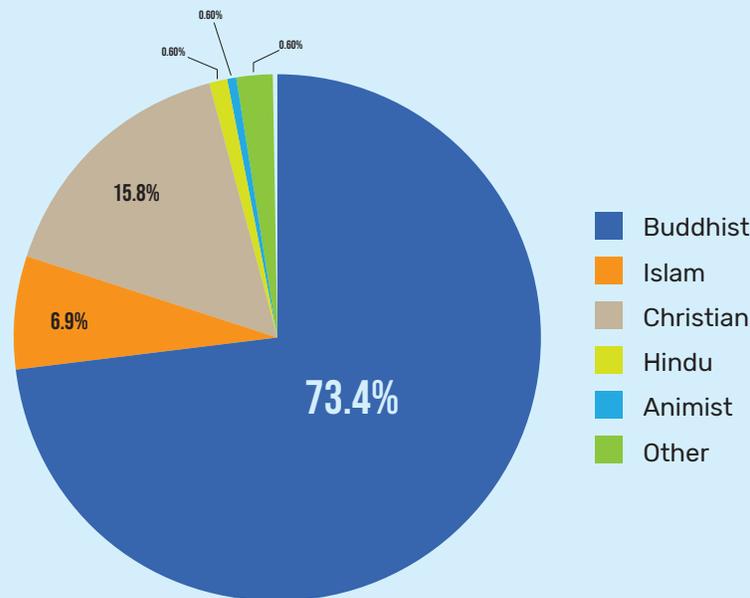
Quantitative research was undertaken to explore the social inclusion in schools in Kayin State. Surveys were conducted with the students and teachers in seven schools. The literature review explored the existing situation of discrimination and social acceptance in Kayin State. Additional qualitative research sought to understand policy level gaps that must be addressed in order to promote decentralized curriculum development in schools, autonomy in decision-making, and mainstream social inclusion in schools. Focus Group discussions as well as interviews were also conducted with teachers and students. Besides, two principals and one school officer were also selected for key informant interviews.

Scope of the study

The research was conducted amongst grade 6 and 7 students, ages 11-14, and amongst middle school teachers in Kayin State. Kayin is composed of seven townships under four districts: Hpa-an, Myawaddy, Hpa-pun and Kawkaik Districts. Target groups were selected from one school located in each of the seven townships: Hpa-an, Hpapun, Myawaddy, Kawkaik, Hlaingbwe, Thandaunggyi, and Kyainseikgyi Townships. These seven schools were selected according to the recommendations of local volunteers and based on the probability of the school featuring diversity among its student population. Additionally, all participating schools were State administered and schools located in EAO-controlled areas were not considered for this study.

Sampling and sample size

Within each of the seven schools selected from each township, 30 students from each

Figure 5 - Religion of Surveyed Students

school (a total of 205 students) were surveyed. 70 of them (10 from each school) also participated in focus group discussions. Five middle school teachers from each school (a total of 35 teachers) responded to the surveys and participated in focus group discussions. Buddhists were the majority of surveyed students at 73.4%, followed by Christian students at 15.8%, Muslim at 6.9%, Hindu at 1%, Animist at 0.5% and others at 2.5% (fig. 5). One of the schools was exclusively in the Christian community whereas the other schools were mostly composed of Buddhist students. Among the surveyed teachers, the majority of teachers, like the students, were Buddhist at 82.9%, followed by Christian at 14.3%, and Muslim at 2.9%. A majority 51.4% were of Kayin ethnicity, followed by 28.6% Bamar, 11.4% Mon and other 8.6%. In terms of gender, 48.5% of surveyed students were male while the rest were female at 51.5%. A significant percentage of teachers were female, at 97.1%, while only 2.9 were male.⁶

Limitations and challenges

This research explores only seven government schools in seven townships of Kayin State and, therefore, does not necessarily reflect the situation in other schools, in EAO- administered schools or in schools run by other groups.

The project was conducted amidst the Covid-19 period, and thus surveys were carried out without close administration from the research team, but instead through collaboration

⁶ According to World Bank (2018), the percentage of secondary teachers in Myanmar is around 86% of the total.

with local volunteers. Research-related workshops and training were organized via online platforms which were found to be less effective than the face-to-face sessions. Therefore, the results of the interviews and surveys were difficult to verify, especially in cases where respondents had returned to remote areas, where travel restrictions and limitations of communication made access difficult.

The study discusses topics such as cultural diversity, discrimination, and anti-bullying, and does not focus on a particular marginalized group but, instead, addresses these issues generally. As such, the research cannot identify the participation of LGBT-identified persons, especially in cases where the community may not be aware or accepting of their presence. The same is true for membership in other marginalized groups, when membership is not publicly acknowledged.

■ FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study are separated into two categories: Biases as Barriers to Social Inclusion and systemic barriers to social inclusion in Myanmar's Schools. All the answers to the survey questions are, therefore, analyzed and classified under these two specific categories, with detailed descriptions following these headings.

Biases as Barriers to Social Inclusion

This section discusses the individual and interpersonal barriers that prevent social inclusion among students and teachers at targeted schools in Kayin State. A lack of social inclusion gives rise to bullying and harmful stereotypes that adversely impact the social environments found at schools.

To gain insight on individual and interpersonal barriers, students and teachers were asked four questions.

- 1) Topics that are avoided to discuss in the classroom
- 2) Reason for not discussing
- 3) Bullying rate, the common form of bullying
- 4) Reaction and knowledge on Different sexualities

Below this section elaborates findings for each of these questions. Broadly, however, the research identified the following the individual and interpersonal barriers:

- **Teachers seemed uncomfortable discussing topics such as sex education, hormonal feelings, and interpersonal differences, but were very comfortable discussing topics such as non-violence or respecting women. Amongst those who reported having discussed either of these topics, however, most had over 21 years of experience.**
- **In the classroom, teachers were hesitant to talk about topics that had undertones, allusions, or references of a sexual nature, fearing that parents would not approve of these discussions taking place in an academic setting. The teachers, however, showed interest in discussing these issues if institutional authorities supported and encouraged healthy discussions and interactions.**
- **Verbal bullying through using derogatory and racist comments was reported**

to be very common amongst boys. Those subject to bullying were often struggling with classwork or belonged to a minority ethnicity.

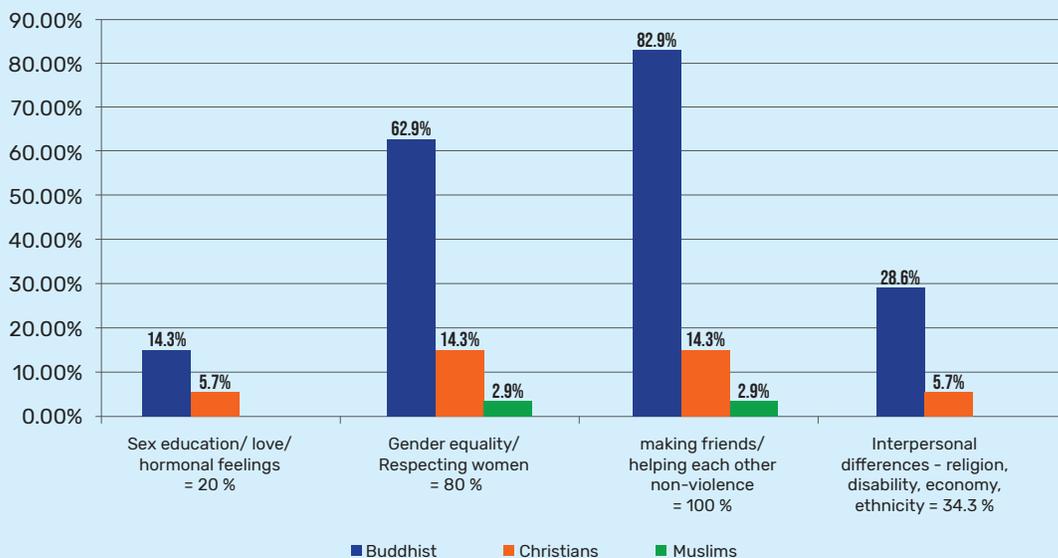
- Gender stereotypes were found to be prevalent among students and teachers, with the idea that women are inferior to men deeply rooted in the minds of students. Knowledge and acceptance of LGBT groups was additionally found to be limited.

1. Topics that are avoided to discuss in the classroom

To see if the teachers had experience discussing topics that could impart equality, justice and non-discriminatory attitudes amongst their students, we prepared a series of multiple-choice questions for them to answer. The answer choices included topics we considered necessary for the teaching of social inclusion, such as topics of interpersonal differences, gender equality and respecting women, making friends and non-violence, and finally sex education, love and hormonal feelings.

The teachers reported being uncomfortable discussing sex education, hormonal feelings, and interpersonal differences, but were much more comfortable discussing topics such as non-violence, or respecting women. However, teachers with experience of more than 21 years are more likely to have discussed either of these topics.

Figure 6 - Topics of Discussion (Teacher Survey)

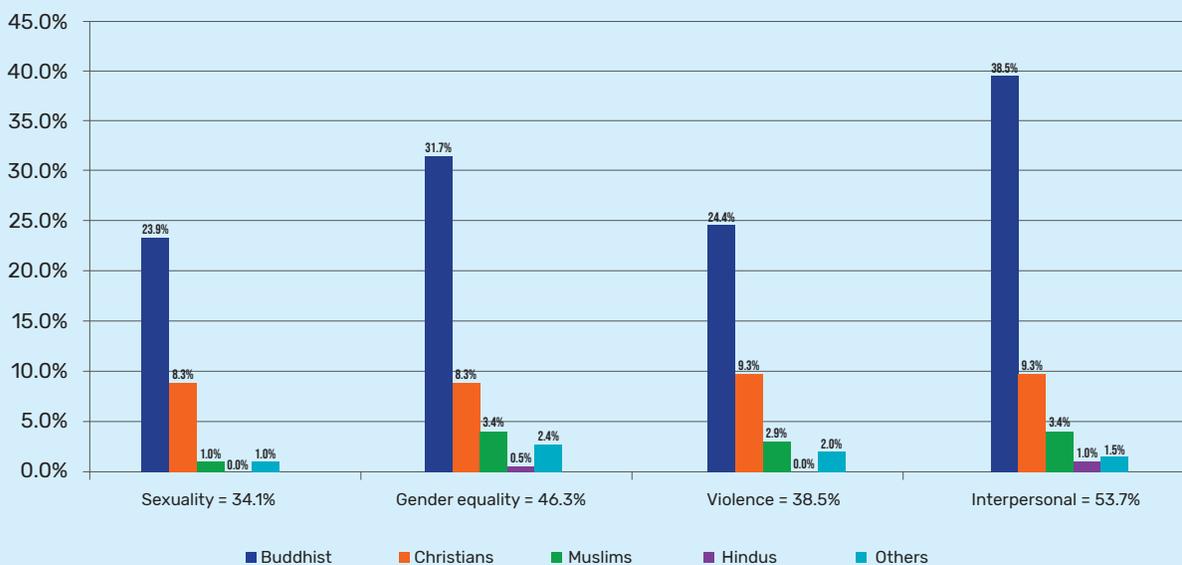


Source - Created by researcher

The data suggested that ‘making friends, helping each other or non-violence’ were the areas that teachers have discussed most. 100% of the surveyed (N=35) teachers saying they have conducted a discussion on any of those areas (fig. 6). 40% of them were in their 21st year of teaching, or later. Over 59% of the students surveyed (N=205) also stated that they have had a classroom discussion on bullying. Additionally, 39% of the students (N=205) reported having discussed a topic relating to “violence.”

Meanwhile, ‘gender equality and respecting women’ was the topic second-most discussed, with 80% of the surveyed teachers reporting such discussions (fig. 6). 46% of the students also stated that they had discussed this topic in the past. A majority of the teachers who have held these discussions were Buddhists at 78.6%, while 17.9% are Christian and 3.6% are Muslim. Important to note is that the 17.9% Christians and 3.6% Muslim here are 100% of the total respondents of those religions. Of those who have discussed these topics, about 32% were in their early teaching years (0-5 years at their school), while, overall, 43% of the teachers who have discussed these topics were senior teachers who have over 21 years of experience teaching.

Figure 7 - Topics of Discussion (Students Survey)



Source - Created by researcher

On the other hand, the data reveals that topics of interpersonal differences (religion, disability, ethnicity and economy) were discussed less and a only few (34.3% of the surveyed teachers, all of whom were female) reported having done so (fig. 6). It is interesting to see that the smallest minority groups, such as those of Muslim religion, are not included among them.

Overall, 'sex education, love or hormonal feelings' was shown to be least discussed in the classroom (fig. 6) with 20% of teachers reporting discussions on these topics. 71.4% of those teachers were Buddhists and 28.6% were Christian. Ethnically, 85.7% were of the Kayin ethnicity, 14.3% Bamar and there were no responses from other minorities. On the other hand, a similar 34% of students (N=205) answered they have recently discussed sexuality or related topics in the classroom.

In summary, more teachers reported having discussed 'safe' topics in classrooms that did not have undertones, allusions, or references of a sexual nature. The reason they provided for this was that such topics could be considered sensitive. Generally, topics such as making friends, helping each other, non-violence and respecting women (except that of gender equality) are not perceived of as contradicting social norms and standards.

2. Reason for not discussing

Sex education and interpersonal differences are the two areas that are least likely to be talked about in the classroom. Of the teachers, six female Buddhist respondents (N=35) addressed their reasoning for not discussing these issues, explaining that they thought parents would not like it. Two of these three had been teaching for 21 years or more. One respondent answered that it is because they had no time or energy to do so and were lacking support from the school. Another respondent also thought students were not ready to understand these topics, while a final, particularly interesting response noted that these are complicated topics, with too many dynamics involved.

Despite that, 94.1% of teachers (N=34) said they were willing to hold discussions on these topics with the required support. 32.4% of them had been at their schools for 1-5 years while 14.7% of them have been serving at their current school over 21 years. 79.4% of them were Buddhist while 2.9% of them were Muslim and 11.8% were Christian.

In summary, teachers were hesitant to talk about topics in the classrooms if these topics had undertones, allusions, or references of a sexual nature because they believed that parents would not like these discussions to take place in an academic setting. Teachers showed interest in discussing these issues if institutional authorities supported and encouraged healthy discussions and interactions.

3. Bully or Harassment

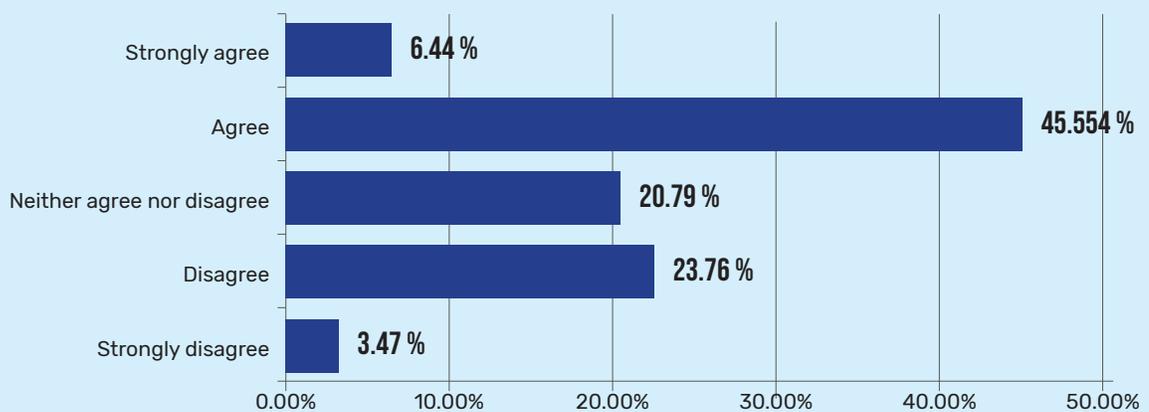
"Bullying" as World Health Organization defines it, is "a multifaceted form of mistreatment, [...] which includes teasing, name-calling, mockery, threats, harassment, taunting, hazing, social exclusion or rumors" (2002). Olweus (1993) also explains that "a student is being

bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students." "Negative actions" can be physical or verbal, and can include showing unkind facial expressions or gesticulations, and deliberate marginalization (Olweus, 2010). A UNESCO report stated that approximately one-third of the students are bullied at school with more boys (32%) experiencing bullying than girls (28%) (UNESCO, 2018).

(i) Incidents of bullying

About 46% of the students who were surveyed (N=205) reported that bullying and verbal harassment is common at their school (fig. 8). The teachers seemed to be less aware of

Figure 8 - Bullying or verbal harassment are common at my school (Result from Students Survey)



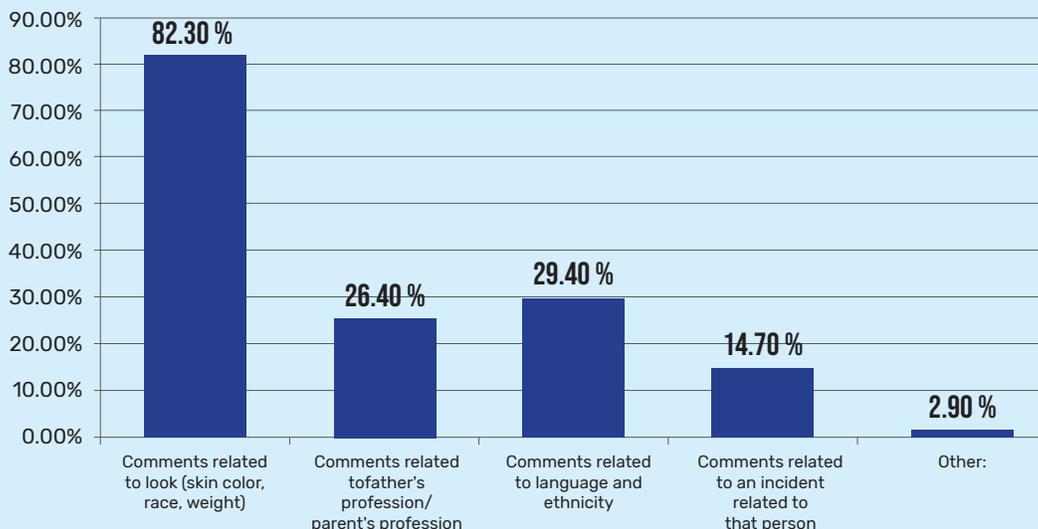
Source - Created by researcher

how common bullying and verbal harassment were, as less than 29% of teachers recognized bullying as somewhat common at their school. 97% of teachers (N=35) said that the most common form of bullying was verbal, although some 34% (N=35) said bullying might be physical and about 43% said it could also be psychological. Moreover, about 82% of teachers (N=34) described verbal bullying as taking the form of comments related to the looks of a person such as their skin color, race, or weight (fig. 9).

(ii) Reasons for bullying

Isernhagen & Harris (2003), as cited in Turner (2015), describe name-calling, teasing, or using insulting words as the features of verbal bullying, which is considered to be a type of victimization. In our study, about 55% of the students reported that their peers and friends are sometimes teased or bullied because of their religion, ethnicity or skin color. Some students admitted that sometimes they tease their friends by calling them 'A Thar Mae' which

Figure 9 - Survey Responses from Teachers: Sometimes when students tease each other, they commonly use

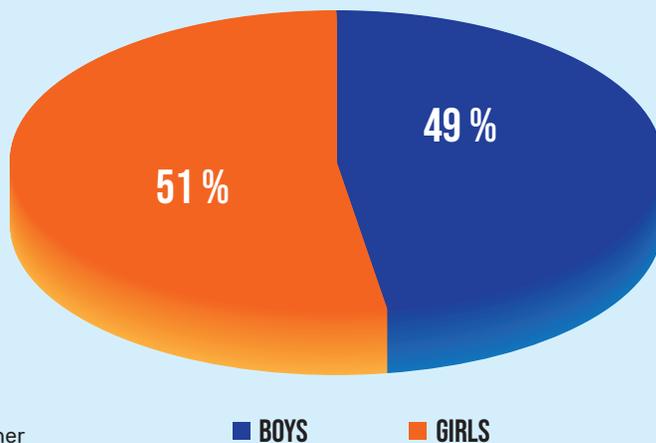


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literally means 'dark skin' or by using the term 'Kalar' for someone who is or looks Indian. It is noted that about 50% of those who reported this were girls. Of the 50% (N = 205), 81% of these girls were Buddhists and in the 11-14 year-old age group. Of the boys making up the other 50%, about 78% were Buddhists in the same age group. This is notable when compared with the results of surveys with teachers, given that 40% of the teachers surveyed thought that bullying was more common amongst boys.

Students who were surveyed also reported that sometimes their friends are teased or bullied because of their difficulty in reading, writing or speaking in the classrooms (fig. 11). Not being able to use their mother tongue at school could be one possible reason for students'

Figure 10 - % of students (11-14 yrs) with difficult understanding in Bamar



Source - Created by researcher

Figure 11 – Survey Responses from Students: Students at my school are teased/bullied if they have difficulty reading, writing and speaking in classrooms



Source - Created by researcher

difficulty in this regard. The Bamar language (Burmese) is the official language nationwide and is therefore used at government schools in Myanmar. Technically, only Burmese and English are used in the textbooks and in the official curriculum, and only Burmese is used in teaching. Myanmar officially recognizes 135 groups of ethnicities speaking more than 100 languages. Burmese is not the first language for many people in Kayin State as well as in other states across the country. For students at the schools in Kayin State, about 53% of those students surveyed (N=205) said that Burmese was not their first language. People of Kayin ethnicity were more likely than average to not have Burmese as their first language, with 60% of respondents reporting that Burmese was not their first language, despite ethnic Kayin being only 51% of our sample. Of this 53% of students, about 50% said that they find the Bamar language difficult to understand (fig. 10). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census shows the literacy rate in Kayin State is 74.4% , 15.1% lower than the Union literacy rate of 89.5% (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014). According to a field report from KHRG, ethnic minority civilians in conflict-areas often do not have access to a formal education due to the destruction and closure of schools in their areas and due to histories of displacement, which did not allow communities to establish permanent schools (KHRG, 2008).

At the time of the survey, students in Grade 6 and 7 were asked if they make friends based on ethnicity. About 40% of the students (N=205) reported that they preferred to make friends with who are of the same ethnicity as them. A majority 72% of them were of Kayin ethnicity.

In summary, bullying was reported to be a commonly occurring phenomenon in schools. Bullying and verbal harassment of students was based largely on unchangeable identities related to social groups, and most common among boys.

4). Gender Stereotype

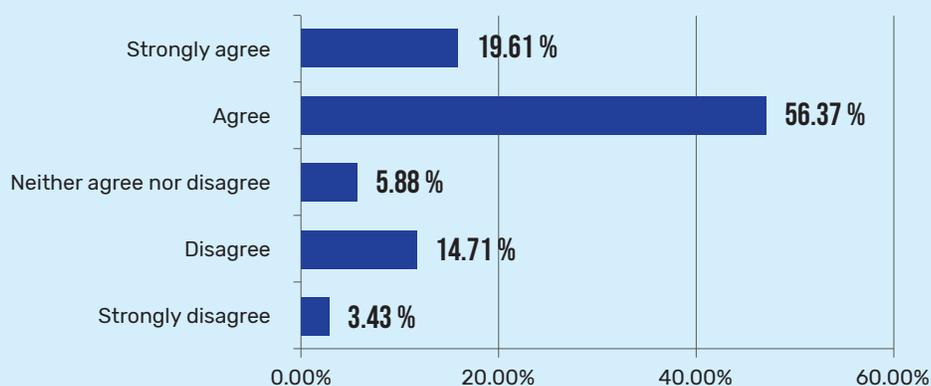
A gender stereotype is an opinion or presumption about the way women and men are defined, how they behave, or how they should behave. A gender stereotype begins to be problematic when it prevents men and women from advancing their individual skills, choosing their jobs, or making other life decisions (OHCHR, n.d). In Myanmar, gender stereotypes against women are rooted in religious, cultural, political, and customary practices (GEN & Global Justice Center, 2016).

This particular section of this paper focuses on the forms of gender discrimination and gender bias that prevail among students and teachers. Stereotypes against men and women as well as LGBT groups were frequently found in our survey. This section is divided into two parts 1) Stereotypes of Men and Women and 2) Stereotypes of LGBT-identified Persons.

(i) Men and Women

Cultural perceptions related to the superiority of men over women were found to be dominant among students. Survey questions were developed to gauge the perspectives of students and teachers regarding gender. Around 56% of the students (N= 205) surveyed at the school in Kayin State agreed with the statement 'Men are better suited to leadership roles than women', while approximately 20% strongly agreed (fig. 12). Both girls and boys seemed

Figure 12 - Survey Responses from Students: Men are better suited to leadership roles than women.



Source - Created by researcher

to have a similar opinions on this statement — amongst these respondents, 50% were boys and the other 50% were girls. People of Kayin ethnicity, the majority in the state, made 56% of those who agreed. It was interesting to note that one boy commented that “boys are ‘noble’ than girls” which implies boys belong to a higher order of society or are superior to girls. Traditional perceptions of women see them as child-bearers and family caretakers.

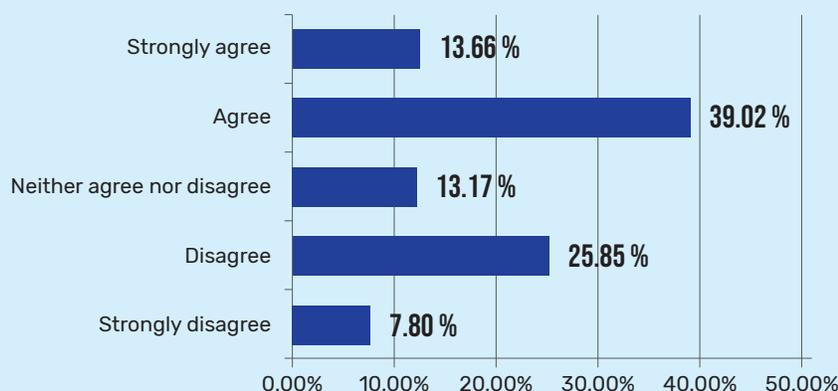


Social norms and stereotypes depict women as weak and incapable of making decisions in the family, while the wider society has limited women's ability to participate in public life and politics (GEN & Global Justice Center, 2016).

Teachers' perspectives on boys and girls were different, with about 72% of the teachers (N=34) believing that boys tend to be better at math than girls, and 80% of them reporting that boys like sports more than girls. Relatedly, 80% of them (N=34) believe girls are more obedient, respectful and studious. Additionally, a significant 91.4% also thought that girls were more emotional, while about 69% thought girls were better communicators than boys. In choosing class leader (or class monitor), most teachers choose male students although, at some schools, teachers choose one male and female student. A teacher explained, "we choose male students as class monitors because they are more appropriate to put in front of the people, and they are energetic when asked to do stuff like carrying chairs or drinking water".

For the statement "Graduating high school is more important for boys than for girls," 39% of the students (N=205) agreed and 14% strongly agreed. Among them, about 48% were girls and around 61% were of Kay-in ethnicity (fig 13). These results might reflect patriarchal beliefs that the man is the head of the household and so should also have a better education and a better job to provide for the household. In Myanmar culture, men are usually the head of the house and are often given the power to rule over the household members, including their wives and other family members (Nwe, n.d).

Figure 13 - Survey Responses from Students: Graduating highschool is more important for boys than for girls...



Source - Created by researcher

(ii) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

The biased cultural perception of men and women might also create amongst some students a biased attitude towards those with different sexual identification, including LGBT-identified people. Our data suggested that there were homophobic attitudes among students. As a matter of fact, there were about 28% of the students (N=202) who reported that **they did not want to be in the same class with an LGBT-identified person**, while approximately 57% of (N=202) said they do. About 20% of the students (N=203) said they would not continue to be friends with someone who came out as gay or lesbian, but around 70% reported that they would remain friends. More boys reported being unwilling to befriend someone who is gay or lesbian—more than half, or 56% of those who were unwilling to be friends with someone who is gay or lesbian, were boys. People of Kayin ethnicity seemed to be more unwilling than other ethnicities, with around 72% of these respondents are of Kayin ethnicity. The unwillingness was found to be more prevalent among Buddhists and Christians, with around 77% Buddhist (higher than the average 73.4% of Buddhist students) and around 19% of the respondents were Christian students (higher than the average 16% of Christian students). On those identifying as gay, one boy commented that **“they attained nobler lives and they want to become women,”** meaning that, though they were born with the glory of men (which many Myanmar people believe to be inherent) and they want to give it up to become a person of lower social order. While physical abuse is uncommon, students admit that they do tease or make jokes when they think a student is part of an LGBT group or when they think a boy behaves in a feminine manner or a girl in a masculine manner.

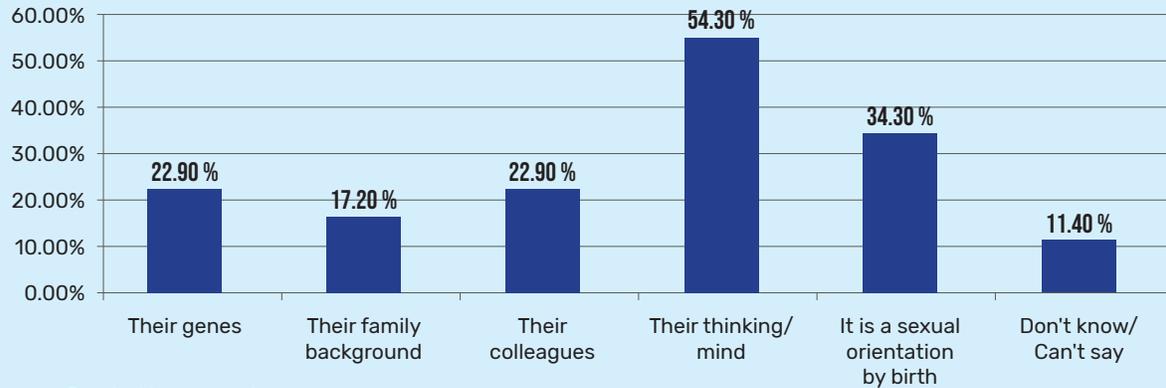
Our literature review similarly revealed that LGBT people are not socially accepted in the region. LGBT people are looked down on by society and they are often mocked and embarrassed in public (Myint & Htwe, 2017). Discrimination is also reported at schools, with LGBT students treated differently by their teachers—a fact which can cause them to drop out of school (Myanmar ICT Sector-Wide Impact Assessment, 2015). When some LGBT students wear clothing that reflects their gender preference, they are often bullied and beaten by their peers at school, with no action taken by teachers (Myanmar LGBT Pride Out in Force, 2019).

The teachers’ perspectives on LGBT groups also show a gap in knowledge and experience regarding this student population. Of teachers,



They attained nobler lives and they want to become women.



Figure 14 - Survey Responses from Teachers: If someone is of LGBT group, it is because of_____.

Source - Created by researcher

54.3% (N=35) thought that being LGBT was because of the person's thinking or mind. 40% of these were in the 21 or above years of teaching group. About 35% think it is by birth, and few respondents think it is because of their colleagues or family background (See figure 14).

In summary, the attitude of the students and teachers is reported to reflect biases between men and women. The impression that women are inferior to men also persists in the minds of the students. Finally, LGBT issues are not well-recognized in the school environment and students and teachers are not well-informed regarding different sexual identities and orientations.

Systemic Barriers

This section discusses the systemic barriers that have been raised against social inclusion in schools in Kayin State. Thus, we attempted to explore the teachers' opinions on the policies and practices of their schools, in an effort to promote cultural diversity and non-discrimination, and to and discourage bullying.

We asked the respondents the following questions to get insight on the systemic barriers to social inclusion found in schools:

- 1) How does your school organize informal and non-academic activities?
- 2) How do teachers at your school deal with incidents of bullying and verbal harassment?
- 3) How might teachers include students who have been disadvantaged?

Generally, the findings suggested that-

- Schools lack policies, guidelines, and programs for anti-bullying, for the promotion of cultural diversity, and for non-discrimination more broadly.
- Teachers informally play a role in intervening when such issues arise in the classroom.



We do not have policy or program as such. The activities organized at school are assigned our superior officials



Cultural diversity and non-discrimination

Promoting Cultural Diversity and non-discrimination is important in helping every student access opportunities and achieve positive outcomes. As such, it is vital to cultivate “inclusion” and knowledge, incorporating beliefs, values and custom of different social groups into a “multicultural education” [...]. “Inclusion” and awareness of “multiculturalism” nurtures “acceptance” and prepares students to keep up within a society where diversity is growing.⁷

Minority ethnic groups in Myanmar have been discriminated against in terms of the undermining of their culture, education, language and historical narratives. They have suffered violence as a result of ethnic armed conflicts, and they are often victims of war crimes including violations, abuses, and torture (Amnesty, 2017). Kayin State is one of the most conflict-affected areas in Myanmar as a result of the violence between ethnic armed organizations and the Tatmadaw, ongoing since 1949. This conflict has had a huge impact on Kayin State’s economy, education, health infrastructure and on the livelihoods of the people (UNHCR, 2014). The conflict has displaced a large proportion of the population, with Kayin State producing the second-most displaced persons in the country after Mon State. Many displaced persons still live in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, following decades of conflict (Myanmar Population and Housing Census, 2014).

The following sections discuss our findings on cultural diversity and non-discrimination in four:

- 1) Policies and programs on cultural diversity, non-discrimination and anti-bullying;
- 2) Events and activities used to promote cultural diversity, non-discrimination and anti-bullying;

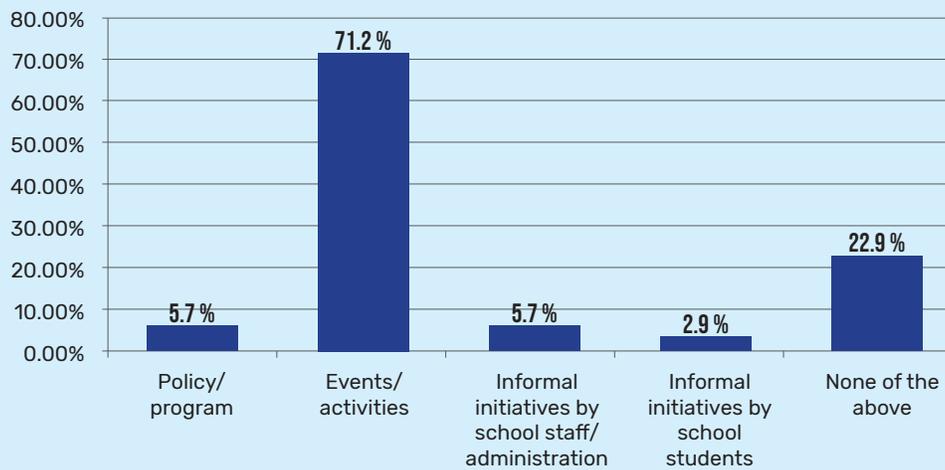
⁷ The Importance of Diversity and Cultural Awareness in the classroom. (n.d.). Drexel University School of Education. Retrieved from <https://drexel.edu/soe/resources/student-teaching/advice/importance-of-cultural-diversity-in-classroom/>

- 3) Interventions in the case of bullying and verbal harassment; and,
- 4) Social inclusive initiatives at the school level.

1). School policies on cultural diversity, non-discrimination and anti-bullying

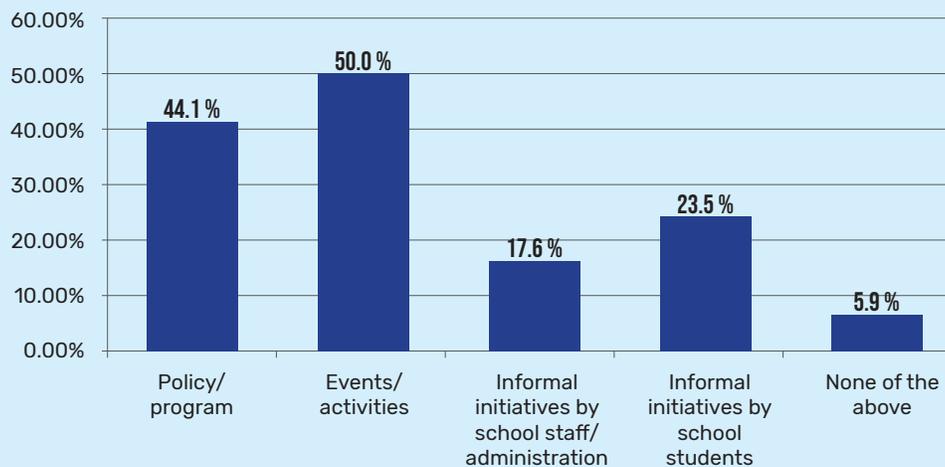
Policies are important because they lay the foundation and determine the flow of the actions to be taken in pursuit of specific goals. It is important that schools have policies to handle cases of bullying and improper conduct. Also important is that teachers, parents and students are aware of these policies (Department of Education UK, 2018). It is interesting to note that very few of the teachers we surveyed think their schools have policies or programs to promote cultural diversity and non-discrimination, or either of those individual

Figure 15 - Survey Responses from Teachers: To promote cultural diversity, we have _____ at my school.



Source - Created by researcher

Figure 16 - Survey Responses from Teachers: To tackle bullying, we have _____ at my school.



Source - Created by researcher

goals. A few 5.7% of the respondents (N=35) assumed their schools have policies or programs to promote cultural diversity in school. About 27% thought their school had a policy or program for non-discrimination and, finally, there were 44% who thought they had policies or programs for anti-bullying. However, in interviews with school principals, one **principal** stated that: "We do not have policy or program as such. The activities organized at school are assigned by our superior officials." Instead, she mentioned the role of the teacher, noting that they are vital in teaching children norms and practices regarding how to behave with each other.

It could be concluded that there is a lack of formal strategies to 1) impart the value of and respect for different cultures and practices, and 2) to prevent bullying and verbal harassment.

2). School events promoting cultural diversity, non-discrimination and anti-bullying

One **Principal** stated in the interview that there was no school events planned for the promotion of cultural diversity in the year's calendar. Activities organized within schools are planned at the beginning of the academic year, while other non-academic monthly activities are often delegated to schools. These include the celebration of Martyr's Day, Union Day, and activities promoting awareness of drug use, road safety, and the planting of trees for a green environment. Most activities that happen on such days are special talks or essay competitions.

There was hardly any event reported that was organized in promotion of the culture of ethnic minority groups. One principal, however, noted that the school was trying to represent ethnic minorities in a festival that was meant to inspire better cooperation and relationships between teachers and parents, called "Sone Nyi Pwe Daw." In doing so, they tried to organize students to perform traditional dances and songs that of their ethnicities. On the other hand, another principal stated that cultural events are not organized at schools, and that, instead, annual events were organized at the township level, such as is the case with the "Kayin Traditional Wrist Tying" ceremony, for instance, where principals select students to represent their school. To participate in the event, students would dress in their respective traditional costumes.

In addition, in some schools there was a common practice of celebrating festivals of different religions, such as Ka Htain in Buddhism and Christ-



There are no activities affiliated with other religions because they, non-Christian teachers, don't lead their children.



mas in Christianity. Usually, religion- and ethnicity-related events that are organized at the schools represent only the school's majority groups. Buddhism is the majority religion in most of the schools we surveyed, with one school exclusively from a Christian community and largely celebrating only non-academic activities related to Christianity. The School Officer at this school explained that **"there are no activities affiliated with other religions because they [non-Christian teachers] don't lead the children."** She also added that there are too few students of other religions to be able to organize such activities. In other words, the individuals that belong to minority groups are likely to be discouraged from such celebrations due to their small populations. But, if there were a number of individuals belonging to a minority group with active leadership, there might be activities organized to celebrate their cultural identities within the school environment.

Despite lacking proper mechanisms, there is a degree of limited flexibility when it comes to opportunities to celebrate cultural and religious identity within schools.

3). Interventions on Bullying and Verbal harassment

Mechanisms for dealing with incidents of bullying

Teachers, principals, and others with responsibility at Kayin State school are the most suitable figures when it comes to managing issues related to bullying, though there is no one-size-fit-all solution for every school (Department of Education UK, 2018). In our survey results, 41.9% of the students (N=205) reported having seen teachers intervene in student disputes. A respondent reported that "we handle problems that are not serious at school and if someone is injured or hurt seriously, we call upon the parents of students from both parties and let them discuss." What she meant by "not serious" here is likely to include quarrels, teasing and verbal incidents that do not end up in physical injuries. In talking about how her teachers deal with incidents of bullying, one girl explained that "the perpetrator will be scolded and told not to do that again, and disciplined to live harmoniously."

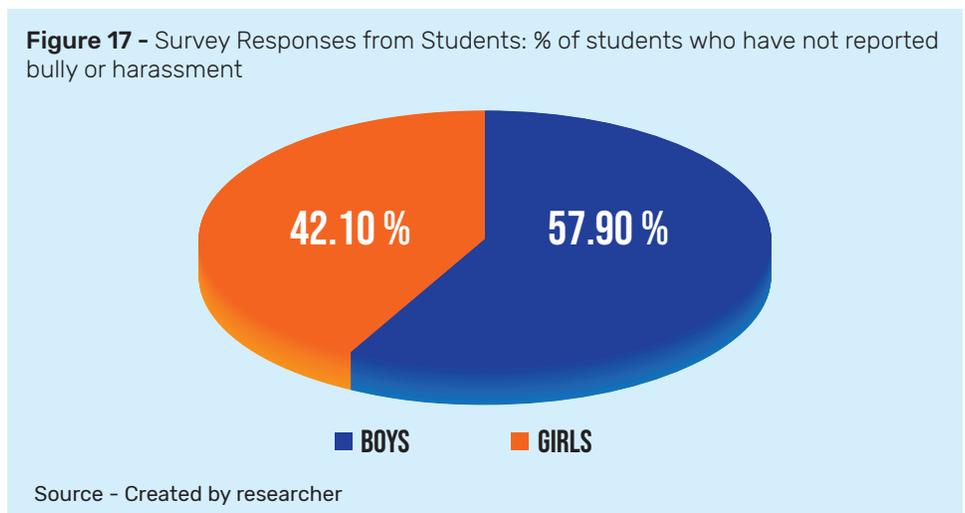
In an interview, one school officer also mentioned a "rule and regulation maintenance group" that her school had created to tackle bullying and fighting. In this group, there were 5 teachers who took turns monitoring the classrooms when they were not teaching. She added that these teachers also set up a scoring system for students. At schools in Myanmar, students are usually divided into five groups which are formed under the Students' Council, which is a group established for the purpose of organizing non-academic or social activities. In addition, at this particular school, students are required to monitor their peers' behavior or manners and, if they see misconduct such as bullying or harassment, they report it to the teachers. At the end of the year, the teachers rate the score of respective groups according to the behaviors of each group's members. Considering that this school was not very big, with only 19 teachers, this was an effective program. As a result of teachers being present

much of the time, the frequency of disputes between students was reduced, with teachers reporting that they rarely see fights and quarrels except some children teasing each other.

In summary, schools generally do not have a policy and mechanism set for anti-bullying and harassment; rather, individual teachers or small teacher groups must intervene when negative actions or misconduct amongst students arises in the classroom or school environment. Teachers' interpretations of "negative actions" might vary and might result in different responses to the same conduct, with the "correct behavior" as recognized by teachers likely to be similar to the standard established within the wider community. As a result, without a set policy these determinations are likely to be subjective, reflecting teachers' accepted norms.

Reporting cases of bullying

60% of the students surveyed (N=205) said that they had never reported cases of bullying or verbal harassment, though 55% said they were aware of their friends and classmates being bullied. Girls were more likely to have never reported cases of bullying and verbal harassment— 58% of those who never reported the cases were girls (fig. 17). Christians stu-



dents were found less likely to have ever reported cases of bullying or verbal harassment . For this question, around 23% of the non-reporting respondents were Christian students while the average percentage of Christian students in the study was around 16% of all respondents.



The text book lesson such as farming rice does not necessarily reflect our daily jobs here and it makes it difficult for the students to see the picture. The teaching period as other subjects is 35 minutes. Time is insufficient, though



Some reasons for this were raised in focus group discussions with students. First, verbal harassment such as name-calling, teasing, mocking and other common forms of harassment were sometimes reported to be positive rather than considered serious or hurtful. For example, one student explained that one of his classmates had the nickname “Aladdin” because his father sells ice-cream named Aladdin, before noting that the name was meant to show affection rather than to be hurtful to the student himself. Second, the data also suggested that some students might be reluctant to report being bullied or seeing someone bullied even if they want to do so. A few students reported they did not report cases of bullying to teachers because they were threatened [by a classmate or by the bully]. Additionally, some students also say that they might become involved in the problems, themselves, if they report seeing bullying or harassment. Finally, in many schools, beating was still considered a way to punish students. Consequently, some students were reportedly unwilling to report bullying amongst their classmates because of this punishment, especially when the harassment was verbal was considered to not be hurtful.

In summary, students were often discouraged to report bullying or verbal harassment, particularly when they did not perceive the incident as being especially negative. The fear of the perpetrator or of becoming involved in the problem (if they are not already), as well as concerns over the severity of punishment, were also factors in students’ decision about whether to report harassment and bullying.

4). Social inclusiveness at the school level

Gaps in languages, customs and practices, and social backgrounds create the need for extra activities for social inclusion of minorities and socially disadvantaged groups in schools. Currently, there is one session a week certified for teaching local ethnic language at schools and one session called “local curriculum.” The ethnic language session aims to teach minority ethnic languages at school with teachers who speak the language while the local curriculum component seeks to promote the practices and customs of a particular place. For example, a teacher said they teach about how to plant, nurture and harvest tea or durian plants— lessons which are not included in mainstream textbooks. “The textbook lesson on farming rice does not necessarily reflect our daily jobs here, and it makes it difficult for the students to see the picture. The teaching period is 35 minutes, as with other subjects. Time is insufficient, though” the teacher reported. Additionally, it takes more time and effort to develop the local curriculum components as there is no textbook for these sessions. With many of these sessions supporting the recognition of cultural diversity, they don’t necessarily reflect every aspect of social inclusiveness in the mainstream classroom. Language barriers are a massive problem for teachers in some areas, and these are not readily included. A teacher said that it sometimes takes a week for some students to understand a paragraph of the lesson due to language difficulties. For example, if they are teaching about the kettle, they have to bring a kettle to school so that the students understand clearly. Differ-

ences in students' ability to learn require different approaches that vary accordingly to the needs of the particular students; the "one-size-fits-all" approaches do not necessarily respond inclusively (Soriano, Watkins, & Ebersold, n.d.).

Mobility friendliness in schools is also an important aspect of children's rights to education. Children with disabilities are more likely to be less educated, unemployed, earning less, and being less healthy than others (World Bank, 2020). Out of the teachers surveyed (N=33), approximately 49% said that their school building and teaching techniques were not disabled-friendly. Given that Kayin state is an area where a lot of armed conflict has taken place, and is still happening, and where landmines are still a massive problem and have left many civilians disabled, there may be physically disabled children in the classrooms. Despite this, there were very few teachers who said their schools have students with disabilities. About 33% of respondents (N=33) said there were a few physically disabled children at their schools but about 64% said they have seen no student with disabilities, at all. About 35% of the respondents (N=34) thought they have mentally disabled students at their schools. For the students who are left behind academically or who do not do well on the lessons, teachers spend extra personal time to assist them, sometimes after school or on weekends,.

In conclusion, there are limited mechanisms for encouraging inclusiveness in schools, with teachers required to independently put more effort into teaching systemically marginalized students.

CONCLUSION

The research presented here establishes that there is a lack of social inclusion and integration in the schools of Kayin State. Verbal harassment is found to be a commonly-occurring phenomenon in school environments, with the nature and form of verbal harassment and bullying usually based on cultural identities, or on skin color, physical appearance, and language inability. Some students describe being hesitant to report bullying and verbal harassment. Systemically, the schools lack proper strategies to impart value and respect for different cultures, practices, norms and customs, as well as proper policies and mechanisms for anti-bullying efforts. The aims of National Education Law (NEL) (2014) and NEL Amendment (2015) include supporting the learning of nationalities' languages and culture, promoting respect of civic and democratic values and human rights, and creating an international-standard learning environment. Both the NEL and NEL Amendment also aim to promote inclusive education and special education programs for students with disabilities and for other students who have otherwise limited opportunities to study. The principles of basic education, as stated by the law (2019), include: promoting inclusive education programs for students with disabilities; ensuring no discrimination based on race, origin, religion, class, culture, gender, economic status and disability; and promoting respect of all nationalities' culture, literature, art and heritage.

The following section provides recommendations for more inclusive education:

Opportunities for inclusive education:

Teaching human rights

Teaching human rights is a significant approach to establishing a more inclusive and responsive classroom. It is widely accepted that teaching human rights can create a fairer environment where there are fewer negative behaviours amongst students and teachers. Amnesty International has asserted that learning human rights at schools will provide the wider community with a shared culture of equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, and participation—all of which are vitally important to achieving a peaceful and just society (Human Rights Friendly Schools, n.d). Teachers play an important role in delivering knowledge as well as in nurturing respect for different values and practices (Brett, Mompoin-Gaillard & Salema, 2009). To deliver human rights education, firstly, teachers must be aware of the rights and responsibilities of the Child. Moreover, students should be well informed of information on human rights declarations and conventions, child rights and related international laws, the meaning of the articles within, and the values rooted in these. Secondly, teachers must adopt a positive attitude towards human rights and be able to develop a non-discriminatory classroom in which rights are respected, in practice, by both teachers themselves

and by students. Finally, teachers need to encourage the students to practice their rights as well as to protect others' (Robinson, Phillips & Quennerstedt, 2018).

Inclusion of cultural perspectives in school lessons

Textbooks play a role in teaching cultural diversity (Rad, 2014) and, as such, it is important that the content in textbooks that is officially prepared by the government includes ethnic and cultural perspectives. Students are unlikely to fully benefit from content that they cannot relate to (Mendez's, n.d.). The "local curriculum" that was set up by the Department of Ethnic Culture and Literature aims to address this issue, but it has, thus far, been an after-school extracurricular session similar to sessions for ethnic language teaching. It also does not have yet a textbook upon which teachers can rely in developing lessons. Therefore, this program could be more effective for students if the ethnic and cultural contents is also included in mainstream textbooks, with the inclusion of ethnic and cultural perspectives in supplementary educational materials (such as visual aids, storybooks, games, etc.) also being a way to teach cultural diversity. Including literature of different cultures can equally encourage cultural interaction between students and improve knowledge and understanding of one's perception of culture. Using ethnic minority stories, literature and perspectives may be biased, but is important for cultural responsiveness (Gay, 2010) and, thus, for inclusive education.

Encouraging positive interactions and relationships

Teachers should attempt to encourage positive interactions and relationships among students. To do so, cooperative learning strategies in the classroom should be adopted. These can promote "greater acceptance, liking, support, and caring interactions among classmates among students" (Juvonen et al, 2019). Cooperative learning creates a situation for students to interact and collaborate with their classmates in a group or as a team in pursuit of a common goal (Buchs & Butera, 2015). These teams could be purposefully formed with the representation of different groups so as to foster positive relationships and inclusion among groups with different backgrounds (Juvonen et al, 2019). Therefore, teachers have to be aware of students' cultural backgrounds, interests, learning styles and their significance. Showing interest in their background builds trust between teachers and students, and makes students feel appreciated. As a result, they communicate more openly with the teachers and are more likely to be able to interact with classmates— an opportunity that is important for building up cultural awareness as well as recognition of its value.

A "whole school approach" for anti-bullying

The whole school approach is considered to be the most effective for intervening in bullying at schools. It involves the participation of individual students, teachers, parents and representatives from the community (Debra, & Wendy, 2014). The whole school approach usually contains prevention-related activities and responsive activities, which require the participation of students, teachers and parents.

Preventative activities

- 1) School should form a working group, committee, or team teacher and parent representatives. This group would then take a leading role in establishing policy and practices—taking into account the opinion of experts and public officials—in order to address bullying at school (Golubeva, 2018). Clear responsibilities should be assigned to the respective persons selected to carry out these activities.
- 2) Students, parents and every teacher also should be well informed and awareness of anti-bullying policies, as well as about bullying and its consequences (Golubeva, 2018). Events or programs to raise students' awareness to teach the community about bullying and its consequences have been shown to be effective prevention measures, and therefore should be organized regularly. Events such as "Sone Nyi Pwel Daw" draw attention to the school involve participation from the broader community, so so could be used as a medium to deliver messages about anti-bullying. Schools may also have the opportunity to organize similar events with participation from parents and from the broader community.
- 3) There should be teachers assigned to monitor classroom, school surroundings and playgrounds. Our data from schools in Kayin State suggested that bullying or verbal harassment are not likely to occur in the presence of teachers. Therefore, incidents of bullying are more likely to occur in school areas where the teachers are absent, such as playgrounds, and it is important, therefore, that these are regularly monitored. One of the schools studied in Kayin State initiated a monitoring group to prevent bullying, fights and misconduct that happened both in the classroom and in the school compound. Members of this group and the school's teachers should take turns monitoring classes, showing their presence so that the students will behave properly. This initiative was found to be effective in reducing the physical and verbal incidents that happened at the school. Later, the school passed on the responsibilities for this work to student leaders, who regularly monitor the classroom and report to the teacher.
It is vital to encourage every student to report cases of bullying. Reporting can discourage students to a certain extent and can also help victims. Additionally, clear information on the procedure for reporting— including where and to whom students should report— and on the documentation of reported cases will assist in the future evaluation of anti-bullying initiatives (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation- AU, 2017).

Responsive Activities

- 1) Punishing the bully includes oral warnings, calling parents or guardians, detention, denying permission to attend classes for a short period, up to suspension from school (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation- AU, 2017).
- 2) Another increasingly-used approach focuses on restoring peace and justice among students rather than punishing them. The victims should be assured of their safety and enabled to express their experiences to one another. In doing so, the bully must also become aware of how he or she affected others and be encouraged to do better and apologize for the damage they caused (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation- AU, 2017).

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