

The Review of Myanmar's Educational Reforms Base on the NLD Government Major Education Policies

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Abstract

Myanmar's military coup brought the NLD's five-year regime to an end. During the past five years, the NLD government led by Aung San Suu Kyi carried out a series of reforms in the country. This paper will be based on the Myanmar official policy "national education strategic plan 2016-2020", giving briefly comments to the education reform policies of the NLD government after it came to power.

Keywords

Myanmar; Educational reform; NLD; Military.

1. Reform Background

One of the overall promises in the NLD election manifesto (priority 3 of 4) was: 'To change the lives of our people, the NLD will strive for a system of government that will fairly and justly defend the people' (NLD, 2015:4) [1]5. With regard to education (NLD, 2015:15), the NLD promises the following:

We will prioritize the needs of schools in less-developed areas where schools currently lack necessary facilities and equipment, in order to make middle school and high school education more accessible to all.

For the improvement of the quality of life of people with limited educational qualifications, we will establish opportunities for further education through programs for continuing basic middle and high school study, and in-school and out-of-school vocational training opportunities of equivalent standard.

We will establish effective education services that do not place a burden on parents and communities [1]6.

After taking control of the country, the NLD government set the national goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2030. Education and poverty reduction were identified as the key drivers in the process of achieving democratic peace. The NLD government recognizes that the provision of quality and acceptable education through a variety of formal and alternative education channels is essential for students to achieve their career aspirations and lifelong learning goals. In today's global economy, the development of developing countries fundamentally depends on the knowledge, skills and capabilities of their people. Taking education as the first investment object can reach the long-term benefits. Education is important to national economic development and social prosperity and it's also the foundation of national construction and national unity. It gives every citizen the opportunity to improve their living standards and make contributions to the national development.

2. Main Educational Reform Proposals of the NLD Government

The NLD listed education reform as the focus of the government's work, established an education work group (EWG) to conduct a comprehensive review of the education sector to

assess the strengths and weaknesses of the national education system, and formulated the national education strategic plan 2016-21 (NESP). The working group was established to make recommendations and conduct in-depth review for the drafting of the national education law and relevant laws.

Through the joint efforts of all parties, the parliament passed the National Education Law (2014) and its amendment (2015) to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the national education system. These two new laws have led to a wide range of interrelated and mutually reinforcing reforms in the national education system: recognizing the right of all citizens to and compulsory primary education; Establish an education quality assurance system; Extending basic education to 13 years; Support the study of national languages and cultures; Corresponding decentralization within the education system, etc [2]14.

2.1. Preschool Education: Implementing Early Childhood Care Programs

The so-called early childhood care scheme is to ensure that all school-age children can receive preschool education on time. For a long time, Myanmar's external data show that Myanmar's education is at a high level in Southeast Asia. For example, the Myanmar government once said that the literacy rate of Myanmar people are more than 90% and the annual enrollment season sent a document that Myanmar's enrollment rate is more than 95%, but in fact, at the beginning of school the government will issue an announcement to encourage parents to send their children to school. The enrollment rate of students are really high at the time of enrollment, but it is unclear whether they insist on learning after the beginning of school. If you look closely at the comparison of the number of primary junior and senior high school students in Myanmar, you will find that the number is decreasing significantly, that is, the dropout rate is high. In Myanmar military leader Min Aung Lai's speech on August this year, he mentioned that the number of people over the age of 25 with junior high school education in Myanmar has reached 18.2 million, that is, one third of the people in Myanmar have graduated from junior high school. Although the education level in Myanmar is low, some achievements have been made in early childhood education. Data shows that from 2000 to 2010, the proportion of children aged 3 to 5 participating in various forms of organized early childhood care education programs in Myanmar has increased from 9% to 23%. It is worth noticing that the number of school-based preschool centers increased by 45% between 2009 and 2014 - from 5018 children in 2272 kindergartens in 2009 to 134319 children in 4119 kindergartens in 2014.

2.2. Basic Education: Achieving the Goal of Education for All

A report by MIMU (Myanmar information management unit) pointed out that there are obvious differences in living conditions and economic level between urban and rural residents in Myanmar: 72% of rural villages have not been electrified, and residents in rural areas are less likely to have access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. The secondary school enrollment rate in rural areas is only half that of cities and towns. The literacy rate in Shan state, more than half of the children in 19 townships have never attended school. Monhet town is particularly prominent, with 85% of the children haven't attended the school. Other provinces and states with low education level are Karen, Magwe and Rakhine. Children from rural families or other vulnerable groups are unlikely to be able to complete primary to secondary education [1]1. Specific measures taken by the government to improve this phenomenon includes:

2.2.1. Reduce the Cost of Basic Education And Increase the Enrollment Rate

Between 2011 and 2014, the number of children enrolled in basic education schools increased about 400000 (from 8.2 million to 8.6 million), Myanmar has completed the education for all (EFA) goal in 2014, the net enrollment rate of first-year students reached 98%. In addition, from 2010-11 to 2012-13 academic year, the net enrollment rate of all grades of basic education also increased, and the enrollment rate of junior middle school students increased significantly.

These increases are largely due to the government's free education plan, which has gradually promoted the free policy of basic education since its implementation in 2011-12, and provided textbooks and uniforms to all students for free. The government also provides grants to all basic education schools to reduce the burden of school operating costs traditionally borne by the community. The program is popular among middle-class parents because it greatly reduces the cost of family education. As for the poor people, even with the help of the government, children still unable to complete basic education and has the highly drop out rate.

2.2.2. Increase Assistance to the Poor Students

Between 2011 and 2012, the government launched a student financial aid program for the poorest students. By the 2014-2015 academic year, the financial aid program had covered about 16000 students in 330 townships across the country. In the 2017-2018 academic year, when the NLD was in power for two years, the program had been expanded to 100000 students. The expanded plan focuses on students in grades 5 to 11, which on the highest risk of dropping out of school.

2.3. Vocational and Technical Education: Develop A Technical and Vocational Education and Training System with the Same Status as Universities

There are 70 vocational and technical schools in Myanmar. From April 2016 to 2020, 41707 trainees passed short-term vocational training, an increase of 36381 over 2011 to March 2016; There are 10189 graduates from high school technical schools, an increase of 6040 over the period from 2011 to March 2016[2]39. The government has recognized that the labor market needs more skilled workers to establish industrial bases in urban areas to achieve the national economic development goals.

In recent years, the government has carried out a series of reforms to strengthen the vocational and technical education system. In August 2013, parliament approved a new employment and skills development act (ESDL) to regulate various forms of skills development for workers who have entered or about to enter the labor market. ESDL allows the establishment of a National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) and the formulation of national vocational skills standards to recognize informal, short-term and enterprise training. Another important training activity is the establishment of six new industrial training centers under the Ministry of industry. And the Singapore Myanmar vocational training institute was established in Yangon to provide short-term competency based courses.

2.4. Higher Education: Expand the International Influence of Myanmar College

Myanmar is eager to build a world-class higher education system, so that universities can have curriculum autonomy and independent governance and have the ability to conduct independent research. The higher education reforms initiated by the government involves giving higher education institutions greater autonomy. For example, some higher education institutions have set their own admission requirements according to their university statutes. Myanmar's higher education institutions want to establish a national qualification framework linked to the ASEAN reference. Restrictions between Myanmar's higher education institutions and international higher education institutions have been liberalized, memorandums of understanding and the research partnerships have been established with some countries. The new presidential scholarship program has been introduced to help Myanmar students study abroad. Universities have also begun to set up student service centers to meet the needs of students. From 2017 to 2018, Myanmar published 22152 scientific research papers in domestic and international scientific research journals, an increase of 9385 compared with the period from 2011 to March 2016. In addition, Yangon University ranked 13072 among universities in the world 2016, rising to 7116 in 2020; The ranking of Mandalay University also rose from 20701 in 2016 to 9722 in 2020[2]40.

3. Conclusions

Since the NLD came to power, many unsolved problems in Myanmar society become more clearly and distinguishable, but only a few of them can be solved. Although the Myanmar's education reforms achieve it's own success, but it can't touched the real issue of this country. In this situation, no matter how strong the reforms are, without the political stability, it's just like whistling into the wind. Myanmar's educational reforms still has a long way to go.

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