Ethnic Content Integration and Local Curriculum in Myanmar

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Myanmar is home to over 54.8 million people, consisting of over 100 ethnolinguistic groups with distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical backgrounds. Since Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain, education has been used as the main political tool for Bamar national assimilation, neglecting this rich ethnic and cultural diversity. Myanmar opted for the assimilationist approach in which non-dominant ethnolinguistic nationalities are vanquished through the use of educational instruction, materials, and teachers' education, all of which are 'Bamarcentric', centered around a single ethnolinguistic identity and language in Myanmar, Bamar. Other, non-dominant ethnolinguistic groups in Myanmar have long desired to incorporate their own languages, cultures, and histories into the educational system. In this vein, the National Education Law (NEL), which took effect in 2014, provides the integration of non-dominant ethnic languages and cultural identities into the mainstream curriculum. From this, a modified curriculum framework concerning the integration of indigenous ethnic content was produced in order to promote multicultural coexistence. The present study explores the implementation of the Local Curriculum and integration of non-dominant ethnic content into the curriculum in primary schools through the analysis of the curriculum development process and the integration of non-dominant ethnic content such as local literature, cultural perspectives, and indigenous worldviews. The study was conducted in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Mon states and the Yangon region, where a variety of ethnolinguistic groups reside. Using a qualitative approach, the study drew on findings from interviews with 63 participants, four classroom observations, and document analysis from four states and one region. The study revealed that the implementation of the Local Curriculum promotes multiculturalism and social cohesion.

Keywords: Ethnic Content Integration; Local Curriculum; Multicultural Education; Multiculturalism; Myanmar

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INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is home to 135 ethnic groups, each with its own language, culture, and sociopolitical structure. Although there is controversy surrounding this number, these 135 groups have been designated by the Myanmar government as 'national races' (Clarke, et al., 2019; Lwin, 2011, p. 2). Despite the country's cultural and linguistic diversity, one language and culture, that of the Bamar people, has dominated and has been legitimized in the educational system without recognizing other indigenous groups (Lwin, 2011, p. 4). Although many groups taught

their language and culture both formally in schools and by traditional means during British colonial rule, the teaching of languages and cultures other than Burmese was gradually prohibited starting in 1962 when General Ne Win seized power over the country (Lwin, 2011, p. 2). Recently, however, educational reform in Myanmar has generated momentum towards a new curriculum framework with respect to multicultural education, allowing for integration of local, non-dominant ethnic content. Promoting non-dominant ethnic content in the mainstream educational system thus appears to be a significant historical change.

The political landscape started to change after the 2010 general elections, albeit under the 2008 constitution (designed and implemented by the military). After the elections, the government began to promote various sectors. Education was one of the sectors put on the agenda for the promotion of state development. The National Education Law (NEL) that was approved in 2014 encourages a wide range of reform across the national educational system (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2014). In the National Education Law, 'National Education' is defined as "education that values, preserves, and develops the language, literature, culture, art, traditions, and historical heritage of all the ethnic groups in the nation" (MOE, 2014, art. 2g). It is designated as "free and compulsory education" (MOE, 2014, art. 2w), so that the national and regional governments at all levels provide full support as mandated, so that all school-age children can complete Basic Education.[1] Furthermore, article 44 ensures that the regional governments can exercise authority regarding the teaching of ethnic languages and literature starting at the primary level and gradually expanding to higher grades. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) emerged in 2015, based on article 39(g) of the NEL as well as a comprehensive education sector review (MOE, 2015). The NCF encourages that the Local Curriculum should not be alloted more than 20% of the school day in government schools. Non-dominant ethnic languages, cultures, historical heritages, and regional knowledge, including environmental topics, are to be taught during the Local Curriculum period. The Local Curriculum is designed and taught in accordance with the needs of each state and region by law (MOE, 2014, p. 44).

From late 2012, UNICEF began a nation-wide project on language education and peace-building, titled Language, Education and Social Cohesion (LESC), designed by Australian Consultant Professor Lo Bianco (2016). The language policy review that was undertaken across the country by conducting significant dialogues with the non-dominant ethnic communities and government bodies resulted in the development of the "Nay Pyi Taw Principles", which stipulates broad terms such as "unity, diversity, cohesion, education employment, service delivery, international relation, inclusion communication, and ethnic rights" (Lo Bianco, 2016, p. 17). With the amendment of the National Education Law in 2014, the Curriculum Framework was adapted in 2015 (MOE, 2015). Consequently, the government launched the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP 2016-2021) and went through with plans to implement a Local Curriculum (MOE, 2016).

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1   The National Education Law, Article 16. (a) Basic Education is divided into the following three levels, aiming to have 12 years of education after the completion of kindergarten: i. Primary Education ii. Middle school Education iii. High school Education (b) Kindergarten will be regarded as the base level of Primary Education (c) In order to complete one of the levels of education listed in sub-paragraph (a) educational competence shall be assessed.

As such, the present study aims to explore the integration of local non-dominant ethnic content and implementation of the Local Curriculum in the mainstream educational system. The current study looks at four states and one region with 24 non-dominant ethnic groups that have started to implement the Local Curriculum in Grades 1, 2 and 3. Some states and regions have not yet begun to implement the Local Curriculum because of various challenges, including the presence of many dialects for one language, lack of awareness about the Local Curriculum development, and a lack of budget. The Local Curriculum was developed in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, and Mon states, with technical support from UNICEF and coordinated by the respective state governments – under supervision of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Ethnic Affairs in each state. Particularly, the Local Curriculum for the West Po Karen and Sgaw Karen groups who live in Yangon, Tenasserim, Pegu, and Irrawaddy regions were developed under the supervision of the Yangon Region Karen Literature and Culture Committee. Even though the study did not consider the entire educational system, looking at the Local Curriculum as part of the system can be helpful as a first step in the process of establishing multicultural education.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION – THEORETICAL ISSUES

This study sought to identify the trend of multiculturalism in Myanmar by analyzing the Local Curriculum development process and considering the integration of non-dominant ethnolinguilistic groups' values, literatures, cultures, and worldviews. Multicultural education theories were adapted for the Myanmar context in order to analyze research findings. Multicultural curriculum reform approaches – contribution, additive, transformation, and social action (Banks, 1989) – were used to analyze the characteristics of the Local Curriculum. Moreover, theories of multiculturalism in terms of ideological tendencies, such as conservative multiculturalism (Banks, 2006, 2010; Gay, 2000; Glazer, 1974; Gorski, 2009; Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011; Jaramillo, 1975; Jenks et al., 2001; Williams, 1975), are discussed. These theories shape the scope of the present study, discussing in-depth the concept of the integration and implementation of non-dominant ethnic content.

According to Banks (2008), a key goal of multicultural education is "to help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures" (p. 2). Multicultural education is meant to provide students with cultural content and analytical skills in order to reflect on the sociocultural issues of the surrounding community. Banks argues that a curriculum needs to be reformed in accordance with its sociocultural context since the mainstream-centric (dominant or majority) curriculum often has a negative impact on not only non-dominant ethnic children, but also children whose background is that of the dominant language and culture (or mainstream/majority language and culture) because they have no chance to learn about other worlds (Banks, 2010, p. 234).

However, multicultural education is often questioned during the reform process due to ideological and "political resistance" (Banks, 2010, p. 244-245). Assimilationists such as Glazer (1974) and Williams (1975) think that emphasizing ethnic cultures is harmful as it creates division and separation among members of society, which they

call 'balkanization' (Banks, 2006, p. 118; Glazer, 1974; Williams, 1975). Conservatives are profoundly interested in a fixed transmission of knowledge based on the social order (Banks & Banks, 2007). Hence, the conservatives are frightened by their imaginations as they think that promoting a culturally plural society is harmful (Hopkins-Gillispie, 2011, p. 2).

Liberalists argue that ethnic cultural identities should be promoted in schools, but Jaramillo (1975) thinks that only 'visible minorities' should be included. This is primarily based on the demographic statistical categories in relation to the employment act in the United States. The theory of liberal multiculturalism suggests that teachers should integrate other cultural content and be aware of students' backgrounds. This perspective opposes conservative multiculturalism, since it tries to be dynamic and flexible (Banks, 2010; Gay, 2000). Sometimes, liberal multiculturalism becomes superficial by "celebrating the differences" (Jenks et al., 2001, p. 92) instead of critically analyzing the issues of inequality among cultural groups. Gorski (2009) also argues that the liberal multiculturalists "support diversity programs," "but only in ways that ignore the access implications of difference" (p. 311).

Critical multiculturalists emphasize structural change. They believe that ethnic groups have their own unique learning styles (Banks, 2006, p. 117). Cultural pluralists suggest that the cultures of non-dominant ethnic minorities should not be ignored in teaching and learning, and that educators should be encouraged to use the materials produced by these groups (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Novak, 1975). McLaren (2003) argues that educators should focus on pedagogic steps, social relations, and democratic initiatives in schools. In this approach, teachers are required to transform themselves (Freire, 1998). This means that critical multiculturalists demand not only "recognition of cultural differences" (Taylor, 2011) by celebrating festivals or integrating cultures into a mainstream education, but, also, require a change of style, meaning, and strategy in order to transform the curriculum into one reflecting democratic values.

Thus, many critical multicultural education advocates criticise contributive and additive approaches to curriculum reform, saying that they do not make social change, but only provide a sign of recognition. Torre (1996) stated that the additive approach does not motivate students in learning, creating social change or generating critical thinking skills to enable them to raise their voices in the face of discrimination and inequalities in society. Bishop (1997) also commented that respective ethnic people's involvement in literature selection is much more important in curriculum reform.

It is necessary to note that the situation of cultural diversity is not the same everywhere in the world. For instance, the United States and many countries in Europe have increased diversity due to global migration, while many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar and Thailand, are home to many national ethnic minorities (Tilaar, 2004).

Thus, this paper argues that in Myanmar multicultural theories and practices may not be applicable in the same ways as they are in the West. Particularly in Myanmar, throughout the state-formation process, ethnic nationalities have fought against Bamar nationalism and claim for self-determination. Modern Myanmar is a combination of many nations that were independent in pre-colonial times (Myint-U, 2004; Sakhong, 2012; Williams & Sakhong, 2005). Even during British colonial rule, the frontiers were administered differently. There were, for example, the Chin Hills Regulation

promulgated in 1896, the Kachin Hills Regulation in 1895, the 1919 Act of Federated Shan States in 1920, and the 1935 Burma Act in 1937 (Williams & Sakhong, 2005, p. 11). Sakhong described that "the 1935 Burma Act was applied to the area of the pre-colonial Myanmar/Burman Kingdom, which included the former Arakan and Mon Kingdoms as well as delta areas of Karen country" (Williams & Sakhong, 2005, p. 11).

Since Myanmar gained independence from Great Britain in 1948, Burmanisation has taken root and there is a Bamarcentric approach in all aspects of society, including education. Monolingualism and monoculturalism were the only approaches used in every level of school, and teachers have been used as political tools for many years where they served in a state-building role under the instruction of a one language, one culture and one race ideology, instead of promoting unity through diversity by using ethnic languages and cultures in the school. Myanmar continues to face political conflict with non-dominant ethnic nationalities – the so-called 'natives' (Myint-U, 2004) – that has a significant effect on state-building, as the adoption of multicultural education is about integration of non-dominant ethnic groups' cultures and identities. Thein Lwin (2002) stated that education has been used "as a political tool preventing children from learning how to think" (p. 1). Lwin also noted that "many schools in the ethnic nationality areas do not want to use the curriculum written by the military regime" (p. 3). He argues that the curriculum developed by military government leads to Burmanisation.

Curriculum reform is directly associated with the teachers' roles. Teachers are the leaders in policy implementation (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Therefore, it is crucially important that the teacher be aware of policy changes. The literature reveals that most teachers seemed to face a dilemma when the new policy was enacted because they lacked understanding of it (Wallace & Fleit, 2005). Jackson (1992) states that this was because of the "lack of clarity concerning changes in skill, resources, and motivation" (p. 206).

Currently, there are 22 Teacher Education Colleges and two Universities of Education in Myanmar (MOE, 2015), and 47,363 Basic Education schools with approximately 9.26 million students (MOE, 2016). Han Tin (2008) found that teachers in Myanmar are "highly conservative and traditionalist, and tend to resist change" (p. 114). Han Tin (2008) argues that, although teachers are provided with capacity-building and attend the new teaching methodology orientation training, they still return to the classroom with old, traditional methods after completing training.

METHODS

The research method was determined according to the goal of the study. The aim of the research was to understand the integration of ethnic content and the implementation of the local curriculum. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was utilized, using in-depth interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. The interviews were conducted with 63 participants – 24 interviews were done with indigenous, ethnic focal persons who were in charge of developing the Local Curriculum, and 39 participants were Teaching Assistants (TA) who taught the Local Curriculum in Grade-1 classes (lower primary classes with students aged six or higher) in primary schools. Conducting interviews with those participants was

very important because they were practically implementing the curriculum reform process. The document analysis included the National Curriculum Framework (MOE, 2015), Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (MOE, 2017) and Local Curriculum Textbooks. Four classroom observations were held in Kachin State and Kayah State. Data was collected over the period of four months (October 2019 to January 2020). All participants were purposefully selected for in-depth interviews, as the researcher believed that they could reference their experiences about how they created the Local Curriculum and what they expected from it. The process of data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), which "is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data" (p. 297). Coding, categorizing data, sorting the data into key headings, and listing the topics within each key heading were all performed. Then, the categories that arose in the previous steps were compiled into groups – avoiding overlap, making comments on the groups or results in the previous stage and reviewing their messages and evaluating the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Local Curriculum is intended to reflect 'local needs'[2]. There are 120 hours out of 840 hours per year allotted to the Local Curriculum for the lower primary level curriculum. The Local Curriculum is allotted 14.2% of the curriculum, while 86% of teaching hours are for other subjects. There is also some flexibility in the curriculum according to local needs. The specific content of the Local Curriculum is determined based on the respective region and culture and the language of instruction that is spoken in the area.

In order to implement the Local Curriculum, the Ministry of Education established the Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (LCIP) in 2017, based on article 44 of the 2014 National Education Law (NEL), which provides guidelines for forming implementation committees. According to the analysis of the protocol, Local Curriculum implementation committees were established in each state. These committees were formed with government officials from organizations such as the Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Ethnic Affairs, and State Education Office, as well as retired education officers, university professors, and instructors from teacher colleges. Thus, they were unfamiliar with non-dominant ethnic cultures. The Literature and Culture Committees of ethnic groups, who work with language and the education of ethnic minorities, and who are experts regarding their respective languages and cultures, were not mentioned by name, although such a broad term 'language experts' is used in the protocol to act as representatives from each respective ethnic group.

The extent to which each member was engaged with the development of the curriculum varies from state to state. For example, some top-level government officers have been actively involved throughout the process of developing the Local Curriculum, while others were present only for short periods. In one case, the State

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2   Emphasizing ethnic language, culture and history, persons that are admirable in the regions, natural resources, local business, and basic computer skills to be included in the local curriculum content accordingly. This is defined in the National Curriculum Framework (2015) and the Local Curriculum Implementation Protocol (2017).

Education Officer was involved in all aspects of implementation, while in another case the State Government provided only financial support. Although ethnic Literature and Culture Committees (LCCs) were not mentioned by name in the protocol, they took on the role of language experts in the development of the Local Curriculum, providing cultural and linguistic information. Each ethnic group has its own literature and culture committee. As such, local LCCs are the primary resource for all aspects of culture, including language, values, traditions and history.

The aforementioned protocol also elaborates what the Local Curriculum Framework will look like based on the 2015 National Curriculum Framework, dividing the Local Curriculum into two main tracks: ethnic languages, namely ethnic language teaching (ELT), and other social studies, namely local knowledge (LK), as shown in the following table.

Local Curriculum	
Grades 1, 2, and 3	
40 minutes in a teaching period, 5 periods in a week, 120 teaching hours in a year	
Ethnic Language Teaching	**Local Knowledge**
3 Periods per week	2 periods per week
40 minutes per period	40 minutes per period
In respective ethnic languages	In the Burmese language
Content	
Local ethnic language	-ethnic history and cultures
	-regional economic situation
	-agricultural and other relevant content

Table 1. Local curriculum learning areas and time allocation in primary school. (developed based on findings).

The protocol also stipulates that there is to be one Local Knowledge book per state, written in Burmese. Although each state is named after a particular language group (e.g., Kayah State for the Kayah people), there are many different indigenous language groups in each state. As such, there is not enough time or space in the textbook to include each group's (from the respective state) Local Knowledge content. This proved a challenge in negotiating among the different groups as to which content should be included in the curriculum. Furthermore, the language experts responsible for providing local knowledge for the curriculum found it difficult to translate terminology related to their culture and traditions into Burmese. Since local teachers must speak to children in their language rather than in Burmese, this could create difficulties.

The study revealed that there were also members of the committees responsible for developing the Local Knowledge curriculum associated with the government who had considerable influence on deciding what to include in the curriculum. The content for the Local Knowledge portion was collected by the Literature and Culture Committees, passed to the Local Knowledge Development Team (LKDT), and approved by the Local Curriculum Implementation Committee (LCIC), which was comprised of elites – not community representatives. On the other hand, the

ethnic Literature and Culture Committees faced much controversy among themselves regarding the inclusion of local heroes. Some ethnic Literature and Culture Committees wanted to include the heroes who sacrificed their lives for their nation but some did not want to add them. For example, the historic hero Saw Ba U Gyi, who is an iconic hero for the Karen people and who sacrificed his life in 1950,[3] was not included. One interview regarding the inclusion of heroes in the Local Knowledge is quoted as follows:

> Some may think Saw Ba U Gyi should be included in the school curriculum; of course he was a great leader for the Karen people, but not for this nation. (Not) like Mann Ba Khaing, who was assassinated with Bo Gyoke Aung San. He is one who worked for the nation. We must be aware of this. And this curriculum is not for one particular ethnic group, but KNU (Karen National Union) schools might be teaching Saw Ba U Gyi as their leader because he was a Karen leader, but not for the whole Burma. (Secretary of the Yangon Literature and Culture Committee, personal communication, 29 January 2020)

Saw Ba U Gyi was a great leader for the Karen people, but some criticized Saw Ba U Gyi as championing only Karen people, not Karen State. In fact, today's Karen State was created in 1952, two years after the death of Saw Ba U Gyi, and is just a small area that excludes many Karen-inhabited areas (UNDP, 2014, p. 16). The Karen inhabited areas includes "Tenasserim division including Toungoo district, Irrawaddy division, Hanthawaddy division, Insein district, Nyaunglebin sub-district" (Dun, 1980, p. 82-83). Even the name "Karen State" was renamed to "Kayin State" by the military regime in 1989 (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 98; UNDP, 2014, p. 23). Karen leaders demanded a separate state (Myint-U, 2006). The people in the Local Knowledge development team may not be aware of the history of Karen State or they may have a narrow view that the curriculum is to teach about content pertinent to the states of Myanmar.

Symbolically, non-dominant ethnic clothes and instruments were added to the curriculum, which may not be sufficient or generate further analytical skills. Inclusion of notable historical figures (heroes) of non-dominant ethnic peoples, special days and the celebration of non-dominant ethnic cultures in the Local Knowledge are superficial because the content is written in a Bamar (mainstream or majority) perspective, instead of the non-dominant perspectives. Those figures who prominently served the Burmese government were included, but not those who fought for non-dominant ethnic groups' rights and freedoms. In addition, the Local Knowledge content does not reflect on conflict resolution at all. It does not support children in developing critical thinking or reflection on real-life circumstances. Though the superficial inclusion of diversity allows students to gain limited general, surface-level knowledge, as they learn about the simple, visible characteristics of other ethnic groups, they do not learn their perspectives or underlying worldviews. Students have no chance to learn about differences or to understand different cultures. This is another way of stereotyping through education and promoting superficial practices, and can be harmful to children as they might not understand the facts of history.

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3   Observed as "Martyrs' Day" in KNU areas.

On the other hand, the Local Knowledge textbook analysis showed that there is no effective teaching methodology applied in the teaching of the Local Knowledge portion of the curriculum, but that teachers will teach the developed syllabi in a traditional way, focusing on rote memorization instead of promoting critical thinking. Critical thinking means that students can analyze the socio-political inequality in society and the fact that Burmese society is comprised of different characters and power dynamics among the Bamar and other ethnic groups, as well as the oppression faced by those ethnic groups. The National Curriculum Framework stipulates that the Local Curriculum is to promote peaceful coexistence and to ensure sociocultural diversity in order to solve political conflicts. However, the Local Curriculum, particularly the Local Knowledge portion, fails to include such issues because of the fear that the government would not implement it fully. In an interview with the Karen State Focal Person, she expressed that "there is no other thing that can kill someone. We're not putting in content that would violate the law and [lead someone to] commit murder. We only need our freedom to promote our history through education" (Karen State Local Curriculum Development Ethnic Focal Person, personal communication, October 24, 2019). In part because of the many issues involved, Local Knowledge was not ready to be taught in school in the 2019-2020 school year.

As for the Ethnic Language Teaching (ELT) portion, the curriculum was developed for only Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Mon States and not in Chin State. There are over 50[4] (Salem-Gervais & Lian, 2020) languages spoken indigenously in Chin State and no agreement could be reached as to which or how many languages should be included in the curriculum.[5] Altogether, 24 language groups developed their own ELT textbook. These books were made by revising existing learning resources, making them more relevant and employing appropriate language teaching pedagogy, as well as creating new resources that are properly sequenced according to the children's levels of language proficiency. The results of the study revealed that ethnic Literature and Culture Committees were responsible for the ELT portion of the curriculum, including topics based on their respective 'cultural calendar'. A cultural calendar includes various cultural components including food, games, clothes, events, work, tools, history, famous leaders, and the group's flag. Grades 1 to 3 were systematically arranged so that children first develop oral proficiency and then basic literacy skills, introducing all the sounds and symbols of the language. The ELT portion was also developed in a way that the students learn both how to accurately produce language as well as understand that language has meaning and can be used to communicate novel ideas, using primarily stories from the community. The Grade 1 ELT books were launched in the 2019-2020 school year. Thus far, LCCs have taken responsibility to contact school principals and township, state, or national education departments as necessary in order to ensure local ethnic teachers are posted to each school to teach the curriculum, as well as for publishing the ELT books and teaching materials.

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4   Chin language groups are under discussion; the government lists out 53 as Chin sub-groups, which is not accurate. Obviously, 'Chin' itself is also listed as one of the subgroups, and many such as Naga, Tangkhul, Malin, Anun, Lhinbu, and Meitei have never been considered as Chin groups (see also Salem-Gervais and Lian, 2020). Historically, Tangkhul, Malin, and Anun have been considered as Naga people.

5   The author was able to talk with four of the Chin State Local Curriculum Implementation Committee members for one hour.

Regarding this, a focal person revealed in an interview as follows:

> So, whatever we do with MOE is not fully trustable at last. Still not producing the materials and teacher employment which they did up-side-down is visible. We have no materials, like big books and cards. The director of the MOE said that there isn't any budget left. (Focal Person of Gebah from Kayah State, personal communication, 27 October 2019)

The focal person of Shan Ethnic groups stressed that "yes, our work is sometimes like '*Sin Lee Khway Hmyaw*',[6] which cannot be possible" (Focal Person of Shan Ethnic Groups from Kachin State, personal communication, November 10, 2019), and the Focal Person of Jinghpaw also expressed that "the LCC recruited and supported TAs, and when they were promoted to be permanent teachers, they became *Hpaya pyi nyan phyat*"[7] (Focal Person of Jinghpaw from Kachin State, personal communication, 11 November 2019).

The implementation of the ELT portion of the curriculum varied from school to school and depended on the school principal. Many school principals were not aware of the Local Curriculum or that it was allotted a time period in the school day. Some were also reluctant to include ELT during school hours as they were under the impression that local ethnic languages were not to be taught at school during school hours. Some of the teachers appointed to teach the Local Curriculum were posted as part-time teaching assistants (TAs) and language teachers (LTs). TAs and LTs are constantly taken advantage of by the permanent teachers because they are part-time teachers. Being teaching assistants, TAs are overloaded with administration work. Sometimes, permanent full-time teachers take the time allotted for language instruction and teach other subjects, leaving the TAs to teach the ELT after school hours. During interviews, most of the participants used words like 'bothersome', 'overloaded', and 'discriminated' in regards to their work. The teaching assistants who teach the Local Curriculum were insulted by the permanent teachers by using ofensive words. They are given a heavy workload, including cleaning the school campus and doing paperwork, which are not supposed to be done by teaching assistants, and, at times, they are told to teach other subjects apart from the Local Curriculum. Focal persons from Kachin State said that they used to relay these problems to the District Education Officer (DEO) but neither the school head nor the teachers received a response, although the DEO said something would be done.

> Regarding the issues, I met with DEO many times to complain. It's not really a complaint but an exchange of understanding. Otherwise, our teachers will have no opportunity to teach. I am aware that most other language groups face that kind of problem. (Focal Person of Shan Ethnic Groups in Kachin State, personal communication, 10 November 2019)

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6   'Sin Lee Khway Hmyaw' is a Burmese saying that means one is hoping for an impossible goal.

7   Hpaya Pyi Nyan Phyat is a Burmese idiom that means the scaffolding is cleared out after finishing the construction of the Pagoda. The meaning is that after completing local curriculum development, no other issues are considered.

> The timetable should be made so that we can teach grade 1, 2, 3 without conflicting with other classes. A proper timetable is needed for language teaching. We asked the school headmaster for a time to be specified and he wanted to have a set schedule as well but he did not receive instructions from his superiors so he said that he couldn't. (Focal Person of Tai Lae Literature and Culture Committee in Kachin State, personal communication, 10 November 2019)

In cases like these, the local LCC negotiated with the principal and discussed how to include the Local Curriculum in the school day. In some places, however, the part-time TAs were very much appreciated and helped in teaching other classes as well as helping with administrative work in the office. Some TAs were able to adjust their teaching schedules with the headmaster and other regular teachers. One TA from Kachin state said:

> I got to negotiate at school with the other teachers and the head of school. I am happy because this curriculum is taught during school hours. I am given the last period of the day. So, the students feel bored at that time. The head of the school is Jinghpaw. (Teaching Assistant from Kachin State, personal communication, 11 November 2019)

As it was stated by Wallace and Fleit (2005) and Jackson (1992), teachers often face a dilemma in implementation because of a lack of understanding the new policy. The study found that the newly stipulated laws and policies were not properly made known to teachers and education administrators at all levels.

LCCs recruited TAs after testing their language skills and they were posted by the government after having received training on language teaching methods and how to use the teaching materials. In some instances, the government did not post a relevant local teacher (e.g., the teacher did not speak the language of the students). There were several challenges in the posting of TAs, as the implementation of Local Curriculum is a new mechanism.

Despite these difficulties, the findings from the classroom observations reveal that the ELT component of the curriculum aids in ensuring active participation from the students and that they understand the lessons. In contrast, previously, when the children's languages were excluded in school and they did not have the opportunity to participate in learning, the children faced many difficulties. Now, the ELT portion aids in student comprehension and in building healthy learning habits, as both the language and content are familiar to them.

Moreover, children from different language groups enjoyed the ELT portion even when there was not a teacher who spoke the language of each of the ethno-linguistic groups represented in the classroom. It was found that children enjoy the Local Curriculum, based on their own culture. Integrating local ethnic content in the curriculum encourages social cohesion by promoting multiculturalism from the time children start school.

Based on the findings of this study, Multicultural Education Policy can be described as shown in the chart. The following MEP model can be used as a model of curriculum reform in Myanmar.

Curriculum	Contents	Teachers	Educational aims	Principles
• Use indigenous ethnic language • Use respective ethnic materials • Use multi-ethnic integrated materials • Employ Multi-Strategy Method (MSM) that is culturally relevant teaching style • Aim to help the child to learn how to function effectively within society, his or her ethnic culture, and other ethnic cultures.	• Cultural heritage • Food • Heroes • History (person & process) • Identity • Environment and location • Animals • Natural resources • Agriculture	• Students need skilled teachers who are very knowledgeable about and sensitive to their ethnic cultures and cognitive styles • Multicultural competency is required • Teachers are knowledgeable in language and culture of the students • Equity teaching pedagogy	• Help students learn diversity • Create effective learning • Promote cultural pluralism • No total integration • Not restricted to other cultures • Open society biculturalism • Promote peaceful co-existence and democracy	• Majority & minority emphasis • Group rights are primary • Common ancestry and heritage unify • Marginalized groups have unique learning styles

Table 2. Multicultural education policy (MEP) model. (developed based on findings).

In the MEP model in Table 3, the educational system aims for children to function well within their respective local ethnic culture, and employs teachers who share the same language and culture as the students. It is noteworthy to look at the phenomenon of Local Curriculum implementation amid the curriculum reform process as it occurs in the midst of political transition and social change and in a multicultural context. However, as the LK component of the Local Curriculum does not make use of the local ethnic languages, students will not learn the content well and overall achievement and social change may not be as evident as the ELT portion. The ELT portion has the potential to generate remarkable transformation as local content is presented in the language students understand, ensuring that the children can actively participate in class and learn what is being taught.

In a multicultural society, curriculum reform is necessarily a social reform process and governments often choose to start at the lowest level of content integration approach (Banks, 2006). However, the case of Myanmar is different, as the LK represents a contribution approach, while the ELT is at the transformation approach level, as shown in
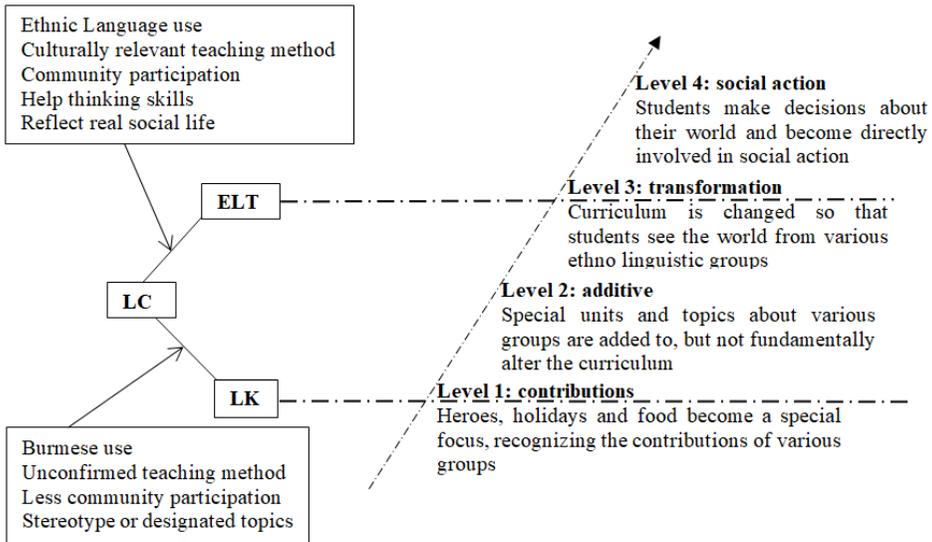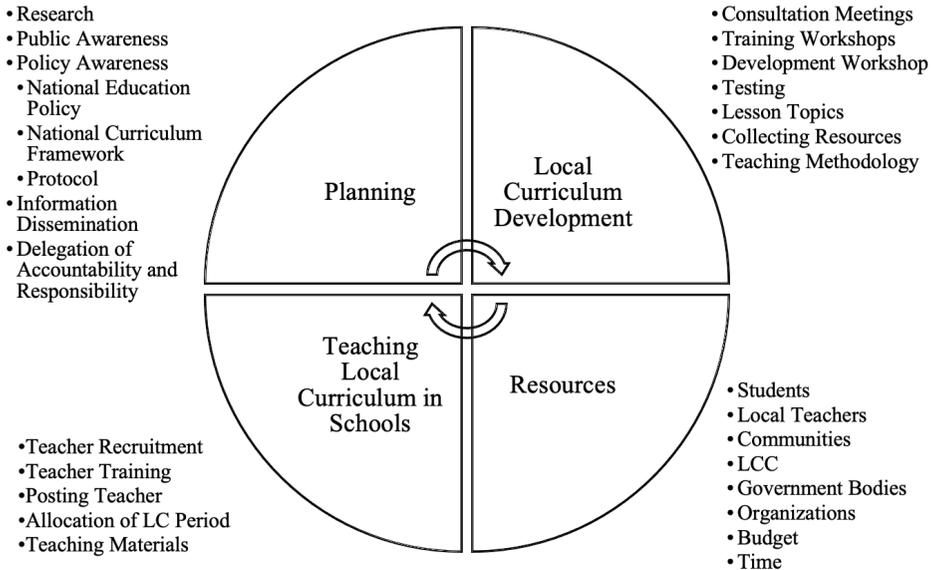
Figure 1. Local curriculum approach level. (developed based on findings).

Figure 1. The time allotment and schedule for the curriculum for the entire school year has been changed. There are 120 hours in a year given for the Local Curriculum, much like a core learning area. The ELT content guides children in learning about sociocultural diversity and problems that often arise in a multicultural society and children are encouraged to engage in problem solving. In classroom observations, it was found that ELT lessons are prepared such that a class writes and talks about their own experiences, or they participate in role play that the teacher has prepared according to the lesson's theme. Then, the teacher facilitates the class in discussion regarding their experiences and the story text so that students gain more knowledge and develop thinking and analytical skills. Respective socio-political markers of different ethno-linguistic groups are taught in ELT lessons, such as the flag, anthem and history of the monarchy and ruling system, intended to help children develop their thinking skills. This can also help children in comparing present life and the past of their people. However, ELT content at the primary level is basic; it does not achieve the aims of the social action approach. In higher grades, as the study reveals, ethnic groups expect to create more advanced lessons about why and how the people of non-dominant ethno-linguistic groups are marginalized. The students are not taught social action skills to balance the power with the dominant group because the curriculum framework was developed so that it focuses on peaceful coexistence rather dissent, rebellion, and tribalism.

The current implementation process and lessons learned should be taken into consideration when implementing the Local Curriculum for upper levels and for other ethno-linguistic groups in other states. The framework for implementation is comprised of four essential parts, all inextricably intertwined and requiring careful attention, as shown in Figure 2 below.

In the midst of writing this paper, the political situation has tremendously changed in Myanmar. The military seized power from the civilian-led government on 1 February 2021. In response to the coup d'état, a civil strike, called 'Spring Revolution'

- Research
- Public Awareness
- Policy Awareness
  - National Education Policy
  - National Curriculum Framework
  - Protocol
- Information Dissemination
- Delegation of Accountability and Responsibility

- Consultation Meetings
- Training Workshops
- Development Workshop
- Testing
- Lesson Topics
- Collecting Resources
- Teaching Methodology

Planning

Local Curriculum Development

Teaching Local Curriculum in Schools

Resources

- Teacher Recruitment
- Teacher Training
- Posting Teacher
- Allocation of LC Period
- Teaching Materials

- Students
- Local Teachers
- Communities
- LCC
- Government Bodies
- Organizations
- Budget
- Time

Figure 2. Suggested local curriculum implementation framework.

has been taking place across the country, with the situation worsening daily (Jordt et al., 2021, p. 23). Consequently, the National League for Democracy (NLD) politicians who were elected in the 8 November 2020 general elections established the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on 5 February 2021 (Human Rights Council, 2021; Acaps, 2021). Subsequently, CRPH formed the National Unity Government (NUG) on 16 April 2021 (Lilly, 2021) and claimed to be the legitimate government and promised to establish a federal democratic state and to implement federal education. A Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) launched across the country, boycotting all government services that the State Administrative Council (SAC) plans to implement (Karen Human Rights Group, 2021). In this situation, it is uncertain whether this Local Curriculum implementation can be carried on or not. The State Administrative Council (SAC) announced after the coup that they will continue the implementation of the curriculum without any problems. However, civilians continuously protest against SAC, as the CDM campaign calls on citizens to boycott government schools. Thus, obviously, this sudden political change affects all sectors and will negatively impact all socioeconomic development.

Now, the civil strike is shifting toward civil war as the NUG formed a People's Defense Force (PDF). The authors believe that the schools in central Myanmar face more hardship at this time and schools in ethnic-dominated areas might be able to continue to sustain their school programs because they have been experiencing this kind of conflict for 70 years, so it is not much different for them. However, this political change is a great turning point that has the potential to enact great changes in Myanmar. The impact of the coup can lead to "balkanization" (Glazer, 1974) wherein ethnic territories, which seem to be the rump states, controlling some part of their territories for many years could legitimately become autonomous states.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studying the Local Curriculum development and implementation process illustrates the opportunities and challenges in implementing a larger multicultural education policy. Through this study, the challenges in integrating local ethnic content came to light. Many lessons can be drawn from these challenges and will be helpful in setting up a multicultural educational policy in Myanmar. This study also shows the process of Local Curriculum development and the integration of local ethnic content into the curriculum and how the curriculum, along with the MEP model, can be adapted for the purpose of social cohesion.

The findings from the research conducted in some ethnic communities concerning the Local Curriculum development process provide practical insight through lived experience in integrating local ethnic content into the curriculum. Thus, relevant government ministries and ethnic leaders or LCCs could benefit from lessons learned thus far in how to take the next steps in developing a curriculum for higher levels and for other ethno-linguistic communities. Conducting research on integrating ethnic content in the local curriculum is of great value to both ethno-linguistic communities and governments, since multicultural educational policy has been more formally applied. Ethnic languages have been allocated as a subject in the curriculum since the 2014 curriculum reform, but not all the ethnic communities were informed and have not developed instructional material.

The author believes that the characteristics of curriculum reform approaches depend on the sociopolitical situation of the country. Historically, ethnic groups in Myanmar have employed their own culture, traditions, heritage, and literature in the respective school systems. Presently, implementation of the Local Curriculum in the formal educational system by employing the literature of ethnic minorities gives hope for sustaining and promoting multiculturalism as the cultural aspects of each ethnic group are fully installed in the lessons in the ethnic language teaching portion.

Recommendations

1. Ethnic Content Integration implementation should be carried out with full participation of local LCCs because they are most responsible and accountable for providing resources, as found in this research. They know what is most relevant to their communities and their children. LCCs should be officially designated as members of the implementation committee prescribed in the protocol. As they play an important role in developing the Local Curriculum, their technical abilities and capacity should be strengthened.

2. Rather than dividing the Local Curriculum in two parts, one in Burmese and one in the respective local language, the entire local curriculum should be in the children's first language. In this way, children can learn the content sufficiently and effectively.

3. The legality of teaching the Local Curriculum in the mainstream curriculum should be well-communicated to local schools, as it is prescribed in the National Curriculum Framework. The policy regarding ethnic language

teaching during school hours should also be communicated to every level of related educational departments. If this is done, the posted language teachers can teach their classes with full confidence while school principals can manage the logistics of teaching the Local Curriculum in their schools.

4. As there are many ethnolinguistic groups in Myanmar, implementing multicultural education through the Local Curriculum can aid in the development of education. The implementation of the Local Curriculum is a turning point in Myanmar and a possible pathway to peaceful co-existence between various ethno-linguistic groups, and national reconciliation. Therefore, content integration in the mainstream curriculum should be supported, both in the budget and through technical support from the government.

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