



# POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MYANMAR AND THE GED:

## QUALIFICATION VERSUS EDUCATION

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# 0. ABSTRACT

The pathway to university has long been a challenge for many students from Myanmar. Graduates from schooling run by ethnic-based education providers (EBEPs) outside government-controlled areas, or migrant learning centers (MLCs) in neighboring countries are unable to get recognition for their K-12 schooling. This has exacerbated since the 2021 military coup, with hundreds of thousands of students unable to access any form of government-recognized basic education.

One common route to international universities is via the US General Educational Development (GED) Certificate, which is widely accepted as an entrance qualification in Thailand and other regional institutions. In recent years, a number of online and face to face programs have established GED tuition programming. In this paper, we discuss some of the issues involved in teaching and studying for this qualification, and assess some of the alternatives, with a particular focus on educational programming designed by post-secondary providers catering to the contextualized and changing educational

needs of students within their constituencies. We argue for the establishment of a university entrance qualification combining quality assurance and contextualized content options, recognized by international tertiary education providers.

Input into this paper comes from interviews undertaken between May-July 2023, with students enrolled in or graduated from GED programs, teachers and managers involved in education sectors targeting Myanmar students currently living in Thailand, and the researchers' personal and professional experiences working in education on the Thai/Myanmar border over the last three decades.

Sources referred to in this paper discuss a range of related topics, from analysis of and access to higher education prior to and since Covid-19 and the 2021 Myanmar military coup to education planning and implementation amongst ethnic and community-based education providers, migrant learning centers and online educational initiatives.

# 1. METHODOLOGY

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and Key informant (KI) interviews were conducted between June–August 2023, with current and former students, teachers, and managers of GED preparation programs:

- Six students currently studying in-person post-secondary institutions on the Thai/Myanmar border. (FDG 1, 2)
- Two teachers and one former teacher instructing GED-focused curriculum in online and in-person post-secondary institutions on the Thai/Myanmar border. (KI 1-3)
- Two graduates of GED preparation programs and university scholarship recipients currently working in education in Myanmar and the Thai-Myanmar border (KI 4, 5)
- Three education managers – principals and academic coordinators – of face to face and online GED preparation programs targeting students throughout Myanmar and on Myanmar’s border (KI 6-8)

Time and communication constraints mean that quantitative data on numbers of programs and students currently teaching and learning GED curriculum, how many go on to sit the test, and pass rates of test-takers was outside the scope of this paper. That data will provide useful material for future analysis.

## 2. THE GED AND MYANMAR: SOME BACKGROUND

The General Education Development qualification is recognized as equivalent to a United States high school diploma. The GED tests comprise four examinations measuring proficiency in social studies, science, mathematics, and reasoning through (English) language arts. Each test is taken separately, and any test not passed can be taken again (twice within a 60-day period). Test tasks are all closed-answer questions such as multiple-choice, with a written essay for the language arts subject.<sup>1</sup>

Candidates are required to have a valid identification document (national ID or passport), and each of the four tests costs (at time of writing) US \$80. There are test centers in Chiang Mai, Mae Sot, Bangkok, Yangon, and Mandalay.

GED credentialling initiatives targeting students from Myanmar have been happening since at least 1998, when the Intensive College Foundation Program (ICFC) was established by the Open Society Institute in Bangkok, later Chiang Mai. Students were initially exiled

activists and refugees living along Thailand's borders with Myanmar and urban centers in Thailand. Subsequent intakes expanded to include students from Myanmar seeking tertiary education beyond the limits of Myanmar's university systems. In the eleven years ICFC was running, over 225 graduates gained their GED certificates, the majority of whom received scholarships to study at regional universities. After ICFC was closed, other GED programs were established, comprising a small subsection of Myanmar's post-secondary ecosystem.

Since the 1990s, increasing numbers of community-based organizations, ethnic-based education providers and INGOs have set up post-secondary schools, variously focusing on academic preparation, community development, vocational training, or specialized subject instruction. The Post-secondary Education Forum<sup>2</sup> defines these with the criteria of being secular, non-profit, catering to students over sixteen, and having regular intakes.

1. <https://ged.com/>

2. <https://psecmyanmar.com/en>



Initially based in refugee camps on the Thai/ Myanmar border, many were later established amongst populations from Myanmar in neighboring countries and, after 2010, inside Myanmar, providing an alternative to the opportunities and access afforded by Myanmar's government-run secondary and tertiary education systems. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of these transitioned to online instruction, with further online programs set up following the 2021 military coup. The post-secondary sector comprises upwards of 150 schools, located in Myanmar and in neighboring countries hosting populations from Myanmar. The sector also includes a range of support services such as curriculum development and teacher training organizations, and donor and advocacy groups (Siangpum & Julian 2022, Loong & Rinehart 2021, Maber 2016).

The overriding challenge faced by these institutions is the lack of recognition for their courses. Many are well-regarded by their wider communities, with graduates being highly sought after for roles within local and international NGOs and businesses. Many of these institutions design and implement programming closely aligned with the pedagogical and political needs and preferences of their target students, leveraging local and international expertise, designed to meet reputable standards and

benchmarks (Metro 2021, Loong & Rinehart 2019, Oh, Walker & Thako 2019, Maber 2016). However, with a few notable exceptions (Siangpum & Julian 2022) a qualification from a post-secondary school does not confer admission to tertiary studies and is not perceived as having the same value as a degree on the national and international job market. "Accreditation is inevitably restricted by the reluctance of the Myanmar and Thai governments to recognize a non-state entity" (Thako, 2014).

As a consequence, many seek credentialing options with recognized tertiary institutions and prior to 2021, government recognition (Inoue 2023, Thako 2014). This is further discussed in the context of migrant learning centers (Tyrosvoutis 2019) and amongst ethnic education providers (Than Min Htun & Mortenson 2020, Jolliffe & Speers Mears, 2016). Oh, Walker and Thako (2019) outline the efforts made by the Karen Education and Culture Department, who since 1947<sup>3</sup> have developed education programming "out of community efforts while establishing its own spheres of knowledge, values, practice and administration." Oh et al (2019) further point out how this has enabled the Karen Education and Culture Department to be seen "as a legitimate education authority and the Karen curriculum as a valid body of knowledge," and how this is an important step in validating

3. <https://kecdktl.org/>



the learning of the approximately 170,000 students in areas under KEDC administration. Initial discussions between the KEDC and Myanmar's Ministry of Education working towards this were brought to a standstill by the military coup.

Siangpum and Julian (2022) argue that accreditation of learning also plays a big part in ensuring quality of instruction, support, and administrative services, and has a significant role to play in standardization of curricular objectives and benchmarks, which would be a useful step towards greater recognition of non-state education systems.

At the time of writing, there are upwards of two hundred online and offline post-secondary schools educating tens of thousands of students in and from Myanmar, with new initiatives starting up frequently. Many are now under pressure to switch to or include GED programming. The percentage which currently offer GED preparation is difficult to establish, but the authors personally know of more than twenty, including at least twelve on the Thai-Myanmar border<sup>4</sup>, and several other schools are considering offering it within post-secondary or high school programming.



4. Here defined as the provinces in Thailand adjacent to regions in Myanmar and urban centers with a significant population from Myanmar

## 3. KEY FINDINGS

Participants, comprising students, teachers, and managers, interviewed for this paper characterized their students and classmates as variously coming from the refugee camps and the migrant learning centers in Thailand, and throughout Myanmar, with KI 6 also having students from the Myanmar-China border studying online. Additionally, many current learners are high school and university students who left government schools and universities in Myanmar to join the Civil Disobedience Movement or are otherwise unable to access tertiary education in Myanmar (KI 1, KI 2, KI 5, KI 7).

For all participants, the overwhelming reason to study and teach the GED was that it was the only opportunity to access tertiary education, which is limited, impractical or ethically problematic in Myanmar under current conditions. Regional universities usually require an internationally recognized qualification. Additionally, gaining access to these universities, for students participating in this study, means being awarded a scholarship to cover course costs and living expenses. As KI 7 stated regarding the GED “They don’t have anywhere to go after graduating from schools in migrant and refugee camps. We provide a pathway for university level education. GED is a passport to study at a university.”

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### 3.1 INSTRUCTIONAL AND LEARNING CHALLENGES OF THE GED

Getting onto a GED preparation course is a competitive process, with most courses requiring a high level of English language proficiency, of at least Intermediate<sup>5</sup> level (FDG 2, KI 7), mathematical ability, and in some cases, social studies and science knowledge and skills (KI 7).

“We first need to be chosen from hundreds of applications, then we need to sit the interview, and after that we need to pass the GED entrance exam which tests our English and Math skills.” (FDG 2)

Once enrolled on a GED preparation program, students need, alongside the language and critical thinking skills, a lot of practice with the question types (FDG 1, KI 3, KI 4). Some mentioned the heavy workload required (FDG 2, KI 8). All commented on the challenge of the foreign content. The US-focused social studies content, particularly history, is viewed as especially challenging (FDG 1, KI 1, KI 2, KI 4, KI 6, KI 7). “Students from Myanmar have got science and know about mathematics. Social studies you need to know the American background.” (FDG 2).

Time pressures were also a constraint for both teachers and students, with participating programs usually allocating between six months to a year for instruction (KI 2, KI 7, KI 8). KI 8 also made the point that it can take time to get used to the new content and instructional techniques which requires “motivation, to do it within the time period. Both students and teachers have to work hard together to pass the course within one year. Students are not familiar with GED teaching methods, and they struggle with some background knowledge,”

The complexity of wrangling unfamiliar language, content, and tasks at the same time (FDG 2, KI 3, KI 4, KI 8), was a major challenge. FDG 2 and KI 3 discussed the need to translate content and questions into Burmese in order to highlight the techniques required to come up with answers. “We need critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Also to use our brain to translate into mother language - sometimes it is confusing and sometimes we make the wrong conclusions about meanings of words.” (FDG 2).

5. ‘Intermediate’ language proficiency approximates to the Common European Framework for Reference of Language (CEFR) scales as B1.level, or around an IELTS 4.0

## 3.2 BENEFITS OF STUDYING THE GED

The main positive aspects of GED instruction are the wide acceptance of the qualification gained and the comparative affordability of the tests, especially when compared to other international qualifications such as IGSCE and IELTS (KI 3, KI 7), although KI 7 mentioned that an exam focusing on language skills rather than subject content – such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) – would be a more appropriate measure of students' likelihood to succeed at tertiary studies.

The global nature of the mathematics and science syllabus was brought up (KI 4, KI 8) plus some students and teachers commented positively on the world history content (FDG 2, KI 5) “I like politics and law, history, (the opportunity to) understand more world and US history, starting from British history to American” (KI 5).

Also mentioned was the focus on critical thinking (FDG 2, KI 1, KI 2, KI 3, KI 7, KI 8), and the benefits of looking at events and issues from different points of view (FDG 2). KI 8 brought up how these skills are practical training for university study “Students learn to answer opinion questions, where to get reliable information, Analysis, reasoning and

other higher thinking skills, The test structure is very useful for university level” (KI 8).

Despite this focus on critical thinking, students are often able to get through the test using memorizing strategies, which many Myanmar students are likely to have had a lot of practice with through prior educational experiences. (FDG 2, KI 3, KI 8).

“For students whose English may not be good enough, they luckily have had a near genetic transfer of ability to memorize. Through the early 2000s we came to realize that the weaker students were depending on the stronger students who took the tests first to memorize the correct multiple choices and recite them before they fell into their beds exhausted after a suite of GED tests.” (KI 3).

“Students who do not have evaluation, inferencing or analysis skills, but only memorizing, might pass the test, but students need to be able to analyze, e.g., the advantages and disadvantages of democracy and communism, and identify people's ideas. A lot of students struggle with that.” (KI 8).



**As well as tertiary access, GED study and qualification can broaden career opportunities.**

Some participants commented positively on the academic skills acquired through GED study, and the strategies employed to manage unfamiliar content. KI 4 mentioned how proficiency in reading comprehension can get students through the tests, even if the materials are not related to students' contexts. Students in FDG 2 listed some of the overall strategies they employed to get through the course: "The main things to focus on are learning words and searching for information. Read more and more, look online. The book is not enough. We need to do self-study, identify our own weaknesses, and do research ourselves." (FDG 2).

As well as tertiary access, GED study and qualification can broaden career opportunities, as expressed by KI 1, with high demand for teachers who themselves have gone through the GED examination process. Additionally, employers, who might not be aware of the non-state education systems that students have attended, respect the GED as an internationally recognized qualification. "Students can easily find a job teaching or in the NGO sector after they pass the GED. GED supports them with networking, English and experience from how they learn the GED. Some students become GED teachers." (KI 1)



### 3.3 LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

Issues involving ID were brought up (FDG 2, KI 2, KI 5), with the need for government identity documents to sit the exam being a barrier for many. The cost of the exam, currently 80 USD for each of the four papers, plus the pre-tests, at 6 USD per test, was also a constraint (FDG 2), and the lack of scholarships available once you have passed the test (KI 1, KI 5). Regarding scholarships, KI pointed out: “While earning a GED can open doors, it does not necessarily make financing a secondary education any easier. Three of the school’s 47 GED-earners have won scholarships to Thai universities, but paths for the other 44 have yet to be decided.”

Schools often find it difficult to recruit suitable teachers, with the (presumably) more formally qualified international teachers not understanding the students’ backgrounds (KI 8) and Myanmar teachers having difficulty

with the language and content of the GED (KI 7, KI 8), although this is changing now more Myanmar graduates from GED programs are entering the profession.

“It is difficult to find teachers with knowledge to teach GED. Students need more explanation and more understanding (so international teachers) need to change teaching methods. They might be very professional teachers but (often) they don’t teach to students’ level.” (KI 7)

(Teachers) need to read a lot of information – go back through the history, learn all about political changes of the US. If you have to teach this in two or three months, you need to learn all that yourself.” (KI 8)

**Many expressed a preference for more Myanmar or Asian content in literature and social science, human rights and democracy studies.**

### 3.4 ALTERNATIVES

One concern is that a focus on the GED undermines local initiatives to develop courses focusing on expressed student and community needs, and that ideally a university preparation course would also focus on skills and subjects useful for both tertiary studies and other aspects of students' future lives.

“GED program should not solely teach (the GED) program. It should equip students with other life skills such as computer skills, teaching skills or any other subjects that can support them to get the job after they finished the program. An alternative program should include research skills because we need to do research at university.” (KI 1)

“I know there were some students who found the dryness and alien nature of GED quite dispiriting after the rich lessons we've been able to offer. If language skill can be elevated in a meaningful environment, along with critical study skills, the GED might seem less daunting and more of a requirement than a body of knowledge and education, to illustrate universal

themes of elevating dignity, discovering self-forgiveness, recognizing compassion beyond the religious teachings, and to situate students in a global struggle as a source of strength and solidarity. I attribute the personally regenerative components of the 'GED' / social justice education programs, whether GED was achieved or parlayed further, as defining catalysts for the many powerful women graduates. I witnessed many astounding transformations.” (KI 3)

KI 4, who later studied social science at Chiang Mai University, commented that much of the GED content studied was non-transferable and of little use after passing the examination.

However, alternative international qualifications such as IGCSE and IB<sup>6</sup>, were seen as impractical, without appropriately skilled and qualified teachers, more time available, and increased funding to cover the much greater costs associated with running these programs (KI 3, KI 7). “I like IB and IGCSE better, but we can get students through GED in one year. My dream is to have an

6. See, for example, Chulalongkorn University's list of accepted high school equivalency qualifications at <https://hscs.atc.chula.ac.th/>



international school level of education where we can do that, if donors could pay.” (KI 7)

One ideal, according to KI 6, was that Migrant Learning Centers might standardize curriculum to recognized benchmarks that regional and international universities would accept as suitable for entrance, perhaps alongside an adequate TOEFL or IELTS score. One such initiative, at the time of writing, is being piloted by Bridging Education Access for Migrants (BEAM), a number of online affiliates, and Chiang Mai University.

Many expressed a preference for more Myanmar or Asian content in literature and social science (FDG 2, KI 4, KI 5, KI 8), human rights and democracy studies (KI 2), a broader world history focus (FDG 1), life and work

skills, computer, and teaching skills (KI 1). Additionally, if it were possible, a GED-style course in Burmese language (FGD 1, KI 3) would be helpful either before or as alternative to the English language test. Regarding GED content and relevance for the local context, KI 5 made the point that,

“GED is not the choice for education. We have to build the students’ skills to go out in real life. Not everyone who finished GED can go to university, because the GED is American curriculum, and the learning focus is only that thing and they might forget about other education, skills, and vocational training here. I would like to make our own course with English, science, social studies... one good thing is world history.” (KI 5)



## 4. ANALYSIS

The cognitive burden for second+ language learners<sup>7</sup> in studying the GED is considerable, and a rich source of potential future study. For a student unfamiliar with US content and norms, encountering new methodologies, this burden is considerable. Differentiated instructional strategies and opportunities for personalization, known to reduce this cognitive burden, often fall outside the scope of GED tuition materials and programming. Teachers can bring this into their instruction (Subhap 2014), but often a lack of training and focus on getting students acclimated to the skills and content they will encounter in the test<sup>8</sup> makes this a lesser priority.

However, despite these challenges, increasing numbers of schools are adopting GED-based curriculum, or using pre-GED course materials to prepare students for eventual GED study. Whilst statistics on numbers of programs running GED or pre-GED programs are not currently available, the authors of this paper can point to twelve such programs on the Thai-Myanmar border, reflecting schools' "evident anxiety over accreditation and recognition for alternative learning experiences" (Maber 2016) and the limited recognition of locally-developed courses.

With many border-based schools switching to a GED-focused curriculum, this runs the risk of 'teaching to the top', at best; directing

7. For many students from Myanmar, English is their third, fourth or more language, that they will have engaged with in a form-focused rather than meaning-focused approach throughout their previous schooling.

8. Some useful advice from KI 3 on teaching said skills:

- Have students read the questions first; they might be able to answer without having to read the entire passage.
- Always check how many questions there are for any passage. If a 300-word passage has only one question, skip it, and come back to it. A paragraph of 50 words might have 4 questions, which equals more passing points if answered correctly.
- Guess an answer, as no points are deducted for wrong answers. Leave no question unanswered.
- After developing some analytical skills, assign students a carefully selected passage with the correct answer removed from the 5 multiple choice answers. They have to write in the correct answer, as well as write in explanations of why the other 4 answers are wrong. This was also done verbally "on the fly" in class as students came to expect this type of approach. A variation, depending on time, is to remove the four wrong answers and ask them to select suitably misleading information and inferences from the existing paragraph as four incorrect answers. This lets them inside the "mechanisms" of the question formats.
- Of course, as mentioned previously, translation or preparation of GED format questions in all five subjects in Burmese is useful for revealing the academic mechanism and the objectives, while slightly demystifying the edifice of the unscalable GED. It reveals a thinking skill, as opposed to a preexisting body of knowledge.

instruction to the needs and abilities of the highest-performing students in the class, whilst paying lesser import to the needs of those unlikely to get through a GED exam or gain a scholarship to study at university. An author-observed phenomenon is the ‘sinking or swimming’ style of instruction; exposing students to highly challenging material in the hope that this will increase their pace of learning, leaving some to fall back on techniques of rote-recall of content without understanding of meaning.

A 2012 (Curriculum Project) study on English language levels of students entering 47 post-secondary educational institutions found that over 50% of students were entering at high beginner-low elementary (A1-A2) level English proficiency. There was wide variation, from 5% with almost no English to 5.2% having acquired the intermediate (B2) level of English required to access GED content. These statistics were similar to those gathered in 2007. Assuming there is some, but not spectacular, improvement in students’ English language exit levels of the basic education systems feeding these intakes, a concern is that many students are struggling with the

language needed to access GED content and skills.

Aside from its university entrance function, participants outlined the benefits of the GED as a course of study for its focus on critical thinking/higher order thinking skills, English language acquisition, academic strategising, the (limited) world history syllabus, and the universal nature of the science and mathematics syllabus. These subjects and skills could be integrated into local curricula “in the Thai-Burmese borderland...where education is a somewhat integrated system of cross-border schooling and training that has operated independently from central Burmese and Thai administration. Moreover, the education here has developed out of community efforts while establishing its own spheres of knowledge, values, practice, and administration.” (Oh, Walker & Thako, 2019)

The difficulties inherent in substituting the GED, in high schools and post-secondary initiatives, with a locally-developed curriculum targeting student needs for a future which may or may not include tertiary study, are considerable, despite efforts

amongst ethnic based education providers (Spring University Myanmar 2023; Yeo, Gagnon & Thako 2020; Loong & Rinehart 2019; Jolliffe & Speers Mears 2016), migrant learning centres (Tyrosvoutis 2019) and more recent online initiatives (Spring University Myanmar 2023; Metro 2021). Additional constraints to this include the emergency contexts many are operating under, and difficulties in standardizing courses both within sectors and to recognized benchmarks, as well as a lack of resources, both material and human.

Potentially therefore, non-formal or informal education initiatives promoting community development and rights-oriented social change may support this inter-relational subject formation through allowing a flexibility and creativity that is sensitive to diverse learner experiences within a shared context of displacement. (Maber 2016)

Loong and Rinehart's 2019 paper describes a network of post-secondary schools with standardized curricula and outcomes, developed with needs of students and community as a central priority. With greater levels of recognition for such initiatives, this



and other similar networks offer one model of a way forward. "Taught subjects, including civic education, social science, leadership and management, and English language, are largely consistent between schools, although specific curricula is often iterated over time. Students also acquire technical skills including information technology, community development, and project management...

Can the sector and its graduates—in the words of a post-secondary leader in Karen State—be valued for offering 'local solutions to country-wide problems?' (Loong & Rinehart, 2019)

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Myanmar's youth need access to quality tertiary study options. For the individual student, the closing off of these study pathways takes a heavy toll on mental health, limits employment options and deprives their communities and society of the skills they could put to use. The determination of so many students to leave their families and take often dangerous journeys across borders to take up any chance to get to a university is a measure of the value placed on the chance of higher education.

Depriving a generation of tertiary education has myriad long-term consequences, as can be seen in the previous iterations of this when for years universities were closed following the 1988 and 1996 student uprisings in Myanmar. These effects include further exacerbation of inequality and social unrest, compounding brain drain, decreased innovation and research capability and a reduced capacity to manage complex societal challenges.

The GED has had a role to play in mitigating these issues, but the question of whether this is the most appropriate and effective way forward in the present circumstances is up for debate, and the authors hope this paper will contribute to this discussion and any forthcoming planning around the issue.

There have been various attempts to accredit higher education initiatives along Myanmar's borders. Three Australian tertiary institutions variously offered no-cost credit-bearing courses between 1998 and 2020<sup>9</sup>, but none are currently running. There are universities in the region and further afield, who officially, by arrangement with specific post-secondary schools, or on a case-by-case basis, do not require high school matriculation or equivalence to enter university and have instead developed their own entrance criteria. One example is the Asian University for Women, who explicitly welcome applications from stateless students, and administers their

9. Technical and Further Education South Australia ran Certificate Three and Four courses in Community Management and Primary Health Care using contextualized materials via the Distance Education Programme of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma 1998-2003; Australia Catholic University offered an Associated Degree Program and Open University Australia offered a range of undergraduate degrees by distance throughout the 2000s and 2010s.



own entrance examination<sup>10</sup>. As mentioned, Chiang Mai University's Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development is piloting one such initiative at the time of writing.

KI 3 points out that many universities in the region have been accepting education scholarship students from Myanmar over the last three decades, and might consider developing more straightforward access processes: "In a perfect world, the international universities that Burmese displaced students have been attending over the last 20 to 25 years in Thailand would have some power to give accreditation to their own equivalence examinations." (KI 3).

Although some Myanmar schools have forged partnerships with international universities,

most post-secondary institutions are self-accrediting. Payap University Thailand's Centre for Social Impact<sup>11</sup> runs a Certificate in Social Entrepreneurship and Community Development, charging schools \$3,000 USD each per cohort of students for accreditation. However, most other options, which charge per student, are significantly more expensive.

It was not possible within the scope of this paper to locate any studies comparing the GED to alternative university entrance qualifications in low resource contexts, as overseas studies focusing on the GED vs the UK IGCSEs, the European International Baccalaureate or other international equivalence qualifications have limited relevance. One author's experience working with a GED preparation school in 2006 attempting to find alternatives concluded

10. The entrance examination measures an applicant's current ability in English communication, IQ test (Sudoku Problems), picture study, listening and critical thinking. The purpose of the interview is to observe and evaluate qualities that may not be evident in the applicant's examination scores or application forms. These qualities include but are not limited to:

- An open and inclusive attitude toward those from different countries, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds;
- Integrity, courage, and resilience in the face of adversity;
- Motivation to learn and collaborate with others;
- Passion and curiosity about the broader world beyond one's career prospects;
- A sense of gratitude for those who have aided in one's personal growth and success;
- Clarity of thought and vision, and an awareness of one's goals for themselves and their communities. <https://asian-university.org/admissions/>

11. <https://csi.payap.ac.th/>

**It is the authors' considered, informed plea that a regional or international body, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) would develop a high school matriculation qualification that was not bound to a specific educational culture.**

very quickly that the financial, human and material resources required to run an IGCSE or IB program for non-fee-paying students made such a switch impossible, whilst acknowledging that these are, perhaps, a better pedagogical fit to equip Myanmar students with the necessary skills to succeed in international tertiary education.

Full confession. It is the authors' considered, informed plea that a regional or international body, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) would develop a high school matriculation qualification that was not bound to a specific educational culture.

This could reliably inform curriculum design and instructional strategies for Myanmar and border post-secondary and high schools, allowing them to offer programs leading to university entrance, whilst taking into account the needs of students on other pathways. Moreover, the value of having this qualification would stretch far beyond Myanmar. Recognizing the time and costs associated with such an undertaking and taking into account the increasing number of students having to prematurely give up on their educational aspirations, we suggest starting the process of developing this as soon as possible.

## 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOLS, POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS:

- Undertake needs assessment to determine the gap between students' entry to high school and post-secondary programs and the skills, content and language required to access tertiary education;
- Greater emphasis on networking and sharing resources, and best practice in teaching, curriculum and assessment initiatives;
- Develop programming that takes into account the needs of students likely to go on to tertiary study, and also those on other pathways;
- Where possible, standardize programming throughout networks referenced to recognized benchmarks.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES:

- Waive entrance criteria for those who demonstrate, through previous educational and professional experience, an ability to study at tertiary level;
- Develop institution-specific entrance examinations and other assessment;
- Develop partnerships with education providers from Myanmar to offer accredited courses;
- Offer low-cost bridging and foundational programs to equip Myanmar students with the skills and language to access tertiary-level study.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS AND ADVOCATES

- Boost funding to teacher training, educational management, and student support at all levels, from early childhood through higher education;
- Fund and establish initiatives such as bridging programs to tertiary study, without losing sight of the need for vocational skills training, community development focused programming and other education outcomes;
- As scholarship providers, use leverage with universities to suggest a wider range of entrance criteria;
- Lobby international organizations such as ASEAN and UNESCO to develop regional and international high school equivalence criteria.



## 6. POSITIONALITY AND THANKS

**K**atie Julian (she/her) is a curriculum and materials developer working with people from Myanmar. She is from New Zealand, and from 1995–1999 worked as a volunteer teacher in refugee camps on the Thai–Myanmar border and is a founding member of Mote Oo Education<sup>12</sup> and the Post-secondary Forum<sup>13</sup>. She did the background and desk research parts of this paper.

**N**ang Lao Kham (she/her) is a peace education trainer with Mote Oo Education. She is from Shan State, Myanmar. She has been actively involved in the Peace and Conflict field since 2011, working as a facilitator, trainer, and translator. She did most of the field research parts of this paper.

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12. Mote Oo Education was established in 2013 to support the post-secondary and adult education sectors in Myanmar and on Myanmar's borders. [www.moteoo.org](http://www.moteoo.org)

13. The Post-secondary Forum was formed in 2022 to provide information, resources, and advocacy for the post-secondary sector in and from Myanmar.

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