

CENTRE FOR UNESCO, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Seminar
on
EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

**Presentation by Professor Han Tin, Visiting Fellow, Centre for UNESCO,
Australian National University, Canberra
Wednesday, 31 March 2004**

About the seminar:

The main objective of the seminar was to provide an overview of **Education in Myanmar**. It dealt with the country setting, a brief historical background and a description of the way in which the system of education had evolved. The roles played by the stakeholders in education were highlighted – for the success or failure of the whole education process depends on the interaction and the changing roles they (the stakeholders) play or are assigned to by the society in which they live. The importance of and follow up to the **UNESCO/ UNDP/ MOE Education Sector Study** were also considered. Education is regarded as a priority sector for it is essential for human resources development and is viewed as a key for national development. In recent years, many reforms in education have been undertaken in Myanmar. However there still remain areas of concern that will have to be addressed. The seminar was in the form of a power point presentation. Here, a shortened version of the paper precedes the power point slides. For more details about **Education in Myanmar**, see Han Tin, 2000. ‘Myanmar Education: status, issues and challenges’ *Journal of Southeast Asian Education*, 1(1): 132-60, and Ministry of Education, Government of the Union of Myanmar, March 2002. *Myanmar Education Updates*, 2(1).

About the speaker:

Professor Han Tin is a Visiting Fellow at the ANU Centre for UNESCO. He comes from Myanmar. He was Rector of the Institute of Education, Yangon from August 1992 till November 2001 when he retired. Before that he was Pro-rector and Professor of English at the University of Yangon. He still teaches at the University Yangon and also at the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon.

Professor Han Tin has also been associated with the Myanmar National Commission for UNESCO for many years. In 1979, he undertook his training for new National Commission Secretariat members in Bangkok at the Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. In 1992, he was appointed Secretary-General of the UNESCO National Commission for Myanmar and served in that capacity till 2002. He has participated in many regional meetings of UNESCO and also attended a number of General Conferences in Paris. Professor Han Tin was also on the Steering Committee of the **Education Sector Study** for Myanmar which was undertaken by UNESCO/ UNDP and the Ministry of Education in 1990-93.

EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

1. *Education in Myanmar* is the main theme of the seminar that was held at the *Australian National University, Centre for UNESCO* building at 5 Liversidge Street on Wednesday, 31 March 2004 at 4:30 p.m.
2. By means of a power point presentation, a brief survey was made of the development of education in Myanmar from pre-colonial days to the present.

3. **The setting**

In terms of land area, Myanmar with 676,533 square kilometres is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia. At its widest it measures 936 kilometres, and 2,051 kilometres at its longest. It is bordered by Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand. Its border with Bangladesh is 271 kilometres; with India is 1,338 kilometres, with China is 2,204 kilometres; with Laos is 238 kilometres and with Thailand is 2,107 kilometres. It has a coastline of 2,300 kilometres. It has four major rivers the Ayeyarwady, the Thanlwin, the Chindwin and the Sittaung. The Ayeyarwady is the longest river in Myanmar. In addition a very short part of the Mekong River marks a small section of the border between Myanmar and Thailand, and also between Myanmar and Laos. The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) comprises Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Yunan Province in the People's Republic of China. These six countries have, since 1992, entered into a programme of subregional economic cooperation with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank.

4. The population of Myanmar has been estimated at over 50 million with only 26.6% of its population living in urban areas. Agriculture, which accounts for over 50% of Gross Domestic Product, is still the main sector of the economy. However, Myanmar is a country which is rich in natural resources. It also has a large reserve of renewable and non-renewable energy resources.
5. Myanmar is a Union of fourteen administrative areas - seven states and seven divisions. The seven states are represented by the seven major ethnic groups - Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. The largest ethnic group is the Bamar. They are spread among the seven divisions. There are also other ethnic groupings - as many as one hundred and thirty-five groups have been identified. In modern Myanmar, there is a diffusion of races across all seven states and seven divisions.

6. **Our heritage: a brief history**

Myanmar's history dates back to around the first century A.D. with the founding of the Pyu dynasty and the establishment of the Beikthano, Srikshepra and Halin city states. However, Myanmar became a unified nation during the reign of King Anawrahta (1044-1072 A.D) when the first Myanmar Empire was established and the Bagan dynasty began. The glory that was Bagan can be discerned from the still existing cultural and architectural achievements of that era which have survived the ravages of time, nature and man. The second Myanmar Empire was established by King Bayintnaung in 1551. This was followed by the establishment of the third Myanmar Empire in 1752 by King Alaungpaya.

7. European colonial aspiration and expansion changed the course of history in Asia. Almost all countries of mainland Southeast Asia were affected. Myanmar was no exception. It was in 1824, that the first Anglo-Myanmar War was fought. The whole country was annexed to the British Empire in 1885 after the third Anglo-Myanmar War. The British called the country "Burma" -- the country of the Bamars. This was in spite of the fact that the people of the country have, over the centuries, called their homeland "Myanmar". This name embraces all the nationalities living in the country.
8. The Second World War also wreaked destruction as Myanmar became a major battlefield. The "scorched earth" strategy employed by the opposing forces caused grievous damage both to the land and its people. Myanmar regained independence from the British on January 4, 1948 but was left with a legacy of deep racial divisions as a result of the "divide and rule" policy of the British colonial administration. It is only in recent years that law and order, as well as peace and tranquillity have been restored to most of the areas which had been under dissenting groups. Social development, especially education is now reaching many of these areas which hitherto had remained unreached.
9. The predominant religion in Myanmar is Theravada Buddhism, with about 90% of the population being Buddhists. The remaining 10% are Christians, Hindus and Muslims. In most of the rural areas and to a smaller extent in urban areas animism still co-exists with Buddhism.

10. Education in the early days

Education, since the early days, has been highly regarded in Myanmar. *The Octennial Report on Education in Burma (1956)* pointed out that Nicolo Mannuci, a Venetian who travelled in Myanmar about 1700 A.D. described the country “as a kingdom governed by the pen, for not a single person can go from one village into another without a paper or writing” (p1). Like Manucci, many travellers from the West were impressed with what was practically universal education for boys long before anything of the kind existed in the European world. Life revolved round the village and the values of “extended families” were strong. The village then was a self-contained agricultural unit of community life. The monastery served as the centre of education and culture where all children could learn the 3 R’s. Education was largely religious and ethical rather than secular and economic - life and education were very closely related in those days. That education or rather formal schooling is a preparation for life was introduced into Myanmar with the coming of the British. Ironically, in this era of diminishing awareness of the environment and the world we live in, many educators in the West are returning slowly to the idea that education is life itself and not merely a preparation for life, and that life is education.

11. As early as 1813, eleven years before the first Anglo-Myanmar War a charter was granted allowing mission schools to operate freely in the country. Following the first Anglo-Myanmar War in 1824, Myanmar had to cede to the British - Rakhine, Tanintharyi, Assam and Manipur. In 1835, the Macaulay Report was introduced as a blueprint for education to be used in the colonised regions. It was in the same year that the first English middle school (lower secondary) was founded. In 1872, the first high school (upper secondary) was established, by the missionaries. This school was the Baptist High school. The first Government high school was founded by the British colonial administration in 1874. Two years later, this Government High School was upgraded and became University College, Rangoon. It was affiliated to the University of Calcutta. In 1920, the two existing colleges – University College, Rangoon and Judson College – were amalgamated to form the University of Rangoon. The University of Rangoon was shut down during the Second World War. After regaining Independence, the University was reopened and the two colleges were abolished and a unitary system was adopted. In 1964, this unitary system ceased to exist. In its place were set up numerous professional institutes, arts and

science universities, degree colleges and colleges. The University of Yangon and the University of Mandalay became arts and science universities and most of their faculties became professional institutes. This system is still in force with substantial modifications. There are now 151 tertiary education institutions – universities, institutes, degree colleges and colleges.

12. The stakeholders in the education process

The major stakeholders in the education of any country are the teachers, the parents and the students. The success or failure of the process depends on the interaction of these three groups and the changing roles they play or are assigned by the society in which they live.

13. The role of teachers

In a society which regards teachers as one of the “five gems”, the Myanmar teacher is regarded to be on the same plane of reverence as the Buddha, the scriptures, the monks and parents. The teachers are usually role models in their communities. They are traditionally regarded as community leaders in rural as well as urban communities; but more so in rural ones. Because of this role in the community they are often regarded as key players in any social mobilisation effort, be it at the community level or national level. Teachers, therefore, have great potential to act as agents of change.

14. The role of parents

Invariably the children of educated parents are assured of an education. It is the children of those parents who themselves did not have the opportunity of schooling and an education who miss out from the benefits of education. Such parents do not realise the value of education. Also financial constraints often discourage many poor parents from sending some or all of their children to school. Often these parents keep their children gainfully employed to supplement the family income or keep them at home to look after their younger siblings while both parents are away at work. Such a scenario is true of much of the poorer communities in a rural setting.

15. Life in Myanmar is still characterised by a strong sense of community and an essence of the extended family is still retained in the urban areas. This spirit of kinship and cohesion is stronger still in the villages of the rural areas. Lending a helping hand to others, especially those under difficult circumstances has long been a tradition amongst the Myanmar people. The ethic of giving, of sharing with the poor and the needy, of helping one another, is not confined to any one

religious community. This is a trait of the Myanmar people irrespective of the religious beliefs they profess. But for most of the population, they are guided by Lord Buddha whose teachings emphasize love, compassion, non-violence and tolerance.

16. This spirit of sharing and community participation in the education sector has been characterised by the revitalized Parent Teacher Associations and the newly established School Boards of Trustees. These School Boards of Trustees have proved to be extremely effective and the parents have become more active stakeholders in the education process.

17. The role of students

The largest group of stakeholders in education are the students. There are approximately 7.5 million students (out of a total population of over 50 million) from all levels of education. Since 1988, when Myanmar emerged from an isolation of twenty-six years, the young people of Myanmar have become more aware of the world around them. They are becoming increasingly aware of what life has to offer; but many of them are very naive and unaware of the dangers and pitfalls of modern societies.

18. Following the 1998 and 1999 education reforms, and concerted efforts by the government and the communities, school enrolment has increased and there has been a shift away from the domination of school-life by examinations. Children are gradually being weaned away from “rote learning” in its most extreme form towards “creative learning” and “critical thinking.” They are being encouraged to read more widely and go beyond the rigid confines of a national school curriculum that is being gradually reformed.
19. At the post-school level, the expectations of the students are more varied, and yet at the same time they are more focussed. They know what they want and are willing to invest in courses, which in turn will provide them with a learning that will enable them to succeed better in life. This is attested by the popularity and the huge success of the courses offered by the Centres for Human Resource Development at the various universities, institutes, degree colleges and colleges. For these courses to continue to grow quality must be assured and the course conductors must be aware of the dynamics of a future-oriented society and all its manifestations.

20. The Ministry of Education

There are 10 departments under the Ministry of Education. It is headed by the Minister of Education. The 10 departments are distributed between two Deputy Ministers. The Deputy Minister for Higher Education oversees the Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar), the Department of Higher Education (Upper Myanmar), the Department of Myanmar Language Commission, and the Universities Historical Research Centre. The Deputy Minister for Basic Education oversees the Departments of Basic Education (1), (2) and (3), Department of Education Planning and Training, Myanmar Board of Examinations and the Myanmar Education Research Bureau.

21. In keeping with its policy of providing an equitable provision of education throughout the nation, the monolithic Department of Basic Education has been reestablished as the Departments of Basic Education (1), (2) and (3) together with the Department of Education Planning and Training. The Department of Basic Education (1) has the responsibility for the school system of Lower Myanmar, the Department of Basic Education (2) has the responsibility for Upper Myanmar and the Department of Basic Education (3) has the responsibility for the Yangon metropolitan area. In line with the same policy, there are two Departments of Higher Education, one for Lower Myanmar and one for Upper Myanmar.
22. The functions of the departments under Basic Education are coordinated by the Basic Education Council, the Basic Education Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbook Committee, and the Teacher Education Supervisory Committee.
23. The functions of the departments under Higher Education are coordinated by the Universities Central Council and the Council of Universities Academic Bodies.
24. The Ministry of Education has been holding annual seminars for both basic and higher education sub-sectors since 1997. During this period seven seminars on higher education and six seminars on basic education have been held. These seminars enabled academics and educators to assess the current situation, to identify issues, to work out solutions and to formulate programmes for strengthening the education sector. These seminars led to the introduction of ICT in the education sector and of providing the necessary facilities and infrastructure to sustain the use of ICT in education.

25. Basic Education

The structure for school education is 5-4-2 with five years of primary school education, four years of middle school education and two years of high school education. There are eleven years of education. One feature of this structure is that the Kindergarten (KG) is regarded as part of the primary education cycle and, in fact, it constitutes the first year at

school. Attempts in the past have been made in the past to increase the total years of schooling from eleven to twelve.

26. A long-standing issue is the difference in the number of students enrolled at primary schools (4,929,635) and the number enrolled at middle schools (1,921,676). This is further highlighted by the disparity between the number of primary schools (35,159) and the number of middle schools (3,102). These are indicators of the fairly large dropout rate after the completion of the primary education cycle.

27. Higher Education

In the higher education sub-sector, there are altogether 151 higher education institutions and these are administered by 13 different ministries. The high cost of education is borne by the different ministries. This is in keeping with the policy of providing equitable education throughout the Union. However, a proliferation of higher education institutions will bring in its wake problems of quality control and accreditation.

28. The Universities of Distance Education in Yangon and in Mandalay have over the years proved to be extremely popular. In AY 1987-88, there were only 38,050 students but by AY 2001-2002, the number has increased to 560,781 students. The Higher Education Seminars also dealt with the need for enhancement of the quality of the distance education system. Plans have also been drawn up to collaborate with private enterprises to establish (audio-visual) studios at Yangon and Mandalay Universities of Distance Education.

29. The Data Broadcasting System has been utilized for distance education since July 2001. There are altogether 455 e-Education Learning Centres throughout the country.

30. e-Education Initiatives

Since 2000, an effective ICT infrastructure is being established for the basic education sub-sector as well as the higher education sub-sector. This thrust consists of

- providing computer access in schools and higher education institutions
- setting up a network of e-learning centers, e-resource centers, and computer training centres
- establishing an electronic data broadcasting system for the education network
- introducing wireless link video conferencing
- creating a fibre optic network system for linkage among departments and universities
- setting up an education intranet
- providing internet access

31. Teacher Training

Teacher training in basic education sub-sector is provided using a two-pronged approach - in-service teacher training programmes and pre-service teacher training programmes. Pre-service as well as in-service teacher training programmes are provided by 2 Institutes of Education and 20 Colleges of Education. A one-year distance education through correspondence course is conducted for primary and lower secondary teachers without certification.

32. The Education Colleges also provide the Township-based Primary School Teacher Training One-year Course in collaboration with township education officers. The training is conducted during weekends, and October and December school holidays.

33. The Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) Programme and the Postgraduate Diploma in Multimedia Arts (PGDMA) Programme were initiated in AY 1999-2000 and are conducted by the two Institutes of Education. Both programmes accept pre-service as well as in-service teacher trainees.

34. Much emphasis and priority is given to the training of teachers for the quality of a nation's education depends on the quality of its teachers. The Delors Report (1966:141) has pointed out that "much will be expected and much demanded of teachers."

35. Values education

The school curriculum places emphasis on Values Education. It tries to:

- maintain cultural traditions and local customs
- retain traditional values but with a willingness to change and adapt to changing demands of a modern dynamic society
- inculcate tolerance of other cultures, beliefs and religions

36. Academy of Arts and Science

To enable academicians and technocrats to play a greater role in the creation of a modern Myanmar, the Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science with an Executive Committee of 24 members and a membership of 717 members was established on 16 August 1999.

37. Our vision of education

To create an education system that can generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age.

38. Education and Human Resources (EHR) Sector Analysis

Education and Human Resources (EHR) sector analysis was widely used in the late 1980s by donor agencies such as World Bank and USAID. UNESCO's sector analysis approach was specifically designed to ensure national "ownership" of the sector analysis by placing emphasis upon participatory work

involving national experts and implementors extensively, while at the same time allowing for outside perspective and expertise to balance the review and enhance the quality of analysis.

39. UNESCO conceptual hierarchy for the EHR sector analysis is related loosely to the classic strategic planning approach:

diagnosis> policy> strategy> programme> projects

(Stoner, Collins and Yetton, 1989. *Management in Australia*, Prentice Hall).

40. The EHR sector analysis process is composed of three stages:

- diagnosis of the system;
- strategy development and feasibility assessment; and
- action planing

41. UNESCO sector analysis process is a form of strategic planning applied to the education and human resources development sector. There are certain key elements that help ensure the success of the effort:

- political commitment
- participation
- collaboration and policy dialogue
- viewing education and human resources development as a system
- allocation of sufficient resources.

42. UNESCO's Policy and Sector Analysis Division has now assisted more than twelve countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to conduct EHR sector analysis.

43. EHR Sector Analysis experiences in Myanmar and Viet Nam are presented here because in both countries the studies were initiated at approximately the same time. The basic implementation design of three phases - diagnosis, strategy development and action planning - was the same. The tangible outputs of the sector analyses were attained in a similar fashion and are very similar in format.

44. Differences in methods and results of the two sector analyses are of interest, especially, with regard to the importance of political factors, participation and collaboration for successful EHR sector analysis. (see UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1996. *Education and Human Resources Sector Analysis: A Training Manual*, Bangkok Chapter IV :15-19).

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