

Community Preference for Children's Education

Malar San¹, Manual Selvaraj Bexci²

^{1&2} Faculty of Social Science, Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's email: msan@lincoln.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In Myanmar, a pressing concern exists regarding the community's preferences and attitudes towards children's education. Despite the country's commitment to improving its education system, a lack of comprehensive understanding of community preferences for children's learning spaces poses a significant obstacle. The community's preferences regarding children's education in Myanmar are very important within the ever-changing educational environment. This study examines community preferences for their children's learning spaces during crises. The study utilizes a qualitative methodology. The results indicate that primary school-age children have the highest attendance rates in community-run educational spaces, whereas formal schools rank second in attendance. Nevertheless, the persistent civil fighting has diminished confidence in conventional educational institutions due to regular aerial bombardments. Temporary learning spaces, educational spaces affiliated with churches or faith-based organizations, and tuition centers have important roles, each with unique attendance patterns. Responses to ethnic, monastic, and vocational education spaces are scarce, suggesting a restricted supply. The study underscores the disparity between educational facilities managed by the local community in villages and those in refugee camps, underscoring the significance of the surrounding circumstances for evaluating access to education. Despite their obstacles, community learning spaces are essential in both stable and critical contexts. The research offers useful insights into how conflict dynamics affect educational decisions in the community and lays the groundwork for intervention efforts to improve education in various community settings.

Keywords: *Community Engagement in Education; Learning Achievement; Security Risk for Schooling*

Background

Background of the Study

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, with 54 million diverse residents and recognition of over 100 ethnic groups (World Bank, 2020); (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2020). With a complicated mix of ethnic groups, a wide variety of cultures and languages, political upheaval, a history of civil war, and great poverty, Myanmar is a multi-ethnic nation. Decades of military control, political upheaval involving ethnic minority groups, social unrest, alienation from global events, and pervasive poverty have all been experienced by the country. One of the most ethnically diverse nations in the region

is thought to be Myanmar. As stated in the constitution, 135 distinct ethnic groups are recognized by the government as "national races" (Crisis Group, 2020).

Myanmar's economy and society have suffered a terrible hit due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Months into the COVID-19 crisis, which led to nationwide school closures, it was clear that children across the nation have long-term effects on schooling, particularly for those already marginalized. Less than 40% of students enrolled in school in February 2020 engaged in learning activities, with lower rates for kids in the poorest quintile of wealth, according to a December 2020 World Bank report (World Bank, 2020). Following the coup on February 1, 2021, Myanmar has been under direct military rule for more than two years. According to estimates, as of August 8, 2022, 1,270,000 people in Myanmar were internally displaced as a result of fighting and unrest following the military takeover (UNHCR, 2022).

Myanmar has experienced a decline in enrollment at all levels over the past few years. Approximately 28% of children aged 6–17 were out of school in 2023, a notable increase from 21% in 2017 (World Bank, 2023). The coup has also resulted in a considerable increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs), with an estimated 2.9 million people displaced since 2021 (UNHCR, 2024). Attacks on educational facilities have increased, with over 245 reports documented by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) during 2022–2023. Notably, only 31% of None-Displaced Stateless People (NDSP) girls had limited access to any type of secondary education, whereas 62% of boys accessed education (UNOCHA, 2023).

Research Problem

This study examines community preferences for selecting the type of school for their children during twin crises (COVID and civil conflict). There is one strong reason behind doing this study. After COVID, people have less trust in the government schools managed by the State Administration Council due to security concerns as the military has attacked educational facilities many times (UNOCHA, 2023). They find an alternative learning pathway where their children can learn safely. This knowledge gap hinders the implementation of policies and initiatives to enhance children's education. The problem involves exploring and analyzing the factors influencing community preferences for children's learning spaces in Myanmar (UNICEF, 2023). The primary objective is to identify the community's preference for primary children's education in Myanmar.

Significance of the study

Owing to the ongoing civil strife and political unrest throughout the nation, a large number of people have been displaced (UNOCHA, 2023) and have relocated to safer areas in an effort to support their children's return to school. People are worried about security and want to ensure that their kids return to school in a safe manner. Thus, it is crucial to understand community and parent preferences for their children's education, particularly with regard to learning settings that can give children a high-quality education in a secure environment (UNICEF, 2021).

Community Engagement in Education

Family-school-community partnerships are a shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways, and families take initiative to actively support their children's development and learning. Schools and community organizations also make efforts to listen to parents, support them, and ensure that they have the tools to be active partners in their children's school experience. Family and community engagement in education refers to the shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways, and families take initiative to actively support their children's development and learning. It encompasses the shared partnership and responsibility between home and school. Such engagement is essential for school improvement (Mosley & Valdez, 2022).

Learning Achievement

Learning achievement refers to the extent to which a learner has attained their short- or long-term educational goals. It is a measure of the knowledge gained by study, instruction, or scholarship. Learning achievement is strongly correlated with differences in personality and intelligence, as well as students' levels of self-efficacy, self-control, and motivation. "Student achievement measures the amount of academic content a student learns in a determined amount of time. Each grade level has learning goals or instructional standards that educators are required to teach. Standards are similar to a 'to-do' list that a teacher can use to guide instruction. Student achievement will increase when quality instruction is used to teach instructional standards." In other words, learning achievement refers to what students were able to learn in a determined period of time. It is measured by the amount of academic content a student learns in a determined amount of time. The quality of instruction and the learning goals set by educators are critical factors that impact student achievement.

Security Risk for Schooling

Schools should be one of the safest places where children can be. However, that is simply not the case for many children around the world. Inappropriate school facilities may have poorly constructed classrooms and playgrounds, insufficient or gender-insensitive toilets, or inadequate furniture, and their very location might make them more vulnerable to disaster when hazards strike. Consequently, school safety has become a priority for many governments, especially in countries like Myanmar with on-going civil conflict. Security risks in schools include shootings and bombings, vandalism, bullying, phishing, data breaches, etc. While it is impossible to plan for every scenario, UNESCO, along with other stakeholders, is actively engaged in empowering schools and their communities to identify the risks they are exposed to in order to map their vulnerabilities and capacities to enhance school safety. Preparation is key to saving lives when a disaster strikes.

Literature Review

Families actively assist their children's growth and learning through the shared responsibility and reciprocal process of family-school-community collaboration, which is implemented by schools and other community agencies and organizations. (National Centre on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, 2023). Schools and communities also try to listen to parents, support them, and ensure they have the tools to be active partners in their children's school experience (O'Toole, Kiely & McGillicuddy. (2019)). Family and community engagement in education refers to the shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways, and families actively support their children's development and learning (Garcia, 2019). It encompasses the shared responsibility between home and school. Such engagement is essential for school improvement (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment, 2023).

In today's culture, the educational environment is changing quickly, and the decisions made by communities about children's education have a crucial impact on forming the next generation (Basilaiia *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, there is a conspicuous void in extensive studies investigating the myriad of elements that shape community choices for children's education (Buchanan, 2020). Although all children are entitled to a safe and high-quality education, the effects of natural and man-made disasters prevent many children from realizing this entitlement. One of the safest places for children to be is at school. For many children worldwide, though, that is simply not the case. In addition to having badly designed classrooms and playgrounds, inadequate or gender-neutral restrooms, and inadequate furnishings, inappropriate school buildings may be particularly disaster-prone due to their location.

According to the World Bank (2022), five measurable characteristics of safe schools are identified. They are:

- Physical safety: safety from risks that can cause bodily harm in school or on the way to and from school.
- Mental health and wellbeing: prevention of negative stress and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other negative thoughts and feelings; as well as protection from psychological violence
- Instructional practices and environment: safety derived from the practices and environment in which learners, teachers, content, equipment, and technologies interact to enhance learning engagement and inclusion.
- Interactions and relationships: positive interactions that promote social and emotional learning (SSEL) and inclusion.
- School connectedness: partnerships and engagement of school with the (a) families; (b) community; (c) other schools in the cluster.

The vulnerability of school buildings to severe natural disasters and the harm they cause is undoubtedly a global issue that is not becoming any smaller. The next generation of members of a community is largely educated in schools; because of their age and developmental stage, schoolchildren are among the most vulnerable members of society. In times of calamity, a safer and more robust school can help restore normalcy to society, save the lives of local residents, and act as a temporary shelter. (D'Ayala *et al.*, 2020).

As a result, many governments and non-governmental groups now prioritize school safety. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the New Urban Agenda are merely some of the frameworks and conventions that formally recognize the issue of school safety. These documents address the topic from various angles and have gained rapid recognition (Alejo, Yao & Reuge, 2023).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The proposed study is designed to explore what types of learning spaces are available/open in the community, what proportion of primary school students accessed those schools/spaces and people prefer what type of learning spaces/schools to send their children's leaning. So that, the people aware of what type of support would be essential to support children learning continuity during sever civil conflict.

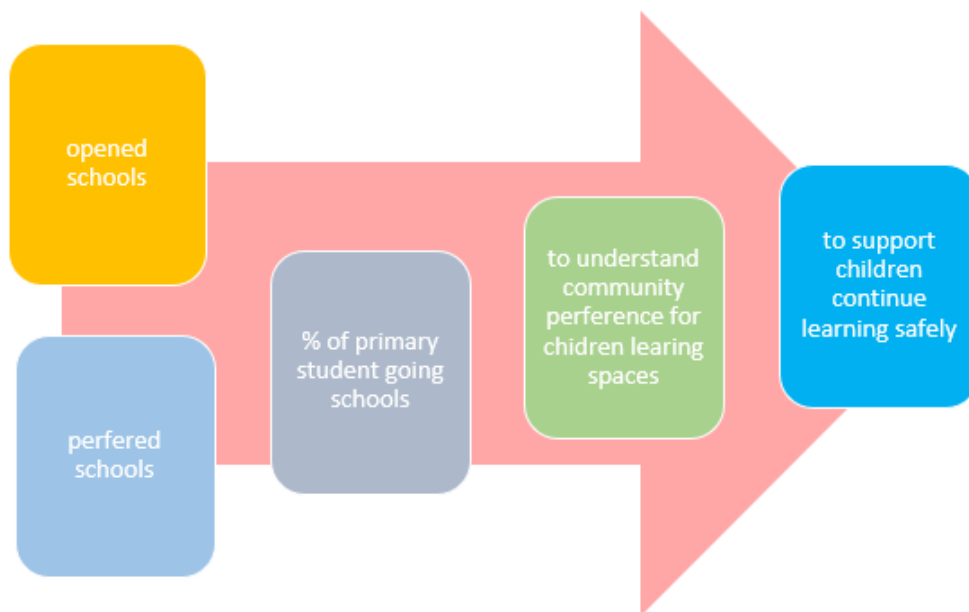


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methods

The Objective of the Study

The quantitative research method was used to answer the research objective. The study aimed at assessing the educational spaces that are currently open in communities, those that are being attended by children and adolescents, and the preferences of various key stakeholders regarding education. It was envisaged that the study would lead to the creation of a strong evidence base through which improvements in access to and quality of education services would be made, which in turn would lead to meaningful and sustainable change for the children of Myanmar (Patrinós, 2018).

Research Questions

In order to understand the level of attendance at open educational spaces in the community, the respondents to the KII survey were asked:

- What types of education spaces are open in your community?
- What proportion of primary-level-aged children in the community attend them?
- What types of educational spaces would you prefer for your children to attend?

Instrument and Coverage

The education sector has a variety of community-level stakeholders, including parents and caregivers, teachers, community facilitators and volunteers, community leaders (including faith-based and religious leaders), and children and adolescents. It was considered critical to get the perspective of all these stakeholders on board, and thus a qualitative method approach was adopted, which included individual Key Informant Interviews (KII) with teachers, community facilitators, volunteers, and community leaders. The study applied a purposive sampling method based on population. The primary data are collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire form developed based on the Key Informant Interview (KII). Although a total of 1200 people joined the study, after data cleaning, 1047 KIIs were conducted in 65 townships in 7 states (Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Rakhine, Mon, and Shan) and 4 regions (Sagaing, Magway, Bago-EEast and Tanintharyi). Given the fragile security situation in the country, the enumerators were not able to collect a uniform number of responses across all states and regions, and thus the sample has large variations. In cases where the sample size was very small, these states and regions have been merged with others that are either geographically proximate or similar in terms of social characteristics to enable statistically sound analysis.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire comprises respondents' personal factors and questions related to education spaces such as monasteries, church-based centers, formal schools, and others. The questionnaire also includes a ratio of attending schools in community education spaces. In order to understand the level of attendance of open educational spaces in the community, the respondents of the KII survey were asked (a) which open educational spaces are being attended by primary school-age children in their community (this question allowed for multiple responses) and (b) what is the proportion of primary school-age children in their community accessing a particular type of educational space. This is the proportion of primary school-age children in their community accessing a particular type of educational space. This was measured using a five-point Likert scale, including "nearly all," defined as 91–100%, "most," defined as 61–90%, "about half," defined as 41–60%, "some," defined as 11–40%, and "nearly none," defined as 0–10%. The data collection was done through Kobo Collect, and data analysis was done using SPSS for statistical strength.

Results & Discussion

There are various types of education spaces available for children in Myanmar, including monastic schools, church-based and faith-based education spaces, community-run education spaces, temporary learning spaces, tuition centers, ethnic education spaces, vocational education and training (VET), and

other skills-based education spaces. The KII survey revealed that on average, 1.5 primary level education spaces were open in communities, with the highest in Rakhine (3.25) and the least in Shan South.

Types of Education Spaces Opened in the Community

A state- and region-wise analysis reveals that community-run education spaces are the dominant primary-level education spaces currently open in Kayah (68%), Chin (78%), and Magway (71%), while formal schools are the dominant primary-level education spaces currently open in Kachin (71%), Kayin/Bago (52%), and Rakhine (51%), and temporary learning spaces are the most dominant primary-level education spaces currently open in Rakhine (71%), and Shan South (54%).

In Kachin, the dominant primary-level education spaces open include formal schools (71%) and church-based or faith-based education centers (47%). In Kayah, community-run education spaces (68%) rank first, temporary learning spaces (28%) are a distant second, and ethnic learning spaces (10%) rank third. In Kayin and Bago, most respondents reported formal schools (52%) being open, followed by temporary learning spaces (20%), church-based or faith-based education spaces (17%), and ethnic education spaces (13%).

In Chin, a wide majority of the respondents reported community-run educational spaces (78%) being open. In Sagaing, the majority of the respondents reported that tuition centers are open (68%), followed by church-based or faith-based education spaces (25%), temporary learning spaces (24%), and community-run educational spaces (20%). In Mon/Tanintharyi, the most commonly open primary-level education spaces include temporary learning spaces (37%), formal schools (33%), community-run educational spaces (19%), and church-based or faith-based education spaces (12%).

In Magway, tuition centers (71%) are the most predominantly open education space, with formal schools (30%) a distant second. In Rakhine, tuition centers (85%) and temporary learning spaces (78%) were the most reported open primary education spaces. In addition, church-based and faith-based educational services and formal schools were reported to be open by 69 and 51 percent of the respondents, respectively. In Shan South, the highest proportion of respondents reported tuition centers (54%) as the main primary education space open, followed by formal schools (33%) and community-run educational services (21%). In Shan North, formal schools and community-run educational centers were reported to be open by 40 and 32 percent of the respondents, respectively.

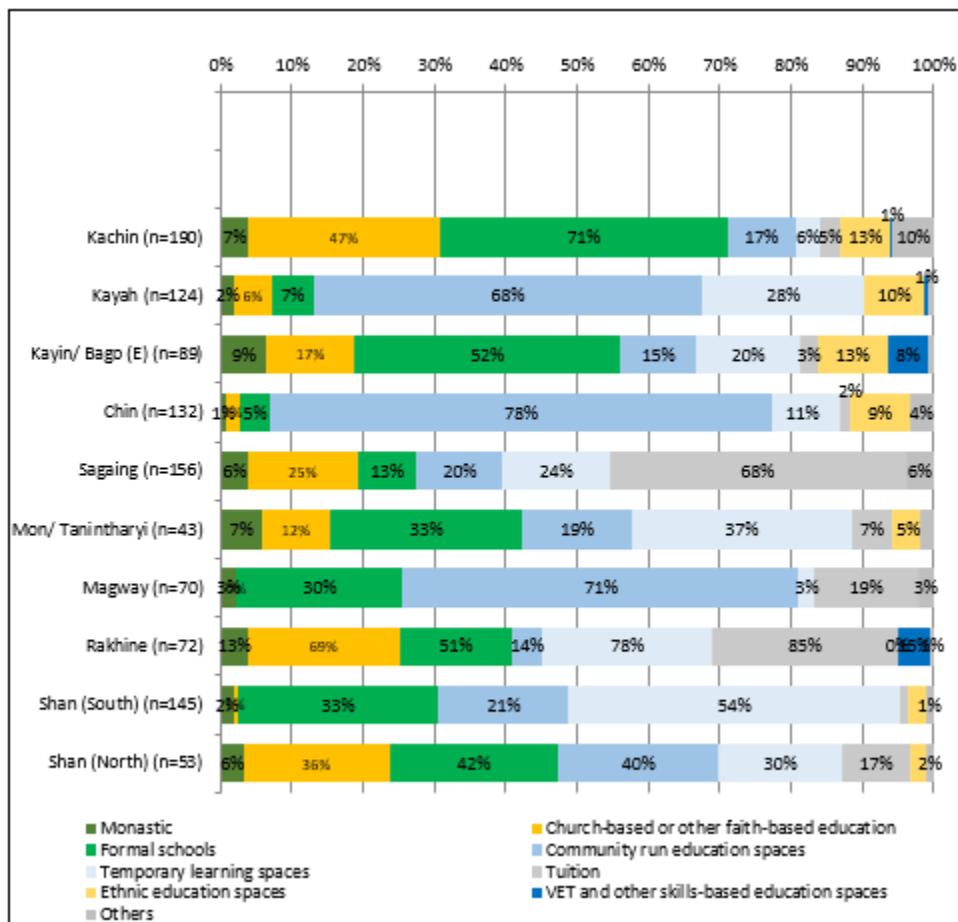


Figure 2: Primary Level Education Spaces Opened in the Community By State/Region

Primary Level Education Spaces Attended by Children.

In order to understand the level of attendance of open educational spaces in the community, the respondents of the KII survey were asked (a) which are the open educational spaces being attended by primary school age children in their community (this question allowed for multiple responses) and (b) what was the proportion of primary school age children in their community accessing a particular type of educational space – this was measured using a five point scale including “nearly all” defined as 91-100%, “most” defined as 61-90%, “about half” defined as 41-60%, “some” defined as 11-40%, “nearly none” defined as 0-10%. In addition, another category of “do not know” was also provided.

The findings reveal that community run educational spaces are the most attended by primary school age children (383 responses), followed by formal schools (359 responses), temporary learning spaces (286 responses), church-based/faith-based educational spaces (230 responses) and tuition centers (208 responses). In line with the finding that very few ethnic, monastic and VET and other skills-based educational spaces are open in local communities very few responses were received regarding primary school age children attending these education spaces – ethnic education spaces (69 responses), monastic schools (55 responses) and VET and other skills based educational spaces (20 respondents). (Figure 3)

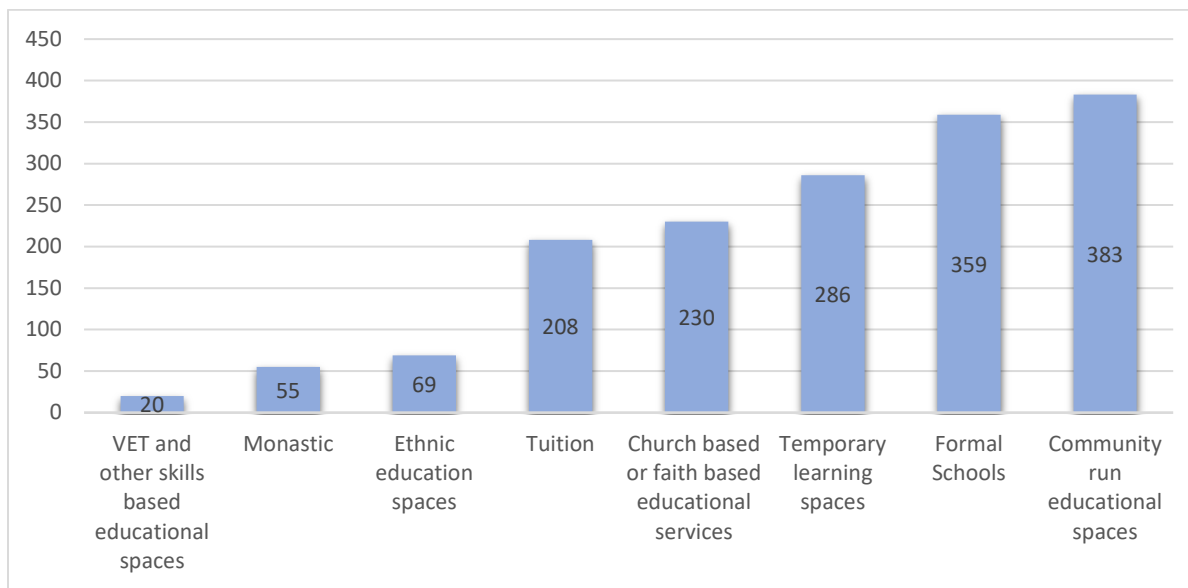


Figure 3: Education Spaces Being Accessed by Primary Level School Children - Number of KII Responses

Preferred Education Spaces for Children in Their Communities by States/Regions

The most preferred education spaces were formal schools (53%), followed by community-run education spaces (30%), VET, and other skills-based education spaces (29%). The respondents have provided more than one option in response to this question, and most have preferred the presence of more than one education space per community. Category of others has been indicated by 9% of the total respondents.

VET and other skills-based education spaces which overall ranks as the third most preferred education space is preferred mostly in Rakhine (63%). A significant proportion of respondents from Kachin (36%), Kayin/Bago (33%), Shan South (32%) prefers this education space. In other states/regions the preference levels are found to be between 20-30 percent which is a significant proportion. These trends can be attributed to the fact that vocational and skill-based training is preferred given its potential to create job and employment opportunities for children.

In Rakhine, a large proportion of the respondents have also demonstrated their preference for temporary learning spaces (65%) and tuition centers (61%). Tuition centers were also one of the significantly preferred education spaces in Sagaing with 32 percent of the respondents stating it as their preference. (Figure 4)

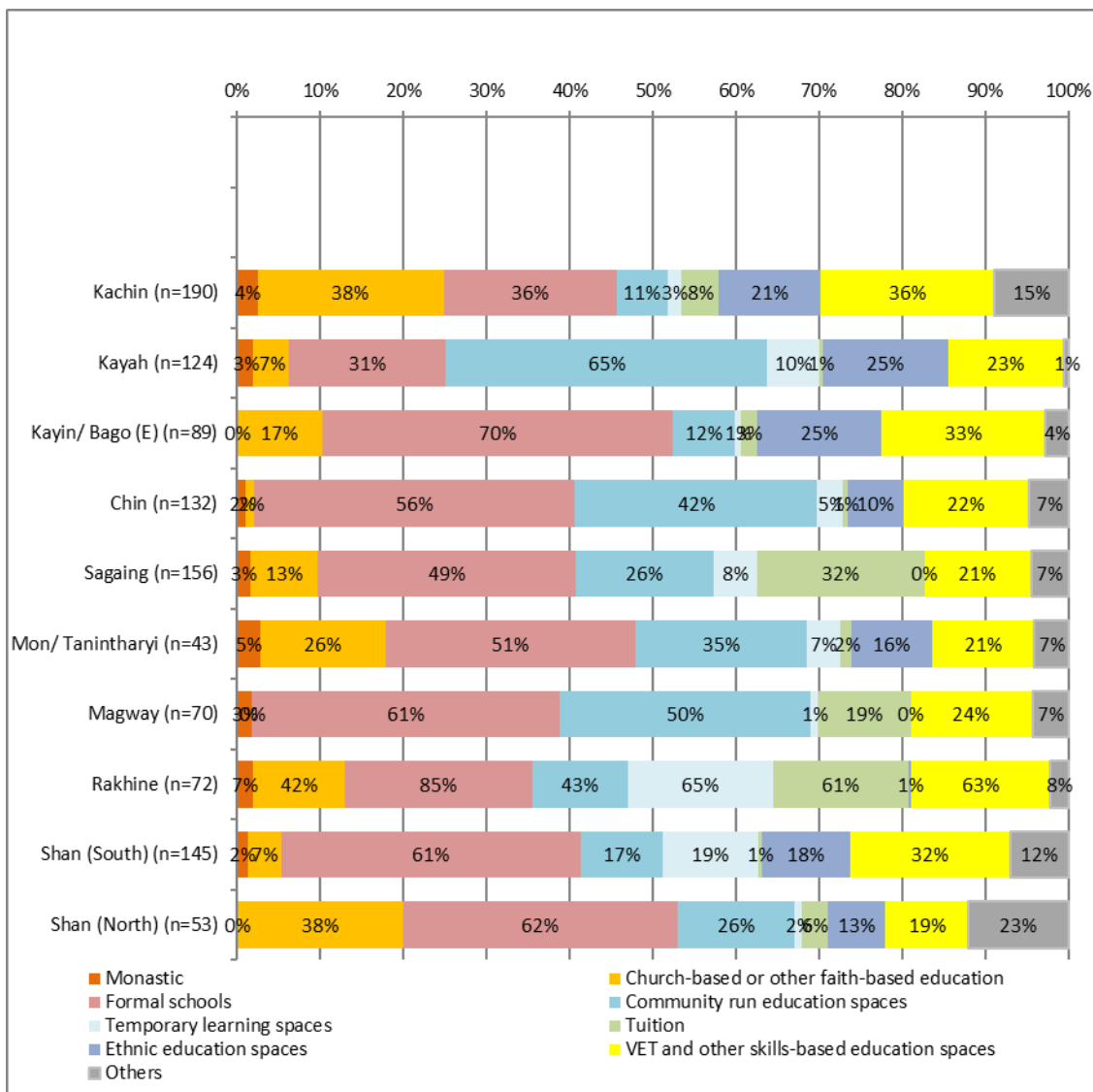


Figure 4: Preference Regarding Education Services for Children in Their Communities by States/Region Wise

All parents want to send their children to school, and community-run education spaces are the trustiest schools due to civil conflict. Therefore, people preferred to send their children to school. Ethnic schools are in areas where the majority of ethnic groups are staying, such as Kachin, Kayah, and Kayin States. Ethnic schools are the first choice for ethnic groups, and they prefer to send their children to those schools based on trust and due to mother tongue learning opportunities. People from the capital and big cities may need more access to community-run schools and ethnic-based schools. They may also prefer to send their children to government schools, which have a system in place with trained teachers.

Conclusion

This study offers valuable discoveries regarding the educational environments frequented by children of primary school age in nearby communities. The research indicates that community-operated educational spaces are the most frequented, with most respondents confirming high attendance rates, especially in typical rural areas. Despite being the second most popular educational setting, formal schools are confronted with obstacles like frequent air attacks in the ongoing civil conflict, resulting in declining community confidence. Temporary learning spaces, educational spaces based in churches or faith-based institutions, and tuition centers all have important roles in meeting primary school children's educational needs. Each of these options has its own distinct pattern of attendance. Significantly, educational

institutions focused on ethnic, monastic, and vocational training and skill-based facilities obtain comparatively fewer replies, suggesting a restricted presence within local communities.

Respondents emphasized that community learning spaces are the most often utilized locations for children's education, emphasizing their importance in stable and challenging circumstances. The study illuminates the effects of the ongoing civil conflict on the availability and confidence in official schools, uncovering an intricate relationship between conflict dynamics and educational decisions. The findings serve as a foundation for additional investigation and intervention approaches designed to tackle the difficulties formal educational institutions encounter and guarantee fair and equal opportunities for education, particularly in regions affected by severe civil conflict. This research provides significant insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders that aim to improve the educational environment for primary school-age children in various community contexts.

Declaration

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: In the data collection process, informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Conflict of Interests: Not applicable.

Acknowledgment: Gratitude to, supervisor for the immense support extended by her throughout the preparation of this manuscript. All the authors are acknowledged, and all the required details are mentioned.

References

Alejo, A., Yao, H., & Reuge, N. (2023). Tracking Progress on Foundational Learning: Findings from the RAPID 2023 Analysis. *UNICEF*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED631774>

Basilaia, G., Dgebuadze, M., Kantaria, M., & Chokhonelidze, G. (2020). Replacing the classic learning form at universities as an immediate response to the COVID-19 virus infection in Georgia. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology*, 8(3), 101-108. <https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2020.3021>

Buchanan, V. (2020). *A study to identify factors impacting upon the decision-making processes of elective home education professionals when determining the suitability of parental provision* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield). <https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/35236/>

Crisis group. (2020). Identity Crisis: Ethnicity and Conflict in Myanmar. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/312-identity-crisis-ethnicity-and-conflict-myanmar#:~:text=This%20report%20examines%20the%20historical>

D'Ayala, D., Galasso, C., Nassirpour, A., Adhikari, R. K., Yamin, L., Fernandez, R., ... & Oreta, A. (2020). Resilient communities through safer schools. *International journal of disaster risk reduction*, 45, 101446. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2019.101446>

Garcia, J. (2019). Critical and culturally sustaining indigenous family and community engagement in education. *The Wiley handbook of family, school, and community relationships in education*, 71-90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119083054.ch4>

Mosley, J., & Valdez, A. (2022). Learning from Young People about How Safe and Supportive Conditions at Home Can Inform School Climate. *WestEd*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED621228>

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2023). Family-School-Community Partnerships | Safe Supportive Learning. Ed.gov. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/training-technical-assistance/education-level/early-learning/family-school-community-partnerships>

O'Toole, L., Kiely, J., & McGillicuddy, D. (2019). *Parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children's education during the primary school years*. National Parents Council. <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/9823>

Patrinós, H. A. (2018). Four Education Trends that Countries Everywhere Should Know About (News and Research 100).

UNICEF. (2021). *Education at risk: A generation of children in Myanmar must have safe, appropriate and inclusive opportunities to continue their learning*. (n.d.). [www.unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/education-risk-generation-children-myanmar-must-have-safe-appropriate-and-inclusive). <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/education-risk-generation-children-myanmar-must-have-safe-appropriate-and-inclusive>

UNICEF. (2023). Myanmar Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4, <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media/9216/file/UNICEF%20Myanmar%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%204%20%20.pdf>

UNICEF & SEAMEO. (2020). *SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report | UNICEF East Asia and Pacific*. (2020, December 1). [www.unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/sea-plm-2019-main-regional-report). <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/sea-plm-2019-main-regional-report>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2022). Myanmar Humanitarian Update, August 2022. *Myanmar*. (2018, January 30). OCHA. <https://www.unocha.org/myanmar>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2023). Education Brief 2023, Myanmar Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2024). Myanmar Emergency Overview Map, July 2024.

World Bank. (2020). Myanmar Economic Monitor, December 2020: Coping with COVID-19. World Bank. *Open Knowledge Repository*. (2024). [Handle.net](https://hdl.handle.net/10986/34936). <https://hdl.handle.net/10986/34936>

World Bank. (2022). [https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/brief/Safe Schools: Supporting the Future of Learning through Safe Schools](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/brief/Safe%20Schools%3A%20Supporting%20the%20Future%20of%20Learning%20through%20Safe%20Schools) (worldbank.org) *Development Topics*. (2018). World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/brief/Safe>

World Bank. (2023). Education in Myanmar: Where are we now? *Myanmar EDUCATION IN MYANMAR: WHERE ARE WE NOW? . . . Document of the World Bank Education and Poverty Global Practices East Asia Pacific Region*. (2023). <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/716418bac40878ce262f57dfbd4eca05-0070012023/original/State-of-Education-in-Myanmar-July-2023.pdf>