

Pedagogy of the Karen

Indigenous Education as Self-determination

Saw Ni Thaw Htoo



Critical
Perspectives
on Regional
Integration

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in Transition



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The Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration series is the product of teaching and research at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. It draws on primary postgraduate research undertaken for the dissertation in the Center's International Masters of Social Science (Development Studies) program. The focus of the program is to consider the processes and consequences of the increasing interconnections and regionalization between the five mainland Southeast Asian countries (Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam), and specifically to examine the relations, exchanges and encounters within the context of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

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Pedagogy of the Karen:
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Saw Ni Thaw Htoo

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Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration series

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Series Foreword

The monographs of the Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration series started as masters theses based on original primary field research and written as a part of the requirements for the Master of Social Science (Development Studies) program (RCSD) in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. Initial volumes in this series focused on Myanmar, covering livelihood strategies, changing ethnic identities, border- and boundary-crossing, and the commoditization of culture in the context of tourism. Later volumes broadened to cover a range of issues in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia—from resource governance conflict between state and citizens, conditions for migrant workers, cross-border trade, labor, and remittances, and the dynamics of networks built on ethnicity, religious identity, and even organic agriculture.

For over twenty years RCSD and Chiang Mai University have developed research expertise in resource management, environmental impact assessment, upland agricultural systems and indigenous knowledge, and ethnic and gender relations. In the last six years of this research series, these monographs have shone a light on how these complex issues have taken on new dimension and form as populations and territories have transformed in line with the promises and (un)fulfilled on-the-ground realities of regional projects such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). It is my great pride that much of this important research is being done by Chiang Mai University students who come from the countries in focus, and it is my great hope that the data they gather and the critical analyses they offer can help improve the scholarship on— and the lives of—people throughout this region.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Series Editor,
Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration Series

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Abbreviations

ACU	Australian Catholic University
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BKNA	Buddhist Karen National Association
BSP	Bureau of Special Project
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CBO	Community-Based Organizations
CESR	comprehensive education sector review
CSO	civil society organization
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
EAG	ethnic armed group
EAO	ethnic armed organization
EIP	English immersion program
ENAC	Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center
EPIC	Education Promotion and Implementation Committee
FESR	Framework for Social and Economic Reform
IDP	internally displaced people
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act
KCO	Karen Central Organization
KECD	Karen Education and Culture Department
KED	Karen Education Department
KESAN	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIC	Karen Information Center
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNA	Karen National Association

KNDO	Karen National Defense Organization
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNO	Karen National Organization
KNU	Karen National Union
KRCEE	Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity
KSEAG	Karen State Education Assistance Group
KSNG	Karen Students Network Group
KTTC	Karen Teacher Training College
KTWG	Karen Teachers Work Group
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
KYO	Karen Youth Organization
LMTC	Leadership and Management Training College
MNEC	Mon National Education Committee
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTB-MLE	mother tongue-based multilingual education
MTT	mobile teacher training
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NDAK	New Democratic Army-Kachin
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NIPEPF	National Indigenous People Education Policy Framework
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NNER	National Network for Education Reform
OBE	Office of Basic Education
OCED	Office of Central Education Commission
OHE	Office of Higher Education
OS	Office of Secretary
TRIBES	Tribal Resource Institute in Business Engineering and Science
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Saw Ni Thaw Htoo

Burma/Myanmar: A Note on Terminology

Prior to 1989, the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia was exclusively known internationally as “Burma,” the name that British colonizers used after they consolidated the central plains and previously autonomous mountainous regions in the mid-1800s in reference to the country’s largest ethnic group, the Burman. The international use of “Myanmar” to refer to the country dates only to 1989, when the country’s unelected military rulers of the time announced the change of the nation’s name to “Myanmar Naing-Ngan.”

In addition, the official names of many ethnic groups, regions, cities, and villages were also changed, including that of the former capital from “Rangoon” to “Yangon.”

The name changes were purportedly an effort on the part of the military regime to remake Burma into a more inclusive, multiethnic country, and to cast off vestiges of the colonial era. However, many critics pointed out that these changes failed to address the root causes of problematic Burman/ethnic minority relations, and historians have shown that both “Burma” and “Myanmar” were used prior to British administration. In addition, the use of “Myanmar” in English presents a grammatical challenge, as there is no conventional adjective form.

While international organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International have adopted the use of “Myanmar,” journalistic, activist, and academic convention in much of the world continues to favor the use of “Burma,” although usage patterns continue to evolve. For this series, the decision of whether to use pre- or post-1989 “official” names has been left entirely to the author of each work, and in most instances the names are used interchangeably with no intended political implications.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Karen migrated from Mongolia over 2,500 years ago and were some of the earliest settlers in Burma (Worland, 2010: 8, Rajah, 2008). Rajah's research states (Rajah, 2008) that the Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen represent the two largest groups, while their languages belong to the Sino-Tibetan group of languages (p. ix). According to the government's announcement on May 6, 1936, there are eleven Karen tribes: (1) Sgaw (2) Pwo (3) Pa-O (4) Paku (5) Mon-Ney-Bwe (6) Bwe (7) White Karen (8) Padaung (9) Eastern Bwe (Ka-renni or Kayah (10) Con-ker, and (11) Geh-Bah (p. 309). During the Mon, Rakhine, and Burmese monarchial rule, the Karen were ill-treated, oppressed, and massacred. They were forced to build pagodas and dig irrigation channels for the monarchial rulers. During the era of British colonization starting in 1886, the number of Christian missionaries increased. As a result, many Karen converted to Christianity, which was the turning point in formalizing Karen education through missionary schools and churches and the standardization of written Karen languages (Rajah, 2008, p. 310, Marshall, 1992, p. 304).

The Karen¹ have been fighting for self-determination in Burma² for seventy years since Burma gained independence from the British government

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- 1 For this research, I use the term "Karen" to refer mainly to the Sgaw and Pwo subgroups.
 - 2 In this thesis, I use both Burma and Myanmar interchangeably without political intention. Burma military government changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, and some places, for example, Rangoon to Yangon (Selth, 2010, p. 402).

in 1949. While militia forces have been important for reaching their goal, the provision of Karen community-based education is also one of the most crucial activities in their nationalist movements. Although the Karen have faced many socio-political ups and downs, the unfailing desire of educating their children has been continued until the current day, despite facing educational and financial limitations. This research focuses on the provision of education by Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), which is one of the departments of the nationalist movement of the Karen National Union (KNU) in Burma.

Background and Rationale of the Study

Throughout seven decades of armed conflict, the Karen education system has educated Karen children within and outside of Myanmar in often extremely difficult circumstances (Lall & South, 2014). During the decades of civil war between ethnic insurgencies and successive Myanmar government regimes, their armed ethnic groups (EAG), including those of the Karen, developed their own ethnic education regime in response to the uneven access to education services from the State (Lall & South, 2012, p. 8).

Concurrently, the process of “Burmanization” (or “Myanmarfication”) triggered the ethnic nationality struggles for self-determination, the process of which can be seen in various military government policies since the 1960s, including those in the field of education (South & Lall, 2018, p. 4). During General Ne Win’s regime from 1962-2010, Burmese leader U Ba Maw’s slogan “one country, one people, one blood” was implemented strategically to unify different ethnic groups into a single national identity in the militarized country. The adoption of a State-centric curriculum across all education institutions in Burma in 1966 through the passing of the Basic Education Law was a strategic tool to manipulate “state’s ideology” playing an important role in shaping the role of the state in the minds of people (Lall, 2018, p. 149; Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 34).

A case in point is the history and geography curricula, which promotes a Bamar version of state ideology with its central foci being a detailed account of the Burma kings and hailing Aung San as the ‘father of the army’, whilst casting the British as a core enemy. In contrast, ethnic led education systems, including those under the direction of the KNU, portray the British as their guardians from the ill-treatment of the Burmans (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 37).

The introduction of the school matriculation examination in 1962 limits the choices of students' interest course of study for pursuing Higher Education. Generally, the contemporary provision of education by the government in Myanmar is assumed to be poor quality, using outdated pedagogy and implemented with limited geographic coverage due to the civil war. The limited access to poor quality education has resulted in poverty for many of its citizens especially those in the rural areas (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017).

The Myanmar Government recognizes 135 'national or ethnic races' (*taingyintha*) in Myanmar (South & Lall, 2016a, p. 6). South & Lall (2016b) observed that there are eight types of education provision for these ethnics in Myanmar.

Type	Characteristics	Examples
Type One: Ethnic-input schools	Government-run schools with civil society input.	Government-run schools, with some teachers (and teaching materials) provided by the local community or civil society.
Type Two: Mixed schools	Government schools in EAG-controlled and contested areas, with some EAG and/or civil society input.	Includes schools in remote areas that accept volunteer teachers.
Type Three: Hybrid schools	Part government, part EAG; sometimes also input from civil society.	NDAK schools in Kachin ceasefire areas. IDP schools in Kachin areas. Schools which were previously under the authority of EAG education departments, but have now been 'flipped' (or 'poached') by government Ministry of Education.

Type Four: EAG (government curriculum) schools	Schools managed by EAG, with no government teachers, but which use government curriculum (often in translation) and where children can sometimes transfer to the state system after a test or local arrangement. Curriculum is supplemented by ethnic nationality-oriented materials, especially for history and social studies, but sometimes also other subjects	NMSP/MNEC Mon National Schools. KIO schools (teach government curriculum in Jingphaw etc., and later in Burmese). Some Karen schools, particularly those supported by the community with limited KNU/KECD input.
Type Five: EAG schools	Schools built and run by EAGs and/or associated civil society groups, with separate MTB curriculum; no recognition/ accreditation or possible transfer for students.	KECD schools, and ‘community schools’ in areas under KNU authority or influence; refugee camp schools.
Type Six: Civil society private schools	Separate MTB curriculum and different teaching methods; no recognition/ accreditation or possible transfer for students.	Community-supported schools in northern Shan and Kachin States. Some Karen schools in KNU-controlled areas (sometimes administered and funded by churches).
Type Seven: Foreign curriculum schools	Curriculum developed in/by another country, allowing (some) students to transfer to other schools in that country.	Schools with Indian curriculum in Kachin; some Karen mission schools.
Type Eight: Supplementary schools	Schools that focus on ethnic language and/or culture/religion, but teach after the government classes are over – either summer schools or afternoon/evening schools.	Mostly provided by civil society groups; often linked to the Sangha and the churches.

Table 1.1: Typology of ethnic education provision in Myanmar
 [Progressing from those closest to government system to those further away]
 (South & Lall, 2016b, p. 16-17)

Type One schools (government-operation schools with civil society input) include schools particularly in Kachin State and Bago Region (and some other places) that were founded during the colonial period and historically run by Christian missionaries. Type Two mixed schools (government schools in EAGs-controlled and contested/mixed authority areas, with some EAG and/or civil society input) include especially Mon ‘mixed schools’ which teach Mon language and history during school hours. Moreover, the Mon National schools planned for the students to take government matriculation exam, enabling the graduates to progress to the government higher education system (Lall & South, 2014). A few of these ‘mixed’ schools also exist in Karen populated areas. Type Three hybrid schools (part government, part EAG) are schools that were operated by EAG Education Departments but accepted links or integration with the government system. These schools include a few MNEC (Mon National Education Committee) schools and NDAK (New Democratic Army-Kachin) schools which use government curriculum and their own local teachers, as well as government-provided teachers (South & Lall, 2016b).

Additionally, Type Four schools are EAG (government curriculum) schools with no government teachers, but which use government curriculum and supplemental MTB-oriented (mother tongue-based) materials. The Mon National Schools are counted in this type, as were Kachin Independent Organization (KIO) schools until 2011 when they were disrupted by renewed armed conflict with government forces. Type Five schools are EAG operated schools (built and run by EAGs and/or associated civil society groups, with separate curriculum). These schools comprise most of the KECD schools, as well as the schools in refugee camps in Thailand for Karen refugees. The current KNU education policy enhances nationalism and is based on federal principles; its curriculum has been developed by KECD with aid from international and national non- government organizations (NGOs) (South & Lall, 2016b).

Type Six schools are civil society private schools that have a separate MTB curriculum in Karen and northern Shan States. These schools are self-funding and are not aimed at preparing students for government exams. Type Seven foreign curriculum schools (allowing students to transfer to other schools in that country) include KIO schools in Laiza (KIO headquarters area) and missionary-run schools in Karen areas. The final Type Eight schools are supplementary schools (summer schools or afternoon/evening schools) such as those provided by the Mon Sangha-led Mon Summer Language and Literature

trainings and summer schools run by churches in Karen and Kachin States (South & Lall, 2016b).

The semi-civilian government of President U Thein Sein (2010-2015) initiated the peace process in late 2011. The KNU was one of the EAGs that signed a ceasefire agreement in 2012, at which time its Unlawful Association status was removed. The peace process also opened the way for a reformation of the mainstream education system. During this time, the government built hundreds of new schools and dispatched thousands of teachers to the mixed-controlled and solely KNU controlled areas which the government found difficult to access previously (Lenkova, 2015).

The Framework for Social and Economic Reform (FESR) established in December 2012 proposed the decentralization in education in theory, but this has not been realized in practice. The education reform in Myanmar can be described as *deconcentration*³ rather than *decentralization* (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017, p. 179). In practice, while some decision-making power moved up to the district from the township, the central level continued deciding budget distribution and regional and state-level *hluttaws* (parliament) had no authority over education. Such decentralization is interpreted as ‘an extension of central control’ (pp. 181-183). In response, in the lead up to the democratic election in 2015, National Network for Education Reform (NNER) prepared a position paper expressing its loss of faith in the interim government’s Ministry of Education’s education reform process, stating that the EPIC (Education Promotion and Implementation Committee) imposed “...comprehensive right thinking” which implies one individual or group’s influence over the thinking of others (Education Policy Working Group, 2014, p. 2).

While successive governing regimes have imposed highly centralized and state-controlled educational models that aim to serve the Burmanization process, the KNU/KECD have provided schools in their controlled or mixed-controlled areas as part of their self-determination campaign. Many Karen communities believe that the loss of indigenous Karen education will result in

3 Administrative decentralization is supposed to distribute power, responsibility and financial resources to different levels of government. Decentralization usually consists of three major forms: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Deconcentration is the weakest form of decentralization and does not transfer any real power to local governments. In fact, it does not require any decentralization of power because it does not give the authority to practice local decision-making (Utomo, 2009, p. 2).

the loss of cultural identity. Rather than competing with government education, Karen schools are trying to fill the gaps with the provision of important educational services to their communities. During the peace process negotiations with both Thein Sein and National League for Democracy-led governments, the Karen strove to maintain their ethnic education systems while carefully marching towards a more democratic federal nation-state.

This research explores how the Burmanization policies influence Karen society in nation building, and the development and consequences of Karen education which do not have accreditation and recognition from the mainstream government.

1.2 Statement of the research problem and justification

For the Karen, their education is strongly linked with struggle and sacrifice, identity, freedom, and self-determination in their land Kaw Thoo Lei. Karen young people sacrificed to attain their education in extremely difficult situations, for example, learning the basics under trees in the jungle while fleeing from the persecution of the Burmese Army.

The KNU established schools in areas under its control since the independence of Burma under the responsibility of the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD). Subsequently, the Education Department was re-established in the 1970s based in the high school of Wangka village (Kaw Moo Rah), on the Thailand Burma border (Lall & South, 2014, p. 307; Lenkova, 2015, p. 7). KECD provides educational services to Karen communities and, at the time of writing, is supporting over 1,500 schools with nearly 175,000 students and paying stipends to nearly 11,000 teachers in both the mix-controlled and fully controlled areas of KNU. Across the seven predominantly Karen refugee camps in Thailand, the CBO Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE) is responsible for 64 basic education schools with 22,500 students taught by 1,000 teachers (Oh, Walker & Hayso Thako, 2019, p. 6). However, the KNU leadership and KECD education are prioritizing Sgaw Karen language, which can be seen to be prioritizing ‘Sgawization’ of Karen society through education provision, since Pwo Karen languages are not recognized in the classroom in the modern era (McConnachie, 2014, p. 49; South, 2011, p. 36).

Both languages have existed side by side for millennia; yet the perceived cultural reality of the status of Sgaw Karen as the lingua franca has elevated its status within Karen society, which in turn, has devalued and resulted in a non-recognition of Pwo Karen literacy as a legitimate linguistic mode (Worland, 2013).

There is an argument that there should be only one national language for the Karen nation, thus Sgaw Karen is widely used and recognized as a Karen national language by the Karen National Union. The recognition and adoption of Sgaw Karen language as a national language in KNU governing system has devalued both East Pwo Karen and West Pwo Karen literacy. Also, the other Karen subgroups, for instance Bwe Karen, have developed a different text which is based on English letters. This remains a contentious issue among Pwo Karen cultural preservation groups and it cannot be denied that the KNU's recognition of Sgaw language in their administration gives a certain legitimacy and Sgawization of the Karen subgroups.

For the Karen population in KNU administration and mixed administration areas, the network of KECD-administered, community-run, “mixed” and other schools in Karen-populated areas contributes a basic education often in very difficult circumstances. [In collaboration, the Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG) which was formed in 1990s by Karen community teachers primarily to improve teaching quality (Oh, Walker & Hayso Thako, 6-7), and its network are assisting these non-state schools by providing the crucial need for teacher stipends and training.

The Myanmar government and the KNU education systems are vividly different, especially in terms of mother tongue learning, whereby KECD schools teach Burmese language only as a subject, and in its history curricula. As stated by Lenkova (2015), “There is no doubt that the KECD and government curricula have opposite visions of the same historical periods and events.” With Burmese only taught as a subject, many Karen do not become fluent in the national language. This, combined with the lack of state recognition of this education, produces problems as KECD graduates are unable to continue their studies in the government structure of Higher Education system and access jobs opportunities in Myanmar. Even so, some of these graduates find other ways to continue their education, while some find gainful employment or internships

in the various Community-Based Organizations (CBO) or NGOs and internships (Shiohata, 2018; Lenkova, 2015; Lall & South, 2014).

My personal experience of completion of Basic Education High School from 1997 to 2008 at No. (5) B. E. H. S, Taungoo, highlighted to me how the teacher-oriented teaching method and compulsory rote learning excludes critical thinking in the classroom. I was resigned to the fact that I needed to progress to university degree study to gain employment in the mainstream system, but rather than endure another three years in a rote learning environment in a full three-year degree program at Toungoo University, I gained my parents' permission to enroll only in their Distance program in 2009, graduating in 2012. The nickname of Distance Education program is *Yat Thone Sal Bwet* which translates 30 Days Degree, since the students actually only attend 10 days intensive rote learning classes per each of the three academic year followed by 100% examinations. In the same period, I attended the Bachelor of Liberal Arts at Myanmar Institute of Theology, Insein, Yangon full-time, graduating their four-year degree in 2013. This degree program promotes a student-centered learning approach so completely opposite to what I had previously experienced, encouraging me to critically think and contribute to my own learning; highlighting to me the doubtfulness of the quality of the Myanmar mainstream education system and its ability to produce citizens able to positively contribute to a democratic Burma.

While the government education regime practices the teacher-oriented method, the KECD schools' approach is more student-centered that encourage critical thinking classroom with a curriculum developed by the Karen community in Myanmar (Lenkova, 2015). Although there are questions about the quality of KECD education, there is the perception that it and related community-based education is higher than the government provision of local schools in Myanmar (Shiohata, 2018, p. 8). In a 2014 Irrawaddy News interview, KECD Secretary Saw Law Eh Moo, explained how the KECD teaching approach has shifted from teacher-centered to more child-centered since 1995 with the help of international organizations and educational experts (Michaels, 2014). However, the lack of official recognition of KECD education regime remains a crucial issue with both the students and their parents concerned about their uncertain futures. Students are not eligible to continue on to government higher education including public universities, and have a disadvantage in applying to jobs.

Despite such disadvantages, the KNU through its KECD continues to establish Karen community-based schools in opposition to the successive government education regimes. The governments' provision of mainstream education follows an outdated pedagogy (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017, p. 173) which serves the Burmanization/ Myanmarfication agenda of the successive governing regimes. In contrast, Karen community-based education is characterized by student-centered teaching and encourages critical thinking classroom which exercises critical pedagogy (Lenkova, 2015). Further, the KECD education system encourages multilingualism which includes Burmese and English in the curriculum, with Karen language as the main medium of instruction. This KNU education policy has practical benefits for equipping students to be contributing members of their communities because its child-centered teaching approach was developed by practitioners at the ground level (Naw Khu Shee, 2018).

For the Karen, the establishment and development of their own education system is assumed as part of a self-determination campaign (Lenkova, 2015, p. 7). As one element of self-determination, indigenous people demand "indigenous control of indigenous education" since indigenous rights and voices are marginalized as policy actors and citizens by state educational systems (Wotherspoon, 2014, p. 335-336). Their concept of self-determination is communal, positive, and integral to their daily living. They believe that self-determination of education makes them strong and enhances the survival of their culture, language, and development as a communal goal. Additionally, indigenous peoples view national education of the state as a threat to preserving their cultural identity (Cornelio & Castro, 2016; Manuelito, 2005). Johnson (2016) argued that the provision of Karen education focuses the role of community-provided education in the development of group culture and identity which supports their nationalist claims in the international arena (p. 4). KNU education policy enhances nationalism and is based on federal principles (South & Lall, 2016b). Even so, with the lack of recognition from the nation-state, Karen education could be said to be "preparing students for national life in no country" (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017, p. 174).

In this research, I argue that the provision of Karen education, as part of a self-determination campaign, is the act of emancipation to achieve freedom and rights that supports their nationalist claims of a recognized "Kaw Thoo Lei" State with legislative powers within a Federal Union of Myanmar.

Accordingly, in the above context, this research explores historical factors that give rise to the essentiality of education for the Karen up to the current time. The research focuses on the development, consequences, and social meaning of Karen indigenous pedagogy of the KECD under the KNU which differs significantly from government mainstream education. Further, it studies how Karen education functions to preserve and promote cultural identity and human rights.

Research Questions

- How has Karen indigenous pedagogy developed and implemented under the leadership of KNU/KECD?
- How has Karen education preserved and promoted cultural identity and human rights through the provision of KECD education?

Research Objectives

- To explore the successive government national education for nation building and their influences towards Karen society
- To examine the KECD pedagogy and its nationalism, and
- To discover the consequences and social meaning of Karen indigenous pedagogy.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this research, operational definitions of four key terms—pedagogy, indigenous peoples, freedom, and self-determination—are provided.

Pedagogy refers to the governance, curriculum, and the teaching approach to education delivered by the KECD under the authority of the KNU. The nature of education is to guide students in acquiring understanding, capabilities, and virtues foundational to living well, including the fulfillment of potential, facilitation of autonomy, and acquisition of knowledge (Curren, 2014).

Indigenous peoples: Karen are one of the original inhabitants of a land later colonized by others, who have unique ethnic identities and cultures with strong ties to land and territory. Being indigenous people, Karen are not only

one of the ethnic groups in Myanmar, but also early settlers in Myanmar over 2,500 years ago. Indigenous people commonly experience threats of eviction from their ancestral territory – including the threat of assimilation and loss of identity (Kapoor & Shizha, 2010; Rajah, 2008).

The term *freedom* for Karen is the freedom to live where they please, to choose their own friends, to choose their jobs, and to choose their rulers. As well, the Karen students must have freedom to participate in what goes on in the classroom and their schools. The practice of freedom for Karen education is essential because it is assumed and re-created by human communities in struggle (Moore, 1982; Freire, 1973).

The term *self-determination* is considered as ‘the Karen control of Karen education’ in preserving cultural identity. The provision of Karen education, as a campaign of self-determination, enhances the survival of their languages, cultures, and the protection of their rights (Lenkova, 2015; Manuelito, 2005).

Theory, Concepts and Conceptual Framework Underpinning this Research

To gain a deeper understanding of this research, I engage three concepts: cultural hegemony, critical pedagogy, and indigenous education. To observe the pedagogy of the Karen, I conceptualize these concepts in examining the Karen indigenous community of KNU/KECD education provision to the Karen both inside and outside of the Karen state of Myanmar.

In order to respond the hegemonic power of successive governments, the Karen reproduce counterhegemony to sustain their cultural identity and political autonomy. In order to achieve domination over subordinate groups, there is a power called ‘hegemony’ gained through active consent. Although ‘active consent’ is necessary in attaining hegemony, consent and force closely coexist. However, when the dominant groups are too self-serving and narcissistic, the subordinate groups challenge the hegemonic power of the dominant groups through counter-hegemonic activities (Gramsci, 1971; Artz & Murphy, 2000; Lears, 1985). By adopting the concept of cultural hegemony which is challenged by the counter-hegemonic activities of subordinate groups, I take the position that the provision of KNU/KECD education is one of the counter-hegemonic activities in countering Burmanization.

Freire (2000) introduced the concept of critical pedagogy by comparing the ‘banking model of education’ which is a practice of the oppressors, and ‘problem-posing education’ which is a practice of the liberation for both the oppressed and oppressors. Critical pedagogy posits that everything in school is political and encourages a transformation of society by equipping the students to practice democracy in the schools. The core responsibility of critical pedagogy is to transform oppressive institutions or social relations (Stevenson, 2010; Monchinski, 2008). I engage critical pedagogy in analyzing the ‘banking model of education classroom’ practiced by the mainstream and the ‘critical thinking classroom’ practiced by KNU/KECD education.

All form of indigenous education are transformative, demanding self-determination while resisting assimilationist activities of most national education programs. Indigenous education is being shared and reshaped across generations by producing the knowledge that fits the historical contexts and requirements of indigenous people. Indigenous communities demand culturally responsive curricula with their own languages. From the perspective of indigenous people, indigenous education is the instrument that helps them to flourish their own cultural, economic, and political destiny (Cajeta, 2016; Champagne, 2015; Jacob et al., 2015). The Karen people, as one of the indigenous groups in Myanmar, establishes KNU/KECD education with their knowledge and culturally responsive curricula in preserving and promoting cultural identity and rights reclamation. To this end, I adopt ‘indigenous education’ to guide and conceptualize the indigenous form of education provision by KNU/KECD.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1:1 depicts the interrelationships of the three concepts guiding this research. By engaging the three main concepts of cultural hegemony, critical pedagogy, and indigenous education, the research analyzes the problem statement critically. Generally speaking, cultural hegemony is a kind of power that a dominant group uses to gain active consent from the subordinate group. But when a dominant group is self-centered, the subordinate group produces counter-hegemony as we see in the Karen case – KECD education that is separatist from the mainstream education. The concept of critical pedagogy’ embraces a critical thinking classroom, which is encouraged in KECD education, while the mainstream practices ‘banking concept education’ which serves the Burmanization/ Myanmarfication of successive regimes. The practice

of critical pedagogy promotes democratic education and the freedom that the Karen community is seeking. Lastly, ‘Indigenous education’ conceptually demonstrates why and how indigenous peoples are demanding ‘self-determination’ not only in the education sector but also in the political arena. Similarly, main goal of the Karen, as an indigenous group, is to achieve self-determination in Myanmar in accordance with a federal democratic Union.

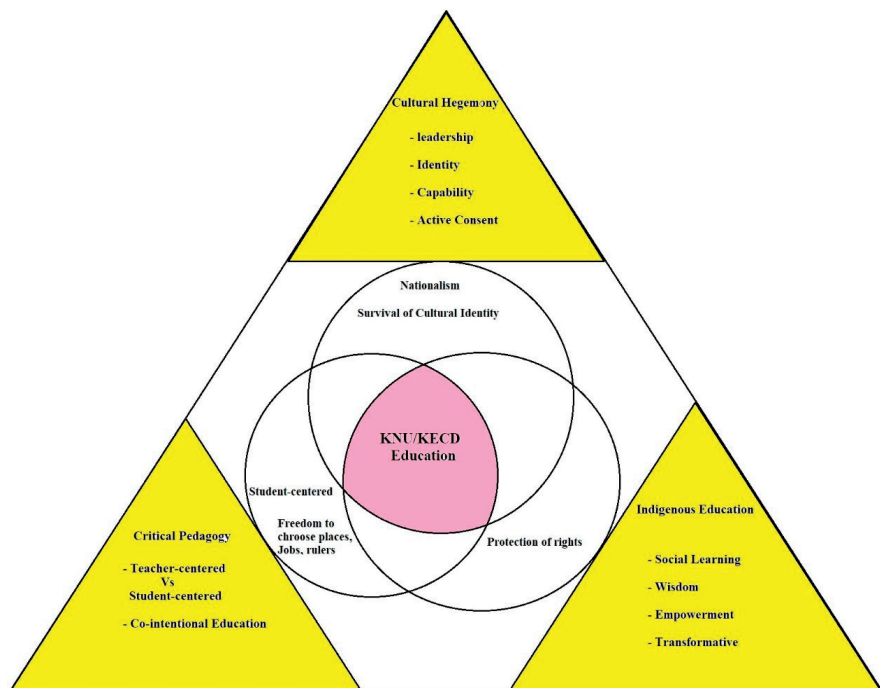


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework (by author)

Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore the purposes of the provision of Karen education, its pedagogy, and the struggle for self-determination. A qualitative approach was adopted in carrying out this research in order to understand the topic from the perspectives of the local population. As such, it enables the researcher to interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation (Mack et al., 2005).

Research site



Figure 1.2: Map of Taw Oo District (Kaw Thoo Lei)
 Retrieved from <http://khr.org/maps> (Accessed 2019, 13 April)

The principal research site was at Hto Lwe Wah Public High school and Junior College at Toungoo District which is approximately 45 minutes’ drive (32 kilometers) from Toungoo city. Toungoo District (Taw Oo in Sgaw Karen

language) is located in the northwestern part of Karen State. Communities in Toungoo District are under varied degrees of Government and KNU control. In that area, the Tatmadaw⁴ has carried out attacks on villages since 1974 with major attacks occurring in 1992 and 1996. According to recent Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) report (2019), villages in Toungoo District under the control of the Tatmadaw Military Operations Command still encounter regular and ongoing demands for forced labor – specifically during military re-supply operations and road-building activities. Currently, both Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops are active in Toungoo District (KHRG, 2012).

Geographically, KNU-Taw Oo District is situated at the eastern part of the Yangon-Mandalay highway and railway, and since it is territorially close to Nay Pyi Taw, direct combat with Tatmadaw has been prevalent for decades. Since before the ‘four cuts’, as well as and after 1975, KNU-Taw Oo district could only provide primary and middle schools at the township level. However, during the period of 2002 to 2005, the district level high school was established but the Tatmadaw burned it down and destroyed all the village level, township level and district level schools in the Taw Oo district. Most people were forced to flee to internally displaced persons’ (IDP) schools closer to the Thai-Burma border and also across the border into refugee camps. One middle school continued operation until 2007 in Daw Hpa Kho township, but it had to halt because of the intense attack from the Tatmadaw. In 2008-09, KNU-Taw Oo District was able to re-establish primary and middle schools in Daw Hpa Kho and Htaw Ta Htu townships with a small number of students. There was agreement and vision to establish a district level high school at the 3rd Congress of 2010 KNU-Taw Oo District. The bilateral agreement with the Tatmadaw regarding the ceasefire in 2012 provided the impetus to further this vision. Accordingly, at the 4th Congress in 2013, the decision was finalized to establish Hto Lwe Wah High School in Htaw Ta Htu Township, Lan Kwal Old village. A School Committee was formed with the leadership of the Chairperson of KNU-Taw Oo District (Saw Thaw Tu Htoo, email interview, 30/01/19).

Unit of analysis

The most typical units of analysis are individual people. In qualitative research, researchers are interested in exploring, describing, or explaining how

4 The Tatmadaw is the Burmese language term for the Burmese military.

different groups of individuals behave as individuals. Social groups can also be units of analysis in social research. Therefore, we may be interested in characteristics that belong to one group, considered as a single entity (Babbie, 2013). Likewise, this research observed Hto Lwe Wah Public High school and Junior College, its related educational organizations, the parents, teachers, students and senior community members who directly or indirectly participate in both individual and groups as a single entity. This school was founded and continues to come under the responsibility of KNU Brigade Two in Toungoo area.

Hto Lwe Wah Public High school was built by the KNU Brigade Two and the first intake began in June 2015. The school uses KECD curriculum and offers grades from 7 to 12. A Junior College began in June 2018 following the first Grade 12 graduation in March 2018. The June 2019 intake included 346 students and 15 teachers including a boarding house for the students who live far away. Students mostly come from the surrounding Karen villages and some are from internally displaced person (IDP) families in relocation sites, especially from Ee Thu Ta camp on the Thai-Myanmar border (Lenkova, 2015).

Level of analysis

According to the research objectives, this study analyzes different levels. The first analysis involves the KECD education department and the related agencies which contribute in the establishing and developing of KECD education. The second analysis aims to understand the functions and management of the school under KNU and KECD including the KNU Brigade Two/Taw Oo District management and their perception regarding the establishment of Hto Lwe Wah Public high school and Junior College. To be able to understand the challenges and obstacles of establishing KECD schools, the relationship and interaction of KNU Brigade Two, the KECD Central and Brigade Two/KECD were observed. Thirdly, I observed to gain the perspective and views of parents, teachers, and students regarding the provision of KECD schools to enable a wider understanding of the impacts of KECD education.

Role of researcher

It is important to consider carefully the role of researcher while conducting this research. I decided to exercise the complete membership role in this research because I am one of this Karen community's members (who

was born in Toungoo Karen community) and though my education pathway was different, I share a common culture and goals for my ethnic group. This is the reason why I developed this research with the aim to gain the recognition of KNU/KECD education including self-determination within a democratic federal state in Burma. The “complete member” researchers throw themselves fully into the group as “natives.” The complete membership role brings to researcher a more certain amount of legitimacy and has the full acceptance of insiders. They are able to gain the full openness of their subjects. Additionally, the complete membership role enables researchers to gain a different perspective than other researchers could obtain (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 81).

Recruitment of participants

With the target population for this research identified, the next step concerns access to them. To this end, purposive sampling defined as “obtaining a pool of respondents that is appropriate for the study, and which is largely determined by the judgment of the researcher” (Henn et al., 2006 , p.133) is the manner by which I selected participants for study. As bias can occur in even heterogeneous populations, purposive sampling enhances rigor as it involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, purposive sampling recognizes the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and their ability to communicate experiences and options in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

For the purposes of this research, gender equality was considered with both male and female included. Secondly, in order to generate rich data, I included the governance of the KNU/KECD, the parents, the teachers and the students in both high school and junior college. I believe that the inclusion of multiple voices from a variety of participants’ points of view enhanced the quality of this research.

Table 1.2 details my research participants. I used pseudonyms in parts and real names in others with the consents from the participants. Real names (with permission) are used for the first four respondents’ in giving respect to the KNU personnel and legitimacy of their words. The pseudonyms are used for the parents, teachers, and students to protect psychological and social risks for them (Mack et al. 2005).

No.	Participants/ Pseudonyms	Gen- der	Age	Interview Type	Status	Loca- tion
1	Saw Eh Wah	Male	54	Key Informant Interview	Chairperson (KNU Taungoo District)	Hto Lwe Wah
2	Saw Hei Soe	Male	38		KECD Officer (KNU Taungoo District)	
3	Saw Thaw Tu Htoo	Male	35		Secretary (KNU Taungoo District)	Email
4	Saw Law Eh Moo	Male	37		KECD Secretary/ Central KNU	Email and Phone
5	Naw Khu Paw	Female	27	Individual Interview	Full-time teacher	Hto Lwe Wah
6	Naw Paw Paw	Female	22		Intern teacher	
7	Naw Shee Shee	Female	19	Life history Interview	2 nd Year - Junior college	
8	Saw Lah Lah	Male	19		2 nd Year - Junior college	
9	Saw Htoo Htoo	Male	27		Full-time teacher	
10	Naw Wah Wah	Female	27		Full-time teacher	
11	Saw Thaw Htoo	Male	30		Full-time teacher	
12	Saw Kyaw Doh	Male	17	Focus Group Discus- sion	First Year -Junior College Students	
13	Saw Tha Gay	Male	19			
14	Saw Kwar Hsi	Male	18			
15	Saw Blessing	Male	19			
16	Naw Paw Blute	Female	19			
17	Naw Julie Htoo	Female	18			
18	Naw Gay Gay	Female	18			
19	Naw May Paw	Female	17			

20	Saw Bwe Moo	Male	18	Focus Group Discussion	Second Year - Junior College Students		
21	Saw Lay Lay	Male	20				
22	Saw Ler Htoo	Male	19				
23	Saw Eh Moo	Male	20				
24	Naw Law Eh	Female	18				
25	Naw Hse Hse	Female	18				
26	Naw Poe Mu	Female	16				
27	Naw Dah Dah	Female	18				
28	Saw Taw Htoo	Male	30	Focus Group Discussion	Teachers		
29	Saw K'paw	Male	23				
30	Naw Dah Poe	Female	21				
31	Naw Hsi His	Female	22				
32	Naw Poe Poe	Female	22				
33	Naw Day Day	Female	24				
34	Naw Nyaw Nyaw	Female	23				
35	Naw Jue Jue	Female	23	Focus Group Discussion	Intern Teachers from USA		
36	Naw Joy	Female	28				
37	Saw Thue Thue	Male	23				
38	Naw Moe Moe	Female	51	Focus Group Discussion	Parents	Taw Goo Village Near Hto Lwe Wah	
39	Saw Moo Soe	Male	55				
40	Saw Joe Joe	Male	47				
41	Naw Lu Lu	Female	43				
42	Naw Pearl	Female	53				

Table 1.2: Demographic information of research participants

Data collection

Five data collection methods were employed; participant observation, focus group discussions (FGD), individual in-depth interviews, life history interviews, and key informant interviews to provide rich data for analysis.

From June to August 2019, I lived full-time on site in the role of Science and English teacher for the Junior College. I conducted participant observation by watching, listening and seeing what and how people interact in their daily lives during this three month period.

I conducted five focus group discussions with students, teachers and parents (ranging from three to eight participants per FGD) in order to hear different voices and perspectives from the community. I conducted in-depth topic-oriented interviews with two teachers and life-history interviews with three teachers and two students. The life-history interviews enhanced my understanding of the provision of KECD education and provided a rich description of different episodes in contemporary Karen history and how those episodes have impacted on the lives of these people. Both the topic-oriented and life history interviews helped my understanding of the different roles the participants play in their society, enhancing a deeper knowledge of indigenous education. I conducted four key informant interviews with the KNU Chairperson of Brigade Two, Secretary of Brigade Two, KECD officer of Brigade Two and KECD secretary of the central KNU.

I applied semi-structured interview style for the FGDs, individual, and key informant interviews since it consists of open-ended questions which allows the in-depth responses from the participants. The life history interviews utilized an unstructured interview style giving the participants complete freedom to share their life stories as they chose. Interviews were conducted in either Sgaw Karen or Burmese languages. As I am fluent in both languages, there was no need for a translator which reduced the margin for translation error. Since my research is about education, my personal life experiences and educational background shape the interpretation.

The researcher considered deeply ‘respect for communities’ including respect for the values and interests of the community in research and, wherever possible, to protect the community from harm. The researcher invited voluntary participation of the respondents as one of the most important ethical values and carefully explained to the participants the purposes of the research. The researcher obtained informed consent from the research participants by formulating a letter of information and consent in Sgaw Karen, Burmese and English languages.

Limitations of the Study

I chose my research site at Hto Lwe Wah Karen Public High school and Junior college in the KNU Taungoo District which is also under the administration of KECD. So, the research is solely focused on the provision of

Karen education by KNU administration, and other Karen community-based education and Karen faith-based education are not included. The research does not represent the Karen education as a whole, but the Karen education which is using and following KECD curriculum and principles under KNU administration.

Each brigade has different socio-economic backgrounds and the accessibility of KECD education. Also, the funding and budget for education in respective Brigades varies according to their economic strength. The struggle from the conflict with Tatmadaw varies from each region. Since the research is carried out only in KNU Brigade Two administration, it has limitation to represent all Karen schools in KNU seven districts.

Chapter 2

Historical Contextual Analysis of the Karen in Burma and their Value of Education

Introduction

This chapter studies a historical contextual analysis of the Karen and their educational values in order to understand the pedagogy of the Karen indigenous education in this era. In this chapter, firstly the historical development of education in Burma is explored in three main shifts, the precolonial Burma education, colonial Burma education under British rule, and postcolonial Burma education by successive governments. Secondly, the origin, nationalism movements, and struggle of Karen is rediscovered together with their historical value of education. Finally, I observe the peace process through 2020 and the reformation of education that lacks consideration of indigenous education provision.

Karen identity formation was developed concurrently with American missionization and British colonization; the first which introduced a written script and schooling, and the latter which significantly influenced the socio-cultural development of Karen. Therefore, it is essential to reflect the mainstream education of Burma in three main shifts in which the Karen identity and schooling were introduced and developed throughout successive socio-political contexts.

History of Burma Education

There are three main shifts of education provision in Burma, education in precolonial Burma, education in colonial Burma, and education in postcolonial Burma. The studies of these three main shifts provide the essential understanding of the emergent and development of pedagogy of the Karen in Burma.

Education in the pre-colonial era

Before the period of British colonization which began in the 1820s, the main education provision was the monastic education by the monasteries of the Theravada Buddhist order, the Sangha which aims to practice and preserve Buddhism. In the twelfth century, Buddhist learning monastic education had risen to its peak under the Burmese Kingdom of Pagan. With the rapid development of Buddhist culture and learning at Pagan, the kings of Pagan invited the most learned monks from Lower Burma and neighboring countries. Monastic education was generally rural-based and open to pupils from different classes or backgrounds, but female students were not included. The monastic schools served to “civilize” the other non-Buddhism groups as a means to assimilate people into the lowland polities. Monastic education was free under the Sangha which largely relied on contributions from the local communities. Most pupils joined the monasteries around eight years old where they learned Buddhist scripture and Buddhist moral codes. The minimum period for a boy to attend the monastery school was three or four years. The teaching prepared the boys to enable them to fit into an agrarian society, self-sufficient economically and earning merit though doing good deeds. The teaching methodology practiced was rote learning of basic literary texts and grammar in Burmese and Pali, but mainly the Buddhist doctrine. During that period, the purpose of education was to sustain Buddha’s dispensation and assisting the young boys to achieve higher-status rebirth. Through the monastic education, the pupils were meant to meet their spiritual, social, and cultural needs to practically apply in their communities (Johnson, 2016; James, 2005, p. 80; Cheesman, 2003).

Monastic schools focused on Pali grammar to be able to study the Buddhist Pitakas. Pali grammar was studied by the court and the kings in Pagan. Pagan was the center of classical Burmese Buddhist learning and culture. Particularly, the monks were serving as educators in spreading the system of monastic education across the villages of Burma. The monks, as royal tutors,

would usually be invited to live in the capital, where the king could support them and at the same time benefit from their services. The main objective of monastic education was to train the character rather than fulfilling skills for a profession. Religion, ethics, and literary art were the focus of the study since these were suitable for a pre-industrial society (James, 2005, p. 80).

Colonial era education provision

In the second shift, the Burma educational transition of monastery-based education began when British colonial rule began in lower Burma in 1824. When the whole Burma became under British rule in 1885, the British government introduced a colonial system of education.

Table 2.1 compiled by Thein Lwin (2019) details the latter two of the educational shifts discussed above moving forward to the current time.

	Political events	Educational transitions
1824	British colonial rule began in lower Burma	Monastery-based education
1885	All of Burma under British rule	Colonial system of education
1948	Burma became independent	National system of education
1962	Military took power in a coup	Education under the “Burmese Way to Socialism”
1988	Democratic uprising	Education under the military regime
1990	Election: NLD won a landslide, but result was ignored	Education under the military regime (40% of children never attend school)
2008	New constitution allocated 25% of seats in parliament to military	Education under the military regime (Compulsory primary education)
2010	Election: military-backed party USDP formed government	Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) is conducted by the government
2015	Election: NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi forms government (hybrid regime of NLD and military)	National education law was approved in September 2014 and Amended in June 2015

Table 2.1: A chronology of key political events and educational transitions
(Thein Lwin, 2019, p. 275)

Under the British colonial regime, different educational systems were provided in various regions. Education in Buddhist lowlands became a joint venture with mainly American Baptist missionaries and the Sangha providing educational services across the areas where they were placed. After the British occupation of Arakan and Tenasserim in 1826, George Boardman, as part of his mission to the Karen, opened a school for boys in Tavoy (Dawei), but Burmese, Mon, and Tavoyans also joined the school. Concurrently, women missionaries including Boardman's wife, opened schools for girls. From 1830, the Baptists focused on the Karen in Tenasserim provinces, establishing schools at Amherst, Moulmein, and Tavoy. In 1843, a boarding school in Moulmein was opened to train Karen pastors and teachers. After all of Lower Burma became British territory, in the delta, many Karen had graduated with a high school level of education, with some such as San C Po and T. Thanbyah gaining university degrees from England and America. Thus, the Karen, especially the Christians, dominated many areas of employment in colonial Burma as doctors, nurses, soldiers, teachers and police (Johnson, 2016; James, 2005).

Christian missionaries provided education to ethnic minority areas in the highland territories. Generally, three types of schools, Anglo, Anglo-vernacular, and vernacular schools were fulfilling the educational services during the British rule. In Anglo schools, the medium of teaching was English, except the Burmese language and literature subject, and most of the students were from western elite families. In Anglo-vernacular schools, English served as a medium of teaching and Burmese as a second language. Between 1835-44, three Anglo-vernacular schools opened in Tavoy (Dawei) with a bilingual English-centered curriculum. In 1926, Karen Missionary High Schools were established in Yangon, Patheingyi, Hinthada, Tharyarwaddy, Taungtha, Mawlamyine and Dawei with the Karen language as a second language in the teaching. Vernacular Schools gave the access of education in the rural areas for those who were poor with Karen language as a medium of teaching. With the influence of the Christian teaching, many Karen living in the lower regions left the monastic schools and joined the Christian schools in which many Karen converted to Christianity. In this way, during the colonial period, the Karen people enjoyed a high level of educational services (KNU, 2019; Johnson, 2016; Cheesman, 2003).

The next section observes the post-colonial education after Burma gained independence in 1948 with the introduction of the National education system up to the newly enacted National Education Law in September 2014 under the

National League for Democracy (NLD) government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Consequently, it studies how the Burmese successive governments imposed national educational policy for nation building through Burmanization over the whole country.

Post-colonial era in education provision

The third shift in education provision occurred in the postcolonial Burma with the declaration of the Burmese language as the official state language by U Nu, the first Prime Minister of Burma after independence in 1948 (Johnson, 2016). The government released a statement of education policy which was based on the report of the Education Policy Enquiry Committee and practiced a centralized system of education. The report included the abolition of colonial system of Grants-in-Aid and adopting a state provided system of education. The three systems of schools, Anglo, Anglo-Vernacular, and Vernacular were forced to unify into a single homogenous system. The control of education was centralized under government through the agency of the Ministry of Education and Burmese language became the medium of instruction in the Primary stage and Secondary stage in all schools (Thein Lwin, 2007).

In 1962, General Ne Win's military coup d'état changed the national education to 'Burmese Way to Socialism.' General Ne Win announced that:

the existing education system is unequated with livelihood and will have to be transformed. An educational system equated with livelihood and based on socialistic moral values will be brought about. Science will be given precedence in education... our educational target is to bring basic education within the reach of all. As regards higher education only those who have promise and enough potentialities and industriousness to benefit from it will be specially encouraged (Thein Lwin, 2007; Thein Lwin, 2019; James, 2005, p. 100).

Under the "Burmese Way to Socialism," private schools were nationalized. Although the Buddhist monastic schools could continue to operate in rural areas, the Christian schools were totally prohibited by the Ne Win coup. There was lack of consideration for indigenous, vernacular languages for those whose mother tongues were not Burmese. Most independent associations and

newspapers were forced to shut down by the Revolutionary Council. All publications had to pass under the censorship board. Most foreign missionaries, scholars, and Western foundations were forced to exile and access to Burma was strictly prohibited. The release of the Basic Education Law (1966) tightened the supervision of schools and its activities. The 1974 Constitution was amended but all rights were closely watched by the state including academic freedom and freedom of speech (Thein Lwin, 2007; Cheesman, 2002).

By the time in mid-1980s, corruption spread through all sectors of government administration – in education sector, the public was dissatisfied with teachers' salaries and the low quality of state schooling. Thus, on August 8, 1988, university and high school students led the mass protests throughout the country. The government responded with thousands of students and civilians killed by the military in what came to be known as the 8'8'88 uprising. The military junta State Law and Order Restoration Council took the state power and declared the demise of the 1974 Constitution and Burmese Way to Socialism. After the students protest, all universities were closed for two years. Another series of student protests in 1996 and 1998 resulted in another three years closure of universities. In Yangon, between 1988 and 2000, universities were closed for 10 out of 12 years. After the reopening of universities and colleges in 2000, the government relocated many universities to different sites with campuses far away from any urban area. The regime believed that keeping students away from cities helped them to gain full control over any potential civil strife led by students.

The successive military regimes from 1962 to 2010 were major forces influencing education – specifically under General Khin Nyunt who chaired the Myanmar Naing-ngan Educational Committee – whereby policies fostered Burmese-centric tradition, culture and social values while supporting the military political objectives. Under this system, the Basic Education perceived the students as future 'human resources' to maximize their quality for the benefit of the state, hence, management of schooling was solely supervised by the State. During this time – 1988 to 2010 – the accessibility and quality provision of Myanmar national education continued to decline and roughly 40% of children never attended school or failed to complete primary education (Thein Lwin, 2019).

Education provision during the democratic transition period in Myanmar

A new National Educational Law was released in September 2014 and amended in 2015, with parliament enacting several amendments of previous acts passed in the military regime era. However, few changes actually occurred in practice with a continued highly centralized system and lack of academic freedom (Thein Lwin, 2019). However, the reintroduction of teaching ethnic minority languages into mainstream education system by the 2014 (amended in 2015) Educational Law raised possible positive outcomes, limiting the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, improving accessibility for children from ethnic nationalities in the mainstream system, and addressing one of the root causes of conflict—the abolishing of ethnic language teaching since Ne Win’s coup. While teaching of ethnic language was carried out in five ethnic states—Mon, Karen, Kayah, Chin and Kachin states—since 2016, Mon state schools allocated the most hours of ethnic language teaching during school hours in one daily period (40 minutes) out of eight. In the newly amended Education Law, the term “classroom language” has been introduced by granting to use local language in explain the curriculum and the text. Yet, the use of ethnic language teaching textbooks does not include the local knowledge and ethnic local histories which are perceived as sensitive topics (Salem-Gervais & Raynaud, 2019).

In the area of Taungoo district surrounding my research site, the Ministry of Education has introduced Karen ethnic language teaching from grades one to three since 2015. Government high schools have plans to expand this to Grade 8 in coming years. However, the availability of Sgaw Karen language teaching varies from school to school and region to region where the Karen students are populated with teaching usually takes place outside school hours. Currently, the ethnic language teacher assistant (TA) has to lead the teaching of Karen language, while the government pays a daily wage of 4,800 kyat. The textbook is a direct translation of government textbooks ,with little or no input from ethnic community. In some parts of the government schools in Taungoo, there are complaints from the Karen language teacher assistants that they are directed to teach Karen language classes outside of classrooms on the floor, without tables and chairs, because the subject is not incorporated into the curriculum. They state that the last page of the grade one textbook (page 54) includes lyrics in Sgaw Karen language of what the textbook claims to be a Karen national song. However, the informant from the KECD says that he and his staff have never heard of this song (conversations with KECD staff) (See Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: MoE first grade Sgaw Karen textbook, cover page, lesson one page, the last page includes a Karen “national” song that local Karen do not recognize (Ministry of Education, 2017)

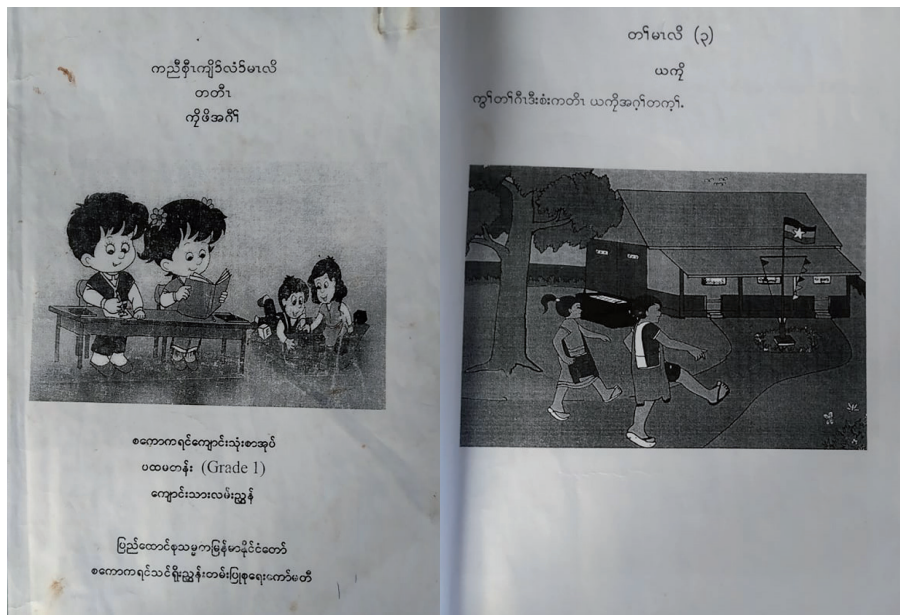


Figure 2.2: Grade one Sgaw Karen textbook cover page and lesson three page developed by Karen Ethnic Affair Ministry, but not passed by MoE (Sgaw Karen Curriculum Development Committee, 2017)

The 2014 National Education Law mentions freedom to develop curriculum regionally in Article 39(g), “to have a right to perform for the development of the curriculum regionally based on the curriculum standards” (National Education Law, 2014). Although Article 39(g) provides the right to freely develop curriculum regionally, the Sgaw Karen textbook (see Figure 2.2) that was developed by the Ministry of Karen Ethnic Affairs, which contains a more critical approach in learning Karen language, was not passed by the Myanmar Ministry of Education.

Under the NLD-led government, the state published its National Education Strategic Plan in 2017 which was based on the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) carried out with guidance and support from UNICEF and other international consultants (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017). However, the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP, 2016-21) fails to address the needs of students, teachers, and marginalized groups in Myanmar and does not fulfill federal democratic principles and the right to education (Thein Lwin, 2019). Although Myanmar signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in 2007, the government is failing to include the right to self-determination of the indigenous people in the education strategic plan in accordance with federal democratic union. The NESP (2016-21) does not recognize schools system provided by indigenous people, such as their local school curriculum, teachers, and students. Therefore, the Myanmar education system creates social injustice and inequality of opportunity among students by neglecting the participation of indigenous people in decision-making including on their culture, language, and local knowledge (Thein Lwin, 2019).

The above details the historical development of education in Burma from the precolonial era through 2020. The introduction of Christian missionary schooling was a significant catalyst for the emergence of the Karen identity and development of nationalism till the contemporary political arena. Hence, it is useful to further study how missionary education created the progression of both Karen nationalism and their socio-cultural advancement in Myanmar that raised the value of education among Karen leaders and their citizenry to the current day.

The Karen: Origin, Rise of Nationalism and Struggle

According to Karen oral history, they originated and migrated from Mongolia where the Karen called *Hti Seh Meh Ywa* (suggested as the Gobi Desert) over 2,500 years ago. Marshall (1922) retold the myth about the origin of the Karen founder *Htaw Meh Pa*. He was a strong man who with family living in the unknown land in the North. Their fields were often destroyed by a great boar; thus, he killed the boar. But only one tusk was found by his children instead of the body of boar, which he made into a comb. The comb provided the old man a supernatural power that gave him eternal youth, and soon their land became overpopulated, which urged them to search for a new and better land by traveling along the river called in Karen *Hti She Meh Ywa*. Drawing on Marshall’s seminal anthropological work, Rajah’s (2008, p. 309) research recorded the chronological migration of the Karen,

Migration of the Karen from Mongolia	B.C. 2617
Arrival of the Karen in East Turkistan	B.C. 2013
Migration of the Karen from East Turkistan	B.C. 1866
Arrival of the Karen in Tibet	B.C 1864
Migration of the Karen from Tibet	B.C. 1388
Arrival of Karen in Yunnan in China	B.C. 1385
Migration of the first group from Yunnan to S.E. Asia	B.C. 1128
Arrival of the first group Karen who entered S.E. Asia	B.C. 1125
Migration of the second group of Karen from Yunnan to S. E. Asia	B.C. 741
The last arrival of the second group to enter S.E. Asia	B.C. 759

Table 2.2: Chronological migration of the Karen to Burma (Rajah, 2008, p. 309)

In this account, the Karen migration to Burma followed three routes; firstly, the Mekong valley route where the Karen established cities and government in Chiang Mai, but they were overthrown by the Thais and moved

into the mountains and across the other side of the Salween river. The second, the Irrawaddy valley route was where the Pwo Karen built the town of Prome, and some went down south to the Irrawaddy Delta places as Ma-u-bin, Bassein, and Myaung-Mya. The third Salween valley route was what now is known as Shan State, moving down to southern Shan State. Those are known as Pa-o Karen, some stayed on in Karenni State (the Red Karen) and some groups went westward to Toungoo, Shwe-Gyin, Thaton, Moulmein, Tavoy (Dawei), and Mergui (Myeik) (Rajah, 2008, p.307-308; Marshall, 1992).

Originally, the Karen were agriculturists. They settled in the land where they were able to produce an abundance of rice by plowing the rich fertile soil with the help of cattle and buffalo. Since rice production was their main livelihood activity, their main consumption is rice supplemented with edible vegetables that grow in their lands. A wide range of birds, fish, and animals are also served as food by hunting. The Karen highly favor fish-paste, *nya u* in Karen, as part of their daily diet. They settled under the leadership of their own patriarch of the village while valuing kinship among the villagers. The links of the kinships are essentially important in socioeconomic arrangements whereby Karen gain mutual advantage in working on livelihoods activities, especially as the cultivation and harvesting of swidden farmlands demands the labor of more than one household. Hospitality is one of the main cultural values of the Karen with guests freely able to enter the house and help themselves to food without asking permission (San C. Po, 1928; Marshall, 1922; Smeaton, 1887).

The name of the 'Karen' was first used by the Mon and Burmese. The Mon used the term *kariang* which is the combination of *kha* and *riang* – while *kha* is a group of people who are Tai speakers, *riang* refers to groups of forest people. The Burmese pronounced *karaing* as *kayin*. There was no written term about *kariang/kayin* before the nineteenth century although the Burmese, Mon, and Thai knew the Karen. The two main groups of Karen are Sgaw and Pwo Karen. Naw Say Say Pwe (2018) recalls the work of Reverend Cronkhite (1916) of Bassein in which the origins of these two groups are detailed. In this legend

passed down generationally in *hta*'s⁵ even to today, the Pwo call themselves the mother race (Mo Hti in Sgaw Karen) and the Sgaw the father race (Par Hti in Sgaw Karen). The legend cites that there was a father, mother, six sons, and a daughter. The mother and daughter were accused of being possessed by an evil spirit and were driven out, so becoming the Pwo race of Karen, with the Sgaw race deriving from the father's side of the family (p. 222). The Sgaw Karen calls themselves as *pwa k'nyaw* that simply means human being; in Pwo Karen language, they refer to themselves as *plong* with the same meaning.

The Karen enjoyed a peaceful and free life under the leadership of their own village patriarchs until the Mons and the Burmese came in the 13-14th centuries and started the formation of monarchial rule. The ill-treatments and oppressions from the Burmese and Mon kings forced the Karen to move away from their settled lands to the hill areas of the east and south. The arrival of American missionaries, the conversion of Christianity and introduction of schooling to the Karen was a beacon for them in their struggle for freedom from being oppressed (Rajah, 2008; Keyes, 2003; Renard, 2003; Cross, 1854).

To understand the rise of Karen nationalism, it is crucial to observe the introduction of missionary schooling which was a key mechanism in enhancing a sense of nationhood among the Karen and in promoting their socio-cultural development. The next section studies how missionary schooling succeeded in conversion of the Karen into Christianity and how it expanded under the leadership of Karen churches in Myanmar.

The introduction of schooling to Karen

The Karen's thirst for education is preserved through legendary and mythical stories. The arrival of white foreigners that brought schooling for the Karen is seen by many Karen to be the fulfillment of an ancient mythical prophecy "to regain their lost book." According to the myth, education is a gift in the form of a book from the creator god, which the Karen carelessly lost. The legend of the lost book has been passed down generation to generation

5 *Hta* in Sgaw Karen language (*le ying* in Pwo Karen language) are a form of oral poetry passed down generationally often in song. Mostly, they are composed of couplets of seven syllables in each line with the last syllable of the first line rhyming with the last syllable of the second line. Many relate to ancestral wisdom and folklore, others recount different events in history to the current time. They are often sung on special occasions such as weddings and funerals (Weedon and Jordan 2012; Zin 2000).

– how they achieved and lost access to divine knowledge and access to literacy which could make them powerful and wealthy. Another version said that they have to give up ‘the book’ to ‘foreigners’ due to their disobedience against the god. Many Karen believe that the knowledge written down in the book will surely enhance their socio-economic development. Thus, the arrival of American Baptist missionaries in the 1820s interpreted this legendary book to be the Bible, which led to the conversion of many Karen to Christianity, believing that their younger ‘white brother’ had returned their lost book, giving them a second chance of economic and social development (Mason, 1843). Mason (1843) recorded how the Karen were eager to learn and study with their own language and books that,

We next heard that teacher Wade, at Maulmain, had made Karen books; so teacher Mason send up Kau-la-pau and myself, in a ship, to learn. Then many of the Karen, here and there, learned to read their own language; and we remembered, that the elders had said again, ‘children and grandchildren, the Karen books will yet arrive. When the books arrive, they will obtain a little happiness (p. 23).

The spread of Christianity during the 1800s to the Karen and the increase of Karen schooling are inseparable. Ko Tha Byu, a debt-slave to a Burman, is recorded to be the first Karen convert to Christianity by Adoniram Judson who was an American Missionary. His conversion and the spread of Christianity together with missionary schooling have made an enormous historical change for the Karen and their education (Worland, 2010; Rajah, 2002). Smeaton (1887) noted how the Karen perceived the relationship of Christianity, education, and civilization during that time,

Three processes have ever since been simultaneously in operation – Christianity, education, and civilization. The Karen regard these three as indivisible parts of the message which for ages their ancestors had firmly believed God would at some time or other send to them. They cannot see why a lesson in arithmetic should not be given at a Sunday school. They cannot understand a church without a school, or a school without a church, or either of these without material advance

in civilization and in the comforts of life; better houses, better foods, and more money with which to live, enjoy life and do good to their fellows (p. 194).

Wherever the Christian Karen established churches, they doubled as schools which led to the increasing numbers of Karen-administered schools. Both the Sgaw and Pwo dialects scripted to a written text based on Burmese letters were developed by Jonathan Wade and the opening up of the American Baptist Mission Press resulted in readers, Bibles, and textbooks distributed throughout the areas where missionaries were operating schools. Jonathan Wade (1798-1872) and his wife Deborah Wade (1801-1868) learnt Burmese and Sgaw Karen while being settled in Moulmein. Wade established a church and a school in 1828 and Mrs. Wade helped teaching in that school where the Karen students were taught English language instruction and the Bible (Jolliffe, 2016; 61-62). Keyes (2003) cited an emerging sense of Karen-ness through education that,

Together with producing a new Christian literature in Karen language, the missionaries also promoted education for Karen through the establishment of schools. These schools were the crucible for an emergence sense of Karen-ness that transcended local communities (p. 212).

The numbers of Karen-administered churches and schools increased under the leadership of the American Baptist Mission during British colonial times. The first Karen Baptist Church Area Association, the Hpa-an Mawlamyine Church Area Association, was formed in 1840 in eastern Burma which provided the training seminars and conferences for the spiritual and socio-cultural development of the Karen. The Morning Star newspaper, the first indigenous language journal in Asia was established in 1842, in the Karen (Sgaw) language. Under the leadership of Baptist missionary in Mawlamyine, the Karen opened the first Karen Baptist Theological Seminary for males in 1845, and the Karen Women's Bible School was opened in 1897 (Boonsong Thansrithong, 2017; U Zan & Sowards, 1963).

In the Delta Area of Irrawaddy Division, Naw Say Say Pwe's (2018) research recorded the increasing numbers of Sgaw and Pwo Karen schools by American Baptist Mission. In 1852, Rev. Beecher started the Baptist Mission schools among Karen at Bassein (currently known as Pathein). Later years in 1858, Rev. Beecher

initiated the Bassein Sgaw Karen Normal and Industrial Institute by providing the subjects, English, Bible, Mathematics, Geography, History, and Health. The school taught industrial subjects for male students and housekeeping subjects for female students, requiring students to work three hours a day with carpenter, joiner, wheelwright, pounding and cleaning the rice, making bamboo and cane furniture and sewing. The Pwo Karen of the Bassein-Myarungmya Mission started the Pwo Karen Middle School of Bassein in 1860. Although the Pwo Karen's progress was slower, there were 80 village schools in Bassein District by 1884. In 1911, while the Sgaw Karen schools numbered 187 with 3,452 students, the Pwo Karen schools provided 25 schools with 815 students in Bassein. In 1923, in honoring of Rev. C. A. Nichols, the Karen Baptist in the Bassein-Myaungmya Mission named a Karen school the Nichols Sgaw Karen High School in Bassein (Naw Say Say Pwe, 2018, p. 227-235).

Boonsong Thansrithong (2017, p. 104) and Worland (2010, p. 17) referred in Mrs. Richardson's book on "The Karen apostle" in 1928 that the Karen Baptist churches operated over 950 schools, including Karen theological seminaries and schools where the Karen churches were established. Likewise, San C. Poe (1928) recorded the rising numbers and development of Karen schooling as,

Where there were hardly five score pupils in a school there are to-day several hundred, and undoubtedly the largest is the Nichols' Sgaw Karen High School, in Bassein, with its roll of 1,400 pupils. Karen High Schools have been established in Bassein, Henzada, Tharrawaddy, Toungoo, Moulmein and Rangoon, and of the number of annual graduates from High Schools a good proportion go up to the University to complete their education and take their degrees in arts or science (p. 64).

The introducing and development of Karen schooling reached its peak under British colonial government through the leadership of the American Baptist Mission and paved the way to create Christian-led Karen national institutions. The next section studies the rise of Karen nationalism while the Karen nationalist movements were favored and improved under the British regime. It also covers the historical roots that have caused the painful grievances between the Karen and Burmans in Burma.

Emergence and struggle of Karen nationalism

The emergence of Karen nationalism was enhanced by Christian Karen elite groups who enjoyed an alliance with the British. A ‘nation’ is the self-identification of people based on the language they speak and the values, allegiances, and the historical memories they share. Nationalism is a process and the creation of unifying features of the nation, or the actions that result from the beliefs of the particular group. Further, it is the combination of the political ideal of territorial self-determination, the cultural idea of the nation as one’s primary identity, and a moral idea of justification of action to protect the rights of the nation against other (Barrington, 1997). Broadly speaking, nationalism can be defined as a social and political movement to achieve the goals of nationhood and realize its national will. The ultimate goal of nationalist movements is to be liberated from foreign domination so that they can govern themselves (Anbarani, 2013). As numbers of educated Karen increased, Dr T. Thanbyah and his educated associates realized their dream for a new Karen word they created – the *daw k’lu*, meaning “all the clans” when they formed the Karen National Association (KNA) in 1881. It was established, not as a religious nor political organization, but intended to promote Karen identity, leadership, education, and writing, independent of members’ religious belief. The Karen National Anthem was composed by Saw Thar Aye Gyi in 1928 and the Karen flag was introduced in 1937 under the leadership of KNA on the occasion of that year’s Karen New Year celebrations. To mark the auspiciousness of the occasion, the British colonial government granted a public holiday; a situation that continues to the current day (Worland, 2010).

In 1928, being regarded as the father of the Karen nation, Dr San C. Po was the first to claim an independent Karen state. The Karen as rank and file in the British army against the Burmese during the Second World War gave rise to the future ethnic conflict between the Karen and the Burmese in Burma. Under the British rule, large numbers of the Karen partook in prominent positions in civil services, education, healthcare, military, and police because of their educational achievement. Since the colonial government began to encourage the foundation of secular education, approximately 250,000 students already joined British-style secondary school by 1940 (Jolliffe, 2016, p. 63; South, 2008; Rajah, 2002).

While many Karen accepted the British as a protector against the Burman majority population, Burman nationalist movements led by Aung San initiated the resistance movement against British rule in the early 1940s. The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was formed in 1942 with those who gained the military training from Japan. Concurrent to the BIA conducting their resistance against the British in league with the Japanese invasion forces from 1942-1945, the Karen remained loyal and defended the British by fighting alongside them (Thawngmung & Cho, 2013, p. 254).

The nationalist movement of the KNA gave rise to the formation of the Karen Central Organization (KCO) in 1942 which advocated for gaining a separate Karen State in the Union of Burma. To implement their nationalist goal, they sent a delegation on a goodwill mission to London in 1946 to the British Government. The failure of achieving a separate Karen state in the negotiations with the British for independence led to another shift of their nationalist movement under the leadership of Saw Ba U Gyi in 1947. With independence granted in January 1948 to a predominantly Burman-led government, Saw Ba U Gyi led the forming of the Karen National Union (KNU) and its defense wing, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), the Karen Education Department (KED in 1949) and other government like departments, thus establishing separate social, political, educational and economic institutions (Thawngmung, 2008, p. 6; Harriden, 2002, p. 107).

Continuously, the Karen claimed for the free state where the Karen population were comprised of the Irrawaddy Region, the Tennesserim Region, the Hanthawaddy District, Insein District, and the Nyaunglebin Sub-division. Shortly after independence, on February 11, 1948, 400,000 Karen took to the streets of cities, towns, and villages across Burma to peacefully demonstrate four demands – 1) Give the Karen state at once, 2) Show Burman one Kyat and Karen one Kyat, 3) We do not want communal strife, and 4) We do not want civil war. Further demonstrations across the country with outbreaks of violence with many Karen civilians killed increased through 1948 and into 1949. With the failure to find any justice for their people, Saw Ba U Kyi's KNU declared the beginning of the Karen Revolution and the installation of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on January 31, 1949 with four principles: 1) surrender is out of the question; 2) recognition of a Karen state; 3) the Karen shall retain their arms; and 4) the Karen shall decide their own political destiny (South, 2008; Smith, 1999).

Many scholars agree that Burman resentment of the Karen had its roots in early British colonization; resentment that simmered for many decades, giving its vent in what became the longest civil war in the history of the world from 1949-2010. During these years wherever the KNU maintained control of areas of Karen State in Burma and along the Thailand-Burma border, Karen history has been taught in primary and secondary schools established by the KNU. This has helped to produce and re-produce Karen ethno-history, ethno-nationalism and nationalism as part of the KNU's educational policies (Rajah, 2002).

The Karen believe that the successive Burmese regimes have practiced annihilation, absorption, and assimilation (3 A's) against the Karen till the present day. From the 1960's to the 1990s by the Ne Win military junta, there was the annihilation attempting program with the "Four Cuts Operation" that included cutting off of new recruits, intelligence, food, and finances to the ethnic armed group-controlled areas. The civilians suffered hugely under this program. Besides lack of food access as whole countryside of grain and rice were burnt by the Tatmadaw and storage silos stolen, villagers, men as well as women and adolescents, were forced to carry loads as porters for the Burmese front soldiers and act as human mine sweepers.

The Karen Revolution suffered further setbacks in the 1990s with several internal splits; the major being the breakaway of several rank and file soldiers to form the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in 1994. This had the direct impact of the loss of the KNU headquarters in Mannerplaw in February 1995 and the largest exodus since the beginning of the Revolution of Karen seeking the safety of hastily formed border camps on both sides of the Thai-Burma border. Further internal splits; the Karen Peace Force in 1997 and the Karen Peace Council in 2007 has notably decreased the strength of KNU (Thawngmung & Cho, 2013). Even so, it has retained a level of legitimacy among the Karen especially in eastern areas of Burma and the border zone with Thailand, and is now a significant stakeholder in the current Peace Process between different ethnic nationalities in Burma and the Union Government since its signing the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015. The following section explores the politics of education provision within this fragile peace process time.

KNU and education during the peace process from 2011 through 2020

During this research, the KNU were participating in the peace process which was started by President Thein Sein in 2011 with initial bilateral ceasefires signed by 14 ethnic armed groups. After four years of continuous meetings, the KNU signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015 to work towards a more Federal Democratic Union. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi led the NLD (National League for Democracy) for a landslide victory for the general election which was held in November 2015. The NLD formed a government and led the peace process by initiating Union Peace Conferences in August 2016 and May 2017. However, the conference of May 2017 did not produce any satisfactory outcomes for the KNU who demanded self-determination with a federal union (South, 2018). The unsatisfactory outcomes resulted in the deadlock of the peace process, in which KNU temporarily withdrew from the formal dialogue in October 2018 (Nyein Nyein, 2018). During this research period, dialogue had renewed with the KNU participating in the 8th Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting on Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Nay Pi Daw on 9th January 2020. This meeting was unanimous in its decision to go ahead with the delayed 4th Session of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong in mid-2020 (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Information, 2019).

The NCA contained only small portions of educational issues in the political dialogue. The Parliament of Myanmar released a new National Education Bill in July 2014. However, the National Network for Education Reform (NNER) criticized that the creation of National Education Commission may contribute to the control over education content and the provision for students with disabilities to remain inadequate and discriminatory. Most importantly, that education bill allows the central control over Basic education, and lack of consideration for the local and ethnic education provision in EAOs controlled areas, including an emphasis on mother tongue learning in the ethnic areas (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017; Lenkova, 2015). From the time when the KNU signed the NCA through 2020, the KNU made little progress for their nationalist ideals within a federal democratic Union, including the reformation of education for the Karen indigenous people in the peace process.

Summary

This chapter provides the historical and contextual background and analysis of the development of the provision of education in Myanmar from the precolonial era through 2020. Before the colonial period, monastic schools were the main education provision in Burma till the entrance of British colonialists. When the American missionary and British colonials introduced the western style of education, the popularity of monastic education declined. The Karen enjoyed educational opportunities from the Christian missionary schools, which produced large numbers of Karen educated elites under the colonial regime. However, post-colonial education is struggling with ups and downs under the successive military regimes which nationalized education and banned ethnic language in teaching in their Burmanization policies.

The rise of Karen nationalism is historically developed through Christian missionary activities since the precolonial period. I argue that Karen nationalism is filled with painful grief because of decades of suppression and oppression from successive dominant groups, and a strong demand of self-determination of their nation Kaw Thoo Lei within a Union of Burma. The Karen believe that they will be free from being oppressed only the day that they can determine their own destiny.

Although the peace process was started in late 2011 when KNU signed of NCA, there has been little improvement in the education sector. Myanmar government education policy does not consider ethnic provision of education. Contrarily, the KNU/KECD sees mainstream education as a threat by extending government administration and ideology. Therefore, convergence of Karen education and mainstream education highly depends on the peace process and political dialogue through the building of genuine federal union.

Chapter 3

Hegemonic and Indigenous Education: A Literature Review and Related Studies

Introduction

This chapter studies cultural hegemony in the context of education, critical pedagogy which aims to liberate the oppressed from oppression, and the indigenous education that demands self-determination for protection and development of their cultural identity and rights. The discussion of literature reviews and related studies helps to conceptualize an in-depth understanding about indigenous education provision for Karen people in Myanmar, particularly Karen education which is provided by KNU/KECD.

Literature Review on Cultural Hegemony, Critical Pedagogy and Indigenous Education

This research is guided by three main concepts of cultural hegemony, critical pedagogy, and indigenous education. I conceptualize cultural hegemony as enforced power, adopted by successive Burmese regimes to gain consent from the Karen population by using mainstream education as a mechanism for Burmanization. To counter such Burmanizing hegemony, the Karen in KNU-controlled areas have established their own indigenous education as a tool in of counter-hegemonic activity. I further engage critical pedagogy in observing mainstream education that adopts the banking model of education and the KNU/

KECD education which encourages a ‘critical thinking classroom.’ Lastly, the research engages indigenous education scholarship in conceptualizing the indigenous education provided by indigenous Karen people in Burma.

Cultural hegemony

In order to better understand the factors that give rise to the Karen ethnic national education, this study employs the concept of cultural hegemony. The cultural hegemony helps to conceptualize how successive Burma governments have used education as a tool to assimilate and acculturate the ethnic people which tends toward cultural genocide. An example of this can be seen in the Grade Seven history textbook produced by the Myanmar Ministry of Education and taught in all Government schools. This text relates the success of the Taungoo emperor under Burmese Kings across Siam, Rakhine, Shan, Kachin, Chin and Mon states (Figure 3.1).

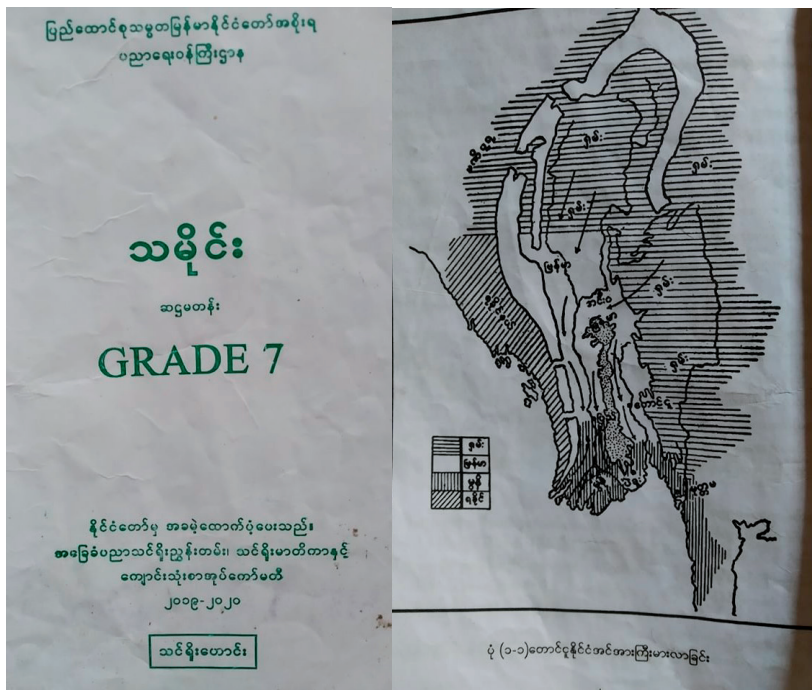


Figure 3.1: Government grade seven history textbook cover and page two about the Taungoo Empire with map (Basic education curriculum and textbook committee, 2019)

In resisting such hegemony, the Karen practice counterhegemony to resurrect and sustain their social, cultural, and political phenomena. The counterhegemony education activity is seen, for example, in a Karen education reader book. On the cover page of the Grade Seven reader textbook produced by the KECED (see. Figure 3.2), it is written that the book is supported by an NGO ZOA Refugee Care and prepared by KED while revised by teacher Noe No with a publication date in February 2003. The content of the textbook contains Karen literature, cultures, and histories. Such content is never taught in mainstream education; Karen history and culture are undermined by the successive Burmese regimes.

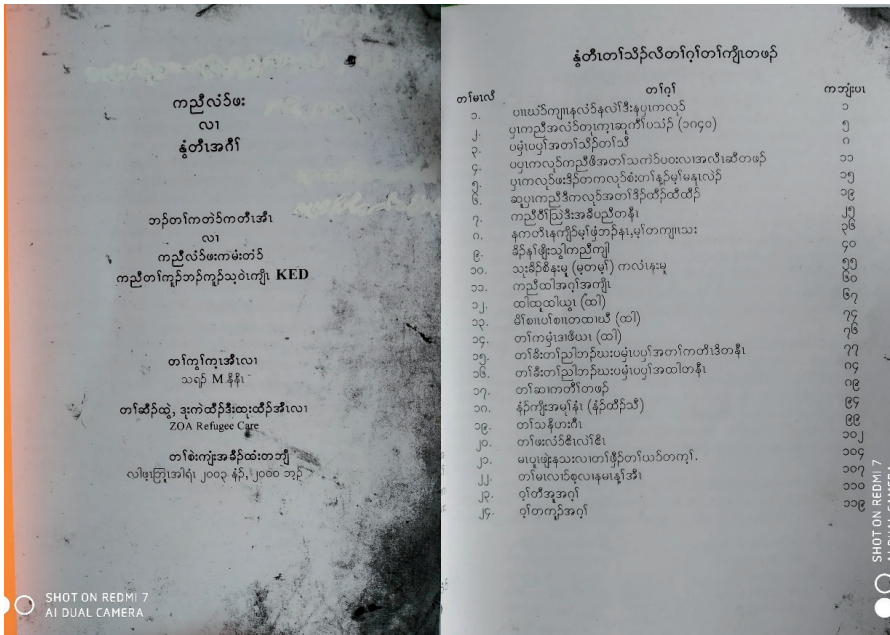


Figure 3.2: KECD’s Karen reader grade seven textbook cover and content pages (Karen Reader Committee, 2003)

Hegemony is generally known as power through active consent (Gramsci, 1971; Artz & Murphy, 2000; Lears, 1985). Gramsci (1971) introduced two strategies about how a dominant group achieves consent from subordinate groups. They are “the *spontaneous* consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group,” and “the apparatus of state coercive power which *legally*

enforces discipline on those groups who do not consent either actively or passively” (p. 12).

Interestingly, Lears (1985) viewed that according to Gramsci’s translated writings, there is no specific definition of cultural hegemony, because consent and force nearly always coexist in his writing. To achieve hegemony, the dominant groups have to earn the consent of subordinate groups. Lears observed closed and opened versions of cultural hegemony. In the closed version, the subordinate groups lack the ability to resist, while in the open version, the capability of subordinates advance which may lead to the formation of counterhegemony (pp. 573-574). In this regard, the counterhegemony of Karen emerged according to their advancement of capability, which has paved a way in developing counterhegemony.

Artz & Murphy (2000) defined hegemony as “the process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups” (p. 1). Power does not emerge naturally but must be established through behavior which often relies on physical force, economic constraint, legal guidelines, or other possible strategies. A particular dominant group cannot have hegemony without active consent of the population. Therefore, in order to be able to lead a society, a dominant group has to represent all social classes, establish cultural and intellectual superiority, and support political and social solutions to problems. However, if the dominant classes are too self-serving, they will likely encounter challenges by other social groups in their political, social, and economic leadership. Hence, to attain new social relations, subordinate social groups need to develop new hegemonic institutions that respond to the interests of the subordinate groups. The 1962 Ne Win military coup d’état in Burma resulted in the forceful introduction of “a more Burman-centric version in the standardized curriculum” in education delivery. This triggered the Karen to develop a new hegemonic institution, particularly the educational development of the KECD (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 34).

Adding to Artz and Murphy’s definition, Lutz (1990) argues that in the context of hegemony, cultural identity is a social construction that can develop in a separationist manner as long as the dominant groups are self-seeking. Under certain social conditions, the emergence of the self-identification of minorities can be advanced in five conditions: the existence of a large number of people in the same situation; geographical concentration; identifiable targets

of opposition; events which lead to sudden changes in social position; and an intellectual leadership with readily understood goals (p. 7).

While Artz and Murphy's (2000) interpretation of hegemony is more about active consent, Fischman and McLaren (2015) emphasized a dominant society establishment of two forms of control: coercion which is sustained by politically regulated oppressive repression and active consent. They implied that Gramsci associated hegemony with civil society and institutions such as churches, schools, the press, the family, hospitals, and political parties. In this way, the aim is primarily to build counterhegemonic alliance of social formation rather than transforming civil society. Yet, one of the main objectives of the counterhegemonic alliance should interrupt and halt the authoritarian power and structure of the state which sustains the oppressive practices (Fischman & McLaren, 2015). By exploring the concept of culture hegemony, this research seeks to understand ways and means of successive Burma governments' oppressive activities lead to counterhegemonic alliance of the oppressed Karen communities.

Critical pedagogy

By adopting critical pedagogy as a concept, it is beneficial in examining the comparative pedagogy of the Myanmar Government education regime and the Karen national education regime. Since a critical thinking model in education is essential in critical pedagogy, this concept helps to explore how and why the mainstream education and Karen national education developed on opposing axes. Freire (2000) implied the notion of critical pedagogy in his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, which encourages a revolutionary leadership to practice co-intentional education, and by creating knowledge critically between teachers and students (Freire, 2000, p. 69). In contrast, Freire (p. 73) stated that in the 'banking education'–

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught
- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- the teacher thinks and the student are thought about
- the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
- the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply

- the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
- the teacher chooses the program content, and the students who were not consulted adapt to it
- the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students
- the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

Freire insisted that while the banking model of education treats students as materials, the problem-posing model of education facilitates them to become critical thinkers. It is crucial for the revolutionary leadership to consider ways of helping the people to help themselves critically in order to address situations that oppress them. It is the processes of humanization for the oppressed who are dehumanized by the oppressor. The Karen national education encourages a more child-centered approach which is contradictory to banking education, thus enabling them to attain emancipation from the oppressor (Naw Khu Shee, 2018; Lenkova, 2015).

Critical pedagogy is crucial in the transformation of education in this era. Gramsci (1971) writes that ‘humanistic’ type of schools aim to develop every individual human being to raise the fundamental power to think and have the ability to find one’s way in life. He also encouraged critical thinking,

By means of collective discussion and criticism (made up of suggestions, advice, comments on method, and criticism which is constructive and aimed at mutual education) in which each individual function as a specialist in his own field and helps to complete the expertise of the collectivity... (1971, p. 28).

Moreover, he advocated that the school must be a creative space which develops the element of independent responsibility in each individual. The creative school is not about “inventors and discoverers,” but the place where “learning takes place especially through a spontaneous and autonomous effort of the pupil, with the teacher only exercising a function of friendly guide – as happens or should happen in the university” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 33).

Supporting Freire and Gramsci's approach, Monchinski (2008) states that critical pedagogy is a process of relationship which exercises both practice and theory, "...an ever-working relationship between practice and theory... a relationship that is always in progress, involving a constant give-and-take, a back-and-forth dialectical informing of practice by theory and theory by practice" (p. 1). Furthermore, Critical pedagogy always takes a position that everything in school is political and politically engaged. Because teaching alone is not able to transform society, schools are the space where students can be equipped to practice democracy in achieving the good life and good society. Thus, school must engage problem-posing education which is one of the core elements of critical pedagogy (Monchinski, 2008).

Two further proponents of critical pedagogy are Stevenson (2010) and Breunig (2005). Stevenson views that any critical form of pedagogy needs to consider relations of freedom, authority, and responsibility in facilitating the process of learning. He maintains that for a democratically oriented society which is built upon equal rights and where opposition to discrimination is achieved, first a learning space with full freedom by acknowledging critical thinking needs to be created (Stevenson, 2010). Breunig (2005) affirmed that critical pedagogy comprises notions of how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns. In this way, critical thinking is encouraged, which in turn uplifts practices to transform oppressive institutions or social relations (p. 109). Actually, critical pedagogy is a project of schooling which focus teaching on the development of a moral project for education as social transformation. Although one of the purposes of schools is to prepare well-performed workers for a changing economic development, Breunig insists that it not only prepares skillful workers contextually, but also offers them a vision of the development of a more socially just world (p. 112).

According to the context of mainstream government and Karen national education in Burma, I engage the critical pedagogy concept which supports the research to gain a deeper understanding of the two comparative educational regimes and their pedagogical practices. While the current provision of education of government is practicing outdated pedagogy, critical pedagogy is being engaged to compare and contrast these regimes (Zobrist & McCormick, 2017).

Indigenous education

The Karen, being one of the indigenous ethnic groups in Burma, have developed their own national education in the midst of difficulties and serious adversity. Therefore, employing indigenous education as a third concept in this research further contributes to a deep examination of Karen national education. Commonly, indigenous forms of education are contextual, local, and original, committed to communal and cultural values, transformative and nature centered, demanding self-determination, and resisting assimilationist and acculturationist assumptions (Cheng & Porter, 2015; Champagne, 2015). Cajete (2016) expressed that indigenous forms of traditional education within the context of the community are holistic and produce deep learning and commitment to communal and cultural values. He describes indigenous education as transformative and nature-centered which aims to produce a person with a well-integrated relationship between thought and action. This kind of communal education contributes to change that brings peace of mind, tranquility, and harmonious adaptation.

Keddie (2014) argues that the core problem in the western education systems is that they tend to focus on assimilating indigenous peoples into non-indigenous cultures and societies by ignoring indigenous traditions, cultures and languages. Global and national mandates counter this problem by stressing the need of equality of self-determination within education. For example, Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their education systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (cited in Keddie, 2014, p. 56). Keddie studied how the educational revolution led by Maori communities in New Zealand was responsive to the cultural values and political/social realities of Maori groups, aiming to improve educational opportunities and creating a space of community autonomy.

Jacob, Cheng and Porter (2015) interpreted ‘indigenous’ as that which is local, original, or native to a particular geographic region. Indigeneity includes the ingredients such as the communication media, cultures, identities, knowledge systems, and technologies developed or possessed by indigenous peoples. Therefore, Jacob, Cheng and Porter proposed ‘indigenous education’ as the path and process whereby individuals gain knowledge and meaning from

their indigenous heritages. Indigenous education is communal and communitarian, being shared and reshaped across generations and geography by generating the knowledge to fit the historical contexts and needs of indigenous people, then spread through educative means to others. Furthermore, indigenous education is an ongoing process and can be understood as an eternal reciprocal, interactive, and symbiotic learning process (pp. 2-3).

Their research found that national education policies tend to restrict indigenous learning and knowledge attainment. This may lead to conflict when dominant education systems favor certain languages, individual perspectives, and principles of competition, neoliberalism, managerialism, and individual recognition rather than indigenous languages and arts and principles of collective thoughts and practices that are fundamental to many indigenous societies. Governments have often used formal education as a tool to assimilate and systematically destroy indigenous ways of knowing and learning. In contrast, indigenous pedagogies are comprised of a variety of modes and philosophies of instruction and teaching methods, consequently having the potential to influence more than just indigenous peoples, but all people of the earth with the ability to learn from each other (pp. 6-7).

Champagne (2015) maintains that Indigenous communities usually have strong cultural and institutional commitments to maintain their social and cultural nations, thus preferring the education curricula be taught in their languages and within their own cultural contexts. They generally have strong suspicions about the purpose and goals of national policies of mainstream education toward indigenous communities and their futures. As a matter of fact, many indigenous communities are not opposed to mainstream education per se, but the assimilationist and acculturationist nature of most national education programs. They just want to see education as an instrument that assists and flourishes their own culture, and their economic and political future (pp. 102-103).

For me, as one of the members of the Karen community, I believe that adopting the concept of indigenous education fills the gap of essential knowledge in examining the Karen ethnic national education. Additionally, KECD conducts a multilingual education system that aims to preserve culture and language of the Karen while also providing Burmese and English languages, thus enabling the students to be able to perform in a wider context (Naw Khu Shee, 2018, p. 4). Since the mainstream education in Myanmar is largely centralized and

aiming to Burmanize the minorities, the reflexive response from the indigenous Karen ethnic education is to separate from the mainstream in order to sustain their own culture and language practices in campaigning for self-determination not only in education sector, but also in pursuing freedom and genuine federal union in Myanmar.

Related Studies

The below section studies research about how different nation-states often use education as a tool to assimilate minority groups and indigenous people in nation building. It observes that while the nation-states enforce those educational policies to achieve their political objectives, the demanding of self-determination of indigenous education by indigenous people is crucial for their preservation and promoting of cultural identity and rights. The last section studies the adoption of mother tongue-based learning which contributes to successful learning outcomes of children in various contexts.

Hegemonic education and domination

Educational policies and their implementation by most nation-states tend to use education as a strategic tool to control, assimilate minority groups especially in the process of nation building and improving economic development (Payes, 2013; Prasit Leepreecha, 2008; Duquette, 2001).

Von Feigenblatt et al. (2010) studied how the successive governments of Thailand use education as a weapon of mass assimilation of the minority groups in Thailand stating that “the present hegemonic Thai based curriculum favors a certain socio-cultural stratum of the population and brings about negative externalities” (p. 293). The authors engaged three concepts – human security, development as freedom, and liberation pedagogy – as the theoretical framework for their research. Thailand is portrayed as “land of the free” or “land of the Tai.” In order to modernize and develop, Thailand’s ruling elites centralized the education system by establishing the Ministry of Education. Although the “child centered” system was introduced in 1995, most classrooms still apply a high control approach as the model of discipline. The main purposes of primary and secondary education are to assimilate the entire population in Thailand based on the three pillars – Religion (Buddhism), Monarchy (Chakris dynasty) and Nation (Tai) – to prepare its citizens for national economic

development. In the case of educating the hill tribes and minorities, the role of education becomes not only a tool to produce a skillful population for economic purposes, but also cultural and political purposes. The authors encourage liberation pedagogy to lead the students in the learning process which permits them to be who they are with a more student-centered and more holistic teaching approach (Von Feigenblatt et al., 2010).

Prasit Leepreecha (2008) provided his personal experience regarding the assimilation of minority groups in Thailand. He was born and grew up in a remote Hmong community in the mountains of northern Thailand, and at the age of six he attended school in a lowland community. In school, he learnt how to speak, read, and write Thai. In addition to the central Thai language (the lingua franca used throughout the country), his classmates from the Hmong, Mien, and H'tin ethnic minorities also learned the history and culture of Thailand. As students, they had to wear the official school uniform, sing the Thai national anthem, and witness the raising of the national flag every morning. After that, they had to chant and pray in the Buddhist way, even though many of them were not Buddhists. At the end of every week, before leaving for home, they sang a song to praise to the Thai king, as their monarch. Thai nationalism was part of the hidden curriculum in subjects such as history, Thai culture, civil responsibility, and morality. All were based on the central Thai or national base of knowledge exclusively, since the school curriculum was set up by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok. Only Thai national history was taught in primary school. Although some local history was added to the secondary school curriculum, there was no history of local ethnic groups. Importantly, only the central Thai language was allowed officially in the classroom. Speaking local dialects or languages in class would result in punishment, even though students and teachers alike were local people. In this way, school, as one of the state's Hegemonic institutions, plays a significant role in gradually shaping the local and ethnic identity, aligning it with the nation-state (Prasit Leepreecha, 2008).

In the case of Israel, Payes (2013) observed the divided education in the Arab-Jewish city of Jaffa in Israel which enhances the domination of Jewish communities. The author conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation to understand the segregation of education that provided inadequate resources for Arab education, structural separation, and a national curriculum that promotes a one-sided view of history and citizenship (p. 546) with the aims

of education in Israel are designed to favor secular Jewish society while neglecting the Arab citizens (p. 552). Arab schools suffer from serious budget discrimination, and students' academic results are significantly lower than the state-favored Jewish schools. The government's failure to implement an intercultural approach worsens the conflict between Arabs and Jews. Here, education becomes a key role for hegemonic domination over the Arabs (Payes, 2013).

Choi Tse (2007) argues how school education was adopted by the SAR (Special Administrative Region) Hong Kong government to achieve consent in building nationalism in Hong Kong. The research was mainly carried out by reviewing policy papers and analyzing newspaper reports and comments. Although ethnic Chinese are the majority, a new identity 'Hong Kongese' emerged in later years since the separation between Hong Kong and mainland China in. However, after the SAR government was established in 1997, the government implemented national education, especially the promotion of civic education, continually increasing the number of China topics in school syllabi. Even though there has been criticism of this incursion into Hong Kong's established education system by citizens and democratic party members, it has been overridden by the pro-Beijing camp advocacy of national patriotic education through the provision of resources, administrative support, and the publicity machine of the central and local Governments. As a result, the public and young people have become less resistant to national education and Hong Kong's integration with China through nationalist education provided by the state (Choi Tse, 2007).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Neriko Doerr's (2009) research found how laughter of Te Reo-speaking students at teachers' mispronunciation of Te Reo produced a counterhegemonic action that challenges disrespectful behavior towards Te Reo people. Until the 1970s, Maori minority culture and Te Reo language was suppressed in the education system, forcing Maoris to assimilate into Pākehā (white people) (p. 127). Then in the 1980s, Te Reo language was introduced as a compulsory subject across all schools. Doerr conducted ethnographic, participant observation research at Waikaraka High school in both bilingual and mainstream classes. Her analysis of language-minority students' counter-hegemonic actions at school in Aotearoa/New Zealand showed the bilingual unit created students who could stand up for their culture without abandoning schooling (p. 139). The laughing of mispronunciation of Te Reo language made the mainstream teachers respect and learn to pronounce the minority language properly. The researcher interpreted that the laughter

was a counter-hegemonic activity because it challenged the mainstream teacher's power by redefining what Te Reo pronunciation is (Doerr, 2009).

Apple (2015) argues that "true counter hegemonic education was not to throw out 'elite knowledge' but to reconstruct its form and content so that it serves genuinely progressive needs" (p. 178). In contrast, Kyler Jr (1991) noted that the hegemonic control of education intends to:

- Degrade teaching and learning to rote implementation and mastery, respectively;
- Define schooling in the context of corporate self-interest and economic growth (i.e., education for social transformation and critical citizenship is replaced with a more blatant notion of producing efficient, patriotic workers capable of aggressively competing in a global economy);
- Defend schools as sites of cultural production in an attempt to rid the classroom of cultural pluralism, diversity, and relativism (i.e., thereby assuring the preservation of an ethnocentric Western culture, in which the economically privileged groups maintain their intellectual supremacy); and
- Ignore critical research having the potential to transform schools and society, ensuring that marginalized teachings and learners fail to function as active subjects committed to self and social empowerment (pp. 403-404).

Therefore, if the dominant group is too self-serving, the subordinate groups conduct counter-hegemonic activities which commit to maintain their cultural identity (Artz & Murphy, 2000). The counter-hegemonic activities of the subordinate groups evidenced in the above research have both supported and guided this research into the provision of KNU/KECD education as one of the Karen counter-hegemonic activities for self-determination.

The implications of critical pedagogy in different contexts

According to Pittard (2015), critical pedagogy is about justice-oriented education. From her view, equality and equity should be the primary aim in the school through critical pedagogy, by saying that "...educators, pre-service teachers and practicing teachers engage Critical Pedagogy because of their commitments to reducing inequality and inequity in schools and providing analytical tools to their students for understanding and analyzing how power operates in both

schools and society,” (p. 328). Critical pedagogy encourages democracy which helps to critically analyze power and its unfulfilled promise of emancipation.

Allen (2005) argues that white people receive both material and psychological benefits from a white supremacy system in the USA. Through the social structure developed by the white majority, white supremacy provides white people with greater protections and material advantages which results in dehumanizing other under-privileged racial and ethnic groups. The whites have written histories that see whites as the creators of civilization and color people as a threat to their civilization projects. In fact, white educators working in urban communities regard themselves as ‘white knights,’ whose are the savior of color people from oppression. Allen observed that critical educators need to advocate to stop ‘white supremacy’ and white students must be shown other ways of being white. The author insists that critical pedagogy is the means to contribute to the transformation of white identity and the elimination of white supremacy (Allen, 2005).

Lee (2006) explored about a summer program, Tribal Resource Institute in Business Engineering and Science (TRIBES), for Native pre-college students at the University of New Mexico which assist Native American and Native Canadian students. For the indigenous people, education has been a way to learn about life which directly involves natural, participant observation, hands-on practices, and storytelling; also, as a means of cultural transmission. The TRIBES program highly emphasizes on a curriculum that promotes critical thinking and critical consciousness and helps the students become aware of what it means to become a complete human being. By learning to become a complete human being, the students will realize that contribution and service to their Native communities should be important goals in their lives. Lee argued that the intersection between critical pedagogy and indigenous education promotes the students to think about nation building from an indigenous perspective with strong commitment to their communities. As critical indigenous consciousness is connected to communal and indigenous educational goals of commitment to community, it becomes the means to protect tribal sovereignty and self-determination (Lee, 2006).

Silwadi and Mayo (2014) argue that access to education is a liberating and empowering tool for oppressed and disadvantaged groups in Palestine. Historically, Palestinian education was provided by the Ottoman Government

(p. 72). Post-World I when Palestine became a British Protectorate, Britain set up a separation education system for the Jewish populations by giving autonomy to the Jewish schools, but there was no such consideration for Palestinian populated schools. In this way, Palestinian national aspirations were suppressed. When the Israeli State was official established in 1948, the Palestinians were forcibly evicted from their lands, and Palestinian villages, towns and cities were destroyed. The authors insist that in the current time, the Palestinians utilize education as a tool for liberation and freedom from the Israeli military occupation; an essential means to resist the occupation, maintain identity, and build an independent nation (p. 73).

In India, Sinha (2016) criticized that the teaching-learning processes are often based on one-way interaction between teachers and students, which is regarded as the authoritarian learning space. The present worldview perceives the role of a teacher to frame and convey knowledge for the economic growth a state, instead of a critical leader who is eager to develop critical ability among students. The caste-based social structure in India triggers the inequality and discrimination in educational settings, in which lower-caste students have to sit and eat separately from upper-caste students and teachers. This discrimination results in large school dropout rate of lower-caste students because some teachers practice coercive methods to deal with these students. The author encourages teachers to adopt critical pedagogy and become agents of social change; he intensively argues that “the role of the teacher is not limited to passively following and communicating mainstream values but involves constructing a new participative identity through critical pedagogical engagement and by acting as an active agent of social change” (p. 304).

The Indian-produced film *Three Idiots* released in 2009 gives me insight about how Indian students are under the social pressure (the excessive demand of the parents, relatives, teachers, institutions, and societies) of an Indian education system. In the movie, the Indian educational society believes that the students who perform rote memorization without any mistakes are the excellent students. Actually, rote memorization without critically understanding produces no value, likewise good grades received by rote memory do not contribute value in real life. The pressure from the family to pursue engineering subjects because of the potential for high-paid jobs and professional achievements neglect the students’ talents, aptitudes, and interests. Those who cannot endure the impact of social pressure quit schools with some committing suicide (Hussain and

Ahmad, 2016). This movie encapsulates the banking concept of the education regime that I have experienced in Myanmar. The film raises awareness and challenges the education system of India to reform their educational practices and structure. By highlighting the impacts of the banking concept education, the film encourages a critical pedagogical approach which enhances the students to think critically and freely, paving the way to their genuine success.

Many researchers observed how critical pedagogy promotes justice oriented and democratic education. In comparing the pedagogies of Myanmar government education regime and KECD education regime, critical pedagogy helps to analyze how and why the KECD education regime is demanding freedom under the oppressive Burmese regime.

Indigenous education as self-determination

In conceptualizing indigenous education, it is important to critically understand first, “What is indigenous knowledge?” Basically, indigenous education is founded on indigenous knowledge which is local, contextual, and a demand of self-determination (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Maurial, 1999; Wotherspoon, 2014; Cornelio & Castro, 2016). Semali and Kincheloe (1999) defined indigenous knowledge as a “...dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives” (p. 3). UNESCO provides the definition as “the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings” (cited in Xing & Ng, 2016, p. 4). It is accepted widely that the local knowledge is unique to a given community or society, culture-bound and community-based, developed continuously in everyday experience, and passed down through generations. That knowledge consists of rich practical information applicable to real lives which is shared and re-shared by a community, rural or urban, from religious beliefs, and linguistic heritage and practices. Promoting indigenous education through indigenous knowledge helps indigenous people to preserve their languages, cultures, and ways of life, enabling students or individuals to have ownership of their knowledge in a way that is respecting their culture, tradition, and identities. Additionally, indigenous education can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool in teaching and research that brings the richness of indigenous languages, worldviews, and experiences into the learning

process, and most beneficially, it broadens the scope of pedagogical strategies (Xing & Ng, 2016).

Although the definitions and understanding of ‘indigeneity’ may vary in different regions, ‘indigeneity’ is a highly political concept with direct implications to land rights, human rights, and education. Most indigenous people suffer various forms of oppression from poverty, discrimination, and sociocultural marginalization. Indigenous peoples are also described as Native, Aboriginal, First Nation, and other terms in different countries. Although there is no common definition, indigenous peoples are those which, “having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them” (cited in Xing & Ng, 2016, p.40). Likewise, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided two significant characteristics of indigenous people as; (1) those descended from population groups present in a given area, most often before modern states’ establishment; and (2) maintenance of cultural and social identities, and social, economic, cultural, and political institutions that are different from mainstream or dominant societies and cultures (cited in Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015, p. 41).

Being an indigenous people is being original inhabitants of a land later colonized by others. They are the nondominant sectors of society with unique ethnic identities and cultures; strong ties to land territory, experiences of or threats of dispossession from ancestral territory; the experience of being subjected to culturally foreign governance and institutional structures; and the threat of assimilation and loss of identity (Kapoor & Shizha, 2010).

In many countries, the education provision for indigenous people from the state public system is problematic and challenging, because the schools run by nation states often have no provision to prepare school settings which are culturally and socially relevant to indigenous students. For instance, the mainstream schools provide the setting for indigenous students to accept and adopt the values and social order of the mainstream institutions so that they may smoothly integrate into the mainstream society. Hence, the formal education systems are contributing to the loss of indigenous identity, control, and self-determination, and are being labelled as a site of ‘indigenous genocide’. To counteract this trend, indigenous education must support and promote the maintenance, use, and survival of indigenous people’s cultures, languages,

knowledge, traditions and identity, and also provide and develop the knowledge and skills that enable indigenous peoples to participate fully and equally in the national and international communities (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015).

In establishing indigenous education, there are three main elements in appropriately indigenizing the education. Indigenizing is a process through which culturally colonized nations or communities reassert and reclaim their identities and heritage in various aspects and manners, to make education culturally relevant and responsive. The three elements are indigenizing content, indigenization of teaching and learning practices, and indigenization of the language of instruction. In indigenizing the content, culturally sensitive curriculum plays an important role. The content and curricula which are delivered in the classroom should be developed through local contents, activities and their experiences. To indigenize teaching and learning practices, culturally relevant pedagogy has to be introduced, which includes three components: academic success, the development and maintenance of cultural competence, and the development of a capacity to raise questions on social norms, values, and institutions that reproduce social inequalities. Since the classroom is the place where teaching and learning mainly takes place, the education system should provide opportunities for teachers and students to empower themselves in meaningful and culturally sensitive manners. Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. The third element is the essential role of the indigenization of language of instruction, because language is the main avenue for transmission of culture and the formation of one's identity (Shrestha & Khanal, 2016).

Although many national governments have developed policies that intend to safeguard indigenous cultural identities through educational institutions, often they have failed in their implementation to contribute preservation and development of indigenous cultural identities. Jacob, Liu and Lee (2015) observed how five countries, China, Mexico, Taiwan, Uganda, and the United States respond to the issue of indigenous education in policy and implementation. Rather than embracing the components of indigenous education described in above paragraphs, they found that many government policies intentionally cause the assimilation of indigenous peoples into the dominant national culture resulting in "indigenous genocide" of indigenous peoples' languages, cultures, and/or identities.

In the case of China, the term ‘indigenous people’ is contested. Even so, China’s government has adopted a series of laws and policies to help protect the equal rights, cultures, and languages of ethnic minority peoples. Since 1949, the Constitution provides the protection of rights and interests of the minority nationalities and promises that citizens of all ethnicities have the right to use their own spoken and written languages. Although the central government pays attention on bilingual education for ethnic minorities in accordance with its education language policy, the process of policy implementation does not meet its goals because bilingual education in China is more of a tool in facilitating mastery of the dominant language, which is viewed as advanced and useful. Additionally, the centralized and standardized curriculum is often not relevant to ethnic minorities who mostly live in rural regions of the country. In most cases, although many textbooks have been translated into both minority and Chinese languages, those translated textbooks exclude local histories, cultures, and religions of ethnic minority people. What is more, ethnic minority students often lack Chinese language fluency and experience socioeconomic struggles for entering higher education which lead to a series of social injustice issues (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015).

Similar to China, Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution offers the law to protect and promote the development of indigenous people’s languages, cultures, customs and specific forms of social organization. While bilingual education for indigenous peoples was introduced to Mexico since the 1930s, the policy only aims to ‘Mexicanize’ the indigenous people to integrate them into the nation’s mainstream society in unifying Mexico. The government implemented the project which prioritizes Spanish language above all other languages and operates a uniform education program. As a consequence, the implementation leads to inequality of education for indigenous peoples, and an educational achievement gap between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Other factors are the social structures and societal norms that position indigenous peoples in Mexico as inferior or subordinate. These factors result in many indigenous peoples rejecting their indigenous identities and refusing to speak or study their indigenous languages, leading to the potential loss of indigenous cultural identity (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015b).

In Taiwan, the government recognizes sixteen official tribes and has a separate political and education system from mainland China. Most of the country’s indigenous people live in mountainous places and regions in the

central, southern, and eastern parts. In order to get better access to jobs and educational opportunities, many of Taiwan's indigenous people migrate to the urban areas in the western and northern parts of the county. For Taiwan's indigenous people, education provides both opportunities and threats to the survival of their languages, cultures, and identities. To access better employment, they have to study vocational and technical areas including nursing, teaching, and arts in the major universities, although there are few numbers of graduate programs in indigenous studies at Taiwan higher education institutions. The indigenous students who graduate from indigenous graduate program have fewer opportunities to get advanced jobs due to their language barrier in mastery of the Chinese language. Those who join higher education degrees in the mainstream universities encounter various challenges whereby they are residing in a place far from their homeland and social support network of friends and family, which often lead to discouragement and dropping out from their studies (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015).

Uganda is a country rich in diversity with 61 different ethnic groups and the state recognizes over 50 languages in the national constitution. Although Uganda is a multilingual society, the state recognizes only English as the official language. All schools follow a centralized curriculum and many schools are operated by religious sponsoring organizations, for-profit, non-profit, and also government-sponsored schools. The quality of education and instruction varies at all levels since poverty is a major hindrance for the progress of indigenous education in Uganda. There is also inadequate funding for developing relevant local language, teaching-learning materials and training qualified teachers. Moreover, the parents conceive that indigenous language instruction in schools could not meet their desire for their children to get well-paid jobs, since they considered English language as a tool to enable their children to obtain a better employment job (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015).

In the USA, the Native American Policy Review Commission criticized that the intentional 'Americanization' of Native Americans or assimilation of American Indians into mainstream society negatively impacts the Native American men and women in the education sector. After there were continuous criticisms that both public schools and the federal American Indian education system are focused on turning Native American children into whites, the government reconsidered its educational policy for Native Americans. Subsequently, the serial release of the Indian Self-determination and Education

Assistance Act (1975) and the Educational Amendments Act (1978) provided decision-making powers to indigenous school boards, which enable them to hire teachers and staff by the direct funding to Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian-controlled contract schools. Although those Acts contribute benefits to some extent, in the practice the average Native American student's scholastic achievement is far below most nonindigenous students. It is noted that, in reality, rather than receiving an adequate quality education, training in these Indian language teaching schools is only at a very basic level of teaching in basic vocabulary, counting, and greetings. Many Native American perceive that the loss of their cultures, languages and traditions are caused by the series of oppression accompanied with colonization, modernization, and globalization. For smaller tribes, the last remaining native speakers are often senior adults; when they die, all aspects of living culture, traditions, and in many cases indigenous knowledge will die with them. In many cases, the linguistic genocide is already completed and there are no more remaining native speakers of their respective languages (Jacob, Liu & Lee, 2015).

Indigenous people's demands of indigenous education is directly related with self-determination. In the case of Canada, Wotherspoon (2014) explored the Canadian Government's "democratic colonization" of indigenous people and their lands and communities through various kinds of government policies, practices, and public opinions. There is no single system of education within Canada, which means indigenous people are served by a complex and often confusing arrangement of educational programs with limited funding and curricular offerings. Although the federal government proposed to reform First Nations Education in 2014, it is still doubtful whether it will meet the social, cultural and economic needs of Canada's First Nations and indigenous populations. While the Federal government claimed to offer First Nations education legislative framework, in reality, indigenous rights and voices are marginalized as policy actors or citizens. Actually, educational reform and outcomes for the indigenous people are shaped by three symbolic forms of violence which can be regarded as democratic colonialism. Firstly, the education reform is framed in such a way that positions indigenous people as objects rather than active subjects in the policy formation. Second, the indigenous people's status and interests are assumed as subordinated to policy imperatives determined by the State. Thirdly, the reformation in policy-related initiatives portray education, employment, employability and other outcomes in highly

abstract terms by neglecting the experience and meaning of education for the indigenous people. As one element of self-determination, indigenous people's actual demands and visions are related to the "indigenous control of indigenous education" in education reformation (Wotherspoon, 2014, p. 335-336).

Kaomea (2005) studied education in Hawai'i, in which the indigenous studies curricula have been developed without the inclusion of indigenous classroom teachers who are qualified to teach this curriculum. Although the largest proportion of students in Hawai'i's public schools are Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian, classroom teachers are largely from non-Hawaiian backgrounds, with the majority being Japanese Americans and Caucasians. Because of a lack of instructional preparation, the classroom teachers encounter a limited supply of outdated instructional resources and insufficient funds to support a comprehensive Hawaiian studies curriculum. If indigenous communities do not have authority over their own educational systems and other domains of government, indigenous education and self-determination will continue to depend on the assistance of non-indigenous educators and other alliances. Kaomea's findings recommend that native peoples should have authority over their own issues. Therefore, non-Hawaiian classroom teachers need to defer to Hawaiian elders and cultural experts and perform a helper role that allows Hawaiian educators to take the lead for their own destinations. In this way, non-indigenous educators and educational researchers can serve as allies in enhancing indigenous education and self-determination of the Native Hawaiian (Kaomea, 2005).

Cornelio and Castro (2016) researched indigenous education in the Philippines, one of the first nations in Asia to have passed indigenous rights legislation with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997. Indigenous education in the Philippines is generally state led, with local non-government organizations, international development agencies, and religious organizations also assisting in the initiation and implementing of indigenous education. While motives are to be lauded, conflicts have arisen between indigenous people's schools, the state and other stakeholders because programs initiated by the government still require the indigenous communities to align with national standards. One of the main reasons of the conflict is the National Indigenous People (IP) Education Policy Framework (NIPEPF) developed by the Department of Education which conducted the integration of indigenous knowledge in schools where IP students are enrolled without any consultation with IP community leaders. Therefore, many of these communities do not trust

in the state offer of indigenous education. As a solution to this impasse, Cornelio and Castro (2016) recommended a global citizenship education approach to be adopted to counter the perception that the current management of the NIPEPF is a threat to the preservation of local culture and identity of the country's indigenous people. Global citizenship education will help in exposing indigenous learners to the wider communities of the nation, region, and the world, and recognizing the issues they are collectively faced with as Indigenous Peoples (Cornelio & Castro, 2016).

Abbonizio and Ghanem (2015) studied the significant characteristics of indigenous school education and conventional school education in Brazil. The authors conducted an ethnographic study at Khumuno Wu'u Kotiria Indigenous Municipal School, in the territory of the indigenous Kotiria, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira municipality, Amazonas state, Brazilian Amazon region. The data was collected through direct observation and written records over four months in Caruru Cachoeira, the largest Kotiria community in Brazil. Their findings revealed that in the mainstream schools,

- (i) the school is usually a confined space and most of the activities called class take place within the school building;
- (ii) the school often remains oblivious to the conditions of the current life of the people affected by its actions, and concentrates more in a preparation that will supposedly be taken advantage of by each individual in the intervention on current living conditions;
- (iii) the school deals with knowledge whose legitimacy stems primarily from the fact that it is considered universal, which distances the school from specific aspects of the social group from which its students come (p. 890).

Although there were some similarities between mainstream school education and indigenous school education, indigenous schools were seen to be different, in that they were committed to community participation in their educational projects, prepared teaching materials which are applicable in reality and needs of the community, paid attention to the language issue and culture preservation, and prepared the students to be beneficial to the community with great commitment (Abbonizio & Ghanem, 2015).

To highlight self-determination, Kathryn Manuelito (2005) studied the Ramah Navajo community education that reflects the self-determination of Ramah Navajo, an American Indian people. Her research employed ethnographic participant observation, in-depth interviews and analyzing documents to reveal the Ramah Navajo's perspectives on self-determination. The government enacted the Indian Self-determination and Educational assistance Act in 1957. Since then, the provision of tribal and community-based schools has enhanced the survival of their languages, cultures, and the protection of their rights. The examination found that the Ramah Navajo concept of self-determination is communal, positive, and integral to their daily living. From their perspective, the English 'self-determination' creates unfair competition and selfishness among individuals in the community. The concept of self-determination for Ramah Navajo community is comprised of four processes: community-based planning, maintaining an awareness of self, being proactive, and preserving. For them, the provision of education is a means of survival and protection from the manipulation of outsiders on their land. Also, education is a means to regain land that was taken from the Ramah Navajo and the provision of livelihood, support survival, sustain life, validate the individual, and assure the future. The research maintained that Ramah Navajo people believe that self-determination and education help them to be strong and help the survival of their culture, language and development as a communal goal.

From this review of Indigenous education as self-determination, it can be seen that government provision of mainstream education is often used as a means to assimilate, and systematically destroy indigenous ways of knowing and learning which is called the "recolonization" of the indigenous mind. It is crucial for indigenous voices to be heard in every aspect of education, including in the learning, teaching, and researching grounds (Jacob, Cheng & Porter, 2015). Indigenous education demands a culturally sensitive curriculum and pedagogy which often departs from the mainstream ways of teaching and learning, such as story sharing, networking, nonverbal communications, and culture and place-based learning (Xing & Ng, 2016). Amanda Keddie (2014) summarized the essential elements that need to be addressed in order to produce successful indigenous education as,

- Self-determination or relative autonomy,
- Validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity,

- Incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy,
- Mediating socio-economic and home difficulties,
- Incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the ‘collective’ rather than the ‘individual’ such as the notion of extended family, and
- A shared and collective vision/philosophy (p. 59).

The researchers cited in this section studied how provision of indigenous education in different parts of the world is often either non-existent or compromised in its implementation, as opposed to the tenets of Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people. This research into indigenous Karen-led KECD education adds to this body of knowledge as to how it is aiming to preserve the survival and promotion of their cultural identity, rights, and seeking political self-determination.

Mother tongue-based learning outcomes in classroom education

The KECD has developed a mother tongue-based learning Karen language including Burmese and English languages with the aim for the children to be able to perform in a wider context. It is well researched that the successful adoption of mother tongue in the classroom education serves as a bridge for the children in transmitting knowledge successfully by gaining confidence and motivation and providing the children’s learning ability to be able to perform in a wider socio-economic development arena (Awopetu, 2016; Hafiz & Farik, 2016; Kioko et al., 2014). Awopetu (2016) researched the impact of mother tongue on children’s learning abilities in Nigeria, a West African nation with over 200 ethnic groups and more than 400 native languages, while the English language is the official language of the country. The author adopted an experimental research design (a pre-test, post-test, control design), with 80 students in two public primary schools in the Akure South Local Government Area (LGA), Ondo State. Awopetu’s research finds that the use of a mother tongue reinforces students’ motivation and made them feel more comfortable and confident in learning. Moreover, no significant difference was seen between male and female students in learning abilities, and students showed a significant gain in the learning outcomes after being taught in their mother tongue. The author confirms that there is a direct relationship between the language of instruction used by the teacher and student’s learning abilities, and mother

tongue as a medium of instruction in early childhood classroom is very effective in improving their learning abilities.

Hafiz and Farik (2016) study that children's home language (mother tongue language) and use of cultural tools in teaching mathematics enhance children's performance in mathematics. The authors used a problem-solving approach with a case study of year six students at a primary school in the district of Nadi in Fiji. The research adopted both quantitative and qualitative methodologies which included 20 students and 20 teachers who were Fijians from an Indo-Fijian background. The authors used quantitative method to assess children's mathematics test scores from pre-test and post test results, while qualitative approaches of oral interviews and observations of students and teachers were employed. The research revealed that when mathematics concepts using mother tongue language teaching and learning was mediated by their own cultural tools, student test scores improved markedly. The use of mother tongue language and culturally sensitive activities in the classroom increase correct answers for the oral and written activities. Conversely, the students who are taught without using their mother tongue language and cultural tools scored fewer correct answers for the oral and written activities.

Kioko et al. (2014) observed the success stories of using mother tongue education in Africa and the economic benefits in the use of the mother tongue in creative media or economies. The authors highlighted four realities that need to be recognized and understood: the frustrations of children introduced to education in a foreign language, misconceptions about the success of mother tongue education, educational benefits of mother tongue education, and mother tongue's enhancement of economic opportunities. The authors insist, relating to the first reality, that "an education that is packaged in a language which the child does not understand is simply torture to the child" (p. 2). The second reality is the misconceptions that mother tongue education limits children's learning because mother tongues are not capable of communicating the important meanings that are part of formal education of English language. However, the research points out the educational benefits in the third reality that mother tongue serves as an essential bridge between the children's experiences of learning at home and learning at school for successful learning. The fourth reality that the author's argue is that mother tongues are the foundation for the transmission of social change, persuasion, entertainment and mobilization in the creative economies (pp. 3-4).

The above literature studies the successful adoption of mother tongue-based education learning outcomes which facilitate students to be more productive on a wider globalized stage. The scholarly findings as related above resonate in the KECD education provision of using mother-based learning in their schools which specifically aims for their students to gain positive outcomes for the wider Karen population.

Summary

This chapter reviews the literatures and related studies in which national education is used as a tool for nation building by means of assimilation in establishing national education policies in different country contexts. Minority language and culture are often suppressed in many national education policies. Education, alternatively 'school', becomes a site of states' political agendas which shapes the minorities to align with the nation-state in order to sustain the hegemonic status of state government.

Critical pedagogy contributes to the transformation of social inequality and encourages democracy, which helps individuals to critically analyze power and its unfulfilled promise of emancipation. The intersection between critical pedagogy and indigenous education produces indigenous peoples with strong commitment to their communities. It contributes to critical indigenous consciousness which is connected to communal and indigenous educational goals of commitment to community to protect their sovereignty and self-determination.

Although many national governments have enacted policies that aim to safeguard indigenous cultural identities through educational instructions, in reality, research has revealed they often fail to contribute to the preservation and development of indigenous cultural identities. The establishment of dominant national culture in nation building leads to the genocide of indigenous people' language, cultures, and/or identities. The struggle of indigenous people for retaining self-determination over education, which is directly linked with the protection of their rights, are observed widely. Additionally, the successful adoption of mother tongue in the classroom education produces positive children's learning outcomes and abilities when the children gain confidence and comfortable in their daily learning.

Chapter 4

Pedagogy of the Karen

Introduction

This chapter is the first of two findings chapters that explore how the Karen of KECD education regime perceives Bamar-centric state ideology mainstream education as a threat to assimilation and acculturation of Karen people. In the spirit of ethnography, I conducted my field research over three months in a complete membership role at Hto Lwe Wah Karen Public High School and Junior College. The school is situated in a rural place where both government and KNU administration are established, so-called mixed-control area surrounded by Karen villages. As part of the ethnographic study, I participated as a teacher by teaching English and Science with the KECD curriculum to the junior college students. After building a successful rapport with the participants, I conducted interviews with students, teachers, KNU personnel, and parents of Hto Lwe Wah School concurrently with my teaching role.

On arrival at the campus of Hto Lwe Wah school for my fieldwork, I was surprised how much it has developed in every area especially the increasing numbers of classroom buildings and dormitories since I last visited in 2014. At that time, the buildings were under construction with no students or teachers yet. Returning in 2019, I saw not only the increasing numbers of buildings, but also the school community with 346 students and 15 teachers. Since Hto Lwe Wah school is situated outside of Taw Goo village, there is also a government primary school inside the village. I noticed that there is a different uniform

although students in both schools are Karen. While Hto Lwe Wah students wear white shirts and black pants/skirts (similar to what is worn in the refugee camp and migrant schools on the Thai side of the border), the government students wear white shirts and green pants/skirts. In Hto Lwe Wah, the KECD teachers are responsible to wear white shirts and red Karen *longyi* (men and women traditional skirts) as uniforms for the teachers, and all teachers and students wear Karen dress every Wednesday (fieldnotes, 04/06/2019).

Walking around the campus in my first week, I heard different languages – mostly Sgaw Karen, but also Burmese and English. After school classes, students enjoyed playing informal football, volleyball and badminton games. After many months of formal study in Thailand, I enjoyed participating with them. The school has no access to state-provided electricity; hence a big generator provides electricity for basic computer classes under the teachers' dormitory and lights at night for reading and night study, which also enabled me space to type up my fieldnotes, to charge my laptop's battery and phone, and prepare my lessons for teaching the Junior College students. During class hours, while teachers and students from Grades 7 to 12 use Karen and Burmese languages in explanation and discussion, Junior College classes use Karen, Burmese, and English languages. I observed that the style of mother tongue based multi-lingual classroom provides a more comfortable learning environment for the students. Being able to share and question freely in a mixture of languages serves as a bridge for critical thinking (Fieldnotes, 04-08/06/2019).

Over the next three months, I carried out my active membership researcher role teaching daily and supervising night study while contemporaneously conducting my data collection of interviews and participant observation. Seven themes emerged from the data analysis: Karen education and its nexus with nationalism; the struggle for education; fulfillment of indigenous people's right to education; the right to Mother Tongue Language Education as a means to prevent cultural genocide; the value of education under KNU/KECD which is historically rooted in their identity formation and socio-economic development; the practice of rights and development of democratic

institution in the classroom; and finally, Karen education as a transformative tool that enfranchises humanization.

The first four of these themes are the focus of this chapter that analyzes how the provision of Karen education is not only to resist assimilation, but also enhances Karen nationalism that demands self-determination because of the oppression they have been suffering. Consequently, it observes the struggle of the Karen to gain accessible and available education with their mother tongue language. It examines that the provision of KECD education is self-fulfillment of rights to indigenous education. Thus, KNU/KECD Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) not only helps the students to be critical thinkers and increase self-confidence in the classroom, it also both revitalizes and preserves Karen language and culture to resist cultural and linguistic genocide by the mainstream.

Karen Education and its Nexus with Nationalism

Nationalism is the mobility of feelings and national sensation for homeland and the pursuit of political or national-economic goals. The term nation is formed by common history, common culture, common language, and a unitary territory with borders recognized by other nations (Anbarani, 2013, p. 62). Current KNU education policy enhances nationalism and is based on federal principles, while its curriculum has been developed by KECD with the aid of NGOs (South & Lall 2016). In KECD schools throughout Karen State and border areas, Karen (Kaw Thoo Lei) national songs are sung by all students and teachers in front of a raised Karen flag in morning assembly and at the end of the school day. In the morning assembly “My Karen Nation, a blessed Nation” is sung:

My Karen Nation, a blessed nation. I will sing about your beautiful land, valleys, rivers and mountains. I love your trees and clean streams that make me joyful... what a blessed nation... such a beautiful Kaw Thoo Lei...I love all your beauties and I will give my life for you... Kaw Thoo Lei, for the freedom of your people... I am submitting my life... (translated).

For the closing assembly at the end of the day ‘Kaw Thoo Lei song is sung:’

Kaw Thoo Lei, my parents' country. I will be faithful to you forever, I will preserve your beauty and riches. Kaw Thoo Lei, a country I love, I will give my life and my everything will be yours forever (translated).

At Hto Lwe Wah school, they have created their own theme song which is also sung each day:

Verse One – Our country need young people like you and me, to be educated and wise, ...let's try hard together, with unity, we, young people can achieve.

Verse Two – Stand up and look our surroundings., let us take the responsibility, in re-building Kaw Thoo Lei, it is our duty to lift it up.

Chorus - Hto Lwe Wah young people like you and me, we are the hands of our country, in order to fulfill our people's hope, it is our duty (translated).

KECD education enhances not only nationalism but also patriotism. Patriotic education produces the curriculum and educational activities which emphasize the symbols, language, and literature of a particular nation including subjects like history, social studies, and geography. The patriotic education in nation building develops “a concept of community as an organic state, which ensure liberty, freedom and equality, by insisting that the state should be created and organized according to the ideal of beauty” (Wiborg, 2000, p. 238-239). The Karen national songs express all the beauties of their nation and enhance the Karen national spirit among the students. The songs give a responsibility to the students “to achieve freedom for their people.” Rebuilding Kaw Thoo Lei (Karen State) is also a key concept for the students. As Kaw Thoo Lei was attacked and villages destroyed by the successive Burmese governments, so Kaw Thoo Lei children are responsible for re-building their imagined nation (Anderson, 2006).

Through decades of organized violence resulting in the destruction of lives, homes and livelihoods, Karen nationalism is filled with grievous loss and the demand for self-determination. In both interviews with key informants and focus group discussions, this was a common theme discussed,

Once, our nation was taken by Burmese people. They took our land, so our Karen are dispersed. If we follow mainstream education, we will then become Burmese. But we have to stand on our own foot, to be in unity, may be one day, we will get back our nation (Saw Thaw Htoo, 03/07/19).

When I was in Burmese school, we only have to learn about Burmese history and Burmese leaders. If we compare, we haven't learnt about Karen leaders, but only Burmese leaders. But, when we come back, we learn about Karen leaders, and we came to know about it (Naw May Paw, 18/07/2019).

According to the above quotes, Saw Thaw Htoo sees the mainstream education as a threat to assimilate the Karen people "if we follow mainstream education, we will then become Burmese." He mentioned "unity" as a lost characteristic in re-building the Karen nation. The first-year student, Naw May Paw, highlights her previous experience as a Myanmar high school student, that the mainstream education is Burmese-centric and omits their historical values "we only have to learn about Burmese history and Burmese Leaders". The mainstream national curriculum often mentions that the "Karen are rebel group and bad guys" in the history. In Hto Lwe Wah school, students get the chance to learn their own Karen historical values and about their leaders through education provided by KECD. Another student who has experienced both mainstream and Karen education states that -

When I come to know politic a little bit, I think that the Burmese national song is meaningless for me. The song that "with Justice, freedom in our land" ...what? we don't have freedom. And our ethnic group do not get a chance to govern our land, our state. We just have to live under "Jingoism or Burmese Supremacy." "it is the land with fairness and clean," actually it is not, they oppress the ethnic minority. We just have to live under them. If we want something, we can't speak out. Like, we want to govern our own state. They always want to oppress us. We don't have self-determination. We don't get the real thing yet (Saw Lah Lah, 12/07/19).

Saw Lah Lah sees the Burmese as the oppressor and the national song in the mainstream education is all about lies and propaganda. Although the Burma national song mentions "freedom, justice, and fairness" in its lyrics, the real situation is contradictory to the song in which the minority people are suppressed by Burmese supremacy.

Kuroiwa and Verkyutne (2008) discuss this point, whereby Karen students view different understandings of the Karen insurgency in three ways. First, their understanding of KNU as "freedom fighters" rather than rebel groups and that the Karen Revolution is about getting back what was historically theirs. Secondly, the comparative understanding of the Burmese as cruel, wicked, and dishonest people, but the Karen as inherently simple, honest, tranquil, and peace-loving people. Third, the sacrifices of their leaders in fighting for freedom in their history has created a deep commitment for them to fight for a legitimate goal (p. 409). This view is seen in this comment from Saw Lah Lah where he talks of his experience of learning history in the mainstream education in which the Burma-centric history is the focus, and with a lack of ethnic history,

I am Karen, and I got a chance to learn our real Karen history. It is very good. But in Government, they always mention about their Burmese Kings and their goodness like King Anawyahtar, King Kyan Sit Thar, they always mention about *Taingyintha* are rebellion, bad people, they didn't mention why ethnic group rebel them. So we didn't get a chance to learn our true history in Government school. It is the worst thing, because we are Karen, we got no opportunities to learn our history. Here is Karen history and it is the strength of Karen school. And Karen special days are celebrated and it is good (Saw Lah Lah, 12/7/2019).

Saw Lah Lah shared that the mainstream education portrays the *Taingyintha* as rebels. He only understood the reason behind the Karen starting the revolution in 1949 against the Burmese regimes when he came to Hto Lwe Wah school. Studying and learning history is the one of the core values in Karen education for the development of Karen nationalism. School history texts play a role as instruments of ideological transformation and nation building. The history textbooks are central to the transmission of national values that shape the contemporary patriotism. It is often stated that one of the main goals of

learning history is to cultivate the students for patriotism and love for their Fatherland (Zajda, 2015). Besides, history serves as the collective memory of mankind, for establishing a sense of personal identity, an understanding of what we are as individuals. So historical or collective memory serves as a basis of establishing our societal identity, an understanding of what our society is. Historical understanding can teach us what we are or where we stand in the light of where we have come from (Fitzgerald, 1983, p. 81-82). While studying in the mainstream education, the Karen do not get a chance to know who they are or where they come from, except being portrayed as rebel groups who are fighting against the government. Another student Saw Hei Soe shared,

In Burma, the school didn't teach the Karen history. So we don't know anything about our history. Only after I arrived border camp, I know about that. It is a big difference Our Karen education is that, after Burma gained independent, our Karen education is not allowed anymore. But, KNU continue their own education in its controlled area. Primary, Middle, High school, and post-10. So those who are studying at KECD education, they know our history, our revolution, our culture (01/07/19).

While the government history textbooks describe the British as an enemy in nation building, the KNU portrays the British as their protectors against Burman aggression (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012). Similarly, although General Aung San is regarded as national hero and father in the government educational regime, the KNU education portrays Saw Ba U Gyi as the Karen national hero who stood up against the Burmese military for the free state and self-determination of Kaw Thoo Lei. There is no doubt that the Karen students interviewed in this research value the historical narrative of the KNU through the transmission of KECD education in nation building, a view shared by the teachers interviewed,

Because we are Karen and we have our own history. In Burmese school, what we know is, Saw Ba U Gyi is a rebel, is a bad guy. But, our leader wants our people should have their own nation, their literature (Saw Taw Htoo, 25/7/2019).

Learning history is crucial because we cannot talk about our present social and communal life in any meaningful way without knowing the past where we have lived. In order to communicate within our present social community, the past cannot be separate from the present (Fitzgerald, 1983). History provides us with a collective memory that gives us a sense of connection to place, time, and community. Through history, human beings are able to study the mistakes and mindsets of their ancestors (Hunt, 2011). The social being without the past is the one having no present or future. As well as the past, Karen history is important for today Karen and tomorrow Karen. If Karen has no history, there will be no Karen at all. Learning history in Karen education is about the revitalization of Karen identity which is intentionally threatened by the mainstream education. In Burmese, there is a saying “we learn history not to be stupid or cheated;” therefore by knowing their own Karen history they can potentially avoid being cheated by the cheaters, who can be identified as successive Burmese governments.

The right to govern oneself is often expressed by the Karen. An intern teacher who participated in this research, herself a Karen who resettled to the USA under the UNHCR resettlement program and now returned for a one-month volunteer experience, commented that -

It is a nation within a nation. I feel like it happens in America right now. Because the native people, they kinda have their own school and own government. But they do fine, like transferring to college like everything (Naw Jue Jue, 24/07/10).

Naw Joy, another resettled Karen from USA who was also interning in the school supported her friend’s statement -

I think you (Karen) are able to have your own nation, to have your own country, because you have your own government, I think you do have the right to govern yourself. But it will be hard (Naw Joy, 24/07/10).

The notion of right-to-govern was expressed frequently among the Karen participants in this research. They believe that right-to-govern can liberate them from the oppression of the successive Myanmar government regimes. In fact, they also see KNU as a *de facto* government body which is taking a lead in the political agenda for the Karen. The provision of Karen education is both

for self-determination and nationalist movements of the Karen people to achieve their right-to-govern through education.

Karen comparative perception on mainstream and KECD education

Education has become a mechanism of the state to manipulate and control the policy and curriculum of schooling (Earl, 2014). Soon after the independence of Burma, the breakout of the Karen Revolution and the forceful introduction of “a more Burma-centric version in the standardized curriculum” triggered the Karen to develop a new hegemonic institution particularly the education development of the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 34). The process of Burmanization can be found in various government policies including the banning of ethnic language teaching in the mainstream education. The successive history textbooks enhance a more Bamar version of state ideology. The education system does not provide any space for the ethnic minorities to claim their identities (Lall, 2018; South & Lall, 2018). So, the forming of Karen education is the practice of counter-hegemony in responding to the assimilation program from the Burmanization/Myanmarfication of the state.

The Karen see mainstream education as a threat to assimilate and acculturate them to become Burmese. These scholars’ viewpoints were supported in the discussions with key informants and Hto Lwe Wah teachers alike as seen in the following comments,

The mainstream curriculum is developed with the emphasis of an underlying doctrine of Burmanization Chauvinism. They try to enforce this in many aspects, reflecting in their legal frameworks, laws and policies (KECD Secretary, Thra⁶ Saw Law Eh Moo 02/09/19).

If we use their curriculum, we can’t learn our language and history. Now, we separate, so we have freedom to teach and learn our language and history (Naw Day Day, 25/07/2019).

6 Thra is a Karen term which means ‘teacher’.

Indigenous education introduces a sense of history by social learning and learning how to live in the indigenous community. Indigenous forms of traditional education within the context of community produces very deep learning and commitment to communal and cultural values. Indigenous community is the place of sharing life through everyday activities, through singing, dancing, storytelling and celebration. It is also the place where people are introduced to connectedness and belonging (Cajete, 2016, p. 366). The provision of Karen education is seen as the maintaining of Karen culture, tradition, and identity as being Karen,

It is the main root to preserve Karen culture, tradition and identity amid globalization and mass development (Saw Law Eh Moo, 02/09/19).

We grew up during Myanmar's Way of Socialist party ruled and in 1988 the military ruled. And they told that now is democratic government, but it is a fake democracy. Before I was born, the British education in Myanmar is good for everyone. The students at that time are qualified. After 1962, they saw that English is not good, they even didn't allow to teach English. The subjects in English are also changed. Then they propaganda their idea in the history. The real histories are buried, and now allowed to be known. And the idea and thinking about what to do if the government is wrong, also suppressed by the government. Moreover, the languages are also suppressed. If we use their curriculum, we would kill and destroy our people, our students. we have to learn what we need to learn our language, our indigenous knowledge, our scientific development, and to reach the international arena. So we have to separate our curriculum from them (Saw Eh Wah, 08/07/2017).

P'doh⁷ Saw Eh Wah shared his many years of experience that the real history which has happened in Myanmar is changed and buried under the Ne Win regime. There is a perception that adopting mainstream education will be

7 P'Doh is a Karen term for a respected elder.

suicidal to their own language, knowledge, and history; then will destroy Karen students. In order to prevent that, it is a must for the Karen to adopt a different education regime which is determined by the Karen community. There are two dialectic assumptions that “using mainstream education will result the lost Karen identity,” and “applying Karen education is the preservation and development of Karen identity.” For the Karen, education is seen as a tool not only for resisting the oppressive power of Burmese regimes, but also the re-creation of a new form of counter-hegemonic institution to be free from the oppressors.

The KNU/KECD provision of Karen education promotes nationalism which fills a gap resulting from decades of oppression. The Karen perceive that mainstream education is one of the Burmanization processes that is threatening their social and cultural identity, and KECD education is essential in preserving and promoting their cultural identity.

The next theme to be explored observes how Karen students struggle to achieve accessible and available education in the midst of civil war and how Karen rights have been violated over many decades – particularly the right to education under the Burmese regimes and the Tatmadaw⁸ who enforce their policies.

The Struggle for Education

Through several decades of oppression and rights violation by the Burmese governing regimes and Tatmadaw, it has always been a grievous struggle for the Karen students to access education. Second year Hto Lwe Wah student, Naw Shee Shee retells her story,

Maybe it was in 2006, the fighting is intense, and the Burmese came and fire, and I have run from the battle for two times. We don't have school, just church. We use church as a school. But we didn't get a chance to attend school very well because if the Burmese came, we have to run for our lives. Then my father sends us to my grandma village in Taw Ma Inn village. From grade 1 to 3 in Burmese school. Then we have to run again to refugee camp.

8 Tatmadaw refers to 'Burmese government military.'

We have to hide, if we have to enroll in Government school, I have to put my grandpa name, not my father name. then, my mother lives in refugee camp. So I miss my mom, and I followed to the camp. I stayed there for four years. Then, I come back to my village and when I heard about Hto Lwe Wah is open, I came back here (16/07/2019).

Naw Shee Shee's story highlights how Karen students struggled to access education in the middle of war. When she was young, she began in mainstream education, but the fighting between KNU and Tatmadaw forcibly displaced her, first to another village and then the refugee camp, causing her education to be disrupted. The Karen children in conflict-affected areas often faced difficulty and risk to access mainstream education due to the threat caused by the Tatmadaw. In the case of Naw Shee Shee, she had to use her grandfather's name to enroll in the mainstream education to avoid potential threat from the Tatmadaw.

Similarly, teacher Naw Wah Wah shared that,

When I finished 4th standard, it is difficult for me to continue my education. then I have to go to another village Nat Ywar, it is a Pa'O village. I face many difficulties. Because there are conflicts between Military and KNU. The Burmese troop entered our village frequently and they forced the villagers to work for them. They have arms and they bossy us. This four villages here have suffered seriously from the Tatmadaw (28/07/2019).

Naw Wah Wah's experience expresses the rights violations committed by the Tamadaw to the Karen villages during civil war. For so many Karen children, more than the disruption to their education, their survival was often threatened. During the decades of the 1960s to 1990s, Karen villages experienced the drastic results of the implementation of the four cuts policy, including forced labor by the military. Naw Wah Wah continued her story,

If they want to build their military camp at the hill, they asked the villagers to be porter and forced labors. So, the villagers had to work for the Tatmadaw camp for all days long. Then, they can come back in the evening, so they can't do their own work. And the Tatmadaw soldiers asked foods from us, although we

can't work here. It is difficult for our house. So our parents can't send us to school. Then I have to go to Nat Ywar, my grandma house. We are poor, so we can't go to tuition. We just go to school and come home. It is a government school. If you do not attend the tuition from the teacher, they look down on you. So at that time, we are very poor, we can't even go to tuition. We have small face in our school. When I finished middle school, then I have to go to high school. But my mom can't support me anymore. So, I quit school one year. I am still young, actually it is the age to continue my education. Then my uncle is in KNU and he can't connect our home. But later I got a chance to study in the refugee camp. Then, I saw that everyone receive education without any cost. It is very good to get free education. then, I pray if we are a school one day, I will come back and teach here. I want to help and teach here (28/07/2019).

In her heartbreaking story, Naw Wah Wah exemplified how almost every right was denied under successive military regimes. The high tuition cost of extra classes in mainstream education hindered many Karen students from continuing their education. In contrast, the Karen community provision of education provides a reclamation of right to accessible education in the border refugee camps and/or under the KNU controlled territory in eastern Burma. In another life story interview with a Hto Lwe Wah teacher, Saw Htoo Htoo shared his experience,

At first, I attended school in Burma (mainstream). I attended to 9th standard and I have to join 10th standard. But our home faces financial problem and the situation in the village is not good (because of Tatmadaw), so with my uncle..... I finished KG to 9th standard from here [mainstream], and then I went to Mae Ra Moh camp and attended school at there. After I finished high school at there, I attended Junior college. And after that, I taught at Mu Yu for one year. Then I came back to Burma. I attended a training for one year. Then, I came here [Hto Lwe Wah] because our people need me (Saw Htoo Htoo, 27/07/2019).

Saw Htoo Htoo also attended both mainstream and Karen education regimes. Although the government claims that mainstream education is free and does not charge any cost from the students, in reality, it is really financially difficult for the Karen children to access mainstream education. Karen community education becomes their only accessible education due to Tatmadaw invasion that led to poverty. According to Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28 imposes an obligation on the States to provide the right to education by making it “available” and “accessible” at the level of primary, secondary, and higher education. Article 28 (1) states that (as cited in Verheyde, 2006);

States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need; (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

The Karen students’ struggle for access to education is remarkable. Although they have encountered various violation of rights by the successive military regimes, their resilience to access education proves that self-fulfillment of the right to education through Karen community-based education. By making education available and accessible for the Karen children, KNU/KECD as a *de facto* government fulfills its obligations to their community.

The role of parents is also important for children in accessing Karen education. All parents of Hto Lwe Wah students who participated in a focus group discussion demonstrated their loyalty to leadership of KNU and Karen revolution against successive governments in their conversation. They were unanimous in their belief that learning and knowing Karen history is important for their children since there is no space for Karen history in the mainstream education,

Because of our Karen revolution, if there is no Karen revolution, we will be enslaved by others. Because of this revolution, we can survive. If not, our Karen will disappear.

Those who attend in Burmese school, they don't know about our Karen history. As they are Karen, they should attend Karen school. The establishment of Hto Lwe Wah is good for our people as we are Karen. It is to benefit our Karen people, to know our history (Naw Moe Moe, 27/07/19).

Naw Moe Moe's statement, supported by the other parents, highlight how they consider that the Karen Revolution led by KNU is considered as the survival of Karen people. If there were no Karen Revolution, the Karen people would be lost and enslaved by other dominant groups. The Karen Revolution is valued by the parents as part of the protection of their lives and rights. The value of education in this struggle was also highlighted in this focus group discussion,

As we are human beings, we must have our history, our education. so other people will respect us. Now, this is just the start, me must work more than this. If they are not educated, they will be oppressed as our ancestors. We have suffered that oppression. Previously, if the Burmese called us to follow with them, so we have to go, may be we can even beaten to death, no one knows. Now they are only few educated people. In the past, we are extremely discriminated. So we need to establish education, to develop ourselves. Not to be oppressed by others. Now the education is much more. The more you search, the more it is. So, others search for it, so we have to search. So, we also want education (Saw Moo Soe, 27/07/19).

The Karen perceive that education can enhance their socio-economic standard. There is an equation for the Karen that "being uneducated" will result in "being oppressed." The word 'oppressed' has been narrated as a daily discourse for the Karen. "Our education" highlights the fact that the Karen want to control their own education as "the Karen control of the Karen education." Self-determination through education is portrayed by parents in which they believe that the provision of KECD education is both for the reclamation of the Karen nation and the preservation of their social identity in Burma. Broadly speaking, self-determination is not about separatism, but autonomy or self-government. It is the exercise of their spiritual, social, cultural, economic, and political rights, as well as their practical survival (Whall, 2005, p. 2).

Although our school is not recognized by the Government, it is our school. So, whatever, in my personal opinion, if there is a chance, we have to grab it. We can't wait. Because, we don't have our country yet. We don't have our own nation. So, it is our duty to grab the chance. Only we get the power to do it, we can't develop. We must try while we get an opportunity. We should not discourage. Some of them might be afraid, but it depends on them. I don't deny them. Now, we got a small chance, so we should try and work for it. So, for me, I don't discourage because of lack of recognition. If we are scared, we can't develop. (Saw Moo Soe, 27/07/19).

The lack of recognition does not stop parents from sending their children to KECD education. The words "it is our school" means very much that they want to determine their own educational development. There is a belief that education will help them to build towards a reclamation of their own nation. Although they are in Burma, the Karen often say that "we don't have our country, our nation yet". A sense of strong ownership and demand of autonomy are shown by the parents although they are traveling on an extremely difficult journey for self-determination.

The Karen have faced serious human rights violations under the Burmese regimes. One parent shared her life experience before the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in 2015 and life since,

In the past, they (the Burmese) only give us one or two baskets of rice, so we have to cook with bamboo shoot. Now, because of the ceasefire, we can breathe a little bit. In the past, I have to run till now. Only this ceasefire, I stop running. Because there was a four-cut policy. They gave us only small rice, it is not enough because there are eight members in my family. So, we have to boil rice. In my parents' time, they have to run. Now our time, we also had to run. So, because we are not educated, we have to run. Now, it is a great relief. But we always need to be alert (Naw Moe Moe, 27/07/19).

Life before the peace process among the Karen was bitter and heartbreaking. They suffered the four cuts policy for decades which was

conducted by Tatmadaw. That ‘four cuts’ included the cutting off food, funds, intelligence, and recruits to the insurgents. Tatmadaw often practiced forced relocations of entire communities into strategic villages, appropriation of food which was then re-issued as rations, destruction of crops, and a shoot-on-sight policy. The civilian villagers were forcibly used as porters and human mine detectors in carrying military supplies and walking in front of Burmese troops for their military actions (Rajah, 2002). Although the peace process until the 2021 coup provided some air to breathe, they could not fully enjoy peace at that time due to the continuing presence of Tatmadaw military camps in KNU area.

Because the Tatmadaw did not withdraw from the ethnic areas even though a peace process was supposed to be ongoing, many Karen and other ethnic villagers continued to worry and be uncertain of the future. Although the KNU signed the NCA, it did not guarantee the sustainable peace due to the behavior of Tatmadaw which did not fulfill its promises according to the agreements to withdraw their military bases. Even though the peace process was fragile, the Karen did not hesitate to build a new school to provide educational services to their people.

Before NCA, we asked them [Tatmadaw] to withdraw their military camp. But they did not do it. Look at our Taungoo district, if they want to do real peace, they have to withdraw their army. So the villagers are also worried about it. It is not peace yet. It is just NCA, Nation-wide ceasefire agreement. Just ceasefire. Because we need to grab this opportunity to build the school. If we don't work now, we will be late. So the leaders are working on this. Regarding the guarantee, I don't know what will happen. It is depending on those who break the agreement. If they break the agreement, there could be fighting again. I am not sure about that. But our educational position is now, I think, the international society will see it. Because, our Karen is not only in Burma. Our Karen are spreading all over the world. Those Karen are those who love their people. They have participated in our revolution. If the school is destroyed by the military, the international society will see the situation. Because our education does not destroy the country, to make the country better (KECD Officer, Saw Hei Soe, 01/07/19)

The convergence of the two educational regimes, the mainstream and KECD education, seemed unrealistic in this peace process period. During the peace process from 2011 through 202, rather than simply integrating with mainstream education, the KECD wanted a complementary approach for education in line with the ideals of a Federal Union. While there is no recognition of a true federal union, “the KECD and mainstream education will never meet in an intersection” (Saw Law Eh Moo, 02/09/19). The “Karen control of Karen destiny – including educational destiny” is tied to political outcomes of the peace process.

According to the Karen interviewed in this research, they have not achieved nationalist movement goals to govern themselves and achieve liberation from the oppressive Burmese government. Yet, most were of the opinion that the peace process during the Thein Sein and NLD-led governments acted as a stepping-stone in their struggle for their self-determination and that the provision of KECD education was playing one of the crucial roles in that struggle.

The following section explores the findings related to the indigenous Karen fulfillment of indigenous peoples’ right to education. The research found that although the government does not accredit indigenous Karen provision of education and curricula, KNU/KECD education is regarded as self-fulfillment of indigenous education to the Karen population.

Fulfillment of Indigenous People’s Right to Education

The Karen education is currently filling the gaps and providing indigenous peoples’ right to education, which the government education does not provide as highlighted in Matelski’s (2015) research,

... the military governments that ruled Myanmar between 1962 and 2010 have largely failed to fulfill the population’s right to education (p. 201).

Beiter (2006) defines education that “the transmission to a subsequent generation of those skills needed to effectively perform the tasks of daily living, and further to the inculcation of the social cultural, spiritual and philosophical values of the particular community” (p. 19). Across many countries in the world, education policies and Acts are problematic in their consideration of

indigenous cultural heritage, knowledge, traditional cultural expressions, and languages if they consider them at all. As shown in Chapter Three, numerous scholars have highlighted how mainstream education often has been the vehicle used to assimilate indigenous populations into dominant national ideologies. Such education fails to value indigenous-specific cultures, worldviews, languages, and lifestyles (UNESCO, 2019). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that “Everyone has the right to education” in Article 26. Moreover, according to Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Indigenous Peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

P'doh Saw Eh Wah, Chairperson of KNU (Taungoo District) narrated to me how he and his colleagues had the vision to establish Hto Lwe Wah School,

Our Karen, in this area, we just stay in the battlefield. We are in the battlefield, and parents are poor. It is difficult for them to send their children to school. We look at ourselves. We study in our village, primary school. So the middle school or high school are just in towns. So, when we passed primary schools, six or seven students passed primary. But only one student can continue middle school, and others didn't get a chance to attend schools. Previous students also didn't get a chance to continue their education. Only three or four years

a time, one student can continue their education. So, only one student can join middle or high school only after three or four years. This is our area situation. The parents are poor, the villages are poor because of wars. In the hill areas, it is worse than us. There is no school in their villages. They always face with wars. So they have to study at mission schools at the mission field. They didn't get high standard education. however, the indigenous Karen have their own knowledge, but regarding formal education, they didn't get a chance to attain it. So, there is a reason for the establishment of Hto Lwe Wah school (08/07/2019).

The above conversation highlights how many Karen people could not access education in the midst of war due to the attacks of the Tatmadaw on the Karen civilian villages. Mission schools were the only accessible schooling for those who wish to learn how to read and write. The establishment of Hto Lwe Wah Karen high school and Junior College is a prime example of the self-fulfillment of indigenous people right to education by KNU/KECD which has been violated by the successive Burmese regimes.

Myanmar is one of the signatories of United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (Morton, 2017). UNDRIP (2007) Article 3 and 14 state that,

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they feely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and culture development.

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Even so, there is limited application of these Articles in mainstream education provision. KECD schools are both capable of and are fulfilling UNDRIP's Articles whereby the schools are community sites for the transmission

of culture and a space for their mother-tongue development, as seen in this interview excerpt with a first year Hto Lwe Wah junior college student,

Here I can speak Karen more. Although I am Karen, we don't use Karen language much in our village. Only on Sunday, we use Karen, and other days the Burmese language, then I came here and now I can speak Karen better (Saw Kyaw Doh, 17/07/2019).

The provision of Karen education is in fulfillment of indigenous peoples' right to education in their mother-tongue language with their cultural methods of teaching and learning. In addition, the curriculum which KECD is using is adapted to the particular circumstances of indigenous Karen learners. The promotion of Karen history can also be seen in the activities, curricula, and textbooks, which is crucial for the preservation of indigenous history. The curriculum developed by KECD that is used by at least 38,000 refugee children in Thailand, and up to 2,000 schools in Karen state, is considered by many to be of better quality and more accessible than that in Burma mainstream education (Matelski, 2015, p. 211). Although the state government fails to recognize and accredit the educational services which the Karen education system is implementing, the Karen fulfill their own indigenous peoples' right to education with the aid of INGOs and especially with deep commitment from the communities.

The next section explores the research findings in relation to MTB-MLE (mother tongue language education) as a means to prevent the cultural genocide actively planned through gross human rights violations of successive Burmese government regimes.

Right to Mother Tongue Language Education – a means to Prevent Cultural Genocide

Genocide comes from the combination of Greek word *genos* means tribe or race and the Latin *cide* means killing. The UN defines genocide in the 1948 Convention to intentional forms of physical destruction as, 1) Killing members of the group; 2) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; 3) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; 4) Imposing measures

intended to prevent births within the group; and 5) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (cited in Kingston, 2015, p. 65-66). There are mainly two forms of genocide to destroy or eliminate a nation or ethnic group, 1) By killings its individual members, i.e. – physical genocide, and 2) By undermining its way of life, i.e. – cultural genocide. The implementation of genocide can be achieved through the mass killings of all members of a nation or through a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups. Likewise, cultural killing ensures that people are no longer connected to each other and can be achieved by the suppression of language, religion, law, kinship systems, and other cultural practices by which the people maintain the relations among themselves (Short, 2010, p. 836-838). Kingston (2015) noted a more distinctive definition of cultural genocide as “the purposeful weakening and ultimate destruction of cultural values and practices of feared out-groups” (p. 63-64). It is claimed that cultural genocide is a standalone crime punishable as genocide, because it is the acts that includes the forcible transfer of children to other groups, forced and systematic exile of members of a cultural group, prohibition of the use of a one’s national language, systematic destruction of books printed in the national language or of religious works, prohibition of new publications, and the systematic destruction or dispersion of cultural objects. Also, cultural genocide is often the direct result of physical genocide; faced with repeated waves of military pressure, conquest, relocation, and other forms of violence. Many national education policies serve to perform cultural genocide through the national school systems where indigenous and minority children are studying (Kingston, 2015). Pedersen (2011) claimed that the Karen have faced a secret genocide which was conducted by the Burmese military regimes as a crime against the Karen people by burning Karen churches and schools and a series of killings that resulted in hundreds of thousands of Karen displaced into the refugee camps, with some resettled to third countries.

Language is the core value of defining one’s cultural identity. The language in which children daily communicate with their family and communities helps them to acquire and express knowledge and positions them locally and globally. The failure to recognize mother tongue language in the classroom and education can be regarded as linguistic genocide which is an alternative form of cultural genocide. This is because “Language is foundational to relationships, knowledge

acquisition, and expression of thoughts and emotions; it is both constitutive and reflective of our identities” (Jones & Mutumba, 2019, p. 208).

National language education policies have become a mechanism for the elimination of indigenous and other minority mother tongues. Language is not only a cultural practice but also it connects individuals in a shared identity maintained through language across time and space (McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). The forced closure of all non-mainstream Burma government schools following the 1962 Ne Win’s military government and the abolition of teaching and learning ethnic language in the classroom highlights the violation of Karen and other ethnic groups’ language rights. The practice of institutional linguistic genocide was performed by mainstream education under the implementation of Burmanization. Jacob (2015) states that “the term genocide used with the intent to highlight how central language is in ecology, whereby if one’s indigenous language is restricted, forgotten, stigmatized, or unlearned, it is in essence lost” (p. 130). The elimination and restriction of Karen language from the central language is the initial step of committing linguistic genocide which was carried out by the Ne Win coup d’état.

Day’s (1985) definition of linguistic genocide has relevance here.

It is the systematic replacement of an indigenous language with the language of an outside, dominant group, resulting in a permanent language shift and the death of the indigenous language (p. 164).

For instance, the Hawaiian language faced linguistic genocide because their culture has been in close contact with dominant Western culture, primarily American and English. Gradually, Hawaiians shifted their indigenous language to English, as Day argued that “linguistic genocide is the result of cultural contact between two unequal societies – unequal in terms of economic resources, military strength, and international prestige” (p. 163). Likewise, KECD Officer, Saw Hei Soe shared that,

There are many Karen people who call themselves Karen but cannot speak Karen language at all. There are many Karen who can’t read Karen words, because they have studied only in mainstream education. No Karen history, No Karen language. That’s a big difference (01/07/19).

Saw Hei Soe highlights how the lack of consideration of local inputs has impacted the Karen students in the mainstream system in such a way that many cannot speak Karen language, deficiency of knowledge about Karen national history and cultural identity. My interview with him caused me to reflect on my own 11 years in the Myanmar mainstream education system, and how if not for my parents' teaching at home and attendance of summer church schools, I also could be one of those many Karen Saw Hei Soe is referring to here.

Jacob (2015) recommends four strategies to avoid linguistic genocide: (1) parental involvement, (2) indigenous peoples involvement, (3) governments should play a leading role, and (4) leverage advances in technology to best meet the needs of language learners (p. 127). The first three of these strategies were evident in my research. In the three months I was living in my field site and visiting surrounding villages and townships, I observed both parents and grandparents to be involved in their children's education, engaging with their teachers and involving themselves in school committees. As well, it was evident that many stakeholder groups such as the KECD Central and regional offices and migrant learning centers on Thai side who send their graduates as teachers to Hto Lwe Wah school were committed to mother tongue learning. The KNU maintains itself as a *de facto* government for revitalizing Karen language preservation by KECD schoolings. However, the advancement and use of technology in KECD education is still the most challenging part of developing their education regimes.

Moreover, the leadership and development of KECD education is mainly developed from Sgaw Karen language that enhances 'Sgawization', while the other large group of Pwo Karen language is not included in either the curriculum or the medium of instruction. One evening time, I was talking with a male teacher who belongs to the Bwe Karen subgroup and who comes from the hill village of Thandaunggyi Township. Our conversation reached to the topic of the use of language in the classroom and KNU administration. According to his explanation, Bwe Karen also has developed their written text and started teaching in some of the government primary schools where Bwe Karen students are populated. But the challenge is that Bwe Karen language is not understood by most of the Karen population. His perception is that while there are many Karen subgroups who have their own written texts such as Sgaw text, East Pwo Text, West Pwo Text, Bwe Karen Text and Khekho Khebah Karen text, there should be only one national language for the whole Karen population and Sgaw

language is more advanced and widely understood among other Karen subgroups (Fieldnotes, 27/06/2019). Our conversation prompted me to discuss this issue further in my interview with the KECD officer of KNU Taungoo district the following week. He shared,

In our Taungoo district, we have Paku, Sgaw, Mobwar, Bwe, Kayah. But here is not a problem. Our Karen government officially accept only Sgaw language. But our curriculum teaches across all of our ethnic history and culture (Saw Hei Soe, 01/07/2019).

Even though prior to Ne Win taking all the mission and private schools under junta control in 1962 there were community schools teaching in Pwo Karen languages, this has not resumed in any official capacity in the current era. Hence, it can be seen that a process of Sgawization exists in the provision of KECD education under KNU administration. The term ‘minorities within the minority’ is still an uncertain question for the KNU governing system.

Children from minority language communities face significant education challenges. Such challenges include 1) if they have access to a school, their teachers use a language they do not understand, and the students are not allowed to use their home language or mother tongue in the classroom 2) if they have textbooks, they are written in the official school language and focus on the dominant culture. The student’s own knowledge and experience, gained at home and in their community, are excluded from the classroom. 3) The students are expected to learn to read and write in a language they do not yet understand. 4) They are expected to learn math, science, and other concepts in a language they do not understand or are in the process of learning (UNESCO, 2018). These challenges hinder the indigenous learners from the right to mother tongue-based education, as the KNU chairperson shared with me.

We, ourselves, the teachers in our villager taught us the Burmese textbooks, but the teachers are Karen, so they explain us in Karen language. But, when we arrive at the town school, people speak only Burmese. So we don’t understand the explaining and definition of the textbooks. So we are getting bored and we can’t study well. Actually, everything that we learn, have to be with our mother-tongue language, and explaining in our language. And we see that because of the poverty we need school, and another is we need to

understand what we are studying. So we can study well. Therefore, we established this school during the peace process (Saw Eh Wah, 08/07/2019).

The right to mother tongue-based education has been one of the demands of the Karen people. For Karen national education, KECD conducts a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) system that tends to sustain Karen culture and language, while also providing Burmese and English language instruction which enhances the students' ability to perform in a wider context (Naw Khu Shee, 2018, p. 4; South & Lall, 2016a). According to UNESCO, strong MTB-MLE programs can contribute four positive results for the learners, 1) to be multilinguals who are confident in using two or more languages for learning in school, 2) to be multi-literate who can read and write with understanding in both or all of their languages, 3) to be multicultural who maintain their love and respect for not only their home cultures and community but also others, 4) and to be successful learners who achieve their educational goals and develop a life-long love of learning (UNESCO, 2018). Although children may use one language at home, they may also speak another community language well enough to understand it at school. Gradually learners are introduced to additional languages and learning to communicate in these languages. Successful MTB-MLE programs can promote social inclusion and national integration through their recognition of diverse ethnolinguistic identities. By recognizing children's right to learn in the language of their home or learning community, teachers can promote social inclusion, instill pride in their pupil's ethnolinguistic identities, and build a strong sense of national identity, one which valorizes the languages and cultures of all citizens (Taylor-Leech & Caet, 2012). Jones and Mutumba (2019) claim that an MTB pedagogical approach enhances children's abilities to expand their knowledge and social networks (p. 218). Likewise, Cabansag's (2016) research affirms that MTB-MLE improves the students' expression of better ideas, builds self-confidence, improves retention, and promotes a friendly environment in the classroom (p. 46). The following table shows how KECD is implementing MTB-MLE in the Karen education regime.

Table 4.1: Language use in graded instructional material										
Level		Subject	K	E	B	M	S	H	G	Hy
		Grade	Languages of instructional material							
Primary	Lower	1	K	E	B	K	-	-	-	-
		2	K	E	B	K	-	-	-	-
		3	K	E	B	K	-	-	K	K
	Upper	4	K	E	B	K	-	-	K	K
		5	K	E	B	K	-	-	K	K
		6	K	E	B	K	-	-	K	K
Secondary	Lower	7	K	E	B	K	E	K & E	E	-
		8	K	E	B	K	E	K & E	E	-
		9	K	E	B	K	E	K & E	E	-
	Upper	10	K	E	B	K	E	E	E	-
		11	K	E	B	K	E	E	E	-
		12	K	E	B	K	E	E	E	-
Note. K = Karen, E = English, M = Mathematics, B = Burmese, S = Science, H= History, G = Geography, Hy = Hygiene										

Table 4.1: Language use in graded instructional material

Source: (Naw Khu Shee, 2018, p. 3)

While teaching at Hto Lwe Wah school during the course of my fieldwork, I experienced first-hand the benefits of MTB-MLE that the abovementioned scholars discuss. When I was asking a question in English during teaching, there was a long wait for the students to respond in English and this limits their knowledge sharing. Since they are not very eloquent in English speaking, they use Karen words and/or Burmese words in responding to me. In class discussion, although the use of English language is strongly encouraged, the use of their mother-tongue Karen and Burmese languages provides more spaces in sharing and producing knowledge among their peers. It was also beneficial for me that I learnt different Karen words with their contexts in teaching (Fieldnotes, 26/06/2019). In this MTB-MLE classroom, I experienced how languages shift from barriers to bridges in the learning process, building confidence for my students to express their ideas. This supports Awopetu’s (2016) research on how mother tongue teaching enhances students’ learning abilities.

Furthermore, Wisbey (2017) described that MTB-MLE helps develop a learner to be a critical thinker and decision maker by using his/her own languages and experiences as a resource to access other opportunities. MTB-MLE also assists in promoting ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity. MTB-MLE policy is transformative since the students experience a better learning environment and feel comfortable expressing their ideas in their own language. It also helps to reinforce the learners' first language and enhances the ability to learn the second and third language. Using mother tongue language can increase self-confidence in the classroom (Paudel, 2018). Second year junior college student at Hto Lwe Wah highlights how applying MTB-MLE is not only reclaiming of indigenous right to mother tongue language but also the preservation of language identity and being Karen.

Here (in Karen school), you can wear your Karen dress. In Burmese school, you can't wear. We can preserve our culture and language. Because if we lost our language, we will lose our identity as a Karen (Naw Shee Shee, 16/07/19).

Language is fundamental in defining someone's identity. Norton (2016) cited that "language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentence, but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of complex and often unequal social relationships" (p. 476). Languages are entities that are (1) named (French, English, etc.); (2) distinct from each other, suggesting a commonly held view that languages should be kept separate; (3) learned in a particular order (L1, L2, L3...); and (4) attached to particular groups of people as makers of national, ethnic and/or cultural identity. Identity is attached to someone's linguistic ability because it connects the individual not only to the social world, but also because it frames the use of language as social, and the way they are perceived by others as users of language (Preece, 2016; 4). Joseph (2016) maintains that,

Identity is grounded in beliefs about the past: about heritage and ancestry, and about belonging to a people, a place, a set of beliefs and a way of life. Of the many ways in which such belonging is signified, what language a person speaks, and how he or she speaks it, rank among the most powerful, because it is through language that people and places are

named, heritage and ancestry recorded and passed on, and beliefs developed and ritualized (p. 19).

Naw Shee Shee's statement that "if we lose our language, we will lose our identity as a Karen" highlights the way she understands Karen language to be inseparable from its identity. In this way, as a young Karen woman, she acknowledges that preservation and development of Karen language is vital in preserving Karen identity as a whole. In the same way, one of the Hto Lwe Wah teachers, Saw K'paw, shared how the mainstream education was used as a tool to assimilate and sustain the oppressive regimes of the successive Burmese governments:

Karen revolution started because of the oppression from the Government. At that time, there are many educated Karen. The Burmese use gun to kill us. Then, they use education, then religion, many ways. If we didn't do anything, we can't call ourselves as Karen, we will disappear, we will become Burmese. So, to transmit the history, they established education and it is very good. If we didn't establish our own education, we just have to learn their education, and finally we will become Burmese (Saw K'paw, 25/07/2019).

So, adopting mainstream education means that the Karen students will no longer get a chance to speak in their language, to study their history and culture. Therefore, the establishment of Karen education is to halt the authoritarian power and structure of the state which sustains the oppressive practices against the Karen communities by violating the indigenous right to education and right to mother tongue-based education. Karen education serves as the main root to maintain Karen culture, tradition, and identity to counter the mass assimilation of Burma-centric mainstream education of Myanmar.

Summary

This chapter has analyzed through the data collected in my fieldwork and scholarly works how Burma's mainstream education has been strategically manipulated by successive Burmese regimes in an assimilation and acculturation process; and KECD education as a counteraction against Burmanization. For

the Karen, the provision of Karen education is seen as a tool, not only resisting the oppressive power of Burmese regimes, but also the forming of counter-hegemonic institutions to be free from being oppressed. It also enhances Karen nationalism that demands self-determination because of the oppression they have been suffering for decades.

While the post-independence Burmese governments largely failed to fulfill the population's right to education in every aspect, KECD education is filling the gaps and providing available, accessible, and MTB-MLE education to the Karen population fulfilling their right as indigenous people to education. Cultural and linguistic genocides through mainstream education are perceived as threats to the identity of Karen, while MTB-MLE education promotes linguistic and cultural identity. In this chapter, the author argues that the provision of KECD education through MTB-MLE education helps the students to be critical thinkers and increases self-confidence in the classroom, as well as the reclamation of linguistic and cultural rights of indigenous Karen students.

Chapter 5

Karen Indigenous Education for Self-determination

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is an analysis of the final three themes of this research: the value of education under KNU/KECD which is historically rooted in their identity formation and socio-economic development, the practice of rights and development of democratic institution in the classroom, and Karen education as a transformative tool that enfranchises humanization. Within my active membership role whereby I was a full-time teacher in Hto Lwe Wah School for three months, I observed how KECD adopts a student-centered and critical thinking classroom approach with a Karen-specific content curriculum. As a form of co-intentional learning where both students and teachers create and re-create knowledge together, they are opposing the oppressive structure of banking concept of education used by the mainstream education.

The KECD approach to a learning environment has caused me to reflect a lot of my own life experiences as a student in mainstream education. Since my family home is in the city of Taungoo, which is situated on the Yangon-Mandalay Road in Bago Region, my parents enrolled me in Number 5 Basic Education High School, Taungoo from kindergarten year all the way through to an undergraduate degree in Taungoo University. Throughout my studying and learning at a mainstream school, memorizing lessons was the only way I

could pass year by year. I am privileged in some way that my parents had extra family income to pay for the extra tuition classes which provided me with the exact questions and answers to the exams, so I could reduce the amount of memorizing reading passages and pass the exams with less stress.

Even so, by the time I passed the matriculation exam after tenth standard that qualified me to move on to university, I was tired and disappointed from years of forced memorization; yet my parents wanted the best for me so pushed me to enroll further in this system at Taungoo University. I am so thankful that I was fortunate to be able to reach a compromise with them – enroll in the Distance Education Program at Taungoo University that required me only to physically attend for 30 days over three years; while enrolling in the Liberal Arts program at the Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) which has a high reputation for its critical thinking classroom approach to learning. So, I endured the required memorization of texts for my mainstream university exams to graduate, while at the same time, gained real knowledge and valuable experience from many different perspectives from the student-centered approach at MIT.

This ethnographic research has provided me the opportunity to contemplate and compare my 14 years of mainstream education experience with the alternative KECD education approach. This is the learning approach that arouses the student's thinking and thirst to seek a particular knowledge from the 'dialogical process' between peers and teachers, where learning takes place through dialogue and conversation. I personally dislike and am fed up with memorization, an opinion I found shared by many of my students at Hto Lwe Wah who had previously studied like me in mainstream Myanmar schools. The KECD pedagogical learning practices of freedom to raise questions and share opinions in the classroom confirm to me the value of the pedagogical difference between KECD and mainstream education regimes.

Through these three months, I experienced personally and collectively with the students and teachers of the school that education is a critical tool in the process of humanization.

Education Value under KNU/KECD

The Karen elite regard scholarship to be the potential for superiority, not only over other groups, but also over the entire Karen race. There is a discourse

for the Karen that education helps to improve Karen unity since there has been bloodshed between one Karen village and another historically. After the Karen Revolution and military takeover of Burma, the education systems in Burma faced a serious decline including minority language suppression. Even so, Karen communities worked to keep education services functioning as much as possible. To preserve groups' cultural identity, the KNU maintained and developed its own education regime with the establishment of KECD, which is providing educational services along the border and inside the Karen State.

The Karen value their education development and take pride in Karen language. In Hto Lwe Wah School, there is a banner mounted on the wall depicting four pioneer leaders who developed education for the Karen. First is the picture of Dr. T Thanbya who was the founder of the Karen National Association in 1881 and the person credited with creating a new Karen word, the dawkelu, meaning entire Karen race, with the aim of creating a pan Karen identity across the whole of Burma. Second, is Sir Dr. San C Poe who became chairperson of KNA in 1925. Both these early Karen leaders were first educated in mission schools in Burma and then gained graduate and postgraduate degrees in the USA and England. Third, is Reverend Jonathan Wade who developed the modern Karen script in 1832 and fourth is Reverend Francis Mason who translated the Bible into Sgaw Karen language with the help of an early Karen convert, Saw Quala, in 1853. On entering the school, students and teachers are reminded of their historical roots and the value placed on education by 18th and 19th century Karen leaders and early American Christian missionaries.



Figure 5.1: Banner hung at the entrance of Hto Lwe Wah’s main school building (photo by author).

This banner encapsulates the transnational nature of Hto Lwe Wah School. Dr. Thanbya and Dr. San C. Po gained their first education experiences in small mission schools with Western missionaries as their teachers. The education they gained, coupled with their dedication, enabled them to graduate from universities in the USA (University of Rochester and Albany Medical College, New York). They brought back the tertiary knowledge they had gained to their homeland of Burma and shared it with their Karen people. In turn, generations of educated Karen have followed their example to the current day. I remember one time I visited to the 2nd year classroom of the Junior College at Hto Lwe Wah. I observed one of the American Karen intern teachers was sitting among her students while explaining the lesson and inviting questions and discussion. There was no special seat for the teacher at the front of the classroom, rather she was sitting among them in a semi-circle. This is the classroom dynamics style that KECD encourages – not only the student-centered pedagogical approach that is internationally promoted; but from a different standpoint, for Karen who have resettled in Western countries to return to their homeland and share their Western education knowledge with our Karen youth striving to be educated in Burma (Fieldnotes, 09/07/2019).

There is a significant difference in the government and the KNU education systems as a result of decades of armed conflict. While the state-level education system in Burma promotes Bamar culture, including Burmese language and social norms, the Karen education system works to foster Karen culture, including Karen language and social norms, which are based on traditional Karen culture, while also embracing international development principles, including recommended content and pedagogy. Therefore, the policies of Karen education have moved toward international policies, rather than away from them (Lenkova, 2015; Johnson, 2016). Having the experience of being educated through international colleges, Naw Joy and Saw Thue Thue expressed their perception on KECD education and curriculum by reflecting on their experiences on first living in the refugee camps in Thailand and then since their resettlement in the USA,

The curriculum here is as high as us. 8th grade Math is really high. I have never seen the mainstream curriculum but, usually in English and Math, our KECD kids are better in English than them even to Thailand students. My cousin who went to Thai school, her English wasn't that good compared to camp kids with KECD curriculum. When we went to America, we don't have a problem with Math too (24/07/2019).

Most of the Karen schools, need better resources, they don't have enough resources like computers or the things that the teachers need to teach, and help the students to learn better. I think they have a lot of idea, and you know, the creativity, they just don't have the materials, and the resources. If they have those, the Karen will be so much better in learning and teaching (24/07/2019).

While Naw Joy stated how the contribution of KECD to English and Math subjects are beneficial to the students, Saw Thue Thue acknowledges the thinking and creativity of the students. Although the KECD is not capable of providing adequate material resources, the curriculum itself encourages the students to open their minds and develop their creativity with their available resources.

Throughout KECD schools, many of the teachers have graduated from the Leadership and Management Training College (LMTTC) in Mae La Camp

and the Karen Teacher Training Colleges (KTTC) located in all the camps which are providing essential educational services for future Karen teachers and leaders. Johnston (2016) notes that “based on post-training assessments and classroom observations, teachers who have participated in KTTC pre-service training have acquired the necessary skills and competencies to teach their subjects and grade level” (p. 10). With the leadership of KTWG (Karen Teacher Working Group), the KECD teachers receive Mobile Teacher Trainings (MTTs) which include topics such as school administration, teaching methodology, teaching evaluation, lesson planning, classroom management and questioning skills, and Karen language and literacy training. Naw Khu Paw as an administrator, shared her educational experience,

I attended one of Kaw Thoo Lei Colleges LMTC [Leadership and Management Training College] for four years. After I finished, I attended another training for one year and also taught in the camp school. Then, I attended ACU [Australian Catholic University] for the migrants. When I attended the college, the teacher gives instruction to the students, and we have to write what we understand. In Burma School, whatever we learned from school and tuitions, we memorize and took the exam. The KECD curriculum is developed for the students to think critically. So they want the students to think what they should do for their future (24/07/2019).

The transnational and international educators’ influences enhance the development and pedagogical approaches of KECD in educating their children across the border line and in KNU-administered areas. Naw Khu Paw gained her knowledge and skills firstly in LMTC which is a four-year degree in Science or Arts situated in Mae La Refugee Camp, Tak Province, Thailand. The curriculum for this College was designed by a collaboration of Western and Karen educators and follows a critical thinking education pathway. The ACU Diploma of Liberal Studies conducted just outside of Mae Sot, Tak Province, Thailand has been in operation since 2007. It is a two-year diploma program that follows the same curriculum as Australian students and provides the chance for them to study via online platforms with their Australian counterparts.

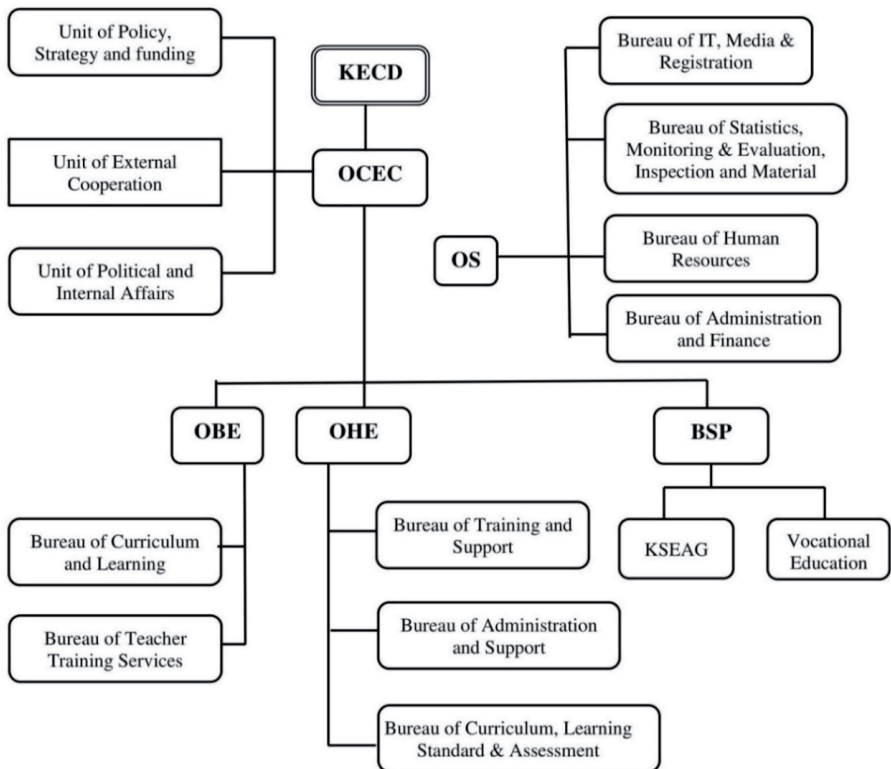
Naw Wah Wah shared another transnational education experience she gained as a full-time teacher,

I attended school in the camp from 9th standard to LMTC College. Education is free in the camp. Then, after teaching here for two years, I got a chance to attend EIP (English Immersion Program). We have to learn about teaching, community development, democracy and debate from that program (28/06/2019).

Similar to LMTC, the EIP program was designed by the collaboration of Western and Umphiem Camp Education Committee members and trains students to be active community leaders.

The above quotes highlight how Hto Lwe Wah teachers are being educated and trained before deploying to teach their Karen students. The Karen training colleges and transnational international programs in the camps educate future Karen teachers by employing critical thinking classroom which covers skills building for community development, English language, computers, social studies, translation and interpretation, teacher training, cross-cultural communication, and critical thinking. These transnational educations have produced the Karen educators in practicing a more critical pedagogical approach of teaching the KECD Karen population. The Karen educators perceived that the Myanmar mainstream pedagogical influence is outdated while the transnational pedagogical influence is updated with the current recommendation by international scholars.

The KNU has an extensive state-like structure with the KECD one of its fourteen departments. KECD is responsible for providing education for the Karen population along the Thai-Burma border and inside Karen state. Referring to Figure 5.2 below, it is seen that while the Office of Central Education Commission (OCED) with Karen educators write educational policy and strategic planning, the Office of Secretary (OS) is conducting administrative activities. The Office of Basic Education (OBE) and the Office of Higher Education (OHE) take responsibility for providing teacher training, and for developing and reviewing the curriculum. The Bureau of Special Projects provides vocational education and works together with the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG) in KNU controlled and mix-controlled areas (Refer Figure 5.2 below).



OCEC = Office of Central Education Commission, OS = Office of Secretary,
 OBE = Office of Basic Education, OHE = Office of Higher Education,
 BSP = Bureau of Special Projects, KSEAG = Karen State Education Assistance Group

Figure 5.2: KECD administration chart (Institute of Higher Education, 2016, p. 23)

The Karen’s value of education and schooling is directly linked with their desire to progress socially and economically, so that they may be able to overcome the oppressions they have been suffering for centuries as one of the indigenous groups. With their knowledge and meaning from their indigenous heritage, the Karen established the indigenous education which is being shared and reshaped across generations and generating knowledge which, in turn, has guided the creation of the curricula to fit the historical contexts and needs of Karen indigenous population. By acknowledging the needs of its population, KNU/KECD has been providing the fundamental educational services to the Karen people with Karen-specific content curriculum while engaging

international principles and norms, albeit with lack of recognition and accreditation from the Myanmar mainstream education. The lack of recognition does not stop the Karen students to strive for jobs and further education opportunities. Most of the graduate students from KECD work for Karen CBOs such as Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Karen Students Network Group (KSNG), Karen Women Organization (KWO), Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Karen Information Center (KIC), and national and international NGOs. Those who finished Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC) and Leadership and Management Training College (LMTC) also join the Karen schools as teachers and administrators in their communities. Some students who want to continue further studies, although they could not join higher education programs in Myanmar Universities, have joined programs on the Thai side of the border to study for qualifying documents to enter tertiary programs in Thailand and Western countries (Fieldnote, 24/07/19).

The following section examines the practice of rights and democratic education in the KECD classroom. During the ruling of military junta, almost all rights were denied including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression in the classroom. It explores the practice of rights to freedom of opinion and expression as democratic education in which KNU/KECD is nurturing in creating and building democratic society.

The Practice of Rights and Development of Democratic Institution in the Classroom

As stated earlier in this chapter, working as a teacher at Hto Lwe Wah school gave me a good opportunity to reflect and compare on my own high school education experience. My reflection of my own high school days is that in the classroom, students are treated as ‘things’; not individual people. We were not allowed to talk and/or ask questions; to attempt to do this is perceived as impolite behavior and is punished. Contrarily, entering the classroom in Hto Lwe Wah each day was a fresh experience; one never knew what questions would be raised; questions at times, I had to admit I did not have an answer, but it was encouraging that students actually asked these hard to answer questions. I observed over the months that students are not afraid to ask questions or more interestingly, give their own opinions about the class content. Here in the learning process, the distance between teachers and students is

being reduced with the dialogical process of learning while the teacher becomes a facilitator in co-creating knowledge together. I learn that this dialogical process enhances freedom of speech and expression which is the foundation of building more democratic institutions and more so, a democratic country.

The research observes that the mainstream education represents as an oppressive institution that practices dictatorship style of learning environment (undemocratic institution) while KECD education maintains a more democratic style which is the biggest gap between these two education regimes. The different pedagogical approaches between mainstream education and KECD education is reflected by second year Junior College student Saw Lah Lah as follows,

In the Government school, the students have to memorize everything and they don't accept the students' opinion and view, they prohibit the students' thinking. So the students can't think because they only have to memorize. But here (Karen school), we have to do in teamwork, and group, and not only teaching, but also game. We have freedom to speak in the class. They gave us the opportunities, if the teacher is wrong, you can say it. When the teacher gave the topic, they accept every student opinion whether right or wrong. Because it is the students' opinion (12/07/19).

Saw Lah Lah explains about transformative learning, which is a process where the teachers play an essential role in providing the learning environments where the students can learn to be critically reflective and examine their own beliefs. The classroom that promotes transformative learning is stimulating active learning, not passive, and encourages students to be critical with the capacity to go on learning even after their college days are over. The learning is inner-oriented and personal, and this learning unveils social injustice, empowering social action. Consequently, the transformative learning also connects with emancipatory learning where both individuals are engaged in learning by the intersection of dialogue and action to create deeper learning which lead to enact social change (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2015; Cranton, 2013). Gallagher (2008) argues that the main objective of the transformative pedagogy is to bring change about social injustice and how to transform undemocratic or oppressive institutions. Through this learning approach, students studying in KNU/KECD schools are educated to strive and create a

more just society and are better prepared for the challenge of transforming any undemocratic social and institutional practices that support inequalities and oppressive social identities and realities.

The KECD classroom acknowledges the voices of the students in the class while learning. It is the practice of freedom in building democratic oriented society. Students participating in this research as well all the students I taught over the three months of my fieldwork often reflected about 'rote learning' in the mainstream education, being happy for the more critical approaches in KECD education regime at Hto Lwe Wah School. The education value of the Karen shows their thirst for education which gives them freedom to speak, to express and think critically in order to be freed from being oppressed, while demanding a federal democratic union in Myanmar.

Consequently, the KECD school sites provide democratic practice by electing one male and one female student monitor for their respective classrooms by free and fair voting in the classroom. The students' president is also elected by student voting. In the election process, while the teachers act as election commissioners, the students get the opportunities to vote for their respected student leaders. Therefore, KECD school offers the practices of basic democratic right by enabling the students to vote to elect their leaders through free and fair students' election (Fieldnotes, 06/06/2019).

In addition to basic democratic rights, the Karen national education provide not only the right to mother tongue learning, but also the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The practice of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is active in KECD classrooms. It is noted that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018, p. 120, Wang et al., 2018). True dialogue can take place only among equals and helps to create a democratic society. Although traditional schools expect absolute obedience and submissiveness from their pupils, the dialogue in a democratic environment develops initiative and critical thinking (Darom, 2000). Edwards Jr. (2010) argued that while critical pedagogy seeks to produce justice-oriented citizens, democratic education aims to produce participatory citizens, although they both have the mutual end goal to create social justice

and a more democratic society and classroom practices. The democratic education produces (a) the personally responsible citizen, (b) the participatory citizen, and (c) the justice-oriented citizen (p. 222).

Likewise, the practice of a student-centered classroom in the KECD education is nurturing the practice of freedom from being oppressed and also the exercising of democratic learning. This is because a democratic education seeks to develop a process of learning that allows public participation and enables students to produce new forms of democratic knowledge. Democratic education enhances the students ability to create a more emancipated society (Stevenson, 2010). Across both focus group discussions with first- and second-year college students in Hto Lwe Wah School, all students engaged in conversation regarding the freedom of expression in the classroom,

We can share our opinion here. But there [mainstream], we are not allowed to talk or to share our idea (Naw Julia Htoo, 17/07/19).

The mainstream system is very strict. There is no freedom in learning (Saw Eh Moo, 10/07/19).

Many of the students in these discussion groups were in a position to compare authoritarian relationships in the mainstream education and a practice of democratic learning in the KECD education.

Democratic learning helps to build healthy relationship between teacher and students. Sharing opinions and ideas is a core value in democratic learning, since without sharing opinions there will be no generating democratic knowledge in building a democratic society (Alshurman, 2015). One student shared her experience with the authoritarian classroom,

They do not give as an opportunity. They always look down at our Karen people. We are afraid to share our opinion in our class in Government school. We are afraid to make a mistake. Although there is a mistake, I am not dared to say it (Naw Hse Hse, 10/07/19).

An authoritarian classroom creates a fearful classroom environment in mainstream education. It is how the oppressive regimes use their oppressive power

to gain fully submissive students or citizens in ruling the state. The more the students become submissive, the easier for the oppressors in implementing their projects. In a democratic classroom, students are born with rights and learn to be responsible. The democratic classroom is understood as a place where a total development of the student's personality is achieved, a place where the processes of humanization, personalization, and socialization are taking place. It allows free expression of one's own thinking without any limits, without suspicions in other's saying, resistance to the teacher, learning from the mistakes, teacher's objection or bad grade. The teacher switches the role to be organizer, coordinator, pointer, and counselor in the democratic classroom environment. Additionally, the students are encouraged to be curious, to study ideas, to use research, to look for alternatives, to take responsibly, rationally to defend someone's belief, and to be open toward new ideas in the process of democratic learning (Kocoska, 2009, p. 2429-2431). In the authoritarian classroom, rights are subordinate to responsibility. Freedom of expression is a right because one person's expression does not prevent another from also expressing himself or herself. Together with freedom of expression, all students are given reasons to be hopeful; they are encouraged to dream and keep their opinions open (Knight & Pearl, 2000).

This research has confirmed that rights to freedom of opinion and expression in the classroom environment is fundamental in building a democratic society. Such an environment is present and active in Hto Lwe Wah School, which is striving for the development of a democratic society that is justice-oriented and empowering responsible citizens for their nation.

The following section analyzes the provision of Karen Education as a transformative tool that enfranchises humanization. It observes that while the banking model of mainstream education dehumanize the Karen students to be able to oppress effectively, the KECD model of thinking classroom empowers the students in the process of humanization which is being dehumanized by successive Burmese government regimes.

Karen Education as Transformative Tool that Enfranchises Humanization

My research field experience as an international student of Chiang Mai University and a teacher of Hto Lwe Wah school at the same time period has enhanced my understanding that classroom education should be treating the students as reflexive human beings who are able to think, express, and speak freely in the classroom according to their background experience and thinking without being intimidated by the teachers.

On July 25, 2019, I joined the whole school community to watch the presentation and play led by the first-year junior college students with the title “Big Rocks First” on the grass field adjacent to the Hto Lwe Wah school buildings. The class teacher, Naw Jue Jue (American Karen intern) joined with us as the audience. The objective of the activity was entitled “Scheduling priorities, not prioritizing schedules.” Three students led the presentation on the ground stage and performed the explanation as their friends acted out the theme. Here, the conventional teacher-led classroom style was reversed where the students lead their fellow friends in the learning and knowledge production process while teacher only facilitated and guided the class in the preparation stage (Fieldnotes, 25/07/2019). This is where the site of education offers the students the opportunity to learn reflexively, challenging them to transform and enfranchise humanization in the educational environment with the aim to have the flow-on effect to enfranchising humanization in the wider community.

Since the KECD adopts a more student-centered learning classroom, it enhances the transformation of undemocratic institutions. Haber-Curran and Tillapaugh (2014) studies how transformative and student-centered learning benefits students in five themes, 1) challenging mental modes of learning, 2) building trust, 3) finding freedom and empowerment, 4) deepening commitment to learning, and 5) reframing learning and self (p. 73). Within such an environment, the students acknowledge the authority structure between the students and the teachers, in which the wall between the teachers (“know all”) and the students (“know nothing”) is broken down. The trust between and among both students and teachers increases because student-centered learning provides a space for individual students to share their opinion and struggles while learning. As trust develops, the students felt more comfortable with the learning environment and with each other, whereby they start to feel a sense of freedom and empowerment. Continuously, the students assume responsibility for contributing to their peers’ learning, building a collective responsibility for learning that also deepens commitment to learning. Students finally develop

a more active and inclusive understanding of learning and acquire a deeper understanding of the self as a learner and leader, which contributes to students engaging in lifelong learning.

In interviews, comparison between mainstream education and KECD education was discussed by all participants. One KNU official interviewed argued,

The successive Burmese government adopted the policy of the 'Doctrinization' concept of dictatorship, brainwash and centralized education regime. Ethnic people do not get a chance to learn their own culture, literature, art and history since they have to learn only 'the history' which provided by 'centralized education' whether right or wrong. Thus, the mainstream education is far from the basic principles of Federalism (Saw Eh Wah, 08/02/19).

P'Doh Saw Eh Wah believes that the curriculum developed by the Burmese government is to serve the interest of the Burman-centric regimes, and therefore it is not suitable for KECD to adopt that curriculum. Since the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) nationalized the whole education system and prohibited Buddhist monks and other non-state actors from providing education services, they and later military governments have influenced the national school curriculum and activities. The extreme focus on rote learning is an effective strategy used by successive governments in order to prevent children from learning how to think and creates totally submissive citizens who do not question the government. Thus, an environment is created where 'only stupid students are questioning teachers.' Similarly, any aspect of education that could produce critical citizens has been forbidden by the military government to prevent potential students-led uprisings that could threaten their oppressive power. As a result, universities were often forced to close and university teachers were also primarily selected based on their loyalty to the military regimes, rather than their qualifications (Matelski, 2015). Additionally, the hidden curriculum consists of the messages given to the children, not only by school structures but by textbooks, teachers, and other school resources that serve as a mechanism for prolonging the oppressive Burmanization. The hidden curriculum of the mainstream promotes a prominent Burma-centric culture that sustains their oppressive regimes by not allowing students to learn the

minority Karen language, history, and culture (Breunig, 2005, p. 113). Such a viewpoint was shared by teacher Naw Wah Wah,

Actually, those who established this curriculum graduated from Burma. The reason why they didn't take mainstream curriculum is, they work with international organization and they found that Burma education is not qualified. So they don't want it more. Because the mainstream education practice rote learning. Because learning is about life-long learning. They don't think it is good, so they don't use it. (28/06/19).

It was interesting to listen to parents' thinking on the KECD pedagogical approach of teaching. During interviews with parents, I was frequently asked why their children are not reciting aloud (rote learning) while other students from the mainstream school do. It was a good opportunity for me to explain the principle and value that our KECD is promoting a critical thinking classroom where the students need to practice thinking in the classroom with little or few necessary memorizations (Fieldnotes, 27/07/2019). The parents' recognition of the different pedagogical approach between KECD and mainstream education reflected how KECD education provision is being delivered.

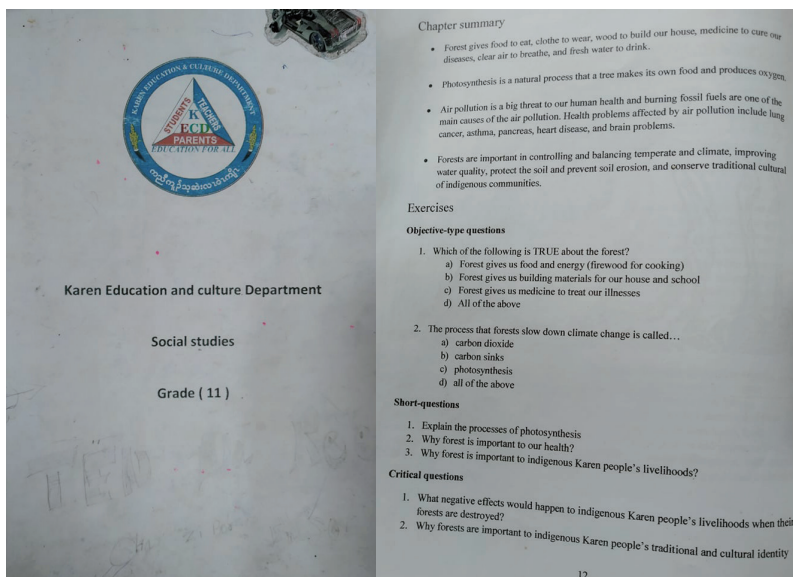


Figure 5.3: KECD grade 11 social studies textbook cover Page 12 (KECD, 2019)

The KECD textbook of Grade 11 reflects how the teaching methodology is being applied (see Figure 5.3). Each chapter of the textbook summarizes the lesson and asks critical questions to the students. For instance, page 12 of social studies textbooks ask two critical questions in Figure 5.3. It expresses that the teaching methodology of the textbook prompts the students to think critically.

The Karen educators believe that adoption of a banking model of education by the mainstream education is threatening the socio-cultural lives of the Karen students. While the mainstream education largely relies on learning by rote in a banking system model, the KECD encourages a more student-centered and thinking classroom. The former treats students as materials, while the latter believes the ‘problem-posing’ education produces critical thinkers. In the focus group discussion with second year junior high school students, this comparison was discussed,

In the past, I attend the mainstream school. But we have to practice by rote learning. I don’t understand anything although I memorize everything. When I arrive here (Hto Lwe Wah school), we need to practice critical thinking, so now I can think (Naw Poe Mu, 10/07/19).

Alam (2013) maintains that humans have the capacity to think critically and denying humans the opportunity to reason is a violation of their basic humanity. So, implementing the banking model of education is the process of dehumanizing the learners and serves as a dehumanizing mechanism. Likewise, the mainstream education dehumanizes the Karen students by denying to right to think, so that the oppressive mechanisms will be able to function smoothly by Burmanization. Naw Poe Mu’s comment, “now I can think,” shows how the KECD education provides a humanizing mechanism against dehumanization by the mainstream education. Humanization is the way of treating a human being as the highest value of social existence and helping a person to reach his potential fully in the learning process, in the process of “becoming more fully human” (Ignatovitch, 2016; Freire, 2000, p. 83-84). Salazar (2013, p. 128) provided five essential keys in humanization,

1. The full development of the person is essential for humanization.
2. To deny someone else’s humanization is also to deny one’s own.

3. The journey for humanization is an individual and collective endeavor toward critical consciousness.
4. Critical reflection and action can transform structures that impede our own and others' humanness, thus facilitating liberation for all.
5. Educators are responsible for promoting a more fully human world through their pedagogical principles and practices.

Humanization is a true dialogical process where two or more people are seeking to understand a common object of study by challenging social inequality and injustice. Freire insisted that animals (dehumanized beings) cannot stand back from the world and reflect upon it, but humans (humanized beings) have the capacity to reflect on the world and to transform it in accordance with this reflection. (Salazar, 2013; Freire, 2000; Roberts, 1998, p. 104). The KECD education which encourages and stimulates the students "to think" is essentially fundamental in the humanization process of the Karen to be more fully human, and above all, enable the facilitating of liberation for the Karen from being oppressed.

A critical form of pedagogy is required to consider relations of freedom, authority and responsibility in facilitating the process of learning. Stevenson (2010) maintains a critical stance is required for a democratically oriented society built upon equal rights, opposition to discrimination and creating a learning space with full freedom and critical thinking. It is the way of co-producing knowledge and can be regarded as emancipatory education which is "to celebrate marginalized social spaces and to foster counter-hegemony discourse that generate actions of liberations and progressive change" (Melo, 2019, p. 2). The emancipatory education stimulates individuals to think critically and to resist social and structural inequalities, with the aim of transforming their lives and communities. Relating to this, a teacher shared with me,

The KECD curriculum is developed with good intentions for the students to think critically. Not to say only my history is good and true but wants the students to learn the real history. (Naw Khu Paw, 24/06/19).

As a teacher, Naw Kku Paw understands that a teacher's duty is to stimulate the students to think critically, not to forcefully impose a teacher's

own thoughts on them. By stimulating the student's thinking, the co-creation of knowledge takes place in the classroom. Freire's (2000) concept of critical pedagogy which encourages a revolutionary leadership to practice co-intentional education, creates critical knowledge between teachers and students. It is the processes of humanization for the oppressed who are dehumanized by the oppressor.

During my fieldwork, I both observed and participated in this practice of co-intentional education where we as the teachers and our students were both the subjects of learning in the task of re-creating knowledge. In Hto Lwe Wah school, this approach to learning is creating critical and rigorous co-investigators of knowledge. One student reflected that -

In the mainstream school, actually I don't mean to say bad things about it. But it is different. We don't get a chance to discuss with a teacher. Here (in Hto Lwe Wah), you can speak freely. Everyone gave you a chance to speak. People do not look down at you. Your voices are heard (Saw Ler Htoo, 10/07/19).

According to Freire, the co-intentional education enhances both teachers and students, and the oppressors and oppressed, to achieve freedom. When the students are allowed to share their opinions in discussion with teachers, both are producing the knowledge which they are seeking. Through the dialogue between the teachers and students, they discover themselves as re-creating knowledge together (Freire 2000). Co-intentional education is a collaborative approach to teaching and learning by co-generative dialogue to stimulate transformation as a process. Co-generative dialogue disregards the role and power in the classroom by respecting everyone's experiences, understandings, and perspectives which are shared in the dialogues. Essentially, co-generative dialogues provide an opportunity for students to participate in authentic learning experiences in which they learn to work effectively with others, learn from their behaviors, and take responsibility for their learning (Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2014).

Summary

This chapter has analyzed the value of education of the Karen under KNU/KECD, which has created Karen-specific content curriculum (consisting of Karen social norms, values, and identity) by embracing international development principles. Moreover, Karen education serves as a practice of fulfilling rights and the development of democratic institution in the classroom to develop a more justice-oriented and responsible citizen for their communities.

Through several of decades of being oppressed, Karen education emerges as a process of humanization of the Karen students who have been dehumanized by successive regimes via the banking model of education. For them, humanization is the facilitating of liberation to be freed from oppression. To this end, I argue that Karen education serves as not only a mechanism to practice rights and democratic education, but also the process of humanization for those who are previously dehumanized by the policies of Burmanized institutions to become more fully human.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Introduction

This research has studied the value and development of the Karen education system and its pedagogical development over its history until 2020. It found that although the historically oppressed Karen encountered unimaginable obstacles to survival under the successive Burmese regimes, many strived to educate their children under any given circumstances. Through the aid of international development agencies, their education and pedagogical approaches have been developed and re-developed together with their indigenous knowledge, norms, and values. In spite of the lack of accreditation and recognition that deny KECD high school graduates accessing jobs or furthering their education in the Myanmar mainstream system, many have found gainful employment in the non-government (NGOs) and civil society sectors (CSOs and CBOs), and some have crossed the border into Thailand to access higher education opportunities provided by NGOs. The research maintains its core argument that the provision of Karen education is the act of emancipation to achieve freedom which preserves cultural identity and rights of the Karen whilst striving for self-determination according to the principles of a federal democratic union.

Major Findings of the Study

The research on Karen indigenous education by studying KNU/KECD education produces seven themes through thematic analysis. The seven themes are 1) Karen education and its nexus with nationalism, 2) the struggle for education, 3) fulfillment of indigenous people's right to education, 4) right to Mother Tongue Language Education — a means to prevent cultural genocide, 5) education value under the KNU/KECD, 6) the practice of rights and development of democratic institution in the classroom, and 7) Karen education as transformative tool that enfranchises humanization. A summary of the findings relating to each of these themes follows.

Karen education and its nexus with nationalism

The study focuses on the Karen education system, which is established under the leadership of KECD, as one of the departments of KNU as a leading political Karen organization. Although KNU education policy enhances nationalism, it is based on federal principles and could contribute to a sample model of building a genuine federal democratic Myanmar. Karen nationalism and patriotism are found through their educational activities and curriculum which includes subjects like Karen specific-content history and geography.

Karen nationalism is filled with grievous loss and the demand for self-determination through decades of organized violence being committed by successive Burmese regimes, including the omitting and devaluing of Karen history in mainstream education. Karen education provides Karen students the opportunity of learning their own history which, in many aspects, is contrary to that provided in the mainstream education curriculum. The Karen education rejects the mainstream curriculum since it is developed within an underlying doctrine of Burmanization chauvinism. Therefore, the Karen right-to-govern themselves and education is demanding the Karen develop their own educational regime with culturally responsive curriculum in the educating of their children.

The struggle for education

The successive Burmese governing regimes and Tatmadaw have violated several rights through military operations against the Karen population. The Karen student's struggle for access to education expresses their resilience of spirit to be educated. The Tatmadaw's four cuts policy operations during four

decades from the 1960s to the turn of the century disrupted many Karen children's access to education and often threatened the Karen students' lives. Many students have experienced forceful displacement due to the Tatmadaw's operations, including destroying their homes, schools, and churches. In this research, the demand of self-determination through education was recurrently expressed by the Karen teachers, students, and parents in which they believe that the provision of KECD education is part of the reclamation of Karen self-government as a nation and the preservation of their social identity in Burma.

Moreover, the mainstream education which demands costly extra tuition for classes, hindered many Karen students from accessing education. Although the government claims that mainstream education is free of charge, in reality, it was extremely difficult for Karen children to access education due to Tatmadaw's clearance operations that led to poverty. Even during the democratization process in the country, the added costs of extra tuition and other surplus expenses exclude many Karen from accessing mainstream education. Whereas, the provision of Karen community-based education is an accessible and available alternative, where students can reclaim their right to education under the leadership of KNU/KECD.

Fulfillment of indigenous people's right to education

It is widely observed that successive governments have largely failed to fulfill the population's right to education. The provision of KECD education can be regarded as the fulfillment of right to education which is mentioned in Article 26 "everyone has the right to education" of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Although the Myanmar government signed the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in 2007, the state has failed to honor their commitment. Instead, the mainstream education continues to be used as a mechanism to assimilate Karen and other indigenous populations into the majority Burmese dominant national ideologies. Thus, this research claims that the establishment of Hto Lwe Wah Karen Public high school and Junior College is a prime example of the self-fulfillment of indigenous people right to education with their cultural methods of teaching and learning by KNU/KECD. KECD schools are both capable and are fulfilling the UNDRIP's Articles because their schools are community sites for the provision of culture transmission and the space of their mother-tongue development.

Right to mother tongue language education: a means to prevent cultural genocide

The research found that both a hidden linguistic genocide and cultural genocide of the Karen people has been committed by successive Myanmar governments. The exclusion of mother tongue language in the classroom can be regarded as linguistic genocide, which is one of the main elements of cultural genocide. The forceful ban of teaching and learning ethnic language in the classroom and education in the 1962 Ne Win coup d'état is the violation of Karen and other ethnic groups' language rights. The Karen perceive that national mainstream education is being used as a tool to assimilate ethnic minorities culturally.

Since the right to mother tongue-based education has been one of the demands of the Karen people, KECD engages Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) system that sustains both the culture and language of the Karen. The study affirms that the adoption of MTB-MLE in KECD education is not only about the reclaiming of the indigenous right to mother tongue language, but also the preservation of language identity and being Karen. The Karen students I worked with in this research acknowledge that preservation and development of Karen language is vital in preserving Karen identity as a whole. From this perspective, Karen education serves as the essential root to maintain Karen culture, tradition, and identity to counter the mass assimilation of Burma-centric mainstream education.

Education value under the KNU/KECD

Through decades of armed conflict between government and the KNU, the mainstream education system in Burma has promoted a Bamar culture which includes Burmese language and social norms. Contrarily, the Karen education system fosters Karen culture which includes Karen language and social norms, while embracing international development principles which include recommended curricula content and pedagogy. The Karen training colleges and international programs in the camps educate and train Karen teachers of KECD schools by employing a 'critical thinking classroom'. By acknowledging the needs of its population, KNU/KECD has been providing their fundamental educational services to the Karen people, albeit with a lack of recognition and accreditation from the Myanmar mainstream education

system. Even so, this lack of recognition does not discourage the Karen students to strive for jobs in Karen community CBOs, NGOs, and INGOs, and further education opportunities in Thailand and Western countries.

The practice of rights and development of democratic institution in the classroom

This research finds that while the mainstream education represents as an oppressive institution that practices a dictatorship model of learning environment (an undemocratic institution), KECD maintains a more democratic model of learning environment (a democratic institution). Through the adoption of ‘critical thinking learning’ approach, students are encouraged to strive and create a more just society, enhancing their ability to challenge and transform any undemocratic social and institutional practices that support inequalities and oppressive social identities and realities.

The KECD classroom also provides the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which is stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The study affirms that the practice of a student-centered classroom is nurturing the practice of freedom from being oppressed and also exercising democratic learning. Karen students in this study who had studied in both mainstream and KECD education systems all compared their experiences of authoritarian relationship in the mainstream education and a practice of democratic learning in the KECD education, stating clearly how their learning has been enhanced and elevated in the latter.

Karen education as transformative tool that enfranchises humanization

The research further found that the Myanmar mainstream education’s implementation of banking model of education — extensive rote learning — is the process of dehumanizing the learners and serves as a dehumanizing mechanism by denying humans’ capacity to reason and think critically. Oppositely, the KECD education provides a humanizing mechanism by granting the students the space to reason and think. It is the humanization process of treating human beings to reach their potential fully in the learning process in becoming more fully human. The KECD education that stimulates the students thinking is the process of ‘co-creation’ knowledge in learning. It is also the form of the co-intention education which enhances both teachers and students, and

the oppressors and oppressed, to achieve freedom, and that model of education enfranchises humanization.

The following section discusses the three main theories cultural hegemony, critical pedagogy, and indigenous education which are being engaged in researching the pedagogy of the Karen in Burma under the leadership of KNU/KECD.

Theoretical Discussions of the Findings

This research on Karen indigenous education and its pedagogy was guided by three main concepts: cultural hegemony, critical pedagogy, and indigenous education. The research employed the concept of 'cultural hegemony' to highlight how the Burmese government education regime strives to achieve active consent from the Karen population. It takes the position that the failure of mainstream education regimes gaining active consent from the Karen is due to the self-serving and oppressive activities of the Burmese dominion. The concept of 'cultural hegemony' leads to the Karen 'counter-hegemony activity' as a mean of establishing a separate Karen indigenous education to its own indigenous population while opposing the mainstream oppressive regime. The research affirms that there is always dialectic forms of 'hegemony' and 'counter-hegemony' where the interests of the subordinated groups are neglected and oppressed by the self-serving dominant groups.

The concept of 'critical pedagogy' plays an important role in examining the relationship between the Burmese mainstream education and Karen indigenous education. Through 'critical pedagogy', the research finds that the establishment of Karen indigenous education is aiming for social transformation from imposed unjust social relations between the dominant Burmese and the oppressed minority. The concept of 'indigenous education' is utilized in this research to express that indigenous forms of education are contextual, transformative, demanding self-determination and resisting the assimilationist objectives of most national education programs (Cajeta, 2016, Jacob et al., 2015). The research finds that the provision of Karen indigenous education is the self-fulfillment of indigenous rights to culturally responsive education, including right to mother tongue-based learning by preserving and promoting their indigenous rights.

The framework developed from these three concepts highlights how the formation and development of indigenous education is performed as a counter-hegemonic activity in countering self-serving and oppressive institutions, in such a way that it frees the oppressed to demand their self-determination as an indigenous people. Albeit with a lack of recognition from the mainstream regime, it observes that indigenous people have not failed to provide educational services to their population with strong commitment in self-fulfilling their own rights.

Recommendations

The Thein Sein and NLD-led governments practiced extensive central control over education policy and education budget. The central Ministry of Education oversaw all the decision-making in developing educational infrastructures and mechanisms while delegating no power to state and regional governments in the Union. The government provision of education in the ethnic areas often faced a shortage of school infrastructure, expensive out of school tuition fees, a shortage of teachers, the closure of schools in conflict areas, challenges in curriculum and language at school, and a practice of discrimination against women and ethnic nationalities.

Considering all the findings from this research, recommendations are made to three sets of stakeholders. Firstly, I recommend that any future educational system in a federal democratic Myanmar embrace the four guiding principles to building a federal democratic union developed by the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center (ENAC) to be included and enacted in its education policies, education system must be based on human rights,

Ethnic national schools and private schools must have the right to exist legally, For sustainable protection and improvement of ethnic literature, culture, and history, support must be provided, reflecting the needs of each state, and the educational system must promote and respond to the development and sustainability of the federal democratic union (ENAC, 2019, p.20).

If these principles can be implemented in the future, the quality, availability and accessibility of Karen education and mainstream education will play a crucial role in building a peaceful sustainable federal democratic Union.

For the KNU/KECD, this research recommends that,

- increase consultation with communities under the KNU administration and local civil society around their expectations and concerns regarding education provision,
- building a better formed and structured MTB-MLE program of KECD which is implementable among Karen people across the country systematically and consideration for the initiation of education programs in other Karenic language groups, and teaching in KECD schools to explore with Pwo Karen Cultural Conservation groups to include both Eastern and Western Pwo as MTB-MTL in relevant Pwo Karen populated area schools.

For the INGOs and NGOs who share an education focus, the research recommends, to provide economic and technical support to ethnic education systems, to conduct research on expectations and concerns of communities in ethnic areas regarding education, to organize joint teacher trainings for teachers coming from different education systems, and to assist in achieving nation and international accreditation of KNU/KECD education.

Above all, this research implores all the stakeholders to embrace Sustainable Development Goal Four 'Quality Education — Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' — in providing educational services to their population that can ensure sustainable development of the communities across the country.

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Pedagogy of the Karen

Indigenous Education as Self-determination

Saw Ni Thaw Htoo

The Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) of the Karen National Union (KNU) operates schools using a student-centered, democratic educational approach that fosters critical thinking and preserves Karen language and culture. This research explores the role of the Karen educational system over its history as both an act of emancipation and of self-determination.

This research was conducted in a public high school and a junior college run by the KECD in Taungoo District over three months in 2019, using ethnographic methods as both a researcher and teacher. Students, parents, teachers, and officials discussed the differences in pedagogy between the KECD and successive Myanmar governments. The Myanmar education system uses an authoritarian model of education focusing on rote memorization, while KECD encourages learning through critical thinking and collaborative discussion to promote more democratic practices and institutions. KECD schools teach Karen culture, history, indigenous knowledge, and language in resistance to attempted Burmanization by the centralized and assimilationist Myanmar government system. Students and teachers also reflected on education as a transformative and humanizing process in their own experiences and observations.