

# Political Transitions and Educational Instability: A Study of Military Coup and Its Impact on Educational Migration of Education Degree College Students from Chin State

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## Abstract

Myanmar has been in a civil war for four years, with no signs of resolution. The ongoing unrest has forced students from affected regions relocate to safer areas within the country to continue their education. This research investigates the educational challenges encountered by college students who migrate internally from Chin State to other areas due to political transitions. The study utilized a phenomenological research design, employing qualitative methods, and implementing a thematic analysis approach to analyze the interview data. The study included thirty Education Degree College (EDC) students who have migrated from Chin State to the Yangon region, including Hlegu EDC and Hakha EDC (relocated in Yangon). The study revealed six key factors influencing the academic achievement of educational migrant students consisting of academic attainment, learning environment, social-cultural interaction, financial matters, mental well-being, and political stability. Addressing these interrelated factors is crucial for enhancing the academic outcomes of educational migrant students. The study further highlights that the migration of an entire school is a complex process, suggesting that it is more advantageous to maintain similar school settings or to merge with existing schools that are already operational.

**Keywords:** Educational migration, Push-pull factors, Internal migrants, Educational challenges, Chin State

## Introduction

Experts project that Myanmar's total population will exceed 54 million in 2025. In 2022, conflict and violence in Myanmar resulted in the displacement of approximately one million people (McAuliffe & Ochoa, 2024). Although researchers have extensively studied migration, they have not established a clear definition (Castles, 2003). The issue of migration is not confined to Myanmar but is prevalent in every country worldwide, making it a common global concern.

Migration refers to the movement of individuals from one location to another to enhance their quality of life, whether for educational, economic, social, or other reasons. Migration patterns are commonly classified based on the purpose of movement (e.g., work, study, family reunification), duration (short-term or long-term), voluntariness (voluntary or forced), and other

special reasons such as environmental displacement. Demographic studies typically distinguish between international (external) migration and internal migration (Rees, 2020). International migration refers to people moving across borders to settle in a country (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009). Internal migration involves moving from one geographical region of a country or geopolitical area to another for various reasons, such as pursuing education, seeking employment, or being displaced by disasters or conflicts (Rees, 2020).

Migration has significant implications for population size, growth, structure, and nation's development. However, policymakers and stakeholders cannot address the migrant issue in isolation. It is associated with background factors such as global religion, environment, culture, politics, and economy. Background factors such as global religion,

environment, culture, politics, and economy influence this association. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes that various environments—from family to society—delicately shape an individual's development.

Education and migration have a complex relationship, and the education system can reproduce and intensify social inequalities of class, gender, and minority ethnicity ( Jacobs, 2022) . Educational migration refers to the movement of individuals seeking better educational opportunities.

Young people often migrate internally from rural to urban areas for secondary or tertiary education, as urban centers offer better schooling opportunities (Elder et al., 2015) . The lack of vocational education institutions offering training in specific professions or specialties within one's residence is a key driving factor behind educational migration (Klyachko & Semionova, 2021) . Paat (2013) suggests that recognizing how cultural differences shape immigrant children's experiences within various ecological systems can enhance the effectiveness of social work service for these children. Consequently, recognizing and addressing these interconnected factors is crucial in educational practices.

In Myanmar, the political conflicts in 2021 had numerous impacts across various sectors. This political conflict suddenly and significantly impacted the education sector, affecting both basic and higher education. Some schools and universities in rural areas were temporarily closed or relocated to safer or urban areas within the country. In the teacher education sector, authorities temporarily relocated specific education degree colleges in unsafe areas such as Hakha, Loikaw, Lashio, Katha, and Kyaukphyu to urban areas. Consequently, students from these regions migrated to ensure continued access to education.

Recognizing the impact of educational migration on students is essential for policymakers and educators. Grigg (2012) highlighted that frequent school changes are often associated with academic performance declines in social adjustment. Previous research has identified various factors that contribute to the educational challenges faced by migrant students, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation. However, a lack of research focuses specifically on the experiences of educational migrant

students in Myanmar. Understanding the educational challenges of internal migrant students is crucial for devising strategies to address their needs and enhance their educational outcomes. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to examine the educational situation of migrant students in Myanmar and to devise strategies to support their educational aspirations. This study aims to fill this research gap and explore the impact of educational migration on student teachers pursuing education amidst political circumstances.

### Statement of the problem

Education serves as the cornerstone of a nation's advancement. The Myanmar government has been working diligently to improve its education system to align with international standards in recent years. The vision guides it: "to create an education system that can generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the knowledge age." As Myanmar enhances its education system, teachers with the appropriate values, skills, and knowledge are required to be effective educators. To reach this goal, Myanmar requires a robust teacher education system that cultivates a high-quality teaching workforce, equipped with the professional knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary for the roles and responsibilities expected of its teachers. The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Myanmar commits to achieving the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) goal of "Improved teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions" by the end of 2020–2021 Academic Year. Phase 1 (2016–2021) will prioritize developing and implementing key reforms to achieve the NESP goal. Phase 2 of the NESP (2022–2027) will focus on completing the key reforms from Phase 1 and introducing additional reforms to support the NESP goal's achievement further. Myanmar's education reform movements have attracted attention as they mark a major shift following decades of limited progress in the sector.

To fulfill the NESP goal, three universities (Yangon University of Education, Sagaing University of Education, and the University for the Development of the National Races of the Union) and 25 Education Degree Colleges are implementing the teacher education

system in Myanmar. In the University of Education, student teachers undergo a five- year (ten- semester) program to attain their degree, B. Ed. In education degree colleges, student teachers undergo a four-year (eight- semester) program to attain their degree, B.A. (Education) or B.Sc. (Education).

Students originating from Chin State, particularly from Hakha Education Degree College, have been migrating to various Education Degree Colleges (EDCs) during mid- terms due to political reasons. Initially, students were dispersed across various EDCs near Chin State, such as Mandalay EDC, and some urban institutions like Hlegu Education Degree College and Thingangyun Education Degree College. Students were later officially relocated to Alone Township, Yangon. The location was a former high school, repurposed to serve as Hakha EDC. However, some students remained behind due to special circumstances. Consequently, they have encountered various challenges in their relocated schools. As a result, these challenges strongly impact their educational outcomes and professional development.

Students are often required to adapt to new and unfamiliar environments, even when migration occurs within national borders. Political changes constantly influence the social environment of schools, necessitating student teachers to adapt and make necessary adjustments. Internal migration for educational purposes also poses challenges, such as financial barriers, cultural adjustments, and logistical issues associated with settling in a new location. The uncertain political situation has heightened stress and uncertainty in students' academic and personal lives, impacting their mental well- being and prospects. Addressing these issues is an urgent need for educators, policymakers, and respective communities.

### **Objectives of the study**

This research mainly investigates the educational challenges faced by internal migrant student teachers from Chin State.

### **Research question**

This study aims to answer the following research question.

- What are the key educational challenges faced by internal migrant student teachers from Chin State who are attending Education Degree Colleges?

- What are students' opinions on ways to mitigate their challenges?

## **Literature review**

### **Conceptual framework**

Migration is a natural phenomenon shaped by social and demographic reasons. Migration is classified into two types: internal (migration within the same country) and international (migration to another country). This study aims to investigate the effects of internal migration on educational obstacles. Internal migration refers to any movement within a geographical or administrative boundary that seeks to change one's place of residence, whether temporarily or permanently. Researchers classify internal migration into two types: interregional movement, which occurs between a country's regions, and intraregional migration, which refers to movement within a specific region of the country.

Numerous scholars have proposed various theories of migration in different contexts. Lee (1966) identified four key factors influencing the decision to migrate including factors related to the area of origin, the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. A critical analysis reveals that the factors influencing migration—namely, the push and pull factors—connect all migration theories (Lee, 1966). Push factors cause individuals to leave one place or region for another, while pull factors attract or pull people from different areas or regions within a country. Pull factors that influence migration include the attraction of city life for education, health, the development of underserved communities, job possibilities, and training facilities, and so on (Todaro, 1969). According to Parkins (2010), important factors include employment opportunities in the new area, potential economic structures, a better standard of living, and favorable geographical conditions of the migrated area. The push forces include unemployment, floods, earthquakes, droughts, and other natural disasters. The theory known as the situational approach suggests that people migrate when new locations have a greater value of place utility, such as social, economic, and other benefits (Wolport, 1966).

Scholars characterize migration theories based on the degree of focus they place on various factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the complex interactions between individuals and their environment, emphasizing that a child's development occurs within a network of interconnected systems. These systems encompass the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, each representing various environmental influences on an individual's development and behavior.

Bronfenbrenner's microsystem encompasses the child's immediate social circle and surroundings, including parents, siblings, peers, educators, and neighbors. These mutual relationships directly impact the child's growth. Positive parental support and educational engagement can enhance cognitive and linguistic abilities, whereas experiences like bullying lead to self-esteem issues. The child plays an active role in these interactions.

The mesosystem is a complex, interconnected system where individual microsystems influence each other. It involves interactions between different microsystems, such as parents and teachers, peers, and family, which can create tension and negatively impact a child's life. Conflicts can also introduce substance use. The exosystem, a part of ecological systems theory, considers formal and informal social structures affecting a child's microsystems. Factors like a parent's job, school board decisions, government policies, mass media, and community resources shape a child's microsystems, even though they do not directly interact with them.

The societal and cultural environment that surrounds a child—the macrosystem—shapes their development through ideologies, attitudes, and social conditions. Cultural beliefs about gender roles, individualism, family structures, and social issues shape the macrosystem, which can differ within the same broader context due to cultural variations. The chronosystem is the fifth level of ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner, referring to the changes and transitions a child experience throughout their lifetime. These changes can be predicted or unpredicted, and can be influenced by historical events, physical and cognitive changes, and social expectations. The response to these transitions depends on the support

provided by their ecological systems. Researchers have utilized ecological systems theory to bridge psychological and educational theories with early childhood curricula and practices. The theory places the developing child at its core, emphasizing that all interactions within and between the five ecological systems aim to promote the child's well-being in the classroom. The theory suggests that effective communication between teachers and parents is crucial for a child's development and the ecological systems in education. Teachers should be mindful of their students' families' social and economic circumstances. Active participation in learning, collaboration, and meaningful experiences are also essential.

Some theories highlight the importance of addressing psychological factors in the migration process. Insights from resilience theory help individual migrants and communities to navigate and thrive despite adversity. Resilience is handling threats from unexpected external events and adjusting positively under academic pressure. Individuals with greater resilience tend to perform better (Yates & Masten, 2004). Academic resilience is the ability of individuals to attain academic success and excel, even when faced with difficult life situations and unfavorable conditions that might otherwise lead to academic failure or dropping out (Rudd, Meissel, & Meyer, 2021).

By reviewing these concepts and theories, researchers identify key factors for analyzing the educational challenges migrant students encounter.

## Background of Chin ethnic people

The government of Myanmar administratively divides the country into 21 units: seven regions (Ayeyarwady, Magwe, Mandalay, Bago, Sagaing, Taninthary, Yangon), seven states (Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan), one union territory (Nay Pyi Taw), one self-administered division (Wa), and five self-administered zones (Danu, Kokang, Naga, Pa'O, Palaung).

After the British administration conquered the Chin Hills and gave them to Burma, the term Chin was formally recognized, and the current name 'Chin State' was adopted in the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma's 1974 constitution (Human Rights Watch, 2009). With common cultural norms and customs, the ethnic Chin people of Myanmar are among the most

diverse tribes in the nation. The Chin people, the majority ethnic group in Chin State, are divided into six primary tribes: Asho, Cho, Khum, Laimi, Mizo, and Zomi. Scholars further classify these tribes into approximately 63 sub-tribal groups.

Chin state lies on the western side of Myanmar. It is bordered to the east by Sagaing and Magway Division, the north by the Indian state of Manipur, the west by the Indian state of Mizoram, and the south by Rakhine State. Chin State covers a total area of 13,907 square miles and lies between East Longitude 93° 15' and 94° 0' and North Latitude 21° 0' and 24° 25'. The climate is mildly hot and humid, featuring three primary seasons: summer, winter, and rainy season (Scarlis, 2010).

Chin State's administrative regions comprise nine townships and four sub-townships, organized within three districts: two in the North (Hakha and Falam) and one in the South (Mindat). Hakha district encompasses Hakha and Thantlang; Falam district comprises Falam, Tedim, and Taunzang; Mindat district includes Mindat, Matupi, Kanpalet, and Paletwa (Bawi, 2015). An estimated population of over 500,000 Chin reside in Chin State. Traditionally, the Chin people practiced animism, but currently, around 90 percent of them are Christians, with a minority adhering to Buddhism.

Although these groups communicate in various languages and dialects and maintain distinct cultural identities, they share historical roots. Chin languages have been identified as Tibeto-Assam, a part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Tedim is the most widely spoken language among Northern Chin, Hakha, and Falam which are spoken in Central Chin, while Southern Chin speaks Mindat Cho. Chin communities historically possessed rich oral traditions yet lacked written forms of literature. Minority languages are currently taught as a school subject in Chin State through Local Curriculum Content initiatives; however, the rest of the curriculum is in Burmese. Since 2016, implementing Local Curriculum Content as outlined in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) has enabled teaching ethnic languages in approximately 20 percent of the curriculum at the primary level, initially up to Grade 3. This initiative allows for the teaching of ethnic languages and literature to be gradually introduced by Regional or State governments, starting

from the primary level and expanding to higher grades over time.

The state is a hilly region with limited transit options. Consequently, Chin State has inadequate housing resources, a weak private sector, limited electricity supply, and poor road accessibility. It is extremely remote, has little basic infrastructure, and has landslides and other natural disasters frequently, especially during the monsoon season. As a result, Chin State's socioeconomic situation is deplorable, with poverty reigning supreme. Chin State, which is lightly populated and among the least developed regions in the country, has the highest poverty rate at 73 percent. According to 2014 Census data, one in five Chin citizens have relocated to foreign nations or other parts of Myanmar, primarily for financial reasons. These economic factors encourage Chin people to migrate as a push factor. On the other hand, employment opportunities in neighboring countries such as India are a pull factor for the Chin people. Between December 2021 and June 2022, approximately 2 million individuals migrated for employment due to conflicts, while Chin had one of the highest rates (IFPRI, 2023).

According to census data, compared to other states and regions in Myanmar, Chin State has a low percentage of persons who complete their education. The union literacy rate is 89.5 percent, while the current rate is 79.4 percent. 95 percent of children of primary school age attend primary schools (Department of Population, 2015); in contrast, only 67 percent of children of middle school age and slightly more than 40 percent of children of high school age attend (Ministry of Planning and Finance, World Bank, & UNDP Myanmar, 2018). In 2022, the matriculation passing rate in Chin State consistently ranks at 26.78 percent, while the overall rate is 46.88 percent, the lowest among other states and regions in Myanmar. However, the matriculation passing rate in Chin State significantly increased to 77.70 percent, while the overall rate was 57.90 percent in 2024. Many view education as a crucial tool for the Chin people to better determine their development strategies in a democratic Myanmar.

The relationship between the Chin ethnic group and the Myanmar state is a challenging one, shaped by a history of marginalization, political disputes, and ongoing conflict after 2021. The military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 turned Chin State into a key

area of armed resistance. Local Chin communities and established groups such as the Chin National Front (CNF) have actively opposed the military regime. Many displaced individuals live in uncertainty, relying on authorities they cannot influence, and encountering major obstacles in resettling and restoring their livelihoods. The lack of viable solutions to these problems places an additional burden on an already underdeveloped state.

### **The current teacher education system in Myanmar**

Improving the education system is crucial for advancing the country, and focusing on enhancing the quality of teachers should be a top priority in Myanmar's education reform efforts. The region's progress depends on both the quality of its educational standards and the skill level of its local teachers. To fulfill today's society's 21st Century learning needs, Myanmar's education system must undergo significant reform. As a result, the government of Myanmar has prioritized teacher education in its education reform initiatives, understanding that improving teacher quality is critical to quality education and improved student learning outcomes. Teacher education is the development of intellectual faculties, methodological approaches, skills, attitudes, and experience for both pre-service and in-service teachers (MOE, 2020).

There are several ways to train to be a teacher under the structure of the teacher education system in Myanmar. However, all teachers are expected to hold a degree and have finished at least a four-year degree course. Degree-level teacher education programs are available in Myanmar at both university and degree college levels. Universities of Education (UoE) offers a five-year Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) program, preparing teachers for high school teaching positions. The University of Development of National Races (UDNR) offers a similar five-year B. Ed. program tailored for ethnic minorities to teach in high schools. Education Degree Colleges (EDCs) also offer a four-year Bachelor's degree program, qualifying teachers to teach in primary and middle schools.

Myanmar has 25 Education Degree Colleges located in various regions, including Yankin, Thingangyun, Hlegu, Mandalay, Meikhtila, Mawlamyine, Magwe, Sagaing, Monywa, Katha, Pyay,

Taungoo, Lashio, Taunggyi, Kyaukphyu, Dawei, Myitkyina, Pathein, Myaungmya, Bogale, Loikaw, Hpa-An, Keng Tung, Pakokku, Hakha. The Myanmar Ministry of Education created a four-year Education Degree College curriculum by the pre-service teacher education reform outlined in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016- 2021. Beyond the Education. The Education Degree Colleges expect student teacher graduates to promote the learning and development of Myanmar's next generation beyond the standard curriculum.

### **Rationale for educational migration of students**

The study of internal migration is important for national well-being because of its effects on economic, social, and demographic development. It is essential to examine internal migration in developing countries like Myanmar. Individuals relocate within their own countries for various reasons. Bouthry (2020) identifies the primary reasons for migration in Myanmar as follows: 40.8 percent for family, 34.3 percent for employment-related purposes, 15.7 percent for marriage, 2.2 percent for education, and 0.7 percent due to conflicts. Between 2021 and 2023, internal and international migration rates increased, with internal migration accounting for 79 percent and international migration for 21 percent. At that time, migration rate for work opportunities was 34 percent, 18 percent for higher paid jobs, and 7 percent for better working conditions. Moreover, migration for education is also increasing (Myanmar Agriculture Policy Support Activity, 2024).

Myanmar, previously known as Burma, achieved independence from the British Empire in 1948 as a democratic nation. It has a population of around 56 million and is currently under the control of an authoritarian military regime dominated by the ethnic Burma group. The country has faced decades of widespread poverty and civil war involving ethnic minority groups. Current political issues in Myanmar emerged in February 2021. On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military conducted a coup against the civilian government, declaring the results of the November 2020 general election illegitimate (Kipgen, 2021). Myanmar's Acting President, Myint Swe, declared a year-long state of emergency and transferred control to the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The State Administration

Council (SAC) regime, led by Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who declared himself head of a caretaker government on August 1, 2021, claims to be the sole representative and voice of the nation. Political unrest in Myanmar in 2021 led to increased international and internal migration of students seeking educational opportunities.

Myanmar's present societal concerns because of civil war, include civil conflict, political unrest, and financial distress. Education has not been a priority at the center of such political unrest. Certain universities and colleges in Myanmar have faced disruptions or administrative challenges. School closures and disruptions to children's education have been common in parts of Chin State for more than four years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and military coup. This could result in a shortage of formally educated youngsters growing up in Chin State. This has raised concerns among educators about the future of the country's learners. Without education in Chin State, life becomes incredibly difficult.

Consequently, institutions may have required students to transfer or temporarily pause their studies until the situation stabilizes. Nowadays, some students from Chin State have migrated to urban areas such as Yangon and Mandalay Regions for their education. This migration (interregional movement) has led to the presence of internal migrant students in Chin State, who face various educational challenges. They encountered numerous challenges in transitioning from a rural to an urban lifestyle. This research examined these challenges through their educational and social activities. A study by Yilmazel, Gizem, Atay, and Derin (2022) revealed that school-related challenges for migrant students include courses and contents, communication, culture, discrimination, exams, homework, physical conditions, registration, rules, and language challenges.

Migration is a complex socio-economic and political process with positive and negative effects on migrant households as well as on migrants. Migration is like a dual-edged sword, with opportunities and challenges worldwide (Mosler Vidal & Laczkó, 2022). To create an egalitarian society for all Myanmar citizens, there must be unity among ethnic minorities and the Burman majority, as well as compassion and empathy for other persecuted people. Every community

in Chin State needs to consider how they will maintain their children's education.

## Methods

### Research design

The researcher employed a phenomenological research design and used qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews guided the data collection process, combining a predetermined set of questions with flexibility to probe deeper based on participants' responses. Thematic analysis was then applied to examine the data.

### Participants of the study

The study included students who migrated from Chin State to Yangon regions, including Hlegu Education Degree College and Hakha Education Degree College (relocated to Yangon). The researcher selected 30 participants from these colleges using purposive sampling: 27 students from Hakha EDC and three from Hlegu EDC (currently, only three students from Chin State are enrolled in Hlegu EDC). Among the 30 participants, the researcher identified 19 (63%) as male and 11 (37%) as female. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 25, with a median age of 22. Out of a total of 30 students, 3 (10%) are in their first year, 5 (17%) are in their second year, and 22 (73%) are in their third year. The researcher carried out the study in the Yangon Region during the 2024 academic year. The main research period covered approximately six months, commencing in April 2024 and concluding in September 2024.

### Data collection and analysis

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with students who had migrated from Chin State to Yangon Region. They briefed the respondents on the study's objectives and assured that their responses would remain confidential. The researchers also informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they were not obligated to answer any or all questions; they could withdraw from the interview at any time. The researchers obtained verbal consent from the participants before interviewing them about their individual experiences. With the participants' permission, they used voice recorders during the interviews, each of which lasted approximately 30 to 45

minutes. The interview consists of two parts. The first segment provides a brief overview of the respondents, enabling the researcher to gather data on the participants' demographic characteristics. The second section explores the participants' perspectives on the educational challenges they face due to educational migration. The study employs a thematic analysis approach to analyze the semi-structured interview data. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using provisional coding, which uses predetermined codes to analyze data.

### Findings

In this study, for qualitative research data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative research data. To obtain in-depth insight into students' attitudes toward the migration process, the researchers conducted interviews with 30 participants from the selected schools, including 27 participants from Hakha EDC (relocated to Alone Township), and three participants from Hlegu EDC. The semi-structured interview questions for student teachers consist of 29 items in five dimensions: four items for academic challenges, four items for accommodation challenges, seven items for socio-cultural challenges, five items for financial challenges, and nine items for psychological challenges.

Based on their responses, the opinions of 30 students who devoted their time and efforts in interviews can be interpreted as the following six key themes.

### Factors affecting academic success

**Language barriers:** Students frequently expressed difficulties due to the language barrier. All the participants reported unfamiliar with the Myanmar (Burmese) language, which led to challenges in communicating with teachers and understanding academic subjects. Most participants indicated that "I have difficulty understanding academic subjects" and they also clarified that "My native language is Chin, and I have difficulty communicating effectively in Myanmar (Burmese) language" (Student 8,13,23). Some participants, especially from Palatwa, indicated that "In my town, we use Rakhine language for daily conversations and thus challenging in Myanmar (Burmese) language" (Student 18,29). Student 1, a 21-year-old male, discussed that "In my state, there is

limited interaction with people from other regions. We speak different ethnic languages and have distinct accents. Since Burmese is used only in schools, many feel hesitant and lack confidence when speaking with outsiders."

In the Education Degree College program, first- and second- year students are taught in Myanmar language, while third- and fourth- year courses are conducted in English. As a result, third year students experienced challenges transitioning between these languages. Almost all third- year students (22 participants) responded that "I am not proficient in English, and I face significant struggles in learning subjects in English." The research consistently highlighted a recurring theme: students' lack of proficiency in the language. As a result, students face emotional challenges, and the kindness and warmth of their teachers positively influence their decision to continue education.

**Academic participation:** Most participants indicated that, initially, they did not engage in school activities. One participant said, "In the earlier days, I did not participate in classroom activities because I was afraid of making mistakes." However, their participation increased over time as they became more familiar with and settled into their current school environment. The researchers observed that the students expressed satisfaction with participating in school activities. Student 4, a 20- year- old female, proudly stated, "I participated in a poster competition to commemorate Martyrs' Day last month." Boosting academic participation directly enhances students' satisfaction with learning. Therefore, it is crucial to find effective ways to encourage their involvement.

**Shortage of teachers:** Since the school relocated from Hakha to Yangon (Alone Township) this year, there has been a shortage of teachers. As a result, students are experiencing difficulties in their academic progress. Participants answered, "We do not have enough teachers for all subjects." "I hope that more teachers will be available to provide effective support" (Student 6,14,17). "At the previous school, we had an adequate number of teachers, which supported effective learning" (Student 15). Volunteer teachers from Yankin and Hlegu EDC supported Hakha EDC in essential subjects. However, students found it difficult to build rapport with them because the teachers changed

frequently. Several participants indicated that while teachers are highly effective in facilitating learning, they expressed a preference against frequent teacher changes, noting that it requires time to establish rapport with new instructors.

### **Barriers to effective learning environment**

#### ***Accessibility issues in classrooms and facilities:***

Due to the relocation of Hakha EDC to Yangon (Alone Township), there has been a lack of adequate infrastructure. The original site, which was a high school, was unsuitable for EDC students. There were insufficient classrooms and dormitories, leading to overcrowded conditions that were not conducive to learning. Students responded, "At the previous school, two students shared a room. Now, nearly 50 students are living in a common room, which creates many difficulties for us" (Student 25). The overcrowded conditions were unsuitable for learning and detrimental to their health. One student answered, "I am concerned about health issues because some students are experiencing flu during this rainy season" (Student 12). Students wanted to learn information and communication technology (ICT), but no ICT rooms were available. As a result, they missed out on these opportunities. Most students reported, "We did not have the opportunity to learn ICT because there was no ICT room available." Students did not have opportunities for practical subjects, such as science, because no practical rooms were available. Students answered, "We would like to engage in practical tasks because it is essential for our learning as college students" (Student 4,10,19). Since ICT and practical subjects are essential in the current technology era, it is crucial to reconsider their availability before relocating schools.

***Inadequate support for the food service:*** No staff was available, so students had to take on these responsibilities alternately. This affected the quality of the food. A 19-year-old male, student mentioned, "We cooked our own food, so sometimes it was overcooked and other times undercooked." Students expressed a desire for the presence of dedicated food service staff.

### **Socio-cultural factors in education**

***Social integration with peers:*** Almost all participants reported strong communication with their peers because the students originate from the same

region and share a common language. Participants responded, "We had no trouble communicating with friends" (Student 16,22,28). "We come from the same school and same culture, which has fostered strong relationships among us, and we support each other" (Student 1,9).

***Social integration with teachers:*** The students having positive relationships with their teachers, whom they described as kind and supportive. However, frequent teaching staff changes require students to build new connections continually. Participants said, "Teachers are kind and patient with us; however, we need time to build rapport with them."

***Cultural society:*** Most students belong to a particular cultural group or community. Consequently, they do not perceive any significant differences. Students reported, "We come from the same state, culture, and religion, which makes us feel comfortable and secure in our school environment."

### **Financial Matters on Academic Performance**

***Cost of living:*** The major expenses for students are stationery and food, with the average cost per individual ranging from 1 to 1.5 lakhs. Most students answered, "We do not spend a lot of money due to financial limitations." "My expenses ranged from 1 to 1.5 lakhs." "I mostly spend my money on food and stationery."

***Financial support from family:*** The family and relatives primarily provide financial support. Students from low-income households face financial constraints. While some students receive financial support from their families, others do not due to their families' status as internally displaced people. The homes of some students have been impacted by civil war, rendering them unable to maintain contact with their families. Students reported that "My family primarily provides financial support." "I have had no contact with my family for a long time, because of civil war, and my relatives who are working in foreign countries provide financial support for me."

***Financial aids from the community:*** Financial issues add to a heavy burden. All students reported not receiving financial support from community or religious organizations. Although the students are Christian, they received no support from Christian organizations. Student 3 is a 19-year-old male from a remote village in Chin State. He belongs to a Christian family and is the

eldest of five siblings. His parents are subsistence farmers with limited income. Due to the political unrest and lack of schools in his state, he migrated alone to Yangon to pursue higher education. Despite being a member of a Christian community, he received no financial or social support from religious organizations during his relocation. Students stated, "Even though I'm a Christian, no church helped me when I moved to the city." (Student 3)

**Employment and income:** Most students work during semester breaks to fund their educational expenses. Students appreciate the ease of finding employment in urban areas such as Yangon. Some students work in factories, others assist in clinics, and some engage in market-related jobs. One student reported, "I work as an aid at my cousin's clinic during the semester break" (Student 12). Another student responded, "I work at a factory to cover my school fees" (Student 17). Some participants responded that they had never expected such an environment and had found it to be a fantastic experience for them.

### **Mental Well-being and Learning**

**Academic pressure:** Academic pressure is one of the most influential factors affecting the mental well-being of students, particularly for third-year students. Participants reported, "I often feel pressure regarding my academic performance" (Student 8). "I am afraid of English, and sometimes I have difficulty understanding academic concepts" (Student 14).

**Concern of left-behind family:** Students' concerns about their left-behind families significantly impact their academic achievement. Some students have lost contact with their families for a considerable time due to the impact of the civil war on their hometowns. Some students maintain contact with their families, but the connection in these areas is poor. Students responded, "I contacted my family once a month because the connection in my town was poor" (Student 23).

**Emotional stability and resilience:** Many student teachers felt "forced" to leave due to the inability to access teacher training programs in their area. It becomes clear that the environment they immerse themselves in profoundly impacts their mental well-being. Peer support and social networks have a

significant positive impact on the mental health of students. Students answered, "We consider teachers and peers as family, and we receive substantial mental support from them." Students vary in their emotional control. Some students frequently feel depressed, especially during the early days of a new EDC, while others manage their emotions well and adapt to various situations. In any case, they manage their emotions, and their religion serves as their best therapy. Students answered, "I meditate and read religious books when I feel depressed" (Student 30). "I sing songs when I feel stressed" (Student 17). "I talk with my friends and spend time with them when I feel stressed" (Student 1).

### **Political instability on career prospects**

**Academic disruption:** Political instability has had a negative impact on hurt their academic journey. They have had to move from one place to another, which has disrupted their lives. They do not have contact with their families and feel stressed about their safety, family financial support has limitations. Political instability has led to decreased concentration on education among students. Students answered, "I find it difficult to concentrate on education when I have no contact with my family" (Student 30). "I do not want to move from one school to another because it is costly and stressful" (Student 11).

**Community pressure:** Community pressure is among the most influential factors affecting career prospects. Some friends, relatives, and community members pressure students to drop out of government schools. Due to political problems, their community, friends, and even relatives discourage them from pursuing a career as a civil servant. This leads to uncertainty about continuing their education. One participant (Student 28) lives in a conflict-affected area, where combat frequently occurs. He answered, "My relatives and friends discouraged me from continuing my education. Some of them are actively participating in local defense forces in opposition to the national army and the current authoritarian regime. There is pressure on me to participate in the local defense force. I am determined to continue my education; however, I am also concerned about my family's security." (Student 28).

Student 17 responded, "Only 14% (7 out of 50) of my seniors from Hakha EDC continued their

education. Some go abroad for employment, others pursue education, while some join local armed groups. In my town, most people engage in traditional farming, and education is not widely encouraged- especially in my chosen profession as a teacher.”

**Career prospects:** They are uncertain about their ability to complete their education. After completing their education, the students expressed uncertainty about whether they would be appointed as teachers or if their place of service would remain stable. They also voiced concern about their career prospects due to the instability in their hometowns, even though most participants preferred to serve in their local communities. Students are also concerned about their career prospects because of the instability of their hometowns, as most participants prefer to serve in their hometowns. Participants answered, “I would serve as a teacher if there were political stability” (Student 12). “Will I continue my education or quit?” (Student 9). Students’ aspirations to become teachers are high, because Myanmar society regards teaching as a respected and noble profession. Student 10, a 20-year-old male, discussed, “Becoming a teacher has been my dream since childhood, and I truly love this profession. I believe it is well respected in my society.”

Another reason for the growing interest in becoming a teacher is the ongoing reform of the education system. Previously, education colleges (ECs) only offered diploma programs, and students had to attend universities to obtain a degree. Now, by upgrading ECs to Education Degree Colleges (EDCs), students can earn a degree directly. This upgrade serves as an incentive for many students to pursue a teaching career. Student 5 said, “I would like to complete my schooling and obtain a degree as quickly as possible to save time and costs. As you may already know, I now have the opportunity to earn a degree directly through the upgraded Education Degree Colleges (EDCs). This allows me to find employment sooner and support my family financially.”

The study identified the six themes mentioned above to address the first question. To address the second question, the researcher gathered students’ opinions on how to mitigate their challenges. The students responded in various ways. Some participants stated, “Political stability is the best way to solve these problems” (Student 4,6,20), “I believe that political

stability is the most effective way to address educational challenges” (Student 5). Another student confirmed that “some challenges were not encountered before political issues arose” (Student 17). Another respondent stated, “Some challenges I can control myself, except for political issues” (Student 6). A 17- year-old male, participant said, “How long will it take, and how long will I have to endure these challenges?” (Student 25).

One participant had a different opinion: “I was excited to relocate to a new place before experiencing the inadequacies of the new school” (Student 1). Another student confirmed, “I initially expected that the urban school would be better than my previous school, and I was surprised by that” (Student 28). One student suggested, “I don’t like relocating to a high school setting; it is underestimated” (Student 16). One participant expressed, “I enrolled in another school before relocating to my current school, which combines existing operational facilities, and I found it satisfying” (Student 8).

## Discussion

The study’s findings indicated that six key factors influencing the academic achievement of internal migrant student teachers consist of academic attainment, learning environment, social- cultural interaction, financial matters, mental well- being, and political stability. Academic attainment is a fundamental factor, while the learning environment influences students’ physical and psychological aspects, which can significantly shape educational success. Social-cultural interaction is essential, as it influences students’ sense of belonging, affecting their motivation and engagement. Financial matters represent a substantial barrier, impacting students’ daily convenience and capacity to concentrate on academic tasks. Moreover, mental well-being is crucial for sustaining emotional stability and fostering resilience in facing challenges. Finally, political stability influences the broader context in which students engage, impacting their opportunities and sense of security. Addressing these interconnected factors is essential for creating a supportive educational environment and improving the academic outcomes of educational migrant students.

Both this study and Maw’s (2018) findings show that financial hardship is one of the major barriers to education for migrant students. In my findings, many

students could not afford basic school expenses. Similarly, Maw (2018) noted that hidden costs and limited school access make education difficult for migrant families, despite being officially free for primary education. These shared findings highlight that economic challenges remain a common and unresolved issue for internal migrants in Myanmar.

The study of Akar (2010) on schools in migrant communities in Turkey highlighted several significant challenges, including overcrowded, under- resourced schools, low academic achievement, and intercultural issues. Students faced malnutrition and lacked emotional and physiological support, with teachers attributing their difficulties to language barriers, low socio- economic status, and poverty. These findings highlight a common theme: migrant children, regardless of location, face significant barriers to education due to a combination of socio- economic challenges, poor infrastructure, and lack of support systems. Both studies suggest that a more inclusive and flexible approach to educational policy is needed to address these multi-faceted challenges.

According to the study results, the same school settings or combining with currently operating schools should be considered instead of transitioning to a different school setting. Instead of relocating to a new place, combining with the currently running school (EDCs) is preferable. As shared during their interviews, participants highlighted several key challenges they faced while transitioning to a new school. They feel more comfortable transitioning to a settled EDC, whereas they are less comfortable in high school settings. Migration of an entire school is not a simple process; it requires careful consideration and thorough planning. Following the transfer, ongoing needs assessments are essential to ensure continued support and adaptation.

All participants expressed a desire to return to their hometowns and contribute to their communities after graduation, which would help address the resource shortage in those regions by utilizing their skills. However, research revealed a deficiency in community support across financial, mental, and other dimensions. Therefore, it is the responsibility of specific communities in Chin State to actively engage in and contribute to the development of their region. Students experience both emotional and physical insecurity

because the safety of their family members is also at risk. Encouraging positive communication with students' families who are left behind is also important. Community involvement is crucial for ensuring that development strategies are culturally appropriate and aligned with the unique socio-economic context of Chin State.

In conflict-affected areas, the primary driver of migration is the search for security, while education plays a secondary role. Although they face challenges in their educational journey, their determination and aspiration to continue pursuing education are admirable. In summary, according to their responses, two factors were identified that can mitigate their educational challenges. The first one is political stability. The second solution is relocating to the same school setting.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

The study included 27 students from Hakha EDC, and three from Hlegu EDC, as only three students were enrolled there. This may have skewed the findings toward students' experiences from Hakha EDC, although all are from conflict-affected areas, Chin State. Due to the sensitivity of the political conflict, information from these areas may be limited, even though the researcher assured participants of confidentiality and encourages their participation by emphasizing their safety. Future research should further explore these areas in greater depth. This study focuses solely on interviews; however, integrating other qualitative instruments, such as observations, could enhance the results. Because the Chin is a distinct ethnic group, it is intriguing to study gender issues within the context of their migration process. Although the study did not directly address gender issues, the researchers recommend including more participants in future research to better examine gender differences in educational migration. The study was limited to a region that may not adequately reflect the broader national landscape of student migration. Future research should examine the long-term impacts, of students' migration on various aspects such as students' outcomes.

Teacher educators should provide support and encouragement to help students understand academic subjects. The researchers recommend retaining original teachers, rather than relying on volunteer teachers, to maintain rapport with students and preserve familiarity

with local accents. As administrators, it is essential to conduct pilot testing and other necessary preparations before relocating schools. Community involvement remains limited. Although there is discouragement toward the military-led education system, communities need to consider alternative ways to educate the next generation. Policymakers should consider context-specific and innovative approaches to education in conflict-affected areas, ensuring that learning remains accessible, relevant, and safe for all learners.

## Conclusion

This study examines internal migration — from rural to urban areas— among students who relocate to access educational opportunities, with political problems identified as the primary driver of this movement. This qualitative research study offers valuable insights into the needs of educational migrant students in shaping educational policies. Internal migration presents challenges and opportunities; while it poses various difficulties, it can also create opportunities. The study aligns with migration theory, specifically, push and pull factors. It demonstrates how push factors, such as political instability, compel individuals to migrate, while pull factors, including the availability of education, a broader environment, and new employment opportunities, attract them to new locations.

This study highlights the importance of educational migration and emphasizes the need for a more systematic investigation to gain a deeper understanding of this process. This research provides valuable insights for teacher educators engaged in practical applications within the educational field, and policymakers endeavoring to enhance stability within the Myanmar education sector. In conclusion, the educational migration of students is important for policymakers, educational administrators, teacher educators, and communities, and thus, they all need to cooperate to support students' education amidst political problems.

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