**CHAPTER ONE**

**BASIC EDUCATION**

Myanmar's education system has its roots in Buddhist-based monastic education. Not only did commoners attend monastic schools, but princes also studied monasticism. The kings governed the country using the knowledge and skills they acquired from the monasteries. During the Pinya period, there were two types of monks: the *Aranyawathi* monks and the *Gamavathi* monks. *Aranyawathi* monks, who led “*Pwe Kyaung*” taught a combination of worldly knowledge, vocational education, and Buddhist teachings. These schools provided training in skills such as swordsmanship, spear-throwing, elephant and horse riding, and astrology—subjects that were essential for the princes. *Gamavathi* monks, who led “*Tae Kyaung*”, focused primarily on Buddhist teachings, with a strong emphasis on Buddhist literature. The monastic education curriculum was deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, contributing to the cultivation of good morals and ethics. Thus, monastic education offered both secular and metaphysical knowledge, bridging practical skills and spiritual development.[[1]](#footnote-1) As monastic education evolved to encompass a wider range of livelihood activities, vocational subjects were also introduced.[[2]](#footnote-2) Historically, there were two forms of education: formal education and informal education.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Formal education follows a prescribed curriculum and includes tests based on proficiency. Upon passing a level, students advance to more advanced curricula. After successfully completing all required courses, a certificate of completion is awarded. Informal education, on the other hand, is more flexible in terms of age, time, and location. It is designed for individuals who are unable to attend formal school or pursue education for various reasons. This form of education takes place without strict time constraints and is offered in convenient settings.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In 1948, the year of Myanmar's independence, there were 4,619 monastic schools across the country. Sir Arthur Phayre, the High Commissioner, was the first to study monastic education during colonial times. The curriculum in these monastic schools was rooted in Buddhist scriptures and included subjects such as grammar, mathematics, ethics (Niti), medicine, and astrology. Monastic education went beyond basic literacy, offering knowledge in Pali literature, Buddhist teachings, history, moral values, and fostering a sense of patriotism. Sir Arthur Phayre presented a report to the Governor-General of India, highlighting the significance of monastic schools to Myanmar and its people. In response, the Governor-General sought to establish an educational system that suited the needs of the colonial administration while addressing perceived deficiencies in monastic education. One of the key measures taken was the introduction of Christian missionary schools, aimed at producing intellectuals to serve the colonial government and promoting Christian missions. Christian missionary activities had already begun in Myanmar as early as 1800.[[5]](#footnote-5) As a result of the colonial education system, Myanmar's monastic education gradually declined. Nevertheless, until the onset of World War II, monastic schools remained central to the country's literary education, playing a pivotal role in the history of Burmese education.[[6]](#footnote-6) The British government's educational reform introduced a modernized and restructured education system.[[7]](#footnote-7) Under British rule, Myanmar's education system lacked a formal departmental structure. Although Western education was introduced during the colonial period, the monastic curriculum remained largely unchanged. A School Textbook Committee, composed of 15 members, was established during this time, and between 1881 and 1884, the Department of Education published over 30 textbooks.[[8]](#footnote-8) In 1867, the Department of Education was established, and educational activities were systematically managed.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The colonial education curriculum included the teaching of English, along with subjects such as mathematics, science, and geography. However, the system produced only a small number of professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and engineers. The primary aim of colonial education was to cultivate a modern intelligentsia capable of providing the colonial government with petty officers and clerks for bureaucratic administration.[[10]](#footnote-10) During the colonial period, as more primary school graduates entered the workforce, high school graduates also saw increased success in securing employment. To obtain suitable jobs, the educational journey was divided into three stages: from primary to seventh grade, from seventh grade to matriculation, and from matriculation to a university degree, with increasing emphasis on each stage. In elementary education, subjects such as English, mathematics, and history were taught by Burmese teachers, while middle and high school instruction was carried out by English and Indian teachers. This created challenges for Burmese students, particularly in understanding instruction. Higher education in Yangon began in public schools as early as 1876. In Sittwe and Mawlamyine, however, secondary education was temporarily suspended due to a shortage of teachers. Despite these difficulties, the government implemented a policy requiring each province to have at least one high school. As a result, the English-Burmese High School in Yangon expanded its role, becoming a central institution in the colonial education system.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The Burmese people's struggle for independence began in 1920, when educated young students and monks rejected the British government's dyarchy and demanded self-government. National education also took root in 1920, marked by a student strike against British oppression and the University Act. Myoma National School, established during the colonial era, produced political and military leaders, as well as the nation's most renowned athletes, film artists, musicians, and literary figures. This school became a symbol of instilling patriotism in its students. The Myoma National school was inaugurated on 17 December 1920, at the site of U Ariya School, where the student strike camp had been located on Tawra Road in Bahan. Master U Ba lwin was its first headmaster.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Japan's current education policy aims to establish a system that emphasizes industrial and vocational skills to support the country's development. A solid understanding of history, economics, and foreign languages is crucial for the global recognition and prominence of the Burmese people.[[13]](#footnote-13) During the Japanese occupation of Burma, there was only one type of public school, unlike the earlier system, which included public schools, local education group schools, government-supported schools, and private schools. The education system was structured into three levels: primary, middle, and high school, which correspond to today's primary, post-primary middle, and high school levels. Primary schools were established in villages, while middle and high schools were located in small towns and cities. Additionally, a system of free education was implemented across all schools.[[14]](#footnote-14) During the Japanese Occupation period, primary schools were established in larger villages, while middle schools were set up in smaller townships. High schools were only opened in major townships. Instead of assigning just one teacher per village school, up to twelve teachers were appointed, depending on the number of students. The Japanese also introduced a free education system.[[15]](#footnote-15) The curriculum remained largely consistent with that of the British, but notably, they removed words and elements that had been adopted under British rule.[[16]](#footnote-16)

On 1 August 1942, General Eda, the Commander-in-Chief of Japan, issued Military Order No. 12 concerning education. It stated:

“In education, the government must reduce the influence of English and the United States as much as possible, and instead, instill the spirit of East Asian development. Additionally, the use of the Nippon language should be encouraged wherever possible, while the use of English is discouraged. Special attention should be given to ensuring that young people are healthy and motivated to pursue education. Moreover, they must be open-minded and show interest in all sectors of industry.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

In Myanmar, new educational policies and projects were introduced during the AFPFL period. In 1948, the Government of the Union of Myanmar announced an educational policy titled the “Education Plan of the Government of the Union of Myanmar”.[[18]](#footnote-18) The declaration mandates free and compulsory primary education, the implementation of a class classification system within schools, and the division of classes as follows:

(a) Elementary school (kindergarten to fourth grade),

(b) Secondary school (fifth to seventh grade), and

(c) High school (eighth to ninth grade).[[19]](#footnote-19)

On April 30, 1962, the Myanmar Socialist Education Policy, implemented by the Revolutionary Council of the Union of Myanmar, was published. The National Revolutionary Council emphasized the need to reform the existing education system, which was viewed as inadequate for career development. The goal was to establish a new education system grounded in strong moral values, prioritizing science and supporting career development. The Revolutionary Council aimed not only to ensure that everyone had the right to basic education but also to provide special encouragement to intellectually gifted and hardworking individuals pursuing higher education.

Studying the state of schools in mountainous and border regions presents numerous challenges. The Revolutionary Council's policy aimed to provide basic education to all ethnic groups. However, significant difficulties were encountered in offering instruction in the native languages of these communities. Teachers sent from the mainland struggled to teach effectively due to language barriers. While efforts were made to publish textbooks in ethnic languages, by 1970-71, only Kachin textbooks had been published and printed, Karen textbooks were still being compiled, and Shan textbooks were still in the printing stage.[[20]](#footnote-20) Despite the government's efforts, ethnic textbooks have not been effectively utilized to this day. To address the weakness in basic education in these regions and the shortage of qualified teachers, scholarships were awarded to students from border regions starting in 1962. Additionally, in 1964, the Union Ethnic Peoples Development Institute was established to train ethnic youth. Between 1962 and 1968, the Institute trained 3,147 trainees.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**(b) Objectives of Basic Education, 1966**

The Revolutionary Council enacted the Basic Education Law in 1966. The objectives outlined in this law are as follows:

1. To ensure that every citizen of the Union of Myanmar receives a sound basic education and develops into a healthy, intellectually capable worker with good character.
2. To cultivate citizens with the spirit and ability to build and sustain a Myanmar socialist, who understand and adhere to the principles of Burma socialist Programmee.
3. To provide vocational education at appropriate levels for the construction and maintenance of Myanmar's socialist society.
4. To prioritize scientific education that promotes increased productivity and vocational skills.
5. To establish a strong educational foundation for continuing to university education.

When the Constitution of the Union Socialist Republic of Myanmar was adopted in 1973, the Revolutionary Council repealed the 1966 Basic Education Law and enacted a new Basic Education Law to align with the new constitution. In addition to the five objectives above, the 1973 law further emphasized the importance of arts education for the preservation and development of the nation's culture, arts, and literature.

On 3 January 1973, the Constitution of the Union Socialist Republic of Myanmar was enacted. Key provisions related to education include:

Section 10: The state is responsible for nurturing the physical, intellectual, and moral development of young people.

Article 152: (1) Every citizen has the right to education. (2) Burmese is the common language, and there is also the right to teach other ethnic languages. (3) Every citizen is required to complete compulsory basic education as prescribed by law.

In 1974, the Burma Socialist Programmee Party announced the following educational policies and objectives:[[22]](#footnote-22)

1. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to receive basic education.
2. To cultivate a strong socialist character.
3. To develop and promote the necessary science and technology for building the socialist system.
4. To produce scholars, intellectuals, skilled workers, and knowledgeable experts who will contribute to the construction of socialism.
5. To train and nurture workers to become well-rounded individuals.
6. To allow those with superior intellect and diligence to pursue university-level education.
7. To enable workers to obtain university or post-graduate degrees while continuing to work.

Although the government introduced policies under the new Basic Education Law, the overall quality of education began to decline due to the teacher-centered teaching system.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**(c) Basic Education Policy of the Burma Socialist Programmee Party**

The basic education policy outlined in the Education Policy and Objectives published by the Burma Socialist Programmee Party in 1974 includes the following points:[[24]](#footnote-24)

1. To organize pre-primary and primary education systematically, fostering socialist spirit, character, discipline, and social awareness.
2. To instill discipline in students from the earliest stages of education.
3. To make primary education compulsory at the appropriate time and gradually expand it as the country’s situation allows.
4. To ensure basic literacy for every citizen, promoting literacy as a national movement.
5. To aim for comprehensive development in all educational areas.
6. To align the education system with production, incorporating vocational training related to local industries alongside basic education.
7. To integrate education with the workplace, enhancing the knowledge, skills, and expertise of workers and enabling them to pursue university-level education.
8. To introduce pre-vocational skills from basic to secondary education levels, familiarizing students with manufacturing fundamentals and offering comprehensive training.
9. To implement a plan for increasing vocational skills and access to higher education.
10. To re-examine and improve the classification of education levels and the curriculum for different levels of education.
11. To develop strong, healthy citizens by promoting sports, national defense preparedness, physical education, basic military training, and school health programs as part of the basic education curriculum.
12. To establish training programs that foster socialist character and behavior.
13. To incorporate the teaching of "ratha" education to develop "ratha" sensitivities.
14. To emphasize the teaching of Burmese at all levels of education.
15. To enhance the examination and assessment system.
16. To implement policies promoting ethnic unity and development.
17. To introduce basic political science subjects into appropriate classes within basic education schools.

**Basic education planning**

In 1962, the Revolutionary Council government implemented economic, social, and political reforms to align with its policy of improving Myanmar's basic education system. During this period, the Department of Education, in coordination with the National Plan, developed a preliminary social education plan. This plan included primary education as a key component of the country's broader economic strategy, which encompassed basic education, industrial agriculture, vocational education, and higher education. The primary education plan involved the following processes.

**(a) Educational Extension Processes**

1. Expand and establish primary schools to ensure universal access to basic education.
2. Increase the number of post-primary schools and university colleges in response to the growing number of primary-level students.[[25]](#footnote-25)
3. Expand infrastructure, including buildings and furniture, and allocate the necessary financial resources.
4. Broaden access to education through the expansion of scholarships and grants.

**(b) Educational Activities**

1. Reduce the wastage of primary education.
2. Establish a strong foundation for secondary education to facilitate further learning at higher levels.
3. Align educational pathways with the requirements of the economic plan and national development needs, ensuring that students have access to high-quality education based on their abilities.
4. Develop methods to closely integrate education with regional industrial, agricultural, and livestock activities.
5. Improve the teaching capabilities of schools and enhance management skills to promote good discipline.
6. Develop a modern, effective examination system.
7. Establish educational channels at the post-primary and university levels to produce skilled professionals who will benefit the country.

**(c) Socialist Character Training Activities**

1. Ensure that trainees in teacher education departments acquire and practice socialist moral values.
2. Implement the practical development of education in schools.
3. Prepare school textbooks to support the development of socialist values.

The preliminary education planning period was established for 1964 to 1970. During this period, key aspects such as the number of schools, industrial and vocational institutions, colleges and universities, required funding, and the number of teachers, buildings, and furniture were addressed.[[26]](#footnote-26) In December 1967, a significant event was held to review and discuss the progress of education officials.[[27]](#footnote-27) The Examination and Evaluation Seminar was held over four days, from 29 December 1970, to 1 January 1971, at the University of Arts and Sciences, Yangon. The purpose of the seminar was to “conveniently discuss and advise on examination and inspection issues, university admission policies, and vocational science school examination matters in line with the new system-based education”.[[28]](#footnote-28) The theme of the seminar was “Learning, Testing”. In June-July 1971, the Government of the Union of Myanmar adopted a plan for the implementation of the first four-year plan under the Burma Socialist Programmee Party.

1. Ensure that schools, teachers, and students operate according to the established plan.
2. Provide students from the secondary to university levels with education in the manufacturing industry (or operations) through a combination of theoretical learning and practical experience.
3. Facilitate opportunities for secondary school graduates to enter the workforce, while allowing those who wish to pursue higher education to continue their studies alongside employment.
4. Universities should admit students based on the country's needs, and, if possible, inform them in advance of their assigned department and the type of profession they will prepare for.
5. Enable village cooperatives to take responsibility for school buildings, furniture, and supplies within their communities.[[29]](#footnote-29)

In 1974, the Burma Socialist Programmee Party announced the following educational policies and objectives:[[30]](#footnote-30)

1. To ensure that everyone who desires basic education has access to it.
2. To promote the development of a strong socialist character.
3. To advance and disseminate the necessary science and technology for building a socialist system.
4. To train individuals to become well-rounded workers.
5. To allow those who are intellectually gifted and diligent to pursue university education.
6. To enable working individuals to obtain a university degree, allowing them to study at the graduate level while remaining employed.

**Education Extension Activities**

Myanmar's socialist education policy and goals emphasize that “everyone has the opportunity to learn basic education”. To achieve this objective, two main activities have been undertaken.[[31]](#footnote-31) The first is the construction of new schools, the expansion of school dormitories, and the acceptance of more students, depending on the country’s financial resources. Special emphasis has been placed on improving education in mountainous, remote, and provincial areas. The second task is to reduce the number of elderly illiterates.

In line with the goal of making basic education accessible to all, the following table illustrates the progress made in basic education over the past ten years, particularly in the expansion of primary, middle, and high school levels.[[32]](#footnote-32)

**Table (2) Growth of the number of schools**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Graded school** | **1961-62** | **1970-71** | **Increased schools** |
| Elementary school | 12851 | 15534 | 2683 |
| Middle school | 625 | 1033 | 408 |
| High school | 308 | 527 | 219 |

**Table (3) Growth in the number of students**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **1961-62** | **1970-71** | **Increased Students** |
| Elementary level | 1681908 | 3177739 | 1495831 |
| Secondary level | 189100 | 624538 | 435438 |
| High level | 65059 | 167714 | 102714 |

**Table (4) Growth in the number of Teachers**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **1961-62** | **1970-71** | **Increased Teachers** |
| Elementary level | 40280 | 59042 | 19555 |
| Secondary level | 6370 | 14264 | 7890 |
| High level | 2331 | 6775 | 4444 |

Since 1962, during the Revolutionary Council government, reforms have been introduced in the primary education sector. The traditional four-year system was extended to a five-year system, covering kindergarten through fourth grade.[[33]](#footnote-33) Every child who reaches the age of five is entitled to attend kindergarten, and by the age of ten, they are expected to complete primary education. In implementing basic education reforms, efforts to expand educational access were conducted alongside initiatives to improve educational quality. The key areas of focus for educational development included:

1. Reforms in management oversight
2. Changes in the curriculum and content
3. Compilation and publication of school textbooks
4. Teacher education and training
5. Production and distribution of teaching aids
6. Promotion of school library activities
7. Support for practical education development
8. Fostering cooperation among parents, teachers, and students

The main goal of basic education is to provide a well-rounded education encompassing knowledge, skills, excellence, strong character, and effective communication abilities.[[34]](#footnote-34) Education management was structured through a combination of central control and regional administration. Within this centralized management system, the Ministry of Education established the Central Council of Universities, the Council of University Education, the Council of Basic Education, and the Council of Industrial Agriculture and Livelihood. These councils were tasked with supervising and regulating university education, basic education, vocational training in industrial agriculture, curriculum development, and examinations. To expand educational activities and increase spending on educational initiatives, further investments have also been made in this sector.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Under the 1964 Revolutionary Council government, the General Education Seminar was held at Mandalay University in Mandalay from 19 to 24 October 1964, lasting six days. The seminar aimed to develop a socialist education system aligned with Myanmar's socialist path, seeking ideas and strategies to reform the existing education system and establish a new model that would support both educational and career development. The seminar's theme was “Towards a New Socialist Education System”. Primary, middle, and high school teachers, along with education representatives from each district, attended the event. Colonel Hlahan, the Minister of Education, served as a patron, and he, along with other education representatives, discussed curriculum reform, enhancing teacher quality, improving examination methods, and effectively implementing educational development initiatives.[[36]](#footnote-36) The primary discussions focused on educational management for implementing the new basic education system, establishing school libraries, completing school furniture needs, compiling and publishing school textbooks, and initiating courses to enhance teacher training departments.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The 1968 Basic Education Seminar was held at Mandalay University from 9 to 12 October 1968.[[38]](#footnote-38) This seminar aimed to assess the first-year outcomes of the new basic education system, which had been implemented during the 1967-68 school year, to ensure alignment between its practical application and its intended goals. The seminar's theme was “Basic Education System: Its Foundation”.[[39]](#footnote-39) On 14 February 1972, government reforms were introduced to develop a new administrative system for the Union of Myanmar. As part of this reorganization, the Department of Basic Education was established.[[40]](#footnote-40) On 16 March further restructuring led to the transformation of the “Myanmar Education Directorate” into the “Basic Education Department”, although this department has since been dissolved.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Table (6) The number of teachers and students in the states**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **High School** | | | **Middle School** | | | **Primary School** | | |
| **School** | **Teacher** | **student** | **School** | **Teacher** | **student** | **School** | **Teacher** | **student** |
| 1961-62 | 42 | 189 | 4070 | 119 | 600 | 16,540 | 1438 | 3825 | 159,245 |
| 1968-69 | 82 | 621 | 15195 | 227 | 1208 | 45,714 | 2328 | 7776 | 367,760 |
| 1969-70 | 83 | 648 | 17,331 | 234 | 1458 | 50,108 | 2534 | 8280 | 391,970 |
| 1970-71 | 84 | 722 | 19,333 | 244 | 1520 | 61,027 | 2724 | 8705 | 41,715 |

The system of assessment through examination was introduced with the establishment of elementary schools, as these tests serve to measure a student’s academic ability and knowledge. In 1942, among the fourteen types of government-administered examinations, those related to basic education were as follows:[[42]](#footnote-42)

(a) English High School Examination

(b) English-Burmese High School Examination

(c) English Secondary Scholarship Examination

(d) English-Burmese Secondary Scholarship Examination

(e) Myanmar High School Examination

(f) Myanmar Secondary Examination

(g) Burmese High School Teacher Examination

(h) Burmese Secondary Teacher Examination

(i) Kindergarten Teacher Examination

At the basic education level, fourth-grade examinations conducted by the government were overseen by regional examination teams. Beginning with the 1967-68 school year, the seventh-grade government examination shifted to an eighth-grade examination, now supervised by state examination boards. The ninth-grade and matriculation examinations, managed by Yangon University, required students to pass the ninth-grade examination to qualify for matriculation. The university entrance examination is the most pivotal in Myanmar's examination system. Since 1966-67, university examination results have been categorized into two lists: (A) and (B). Students on List (A) are eligible to attend both university colleges and vocational colleges, while those on List (B) may attend vocational universities and colleges with the same rights as (A) list students. The university entrance exam thus became a determinant of students’ life goals. University entrance exams were evaluated not only by university instructors but also by high school principals and teachers.[[43]](#footnote-43) A four-day examination seminar was held from 29 December 1970, to 1 January 1971, at Yangon University of Arts and Sciences. Its purpose was to discuss and provide guidance on examination, inspection, university admissions, and vocational education assessment issues, ensuring alignment with the new system-based education model.[[44]](#footnote-44)

**Table ( ) Roster of University Entrance Examination Candidates and Successful Passers**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **High School Students** | **Successful Passers** | **percentage** |
| 1961-62 | 65059 | 3131 | 5 |
| 1962-63 | 82182 | 3660 | 4 |
| 1963-64 | 88046 | 5884 | 6 |
| 1964-65 | 90439 | 7893 | 10 |
| 1965-66 | 125214 | 10711 | 9 |
| 1966-67 | 149646 | 16324 | 10 |
| 1967-68 | 97658 | 26219 | 27 |
| 1968-69 | 107467 | 23493 | 22 |
| 1969-70 | 133278 | 29004 | 22 |

In the field of education, teachers have been trained, but there remain significant challenges in producing qualified educators. During Prime Minister U Nu’s tenure, students who had completed grade seven were offered an emergency three-month teacher training program.[[45]](#footnote-45) Under the Revolutionary Government, those who passed both levels (a) and (b) of the basic education examination were provided with a year of teacher training. While teacher quality may be emphasized, the focus on meeting the required quantity of teachers remains essential. Between 1962 and 1972, there were only 12,163 primary education teachers.[[46]](#footnote-46) During this period, the the number of students increased from over half a million to more than three million, yet the number of teachers remained at just 71,196. Consequently, the student-teacher ratio indicated that each teacher was responsible for teaching an average of forty-three students. Additionally, the number of teachers who were employed but either did not report to work or relocated to urban areas remains uncalculated. This is partly due to the reluctance of city-appointed teachers to serve long-term in remote mountainous regions. Contributing factors included significant disparities in social status between rural and urban areas, transportation difficulties, and instances of unrest rather than the presence of organized armed groups. Furthermore, qualified male teachers were often unwilling to accept long-term primary teaching roles in underdeveloped areas. When opportunities arose, they frequently transferred to other government departments with clearer paths for advancement. This trend partly explains why female teachers came to outnumber male teachers in the basic education sector. In 1961-62, only two secondary-level schools operated, staffed by seventy-eight teachers, while six primary schools were staffed by fifty-five teachers. By 1971-72, three secondary-level schools were staffed by 120 teachers, and 11 primary schools employed 160 teachers.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The Revolutionary Council government actively promoted school education and improved public access to education. The country's economic growth and its industrial and agricultural development were hindered by a large population with low literacy rates. Consequently, the Revolutionary Council prioritized eradicating illiteracy through a public movement. In relation to universal literacy, the Political Report at the 1965 Party Seminar stated, “The most fundamental level of education, which everyone should have the opportunity to attain, is literacy. For the socialist system to be successfully established, everyone must achieve a higher level of awareness and progress, grounded in a wealth of knowledge. For this to occur, it is evident that everyoneliteracy is essential. Therefore, reducing and eventually eliminating illiteracy should be pursued as a mass movement.[[48]](#footnote-48) In 1964, the Myanmar Literacy Movement, a public initiative, was launched to support elderly, illiterate individuals in Myanmar in gaining literacy skills. During the summer of 1964-65, four volunteer students from the Yangon Teacher Training Institute conducted literacy experiments for the elderly in East Sanpya Village, Meikhtila Township.[[49]](#footnote-49) The Revolutionary Council government established and implemented a plan to eradicate illiteracy to build a strong foundation for a socialist economic system, support improvements in manufacturing, and facilitate the spread of ideas and knowledge. This illiteracy eradication plan began in 1965, with initial years focused on preparing strategies for its implementation. Practical tests were conducted to refine teaching methods and determine effective instruction periods. Illiteracy eradication was organized as a public movement, beginning with a pilot project during the summer school holidays of 1965, from April 19 to May 18. Three "R" schools conducted one-month courses across 556 locations in 37 state educational districts. As a result of these efforts, 66,771 people gained literacy in the summer of 1966, 68,497 in 1967, and 29,224 in 1968. Teachers and students collaborated with local volunteers, while additional outreach used film, radio, music, and art to mobilize national support. From 1969 to 1973, literacy campaigns expanded to achieve district-wide success in 12 districts. The Myanmar Literacy Movement eventually gained recognition from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[[50]](#footnote-50) The following table details the outcomes of the illiteracy eradication campaign.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**Table (7) Nationwide Literacy Campaign and Results**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Year** | **Number**  **of Camps** | **Lecturers** | **number of attendees** | **A literate person** | |
| **A literate person** | **A little literate** |
| 1 | 1966 | 2530 | 18032 | 173733 | 66771 | 66363 |
| 2 | 1967 | 2631 | 20541 | 145376 | 68497 | 58804 |
| 3 | 1968 | 9825 | 93177 | 93177 | 29223 | 26511 |

Building on insights gained from the initial tests, efforts were expanded to include literacy programs for the elderly, the compilation of instructional materials for students and teachers, studies on effective teaching methods, and initiatives to encourage community-wide involvement. At the 1968 Party Seminar, a new approach was proposed: rather than conducting short-term courses nationwide during the summer, it was decided to concentrate efforts within a single district and conduct two intensive literacy courses. Mithila District was selected for this initiative, and on 25 March 1969, three "Rs" literacy courses were launched in factories, workshops, and villages across the district. Local residents, alongside university students who volunteered as teachers, facilitated these efforts, with additional support through donated books. By 13 June 1971, the entire Mithila District had achieved literacy, representing a significant milestone in the campaign.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**Table (8) Status of Literacy in Meikhtila Pilot District**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Townships** | **village tract** | **Total Villages** | **Total Camps** | **Population aged**  **15 to 55 years** | **Illiterate population between 15 and 55 years** | | | **Number of literates between 15 and 55 years** | | | **Volunteers** |
| **Male** | **Female** | **Total** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |  |
| Meikhtila | 59 | 435 | 387 | 126817 | 1498 | 22559 | 24057 | 1437 | 21961 | 23390 | 1548 |
| Mahlaing | 53 | 261 | 341 | 77187 | 1415 | 16579 | 17994 | 1388 | 16173 | 17561 | 2569 |
| Tharsi | 81 | 238 | 256 | 77240 | 3647 | 22869 | 26516 | 3447 | 22216 | 25663 | 1548 |
| Wundwin | 69 | 219 | 187 | 87014 | 1673 | 18493 | 20166 | 1490 | 17534 | 19024 | 2017 |
| Total | 262 | 1153 | 1171 | 368258 | 8233 | 800500 | 88733 | 7762 | 77884 | 85638 | 7682 |

**Curriculum**

As part of the educational reforms implemented by the Revolutionary Council, a new curriculum was introduced by the Post-Primary Education Board for the 1961-62 academic year, replacing the Pyitawthar-based curriculum that had been in use since 1954. This revised curriculum remained in effect until 1967. The curriculum details are outlined as follows:

**Elementary Level**

1. Myanmar Language
2. Basic Mathematics
3. National History
4. Geography
5. General Science
6. Public Policy
7. Home Science
8. Crafts
9. Physical Education
10. Painting
11. Basic Agriculture

**Middle Level**

1. Myanmar Language
2. English
3. Basic Mathematics (arithmetic, algebra, geometry)
4. National History
5. Geography
6. Basic General Science
7. Public Policy
8. Home Science
9. Industrial Arts
10. Physical Education
11. Painting
12. Basic Agriculture

**Higher Level Curriculum**

(High School Leaving Certificate and University Entrance Exam)

**(a) Non-compulsory Subjects**

1. Burmese
2. English
3. Mathematics (Numerical Algebra and Geometry)

**(b) University Entrance Track**

Students intending to pursue university studies may select two subjects from the following options:

1. National History
2. Geography
3. Public Policy (Ethic)
4. Pali
5. General Science
6. Economic Cooperation
7. Physics
8. Chemistry

**(c) Non-University Track**

Students not planning to attend university may choose two subjects from the following vocational options:

1. Agriculture
2. Handicraft Industry
3. Burmese Calligraphy and Typing
4. English Shorthand and Typing
5. Accounting
6. Small Business Organization
7. Secretarial Practice
8. Domestic Science
9. Fine Arts
10. Physical Education

In the general curriculum above, the primary and secondary levels serve as foundational curricula, while the higher level enables students to continue vocational education if desired.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Under the Burma Revolutionary Council, a new system-based education model was implemented. One of the practical development initiatives, aligned with the comprehensive education policy of this new basic education system, was the Human Resources Project. Known as the *Luyeechon* Project, it began in 1964. The term "*Luyeechon*" was introduced by the education department of the Revolutionary Government, with Joint Secretary and Deputy Minister Yae Tun serving as chairman and junior Secretary U Thaung Htut acting as convener of an eleven-member committee. A small group of directors coordinated this initiative to support practical educational development.

The objectives of the Luyeechon Project were as follows:[[54]](#footnote-54)

1. To foster the emergence of more academically outstanding students.
2. To increase active participation in educational and practical development activities.
3. To encourage knowledge gathering and an understanding of global contexts to promote socialist principles.
4. To develop beneficial and constructive competition within the country.
5. To enhance participation in sports, thereby improving sports achievements and physical fitness.
6. To build confidence in the construction of a socialist society.
7. To provide training guidelines for merit award recipients to serve as role models, so they may, in turn, teach in townships, schools, and districts, setting an example for other students.

The *Luyeechon* (Talent) Project Central Committee selects talented individuals at various educational stages across townships, districts, states, and regions, encompassing science, colleges, and universities. The committee identifies candidates who demonstrate personal excellence at the school, township, district, and state levels. The final selection is approved by the Central Committee of the *Luyeechon* Project, with evaluations based on 60% intellectual ability and 40% practical educational development. The first *Luyeechon* project was implemented in the summer of 1964, focusing on selecting top-performing students from grades seven through ten. By 1965, the Luyeechon Project expanded to include talent centers in industrial high schools, agricultural high schools, science programs, colleges, and universities. Since 1966, teacher training departments have also been involved, and as of 1976, the Institute of Ethnic Development has selected additional trainees. The table below illustrates the outstanding individuals selected during the Revolutionary Council period.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Table (9) *Luyeechon* demographics (194-1973)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Times** | **Year** | **Basic schools** | **Mathematics** | **Industrial School Science** | **Teacher education** | **College University** | **Total** |
| 1 | 1964 | 254 | - | - | - | - | 204 |
| 2 | 1965 | 245 | - | 1 | - | 50 | 296 |
| 3 | 1966 | 207 | 11 | 9 | 6 | 65 | 300 |
| 4 | 1967 | 204 | 13 | 13 | 6 | 65 | 307 |
| 5 | 1968 | 206 | 7 | 13 | 8 | 65 | 305 |
| 6 | 1969 | 203 | 12 | 19 | 7 | 63 | 319 |
| 7 | 1970 | 209 | 15 | 14 | 7 | 62 | 322 |
| 8 | 1971 | 207 | 15 | 13 | 8 | 64 | 324 |
| 9 | 1972 | 206 | 4 | 13 | 8 | 66 | 311 |
| 10 | 1973 | 208 | 5 | 14 | 8 | 60 | 309 |

Source: Thaung Htut, 2000, 230

According to the *Lulyuchon* project, selected participants were divided into two camps: Ngapali and Inlay *Lulyuchon*. These participants traveled to their designated areas, forming a mobile *Lulyuchon* camp for approximately eleven days. Afterward, all participants regrouped and resided together at the Yangon *Lulyuchon* camp for an additional seven days.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The review report on the basic education sector during the Revolutionary Council period highlights several needs and weaknesses. According to the report, there were 13,284 primary schools with 1,746,214 students in 1962–63. By 1967–68, the number of primary schools had increased by 983, serving a total of 2,791,190 students. At the secondary level, the number of schools grew from 651 in 1962–63 to 878 in 1967–68, with student enrollment rising from 192,871 to 488,648. Additionally, high schools increased from 322 in 1962–63 to 519 in 1967–68, with enrollment rising from 97,853 to 129,697. However, due to the growing students, schools increasingly relied on financial contributions from students' parents for building maintenance and furnishing.[[57]](#footnote-57) Furthermore, challenges persisted in the basic education sector, especially in training qualified teachers.[[58]](#footnote-58)

The use of the Burmese language as the primary medium of instruction in Myanmar's basic education sector, where numerous ethnic groups coexist, has been largely effective in central regions. However, significant challenges have arisen in the mountainous areas of states with limited Burman populations. The Revolutionary Council government did not address strategies to resolve this issue. Additionally, the separation of science and arts tracks based on students’ scores led to an emphasis on science, diminishing the importance of humanities subjects such as history, philosophy, psychology, literature, and sociology. In 1974, Myanmar transitioned from military rule to a one-party dictatorship. Article 152 of the 1974 Constitution declared that all citizens have the right to education and that basic education is compulsory.[[59]](#footnote-59)

**Review**

During the Revolutionary Council period, a review of basic education policy identified several areas needing improvement. Buddhist-based monastic education persisted, while new laws were enacted to expand primary education. Schools and university colleges were established, and curricula were revised according to the new system. In Burma, where many ethnic groups reside, the Burmese-language-based education system was effective in central regions but faced significant challenges in mountainous areas. According to the 1974 Constitution, every citizen was guaranteed the right to education, and basic education was made compulsory. Overall, the reforms in the basic education sector during the Revolutionary Council era centralized the previously independent education system that had been implemented by the former democratic government. The literacy eradication program for rural populations without access to education proved successful, and initiatives in human resource development and practical education were undertaken. However, issues such as policy instability and frequent changes persisted after the dissolution of the Revolutionary Council and during the Pathway Party era.

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