

KANT KAW EDUCATION CENTRE: A CASE STUDY OF ETHNICALLY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR PEACEBUILDING IN MYANMAR

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The concept of peace education highlights the role that education plays in the field of peace and conflict studies. Because it is an emerging field in development, there is a strong call for in-depth studies of particular cases across the world, such as this research project. This project joins a recent surge of interest in researching Myanmar, investigating in particular how ethnically-inclusive education promotes peacebuilding. It focuses on the case of one particular school which aims to deliver peace education in a movement for social change. Reflecting the particularities of Myanmar's social, political and cultural characteristics, the conclusions of this research show that the specific nature of the country's conflict shapes how education for peacebuilding is understood and delivered in the example case. Indeed, it emerges that civil society and community-based networks and organisations are thought to be key pillars of Myanmar's transition from conflict to peace. Furthermore, the usefulness of peace education as a universal goal is questioned. More attention must be paid to the *process* of peace education in developing contexts, and what outcomes are desired. Many of these regions are facing the challenge of entering the 'globalised' world which creates tension between the local and international interests of education for peacebuilding. The ongoing conflict and instability in Myanmar is having an inestimable effect on its young people and their possibilities for the future. Through education, they may be able to access different opportunities, and contribute to the nation's transition to post-conflict. For this reason, it is crucial to understand the ways in which schooling can support positive social and political developments in promoting peace and building cohesion.

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INTRODUCTION

This research project engages with the field of conflict and peacebuilding, focusing on the role of education in Myanmar's pathway to peace. Myanmar is transitioning out of conflict which has lasted on and off since independence in 1948. Conflicts result from a combination of social and political oppression from a half-century of authoritarian military governance, and ongoing, often violent tensions between several ethnic and cultural groups. This research focuses on the latter. Historically, relations within and between these groups have often been marked by conflict around desires for self-determination, and freedom of religion and language, as well as struggles over the control of resources. In this climate of confusion and transition, Myanmar's education system plays a critical role in reconciling difference, building stable and peaceful relations, and promoting social cohesion across the country. This project studies the case of 'ethnically-inclusive' education in Yangon, and the relationship with peacebuilding.

1.1 What is "Ethnically-Inclusive" Education?

The concept of inclusive education has gained momentum over the course of the 20th century as education philosophy has been influenced by discourses of human rights and capabilities. A broad definition comes from Block et al (2014, p. 1340)

An inclusive learning environment is one that provides a curriculum that caters to a diverse range of students and accommodates diverse voices and perspectives so that all children feel they belong and can contribute.

Today, there are several international conventions and treaties around the nature of inclusive education (see e.g. UDHR 1948, CRC 1989, UNESCO 2009). They underline the international community's determination to make education open and accessible to a wide range of social groups, and responsive to their needs as well as the needs of the state. For a long time, the focus of inclusion has been on students with disabilities or special needs, however, it is shifting to include a wider range of identity markers, such as cultural background or ethnicity.

Inclusive education is critical not only for the personal growth of students, but also for inclusion in social and political life (Sleeter, 1996; Osler & Starkey, 2005), as well as 'building social cohesion' in a wider context (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 54) by fostering feelings of belonging in other social groups

such as nationality. This is particularly important in contexts with a high rate of cultural or ethnic diversity. Inclusivity in classrooms can be strengthened through attention to issues of voice, representation and justice (Junne & Verkoren, 2005; Apple, 1990; Sanchez & Rognvik, 2012).

This research project deals with inclusive education as it refers to social and linguistic identity markers, such as culture, ethnicity, language or religion, and the inclusion of minority groups. In many cases, especially in post-colonial contexts, ethnic minorities are considered indigenous to specific areas, which connects with the academic field of indigenous studies, engaging with alternative epistemologies around growth, development, and social and political life. This research argues that these alternative epistemologies have the potential to reveal new ways of thinking, and to be inclusive in different ways. Indeed, for Amanda Keddie, inclusivity must address “‘other’ ways of knowing and being’ to ‘support greater participation, motivation and achievement’ for these groups and counteract the ‘cultural disadvantage’ which pervades mainstream education and limits certain students (2012).

1.2 Peacebuilding and Education in Myanmar

In a case of civil war, as in Myanmar, the transition from conflict to peace necessarily requires a degree of nation-building, ‘the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state’ (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012). In creating a national identity that corresponds to a particular territory, state structures are put in place which turn individuals living in those territories into citizens, who are active in dismantling conflict and preventing it in the future. This is where citizenship or civic education becomes important, teaching individuals to ‘act politically, to advocate both individually and collectively for themselves and for other marginalised people’ (Sleeter, 1996). In Myanmar, the majority of the population has long been denied access to full citizenship under military rule, including fundamental rights and freedoms. As the country transitions, and the relationships between state and individuals change, minority communities are able to participate more fully in the public system, and articulate their own interests and ideas (Lall & Hla Hla Win, 2012). At this critical juncture, schooling plays a fundamental role in strengthening commitment to national values, and citizens’ abilities to pursue long-term and sustainable peace and development.

While Myanmar has a diverse ethnic, cultural and religious landscape, its government has not been a reflection of this diversity in recent history. For many communities the most active and influential actors were for a long time local ethnic- and faith-based groups, that were initially formed for military and representational purposes, but also began delivering the welfare services that were needed in

their communities. This civil society landscape, made up of community leaders and organisations, plays an undeniable role in Myanmar's social landscape, as a driver for bottom-up change, as opposed to problematic top-down actions by the state. As Myanmar transitions to a democratic, civilian-governed society, it is unclear what the effect will be on the current system, and the implications for organisations such as the one in this research project.

Peacebuilding and schooling also intersect in the concept of 'peace education'. Though it is difficult to agree on a concise definition, peace education (or education for peace, education for peacebuilding, human rights education, education for conflict resolution etc. [see e.g. Lopes Cardozo, 2008]) contains several core elements:

- Creating a desire for peace between rivals
- Building knowledge about conflicts, about different societies and value systems, and about inequality
- Promoting behavioural and attitudinal changes toward inclusion, non-violence and conflict resolution
- Addressing structures that produce inequality and injustice

(Fountain, 1999; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Harris & Synott, 2002; Davies, 2004; Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Lopes Cardozo & May, 2009; Berghof Foundation, 2012). Significant attention must be paid to the wider contexts and individual characteristics of conflicts, rather than applying one-size solutions. Ideally, peace education would form a part of a larger process of peacebuilding that goes beyond the classroom, exerting 'political influence' into wider social structures (Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Berghof Foundation, 2012). This connects with Bush and Saltarelli's vision of 'peacebuilding education', which 'would self-consciously and systematically seek to have a positive peacebuilding impact' on conflict-affected regions. Its attention to singular contexts, and grounding in affected communities, which would also be its driving force, shows how it goes beyond the more theoretical and inward-looking peace education.

2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The research was carried out using ethnographic techniques for data collection, emphasising relativity, contextual information ('thick description') and grounded-theory to guide data analysis. These techniques are useful in engaging with individuals' experiences and social interactions on a

micro-level. A high degree of relativity is important because this research is focused on an informant group with a large diversity of backgrounds, beliefs and practices.

This project was designed to collect data on the experience of education at KKEC, how it engages with peacebuilding through ethnic inclusivity, in the form of a single, in-depth case study. Case studies are an effective design 'when asking how or why questions about processes unknown'. A key assumption is that findings are only meaningful in the particular circumstances of the research, meaning that case studies do not produce statistically generalizable inferences, but rather an intimate and holistic insight into a particular social phenomenon (Small, 2009). To maintain the quality of research and convince readers of its authenticity, it must be accompanied by detailed description and contextual information, to provide a 'vicarious experience' of the fieldsite (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A quantitative survey was designed to collect background information about the student body. It contained four questions about demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnic background and Term) and two questions about the students' personal future trajectories (see Appendix). This 'census-type' data is crucial to the 'significant context' in which the project takes place, and for making sense of some of the topics that arose later on in interviews. (Fontein, 2014). Fifty-four responses were collected out of an approximate total school population of sixty.

Over the course of the project, many classes were observed. As the focus of the research was to understand how activities, content and interactions in the classroom connect with ideas of peacebuilding in the school, it was crucial to see them taking place. Ethnographic techniques were used to collect data on the subjective 'perceptions and views' of informants, in their own terms. They are useful for carrying out case study research, as they emphasise the singularity of a situation, the importance of 'being there', and of the 'situatedness of behaviour' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The data allowed interesting themes and questions to come through which formed the basis of in-depth, unstructured interviews with staff. In order to overcome bias, interview guides were designed so as to discuss many of the same topics with different informants, meaning that data could be triangulated in analysis, strengthening credibility.

Based on the data gathered through interviews and observations, three group discussions with students were organised. Group discussions are useful in contexts where time is limited, and topics may be sensitive. Participants are less likely to experience asymmetrical power relations with the researcher, and may feel enabled to voice their own perspectives more freely (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Each participant was also asked to fill in a short questionnaire (see Appendix) which had two significant benefits. It allowed every participant's voice to be recorded, even those who did

not contribute much during the discussion; it also gave them the chance to communicate opinions they were not willing or able to voice during the discussion.

The final data source for this research project was educational materials, such as the textbooks used in classes, through discourse analysis, a method which seeks to understand the relation between language and power. This method analyses data using a normative perspective, paying attention to voice, injustice, inequality and resistance. KKEC is a fascinating site for this form of research, because (1) many teaching materials used are produced within the organisation, the students of KKEC being their target audience, and (2) the language of instruction is English, which carries its own implications.

Based on these methods, quantitative and qualitative data was collected on the topic of ethnically-inclusive education in Myanmar, and the link with peacebuilding processes. The following chapters provide an analysis of this data and outline key findings.

3 FINDINGS: KKEC'S PEACE EDUCATION

Many of Myanmar's communities, especially in ethnic states, have historically been isolated from one another, and from heterogeneous urban centres. When students arrive in Yangon to begin the CLASS programme, for many of them it is the first time they meet young people from across the country. Zahnur, the school's academic coordinator, explained that KKEC is 'the only place in Myanmar that I know where you have young people from fifteen different ethnicities in one classroom'¹. This contact is critical for students to gain knowledge about other communities, to break down prejudices and build understanding about each other. Linking to the theoretical discussion of peace education, one of the school directors describes this process of interaction:

At first [they] maybe [think] 'Kachin people are not good, Karen people are not good, Kayah people are not good'. But by letting them sit together in the classroom, it's also in a way teaching each other. These lessons, in a way, [are a] kind of peace education. You need to understand, [in] each group you have differences and similarities².

¹ From interview, 10.02.2016.

² From interview, 15.03.2016.

This process can be a powerful and challenging experience for students, as evidenced by a Term Three student's own testimony³

I didn't have this kind of experience before. But when I arrived here I have a lot of friends from all over the country, many ethnic friends. [*Gesturing*] He is Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, Burmese and I am Karen.

For KKEC to be able to deliver positive, inclusive education to this diverse student body, they must create an environment in which the differences between individuals does not inhibit their capacity to interact and learn, but opens a learning space for all voices to be heard. Students revealed that while the main challenges which KKEC's diversity produces are risk of misunderstanding, potential arguments, and difficulty working in groups, the benefits include 'new knowledge', learning other languages, and the 'beauty' of diversity. This corresponds to what the literature on peace education calls *behavioural and attitudinal changes* that support inclusion of others. Simultaneously, personal relations between isolated groups are established which facilitates communication and the breaking down of prejudices.

3.1 'Understanding Misunderstanding'

Diversity is a fundamental component of KKEC's vision for the education it wants to deliver. However, one cannot expect the process of bringing students together to be easy or straightforward. Discussions revealed that integration in diverse classes was a significant challenge for them. A Term Three student contended that 'my ideas are probably a bit part of my ethnic [background], but here after I arrived, month by month, I understand [the other students]'. Another noted that 'some classmates' idea[s] are completely different. But it makes me to see from [the] other side'⁴. This links to the theory's description of peace education which emphasises learning about others as a core component.

One teacher explained that Term One students are generally quiet when they arrive, and interactions increase as students get to know each other⁵. 'In high school we have no debate[s] with classmate[s], we have no discussion. Just [the] teacher [who] tells us and we copy. So it's a good concept to debate'⁶. Using communication tools taught throughout the CLASS programme, students are able to articulate

³ From group discussion #1, 11.03.2016.

⁴ Both quotes from student questionnaires, 11.03.2016.

⁵ From interview 22.02.2016.

⁶ From student group discussion #2, 11.03.2016.

their different views effectively, and discuss more controversial or difficult topics in a constructive manner, despite differences. As one student put it: ‘the best understanding is the ability to understand misunderstanding’¹⁰, meaning that the capacity to work through issues of difference produces a higher level of appreciation of one another’s views. Another explained that through group discussions, students are able to focus on their similarities rather than differences, ‘it’s like Peace & Conflict in the class’⁷.

These tools help students develop new attitudes toward one another, leading to the ‘huge’ differences teachers see between Term One and Term Three students¹⁰. A Term Three student explained that throughout her KKEC education, her ‘opinions and perspectives [have] changed a lot’, and that now ‘I know we all are the same and everyone is equal’⁸. The school’s success in establishing this kind of environment is clear in one director’s declaration that ‘after this one year they develop friendship and understanding, understanding about different cultures. You will see [a] student, a Mon student for example, and now they are wearing [a] Karen outfit, something like that’⁹. This is an example of the ‘inclusive classrooms’ discussed above. The theory argues that the embracing of diversity in classrooms is critical to fostering social cohesion in a wider environment (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). This cohesion is produced by the kinds of social and cultural exchanges described here, and moves toward a more socially just environment for ethnic minority groups.

3.2 Learning about Peace

Throughout the whole CLASS programme, students learn theories of conflict analysis and discuss ways in which peace is achieved and conflict is prevented, based on cases within Myanmar and beyond. The curriculum is grounded in practice, through field trips and student debates around key local issues, role play, and other exercises which invite students to contribute their own thoughts and opinions. This practical dimension underlines the strong emphasis that is placed on learning about conflict and peace at KKEC, how they are produced, prevented, supported, and interrelated. For many thinkers in the field of peace education, ‘experiential’ learning is central component of it. There must be recognition and analysis of conflicts in order to learn about de-escalation and prevention (Berghof Foundation, 2012). Simultaneously, students of peace education must learn to resolve conflicts and promote peaceful social environments (Lopes Cardozo & May, 2009), a process that Snauwaert calls social ‘reconstruction’ (2011). What is important about this particular case is that for many KKEC

⁷ From student group discussion #1, 11.03.2016.

⁸ From student group discussion #3, 11.03.2016

⁹ From interview, 15.03.2016.

students these classes are their first time learning about conflict and peace in Myanmar in a comprehensive way, which most see as a positive component of their studies. This is revealed in the qualitative questionnaires completed by Term Three students:

LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES IN MYANMAR...

<i>BENEFITS</i>	<i>CHALLENGES</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘We know more about our country, people and situation. We realise what problems and conflicts are happening or had happened. We can find the ways to solve or overcome these problem[s]’ • ‘Different things [than] what we studied in the high school’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘It makes me worry [about] Myanmar’ • ‘Myanmar is not openly in democracy’ • ‘Parents still worry about talking political because of history situation’

Figure 1 Student questionnaires, 11.03.2016

The ‘challenges’ that students recorded also present an interesting discussion. The history of dictatorship and oppression continues to weigh on students and is seen as an obstacle to the discussions of peace and conflict that KKEC tries to promote. Furthermore, the ‘worry’ that comes with knowledge about the country’s social and political problems seems to impose a kind of responsibility on these students to confront them. These testimonies lead to thinking that, as well as opening students up to new knowledge and empowering them to act, this education carves a gulf between KKEC students and their peers across the country (highlighted by the reference to deficient government education). This gives the impression of KKEC being a sort of ‘bubble’ of knowledge, power and opportunity, as well as responsibility, to a greater extent than in the rest of society. Indeed, students can be seen as a *new generation* of active citizens in peacebuilding, as they may possess more of the important knowledge and skills than previous generations.

3.3 Making Content ‘Relevant’

The idea of ‘relevance’ of content and materials used at KKEC refers to a balance between covering the required subjects and connecting with students in a way that is relatable and useful for them. This is particularly important for the curriculum’s more challenging subjects such as Peace & Conflict or Gender Studies for which students have varying degrees of openness and interest. An example is in the discussion of religious conflicts in Myanmar. KKEC currently has students from Rakhine State which is heavily affected by conflict. In order to be able to teach and discuss the topic constructively, Educasia’s textbooks use case studies from communities outside of Myanmar that have similar characteristics. This was explained by Meaghan, who works in the curriculum development office.

We're not saying 'this group', we're not saying 'Rohingya', or this or that, we're giving an example of something that's quite similar and then using discussion questions and activities to see if they can make any connections.¹⁰

This also allows students to 'make connections with global issues', drawing parallels with their own experiences. Another example of the importance of 'relevant' content is the way in which different 'voices' are included in teaching materials. A Gender Studies textbook uses sources, examples and case studies from different ethnic groups in Myanmar to discuss different attitudes toward gender (Educasia). In this way, students learn new ideas, or new perspectives on those they are already familiar with. This inclusion of diverse perspectives is a core element of peace education, as described in wider literature. It is especially important when conflict is linked to repression of diversity or social fragmentation.

4 OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES: UNINTENDED OUTCOMES?

In the KKEC classrooms, diversity comes from many characteristics, not only ethnic background, and religious beliefs that are often linked to particular groups, but also gender, and ideas about gender roles. These interconnecting and overlapping attitudes and assumptions are brought into the classroom, creating a diversity of opinions, values and behaviours, which influence the way learning can take place, and create challenges to inclusion. This section examines some of these challenges: language and gender, how they play out in the classroom, and the implications for peace education. The strategies which are implemented to support students interactions could themselves have unintended results which are equally important to understand and reflect upon.

4.1 The Issue of Language

Because of the aforementioned isolation experienced by many people in Myanmar, students who arrive at KKEC '... don't know each other's culture, they don't know each other's languages'¹¹. Although Burmese and English – the common languages for most students – are taught in government schools, the uneven level of teaching quality, and difficulties of access to schools for many students mean that levels of proficiency are varied. The linguistic diversity in the classroom leads to questions around the language of instruction. KKEC officially operates completely in English,

¹⁰ From interview 17.03.2016

¹¹ From interview with Zahnur, 10.02.2016.

both in instruction and teaching materials, which can be seen as a way to make education as neutral as possible, to give students a similar starting point. One could see that for students from ethnic states in which there have been conflicts with the government, and who may have been forced to attend government schools as a kind of 'Burmanisation' process, the Burmese language is laden with perceptions of foreignness, oppression or even violent power (Smith, 2002; Huaman, 2011). In that case, the conscious decision not to use the nation's official language in curricula can be seen as a way to level the playing field and neutralise such issues as much as possible. This becomes particularly important when discussing topics and events which may resonate strongly with students on a personal level. Using the English language to approach such discussions could help students to communicate across cultural divides, to depoliticise issues, and to create distance between the theoretical side of what students are being taught, and the practical side informed by their own experiences.

It is interesting to look at the issue of language at KKEC within the field of critical education. In the sphere of indigenous education, language is a central point of discussion, because of its role as cultural identifier, and method of communication. For Huaman, language is one 'dimension of indigeneity' which informs the social justice struggle inherent in this movement. Based on Bourdieu's theory of language and power which highlights language's role in reproducing social structures from which it emerged, Huaman argues that this struggle for justice, through 'raising consciousness' and empowerment, emerges in local language. In the case of KKEC, the social landscape is too diverse to fit neatly into this theoretical discussion. However, the school's agenda of ethnic inclusion and social justice for marginalised communities has strong parallels with the field of indigenous education studies. Therefore, it is valid to question how KKEC aims to 'raise consciousness' and empower these groups in a language other than their own. Perhaps by introducing a 'third-party' language, KKEC is attempting to overcome the challenge facing critical pedagogy, as foreseen by Giroux (in Jackson, 1997), whereby globalisation and the end of indigenous communities' isolation will make it impossible for them to remain monolingual or mono-cultural, outside of mainstream society.

This strategic use of different languages seems to come from a desire to respond to complex circumstances in the best way possible, and there are positive reasons for using either language. Supplementing one language with the other may allow students to learn with the greatest nuance and precision. However, no language is free of subjectivity. The outcome of KKEC's language strategy is that students proceed through this peace education learning the knowledge, tools and skills for peacebuilding with different sets of assumptions and value-judgements, based on the languages of instruction. This could influence how they are able to implement them in different settings, based on

the language they are able to employ. Rather than giving students greater abilities to act in all situations, perhaps the language schism separates the kinds of work they are able to do. Teaching in English also reinforces KKEC's position outside of the country's official education system, which begs the question of how, and indeed whether, students are able to integrate national institutions upon graduation, such as the labour market, higher education or civic organisations. Furthermore, it is interesting to query how language decisions could affect students' abilities to transfer knowledge and experiences into their native language contexts and local communities.

4.2 Gender in Peace Education

In Myanmar, gender is a complex and tense topic of discussion. Many religious and ethnic communities are socially conservative. Gender is often the arena in which conflict plays out between these communities¹². Public discussions around gender issues are often taboo, or at least discouraged, meaning that students arriving at KKEC are often unfamiliar and uncomfortable with this subject. KKEC's Gender Studies class blends local and international perceptions of gender through teaching materials, student and teacher discussions.

In Term Three's Gender Studies class, male and female students are more separated, physically, and female students are less talkative. One of the textbooks notes that 'some activities and discussions might be easier in groups of the same gender', suggesting that teachers may 'split the class into males and females, and do separate class discussions sometimes' (Mote Oo, 2014b). It is critical to mitigate the silencing of a particular group in this way, to maintain inclusion of different perspectives. In this case, female students' voices must be heard in discussions about gender in Myanmar, in order for inequalities and injustices to be confronted and addressed. At KKEC, students are faced with the double-challenge of learning in a mixed-gender environment, as well as being exposed to new and different understandings of gender and what that means. Educasia's *Gender Issues* textbook offers discussion of the Buddhist institution in Myanmar, questioning the link with gender attitudes by highlighting some of the issues that are created. The text untangles religious ideology from destructive social practices around gender, inviting a critical reflection on this contentious issue. Students are also exposed to new ideas through teachers with Western backgrounds. This is important because, as teachers inevitably bring their ideas and beliefs into the classroom (Keddie, 2012), students can come into contact with 'quite liberal perspectives' on these kinds of issues¹³. This

¹² A well-known example is the rape of Buddhist woman in Rakhine State in 2012 which incited the ongoing 'communal violence' with Muslim communities.

¹³ From interview, 17.03.2016.

contributes to the idea of the classroom becoming a kind of 'bubble' where controversial issues can be discussed openly. Thus, students are renegotiating culturally-formed ideas and beliefs, through the school's liberal-leaning curriculum. This begs the question of whether there are consequences of such a shift, in terms of students' abilities to relate back to the conventions of their own communities, and reintegrate successfully. It would be a test of their education whether students are able to exit KKEC's bubble, retaining the knowledge and skills they have learned, and effectively carry out the peacebuilding and development work they have been trained for, in their communities.

Gender Studies seems to be an area where there is less cultural relativity and more Western influence. Meaghan discussed the difficulty of remaining culturally sensitive and neutral, while still trying to teach gender equality in textbooks²⁷. Based on conversations she has had with students she thinks they often struggle with the transition from their own background to the discourse that is presented in this class, which some see as 'foreign' and 'extreme'. 'I feel like they're going from one place where they're told how to think to maybe another'. This may partly be attributed to the rupture between Myanmar's official stance on human rights issues such as gender equality, and the reality 'on the ground'. Indeed, the government is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1997), although these commitments are not comprehensively enforced (UNGA, 2011; Burma Link, 2014). These facts shift the present discussion around local vs western understandings of gender, because officially, Myanmar supports equal rights and freedoms between men and women. Therefore, the discussion of gender equality as a requisite for peacebuilding at KKEC can also be framed as an element of civic education, in that young citizens are being familiarised with a set of civic rights and values to which they also have access. Such an increased awareness around human rights simultaneously supports a top-down process of change and development for Myanmar, while also encouraging young people to explore their global citizenship and connections to an international community.

KKEC is committed to introducing complex and challenging topics to the classroom, and relies on a number of strategies to support open and positive discussions between students. This is a key part of the school's conception of peace education, and another example of where the curriculum blends local and international discourses. The following section problematizes this approach, and the ability for students to navigate a coherent path for themselves upon leaving KKEC.

5 DISCUSSION: WHERE DOES THIS TAKE STUDENTS?

KKEC's particular vision of peacebuilding is to put peace education skills and experiences into practice, for students to be able to become effective community leaders, in their own local areas and other parts of the country.

5.1 'Learn to Lead by Serving'

Community engagement is at the core of KKEC's vision of peacebuilding in Myanmar. Rather than facilitating entry to foreign universities, students are encouraged to stay in the country after graduating, and apply their skills and knowledge at the community level. Although some do leave to complete higher education, they 'come back and serve' in their communities afterwards¹⁴. The concept of 'service' is inextricably linked to the school's idea of leadership and development, as illustrated by the phrase 'learn to lead by serving'¹⁵. While KKEC purportedly focuses on preparing its students for community-based peacebuilding and development work, their preparation depends on acquiring knowledge and skills in an external environment that is also influenced by foreign ideas and policies, outside of Myanmar's public sphere. Indeed, that students are supported to study in non-state education, and even outside of the country, can be seen as a contradiction to the locally-grounded, service-oriented philosophy of the school. The school's curriculum imparts its particular vision by focusing on the community as a key social entity, and site for change. Mote Oo's *Active Citizenship* textbook asks students 'what are the effects of poverty and discrimination in your community? What can be done to promote social justice in your community?' Along a similar vein, a Term Three student's assertion that widespread underdevelopment in Myanmar means 'we need to serve our community, so we need to produce a lot of leader[s] for our community'¹⁶. At the same time, students are exposed to development and peacebuilding processes at the international level, enabling them to make connections between their community experiences and wider global issues.

The emphasis on community-led change is also addressed on a practical level. Students learn 'career-oriented skills' such as leadership and project management. This new knowledge combines with their previous experiences of community service and engagement, and gives them tools to go beyond their

¹⁴ From interview with a director 15.03.2016.

¹⁵ From interview with a director 01.03.2016.

¹⁶ From student group discussion #1, 11.03.2016.

own native communities, to work across different groups and diverse environments¹⁷. An example of students combining practical skills and experiences of local activism is Term One's end-of-term projects for Civic Education. Groups of students choose a particular issue that impacts their communities, and implement campaigns for change in the local neighbourhood. This kind of activity serves a dual purpose. It connects students with issues from communities all around the country, that many may not be familiar with, or that are similar to those faced by their own communities. It also gives students the skills to be active citizens, locally and on a national level, to become involved in social, political or environmental justice issues, encouraging them to speak out and engage others in such causes.

Another example is the Service Learning programme. Service Learning is an educational practice employed across the world in many different ways. In basic terms it seeks to combine academic and practical learning around issues of civic engagement or community service. This 'experiential' learning allows students to 'engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunity for reflection' (Jacoby, 1996). The idea is to build reciprocal relations between school and community, and allow students to put into practice their skills and knowledge. At KKEC, students leave the school and live in new communities for thirty days, carrying out a wide range of community service projects. The aim of this programme is three-fold. It encourages students' 'spirit of volunteerism' and awareness of community-driven change processes. It also helps students to give their academic skills and knowledge a practical basis, linking 'their academic goals, professional goals and the needs of their communities' (TEF, 2014). Finally, it gives students the opportunity to discover new and different parts of Myanmar, and share their own background with these communities. In one discussion with students, four out of five said that the most important experience they had at KKEC was the Service Learning programme. 'I'd like to service my community, because my division is a poor division so I will work there. So I like Service Learning to see how can I serve to the people, the community'¹⁸. A school director explained that the programme teaches students how to apply their leadership and project management skills in different communities, enabling them to work effectively in multi-ethnic environments and diverse situations. This also contributes to the rebuilding of relations between many of the country's fragmented communities. For KKEC, these types of leaders are to play a critical role in Myanmar's process of national

¹⁷ From interview 01.03.2016.

¹⁸ From student group discussion #2, 11.03.2016.

reconciliation and peacebuilding, so the school takes an active role in forming a 'new generation' of such young leaders.

5.2 Future Perspectives: Local and International

In a survey of fifty-four students across the three term groups, the question 'what do you hope to do when you leave KKEC?' was posed to elicit a general idea of students' own plans for their future, incorporating their experiences from the programme. There is a noteworthy trend toward community-focused work, with around half of the students in each term expressing an interest in it at some point in their futures. One Term Three student wrote:

When I [am] leaving the school, I would like to serve in my community. To help to develop my community and also would like to develop the abilities of youth and children. The biggest one I would like to do is to establish my own org[anisation] for youth in my community.

A Term One student wrote:

First, I want to work as [a] volunteer in [a] NGO organisation. Then, I want to apply [for a] scholarship to [study] abroad. My dream [is] to make business opportunities for my people from Rakhine and to help children who can't go to school.

These testimonies would indicate that KKEC's particular vision of peacebuilding is connecting with students and perhaps influencing their perspectives. (It must be noted that the students recruited to the school are already likely to be involved in community work in different ways, as this is a criterion that is sought after in applications). Furthermore, many students felt the potential for immense changes in Myanmar at the time of research, resulting from the transition to democracy that began with the first fair elections since the 1960s. It is also interesting that these student testimonies blend several spheres together in the envisioned futures: returning to their communities, leaving Myanmar for further education, and engaging with international non-state actors. These spheres are often seen as somewhat opposing or exclusive, however, the students themselves present these different experiences as combinable or even mutually reinforcing. This indicates that students understand and utilise their KKEC education in different and perhaps unanticipated ways.

As noted above, KKEC's curriculum is designed to simultaneously capitalise on students' prior interests and encourage them to engage in community-driven change, and to widen students'

perspectives by exposing them to international and Western ways of thinking. The result is that upon graduation, students have the capacity to work with groups in Myanmar, as well as English-speaking environments, and the knowledge of how international labour and higher education markets function. In the demographic survey students shared a wide range of ideas for their futures, from business, to teaching, to human rights advocacy. This open-mindedness that comes from the wide range of knowledge and experiences students gain at KKEC, results in them being encouraged to not only look *into* their communities, but also *laterally*, across Myanmar, and *outwards*, at the rest of the world. This duality also highlights a tension around the outcomes of this education. As an unofficial, unaccredited, private school, KKEC already operates somewhat removed from the national education system. On top of this, through its curriculum, teaching and the opportunities it gives students, KKEC provides certain channels for engaging in change and development systems that are outside of the public sphere. It is possible that this form of organisation contributes to the bypassing of state institutions, for example in so-called 'NGOisation'. This is problematic as it may pose a threat to national power structures, by promoting a more neo-liberal system of decentralised, privatised governance, jeopardising the capabilities of public institutions to respond to address these issues.

The different future plans outlined by students translate into different choices for them. For this case study it is particularly important to think about their future in light of the changing political situation in Myanmar. April 2016 marked the transition to a fairly-elected, democratic government for the first time since independence. Many people anticipate great changes to follow, and many young people in particular are impatiently waiting for new chances to shape their futures in new ways. Furthermore, the democratic government has the potential to lead Myanmar to occupy a greater position on the international stage, rapidly bringing globalisation and all of its properties into the country, which have been for the most part absent, until now. It is hoped by many in Myanmar that these changes will extend into the national education system in reforms, expansion of access and improved quality. The question that KKEC should be asking itself is how far its curriculum enables students to enter this 'new world' and take an active position in effecting system change, on any level. In other words, will students be able to implement the skills and knowledge they have learned, to carry out KKEC's vision of peace?

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Main Findings and Answer to RQs

This thesis has sought to examine the relationship between education and peacebuilding, within the particular context of ethnic-based conflict in Myanmar. The case study of KKEC has tried to show that while the circumstances of conflict, and the work of peacebuilding are necessarily unique in each instance, there are valuable lessons to be learned from each one. As the field of education, conflict and peace affects many communities across the world, it is vital that research be carried out on this topic to respond to those affected, so that sustainable peace may lead to long-term rebuilding and redevelopment of society.

The research led to two main findings which are summarised here. Firstly, the study of KKEC's vision of peacebuilding for Myanmar can be seen as a response to the particularity of this country's conflict, which is understood to stem from historic, political oppression, as well as ethnic and religious difference, which is addressed in KKEC's 'peace curriculum'. Through citizenship education, students are given knowledge and skills to engage in civic processes, to advocate for rights and freedoms, and to participate in the country's political sphere. Simultaneously, the school places a strong emphasis on addressing and embracing the nation's cultural diversity in the classroom, encouraging young people from many different communities to come together, to learn together and about each other. The importance of community in KKEC's vision of peacebuilding is the second key finding of this research. It is the core social entity for understanding conflict, bringing about change, peace and development. In this way, the school makes a case for national peacebuilding to be a bottom-up, locally-informed exercise, as a way to address the particular context effectively. This idea supports peace education theory which demands strong attention to 'various social, political, economic, historical and cultural contexts', to be able to respond to realities on the ground (Berghof Foundation, 2012).

A final point of this conclusion is that, while the case of KKEC in many ways corroborates and adds to existing ideas around peace education, the research found that the programme goes beyond just addressing peace and conflict. The focus on civic engagement, community experience and global issues, along with teaching language and career-oriented skills, contributes to 'widening the gaze' of students and showing them different opportunities for their own lives. The question of what KKEC students do after they graduate has a complicated answer. It seems that the school presents a particular pathway to students as a useful way to implement the knowledge and skills they are taught.

This pathway encourages a kind of 'return to the community', to work toward peacebuilding. The extent to which students follow this plan varies, as many of them see more and different options for themselves. There is a visible tension between local and international spheres, and where the students feel prepared or inspired to work in.

6.2 Relevance and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite the particular context of Myanmar's conflict, an argument can be made for the relevance of this research, especially in the wider Southeast Asian region, where ethnic-based conflicts have some similarities around issues of representation, democracy and development. Indeed, this research makes a case for community-based, civil society-led movements to peace through education, as well as the importance of bottom-up, locally-informed change. This is especially important where minorities, such as different ethnic, or indigenous groups, are involved. The relevance of KKEC's work was noted by Zahnur, reflecting on her own background:

It really shifts the way I see things, the way I see young people, the way I see my own country. You know, like the way I see history, like my own history. Because I think Indonesia and Myanmar politics is kind of similar.

This also corresponds to Huaman's statement assertion that 'peace-building is situated within historical and cultural contexts, but communities can still learn from each other' (2011, p. 255). Of course, this depends on the production of more research in the areas of peacebuilding, education and inclusion, in different contexts.

It is important to understand that this research, and its findings, are a reflection of the particular context in which it was carried out. In April 2016 Myanmar was completing the transition to a democratically-elected civilian government, and there were many expectations for the future and the changes the new government would bring. At the same time, the historical context was still important, in shaping the social, political and economic landscape, and the climate of civil society. It is unclear what changes are in store for Myanmar's communities, in particular for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, so it is also unclear if, and how, KKEC's educational programme is to remain an effective, practical response to this situation. Indeed, it is hoped, also by KKEC's management, that Myanmar's education system undergoes significant transformation in coming years, which would affect them as well. In the face of this potential for immense change, it is uncertain for how long this research will itself remain relevant to the context of Myanmar. Indeed, such a fast-changing environment will benefit from renewed and further research shortly.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

In regards to Myanmar's education system, as it currently stands there is no legal category for schools that operate not-for-profit in the private sector, as is the case for KKEC. There are important implications for accreditation, funding and recruitment, which currently impede the optimal functioning of the institution, and its expansion¹⁹. Should the country's legal framework change to accommodate this third category, it would allow for more schools, with peacebuilding interests in the style of KKEC, to open. Alternatively, or simultaneously, the incorporation of a context-sensitive peace curriculum in public education could significantly aid national peace processes and reconciliation. This is true not only for Myanmar but other situations in which ethnic or religious difference contribute to conflict. What is transferable in the case of KKEC is the emphasis on including diversity and encouraging open communication. This engages with discussions around educational reform in Myanmar, where recognition of educational needs of minority groups is not yet widely accepted. This research has also drawn attention to the general deficiency of Myanmar's public education sector, suggesting that this may prompt young people to engage in private systems of schooling and employment. This could lead to a bifurcation of civil society initiatives for peacebuilding and reconciliation, potentially causing new exclusions or conflicts. The solution would be to work toward a national education system which encourages interaction and movement between all sectors of society, politics and the economy. In particular, this system would need to include remote and minority communities to support their participation.

On the question of international policy for peace education, the main research findings would argue against the creation of a universal, one-size framework. Indeed, they have demonstrated that context is central to shaping any kind of peacebuilding initiative in education, which could be undermined by global strategies. However, there is undoubtedly value in promoting the field of peace education on an international stage, especially as the changing nature of global conflict today is affecting ever more communities. A global understanding of peace education could be effectively connected to existing conventions and treaties, which also offers a way to negotiate the tension between local and western-imposed ideas of conflict and peace. However, this leads to the question of what role the international community may play in national peace education. The ratification of international legislation creates a responsibility of intervention in cases of violation. Whether this is a constructive way to frame national peace education initiatives is unclear, and would likely find international development scholars on both sides of the argument.

¹⁹ From interview 01.03.2016.

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