

Educational fragmentation in Myanmar: Governance shifts, conflict, and the digital divide

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar's education system faces deep-rooted challenges, exacerbated by ongoing political instability. This study explores how governance instability, technological barriers, and economic struggles collectively shape governance shifts, digital divides, and economic disruptions affect students, teachers, and institutions. By comparing Myanmar's crisis with those in Afghanistan and Venezuela, the study identifies common barriers and potential strategies for resilience. It also explores historical shifts in Myanmar's education policies, from colonial-era influences on military control, shaping today's systemic issues. Drawing on ICT4D frameworks, such as the LearnCloud initiative in refugee camps, mobile learning solutions in crisis zones, and Myanmar's pre-2021 e-learning pilot programs, the study considers digital education and telecentres as possible solutions but highlights structural barriers such as censorship, poor infrastructure, and restricted academic freedoms. Advocating for a multi-stakeholder approach, it emphasizes digital resilience, community-driven initiatives, and international collaboration to foster sustainable educational opportunities amid political turmoil. A comparative analysis reveals that Myanmar's post-coup education disruption mirrors Venezuela's economic-driven school closures and Afghanistan's Taliban-imposed curriculum restrictions. However, Myanmar differs in its heavy reliance on digital access, which has been severely restricted by government control.

Keywords: Myanmar, military coup, ICT4D, digital education, education reform

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar's education sector has historically been shaped by political influence, economic instability, and social disparities. The country's educational landscape has evolved significantly, transitioning from the British colonial education system to military-controlled curricula, which prioritized nationalism over critical thinking and scientific inquiry. After Myanmar's independence in 1948, initial attempts were made to modernize education, but military rule from 1962 onwards led to the centralization of education, suppression of academic freedoms, and significant underfunding of institutions (McCormick, 2020; Myint-U, 2007).

The late 20th century and early 2000s saw periodic reforms, particularly under democratic transitions in the 2010s, where digital education expansion and curriculum modernization efforts began taking shape (South & Lall, 2016). In 2011, under President Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government, efforts were made to decentralize education, introduce new curriculum reforms, and integrate digital learning (Bigagli, 2019). However, the 2021 military coup reversed many of these gains, leading to widespread civil disobedience, school closures, and internet shutdowns that drastically affected educational access (Human Rights Watch, 2022; NHK, 2024). The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which saw tens of thousands of teachers, students, and administrators refusing to return to military-run institutions, left the education system in disarray (UNESCO, 2021).

As Myanmar enters a new phase of political uncertainty, the future of education remains uncharted, requiring adaptive strategies that account for both systemic constraints and emerging digital opportunities. The post-coup era has seen significant declines in student enrollment, teacher retention, and access to schooling, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas (Myanmar Myanmar Data Tech Team, 2024).

Political Instability and the Decline of Education as a Public Good

Political instability has led to the erosion of education as a public good, impacting not only on school operations but also the morale of students and educators (D'Apice & Guasconi, 2025). Children of the Mekong, Xian (2023) reports that many students have been forced into informal learning structures, with some even dropping out entirely due to economic hardship or safety concerns. In 2021, UNICEF estimated that at least 12 million children in Myanmar lacked access to proper schooling due to ongoing conflict

and displacement (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, the migration of skilled educators out of the country has further strained the already fragile education system. Reports from Reuters (2021) indicate that over 125,000 educators have been suspended for opposing coup. Universities, once pillars of academic excellence, have suffered from intense crackdowns on students and faculty engaged in protests, further weakening the system (Galloway, 2023).

Ethnic Disparities in Educational Access

Myanmar's diverse ethnic composition means that educational access varies greatly across different regions. Ethnic minority areas, which have long been marginalized, face heightened educational disruptions due to military conflicts and displacement (South & Lall, 2016). The systematic exclusion of ethnic populations from national education policies further exacerbates disparities in literacy rates and skill development (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2018). Alternative education models such as monastic education, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) schools, and Karen National Union (KNU) learning centers offer informal schooling options. These programs provide critical access to education but often lack standardized certification, limiting students' long-term prospects (Myanmar Myanmar Data Tech Team, 2024).

For example, education in Karen, Kachin, Shan, and Chin states has been heavily affected by military attacks, internal displacement, and systematic neglect (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and Karen National Union (KNU) have established their own parallel education systems, but funding remains limited, and students struggle with recognition of their degrees at the national and international levels (Reuters, 2024).

The Digital Divide and Government Internet Control

At the same time, the digital divide has deepened, with the government's control over internet access limiting online learning opportunities for students who depend on remote education. The 2021 - 2022 internet blackouts imposed by the military significantly affected e-learning programs and disrupted access to international learning resources (Freedom House, 2022).

Restrictions on digital platforms have hindered independent educational initiatives, making it difficult for NGOs and international actors to implement alternative learning programs (Bhattacharyya, 2023). In particular, Myanmar's Education Cannot Wait (ECW) initiative, which sought to support marginalized students, has struggled to reach those in conflict zones due to internet restrictions and military surveillance (Education Cannot Wait, 2023).

Given these compounding challenges, this study seeks to analyze Myanmar's education system in the context of its socio-political crisis. It examines how governance shifts, economic instability, and digital exclusion have shaped access to education. Additionally, it draws comparisons with other nations that have faced similar educational disruptions, highlighting potential strategies for resilience and long-term reform (Education Development Trust, 2023).

While the future remains uncertain, investments in education, digital infrastructure, and inclusive policymaking will be critical in ensuring Myanmar's next generation does not remain trapped in a cycle of educational disenfranchisement (World Bank, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Instability and Education

Political turmoil has long been a determinant of educational access and quality in Myanmar. Historical trends indicate that education policies shift depending on the governing body, with previous military regimes imposing restrictive curricula and limiting academic freedom (Htet, 2020). Studies suggest that post-coup governance shifts have further entrenched these challenges, leading to mass boycotts of the state-controlled education system (Manurung, 2021).

Comparisons with Afghanistan and Venezuela show similar patterns where political instability has led to the suppression of independent education, reliance on alternative learning models, and the mass exodus of educators and students (UNESCO, 2021). These cases provide insights into how Myanmar might adapt its educational strategies under prolonged instability.

Case study: Colombia's education response to conflict

Colombia, a country affected by prolonged armed conflict, implemented flexible education models to ensure continuity in learning despite instability. Programs like *Escuela Nueva* introduced community-based, self-paced learning approaches tailored for displaced populations (Parra Osorio & Wodon, 2014). Myanmar could learn from this model by adopting localized, participatory education systems that function independently of centralized control.

The Digital Divide in Myanmar

The country's digital divide remains one of the largest barriers to educational inclusion. While urban areas such as Yangon and Mandalay benefit from stable internet connectivity and private digital learning institutions, rural and ethnic minority regions continue to face systemic digital exclusion (GSMA, 2020). Research highlights that Myanmar's internet shutdowns, government censorship, and infrastructure deficiencies exacerbate digital learning inequalities (Freedom House, 2022).

In comparison, countries like Sudan and Ethiopia have also struggled with digital access due to political control over the internet and infrastructure deficits (Lall, 2021). However, alternative strategies such as investment in low-bandwidth mobile learning platforms and community-led digital education initiatives have helped mitigate some of these issues. Similar models could be adapted in Myanmar to bridge the gap in education.

Case study: Bangladesh's mobile-based learning for rohingya refugees

Bangladesh has successfully implemented mobile-based education programs for Rohingya refugee children, who face barriers similar to Myanmar's marginalized communities. By leveraging low-cost mobile applications and SMS-based learning content, the initiative has enabled continued education despite displacement (Zakir Hossain, 2024). Myanmar's rural regions could benefit from similar mobile learning interventions tailored to low-connectivity environments.

Economic Disruptions and Education

Myanmar's economic instability following the coup has directly impacted students and educational institutions. The World Bank (2023) reported a sharp decline in household incomes, making education unaffordable for many families. Financial constraints have also led to the closure of numerous private institutions and the suspension of scholarship programs. This economic downturn has not only limited access to education but has also intensified social inequalities.

Other nations facing economic crises, such as Venezuela and Zimbabwe, have seen sharp declines in public education funding, forcing communities to rely on NGO-led and international donor-supported education programs. Myanmar could benefit from similar funding strategies to sustain education during its economic decline.

Case Study: Kenya's Cash Transfer Program for Education

Kenya's government and international organizations introduced cash transfer programs to support low-income families in continuing their children's education despite economic challenges. These programs provide financial assistance directly to families, ensuring that students remain enrolled in school (Muthuri, 2016). Myanmar could implement similar targeted financial aid strategies to prevent widespread dropouts among economically disadvantaged students.

The Role of ICT in Education

Studies on ICT for Development (ICT4D) indicate that technology can serve as a bridge for educational access in politically unstable environments. Telecentres, online education platforms, and mobile-based learning have emerged as alternatives to traditional schooling in Myanmar (Eh, 2023). However, limitations such as poor broadband access, a lack of localized content, and government surveillance pose significant challenges to their scalability and impact.

A comparative study of digital education models in Syria and Yemen, both affected by war and instability, suggests that decentralized, mobile-based education platforms and international partnerships can be highly effective in sustaining learning opportunities (Mirza & Al-Abdulkareem, 2011). Myanmar's education system could adopt similar approaches by focusing on mobile-accessible education with localized content tailored to different linguistic and cultural groups.

Case study: Syria's community-led digital schools

During the Syrian conflict, digital schools were established by local communities and international NGOs to provide virtual learning opportunities to children unable to attend physical schools. These initiatives leveraged cloud-based learning management systems and community radio programs to ensure continuity of education (Talhouk, 2020). Myanmar could explore a similar decentralized approach, where community-led digital education initiatives operate outside state-controlled systems to provide unrestricted access to learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, drawing on document analysis and policy reviews to assess Myanmar's education crisis. The qualitative approach was chosen due to the complexity of the socio-political landscape, which cannot be easily quantified but requires in-depth exploration through existing literature, reports, and case studies. The lack of comprehensive and publicly available statistical data on Myanmar's education system post-coup further justifies this approach.

Limitations of Methodology

While this study provides an in-depth analysis of Myanmar's education crisis, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Limited access to primary data:** Due to Myanmar's current political instability and restrictions on academic research, the study relies on secondary sources rather than firsthand interviews or field studies.
2. **Potential bias in available reports:** Governmental and NGO reports may reflect political or institutional biases, making it necessary to cross-reference multiple sources to obtain a balanced perspective.
3. **Generalizability of case studies:** While the study draws from successful education models in conflict-affected countries, the unique socio-political conditions in Myanmar may require tailored adaptations rather than direct implementation.
4. **Technological and infrastructure constraints:** The study assumes that digital education solutions are feasible, yet these interventions may face practical barriers such as low digital literacy, internet shutdowns, and financial constraints.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and insightful framework for understanding Myanmar's educational challenges and identifying potential pathways for resilience and reform.

DISCUSSION

The Impact of Political Instability on Myanmar's Education System

Political instability in Myanmar has had profound effects on the education system, disrupting access, quality, and equity in learning. The 2021 military coup led to the collapse of educational governance, with universities and schools shutting down as part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) (UNESCO, 2021). Many educators refused to work under military control, resulting in a teacher shortage, while thousands of students boycotted state-run schools (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

According to UNICEF (2021), over 12 million children have had their education interrupted, with more than 1.4 million forcibly displaced, limiting their ability to access formal schooling. Higher education has suffered significantly, with university faculty dismissed or imprisoned for their involvement in pro-democracy protests (Freedom House, 2022). Institutions such as Yangon University and Mandalay University, once among Southeast Asia's top academic institutions, have been severely weakened by military purges, censorship, and curriculum restructuring to align with pro-junta narratives (D'Apice & Guasconi, 2025).

Myanmar's education system has also been affected by the growing exodus of skilled professionals. The migration of thousands of qualified educators to Thailand, Malaysia, and Western nations has resulted in a major "brain drain" (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). The lack of skilled educators has led to an increase in unqualified teaching personnel, further diminishing the quality of education.

Meanwhile, in conflict zones such as Karen, Kachin, and Chin states, military offensives have led to the destruction of school infrastructure, the displacement of teachers, and the recruitment of children into armed groups (NHK, 2024). Reports indicate that over 200 schools have been attacked since the coup, with the military using schools for military purposes in violation of international humanitarian law (Insight Myanmar, 2024).

Given these challenges, Myanmar's education system requires urgent interventions, including the re-establishment of independent academic governance, the protection of educators and students, and international partnerships to ensure continuity in education.

Myanmar's education system has been deeply affected by the political upheaval that followed the military takeover. The key challenges include:

1. **School closures and mass boycotts:** Many students and teachers have refused to participate in state-controlled education, leading to widespread disruptions.
2. **Suppression of academic freedoms:** The government has imposed strict control over curricula, particularly in higher education, limiting critical thinking and civic education.
3. **Brain drain and educator exodus:** Many skilled educators and researchers have fled the country, leaving a void in academia.
4. **Unequal access to education:** Ethnic minority regions, already underserved, face even greater educational exclusion due to ongoing conflicts and displacement.
5. **Governance shifts and policy uncertainty:** The instability in Myanmar's government has led to inconsistent education policies, making it difficult for schools and universities to implement long-term strategies.
6. **Economic disruptions affecting students and institutions:** The economic downturn post-coup has left many families unable to afford education, and institutions struggling with underfunding and staff shortages.

Digital Education and the Role of ICT in Bridging the Gap

Myanmar's digital education landscape has been significantly shaped by political interference, technological limitations, and socioeconomic barriers. Prior to the 2021 coup, the country had been making progress in integrating ICT into education, with initiatives such as the Myanmar Digital Education Initiative (MDEI) and the E-Learning Portal launched by the Ministry of Education in 2018 (Lall, 2021). However, these efforts have been severely disrupted by post-coup censorship and internet blackouts.

The military junta has imposed extensive restrictions on digital access, including shutting down mobile data services and imposing licensing requirements for internet providers (Freedom House, 2022). This has disproportionately affected students who rely on online learning, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. A study by World Bank (2023) found that Myanmar's internet restrictions reduced online learning participation by 62% among students in urban centers and 78% in rural areas.

Despite these challenges, digital education remains a critical avenue for bridging educational gaps. Independent education platforms, such as the Myanmar E-Learning Consortium and non-governmental initiatives like the Thabyay Education Network, have attempted to provide alternative access to learning resources (Htwe, 2025). These programs utilize VPNs, satellite communication, and offline digital repositories to circumvent censorship.

However, access to technology remains highly unequal. A 2023 UNESCO report found that only 32% of students in Myanmar have access to a reliable internet connection, and just 18% of households own a personal computer. The digital divide is further exacerbated by income disparities, with wealthier families able to afford private tutors and international online courses, while poorer students are left without alternatives.

For digital education to serve as a viable solution, Myanmar needs significant investment in broadband infrastructure, affordable digital devices, and teacher training in ICT-based pedagogies. The role of regional organizations, such as ASEAN, in supporting Myanmar's digital education efforts could be crucial in mitigating these barriers and expanding access.

With traditional schooling under threat due to ongoing political instability, digital education has emerged as an alternative pathway for students seeking to continue their learning. However, this shift is fraught with technological, financial, and political limitations that hinder its widespread adoption. While online learning platforms, telecentres, and digital tools offer potential solutions, government censorship, infrastructure challenges, and the urban-rural divide present significant barriers to equitable access.

Rise of online learning platforms

A response to educational disruptions - In response to the collapse of Myanmar's formal education system following the 2021 military coup, independent groups, NGOs, and members of the Myanmar diaspora have established online learning platforms to support students who refuse to participate in state-controlled schooling. Organizations such as Uplift Education Myanmar, Myanmar Online School, and Parallel Education Myanmar have launched free or low-cost online courses in science, mathematics, English, and other subjects (Htwe, 2025). These platforms offer alternative curricula that emphasize critical thinking and democratic values, aiming to counteract state-imposed restrictions on educational content. In addition, international NGOs such as Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and the Myanmar E-Learning Consortium have expanded access to digital learning materials by partnering with exiled educators to develop coursework tailored to Myanmar's displaced and marginalized students (Machmud et al., 2021). However, these platforms face significant challenges, including:

1. Internet restrictions that limit students' ability to access online courses.
2. High costs of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops, making participation difficult for low-income families.
3. Limited technological literacy among students and teachers, particularly in rural areas.
4. Despite these challenges, online learning remains a key lifeline for thousands of students who have been locked out of the formal education system due to political instability.

The role of telecentres: Bridging the digital learning gap

Telecentres—community-based facilities providing internet access, computer training, and digital resources—have played a crucial role in expanding digital learning opportunities in Myanmar. Before the coup, the Myanmar Telecentre Network (MTN) and the Asia Development Bank (ADB) supported the establishment of over 150 telecentres across rural townships to enhance digital literacy and education (Asian Development Bank, n.d.).

Since the 2021 military takeover, telecentres have become essential hubs for informal education, especially for students in areas where schools have been forced to close due to ongoing conflict. Some telecentres have transitioned into underground digital schools, offering access to online coursework, research databases, and educational software (Freedom House, 2022). However, telecentres face severe operational challenges due to:

- Frequent electricity blackouts, which disrupt online learning.
- Internet shutdowns that prevent access to educational content.
- Funding shortages, as many international donors have reduced financial aid to Myanmar following the coup.

To overcome these barriers, some telecentres have adopted alternative technologies such as:

- Satellite-based internet services, bypassing government-imposed network restrictions.
- Offline digital libraries, using tools like Raspberry Pi servers to store educational materials accessible without an internet connection.
- Solar-powered learning centers, particularly in remote ethnic minority regions (Myanmar Myanmar Data Tech Team, 2024).

Despite these efforts, without systematic investment and international support, telecentres remain vulnerable to political interference and economic constraints.

Government censorship and internet shutdowns: A barrier to digital education

One of the greatest threats to digital education in Myanmar is government-imposed censorship and internet blackouts. The military junta has routinely shut down internet services to prevent the spread of anti-regime information and limit access to independent educational resources (Freedom House, 2023).

According to Access Now (2023), Myanmar ranks among the top three countries globally for state-led internet disruptions, affecting over 17 million people. These shutdowns have disproportionately impacted students and educators, making it nearly impossible to access:

- Online learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Khan Academy.
- Research databases and academic journals from international universities.
- Video conferencing tools used for virtual instruction (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams).

Beyond internet blackouts, the military has also implemented extensive online surveillance, blocking:

- Educational websites affiliated with pro-democracy groups.
- Messaging platforms used to distribute coursework.
- VPN services, which students and teachers rely on to bypass restrictions (Myanmar Myanmar Data Tech Team, 2024).

These government policies severely limit students' ability to pursue digital education, reinforcing a widening gap between those with access to alternative learning resources and those trapped within the state-controlled education system.

The digital divide between urban and rural areas: Unequal access to education

Myanmar's digital education landscape is characterized by a stark urban-rural divide, with students in major cities such as Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw enjoying significantly better internet access, digital literacy, and educational resources compared to those in rural and ethnic minority regions (World Bank, 2022). Key disparities include:

Urban areas

- Over 70% of students in Yangon have some form of online learning access (UNESCO, 2023).
- Private schools offer international-standard digital curricula and access to MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).
- Many urban students use VPNs and encrypted platforms to bypass censorship.

Rural areas and conflict zones

- Only 35% of rural students have reliable internet access (GSMA, 2023).
- Many families cannot afford digital devices or data plans.
- Electricity shortages and poor infrastructure make digital education unfeasible in many regions.

To address these inequalities, some NGOs and grassroots organizations have implemented low-tech educational solutions, such as:

- Radio-based instruction, modeled after UNICEF's Learning Passport program in war-torn regions.
- SMS-based learning modules, providing coursework via text messages.
- Offline-first digital platforms, like Kolibri, which stores educational content on local networks without requiring an internet connection (UNICEF, 2021).

These solutions offer practical strategies to expand educational access for marginalized students, but long-term investment in digital infrastructure, teacher training, and rural connectivity is critical to closing the digital divide.

The need for a multi-stakeholder approach

While digital education presents new opportunities for students locked out of Myanmar's formal schooling system, significant barriers remain. Without government accountability and international intervention, students in Myanmar—especially those in rural and conflict-affected areas—risk permanent educational exclusion. To ensure sustainable access to digital education, efforts must focus on:

- Investing in resilient digital infrastructure (broadband expansion, solar-powered learning centers).
- Providing alternative education models (community-led learning, radio-based schooling).
- Strengthening international support (funding from ASEAN, World Bank, UNESCO).
- Safeguarding access to information (circumventing censorship through secure educational platforms).

Myanmar's education crisis is not just a national issue—it is a global concern. The international community must act urgently to prevent the emergence of a "lost generation" deprived of knowledge and opportunity.

Structural Barriers to Educational Reform

Myanmar's education system faces deep-rooted structural barriers that hinder meaningful reform, even in the absence of political instability. Historically, the education sector has been underfunded, with spending on education remaining below 2% of GDP—one of the lowest in Southeast Asia (World Bank, 2022). This chronic underinvestment has resulted in poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, and a lack of educational resources.

One of the key barriers to reform is centralized control. Under both military and civilian governments, Myanmar's education policies have been dictated by the central authorities, leaving little room for regional and ethnic education systems to thrive. Ethnic minority education programs, including those led by the Karen National Union (KNU) and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), remain unrecognized by the national government, making it difficult for students from these systems to transition to higher education or employment (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Another major obstacle is curriculum stagnation and censorship. Myanmar's education curriculum has historically been designed to promote national unity under military ideology, restricting critical thinking and independent inquiry (Lall, 2021). After the coup, the junta further revised textbooks to eliminate references to democracy and human rights, while banning materials produced by international organizations (Freedom House, 2022). This limits students' exposure to diverse perspectives and undermines the development of globally competitive skills.

Economic barriers also play a crucial role. Rising poverty rates and economic instability following the coup have made education less accessible for many families. The World Bank (2023) reports that nearly 40% of Myanmar's population now lives below the poverty line, with many children forced to drop out of school to support their families through informal labor.

Reforming Myanmar's education system requires decentralization, increased public investment, international collaboration, and a commitment to academic freedom. Lessons from post-conflict education recovery in countries like Rwanda and Bosnia

suggest that rebuilding education in politically unstable environments necessitates a combination of local ownership and global support. Addressing Myanmar's education crisis will require a multi-stakeholder effort involving domestic civil society groups, international organizations, and ASEAN-led initiatives.

The prospects for educational reform in Myanmar are constrained by:

- **Political constraints:** The government's control over curricula and institutions limits progressive educational policies.
- **Infrastructure deficiencies:** Limited electricity, poor broadband access, and outdated facilities hinder digital learning.
- **Economic challenges:** The economic crisis post-coup has left many families unable to afford private education alternatives.
- **Lack of teacher training and support:** With many educators fleeing the country or resisting the state-controlled system, professional development opportunities are scarce.

Future Pathways: Towards a Resilient Education System

The path to rebuilding Myanmar's education system requires a multi-faceted approach that combines domestic reform efforts, international support, and technological innovation. Given the ongoing political instability, resilience strategies must be adaptable to Myanmar's uncertain future while addressing educational inequalities, digital access gaps, and the structural weaknesses that have long plagued the sector (World Bank, 2023).

Decentralizing education governance

One of the key challenges in Myanmar's education system has been highly centralized control, which has limited the ability of ethnic and regional education systems to develop independently. Future reforms should emphasize decentralization, allowing local and ethnic education networks—such as the Karen and Kachin education boards—to operate with more autonomy. Case studies from post-conflict education recovery efforts in Bosnia and South Sudan demonstrate that decentralized governance helps rebuild education systems in fragmented political environments (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024).

Digital and hybrid learning solutions

Given the severe disruptions to formal schooling, digital education remains one of the most viable alternatives for students in Myanmar. Alternative education models, including community-led learning centers, radio-based instruction, and offline digital libraries, have been successful in other conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan and Syria (UNESCO, 2023). However, Myanmar's restricted internet access and digital divide pose major challenges. To overcome these barriers, NGOs, international donors, and ASEAN partners must invest in low-tech solutions, including:

- Educational radio broadcasts and SMS-based learning modules, similar to UNICEF's Learning Passport program.
- Offline-first digital education platforms, such as Kolibri, which has been used in refugee and conflict settings.
- Solar-powered learning centers to mitigate the lack of electricity in rural and conflict-affected regions.

International collaboration and policy reform

Myanmar's education crisis cannot be addressed in isolation. Regional organizations such as ASEAN and the Asia Development Bank (ADB) should play a greater role in advocating for humanitarian education funding and cross-border learning programs. The Education Cannot Wait initiative has demonstrated that international partnerships can provide emergency education solutions in fragile states (Education Cannot Wait, 2023). Additionally, exiled Myanmar educators and diaspora networks should be leveraged to sustain informal education systems.

The role of private sector actors, edtech companies, and philanthropic organizations in financing innovative education solutions should also be explored. Countries like Bangladesh and India have successfully integrated mobile learning programs to reach marginalized populations, offering a model that Myanmar could adapt (World Economic Forum, 2022).

By implementing these future pathways, Myanmar can begin to rebuild an education system that is inclusive, resilient, and capable of adapting to its complex socio-political landscape.

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CONCLUSION

Myanmar's education system remains in a state of crisis, shaped by historical inequalities, political instability, and the widening digital divide. The 2021 military coup has exacerbated existing challenges, leading to widespread school closures, teacher shortages, and the mass displacement of students (UNESCO, 2023). Despite these obstacles, alternative education models—such as digital learning platforms, community-led schools, and cross-border education initiatives—provide hope for ensuring continued access to education.

To build a more resilient education system, Myanmar must prioritize decentralization, digital innovation, and international collaboration. Lessons from other post-conflict nations show that education recovery depends on a combination of local ownership and external support. The ASEAN community, UN agencies, and NGOs must take on a larger role in ensuring that Myanmar's students are not left behind.

Ultimately, the future of Myanmar's education system will depend on the political trajectory of the country, but proactive investment in alternative education models can help mitigate further learning loss. In the long run, education remains a critical tool for fostering peace, economic stability, and social cohesion in Myanmar (World Bank, 2023).

Without urgent intervention, millions of Myanmar's children risk becoming a "lost generation" with no access to formal learning. It is imperative that domestic and international stakeholders work together to safeguard education as a fundamental right and a vehicle for national rebuilding.

To move forward, the following recommendations should be prioritized:

- **Strengthen International Collaboration:** Myanmar must seek partnerships with international organizations to ensure continued educational funding and support for alternative learning initiatives.
- **Expand Digital and Mobile Learning Solutions:** Policymakers, NGOs, and private sector actors should invest in mobile-based education platforms and low-bandwidth solutions to reach underserved populations.
- **Enhance Policy Advocacy for Education Access:** Civil society organizations and international human rights groups must advocate for policies that ensure unrestricted access to education, even during political instability.
- **Develop Locally Driven Education Networks:** Communities should establish informal education networks and independent learning initiatives to counteract disruptions caused by government restrictions.
- **Provide Emergency Educational Assistance:** Global institutions should implement scholarship programs, financial aid, and resource-sharing platforms to mitigate the economic barriers affecting students and educators.

Despite these challenges, Myanmar's education system can be restructured through decentralized learning networks, digital resilience strategies, and global partnerships. The lessons drawn from other nations with similar political and economic disruptions suggest that education can persist even in crises, provided innovative approaches and stakeholder collaboration are prioritized.

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