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Challenges Facing English Language Education in Myanmar: A Narrative Inquiry

Nang Sandi Oo¹, Marilyn Fernandez Deocampo²

¹Corresponding Author, Master of English Language Teaching, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Thailand. Email: nansandioo@gmail.com

²Program Director, M.A. ELT & Ph.D. ELT, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University, Thailand. Email: mdeocampo@au.edu

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Abstract

The civil disobedience movement (CDM) has reshaped Myanmar's future and profoundly altered its educational landscape. Amidst this upheaval, critical stakeholders, including administrators, the government, and teachers, struggled to maintain the essential foundation of the nation: education. Like people in other countries, the people of Myanmar aspire to improve their quality of life and education, particularly in learning English. This study employed a narrative approach, using narrative writing texts to explore the lived experiences of English teachers working in international and private schools during this period of instability. Through qualitative methodology, the study collected and analyzed personal stories, revealing the multifaceted challenges faced by these educators. Thematic analysis of the narratives uncovered a range of professional, personal, social, emotional, and legal challenges that deeply impacted their lives. Key themes identified include financial hardships, social isolation, emotional stress, legal threats, and the loss of qualified teachers, leading to a decline in teaching standards and student learning outcomes. By capturing the voices of these teachers through their narratives, the study highlights the complex and far-reaching effects of the CDM on Myanmar's education system.

Keywords: Civil Disobedience Movement, English Teachers In Myanmar, English Language Teaching And Learning, Narrative Inquiry

Introduction

When President Thein Sein led the country from 2011 to 2015, improving education became a national priority. In 2013, significant education reform was initiated with the support of international organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF, as well as donors from countries like Australia, England, Germany, and Japan. This reform process continued under the NLD (National League for Democracy) government, with the goal of completion by 2028 (Tanaka & Khine, 2021). As part of this reform, the current education system was structured to include six years of primary education (Grade 1 to Grade 6), three years of lower secondary (Grade 7 to Grade 9), and two years of upper secondary

(Grade 10 and Grade 11). By 2018, Myanmar had 47,365 primary education schools serving approximately 9.26 million students, all under the Department of Basic Education supervision within the Ministry of Education (MoE) (Htike, 2021).

However, despite these reforms, Myanmar's public schools faced significant challenges, mainly due to insufficient government funding. According to Liu and Bray (2020), this lack of funding contributed to poor conditions in public schools and inadequate teacher salaries, which remained insufficient despite increases in 2012 and 2015 due to economic inflation. The low salaries and the relatively low barriers to entering the teaching profession made teaching an unappealing career choice. Tanaka and Khine (2021) noted that teaching was often seen as an easy occupation, with guaranteed employment upon completion of training.

Background of the Study

In the context of Myanmar's education reforms, English emerged as a crucial skill, driven by the country's democratization and its growing status as a tourist destination. English became a 'communication tool' for engaging with the global community (Soe, 2015; Takahashi, 2014) and was regarded as 'an important educational qualification' by the younger generation, aiding them in achieving broader life goals (Takahashi, 2014). As a result of policy changes, the English proficiency of the newer generation in Myanmar has improved compared to the previous generation, thanks to increased learning opportunities. This underscores the vital role of the English language in Myanmar's education system and its potential to shape the country's future.

Given these developments, English language teachers have assumed a critical role in Myanmar's education system. However, despite English being a compulsory subject from kindergarten through university, several issues have contributed to low English proficiency levels among students. According to Pannasami et al. (2020), English teachers in public schools are often under-trained and need more motivation to enhance their skills. This situation underscores the importance of a robust education system in developing countries like Myanmar, where education is fundamental for individuals to thrive in a civil society.

The landscape of education in Myanmar, however, was drastically altered following the military coup on February 1, 2021. The resulting civil unrest and ongoing conflicts forced many children, especially those in rural areas, to prioritize survival over education. Amidst these challenges, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) emerged as a form of peaceful protest against the military takeover, significantly impacting the education system. Starting as an online campaign, the CDM quickly garnered the support of civil servants and private sector workers, who demonstrated their resistance by 'walking away from their jobs' (CEIC, 2017; Walker, 2021). After the coup, over 400,000 workers, including a significant number of teachers, participated in the CDM, with approximately 50% of teachers joining the movement (Drechsler, 2021). However, these participants have faced severe financial hardships, prompting some to return to work under the military regime.

Given this context, the current study explores the experiences of English teachers the CDM has directly impacted. Specifically, it aims to investigate how these teachers navigate the professional, personal, social, emotional, and legal challenges their participation in the

movement brings. By examining their narratives, this study seeks to understand the broader implications of the CDM on Myanmar's education system and the lives of its educators. The research question is thus intrinsically linked to this context, aiming to uncover the nuanced influences of political instability on the educational landscape in Myanmar, with a particular focus on English language teachers.

Literature Review

The Definition of Civil Disobedience Movement

Power (2019) cited Encyclopedia Britannica and constructed the meaning of civil disobedience as the denial act of the citizens to obey the laws or commands of a government to show the objection or to force the concession from the government without using violence. Civil Disobedience has been applied to show rejection for many years back then. However, the term civil disobedience had been invented by the philosopher Henry David Thoreau in 1849. Delmas (2016) explained, in 1840s, Henry David Thoreau refused to pay the poll tax for seven years to convey the meaning of protestation about the slavery in the war against Mexico. After that, Power (2019) mentioned the most famous modern history of using Civil Disobedience were the movements by Gandhi and King. Peterson (2019) defined Civil Disobedience as intended peaceful activities which break unfair or biased rules, policies, and laws in order to demand better changes in governance for the public. Moreover, the citizens who joined the Civil Disobedience comprehended that the act of violating the law was not insulting to the country's rule of law and they had to pay the penalty for breaking laws or policies. Weinstock (2016) also expressed Civil Disobedience as an act of breaking laws which captivate the public attention.

King (2022) mentioned that Myanmar was turning into a complicated, messy, and deteriorated country due to the current reality of political instability. Myanmar citizens have been experienced three coups in the past six decades; in 1958, in 1962, and 1988. And the country has endured military rule and poverty as a result of closed-door policies and civil war. The Civil Disobedience Movement, which began as an online campaign, has become a bigger and wider movement that plays a vital role. Moreover, the Civil Disobedience Movement, started by civil servants, teachers, students, doctors, and railway workers has gained the attention of the public and expanded into various methods such as boycotting military products and persuading members of the army and the police. Lall (2021) stated the education sector played the crucial role in the Civil Disobedience Movement as the educators and staff stopped going to the job and the Ministry of Education (MOE) released a statement which described the CDM teachers and staffs would not get the promotion, and some were sent to the remote universities as the punishment for joining the Civil Disobedience Movement. In search from Radio Free Asia (RFA) (2022), among 450,000 schoolteachers, 200,000 participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement after the military coup.

The Roles of English Teachers in Myanmar

Marber et al. (2019) stated that in Myanmar, teachers were placed at the same level as parents, and the students were required to show them respect. Due to this practice, students adapted to the habit of listening to teachers without questioning them. Besides, the teaching methods in the classroom concentrated on the teacher-centered with rote learning. Therefore, after-school private classes became popular in Myanmar, as the students must take extra classes to understand the lessons. The low salary was another reason why teachers offered tuition classes outside the classroom (Tanaka & Khine, 2021). According to Higgins and Paul (2019), the education system which was centralized by the government had a massive impact on the way the teachers manage the classroom. Ireland and Benthuisen (2014) mentioned that the Myanmar education was suffering from unqualified teachers since they started their teaching jobs without proper training. Although the government has placed emphasis on reforming the teacher training system since 2011, trainee teachers have been affected by the rote learning which they used as the students in the past (Ireland & Benthuisen, 2014).

Pannasami (2019) reported that English teachers in Myanmar have been labeled as unqualified based on the several factors such as an overcrowded curriculum, teacher-centered teaching methods, rote-learning, and insufficient classroom time. According to Win (2021), English education in Myanmar has relied on using the Myanmar language and teacher-centered methods from kindergarten to the tertiary level, making English more of a subject than a language. The teacher-centered method has resulted in minimal exposure to the English language, creating a significant challenge in teaching English (Win, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of a language policy for English language teaching in Myanmar has resulted in the use of the Myanmar language as the medium of instruction in the classroom (Win, 2021). Win (2021) cited McLaughlin (1992) and highlighted teachers' deficiencies in implementing teaching methods and how their educational proficiency impacted their English language teaching. Therefore, based on Pannasami (2019), professional development, academic training, self-study, and continuous practice of using English are significant responsibilities for teachers to maintain and enhance their language proficiency. Moreover, understanding "effective teaching techniques", mastering "classroom management" to foster a positive learning environment, and "learning psychology" to comprehend the cognitive and emotional factors influencing language acquisition are crucial responsibilities for educators in creating an effective educational experience for students (Pannasami, 2019).

Viewing the Status of English in Myanmar

Tin (2014) noted that the status of English in Myanmar is in the Kachru's "Expanding Circle" although Myanmar was once colonized by the British. He differentiated the "Expanding Circle" as the countries that use English as a foreign language and the "Outer Circle" as the former colonized countries that use English as a second language (Tin, 2014). Even though English lost its status as the official language to Burmese (Myanmar language) when the country got independence in 1948, English was still used in official documents by the government administration (Aye, 2020). However, in 1962, the military regime focused on the "Burmanization" process, making Burmese the only language used as the language of

instruction although there are numerous ethnic groups and languages in Myanmar (Lall & South, 2018; Tin, 2014). Then, Tin (2014) stated that in the education sector, Burmese became the only medium of instruction for all levels of education. In 1964, all schools were centralized under the uniform education system by the military regime and English language teaching started from the fifth standard at the secondary level. But the military government constituted a new policy in 1981, which made English a compulsory subject from kindergarten to tertiary levels in order to address the decreasing standards of English in schools.

Tin (2014) cited Lorch et al. (2008) and stated that English language teaching had become prominent in the private sector in the late 1990s, as English was the essential language skill for assisting the compulsory English classes in public schools and studying abroad. Christian institutions, Buddhist monasteries, ethnic communities and private language centers played a key role in promoting English language teaching and learning. In the past, there were many English learners instead of English users according to the situation of a closed country. The students did not have the environment to practice English (Tin, 2014). Then, Ireland and Benthuisen (2014) commented on the changes in the economy, politics, social aspects and education that influenced the booming of English language teaching and learning in Myanmar when the country opened to international organizations at the beginning of 2010. And young people were passionate about learning English as the tourism industry was growing at that time (Takahashi, 2014, as cited in Ireland & Benthuisen, 2014). But the status of English continued as a foreign language.

Understanding Narrative Inquiry

Kim (2016) explained that narrative inquiry had been introduced for the first time by Connelly and Clandinin in an article published in *Educational Researcher*. They advanced the narrative as stories of how humans experience the world based on the theory of Dewey. Wang and Geale (2015) also described that, for Dewey, to investigate the life experiences of the people, it is respectable to study life and education of the people. Besides, narrative inquiry became well-known in education and was used not only as a research methodology, but also as a curricular and pedagogical strategy. Lindsay and Schwind (2016) commented that the aim of narrative inquiry was to explore the phenomenon in depth and breadth. Connelly and Clandinin developed Narrative Inquiry for studying methodology and phenomena in the education sector (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). Barkhuizen et al. (2014) described the narrative inquiry as the unique methodology to examine “language teaching and learning as lived experiences”, as the participants’ lives were continuously engaged in language teaching and learning. Moreover, the method was regarded as the way to study the progression of the status of the second language of a country. Furthermore, the narrative inquiry was seen as the method helping researchers to understand how language teachers and learners construct their life experiences and to comprehend the areas of language teaching and learning from the point of the participants. Moreover, it could deepen the comprehension of language teaching and learning as a lived experience (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Research Objective

This research aims to investigate the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on English teachers in Myanmar, focusing on understanding the multifaceted challenges they face. This study has the potential to significantly inform educational policy and the development of support systems for teachers working in conflict zones, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on education in politically unstable environments.

Research Question

What is the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on English teachers in Myanmar?

Theoretical Framework

Barkhuizen (2020) explained that in the education sector, narrative inquiry plays a vital role in exploring the intentions and beliefs of teachers in their professional and personal lives. This method is recognized as “a sense-making or knowledge construction activity,” making it particularly effective in understanding participants' reasoning and thought processes. Barkhuizen (2020) outlined "five core dimensions" of narrative inquiry relevant to applied linguistic research. These include:

- 1. Narrative Inquiry:** Focusing on examining phenomena to uncover narratives.
- 2. Narrative and Interaction (Stories-from-Interaction):** Analyzing interviews or responses for content.
- 3. Narrative Research and Researcher Engagement:** Addressing limitations in text-based data and researcher engagement.
- 4. Stored Data (Data in Story Form):** Treating the data as stories, capturing participants' responses to research questions.
- 5. Analysis of Narrative:** Involving coding and theme identification to answer research questions (Barkhuizen, 2020).

In the context of this study, narrative inquiry was not only suitable but necessary to capture the complex and deeply personal experiences of English teachers in Myanmar during a time of political instability. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) has placed teachers in precarious and often perilous situations, affecting every aspect of their professional and personal lives. By allowing participants to express their experiences through narrative writing, this study leverages the strengths of narrative inquiry to reveal the nuanced, lived realities of these educators.

In a politically unstable environment like Myanmar, where traditional research methods might not fully capture the emotional and psychological impacts of such turmoil, narrative inquiry provides a unique and invaluable avenue for understanding. It allows teachers to tell their stories in their own words, offering rich, in-depth insights into how the CDM has reshaped their lives. This approach is particularly effective in environments where individuals are navigating multiple, intersecting challenges, such as financial hardship, social isolation, and threats to personal safety. The narrative inquiry, therefore, not only aligns with the study's aims

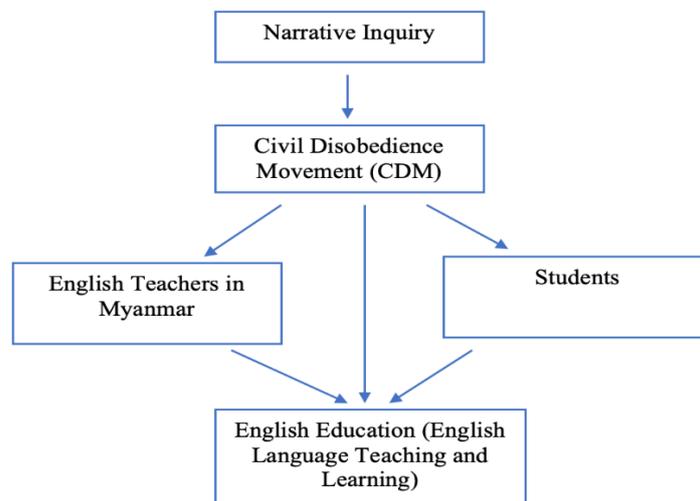
but is also essential for uncovering the broader implications of the CDM on Myanmar’s education system and its educators.

Butina (2015) emphasized that the stories themselves serve as raw data in narrative research. In this study, these narratives provide a vivid and comprehensive picture of the influence of the CDM on English teachers in Myanmar. Given that “humans are natural storytellers,” using a narrative inquiry enables the collection of rich, in-depth information, allowing participants to fully articulate their life experiences in a way that traditional methods might not capture (Butina, 2015). This makes narrative inquiry particularly well-suited for exploring the experiences of individuals in politically unstable contexts like Myanmar, where personal narratives are integral to understanding the broader social and educational impacts of conflict and upheaval.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

The Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Since the present study aimed to explore the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on English teachers in Myanmar, a qualitative method was used to conduct the study. A qualitative research design was chosen to explore the “social reality” and “social phenomenon” (Leavy, 2014) of the teachers' experiences during this turbulent period. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to revealing and understanding individuals' meanings based on their experiences, especially in “new or under-researched areas” (Leavy, 2014). This approach acknowledges the participants' lives, feelings, and experiences from “the subjects’ points of view” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Therefore, this study employed qualitative methods to collect the varied life stories of English teachers across Myanmar, providing “detailed information” that offers an in-depth and clear view of their individual lives (Butina, 2015).

Population and Sample Group

This study was conducted in Myanmar, also known as Burma, a country currently facing instability due to a military coup. The political instability has significantly impacted the lives of Myanmar's citizens, including teachers, doctors, engineers, railway workers, students, and civil servants. According to data from two years ago, there were 430,000 schoolteachers in Myanmar, of whom 125,900 were suspended for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement. However, the exact number of English teachers who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement remains due to the ongoing instability.

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of 125,900 schoolteachers who participated in the CDM. The study employed a snowball sampling method to select participants, which is particularly effective in reaching individuals who might be challenging to contact due to safety concerns or political sensitivity. Initially, the researcher contacted a few known English teachers participating in the CDM. These initial participants were then asked to refer other English teachers involved in the movement. This method allowed the researcher to gradually build a network of participants nationwide, ensuring that the sample included a diverse group of teachers from various regions and educational institutions.

The study ultimately involved 12 English teachers in Myanmar as participants. Seven were English teachers from state schools and universities who had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement, while the remaining 5 were English teachers from private or international schools. The sample included two male and ten female participants, reflecting the broader demographic trend in Myanmar, where 84.58% of teachers were female in 2017 (CEIC, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive political context in Myanmar, this study strongly emphasized ethical considerations to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants. The researcher took several steps to protect the participants' identities and personal information. First, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the questions they would be asked, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the study commenced.

To further safeguard the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the research to ensure their identities remained confidential. Additionally, the final report omitted or altered any identifying details that could reveal a participant's identity or location. Given the risks associated with the political climate, the researcher also employed secure communication channels for data collection and maintained strict data protection protocols to prevent unauthorized access to the information.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was narrative writing texts. Participants were asked to write about their experiences, including how the Civil Disobedience Movement affected their lives, careers, financial situations, and thoughts on the future of English language teaching and learning in Myanmar. Sub-questions were provided to guide

their responses, ensuring that participants addressed critical aspects of the movement's influence on their roles as English teachers.

Figure 2

Questions for Narrative Writing Text

<p>What is the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on you as an English teacher in Myanmar? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- How does it affect or change your career, financial situation, family, and social life? _____.- What do you think is the influence of this movement on English education in Myanmar? _____.- What do you think the future of Myanmar Education, specifically English language teaching and learning will be like because of this movement? _____.- What do you think of the effect of English teachers participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement on students in Myanmar? _____.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was performed on the collected data to analyze the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on English teachers. Clarke and Braun (2016) describe thematic analysis as a method used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report significant themes within data. The process began with the collection of narrative texts from the participants. The researcher first read through all the narratives to become familiar with the data before beginning the coding process. The narrative texts were then systematically coded to identify patterns and significant themes. The final steps involved revising and evaluating these themes to ensure they accurately captured the participants' experiences before finalizing the thematic framework that guided the study's findings.

Results and Discussion

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar has impacted English teachers nationwide, leading to significant professional, personal, social, emotional, and legal challenges. Teachers were motivated by this movement to take a stand against the government, resulting in complex repercussions for their lives and well-being. From financial hardships and job instability to emotional stress and security threats, they have navigated a very difficult situation shaped by political unrest and social pressures. The movement has caused significant disruption in Myanmar's education sector, leading to the loss of qualified teachers, the hiring of inexperienced replacements, and the deterioration of teaching standards and learning outcomes. As experienced educators joined the movement, a severe shortage of skilled teachers emerged, resulting in a notable decline in educational quality. The vacant positions left by these trained professionals have been filled by unqualified individuals, especially in crucial subjects like English, further exacerbating the crisis. This shift has resulted in a deterioration of teaching standards and learning outcomes, demonstrating the impact of the CDM on the educational landscape. Additionally, the continued reliance on traditional methods and the

commercialization of education through mandatory tuition classes have further worsened the quality of education and imposed an economic burden on students and their families.

Moreover, the shortage of qualified teachers and the reliance on traditional teaching methods have hindered students' ability to develop English language skills and have decreased their overall academic development. The impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement on Myanmar's education system has created significant disparities and challenges, especially affecting public education. Additionally, the educational inequality highlights the need for systemic reforms to ensure fair access to quality education for all students. The political crisis has delayed Myanmar's progress in adopting modern educational methodologies, such as hybrid and digital pedagogies. Efforts to innovate and improve educational practices have been delayed, which has negatively impacted the quality of education.

Based on the thematic analysis of the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement on Myanmar English teachers, the themes have been organized into different main categories. Following is the detailed organization and interpretation of the findings:

1. Professional and Financial Impact of Joining CDM

Following the military coup, teachers who participated in the CDM faced severe financial hardships and job instability, as many had to quit their government jobs, resulting in unemployment and a lack of income. The transition to employment in the private sector has been challenging due to surveillance and restrictions imposed by the military government. Even teachers who did not participate in the movement experienced job insecurity and financial difficulties due to school closures. Despite these hardships, some teachers found positive career and financial changes by transitioning to freelance or private school teaching. In contrast, others struggled with financial instability and limited employment opportunities. Thus, the movement has created complex professional challenges and opportunities for Myanmar's educators.

1.1 Financial hardships and job instability

Teachers face financial hardships for joining the movement because they have to quit and terminate their jobs, resulting in unemployment and a lack of salary, causing significant financial hardship. Some teachers were imprisoned for participating in Civil Disobedience, leading to the loss of their teaching positions. Additionally, the military government's surveillance has prevented teachers from changing careers to the private sector. Consequently, teachers are forced to find alternative careers for their financial problems, often in non-academic jobs like online shopping.

Teacher 1: *“Most of the Myanmar teachers who are opposing the military government, are facing threats including career, financial situation, family, personal life and social life. As they stop their job, there is no income for them..... Because of harrowing financial issues, CDM teachers from rural areas have to spend most of their time for non-academic jobs to be able to pay for living costs.”*

Teacher 5: *“This movement has lots of sequences on my life. I have to quite the job. I don't have job, salary and it's very hard for me.”*

Teacher 9: *“My life change a lot when I do CDM. CDM employees were arrested and also I arrested for 1 years and 7 months. I worked as a teacher for 5 years and I don’t know what to do when I out of prison. I only work I can do is teacher.”*

[SE: My life considerably changed when I participated in the CDM. CDM employees were arrested, and I was also arrested for one year and seven months. I worked as a teacher for five years, and I do not know what to do when I get out of prison. The only work I know how to do is teaching.]

Teachers who did not join the Civil Disobedience Movement indirectly experienced the movement's influence on their professional lives due to pressure from citizens, which caused the closure of schools in the private sector. They are confronted with the direct influence of the political situation on their employment and financial situation, even if they are working at international or private schools.

Teacher 3: *“My life also changed a bit due to the political situation of my country. Although I didn’t need to join CDM as I am working as an English teacher in an international school, the school was officially closed for 6 months due to the pressure from the citizen when the coup started happen. So, I was jobless and didn’t have income during that time.”*

1.2 Employment restrictions and Opportunities

The movement has created both opportunities and challenges for teachers. Finding a new job in the private sector has been challenging since the teacher's involvement in the movement against the military government makes it difficult for them to be accepted in private institutions. The transition to a new career is particularly difficult since the teacher has invested their entire life in teaching and due to their specialized career background. This created a professional discontinuation in their teaching career, and they had to transition to a different career. Some teachers have described increased job opportunities, especially for private tutoring, due to parents finding alternative ways to educate children while the CDM disrupts formal education. However, it also hinders the chance to pursue further qualifications, such as a diploma in teaching English as a Foreign Language and studying abroad.

Teacher 4: *“For me, there’re pros and cons. First, I couldn’t join the diploma of teaching English as a Foreign Language which I can easily access in my country. Then I think studying abroad is better than local education, yet I can’t still join the courses because of so many reasons. But, because of this movement, lots of parents offer me to tutor their kids English at home. I can say that I have more job opportunities than earlier.”*

Teacher 5: *“As a government teacher who joined the movement, it’s very hard to find the job in the private schools and also very hard to change the career because I had been teaching in my whole life. For example, I cannot find the job easily as I involved in this movement. I tried to find the job in private school. But for them it very hard to accept me as I am against the military government.”*

Teacher 9: *“I tried applied for the job in private schools or international schools. But the military government prohibited the international and private schools to accept the CDM teachers. And the private and international schools dare not accept the CDM*

teachers. So I cannot find the job for me. I want to teach part time but the parents worry about my safety. So I am thinking about changing an HR career and start to study about the HR. Now I am doing HR career.”

[SE: I tried to apply for jobs in private and international schools, but the military government has prohibited these schools from accepting CDM teachers. As a result, private and international schools are reluctant to hire CDM teachers. Therefore, I cannot find a job in teaching. I want to teach part-time, but my parents are concerned about my safety. So, I am thinking about a career change to HR and have started studying HR. Now, I am pursuing a career in HR.”

1.3 Positive career change

The CDM has created positive professional and financial outcomes for some teachers. By transitioning to freelance teaching or private schools, the teachers have discovered increased job satisfaction and financial stability. This change is displayed through a newfound confidence in their careers and a sense of professional fulfillment.

Teacher 12: *“Most of the staff who participate in Civil Disobedience Movement encounter difficulties and challenges. As for me, my professional career and financial situation have changed positively. I become more confident and satisfied with my profession and income as a freelance and private schools’ teacher.”*

2. Social Impact

Despite the political turmoil, some teachers experienced minimal changes in their social lives due to limited social interactions. Others faced social isolation due to the need to change contact information and relocate for safety, which disrupted their ability to connect and collaborate with other participants.

2.1 Limited social impact

Teachers describe limited social interaction, which results in minor alterations in social life despite the country being in political turbulence. The influence of the movement may vary based on individual social conditions.

Teacher 3: *“Social life hasn’t changed much because I don’t have many friends.”*

Teacher 6: *“For me, I am a private primary school principal and also have been working as an English teacher too. So, I don’t have any big changes in my life because of teachers joining CDM.”*

2.2 Social isolation

Teachers have to change their contact information and move to new locations to prevent apprehension, which leads to social isolation among CDM teachers. This results in their loss of capability to collaborate and support each other.

Teacher 1: *“For fear of the junta’s reprisal and arbitrary arrests, they changed their mobile sim cards and some even had to move to other places. Thus, it has made them lose connection between each other....”*

Some teachers had a noticeable disconnect from their colleagues in the education sector, which showed their isolation from their previous work community.

Teacher 9: “My social life doesn’t change much because my friends share the same ideas and thinking. *But I was far away from the education staff.*”

3. Emotional and Psychological Impact

The movement has created significant stress and depression as teachers struggle with the emotional strain of student inquiries and lack of social support. The pandemic and political turmoil have compounded feelings of loss and grief, which prevent a return to normality. Some teachers face ongoing insecurity and worry about personal safety despite their professional achievements. This complex emotional landscape emphasizes the profound impact of the CDM on educators' mental health and well-being.

3.1 Stress, depression, Insecurity and Worry

Some teachers experienced substantial emotional suffering due to the calls from students asking why teaching had stopped, which led to sadness and frequent crying. The lack of social support exacerbated these feelings, as friends distanced themselves due to their involvement.

Teacher 7: “*I feel hurt emotionally a lot because my students call me and ask why I don’t teach them anymore. I am sad and cry a lot.*”

Moreover, the ongoing crisis has strained teachers' mental health, which is the combination of professional frustrations and personal uncertainties. These challenges and insecurities have increased levels of stress and depression, affecting their overall well-being and performance.

Teacher 8: “*I suffered stress and depression due to this as well as for my own career and the future goals that I had ahead related to my own individual life.*”

Additionally, teachers continue to feel insecure and worry about their personal safety despite their occupational achievements after participating in the CDM. The political instability and potential consequences of participating in the CDM contribute to this anxiety, affecting the teachers and their families.

Teacher 12: “*I become more confident and satisfied with my profession and income as a freelance and private schools’ teacher. On the other hand, me and my family members sometimes feel insecure and worried about my security.*”

4. Legal and Security Challenges

The educators who opposed the military government faced severe personal and family safety risks. The military junta employed strategies such as arresting teachers, threatening their families, and harassing those who could not be directly apprehended, and created an atmosphere of constant insecurity. Teachers and their families encountered continuous surveillance, harassment, and threats, causing some teachers to relocate for safety. The following teachers' narratives illustrate these oppressive actions' influence on their lives and well-being.

4.1 Threats to personal and family safety

English teachers participating in the CDM encounter threats to their personal and family safety since teachers can be immediately captured on the spot if the military government finds them working in private schools. Arresting teachers and threatening their families when they cannot directly apprehend the CDM teachers are the junta's techniques, which create fear and insecurity for the teachers. Additionally, schools hiring CDM teachers confront the threat of being sealed by the military government.

Teacher 1: *“Most of the Myanmar teachers who are opposing the military government, are facing threats including career, financial situation, family, personal life and social life..... If they can't arrest CDM teachers, they threat CDM teacher's families. There is no safe for CDM teachers and their families.”*

Teacher 10: *“They threatened the family of the teachers even in front of a 3 years old little boy if they didn't find the one they wanted.....They tried to get a new job with their qualified skills. However, they were disturbed by the military government. Teachers were not allowed to teach in every private school. If not, not only the teaches were arrested at the spot but also the school was sealed for allowing them to work. They searched CDM teachers everywhere and every time.”*

Furthermore, some teachers faced police investigations, such as phone and file checks, which led to arrests due to protest-related photos. The police used those pictures for threats of imprisonment and intimidation to force the teachers into compliance.

Teacher 7: *“The police check my phone, my gallery, files and they arrest me because they see the picture of protesting and with my school uniform. They pressure me to answer yes to their questions and threaten me that they can sent me to prison for 5 years. But they let me go after I sign the paper. They also told me that they will always watching me.”*

4.2 Lack of security and forced relocation

Continuous threats and surveillance from the police made the teachers feel a sense of insecurity since every movement was filled with danger and aggression. The lack of safety was a primary factor in the teachers' decision to leave Myanmar and relocate to other countries.

Teacher 7: *“They pressure me to answer yes to their questions and threaten me that they can sent me to prison for 5 years. But they let me go after I sign the paper. They also told me that they will always watching me. Therefore, I don't feel secure and move to Thailand.”*

Teacher 10: *“There was no safety for teachers and their family. They have suffered the most suffocating time. Every second was filled with a threat and insecure situation.”*

5. Loss of Qualified Teachers

The widespread participation of teachers in the Civil Disobedience Movement has led to significant challenges within the education sector. The departure of skilled and experienced teachers has created a remarkable shortage, which has decreased the quality of education. This gap has been filled by unqualified and inexperienced individuals, which has negatively

influenced teaching effectiveness, especially in English language education. The absence of well-trained educators and untrained substitute teachers has weakened the overall educational system. The following accounts from teachers demonstrate the critical issues caused by the shortage of teachers, the recruitment of unqualified substitutes, and the subsequent decline in educational standards.

5.1 Shortage of skilled and experienced teachers

The education sector is confronted with a remarkable shortage of qualified teachers due to teachers participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement. After the teachers, who were well-trained in the new education system, joined the movement, there was a gap in the school's teaching capabilities. The need for trained teachers who understand and can implement the new methods is apparent. This shortage requires recruiting new staff, who need more expertise in teaching English, which negatively affects the overall quality of education. Furthermore, teachers who do not join the movement are instructed to teach subjects beyond their knowledge and specialization, which influences the quality of education.

Teacher 1: *“The biggest challenge for us is the shortage of qualified teachers. The teachers who don't join the CDM are forced to teach all the subjects even they don't know enough knowledge of the subjects.”*

Teacher 7: *“I do the CDM and in school no one can teach with the new system. More the army government hire the people with no teacher training and the people who are not qualified to teach.”*

[SE: *“I joined the CDM, and in school, no one can teach with the new system. Additionally, the military government hired people who have no teacher training and are not qualified to teach.”*

Teacher 10: *“As a result, there was a shortage of qualified teachers in our education system which became one of the most challenging problems.”*

Furthermore, replacing qualified teachers with high school graduates who have moderate grades significantly affects the quality of education. Students do not receive the necessary guidance and instruction to perform exceptionally in academics, affecting their future prospects.

Teacher 8: *“The impact on education due to the CDM is that students will continue to lack of quality education not because of the CDM participants but because of the substituted educators being not qualified and certified. Certain schools are giving opportunities to high school graduates with moderate marks to become teachers with a salary around 200000 MMK during the state of inflation in the markets.”*

This significant loss of qualified teachers is particularly destructive for the country, as these well-trained and qualified teachers cannot be easily replaced, and the country has encountered a critical shortage of well-trained educators.

Teacher 2: *“When English teachers stopped working and supporting CDM, the needs of English teachers became challenging because no other people can be replaced in well trained teachers especially in English.”*

5.2 Replacement with unqualified or inexperienced teachers and lack of proper training

The military government quickly substitutes unqualified and unskilled teachers to replace the vacant positions created by the movement. This rapid and unregulated hiring process decreases the quality of English education. The replacement of experienced and well-trained teachers with unqualified substitutes becomes a challenge in English language teaching and learning since the substitute teachers need more skills and knowledge, leading to a decline in the quality of education. Their incompetence directly influences students' ability to learn and use the language in the classroom. The lack of proper training and low language proficiency negatively impact students' learning outcomes.

Teacher 3: *“The junta replaced unqualified teachers without proper training when many experience and qualified teachers joined CDM. And the education system has become weak.”*

Teacher 5: *“The English Education in the future will become a worry situation because of unqualified teachers. Professional teachers involved in the movement. And, the government hired or accepted unskillful teacher immediately.”*

The transition from traditional to new teaching methods has been challenging, especially when inexperienced substitute teachers need help implementing these methods effectively since the professional teachers joined the movement. This gap in proficiency affects the teaching process and the effectiveness of the new curriculum.

Teacher 3: *“If the substitute teacher cannot use the new teaching methods and don't use the English language in the classroom. It can definitely affect on the students' language using in the classroom.”*

Teacher 11: *“The teachers stay at school cannot teach with new teaching methods. That can influence the English language teaching and learning in the school.”*

6. Divergence between Public and Private Education

While students from wealthier backgrounds face minimal disruptions, students from lower and middle-class backgrounds, especially in public schools, suffer from a decline in the quality of education. The inequality is further exacerbated for students who solely rely on public education since the shortage of qualified teachers leaves them at a disadvantage compared to their peers in private schools. This educational inequality highlights the requirement to address the systemic issues within the public education system to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students.

6.1 Different impacts based on socioeconomic status

The movement impacts students based on their socioeconomic status. Students from wealthier backgrounds who attend private or international schools face the slightest interruption in their education as these institutions usually operate. Public school students, especially those from lower and middle-class backgrounds, are affected by the CDM as the changes in the public education system have led to a decline in the quality of English language teaching and learning for these students. Due to their participation in CDM, the absence of dedicated and creative teachers has a negative impact on students, especially students from working-class backgrounds who rely on public education due to financial limitations. Public

schools are limited in providing high-quality English education, creating educational inequalities.

Teacher 3: *“For the students who are from the rich background and normal class people, they go to the private schools and international schools. So, there aren’t any bit big impact on them since all of the schools in private sectors are running as usual.....English language teaching and learning in the public school has definitely changed and the students from the lower class and some from middle class are the one suffering from the CDM.”*

Teacher 5: *“The students who came from the working class, they cannot go to the private center for English subject. They depend on the teacher at government schools or university.”*

Teacher 6: *“The children from the working class are the one suffering because they have to go to public schools due to financial matter.”*

7. Deterioration of Public-School Education

As competent teachers participate in the CDM or transition to private schools, public schools must improve teaching quality and standards. The hiring of inexperienced teachers and the reliance on traditional teaching methods, such as memorization-based methods, further degrade the educational environment. Substitute teachers needing more skills to implement modern curricula exacerbate the problem, although public schools' course materials have improved. The change towards an exam-centric approach reduces students' critical thinking and practical language skills, undermining the overall quality of English education in public schools.

7.1 Non-standard English education in public school

The quality of English education in public schools is predicted to decline due to the participation of competent teachers in the CDM. This non-standard education means that students will receive a different level of instruction and support, leading to a poorer learning environment and outcomes.

Teacher 12: *“In the future, English language teaching and learning in the Government schools will become worse and non-standard because of the lack of outstanding and professional English teachers.”*

7.2 Decline in teaching quality and reliance on traditional teaching methods

The influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement significantly deteriorated the standard of English language teaching and learning in public schools. The military government's hiring of inexperienced teachers without proper training affected the quality of education, as these teachers lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver the curriculum. The quality of English education has deteriorated because the remaining teachers needed more proper training, reverted to traditional teaching methods, and focused solely on exam preparation, resulting in a decline in teaching standards. There is concern that substitute teachers will restart the traditional memorization-based teaching methods, which could positively affect students' language skills and overall learning experience. Moreover, the focus of public-school teachers shifted to exam preparation. This has limited students' critical

thinking and reduced their ability to use English effectively in real-life situations. The current system emphasizes memorization over understanding.

Teacher 6: *“They use the old teaching method which is memorizing when they are teaching....”*

Teacher 7: *“I think the English language teaching and learning can become worse and the teaching system can become like in the past.”*

Teacher 9: *“There have damage in the English language teaching and learning in the public school in Myanmar.....After the teachers who can teach the new education system do CDM, right now the education system focus mainly on the exam. And the students are forced to study this and answer this.”*

[SE: There has been damage to English language teaching and learning in public schools in Myanmar..... After the teachers who can teach the new education system do CDM, right now the education system focus mainly on the exam. And the students are forced to study this and answer this.]

Teacher 10: *“To solve the problems of shortage of teachers, the military coups hired a lot of teachers who had no experience in teaching and who didn’t have enough knowledge of respective subjects.”*

8. Economic Influence on Education

The reliance on tuition classes has transformed education, creating both economic and educational challenges. The lack of focus among teachers in public schools has increased the necessity for additional tuition classes, which has generated financial strain on students and their families, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

8.1 Mandatory tuition classes (Expansion of tuition classes)

Teachers' reduced focus on school teaching has increased the importance of tuition classes. Students are compelled to attend these extra classes, which indicate an economic aspect of the educational decline. Attending these additional classes is essential for students to secure quality education, which needs additional financial resources. Therefore, instead of teachers being dedicated to improving students' learning outcomes in public schools, non-CDM teachers require students to attend additional tuition classes after school to earn extra income.

Teacher 6: *“They use the old teaching method which is memorizing when they are teaching and instruct that every student have to attend the tuition after the school to make more money.”*

Teacher 9: *“The teachers don’t focus their teaching in the schools because they open the tuition class. And the students need to attend the tuition.”*

9. Impact on Students

The transformation in educational practices has brought significant challenges and concerns among educators, including the quality of English language instruction. These changes have exacerbated educational inequality, which has led to negative consequences for student engagement and prospects. Furthermore, teachers have expressed concerns about the impact on students' English language proficiency and overall academic development. There are

growing apprehensions about the extensive consequences of these shifts on educational standards and students' readiness for future opportunities.

9.1 Negative consequences for student engagement and learning

When trained teachers were present, students actively used and improved their English skills in the classroom as English was used as the instruction medium, facilitating better comprehension and expression among students. However, non-CDM teachers' lack of focus and outdated teaching methods led to an ineffective learning experience. Students may need more motivation or support to achieve language proficiency. The old teaching methods negatively affected students since they experienced and enjoyed interactive and student-centered approaches. This change can hinder their ability to develop English language skills and reduce their engagement and enjoyment in learning English.

Teacher 6: *“The non CDM teachers don’t have their focus on the students and English language teaching.”*

Teacher 7: *“I think the English language teaching and learning can become worse and the teaching system can become like in the past.....there may be very big effect on students, English teaching and learning because of this matter.”*

Teacher 9: *“When I was a teacher, the students use English quite well. I also teach using English. I don’t need to translate the sentences.....I see the students improve a lot using English language in the classroom.”*

Teacher 12: *“In the future, English language teaching and learning in the Government schools will become worse and non-standard because of the lack of outstanding and professional English teachers.”*

9.2 Decline in students’ English language proficiency

Students are taught by teachers who need more experience in English language instruction, negatively influencing their learning experience. They need help acquiring language skills efficiently due to the unqualified substitute teachers, who hinder their academic progress and overall language development. The inadequate preparation of substitute teachers results in poor language instruction, affecting students' English proficiency.

Another major issue is students' inability to learn English properly and systematically. This affects their ability to read, learn, and lead effectively since the majority of subjects are written in English. The students' low English proficiency influences their performance in other academic areas and presents educational challenges. This has a long-term influence on their ability to learn and use English, which is crucial for their future academic and professional success.

Teacher 2: *“When the students cannot learn English properly and systematically, there will be no hope for us to expect good readers, good learners and good leaders because many subjects that they are learning are written in English.”*

Teacher 3: *“It surely has big influence on English language teaching and learning since we all see and know that the substitute teachers didn’t get the proper training and they don’t know how to train the students to use or learn English language.”*

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in Myanmar has had profound and multifaceted impacts on English teachers, leading to significant professional, personal, social, emotional, and legal challenges. This study's findings, organized into thematic categories, provide a detailed understanding of these impacts and contribute to the broader discourse on narrative inquiry and educational studies.

This study's findings resonate with research on similar movements in other contexts, such as the teacher strikes in Zimbabwe (Chingono, 2022) or the protests in Venezuela in 2014. In both cases, teachers faced significant financial hardships and threats to their safety, leading to a decline in educational standards and increased reliance on unqualified replacements—similar to the experiences of English teachers in Myanmar.

However, the extent of the systemic disruption caused by the CDM sets the Myanmar context apart, leading to a significant divergence between the public and private education sectors. This finding can be compared to the educational inequalities observed during the Chilean student protests (Bartlett, 2022), where public education suffered disproportionately due to strikes and teacher shortages. In both contexts, the reliance on under qualified teachers and the shift towards an exam-centric approach exacerbated existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The broader implications of these comparative insights suggest that movements like the CDM, while crucial for social and political change, can have long-lasting and unintended consequences on educational systems. The loss of qualified teachers and the deterioration of teaching standards observed in Myanmar echo similar patterns in other conflict-affected regions, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to support educators and maintain educational quality during times of political upheaval.

Implications of the Study

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study align with the theoretical framework of narrative inquiry, which emphasizes the importance of personal stories in understanding the complexities of lived experiences (Barkhuizen, 2020). Through the participants' narratives, this study captured the nuanced and often painful realities of English teachers during the CDM. The challenges they faced, from financial instability to emotional distress, highlight the power of narrative inquiry to reveal how individuals make sense of and navigate extreme circumstances.

This study's findings contribute to existing theories in narrative inquiry by illustrating how teachers in politically unstable environments construct and reconstruct their professional identities in response to external pressures. For instance, the “Professional and Financial Impact” theme demonstrates how teachers' narratives reflect their struggles to adapt to new roles and responsibilities, often outside their chosen profession. This aligns with Barkhuizen (2020) notion of narrative inquiry as a “sense-making” activity, where teachers' stories are not just recounts of events but also ways to make sense of and survive within their new realities.

Moreover, the findings challenge traditional views within educational studies that often overlook the personal and emotional dimensions of teaching in conflict zones. By focusing on

teachers' lived experiences, this study expands the theoretical understanding of how political instability affects educators, not just in terms of professional outcomes but also in terms of personal well-being and social relationships. For example, the theme of "Emotional and Psychological Impact" underscores the profound emotional toll that such environments take on teachers, which is often underexplored in educational research.

Pedagogical implications

This study's findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of narrative inquiry in conflict zones and offer practical insights for educational policymakers and practitioners. The study suggests the need for strong support systems for teachers in politically unstable environments, including professional development opportunities, mental health support, and clear pathways for career transition. By addressing these areas, educational systems can better support teachers' well-being and maintain higher teaching standards, even in times of crisis. In conclusion, the Civil Disobedience Movement has significantly impacted Myanmar's education system and its English teachers. This study's findings, situated within the broader context of narrative inquiry and comparative educational research, provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by educators in conflict zones. To mitigate these impacts, continued efforts are needed to strengthen educational systems and support teachers, ensuring that the quality of education is maintained for all students, regardless of the political landscape.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the need for international support and collaboration in strengthening education systems in conflict zones. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies must work together to provide the necessary resources and expertise to sustain educational quality, even in the most challenging circumstances. The challenges facing English language education in Myanmar provide essential lessons for educational policy and practice in other conflict-affected regions. By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, stakeholders can work towards maintaining and improving educational quality, ensuring that all students have access to a meaningful and practical education, regardless of the political landscape.

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