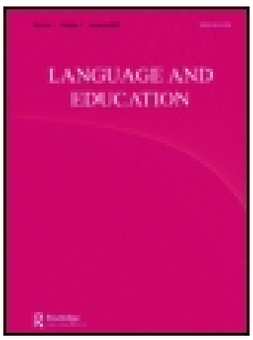

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The value of Bama-saga: minorities within minorities' views in Shan and Rakhine States

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ABSTRACT

Research across Myanmar's ethnic states has shown that large and well organised non-dominant ethnic groups such as the Mon, Karen, Shan and Kachin would prefer Myanmar's education system to offer MTB-MLE so that their children are able to start education in the mother tongue. This article engages with some of the overlooked voices of minorities within non-dominant ethnic groups relating their views on language, education, and Language of Instruction (LoI) and how this shapes their relationship both with other more dominant ethnic and linguistic groups as well as the ruling Burman majority. Using the Language Vitality Framework (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977), the article argues that while the minorities within non-dominant ethnic groups consulted work hard to preserve their language, they want Burmese to remain the LoI in order for their children to be able to get jobs and lift their families and communities out of poverty. Although much still needs to be done beyond language, the groups consulted believed that Burmese provides communities in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual settings with a level playing field they feel is fairer, than if Burman linguistic domination was replaced with another non-dominant language. These communities want multi-lingual local teachers who can explain the Burmese text-books to their children.

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Introduction

Decades of underinvestment and civil strife over 70 years resulted in the slow and steady decay of the Myanmar's state education system. Following elections in 2010, Myanmar has been going through a period of transition. Under the leadership of President U Thein Sein (2011–2015), the country experienced widespread reforms, including the release of most political prisoners, a greatly improved environment for freedom of speech and association, a resurgence of the social sector, economic reforms, and the start of a peace process between the government and some two-dozen Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) (Lall 2016). In 2015 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won an overwhelming majority forming a new government that has continued the reform process. One of the main priorities is the reform of the education sector. However despite the 2012 Comprehensive

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Education Sector Review spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, education remains highly centralised, focusing on access, completion, quality, and transparency as reflected in the National Education Strategic Plan of 2016, that is based on the previous government's draft National Education Sector Plan. Despite non-dominant ethnic group[1] aspirations as a part of the wider peace process to see their languages recognised and being allowed to use them in the formal education system, language and language of instruction policy under the NLD government has not departed from the 1962 policy, with only Burmese being allowed as a means of instruction. The only concession made by the NLD in their revision of this policy document is that the non-dominant languages are now allowed as 'classroom language' to help explain concepts when necessary, however mother tongue-based multilingual education[2] (MTB-MLE) is *not* presently Myanmar education policy, marginalising non-dominant ethnic group hopes and concerns about equal access to and quality of education for their children (Lall and South 2018).[3] The government believes that a unitary language is essential in holding the country together.[4] Research in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual environments has pointed to the importance of a common language and comprehensive school system to ruling governments in cementing the foundations upon which national states and national identities are formed (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). Fishman (1973) in particular points to the choice of a particular dominant language as fundamental to the project of national integration and standardisation and Callahan (2003 and 2004) identifies the dominant language as a cohesive factor that helps on the one hand to create alliances for unity and power, and on the other as a divisive and differentiating factor that tends to reinforce conflict and antagonism in Myanmar society. Given the predominance of Burmese as a marker of power of the Bamar majority, it is therefore not surprising that the government does not feel that MTB-MLE is an acceptable option to be offered to non-dominant ethnic groups, as it might give 'undue' prominence to other languages and in turn change the traditional balance of power between the majority Bamar and the other non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups.

Many international treaties and declarations recognise the right for indigenous and non-dominant ethnic groups to use and learn their mother tongue including the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 (1989, Art. 28), the United Nations General Assembly Minorities Declaration (1992, Art. 4) or the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007, Art. 14) and at national levels, including in Myanmar, many constitutions acknowledge the right for indigenous and non-dominant ethnic groups to use, learn and preserve their languages. These rights are not always implemented (Kosonen in Benson 2004; Kosonen 2017, 2019).[5] So, despite strong evidence of mother tongue education benefits including fewer drop outs and better levels of achievement (Ball 2014; UNESCO 2016), many multilingual and multicultural countries still rely on monolingual education systems (Ouane 2003) and submersion programmes where the majority language is used as the sole language of instruction and children have to swim or sink. In such cases *if* the mother tongue is present in the formal system, it is generally taught only as a subject (Malone 2003).

This is now also the case in Myanmar - Instead of offering MTB-MLE, the government is recognising the linguistic diversity of the country through the introduction of a 'local curriculum' (LC) of 1 period a day in Kindergarten (KG), Grade 1 and Grade 2[6] that is locally developed and that can be taught in a non-dominant language.[7] However fieldwork over 9 months in 2018 across all 7 States[8] shows that the development of this LC and its roll out is haphazard and uneven, privileging larger, more organised non-dominant ethnic and

linguistic groups. The LC is also not accepted by all non-dominant education stakeholders as the solution to their linguistic and education grievances. The LC tends to teach the non-dominant language as a subject and focuses at least two out of the five periods on cultural and local content that is relevant at state level.

Extensive fieldwork over almost a decade shows that larger non-dominant ethnic groups such as the Shan, Mon, Karen and Kachin would prefer MTB-MLE (Lall and South 2018; Lall 2016) and those with parallel and separate MTB-MLE systems would prefer to see their schools and teachers recognised and in some cases even supported by the government. In contrast some of the smaller non-dominant communities have totally different views.[9] This article engages with some of the often overlooked voices of minorities within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups relating their views on language, education, and language of instruction and how this shapes their relationship with both the more dominant ethnic and linguistic groups as well as the ruling Burman majority. The article explains that whilst all minorities within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups consulted as part of this research, work hard to preserve their ethnic language[10] and culture, they explain that they want Burmese to remain the Language of Instruction.[11] Many respondents emphasise that Burmese is the essential language for their children to be able to get good jobs and bring their families and communities out of poverty. They feel that Burmese provides their communities located in multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic settings with a level playing field they feel is fairer, than if Burman linguistic domination was replaced with another non-dominant language. This has to be understood in the local context where minorities within non dominant ethnic and linguist communities already live the dual discrimination of the language and culture of the largest non-dominant ethnic group (in this case the Shan and Rakhine) and they say they fear that if MTB-MLE was on offer, the government would make that language (in this case Shan and Rakhine) the Language of Instruction – rather than their own. They argue that if Burmese remains the Language of Instruction, then all non-dominant ethnic groups have to make the same effort to learn it.[12] These communities therefore do not support an MTB-MLE system that might see more widely spoken non-dominant languages, such as the main language spoken in a State replace Burmese and would prefer multilingual local teachers who can explain the Burmese textbooks to their children.

Non-dominant ethnic communities and their ethnolinguistic background

Myanmar is divided into 7 States (populated mostly by non-dominant ethnic communities) and seven Regions dominated by the majority Burman (*Bamar*) ethnic group. Demographic statistics remain contested, despite a census (the first in 31 years) held in 2014, which calculated the population at 51.4 million people (Government of Myanmar 2017a). It is estimated that non-Burman communities make up at least 30% of the population including Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, and other 5%.[13] The official categories of 135 'national races' (*taingyintha*) recognised by the government are deeply problematic, representing arbitrary and often imposed identities (Cheesman 2017). Although ethnicity is fluid, subject to re-imagination over time and in different contexts (Andersion 1983), in Myanmar it has become a fixed category and a key element in leveraging access to political and economic resources. In the context of decades of armed and state-society conflict and an active campaign of Burmanisation[14] since the 1960s (Houtman 1999; Callahan 2004), non-dominant ethnic communities have often developed their own

schooling systems, run by EAOs, CSOs or the communities themselves. (Lall and South 2018; South and Lall 2016a, 2016b; Lall 2016) Non-dominant ethnic groups communities however, are rarely homogenous in terms of ethnolinguistic orientation or policy preferences and the ethnic diversity extends to intra-group dynamics. Furthermore, in many parts of Myanmar, larger non-dominant ethnic groups such as the Karen, Kachin, Rakhine and Shan coexist with smaller non-dominant communities like the PaO, Danu, Lahu, Lisu, Wa, Htet, Dainet etc. Over fifty years after Ne Win's Burmanisation campaign, the fear of assimilation remains strong across non-dominant ethnic groups.[15] This raises questions about how self-determination for the larger non- dominant group potentially affects the identities and interests of such "minorities within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups".

As argued in Lall and South (2018), the peace process has largely failed to engage with issues of language and education policy, while education reforms have generally not addressed the aspirations and concerns of non-dominant ethnic communities that included recognition of their languages and education systems. Previous research (Lall and South 2018) questions to what extent non-dominant ethnic community voices are represented in education policy debates within Myanmar's reform process. This article, looking at Shan and Rakhine States, focuses in particular on the 'minorities within non-dominant ethnic groups' that are often overlooked and whose voices are not heard either at the state level where they live, or at the union level that is driving the reform process.

Some background on Shan and Rakhine States and the communities that live there

Both Shan and Rakhine States are home to a large non-dominant ethnic group as the state's majority population, with other smaller non-dominant ethnic groups as well as Bamar residents. The Shan people are the country's second-largest non-dominant ethnic group after the Bamar, and their state is the largest ethnic state in the Union. Shan State is also home to many other non-dominant groups, including Kachin, Pa-O, Palaung, Wa, Ta'ang, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, Akha, and others (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016). Shan State has some of the most concerning census data related to literacy, education attendance, and attainment. Although the national literacy rate at the time of the census was 89.5%, in Shan State adult literacy rate was just under 65%,[16] and in rural areas the female adult literacy rate was only 51.8%.[17] The ten districts with the lowest literacy rates were all in Shan, including Makman District where only 24.9% of adults were literate.[18] Youth literacy rates in Shan were 76.8%.[19] A quarter of households in Shan State (24.9%) were classified as illiterate.[20] The ten districts with the highest proportions of the population aged 25 and over with no schooling were all in Shan, where in Hopan and Makman Districts over 80% of the population aged 25 and over had no schooling.[21] Whilst the census information does not distinguish between any Bamar living in Shan State, the Shan majority and the other non-dominant ethnic groups, evidence from the field shows that some of the low literacy statistics are due to children not understanding the language the teacher speaks in the classroom. This is also the case for Shan children, but particularly acute for children from the smaller minorities, who rarely if ever will have a teacher in their class able to speak their language. This issue has been raised before. In the first study of its kind in Myanmar, research by Shalom (Nyein Foundation) in 2011 showed that non-dominant ethnic children, especially in remote and conflict affected areas could not read or write Burmese at the same speed as their Bamar

peers, and often drop out. Testing a total of 474 students across Grades 2 to 5, they found that non-dominant ethnic and linguistic students who were able to read the whole passage took between three and four times as long as their Bamar counterparts. 15% of those surveyed could not read at all and 18% could not read the whole passage.[22] Parents in this field study conducted in 2018 confirmed that dropouts are often linked to children not being able to understand the government teacher who mostly will not speak the local language. There is another reason for the low levels of schooling and literacy. Shan is a conflict-affected state with 9 or more of armed groups operating in different parts of the state. 2018/19 saw the displacement of over 9000 people to 33 IDP sites[23] due to clashes between the armed groups and the Tatmadaw, and in North Eastern Shan State due to the fighting between two local EAOs - the Shan State Progress Party and the Restoration Council of Shan State. These conflicts mean that government teachers mandated to these regions often flee when the fighting starts, and schools cannot operate. Anecdotal evidence collected in one of the conflict areas in South Eastern Shan State shows that locally and community recruited teachers tended to stay with their community even through the conflict.

Problems in Rakhine's education sector have been substantially exacerbated by the inter-communal conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities that has affected the state since 2012 and more recently by the new conflict between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar Tatmadaw.[24] Figures differ widely but in 2015 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated 124,000 conflict-affected children aged 3–17 years, many of which were residing in internal displacement camps were in need of education support.[25] Whilst some of these camps have now closed and children have been returned to schools, a total of 128,000 people from the as yet unresolved conflict remain in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDPs).[26] The new conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) that gathered pace towards the end of 2018 affects other parts of the State including the Mrauk U area that is home to many non-dominant ethnic and linguistic communities such as Chin, Dainet, Mro, Thet and others, many of which live in abject poverty in very remote areas. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that the new conflict has displaced 30,000 people.[27]

Literacy rates at 84.7% in Rakhine are better than in Shan.[28] However the rate declines to 76.9% for women in rural areas. The State Education Officer confirmed in an interview (October 2018) that all government teachers speak Rakhine, most are local and are able to use Rakhine in the classroom. However non-Rakhine communities will not have teachers who speak their language and face the dual disadvantage of having to engage both with Burmese and Rakhine. Whilst these languages are close, they are nevertheless different enough to confuse children whose mother tongue is different and who have not been exposed to either Rakhine or Burmese before arriving at school. As with Shan State, the census education data does not distinguish between ethnic groups. The figures for attainment at primary school level in Rakhine are marginally better than in Shan State: 20.9% completed primary, vs. 12.1% in Shan - possibly because the number of non-dominant ethnic children is proportionately fewer, however only 4% completed secondary education vs. 3.7% in Shan.[29]

The figures from the census show huge disparities between States in educational provision and attainment, and partly explain why some non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups have felt compelled to initiate their own education systems to fill these gaps (South and Lall 2016a, 2016b; Lall 2016). Given that the census was not implemented in some conflict-affected areas, the actual situation on the ground is likely to be even more difficult for

Table 1. (Table 4.4 GoM 2017b) School attendance rates by age states/regions, 2014 census.

State/ Region	Children of primary age (5–9) (%)	Children of secondary age (10–15) (%)	All ages (5–29) (%)
UNION	71.2	68	38.8
Kachin	77.6	81.9	49
Kayah	77.9	78	45.7
Kayin	65.2	67	41.8
Chin	74.6	87.3	56.4
Sagaing	76.8	71.2	41.2
Tanintharyi	71.4	73.6	43.6
Bago	74.5	66.3	38.6
Magway	75.4	71.3	40.8
Mandalay	74.7	68.4	37.8
Mon	71.1	67	41.7
Rakhine	72.9	70	42.2
Yangon	70.5	68	35.4
Shan	55.9	57.3	32
Ayeyawady	72.5	66.3	38.7
Nay Pyi Taw	76.4	75.5	41.2
Total	3,363,302	3,918,030	8,386,961

Table 2. Proportion of population.

	Total (%)		
State/Region	Both sexes	Males	Females
UNION	16.2	13.3	18.8
Kachin	12.3	9.6	15.2
Kayah	22.6	16.1	28.9
Kayin	31.8	27.6	35.6
Chin	25.8	14.1	35.7
Sagaing	11.9	8.8	14.4
Tanintharyi	10.3	9.1	11.5
Bago	10.9	8.5	12.9
Magway	19.3	16.7	21.3
Mandalay	12.5	8.8	15.5
Mon	17.2	14.8	19.3
Rakhine	20.2	12.8	26.3
Yangon	5.9	4.4	7.1
Shan	44.9	39.7	49.8
Ayeyawady	12.3	10.3	14.0
Nay Pyi Taw	8.1	3.9	11.9

non-dominant ethnic children in the most remote regions. As seen in the table below both Rakhine and Shan States had issues with children attending school, with Rakhine children dropping off sharply at upper secondary school level.[30] The lowest rates are in Kayin (65.2%) and Shan (55.9%) (Table 1).

There were also large differences in the percentages of the population with no schooling between States and Regions, with rural Rakhine and all of Shan not doing well at all. Table 2 shows that Shan (44.9%), Kayin (31.8%) and Chin (25.8%) had the highest proportions of people who had not had any schooling. The census' also shows that the proportion with no schooling is consistently much higher in rural than in urban areas and girls are more affected than boys. The lack of information on smaller minorities again masks the pronounced disadvantages within larger non-dominant ethnic groups.

Introducing the respondents

The respondents whose voices form the basis for this article are in effect minority stakeholders within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups who are not represented as separate categories in the census data above.[31] They are recognised as 'ethnic groups'[32] by the Myanmar Government and they mostly live in a State (as opposed to a Region), but they are a smaller minority than the dominant one of the state. In Shan State the dominant ethnic group are the Shan and in Rakhine State the dominant ethnic group are the Rakhine. As such the smaller minorities often face the double discrimination from the Shan/Rakhine communities and the Bamar majority. The minority within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups also differ amongst each other. In Shan State the research engaged with leaders from PaO, Danu, Khun Tai, Akha, Lahu, and Wa.[33] The PaO are the 7th largest non-dominant ethnic group in Myanmar (around 2.5 million) but still a minority in Shan State. They have a Special Administrative Zone (SAZ), which means that under the previous government (2011–2015) they had some administrative independence. Under the NLD led government since 2015, they feel that the SAZ has to report to the State government, increasing their administrative red tape. The Danu, a mainly agricultural community also have an SAZ, but unlike the PaO, they are a much smaller group. The Khun Tai do not see themselves as a minority as their language is spoken by a majority in Eastern Shan State, however it seems that the Shan State government does not recognise them and their language in an equivalent way to the Shan (Tai) speakers in the South. The Akha and Lahu are tribal groups in the Eastern part of Shan State, whose tribes also reside in China and Thailand (as well as Laos for the Akha and Vietnam for the Lahu). The Wa also live across Myanmar and China and in Myanmar have a Self Administered Division, which is run effectively as an independent state where they are the dominant group. However the research engaged with Wa communities living outside of the Self Administered Division.

In Rakhine State the research engaged with non-Rakhine leaders from the Mro, Dinet, Laitu Chin and Thet ethnic communities.[34] The Mro also live in Chin State as well as in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh and the Thet live in Bangladesh as well. The Dainet are closely related to the Chakma people of Bangladesh. The Laitu Chin are one of the Chin tribes. All are agricultural communities living in extreme poverty. There is a lot less information about the non-Rakhine non-dominant ethnic groups than there is on the non-Shan non-dominant groups.

Methodology

Data were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions on two separate field trips to Shan State (July 2018) and to Rakhine State (October 2018).[35] Respondents were contacted through the local Literature and Culture Committees (LCCs)/Literature and Culture Associations (LCAs), local political parties, local education NGOs and the author's exiting education networks that include monastic and government schools and their staff as well as by contacting the local State Education Offices.[36] A number of respondents in Shan State were known to the author from a previous field trip in 2016 that had been organised by the Myanmar NGO Pyoe Pin. Each LCC was asked to organise a meeting with parents of that ethnic group. All other respondents were community leaders, or heads of NGOs or political representatives. The author conducted all the interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with three translators (one per location – Southern Shan, Eastern Shan and Rakhine States) who have worked extensively on education projects with the author between 2012 and 2018. The British Education Association

Ethics Code was adhered to throughout. The respondents were handed a summary sheet of the project with contact details in case they wanted to withdraw from the study. Consent was taken at the start of each interaction. Respondents were informed of their right not to answer questions, to leave or withdraw at any time. It is noteworthy that a majority of respondents were very keen to tell their story and a number asked several times if what they said would be passed on to international organisations or government officials as they wanted their views to be known (and they felt no one was coming to ask them any questions). In a number of cases the translators were contacted by respondents, who wanted to add to what they had said in the interview or FGD. A summary of the main points raised at all interviews or FDGs was read back by the translator to the respondents before departing asking them if they were in agreement with how their voices had been understood. The translator and author compared notes taken in English (author) and Burmese (translator) at the end of each day to compile one set per interview and or FGD. At the end of each part of the trip when the notes had been written up, the Myanmar researcher called the head of each organisation and read the notes out to them both in Burmese and in English. The data was then coded with the translators together at the end of each of the two trips so as to not miss any details.

The field trip to Shan State focused on Taunggyi and surroundings as well as Kengtung, covering South and Eastern Shan State. Overall nine key informant interviews and 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (with 82 participants) were conducted. Respondents included representatives from the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), ethnic political parties, ethnic Members of Parliament, one ethnic Minister, local thought leaders, LCCs/LCAs, as well as students, parents and school board members. Separate research during that same trip was conducted with the PaO in the PaO SAZ in Hopong and PaO villages around Taunggyi through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. In this research phase eight key informant interviews were conducted with respondents representing the Parami Development Network, PNO, PNLO, members of the PaO SAZ Leading Body, PaO MPs, staff of the PaO Education College, head teachers in schools serving PaO communities, and a PaO Monastic School head monk and the monk in charge of education there. A total of six FGDs were held with a total of 45 participants including the PaO LCC, PaO political party representatives, PaO Education College trainees and PaO and Shan parents, most of who are sitting on school committees or boards. A detailed table of all FGD is provided in the Appendix. Interviews were conducted in English, Burmese, Shan and PaO depending on the respondents with a translator present.

A meeting was arranged with the Shan State Education Office and whilst they declined to discuss the education of non-dominant communities, they provided some data showing that eight ethnic languages were being taught in government schools across Shan State to a total of 58,171 students between KG and grade 2 at the time of the interview (See Table 3).

Table 3. Students receiving ethnic language teaching in government schools in Shan State.

Language	KG students	G 1 students	G 2 students	Total Students 58,171
Shan	12,437	10,515	7026	29,978
Pao[50]	5901	7291	5939	19,131
Ka Yan	2218	2803	2327	7348
Kayar	63	78	81	222
Ka Yaw	37	55	29	121
Palaung	640	364	108	1112
Lahu	63	82	14	159
Lisu	77	23	0	100

This teaching is undertaken by 1189 volunteer teachers (remunerated @ Myanmar Kyats 30,000[37] per months for 10 months) 312 daily wage teachers, and 596 government teachers across 1077 schools, mostly outside of school hours.[38] The teachers are selected by the local Literature and Culture Committee (LCC) who proposes their names to the Township Education Office who then gets these agreed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the capital Nay Pyi Taw.

In Rakhine, data was collected during a field trip to Sittwe and Mrauk U and a Chin village a few hours up river from Mrauk U. Three key informant interviews and three FGD (with 37 participants) were conducted with non-Rakine leaders.[39] Two further interviews were conducted - one with the monastic head whose school in Sittwe offered residential education to non-dominant ethnic minority children from remote areas and another with the Rakhine State Education Officer. Interviews were conducted in English, Burmese, Rakhine and other minority languages depending on the respondents with a translator present.

Unlike in Shan, in Rakhine State there is no data available as to how many schools teach non-dominant languages. The schools serving the Rakhine community seem to use Rakhine as a classroom language as teachers and officials say that it is close enough to Burmese. They also have a local curriculum that focuses on Rakhine language and culture, but that is taught outside of school hours. The leaders of the Mro, Htet, Dainet and Chin groups explained that they had to teach their own language outside of school hours without any help from the State Education Office and that they had never heard of a local curriculum being offered for non-dominant ethnic and linguistic children at any government school. It also means that these children have to learn both Rakhine and Burmese, depending on the classroom language of the teacher.

In both States respondents were asked if there was any local MTB-MLE provision;[40] what kind of schools they valued; how their children experienced teaching and learning in government schools; what difficulties they and their families faced doing homework; what mechanisms if any local community organisations had put in place to help children who did not speak Burmese when they accessed government schools; if teachers spoke the local, non-dominant language; how the communities maintained their own language and culture; if they felt they wanted their language to be the Language of Instruction; if they felt they wanted their language to be taught at the government school (and if during or after school hours); how they felt about another non-dominant state language (in this case Shan or Rakhine) to be the Language of Instruction; how they had engaged with the LC (i.e. if they had submitted any language teaching materials to local government authorities) and what issues they had faced when engaging with the government authorities. They were also asked specifically about their main challenges and needs within their local contexts, which often engendered discussions about poverty and access to jobs, going well beyond the issues of education.

Language attitudes and language vitality

Language attitudes with regard to the mother tongue vary from one community to the other, and from one context to the other (Bradley 2013). Much of the literature argues that all minorities should have access to education in their language, in particular when they start school, as it improves their learning and reduces drop outs, but also because it avoids language loss. They argue that governments need to reinvigorate languages that are at risk, providing appropriate resources to avoid language loss. It is often the case that the languages in question are those of disadvantaged and poorer non-dominant groups in rural or remote locations whose socio-economic status and limited political agency can result in their

language dying out as the younger generation moves to urban areas for better jobs, where they cease to use their mother tongue. In Myanmar many of these smaller non-dominant languages have a low status, because they are not used at school as Language of Instruction and they cannot be used in public life more widely outside of the community setting. This can result in language loss 'by attrition' (Lo Bianco 2018).

In this case non-dominant ethnic parents, especially those of minorities within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups, like the respondents in this research argue that while it is important for their children to learn their language to know their origins and culture, it is equally important, if not more important for them to become fluent in the national/dominant language so as to be able to get better jobs and help draw their communities out of poverty. Lo Bianco (2018) states that such arguments are 'entrapment rebukes' – i.e. arguments against 'reversing language shifts,' which include the argument that this traps the community in poverty and atavistic ethnic identities. However communities are the product of their socio-economic and political setting in which they live, and in Myanmar where the legacy of Burmanisation is unlikely to be reversed anytime soon, the voices and views of non-dominant ethnic parents who have to live in that political reality need to be listened to as well. Kosonen explains that communities (and governments) in the region oppose MTB-MLE, as few officials or parents understand the importance of first language based education and the long term advantages. 'The most commonly held misconception is that by simply introducing an unknown language, such as the official language or English, to children as early as possible increases and accelerates the learning of that language. (Kosonen 2017 p. 8) However the communities interviewed for this article said they feel that until and unless the Myanmar government actively reverses the legacy of Burmanisation, many minorities stakeholders within non-dominant ethnic groups will remain powerless to reverse the language shifts, and they remain subject to dual discrimination. They explained that all they can do is work at maintaining their language through summer and Sunday schools, hoping that those who leave for work in the urban areas will not forget their heritage. This article therefore is not an 'entrapment rebuke' against maintaining non-dominant ethnic languages, rather it gives voice to parental views who live in the Myanmar reality of dual discrimination of the larger Burman majority and the local non-dominant ethnic majority within their state.

Research by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977 has shown that three factors: *Status*, *Demographic* and *Institutional Support* can greatly influence people's attitudes to language and affect language vitality. These three aspects of a framework to understand how people see their minority language were further developed by Bradley (2013); Crystal (2003) and Dorian (1999). The first factor highlighted is 'status'. Indeed, a non-dominant group's attitude towards its heritage language often depends on the status the latter is given in the society at national, regional or community level (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977). In contexts of great linguistic and cultural diversity where many languages are spoken but only one or a few are officially recognised and given higher prestige (Ferguson 2000; Fishman 2000), speakers of unofficial languages may find it difficult to maintain their language and be more inclined to language shift (Baker 2006). As Dorian (1999, p. 26) explains, 'the social standing of a group of people carries over to the language they speak'. Ferguson (2000) and Fishman (Fishman 2000) have developed the concept of *diglossia*, referring to contexts where two languages, related or not, coexist and are given different values and are used in different situations for different purposes. A distinction is made between a majority language (often the official

one) and a minority language, with the latter being generally used in more personal, informal situations and the former reserved for state institutions such as administration, medical services, schools, etc. In contexts where the non-dominant language is absent from public services, the dominant language becomes de facto associated with social and economic mobility and people are more likely to favour it (Baker 2006; Dorian 1999; Edwards 2012).

Demographic factors such as migration and urbanisation can also greatly affect language vitality and people's attitudes towards languages (Baker 2006; Bradley 2013). Bradley highlights the importance of the social and local networks, the way speakers of dominant and non-dominant languages interact with one another. Indeed, when members of a community only interact with in-group members using the non-dominant language, as can often be the case in rural areas (Robinson in Baker 2006), the latter is more easily maintained than in a community where people frequently interact with out-group members using the dominant language. However, attitudes vary greatly and even when evolving among speakers of a dominant language, some people can form a solid language community and maintain their language, however small this community may be (Baker 2006).

Finally, institutional support is also one of the key factors of language maintenance and ethnolinguistic vitality. Indeed, when non-dominant languages are represented in the institutions at national, regional and local level, they are perceived as having a higher value within the society and people are more likely to maintain them (Baker 2006; Bradley 2013; Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977). Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) identify public services, industry, mass media, culture, as well as religion and in particular education as factors susceptible to affect language community vitality. However, as Crystal (2003, p. 118) asserts:

> Institutions cannot replace individuals. School programmes, no matter how excellent, cannot replace home-based activities. An important bureaucracy and technology are important aids in fostering language maintenance, but they can never be its foundation. The foundation must come from within the homes and neighbourhoods of the community members themselves.

In the end, families and communities' attitudes towards their traditional languages play a fundamental part in the maintenance of their language and its transmission to the next generation (Baker 2006; Bradley 2013; Crystal 2003). In his 8-level Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale used to assess language endangerment, Fishman (1991, 95) highlights the importance of the role of the 'home-family-neighborhood-community complex' at stage 6, arguing that it cannot be overlooked. Within this complex, especially in contexts where non-dominant languages are not supported by the institutions, parents in particular play a crucial role as some will feel strongly about their children speaking their mother tongue while others will choose to only speak the dominant language with them in order to facilitate their education (Bradley 2013), putting cross-generational interaction (Kumar, Trofimovich, and Gatbonton 2008) and the transmission of cultural heritage at risk (Gupta and Siew 1995). Indeed, in some cases, children may find themselves unable to communicate with their grandparents, and families unable to transmit their traditional values to the younger generations.

Education and language issues for minorities within non-dominant ethnic and linguistic communities

As mentioned above, non-dominant ethnic students in Myanmar are unable to achieve at the same levels a their Bamar counterparts largely because the language of instruction at

government schools is Burmese and mostly (with the exception of Rakhine State, where many teachers are Rakhine themselves and use Rakhine) teachers do not speak the non-dominant language (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016; Shalom 2011). Large non-dominant ethnic communities have therefore been asking for MTB-MLE and/or for the separate education systems set up by a number of EAOs that offer MTB (Mother Tongue Based) or MTB-MLE to be recognised by the government.[41] Preserving their language and culture is a priority for non-dominant ethnic communities across Myanmar (Lall and South 2014; South and Lall 2016a, 2016b; Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016). Research has shown that when the mother tongue is not taught at school, children cannot become fully proficient and are less likely to transmit their mother tongue to their own children (Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar 2010; UNESCO 2016). The Myanmar Ministry of Education does not acknowledge that the achievement gap is linked to the language barrier and has countered with the rollout of the LC that allows non-dominant ethnic culture and language to be taught one period a day during school hours for KG, Grade 1 and Grade 2, with officials explaining that Burmese is an essential part of being a Myanmar citizen. They believe that the LC will allow non-dominant ethnic communities to retain their language and culture whilst keeping Burmese as the glue holding the nation together.

The government logic fails because despite the roll out of the LC, the languages of many of the smaller non-dominant ethnic minorities are mostly not yet taught in government schools and communities have to rely on summer and Sunday schools and volunteer teachers. In Shan State the State Education Office is unsure how to handle the number of non-dominant ethnic groups and languages. The teaching of the Shan LC has been rolled out to certain areas but this has resulted in concerning signs that Shan language teaching risks being delivered in a top-down fashion to non-Shan speakers much in the same way that Burmese permeates existing education. According to one teacher who teaches Shan in a village in the north of the state: '*Most of my students are Ta'ang, some are Shan, Chinese, India and Myanmar […] It is quite difficult to teach the children as Shan is not their mother tongue and so it is difficult for them. I face many difficulties… Some parents complained it is already hard enough for them to learn Burmese*'. During the research most non-Shan and non-Rakhine stakeholders spoke of the double language gap they and their children face when education was provided in Burmese, but Shan/Rakhine was needed to engage with the majority in Shan/Rakhine States, where the language of communication is that of the majority non-dominant ethnic group. In Shan State there was also a palpable sense of unfairness for many that Shan was being taught in government schools (albeit mostly outside of school hours) and that other non-dominant languages were not allowed to be taught in the same way.

To counter this, different non-dominant ethnic minority LCCs have submitted their curricula and books, which are usually used during the summer school (or Sunday schools), to the District or State Education Office for review, so as to be given permission to use these in government schools and have not heard back. Disagreements regarding script and ways of spelling within and between groups adds to the existing challenges as District Education Offices find themselves unable to decide which version of a particular non-dominant language should be officially endorsed, when they receive competing books by different non-dominant ethnic (often religious) organisations.[42] Despite the problems posed by the roll out of the LC and the frustration felt by the respondents in this regard, this did not turn out to be the main education issue the communities wanted to highlight. Instead the main issue was about learning more and better Burmese.

Language and status, demographic and institutional support

Value and status

Highlighted by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) in their study of *Ethnolinguistic vitality,* and by many other scholars since (Baker 2006; Dorian 1999; Ferguson 2000; Fishman 2000), 'value' was closely linked to 'status'. Research has established that when the mother tongue is not taught at school, it will be seen as less valuable and less valued (Ball 2011) despite the strong desire to have their children speak their mother tongue and be proud of their culture. Parents will favour the learning of the dominant language. One study of tribal children in India (Mohanty 2009) showed that over seven to nine years, an Indian child internalises that some languages are more prestigious, more useful and powerful than others; and tribal children learn that their languages have no use for them. This is also the case for the minority within non-dominant ethnic community respondents, who emphasised that the preservation of their culture and language was important (and therefore they did want a LC in their language for use in government schools), but the issue they faced was NOT the fact that their language was or was not being taught in government school (during of after school hours). The issue most non-Shan and non-Rakhine communities wanted to highlight was the fact that they wanted their children to learn Burmese and learn it well so that their community members would be able to join the Myanmar government higher education system and become professionals.[43] '*Since ECCD*[44] *the children learn Burmese. The ECCD teachers are Wa, but the community insist on Burmese unless children don't understand. That way the children have less problems later*.' (ES-13) The head of the Wa LCC explained that because of the language barrier few Wa had done well historically. His personal experience was that he had failed when he was young, but then he learnt Burmese and he was able to get a government job. He added that '*Only when the children are good in Burmese they can get higher education to become government staff. Not enough Wa are working as government staff*.' Burmese was seen as more valuable than their mother tongue; knowing Burmese is seen as a way out of poverty faced by the whole community, especially those living in remote areas. The fact that government teachers did not speak the local language was seen as a problem, not because they could not teach in the mother tongue, but because these Bamar teachers could not explain Burmese to their children. '*This is not their fault, but they don't see the needs of the community*' (ES-7).

Institutional support

The Myanmar government was not seen as helpful in supporting the ethnic communities learn either their own language or Burmese. The 'best way' as suggested by the respondents was that local, bilingual community members should be recruited and trained as teachers so as to be able to bridge the language gap, allowing smaller minority children to stay on in school rather than drop out due to a lack of understanding. However few non-dominant ethnic students make it into the State based Education Colleges (Lall 2015).[45] To fill this gap the PaO have set up their own Teacher Education College[46] for non-dominant ethnic teachers – 60% of the trainees there are PaO, 40% from other non-dominant ethnic communities. However, it is still not enough. More teachers, especially from remote areas where there are shortages of teachers, need to be trained so that they can go back there and teach. This view is supported by the PaO LCC (PaO-2), whose leader said that '*for rural areas*

where there are language barriers we need teachers who can explain things in PaO, and qualified teachers who have to be patient make sure the children learn.' Other respondents have similar views. A member of the SAZ Leading Body said in an interview: '*Some head teachers do not support the teaching of PaO in schools, even if the school serves a PaO community. However, if there is a PaO teacher in the school, then he or she can explain things in PaO and teach PaO to the children*.'

A number of ethnic organisations that took part in the research (in this case the Akha and Mro) had set up boarding houses in urban areas for their ethnic children so these would be able to attend better schools, and the children were given remedial Burmese lessons so as to improve their achievement and their chance to continue on into secondary, post secondary and possibly higher education. These organisations worked on the preservation of their language and cultures as well, but the prime focus was on their children being able to finish school, and move on secondary school and later higher education. The head of the Akha boarding house explained: '*15 ys ago there were no Akha educated people. […] Children now learn Burmese in kindergarten. During their time in school they faced problem with the language. [they stay] in village school till grade 5, then they go to the city in grade 6, in the village they spoke only Akha but when they came to the city they have to speak Burmese. […] At the beginning they face problems, but later the problems get solved. So many learn from Burmese teachers. They learn and then the problem is solved. Last year 280 Akha students passed matric and among them 7 or 8 received distinction in Myanmar language*.' (ES-7) This was the pride of the community that had kept the newspaper cutting with the names of the Akha students for all to see.

One organisation had mobilised its Diaspora to provide scholarships for children that managed to gain access to a university. The Danu group had set up a foundation to help students with education related fees, particularly higher education.

None of these smaller minorities felt that setting up their own schools using their mother tongue (as had been done by larger non-dominant ethnic communities such as the Mon, Karen and Kachin) was either viable or desirable and all were fearful that any system privileging a particular ethnic language in the state as part of LC would mean that their children would find education even harder. A MTB-MLE system based on the state language[47] was something they definitely rejected because they knew that the model would privilege the majority non-dominant ethnic group of the State in which they lived.

Demographic factors

There were of course differences between communities in urban and rural areas. A lack of education and lack of information on laws, policies and rules was cited as an acute barrier for all rural non-Shan and non-Rakhine respondents in navigating the government bureaucracy. When they came to towns, they were discriminated against, because they did not speak Burmese correctly, or understand how they were expected to behave with officials. Most of these respondents explained that their communities all spoke the mother tongue - so that was not the problem - the only way for their community to improve their situation was to learn more Burmese so they could understand the laws and communicate with the 'ruling' Burmese. They generally felt that their community remained 'backward' due to the fact that they did not have educated representatives to make their case. '*Ordinary people don't know about the laws or even the amendments. Officials themselves are not clear*

themselves. So implementation is not effective. Ordinary people lose self-confidence, being not sure what they are allowed to do and what not.' (SS-1) The Dainet leaders (RK-2) spoke of the fear the lack of education and language knowledge created: '*[We are] …afraid to go to government office. We can't write letter, low education, can't speak Rakhine or Burmese language, therefore [there is] discrimination*.' They felt that if as an organisation they were able to have an office in an urban area, they would have more status and it would help the development of their community. '*Students will then also have a place to stay and be able to go to and urban school*' (RK-2).

Lack of education was also related to poverty and some of these communities being located in remote and conflict affected areas. '*In the villages there are drop outs, the parents take children out after they reach 10 ys as they need to work in the field*.' (ES-7) Lahu leaders spoke about the same issue: '*The main barrier is when the Lahu come to the urban area, not used to using Burmese. In remote areas how much Burmese do they learn? In the urban areas because of the mixed ethnic classrooms and because they use it outside school, the children learn*.' (ES-11) The Thet felt multiple language development was the best way: '*We speak Thet at home. We speak Rakhine and Burmese with outside people, in Maungdaw we speak the forbidden language with our Muslim neighbours*.' (RK-5) They claim the children don't have language problems at school as the Thet community lives in mixed villages close to the Rakhine community. Only in remote areas where there are pure Thet villages they can't understand Rakhine and these are the most disadvantaged. A few respondents across the various communities pointed to the PaO as having successfully overcome some of the marginalisation by improving the education levels of their community through the use of Burmese and by encouraging their children to study to higher education levels: '*Look at them* [the PaO] – *they know how to play the system. But they started by learning Burmese*.' (ES-7 and ES-8)

The PaO, being a large minority within non-dominant ethnic groups and concentrated in a geographical area around Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State were particularly clear about their strategy as a non-Shan minority in Shan State. '*One generation ago we were mainly poor farmers with few children finishing primary school because our children could not understand the teachers*' one leader explained (PaO-1). The Parami Network – a PaO civil society organisation made it its mandate to increase the number of PaO in the Myanmar administrative ranks and succeeding in government education was seen as the key vehicle. Today whilst the older PaO generation are still farmers, younger PaO have moved to Taunggyi and have white-collar jobs. Research conducted by Celine Margontier Haynes (2016) as part of her MA dissertation on the language and culture of the PaO shows that the younger urban based PaO do not necessarily speak PaO to their children, and that with the focus on Burmese, many can no longer communicate with their rural families, especially with their grandparents. This was seen as a problem by many who felt speaking PaO is an essential part of the PaO culture, but others felt it was more important for their children to do well and get good jobs by being proficient in Burmese. Yet there was great unhappiness with the government education system, both in rural and urban areas. The PaO LCC (PaO-2) and other respondents said: '*Teachers do not teach effectively and only think of earning extra money through private tutoring*'.[48] In particular respondents from the PNO, said they are not very happy with the education that the PaO children are receiving. The solution most agreed on was a push for more bi-lingual teachers who would be able to explain the Burmese content in PaO. This was the drive behind setting up their own Teacher Education College discussed above, as many feel there are not enough non-dominant ethnic teachers.

Discussion

When reviewing the above one has to remember that most non-dominant ethnic language speakers do not become bi- (or tri-) lingual by choice. If they wish to both maintain their language and culture and integrate with the mainstream society to give themselves more economic and social opportunities, they *have to* become bi- (or tri-) lingual (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981). Therefore, there is a lot of pressure on non-dominant language speakers and, despite efforts and a strong desire to maintain their mother tongues, this can result in language shift for some communities (Clyne and Kipp 1997).

All minority within non-dominant ethnic group respondents in the research were concerned *both* with the preservation of their language within a larger Shan or Rakhine community, as well as the extensive and correct learning of Burmese, so that their community members would be able to join the Myanmar government higher education system and become professionals. *They* see Burmese as a key way out of poverty, to promote their non-dominant ethnic group and position and are less concerned with MTB/MTB-MLE. Although appreciating that the LC meant they might be able to teach their language in government schools, they did not see the LC as sufficient for the preservation of their language, which they felt had to be supplemented with community organised summer and Sunday schools.[49] The LC is welcome as long as it is available in their language and does not represent having to learn another 'foreign' language, which would make things harder for the minority within non-dominant ethnic group children.

As discussed above the value given to the different languages is a significant factor affecting people's attitudes. Burmese or Bama-saga here is seen as the key to prosperity and development. Highlighted by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) 'value' was also an important point discussed by the respondents. Although it was mentioned in both rural and urban contexts, it seemed to be more salient in the responses of urban participants, who were also the ones more likely to speak Burmese to their children. Whilst all considered the non-dominant mother tongue as essential for the survival of their culture, proficiency in Burmese was fundamental, as both were considered of a higher value than the ethnic language and synonymous with better educational and social opportunities. With Myanmar developing, mass communication becoming more accessible to everyone and so enabling more exposure to Burmese, non-dominant languages retains a lower status, most often limited to the private sphere. This is in contrast to larger non-dominant ethnic groups where research shows families are more divided about the use of their language and they tend to fight for language recognition and MTB-MLE.

The issue for the Myanmar Government remains the low retention and achievement rates in States, especially those with numerous smaller non-dominant ethnic groups that are often also conflict affected. Whilst the MoE faces particular challenges with large non-dominant ethnic groups that want their languages and parallel systems recognised, the issues that need resolving for the smaller minorities differ. It seems logical to listen to the local requests in order to break the circle of drop-out and under-achievements, more locally recruited teachers from these non-dominant ethnic communities should be trained so they can return and help the younger generation navigate the government education system. As suggested by the minority within non-dominant ethnic group respondents, bi-lingual teachers who could explain the Burmese content of the curriculum and the textbooks could help remedy some of the low achievement rates, especially in rural areas.

Conclusion

The literature emphasises that MTB-MLE is best practice for children in multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic contexts. Nevertheless it is important to hear the voices of minority communities who live in particular non-dominant multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic contexts. The voices of the respondents in this article emphasised that they work hard to preserve their language and culture, but that they want Burmese to remain the language of instruction as it is the essential language for their children to be able to get good jobs and bring their families and communities out of poverty. They see their main challenge as getting their children into a socio-political and economic system where Burmese is essential. They fear that if MTB-MLE were to become Myanmar education policy, the smaller non-dominant languages would be ignored in favour of the larger non-dominant state languages, making it even harder for their children.

Notes

1. This terminology has been adopted because of the international readership of this journal. It needs to be noted that the 'ethnic minority' or 'non-dominant ethnic' groups in Myanmar reject these labels and prefer to be referred to as 'ethnic nationality' or simply 'ethnic'. Since the reviewers pointed out that this could cause confusion outside of Burma/Myanmar Studies, the terminology has been altered. 'Dominant' and 'non-dominant' have been used rather than majority/ minority because beyond the numbers speaking certain languages, it is also about how the education system is organised, and as discussed later in the article, the status of Burmese.
2. Basic education that starts in the mother tongue and gradually introduces one or more other languages in a structured manner, linked to children's existing understanding in their mother tongue.
3. Using any non-dominant language in the classroom effectively would require recruiting local teachers, or teachers who have learnt a non-dominant language. According to UNICEF, 70% of teachers working in non-dominant ethnic and linguistic areas do not speak local languages (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016, 37).
4. Anonymous interviews with ministry officials including those working on the Comprehensive Education Sector Review as well as a Union Minister for Education between 2012 and 2018.
5. It is however noteworthy that there is a shift in some countries across Southeast Asia. Kosonen (2017) notes: '…over the past two decades, a movement towards multilingual education (MLE) has arisen in the region. The support for non-dominant languages (NDL) in education ranges from the Philippines and Viet Nam's strongly supportive written language policies to Brunei and Laos, where the use of NDLs in education is currently impossible.' p. 3.
6. Officials say this can be developed up to grade 9, different States and different communities within states have developed materials to different levels.
7. A recent report by Nicolas Salem-Gervais and Mael Raynaud (2020) Teaching ethnic minority languages in government schools and developing the local curriculum: Elements of decentralization in language-in-education policy, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Yangon, gives more details on the mechanics of the LC that are not discussed in the article.
8. Myanmar has 7 Regions where Bamar are the majority and 7 States where non-dominant ethnic groups are in the majority. More on the data collection in the methodology section.
9. It needs to be recognised however that there are other, similarly small minority communities in Myanmar that do want MTB-MLE. Research conducted for the Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) by Thailand based SIL showed that Naga, Kaya and some Chin groups expressed the desire to have MTB-MLE. (SIL *Inception report* (2018)*:* "Needs Analysis and Design of a Programme of Capacity Development Support to Partners for Implementation of

Effective Multilingual Education") In the SIL MEC Field Visits Report (2018). "Needs Analysis and Design of a Programme of Capacity Development Support to Partners for Implementation of Effective Multilingual Education" *p. 22* SIL state: 'Very few Nagas complete their education as a result of the language barrier in school, the lack of access to school, and insufficient teachers available for rural schools. Those Nagas who do complete their education typically travel to Yangon, India or Thailand. Living outside their home areas and studying other languages may result in weakening their mother tongue proficiency. Many fear that without attention to MTB MLE the children will continue to grow up with weakening levels of mother tongue proficiency.'

10. In Myanmar and in Myanmar studies minority languages are referred to as ethnic languages. The rejection of the term 'minority' by the non dominant groups has been explained in FN1.
11. Whilst this article engages with minorities in Shan and Rakhine States, there are also similar views in Chin State. In her research on language in Chin State Edwards found that: 'Some parents were so concerned about their children struggling at school; they explicitly made decisions to speak Burmese as much as possible at home to help their children at home. Others had to learn Burmese themselves to be able to do this.' *Nicola Edwards Conference paper (not published)* How Important Is Mother Tongue Education To The Chin Community In Myanmar? 2018 p. 5 (Edwards 2018).
12. To the expert it is clear that Burmese remaining the main Language of Instruction gives the Burmese L1 speakers an advantage over all non-dominant ethnic and linguistic groups. However this article engages with the voices of the respondents and the way they see the context they live in.
13. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html.
14. Burmanisation included the sole use of Burmese in all areas of public life including in schools as a sole Language of Instruction and the elevation of Buddhism as the national religion.
15. For example this fear is so strong in Chin State, for example, that members of smaller minority groups fear assimilation into groups with higher numbers or strength, such as "Hakhanisation". Edwards, N. Mandalay conference presentation 2018.
16. GoM, "Thematic Report on Education Census…". Table 3.2 p. 22.
17. Ibid, Table 3.3 p. 24.
18. Ibid, Table 3.4 p. 25.
19. Ibid, p. 25.
20. Ibid, Table 3.8 p. 29.
21. Ibid, Table 5.8 p. 62.
22. Grade 2 ethnic average reading time 208.34 seconds vs. Bamar reading time 64 seconds; Grade 3 ethnic average reading time 177.35 seconds vs. Bamar reading time 50 seconds; Grade 4 ethnic average reading time 179.94 seconds vs. Bamar reading time 68 seconds; Grade 5 ethnic average reading time 65 seconds vs. Bamar reading time 20 seconds. (Shalom 2011, 13)
23. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MMR_Shan_IDP_Site_A0_Jan2019_20190221.pdf
24. REACH, "Joint Education Sector Needs Assessment in North Rakhine State, Myanmar," PLAN International (November 2015). http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_report_rakhine_joint_education_needs_assessment_november_2015.pdf.
25. https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/UNICEF_Humanitarian_Fundraising_Concept_Note_(SMALL).pdf p.27
26. https://reliefweb.int/map/myanmar/myanmar-new-displacement-rakhine-and-chin-states-21-apr-2019
27. https://reliefweb.int/map/myanmar/myanmar-new-displacement-rakhine-and-chin-states-21-apr-2019
28. GoM, "Thematic Report on Education Census…" Table 3.2 p. 22.
29. Ibid. Table 5.4 p. 56.
30. School attendance was defined in the census as "regular attendance at any accredited educational institution or programme, public or private, for organized learning at any level of education at the time of the 2014 census" (p. 32).

31. There are many 'minority within minority' groups in Shan state. These are only the organizations that were available and agreed to speak during the fieldwork. A number of these groups have multiple and rival LCCs/ LCAs based on religions and religious denominations.
32. Government of Myanmar terminology.
33. The languages of the PaO, Danu, Akha, Lahu, and Wa are totally different from Shan. Only Khun Tai has common linguistic roots with Shan, as both are Shan-Tai languages. Danu, Akha and Lahu are part of the Tibeto-Burman language family, but only Danu is close to Burmese – also a Tibeto-Burman language. Wa is part of the Mon-Khmer language family. PaO is more closely related to Karen, also a Tibeto-Burman language, which however is totally different from Burmese.
34. The languages of the Mro, Dinet, Laitu Chin and Thet are totally different from Rakhine, which is closely related to Burmese.
35. The researcher and author of this article has been working on and in Myanmar since early 2005. Since 2010 she has been working with (non dominant) ethnic communities across Mon, Karen, Kachin and more recently Shan and Rakhine States. The work has focused mainly on documenting the voices of teachers and parents both in government and on government education institutions as well as ethnic respondents working in local NGOs and literature and culture associations. Reports for INGOs and the government as well as academic articles have reflected what these communities say about their realities on the ground and what support they need to educate their children.
36. Process of participant recruitment and informed consentThe Myanmar researcher contacted the various education organisations and Literature and Culture Committees (LCC) in the research areas asking them if they agreed to meet and if they could request parents or community members to come as well. Prior to each interview or FGD consent was taken. The information sheet was read out to all in the local language by whoever was translating. For FDGs the consent form was usually done group wise. The leader ticked the boxes and then everyone signed. We explained that everything was anonymous, there would be no recordings, no one needed to answer any questions, that they could withdraw at any time and that we would contact them at the end of the research to double check if they were happy for us to use what they had shared. Participants were told that their comments would be published. This was in the consent form and reiterated verbally. At the end of each part of the trip when the notes had been written up, the Myanmar researcher called the head of each organisation and read the notes out to them both in Burmese and in English. Where a local translator had been used, the notes were read out to that person who relegated it in the local language.
37. Around $20 at the time of writing.
38. The LC is supposed to be delivered during school hours, however in Shan state the State Education Office staff maintained that because there different ethnic groups attend the same school, the ethnic language can only be taught outside of school hours.
39. Muslim minorities: Whilst we did manage to speak to 4 Kaman community leaders, we did not get access to any IDP camps and had no travel permission to the northern townships and therefore were unable to speak to any Rohingya leaders. The education issues for the Muslim communities go well beyond the issue of language, so these are not covered in this article.
40. In all cases the mechanism of MTB-MLE was explained and examples from Mon, Karen and Kachin State were given to the respondents, to show that this system does exist in Myanmar, albeit outside of government schooling.
41. It is interesting to note that in Cambodia the initial introduction of NDLs in non-formal education have, over time, facilitated a wider acceptance of linguistic diversity and first language-based education in the formal education sector (Kosonen 2019 9, 225). This has not been the case in Myanmar despite widespread MTB-MLE systems developed by EAOs.
42. The fieldwork showed that minority within non-dominant ethnic groups when Christian, were split on denominational lines with Catholics and Protestants (and sometimes non Christian traditional religion followers) all having a different way of writing the language and in some cases using different scripts.

43. It should be noted that Myanmar government teachers are not expected to teach Burmese as a language, even in areas where communities might not speak it. They are not expected to know how to do this. The communities are expected to learn in Burmese. This is the essence of Burmanisation.
44. Early Childhood Care and Development
45. More recent research in 2019 by Salem Gervais and Raynaud seems to point to the fact that more ethnic teachers might be recruited in future; there is at the time of writing no actual policy text or evidence on the ground that bear this out. https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/ethnic-language-teachings-decentralisation-dividend
46. Although set up privately by PaO civil Society groups, the Shan State Education Office has recognised the trainees graduating from the TEC as their own TEC does not supply sufficient teachers every year. This was seem as a major success for the PaO until they realised that this meant that their trained teaches would not necessarily be sent to the areas where they speak the language, in effect negating the reason for setting it up.
47. Similar to India's 3 language formula
48. The LCC saw it as a main issue perhaps because they are from urban areas where private tutoring is widespread.
49. For more information on the LC please see work by Nicholas Salem Gervais.
50. The PaO leaders dispute this and say that PaO is no longer taught at government schools as it is impossible to find local teachers willing to teach the language with such low remuneration being offered.

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