INTEGRATION OF PEACE COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN EDUCATION SYSTEM: THE CASE OF MYANMAR

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Abstract: *Education is always the foundation for the development in every country as it is essential for individual sectors such as politics, economics, social and cultural regardless of time and situation. Moreover, education can provide people knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes that people powerfully engage in the development schemes of their societies. When figuring about education in the society is necessary for the public, peace communication and conflict resolution have been a key role for the diverse cultural communities with multicultural norms and practices to establish effective and sustainable development in education system. Promoting the education about peace and conflict resolution in the system can encourage the peace and stability of the communities and even to the students in their daily lives. The study focuses on integrating peace communication and conflict resolution in the education system and discusses about the direct and indirect approaches to the peace communication and conflict resolution education integration in Myanmar using case study research method presenting descriptive contexts, international examples and background information for in-depth analysis of various perspectives.*

Keywords; *peace, conflict resolution, education, Myanmar.*

1. Introduction

Myanmar is home for more over 135 ethnic groups which is highly ethnically diverse in Southeast Asia region. In the country, the Burmese ethnic group is the majority which is approximately two-third of the total population of Myanmar and the other main ethnic groups are Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. Moreover, there are communities of Indian and Chinese origins which is about 4 percent of the total population, so it can be regarded that Myanmar's history has been known together with the diverse ethnic cultures and traditions in the country. Along with the beautiful diverse culture, the country has been at war itself since independence in 1948. The ethnic conflicts have been extreme political struggles for the central governments throughout the time as all ethnic regions are borderlands with the neighboring countries (South , 2011).

After post-colonial period, the ethnic conflicts have been breaking out in ethnic regions which are also border areas of Myanmar and the ethnic armed organizations mainly control in such regions. Since 1988, when the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) government took political power in Myanmar, the SPDC government tried to continue peace process in achieving national reconsolidation (Smith , 1999). During the time of democratic government from 2011, President U Thein Sein called for the conflict resolution and peace to be carried out altogether by all stakeholders and political powers inclusively. With the effort of the government, in April 2012, ceasefire agreement had been reached with 10 out of 11 major ethnic armed organizations. Ceasefire agreement have encouraged the improvements of social and living status of the people in conflict-affected areas by promoting tourism sector, job opportunities, good transportation, trade and regional economy (Crisis Group Asia Briefing N 149, 2016).

It is widely accepted that peace and conflict resolution is the best solution for all-inclusive political challenges in the country's development and the governments have always pursued the peacebuilding process. Nevertheless, since the political problem in 2021, the clashes and conflicts have started in specific regions of the country and the relation between the current State Administration Council (SAC) government since 2021 and some ethnic armed organizations become intense. The

long effort for peace and conflict resolution which has been built for decades are on the marginal line.

Myanmar has experienced conflicts and social tension for decades in most ethnic minority regions and the governments of Myanmar throughout the time have been finding the best solution for such political trauma. Notwithstanding the effort by the governments, most people of Myanmar are still lacking the knowledge about peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the country. Saying about the conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the process is not only for the stakeholders and policy makers, but it is all for the people in the country to be actively engaged in the whole process. Therefore, it is more important to educate the individuals in the country about peace and conflict resolution to encourage each and every citizen participate all-inclusive peacebuilding process (Zaw , 2018).

Education is the main communication tool among the people and it can also equip the people knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes in the society. Therefore, integrating peace and conflict resolution in the education system operate communication skills, creative thinking and analytic ability not only for understanding about conflicts and peace but also for preventing, managing and strategically resolving conflict situation in the community (Enachescu , 2013). In addition, peace and conflict resolution education lead the young generation who are the backbone of the country's sustainable development progressively perform in the process of getting rid of social violence and injustice in their daily lives or in their society (Galtung , 2010).

Long lasting and ongoing conflicts in Myanmar has led to the misunderstandings, hatred and breakdown in trust among the different communities. In that condition, educating about conflict resolution and peace support the reconciliation process and social cohesion by encouraging the citizens perceiving about diversity and a sense of shared identity in the country (Fink , 2000). Peace and conflict resolution can create the long-term growth in every sector such as political, economic and social, so the active teaching and learning about peace and conflict resolution especially to the youngsters in the society can bring

the sustainable development in Myanmar as the young population who are under the age of 30 is over half of the total population in Myanmar (Monitor, 2019).

The study aims to analyze the integration of peace communication and conflict resolution in Myanmar education system with the possible impacts and future aspects. Along with the main objective of the research, this study figures out the main research question; "How can peace communication and conflict resolution be integrated in Myanmar's education system to encourage the country's long-lasting and ongoing trauma peacebuilding process?" to highlight the integration process of peace communication and conflict resolution in Myanmar's education sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Education as a Communication Tool

Concerning cross-cultural understanding, education plays as the most important role as a communication tool in the society. Regarding the education, it is not only for sharing knowledge and skills among the teachers and students but also the development of communication skills and social interaction among the groups. When it is saying about communication skills, it means about speaking, writing, reading and listening academically, socially and professionally in their perspectives.

Education encourages understanding among the people meaning that education can provide people's development of understanding in political, social and economic issues (UNESCO, 2019). In addition, every people gain the knowledge and skills of critical thinking while analyzing and evaluating the information in the neighboring or in the society, then apply their own ideas and perspectives. The most important factor is that education can bring the mutual understanding among the groups in the society and reduce the upcoming arguments and conflicts understanding and promoting the knowledge and communication skills of the people (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

The most positive fact about education is it can create trust among individuals and build social adherence in the community by applying unity and cooperation with each other towards setting the achievements (Van Deth &

Scarbrough , 2013). Therefore, education can be regarded as a key factor in building social trust and values by encouraging the individuals to create a better society. Regardless of any age, gender and situation, the most powerful mechanism for endorsing social change in the community is no other than education. It is widely accepted that education provide the individuals' knowledge and competencies and such life skills encourage the people partaking in not only political but also social process in their communities (Freire , 2018).

What is more about the education as a communication tool, it promotes innovation and creativity by boosting the people's critical thinking skills and new ideas on different subjects. Innovation and creativity are absolutely imperative in social and economic development in a country and also it can help addressing social challenges (Binkley , et al., 2006). Additionally, education is the main potential source for cross-cultural understanding and social integration by letting the people know about each other and develop the abilities to interact and communicate each other in any form of languages, cultures, traditions, religions and backgrounds (Hickey & Mohan , 2006).

Besides, education and communication are necessary for fostering children and young adults to participate in social activities. Educational organizations adopting teaching and learning approaches with effective communication system for promoting students' engagement in the learning process. Moreover, research about Chinese international students found that education is the foundation factor for the cross-cultural communication skills and promoting the understanding of different cultures (Liao & Liang , 2021).

However, the role of communication in teach and learning process is argued that the effective communication model is essential in students' learning process as such better communication skills encourage students' academic and social achievements, emotional development and well-being in their daily lives (Edirisingha , Cane , Jiang , & Cane , 2018). Likewise, education can bring the students altogether from different social backgrounds and encourage them learn about diversity and social integration and this can reduce misunderstandings, hatred and conflicts among different communities (Edirisingha , Salmon , & Nie , 2008).

Overall, education has been playing the most important role in society for the young generation by equipping knowledge, skills and competencies, on the other hand, communication-based pedagogies provide not only the teachers but also the students new positive and supportive teaching and learning environment that engage in creating more inclusive education system in the community (Gray , Vitak , Easton , & Ellison , 2013).

2.2 Peace, Conflict resolution and Education

Education has the significant impact on peace and conflict resolution in the society and they are also interrelated concepts as education is the essential factor for promoting peace and conflict resolution by encouraging the people understanding, critical thinking skills, respect for diversity and cooperation among the different groups in the community (Salomon , 2013). In another way, it can be regarded that willingness to the non-violence and peaceful coexistence can be stimulated by teaching the individuals about the causes and consequences of conflicts, inequality, discrimination, diversity and so on (UNESCO, 2015).

In addition, education encourages each and every person develop problem-solving skills which are necessary for the conflict resolution in their own communities. From that point, education is also a driving force for the people in creating more tolerant and respectful society on the concept of diversity when they accept different perspectives on specific issues. By creating the knowledge and attitudes for peaceful coexistence and social cohesion, education shapes a harmonious community (Banks , 2015).

Therefore, there is always question how education can shape peace and conflict resolution skills for the students as part of the education sector in the countries. The most symbolic fact is that education can provide students knowledge, competencies and attitudes which are important for problem solving and conflict resolution in their personal lives and also in their respective communities. Significantly, the education can equip the students peace and conflict resolution skills by teaching them about different cultures, traditions, religions and beliefs in any viewpoints or perspectives. Then, education can reduce

misunderstandings and hatred on different viewpoints and experiences and encourage mutual respect (Ross , 2006).

Additionally, education system of a nation is crucial for promotion peace and conflict resolution in the society because it teaches learning individuals to question assumptions, analyze information and develop critical thinking skills (Lieberman & Pointer Malcom , 2018). Besides, it boosts better communication and negotiation skills which are necessary in navigating conflicts and finding out peaceful solutions using the way of conflict resolution and mediation. Overall, peace, conflict resolution and education system cannot be separated as all three are interconnected each other as such concepts are important for promoting the students understanding about culture of peace, developing analytical thinking skills and respect to diversity in the society (UNESCO, 2015).

2.3   Peace Communication and Conflict Resolution in Myanmar

Myanmar has been suffering the trauma of ethnic conflicts for many decades and the challenges of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the country are always reflecting the country's development schemes. Peace communication of Myanmar is also a complicated concept among the people of Myanmar although there are some positive developments in conflict resolution and peacebuilding process of Myanmar with the signing of Nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in 2015 (Zaw , 2018). However, the political changes in 2021 have brought the instability across the country and insurgencies groups are fighting against the central government. Therefore, there are still obstacles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding process throughout the country.

The most significant challenge of Myanmar's peace communication is the lack of trust and mutual understanding among different ethnic groups and central government (Kyaw , 2019). The failure to build better communication network always brings difficulties in promoting dialogue and cooperation with each side and those lead to the misinformation, hatred, mistrust and finally conflict. Soe and Lwin (2021) mentioned about the multiple options of communication strategies which have been used to promote conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the

country such as peace journalism, intercultural communication and dialogue facilitation (Soe & Lwin , 2021).

Regarding the history of Myanmar's conflict resolution and peacebuilding process, communication is the essential tool to bridge the gaps between the ethnic groups and the government throughout the time. Journalism and media can be applied as effective communication tool for understanding different perspectives and viewpoints by reporting the conflict (Kyaw , 2019). Moreover, promoting intercultural communication among the people is another possible strategy for fostering peace communication in Myanmar. Intercultural communication reduces stereotyping and encourages mutual understanding and respect on different groups (Myanmar, 2019).

On the other hand, the most visible and trending strategy of peace communication for Myanmar case is about promoting peace education which is aiming to encourage each citizen to attain more understanding about peace and conflict resolution and building harmonious and balance relationship with each other in the society (Lwin & Soe , 2019). Furthermore, peace education can equip the young adults to learn about the country's histories, cultures, traditions and diversity among the different ethnic and religious groups and such practices advance the students getting rid of cultural and social stereotyping (Myanmar U. , 2015).

3. Research Methodology

Theoretically defining about the peace communication and conflict resolution, it is regarded as one of the communication strategies that operate individuals' skills, creative thinking and competencies in understanding about peace and preventing conflicts and violence. Along with the ongoing conflicts in the country for years, stakeholders, policy makers and all responsible people have neglected the power of peace communication in national reconciliation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding process. Education has been applying the best communication tool to the young people in the society, so integrating peace communication and conflict resolution encourage the young adults and students

strategically resolve conflicts and collaborating with each other in their daily lives and even in their communities.

The objective of the study is to analyze peace communication and conflict resolution strategies in Myanmar and the integration of peace communication in Myanmar's education system as an effective communication tool. Therefore, the study mainly applies case study research method to analyze more about the case of Myanmar in peace communication integration in the education system. Additionally, content analysis and literature reviews method are both used in the research to highlight the study area and develop the research question by collecting data and information from variety of evidences and sources such as academic journals, books, reports and other written materials to explore more in-depth analysis of peace communication in Myanmar's education system. Further, to evaluate the questions concerning beliefs, values and attitudes about peace communication and education, wide range of contents such as government reports, analytical papers and law and policies related to the Myanmar's education sector are analyzed for the main pattern and key research process.

4. Finding and Analysis

Based on in-depth literature review and content analysis, the study finds the various concepts of integrating peace communication and conflict resolution in education sector in Myanmar. Hence, the finding and analysis proposition here will be divided into four themes including international's experiences which mentions about the implementation of peace education as an integral part of peace communication and conflict resolution strategy by international countries in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia regions. And, the theme named "Local Experiences" points out the current situation of peace education in Myanmar and its implementation framework is also specified. Then, the challenges and limitations in the implementation of Myanmar peace education are also indicated as part of research finding and analysis.

4.1 International's Experiences

Concerning the peace communication and conflict resolution education integration, there is no ready made for all situation because the countries have their

own and unique system based on their own structure, culture, tradition and social status. The study did in-depth analysis on the various peace and conflict resolution education of different world countries including Asia, Europe, America and even Africa as there is conflict everywhere and everyone should understand about the value of peace. In the case of Netherlands, the government has implemented peace education as a compulsory part of national curriculum for primary and secondary education and the curriculum mainly explain about the conflict resolution, social justice to provide the students better understanding (de Graaff , 2019).

A South America country, Colombia has set up the peace education as the integral function of the state's peacebuilding process. Its peace education program aims to foster the country's reconciliation process, peaceful coexistence in the community and citizen's democratic participation (Molano Rodriguez , 2018). South Africa government also implemented the curriculum for providing the students knowledge and competencies about conflict resolution and social cohesion in order to understand about conflict resolution and democracy practices (Odora-Hoppers , 2017). In Norway, the government has implemented peace education program named "Learning for Peace", which teach the students about intercultural understanding and conflict resolution letting them to engage in peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities in the society (Brekke , 2019).

Implementation of peace communication and conflict resolution education in Asia region are so interesting that Asia countries are diverse with different cultural and social background. In East Asia, Japan possesses a long history of promoting peace communication education so that the country has set up the peace education basic law to encourage the schools teach peace and conflict resolution (Shimizu , 2019). Moreover, the Japanese government supports peace education programs under the Peace Education Promotion Act (Takahashi , 2017). South Korea promotes peace education as the national curriculum under the name of Ethics and Citizenship education for strengthening its people's understanding about different cultures and values (Kim & Lee , 2016). Moreover, the government endorses government-funded peace education center for the resources training for trainers' program (Moon , 2013).

Sri Lanka, a South Asian country, has implemented peace education program for promoting mutual understanding among different ethnic and religious organizations. Under its program, peace, conflict resolution and intercultural communication are included and its government also organizes Peace Education unit under the control of Ministry of Education for teachers (Jayasuriya & Gunawardena , 2016).

Among the Asia regions, Southeast Asia countries are sensitive to talk about the peace and conflict resolution as most regional countries are well-known for their diversity. Among the regional countries, Philippines and Indonesia are famous for implementing peace education for the citizens and country. In Philippines, peace education is a part of national curriculum through the Peace Education Act and its objective is to foster the students being active and responsible citizens in peace and conflict resolution process in the country (Tungpalan & Pantoja , 2020). On the other hand, Indonesia promotes peace education by integrating into national curriculum through subjects such as Civics and Citizenship Education targeting to encourage understanding and knowledge about diversity and democratic values. Moreover, Indonesia government funds Peace Education Centre for training for teachers (Saragih , 2018).

4.2 Local Experiences

According to Myanmar's culture and tradition, the concepts of peace communication has been introduced to Myanmar people with Buddhist teachings about non-violence, tolerance and empathy encouraging conflict resolution skills and respecting difference perspectives. Ministry of Education in Myanmar has launched a new subject under New Education Policy called, "Life Skills and Citizenship Education" which teach the primary and secondary school students knowledges, skills and attitudes residing in the society at the current situation. However, it found out that the new curriculum of Myanmar rather focuses on the life skills of the students in the society, and not much relevant to the peace communication among the ethnicities and religious groups.

One of the main organizations which are working for peace communication is Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC). The centre has been publishing many books about peace communication educating government officials, stakeholders and civil

society organizations to know and understand about peace and conflict resolution. On the other hand, various NGOs and civil society organizations are participating actively in promoting peace education in their respective communities. The most prominent case is that Karen Women's Organization has set up peace education program for young people in conflict area of Karen state which is Southeastern part of Myanmar including community activities, workshops, ToT sessions and so on in order to foster the people's understanding about reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and peacebuilding.

Although the integration of peace communication in the national curriculum is significant effort for conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in Myanmar, there is no compelling integration procedure in Myanmar's education sector. In fact, there are several ways that can be used for integrating peace communication in education system as informal or formal education approach. As peace communication in formal education system, students can learn concepts of conflict resolution and peacebuilding process since their earlier school days. On the other hand, in informal education system, peace education can be delivered in the way of civil society organizations, religious institutions and so on to keep in touch with all kind of people in the society. However, it cannot be seen any symbolic effort to promote peace education as a communication tool in the country.

4.3 Implementation Framework

Recently, integrated peace education in school curriculums has been trending in regions which are implementing conflict resolution and peacebuilding process. Not only European and African countries, many Asian countries are encouraging integrating peace communication in school curriculums, setting up new policies and acts and providing government-funded facilities for the teachers. Myanmar's neighboring countries, Philippines and Indonesia which are also countries of ASEAN, have been implementing effective peace communication system by integrating in schools' curriculums since a decade ago. As a diverse country with ongoing ethnic conflicts, Myanmar should get ready for its very first step in establishing integrated peace communication in formal education system for its

young generation keeping in touch with understanding of conflict resolution and peacebuilding process.

In Myanmar case, there are multiple responsible stakeholders to promote peace communication; the government which is the main important stakeholders, civil society organizations, educators and schools, media organizations and even individuals. Among all the possible factors, educators and schools are more direct and effective to teach peace communication and conflict resolution. Integrating peace education in the curriculum, teaching intercultural communication and diversity among the different ethnic and religious groups and provide the students opportunities to engage in social activities are the powerful communication strategies for young generation.

The countries implement peace education in their curriculum based on different methods and approaches based on their cultural and social background, norms and traditions. Hence, here, the study figures out the fundamental concepts which must be included in integrating peace education in national curriculum in Myanmar. Like any other subjects in the curriculum, there should be considered about attitudes, knowledge and skills in peace education integration. Then, the study shows which should be included in those three concepts based on Myanmar social, cultural and political context.
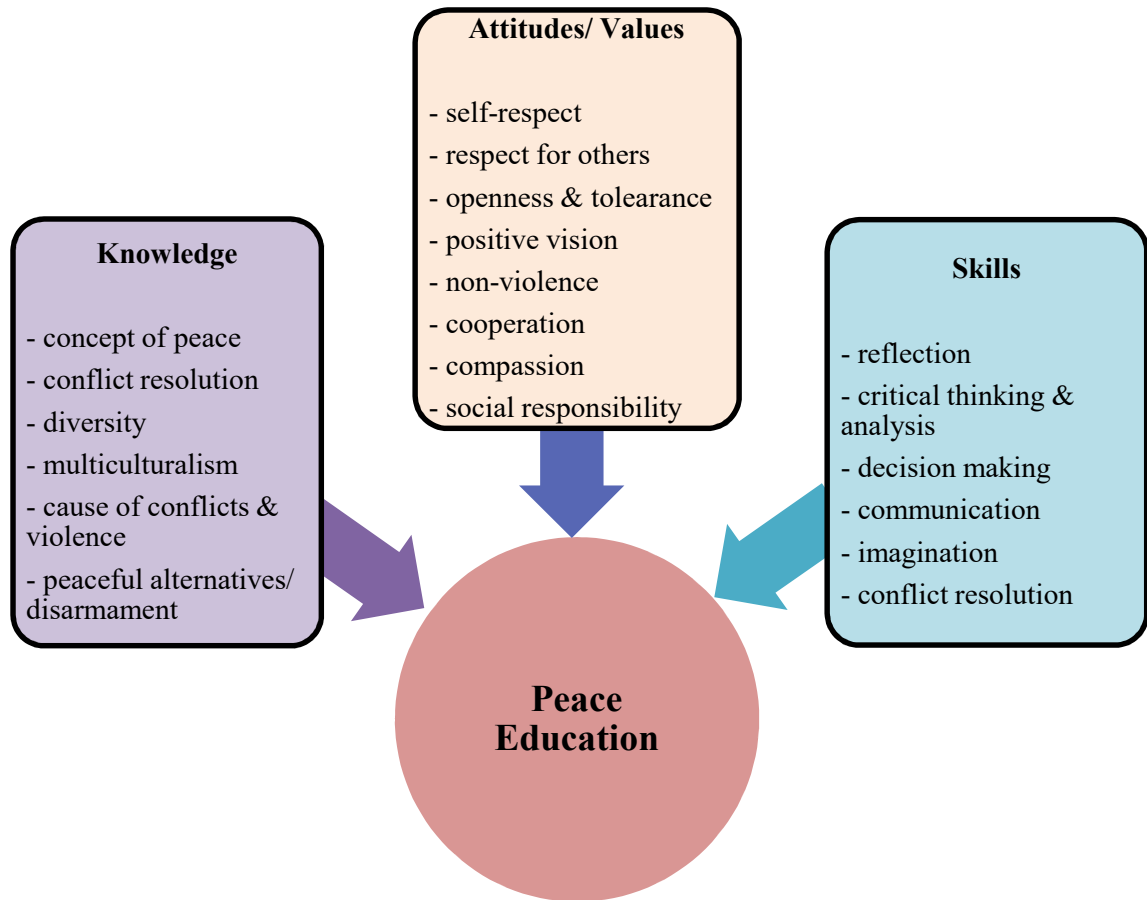
Attitudes/ Values

- self-respect
- respect for others
- openness & tolearance
- positive vision
- non-violence
- cooperation
- compassion
- social responsibility

Knowledge

- concept of peace
- conflict resolution
- diversity
- multiculturalism
- cause of conflicts & violence
- peaceful alternatives/ disarmament

Skills

- reflection
- critical thinking & analysis
- decision making
- communication
- imagination
- conflict resolution

Peace Education

Figure: Logical implementation framework included in determining the peace education program in Myanmar

Concerning strategic approaches to peace communication integration in Myanmar's education system, there are totally five phases in the process. They are; (1) Situational Analysis/ sector diagnosis, (2) Policy formulation/ review, (3) Identification of objectives and design of priority programmes, (4) Costing and financing framework and (5) Monitoring and evaluation. Each phase has its own detailed strategies and functions in order to make the integration process easy and effective. The phase 1; situational analysis or sector diagnosis is about reviewing existing national development strategies and also review education reports written by researchers or external actors. In Myanmar, conflict resolution, national

reconciliation and peacebuilding have always been the most priority national objectives, so there is no difficulty concerning policies and regulations.

The second phase is policy formulation or review which to review national education systems or policies related to peace communication and conflict resolution. Regarding the policies, it needs to be inclusive education policy, language policy as multi-lingual states, capacity development policy and even teacher training policy. However, in Myanmar, there is no such strong policies to implement peace education in its national curriculum. Next, the third phase is about identification of objectives and priority programmes meaning that curricula are the most important functions in integrating peace education in the education system, and equally, such priorities should go to key areas such as conflict-affected regions in the country. Concerning the program's objectives, those need to be affordability, desirability, feasibility and sustainability.

The fourth phase is about costing and financing and it is more expensive and prominent stage of implementing peace education in Myanmar. The costs for all education expenditure items such as teachers, construction classrooms, trainings of teachers and teaching aids should be determined based on priority level in Myanmar as the country's education budget is not hefty. The final stage is monitoring and evaluation the performance what has been implemented during the previous phases comparing with planned inputs, outputs and impacts. Analyzing the Myanmar's effort to peace education, it just stops at the phase I. Although the government sets up the policies and announcements for conflict resolution and peacebuilding process, there is no following procedures to support the government's policies to peace. The above mentioned five stages are the most simple, suitable and effective functions to implement the peace communication integration in Myanmar's education system, however, the study shows that there is no effort at all.

4.4 Challenges and Limitations

Establishing peace communication in the country is essential for the country's development in any sector such as politics, economic, social and so on as the peace can bring the stability and social cohesion but also prevent conflicts and violence in

the nation. There are many challenges and limitations to establish peace communication in the society of Myanmar. The first challenge is fewer human resources who understand about conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the country. Moreover, the citizens are not interested about multiculturalism and diversity which are the most basic things in peace communication. Financing is another challenge as the educational budget is lower than others budget allocation.

There is no strong educational policies to foster peace communication integration in the country's educational system. Consequently, there is no following strategic plans and objectives to set up the peace education curriculum in formal or informal education. The policy makers in educational sector are not active in the implementation process of peace education as there is no response to the recommendations from all professionals and scholars concerning peace and conflict resolution in Myanmar. The biggest limitation about the peace education is curricula development based on the country's current requirements according to situations, rules and regulations, policies and also social status.

5. Conclusion

In Myanmar, young people are the country's future and hope as they are the main foundation of the nation building into more peaceful, sustainable and inclusive society. Therefore, equipping them skills, knowledge and values which are necessary for encouraging peace, reconciliation, diversity and social coexistence can contribute to their cooperation in country's peacebuilding process. To provide the youths with such skills and values about peace and conflict resolution, the best way is education for them as the education is the most powerful communication tool in the society.

Integrating peace communication in the national curriculum of education system help each and every citizen engage in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding process encourage them actively for peace and stability in the communities. Myanmar has been in ethnic conflicts for many decades, so the young generation need to understand about conflict resolution and peace building process and education has always been the crucial component for Myanmar's peacebuilding process. Investing in education sector for peace is one of the best supports to build

sustainable and absolute conflict resolution, national reconciliation and peacebuilding in Myanmar.

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