# VISIONS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MYANMAR AS SEEN THROUGH CHILDREN'S ART WORK

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*Degree: Master degree*

*Major:  Education*

*Academic year 2022*

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**Abstract:**

This research project explored children's perspectives of Primary Education in Myanmar. I chose this topic as I believe children are the future, and their visions of education are important during times of change, as in Myanmar in 2012-13. Moreover, children's opinions/ideas are usually not considered, especially in Asian cultures. Fieldwork was carried out in Yangon, Myanmar in September 2012. The methods were questionnaires, face-to-face interviews with head teachers, observations and thematic children's drawings.

**Key words: Primary Education of Myanmar. Children's Artwork.**

## I INTRODUCTION

**Background, geographical and historical information:** Every school in Myanmar follows the National Curriculum which is written by the Department of Basic Education which is responsible for the administration and management of curriculum and textbooks, teacher education and special projects. The general aims and objectives of the Primary Education are, to be able to have good foundation in education, to improve thinking skills and knowledge, to raise morality, to understand the surrounding environment and to apply the basic mathematical knowledge and skills in daily life situations.

**Political changes which effect the changes in the education system:** Myanmar has a civilian parliamentary government which took power in 2011. The legal system used is the mixed legal system of English common and customary law. Schooling is compulsory until the end of elementary school. Since the start of democratic government and release of Aung San Suu Kyi, people of Myanmar are very hopeful about improvement in education and investment in education has doubled already.

**Reasons for choosing the research topic:** This study is interwoven with some autobiographical reflections based on my experience in the education sector. My experiences of growing up in Myanmar and working at the British Council as an English teacher, teacher trainer and materials developer will be a part of the research and dissertation. There are three main reasons why I chose this topic: 1) to explore the primary education system in my country, 2) to make a difference and 3) to examine Myanmar childrens' visions of the future. Having grown up in Myanmar, I have had sixteen years of education from primary until masters level in TEFL, and have always been dissatisfied with the state education system. Living in Yangon, I went to Practising School, Institute of Education. There were at least 60 students in a class who were not allowed to express their ideas or opinions, were subjected to corporal punishment and where learning always took place by chalk-and-talk and rote learning. I wanted to explore perceptions from government teachers' and some authorities' points of view, by interviewing them to discover how education leaders expect change in the Primary Education system of Myanmar and primary children from different areas of Yangon and different education settings perceive primary education.

**Context and participants:** My area of focus is primary education in Myanmar. The research participants are head teachers and children aged 8 to 11. I focused on four different settings of primary education in the Yangon area: a) urban primary education, b) rural primary education, c) primary education in the suburban area, d) monastic education (schools run by the Buddhist monks) and e) international primary education.

I have chosen five schools to represent each type of primary setting shown in the table below;

| Contexts | Reasons |
|---|---|
| • Urban primary school | The school was set up as a Teacher Training Centre and remains one of the biggest Teacher Training Centres in the country. |
| • Rural primary school | In common with most rural schools, this school 67km from Yangon is in the compound of the village monastery. As I know the whole village and the village head is a relative, this facilitated obtaining information and meeting the locals. |
| • A primary school in the suburban area of Yangon | I chose this primary school because it is in Yangon city, but not quite urban and because my family connections again facilitated contact. |
| • Monastic primary school | Maha Thate Pan is in the outskirts of Yangon and is also familiar to my family. |
| • An international primary class | I chose to observe a primary English class at the British Council because I was a teacher there and it was my own class. |

I chose children and head teachers from various contexts. Primary children were asked to draw pictures; I then interviewed them and the head teachers to determine their views on current and future Primary Education.

**Aim of the study and research questions:** The purpose of this study is to explore the visions of Primary Education in Myanmar as seen through children's art work and perspectives of head teachers on Primary Education. My research investigates the following questions; 1) What are the differences between the Primary Education settings of Myanmar? 2) What are the differences in Primary Education between rural/urban state schools, monastic schools and international schools? 3) How do primary students see education and future education? The main purposes of the research are: to gain a deeper understanding of how Primary Education system works in Myanmar, to explore how political change is affecting or could affect the Primary Education system in Myanmar and to find out how and what stakeholders expect from changes and improvements in Primary Education over the next 5 years. The main sources I used were face-to-face interviews, video recordings and pictures.

**Literature review overview:** There are several issues I have focused on in my literature review: 1) Primary Education continuity and change, 2) Differences in rural and urban primary classes, 3) International perspectives and 4) Primary children's drawings. Mainly because of the political situation, there is a huge gap between rural and urban education, leading to different types of schoolings such as private schools, public schools and monastic schools. In collecting data, I collected drawings by primary children from various educational settings. I wanted to consider their perspectives and experiences as current education users alongside those of their teachers. Head teachers in Myanmar not only have the responsibility to teach and manage teachers, but also teach students. Hence the interviews with the head teachers give the scope of teachers' and the authority's points of view. I have used mainly university libraries, newspaper articles, educational books and online articles.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

"The reason we need schools is to create for children an appropriate environment in which the awesome process of learning about life." Whitaker (1997, p. 51)

Primary Education is not only where children learn how to read, write and calculate, it is the foundation of all learning and the beginning of a child's life. Burmese people believe that children who are taught to pray every morning before classes tend to be more obedient and open-hearted. While volunteering at an international primary school, I observed several classes. It included free time where children could do whatever pleased them: some drew, some built houses with plastic/wooden blocks and some read story books.

**Primary Education continuity and change:** In Myanmar, Primary Education is compulsory until the age of 9 and every child has the right to schooling. Starting from the 2012 academic year, the current government started to provide textbooks and stationery to all public primary sectors. Despite significant political changes in the country over the past century, the system still hasn't changed much. The consequences of decades of stagnation have been poor post and internet communication, with people kept uninformed, leading to low development in technology and education. Government spent only 2.6% of its budget on education.

The major changes in politics in the country are shown in figure 2.1. As Myanmar was under British rule for 60 years, the education system is still much influenced by the British one which left a good foundation for the education system. As Alexander (2000, p.164) has mentioned; "schools and teachers are agents of cultural reproduction", the culture taught in the schools is one of the main factors that hinder progression. The lack of progress in education over the past century has affected rural and urban education, and has made the gap between them even larger. In the last century, in rural areas, there were not a lot of state schools, children went to monastic schools and only children from urban areas went to state schools. Nowadays, in rural areas, there are state and monastic schools, and in urban areas there are state schools and different types of private schools.

**The Differences in Rural and Urban Primary Classes:** In Myanmar, most children from rural areas come from families who have to struggle for their daily basic needs and have few opportunities. Levin and Lockheed (1993, p. 1) claims "Developing countries face a host of common problems in providing sufficient education of high quality to their youth." According to UN Millennium Project, their goal is "to achieve universal Primary Education, to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling." In Myanmar, children in most rural areas finish primary school, achieving competency in reading, writing and basic arithmetic. Although schools are not very effective, they serve the basic purpose of schooling, even those schools in rural areas. There are not enough jobs in the rural areas for parents to support their children continuing middle school, plus as children, parents could not themselves go to middle school, a reason why they do not send the children beyond primary school. Alexander (2000, p. 212) has cited "Ninety per cent of our parents are illiterate. Illiterate parents prevent their children from going forward." He further mentioned that it was the most extreme version. He compared it with another version which is a bit more sympathetic as the head teacher stated; "95 per cent of parents are illiterate. The children's needs are very basic. Some have no clothes to wear, no shoes. They are not clean."

Levin and Lockheed (1993, p.3) continued that; "dropout rates for girls are higher than those for boys, and they are higher for students in rural areas than for students in urban areas." I disagree with the quote in a 2012 context, in Myanmar, there is little discrimination against girls in families, even in rural areas when it comes to education. Levin and Lockheed (1993, p. 3) also assert that "Schools in developing countries often lack the most basic resources needed for education such as qualified teachers, facilities, and textbooks." Mostly because of the salary, a lot of young and creative people would rather choose a different career. Even if they do, they prefer cities to rural areas.

**International perspectives:** Carpenter (2012) has mentioned in her article about **Different Types of Schooling** in the United States; "As parents we want what is best for our children; the best health, the best neighbourhoods, happiness, high self-esteem, and the best education. A good education starts with the type of schooling the child is exposed to." This view is also held by parents in Myanmar. According to their budget, parents from rural areas would send their children to a better school. If parents are poor, they still send their children to local primary school. In cities, where there are even more choices, parents choose different schools according to how much they can afford, how good the schools are in discipline, status and teachers. In rural areas, there are mostly, public schools, monastic schools and in some areas, there are some private schools. In urban areas, there are mainly two big sectors: public schools and private schools.

Starting from the 11th century, monastic education has also been important in Myanmar. Some parents still prefer monastic schools as Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist and parents wish their children to learn the ways of Buddhism. Nyunt (2008) in **Monastic Schools Play Important Role**, citied a monk as follows: "Monastic schools are also places that help the country produce valuable citizens because the students have to learn basic ethical values and morality". As Myanmar is a very Buddhist country, monks have very high authority and are revered by all. A school I investigated had two shifts; 07.00 - 11.30 and 12.00 to 16.30. To my surprise, all children sat down on the floor in front of the head monk and head teacher and paid their respects before they left the school. It not only demonstrates the power distance but also how influential the head monk and the head teacher are vis-a-vis the children and their families. They felt very privileged to be at school, and very grateful that the monastery had taken them in and given them education.

In the Internet article **Pros and Cons of Different Types of Schooling**, there is a clear differentiation between the pros and cons of private and public schooling in a developed country. The advantages of private schools are that they hire international teachers who have more international experience in education. Although Carpenter (2012) argued that in the States, many private schools are selective in

the types of students they admit, weeding out bad elements and building a student body of enthusiastic learners and children have a certain academic level they must meet before being admitted, in Myanmar some schools such are very prestigious and admission is very difficult. In our private schools, there are better facilities for sports, music and science but status indicator remains one of the key factors.

**Primary children's drawings:** Michael Armstrong (1980, p.10) says; "Anyone who comes into contact with young children's writing for the first time is likely to be impressed by the apparent discrepancy, flatness and awkwardness of their writing." I am always amazed by what young children come up with when they draw, regardless of their age, level or origin. Their drawings show more than the pictures themselves; they show where they come from and what they have been exposed to, as well as the relationship between the family members, their childhood memories, their dreams and their experience of learning. Armstrong has also mentioned that drawings are the reflection of their emotions. His work from 1980 is supported by more modern literature; Jolley (2010, p. 180) described childrens' intelligence, personality and emotionality as follows: "Drawings have been used as measures of children's intelligence, personality, emotional state, and their emotional attitudes towards the subject matter drawn, with each approach having formularized its own diagnostic drawing tests." Childrens' drawings are equivalent to adults keeping a diary to improve their memory. Based on the five criteria explained in Chapter 3, 2.4, I investigated the meaning behind childrens' drawings. In their drawings, children portrayed school buildings, teachers, friends, homework, education and lessons. Burke and Grosvenor (2003, p.7) have mentioned: "The meaning of school, its purpose and functions, its place in individual lives, the community and the world are on the agenda."

## III METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

**1. Research Design:** I chose to interview the head teachers because I wanted a practitioner's perspective as opposed to a policy-making perspective and my main interest was to find out how children express their views about education in their drawings. I have used Williams' Draw and Tell method to collect children's drawings from different primary schools. He has noted that children's drawings; "Encourage new conceptualizations of state crime in relation to child victims, demonstrate ethical child-centred research methods, with an awareness of the pitfalls and show that if data is collected effectively and systematically, it can be used for forensic evidence and advocacy."

To answer the research questions, I collected data from head teachers from rural, urban, suburban, monastic and international schools. I have chosen to use a case study method as the research methodology, and I collected qualitative data from several case studies. According to Robson (2011, p.135): "the case is the situation, individual, group, organisation or whatever it is we are interested

in". I focused on five particular cases for my research project to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the differences between the Primary Education sectors of Myanmar? 2) What are the differences in Primary Education between rural/urban state schools, monastic schools and international schools? 3) How do primary students see education and future education? And 4) How has the system changed over time?

According to Denscombe (2003, p.30); "When researchers opt for a case study approach they buy into a set of related ideas and preferences which, when combined, give the approach its distinctive character". I have used multiple sources and multiple methods in collecting data as this allowed me to collect data freely and from different sources. For Denscombe (2003, p.33), the case study approach means; "The researcher needs to pick out one example from a wider range of examples." That is why I chose this as a methodology: to determine opinion, attitude and perceptions of head teachers from rural, urban, outskirts, monastic and international primary schools in Myanmar.

## 2. Instruments

**2.1. Questionnaires: I** have used questionnaires to collect data. According to Denscombe (2003, p.145); "questionnaires are the most productive when what is required tends to be fairly straightforward information – relatively brief and uncontroversial." I decided to use semi-structured survey/interviews in order to have a chance to pursue 'open' answers. Denscombe (2003, p.156) also noted that; "The advantage of 'open' questions is that the information gathered by way of the responses is more likely to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent."

The respondees I focused on are head teachers and students from different primary settings. I have used purposive sampling as it is easy for me to reach out to those 'handpicked' people to acquire their background stories. "The term is applied to those situations where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data." Denscombe (2003, p.15).

**2.2. Face-to-face interviews:** The purposes of interviews are primarily to gather data and to sample respondents' opinions, as in door-step interviews. Although in each of these situations the respective roles of the interviewer and interviewee vary and the motives for taking part may differ, a common denominator is the transaction that takes place between seeking information on the part of one and supplying information on the part of the other" Cohen et. al. (2000, p.268). I carried out face-to-face interviews with selected people based on the questionnaires and collected qualitative data and agree

with Denscombe (2003, p.8), "The face-to-face interview involves direct contact between the researcher and the respondent. Researchers might expect the data obtained to be more detailed and rich, and the face-to-face contact offers some immediate means of validating the data."

**2.3. Observations:** As a part of the research, I observed several classes in all five settings: urban, rural, suburban, monastic and international classrooms, I also took videos and pictures of the observation situations.

**2.4. Children's drawings:** "Drawing tends to recount far more things to the reader than language." Kitahara & Matsuishi have stated. You cannot observe a drawing without noticing the style and emotions, and sometimes you can even guess the life story of the drawer. 'Draw and tell' is a straightforward way to gain data from children (Pridmore & Rifkin 2001: 96). In some instances, the approach may be implemented using a freestyle methodology. This is where children are simply asked to draw and talk or write about their drawings. As a part of my research project, I collected around a hundred drawings, but will be using only around thirty. The five selection criteria are ones which tell: 1) a good story ,2) their background stories, 3) the culture of teaching/learning in Myanmar, 4) their perception of school and education and 5) which show their lack of knowledge about 'future'. Merriman & Guerin (2006, p.48) states "The range of uses of drawings in research highlights their complexity and flexibility such that they can be used as tools for facilitating communication or to aid assessment in their own right."

Williams has stated in his research on Street Children of South Africa that; "children's drawings can be interpreted psychologically, but this requires a specialist approach, and is very difficult, especially in multi-cultural contexts." I used the drawing tasks as questionnaires for face-to-face interviews. There were three different topics I used with children: 1) Good and Bad things about School, 2) Schools I Would like and 3) Schools in the Future. From the drawings, I found out about children's thoughts, ideas and background stories. According to Kitahara & Matsuishi; "The drawing tells more about the drawer himself or herself rather than the subject that was drawn." Those topics were set as 'open' questions for children to answer in pictures. When I found interesting ones which fitted the criteria, I asked them individually what they wanted to convey in these pictures and why. Before the task, I set a time limit and told them that there will be a prize for everyone who finishes the task. The advantages of using this method and why this is the best method to collect data for my research project are shown in the table below along with the disadvantages, limitations and constraints of using this method. Advantages are that Children forget they are on a task and see it as fun, they are competitive (this can be seen as a disadvantage as well) and are motivated to draw as there are

incentives. On the other hand, the disadvantages are that some do not understand what the task is and they are distracted by other children's drawings and time limit.

**3. Context and Participants:** I have handpicked five different settings and I used purposive sampling method. "A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project" Robson (2011, p.275). "The principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest." There are two participant groups; children aged between 8 – 10 and head teachers. I chose children of this age group because this is the age group I teach, and they are mature enough to understand and do the task. For the head teachers gave me different perspectives as a teacher/manager/teachertrainer.

**4. Data Analysis Procedure:** All the methods I used were to collect qualitative data. There are two main reasons why I decided to collect this type of data; I am more interested in meeting people and interviewing them rather than, giving questionnaires to focus groups. I interviewed all the head teachers and carried out all the tasks with children myself, plus, I kept a diary. Thomas (2010, p. 200) said about this type of data analysis; "this puts the themes in sequential order from the interview and uses lines and arrows to make the connections between the ideas and themes."

## IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Findings from children's drawings:** I collected drawings from primary school children based on three topics; Good and Bad Things about School, the School I Would Like and their vision of Schools in the Future. I referred to Burke and Grosvenor's work of *The School I'd Like* and personalised it with my findings. I expected children to express their visions of education through their artwork, letting their imaginations and creativity go free.

*Rural Primary Class:* Out of 18 children's drawings from the rural primary school, I focused on 3 examples. Most children drew the National flag, flower pots and school buildings which are all found in the 3 examples. One girl drew a big library, without the school building, under the topic of Schools in the future. She liked the idea of having a big library in the school compound. The other two children drew similar subjects such as the national flag, flowers and other school related things such as a bag, a pencil and a school building. I asked two children why they drew these things in their ideal school as they already have them at the current school, they could not reply. From my experience of spending some time with children from rural areas, there are several reasons that explain their silence. Children are not usually asked for opinions in Burmese culture and adults usually do not have

conversations with them. Younger people always have to listen to their elders, even if their elders aren't relatives. The drawings are shown in Figure 4.1.

*Monastic Primary Class:* From the monastic school, I collected about 25 drawings. The majority of drawings were of smiley faces that children have copied but I have chosen to focus on one picture of flowers. Although the children are still in Yangon division, they come from very poor family backgrounds, many are orphans, and some have to work as one of the parents had passed away. They do not have any idea of what is happening outside their world. The drawing I analysed was from a ten-year-old boy who drew about Good and Bad Things about School. In the part of bad things about school, he described travelling to school every day. When it rains, the cars that pass by splash muddy water at him and when it is rainy and windy, he gets wet when the wind almost blows his umbrella away. The picture was shown in Figure 4.2.

I concluded my interviews with children from monastic schools.

*Primary Classes from the suburban area:* I focused on 8 drawings out of 40 as they tell stories of their backgrounds, their views on school and education, and their love of being in class. From pictures 1 to 5, there are three categories that came up: playing with friends, studying and clothes they want to wear. Pictures 1 and 5 mainly show that they are happy when they playing in the playground, on swings and when playing football. The boy from picture 5 drew children holding hands, showing they are happy being together with friends.

In Figure 4.4. Picture 2, 3 and 4 all show how happy they are to be in school though the girl who drew picture 2 drew something more diverse. She drew a dress, a school building, two smiley faces, a flower pot, two purses and a cat. When I asked about the dress, she told me that she would be happier if she could wear dresses than the school uniform. She explained about the smiley faces as how happy she and her friends are when they come to school. Picture 1 (drawn by a boy) and 4 (drawn by a girl) showed the bad things about school, when students fight each other and don't work well in class and when they have to take their shoes off to enter the classroom. Another girl said it's embarrassing when boys in class urinate while the teacher is teaching (a consequence of limited break times).

In Picture 6; the boy drew three different buildings with different classes in each of them. The boy wanted to have bigger classrooms and separate buildings for different grades and classes. For the last topic of Schools in the Future, I have 2 samples, Figure 4.6. Picture 7 and 8. One student drew a futuristic school which is a tall building with different storeys, another drew a school she could have in the future, such as having flower pots, a fish tank and a school bus. As most children live near

home, they walk to school but most want to travel to school by bus like children from their neighbourhood. Both children put the national flag in their pictures.

• *Urban Primary Class*

I selected 10 drawings that told the best stories. Under the topic of Schools in the Future, a boy put colours to the pictures where he described a four storeyed school building and a toilet separate from the main building, where teachers and students arrive at school and two students are putting up the flag. His vision of a school has different subjects taught on different floors. In this school, classroom doors are always open for ventilation which is a good thing but also it invites outside noise.

There are 2 pieces of artwork for the topic Good and Bad Things about School which are shown in Figure 4.8. One of them is the work of a girl who loves learning English but doesn't like when she has to sweep leaves in the school compound. A boy drawer showed that he liked the library where there are comics, journals, newspapers, different subjects and stationery.

The last topic: School, there are 7 drawings in two different categories: playgrounds and the whole school context. Alexander (2000, p.175) cited a much-quoted Plowden Report from 1967 as: "A school is not merely a teaching shop; it must transmit attitudes and values". Three children mentioned that they want swings, monkey bars and football matches in the school (the school has a massive football pitch, but students aren't allowed to play on it). They wish to play at school with their friends. From the second category, children described the school as a whole. In picture 6, shown in Figure 4.9, the girl drew the school she would like, in the snow, where there are rainbows, birds flying, a mango tree, a stream with a bridge beside the school, swings, monkey bars, a slide and a separate canteen. She even put a snowman beside the school compound.

In pictures 1, 3 and 7 shown in figure 4.10, the work of the boys is quite similar. There are children playing in the playground, some are doing hide and seek, some are on the slide, some are climbing trees and some are swimming. There is a plane and a bird flying over the school when the sun is shining, he may be dissatisfied with the current canteen at school; a small canteen with only three different stores which sell soft drinks, snacks and traditional food. In his picture, there are separate buildings for canteen, games shop, the gate at the entrance of the campus and the office of the teachers and the head teacher with satellite devices.

• *International Primary Class*

I collected some data from children from the British Council; most of them go to international schools and have travelled outside Myanmar. In all pictures, the teacher is smiling, playing games or singing with them. My students from the British Council drew pictures showing boys and girls sitting together and singing together which doesn't usually happen in Myanmar. In Bad Things about School, they drew running in school and shouting in class. The pictures are shown in Figure 4.11.

For Schools in the Future, the girls in my class responded by producing drawings of people and objects in flight, shown in Figure 4.12.1. There were flying schools, flying teachers, a part of the floor is flying, flying shoes and flying stationery, tables and chairs with wings. In some pictures, they also mentioned fairy/angel teachers, I can assume they wish teachers to be kind.

In picture 6, shown in Figure 4.12.2 below, the girl drew what looks like a chemistry class. When I first met her, she couldn't speak much, even in Burmese, and clearly had learning difficulties but expresses herself in the pictures she draws. In her picture, she put in speech bubbles "Yes, I do everything. I'm great in school." The positivity they showed in their perception of the future also reflects how happy they are in their current school.

The third topic is about School I Would Like. In Burke and Grosvenor (2003, p. 25), a boy named Andrew from Bristol wanted his ideal school to be a very futuristic one. The boys in my study seem to share this idea. In picture 11, the boy described the school he'd like to be in towers. He also included in his picture an IELTS test room, maybe his siblings had undertaken the test. In picture 12, the boy is clearly influenced by superheroes, especially from the children series by Nickelodeon "Avatar: The Last Air Bender" as he mentioned water/ice/lighting/fire/flying classes in the school he'd like. He named his school: "International Talent School". In picture 13, the boy wanted a flying international school which has a flying garden, playground, garage, canteen, teachers' room, hall and television room, where going to school would happen by flying car. There are two security guards as well. The last person in picture 14, shown in Figure 4.14, is clearly addicted to iPhone game Angry Birds. He drew angry birds every day in class. There is also a teachers' tower, a school bus, a science class and a flying class.

**Discussion of similarities and differences between schools**

There are major similarities and differences between rural primary classes and international ones. The major similarities are that a lot of children attending state schools drew the national flag, and that most boys from both State Schools and the international school imagined their schools to be modern and futuristic. The major differences are their exposure to media: both national and western and their

different needs and wants according to their contrasting backgrounds i.e. the needs of rural children are basic such as desire for a library, stationery or a school bus, whereas urban children want futuristic sci-fi schools.

*2.1) Boys and futuristic sci-fi schools:* Most boys from rural/urban state schools and international school have imagined having futuristic sci-fi schools such as flying schools with flying facilities. Only one girl mentioned a school with practical needs and wants such as a school bus and a fish tank. Most boys drew schools that are flying and teach super powers. Richer children read comics and see animations about how the future may be like and thus their dreams are shaped by this, in contrast with children from very poor families and from rural areas.

*2.2) Exposed and unexposed children:* Children from international schools and urban schools dreamed of schools which are situated in a beautiful forest by a stream, schools which are filled with Angry Birds from the iPhone games and schools where teachers and everything in and around the classroom is flying. These children have this imagination from Disney movies, modern electronic gadgets, rich parents and experience abroad.

*2.3) Different children's needs and wants:* Based on their ideas on how they see future schools, it shows that the backgrounds of these children are poles apart. As those children come from different social backgrounds and parents with different outlooks, their exposure to Western media and technology also significantly effects their learning.

**Findings from the interviews of head teachers:** From the 25 questions I used in face-to-face interviews, I wanted to focus on the last question of head teachers' personal wishes for the education. There were a few issues which emerged from the data: classroom conditions and resources, learner-centred teaching methods, teacher appointments and trainings and government support.

*3.1) Monastic Primary Class and Rural Primary Class (Classroom Conditions and Resources):*

Monastic education is mostly self-funded by Buddhist monks and philanthropic donations from parents and other donors. Primary schools from rural areas operate in a similar way collecting village donations. Both monastic and rural primary schools have very basic resources. In one school I visited for example, there were wooden benches, whiteboards, marker pens and textbooks for every two students. All primary group learning happens in a big hall divided by plywood where classes can hear each other. There were three teachers in the monastic school, they teach all classes and all age groups.

*3.2) Urban Primary Class and Primary Class from the Suburban area (Pedagogy) :* The head teacher from the suburban area of Yangon mentioned the CCA (Child Centred Approach) which was started by Japan International Corporation Agency which is another way of learner centred approach involving teaching aids. Myanmar state schools are used to teacher-centred approaches, and teachers are still trained by JICA how to use CCA effectively. The head teacher from the urban primary school mentioned learner-centred education as well. She wished for children to be outspoken, independent, and able to make decisions of their own. She explained that for that to happen, the parents have to encourage them and the teachers have to be properly trained to promote children's thinking skills and allow them to speak up. The main hindrance in learning is the power distance between older people and younger people is vast and children are not allowed to question their elders.

There are a few reasons why culture has so impacted learning; 1) Myanmar is a developing country and is a conservative country. 2) Younger people must pay respect the older generations. Myanmar people have different pronouns to use with people from different age groups and people with different social status. 3) Students have to listen to the teacher and are not allowed to talk back. 4) Classroom dynamics are very predictable, children are controlled by fear. 5) Mostly students chant after the teacher or give the answer to the teacher's question chorally. These factors concerning culture have affected the pedagogy in Myanmar.

*3.3) Urban Primary Education (Teachers' Appointments/Trainings and Government Support):* The head teacher, Cho Cho Oo, who's in charge of the CCA programme, saw things from a different perspective. She discussed the provision of teacher training for teachers in primary education and stated that pre-service is important, giving examples such as young fresh graduate teachers who have little experience in teaching children, but go straight into teaching primary children. She believes that primary education is the foundation of the whole education system and childrens' further studies. Another topic we discussed was how outstanding teachers should teach and lead the primary system instead of teachers who follow rules. As only the head teacher knows what is missing in the school and what's best for the children, if the head teacher strictly follows rules from officials, the school and children cannot benefit from the head teacher. Cho Cho Oo felt the need for continuous teacher training to promote self-study and self-learning habits.

## V  CONCLUSION

Myanmar is now a democratic country which is starting to open up in all sectors, including the Education sector. This study investigated the views of practitioners of Primary Education and those of children from five educational sites. The latter's views are optimistic and vary according to their

family backgrounds, social class, economic circumstances and environment they are exposed to, whereas the views of the former are quite jaded as head teachers have seen little change in four decades. The main lacuna in the project was not being able to reach out to parents and obtain their opinions regarding their childrens' education and their wishes for the future. The most important personal outcome has been increased curiousity about the education system and increased skill as a researcher. This research has however thrown up questions regarding how parents perceive Primary Education and how stakeholders from International schools idealise the education sector.

In future, MOE (Ministry of Education) should encourage and provide more teacher training courses, teachers should keep up with international up-to-date teaching methods by going to teacher training courses and local education administrators should steer teachers towards professional development. As there aren't many research papers on Myanmar, my project will be beneficial to future researchers, NGOs, government policy-makers and curriculum designers. The main idea that came out of the study was that Myanmar is unique because it has been very controlled but hasn't been exploited so maintained its particular culture and traditions. Myanmar now faces many opportunities as it embraces democracy and looks to bring education into the twenty-first century.