A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH LANGUAGE HELD BY GRADES 7-10 STUDENTS AT № 1 MINDAT HIGH SCHOOL, CHIN STATE, MYANMAR

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was two-folded: firstly, to determine the levels of attitudes toward learning English, in terms of four subscales (i.e., English language teacher, English language class, English language textbook and English language work), of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar; and secondly, to determine if there was a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at the target school regarding their attitudes toward learning English language in terms of the aforementioned subscales. This quantitative study used the questionnaire originally developed by Uribe, Gutierrez & Madrid (2013), in order to examine students' attitudes toward English language. The respondents were 529 Grades 7-10 students from № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, during the academic year 2017-18. The research findings indicated that, on average, Grade 7, Grade 8 and Grade 9 students showed positive attitudes toward English language, whereas Grade 10 students, on average, showed neither positive nor negative attitudes toward English language. A Games-Howell post hoc multiple comparison test revealed a significant difference in attitudes toward English language between students from Grade 7 and Grade 9, Grade 7 and Grade 10, Grade 8 and Grade 9, and Grade 8 and Grade 10. Contrarily, it was not found a significant difference in attitudes toward English language in students from Grade 7 and Grade 8, or Grade 9 and Grade 10. Finally, recommendations for teachers, students, administrators and future researchers are presented.

Keywords: Attitude Toward English Language, English as a Foreign Language, English Language Teacher, English Language Class, English Language Textbook,

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Introduction

English is the working language of ASEAN (ASEAN Charter, 2008) and with Myanmar as one of the ASEAN members, proficiency in English matters much to its people. Especially now, that Myanmar has opened to the international community. However, data collected in 1989 in Myanmar revealed that 52 % of the middle school teachers were untrained (Sein, 2015).

Since the quality of teachers is regarded to account for some 30% of variance in student achievement (Hattie, 2003), it is not surprising then that English has had one of the lowest passing rates among all subjects in Myanmar National Matriculation Exam, along with physics (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], 2013). In addition to this situation, the present textbooks used in Myanmar basic education sector have been in use for more than three decades (Sein, 2015).

All these issues regarding learning of English as a foreign language have been noticed by the first author during his time working as an English teacher at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar. However, the lack of previous studies on students' attitudes toward English language in this isolated location of Myanmar makes hard to figure measures to improve the teaching and learning process of this subject, particularly the professional development for teachers, the design of instructional materials, and the elaboration of professional standards for all stakeholders in the education sector in Myanmar (JICA, 2013).

Thus, in order to enrich and update the findings from previous studies carried out in Myanmar (e.g., Sein, 2015) in the light of the several changes that have been happening in the country, the researchers decided to carry out a study to gain a deeper insight into the attitudes of Grades 7-10 students toward learning English language at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar. For that purpose, information regarding the English language teacher, class, textbook, and work were collected, following the recommendations of previous researchers (e.g., Rifai, 2010; Uribe, Gutierrez & Madrid, 2013).

Research Objectives

The following are the research objectives addressed by this study.

- 1. To determine the levels of attitudes of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, toward learning English in terms of English language teacher, English language class, English language textbook and English language work.
 - 1.1. To determine the levels of attitudes of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, toward their English language teacher.

- 1.2. To determine the levels of attitudes of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, toward their English language class.
- 1.3. To determine the levels of attitudes of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, toward their English language textbook.
- 1.4. To determine the levels of attitudes of Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, toward their English language work.
- 2. To determine if there is a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward learning English language in terms of English language teacher, English language class, English language textbook and English language work.
 - 2.1. To determine if there is a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward English language teacher.
 - 2.2. To determine if there is a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward English language class.
 - 2.3. To determine if there is a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward English language textbook.
 - 2.4. To determine if there is a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward English language work.

Theoretical Framework

This research was based on the following theories: Gardner's (1985) socioeducational model, Dörnyei's (2003) process model of second language motivation, and Uribe et al.'s (2013) students' attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language.

Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. Gardner's socio-educational model is a well-known model in the field of language acquisition, comprised of four stages. The first stage is the *social and cultural background* or *milieu*, which is the community where the child grows up, that transmits beliefs and knowledge about the second language (L2) and culture.

The second stage is *individual differences*, which comprises four major variables: intelligence, language aptitude, motivation and situational anxiety. The third stage of the model concerns the *second language acquisition context* where

language is acquired, which can be a formal language learning, as in the classroom setting, or an informal language experience, where a child interacts with L2 in the community.

Both situations can blend in one context as well. The fourth stage, *outcomes*, can be categorized as either linguistic outcomes (fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation of L2) or non-linguistic outcomes, such as attitudes, self-concept, cultural values and beliefs (Gardner, 1985).

Dörnyei's (2003) process model of second language motivation. This model states that motivation can be understood best when categorized into different natural phases. Since language achievement is a very long process, many learning cycles and many tasks are required over several years; hence, time is a natural organizing concept for L2 learning motivation (Dörnyei, 2000). Dörnyei's process model illustrates how language learners are motivated at three main stages of their language achievement process: the preactional (choice) stage, the actional (executive) stage, and the postactional (motivational retrospection) stage.

Uribe et al. 's (2013) model of attitude toward English as a foreign language. Uribe et al. (2013) mentioned that attitude toward learning English was connected to a set of specific factors related to attitudes toward the language teacher, methods, classes, materials and the assignments. Hence, they identified four subscales that can measure the students' attitudes toward learning English: attitude toward English language teacher, toward English language class, toward English language textbooks and toward English language work.

Students' attitudes toward English language teacher can measure students' attitudes of teachers' performance in the classroom, treatment of students and class behavior. Students' attitudes toward English language class can measure students' attitudes toward the English language classroom: contents, activities, methods and assessments. Students' attitudes toward English language textbooks can measure students' attitudes toward the lesson with special emphasis on the textbook and the exercises in the textbook. Finally, students' attitudes toward English language work can measure students' attitudes toward assignments and classroom exercises.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study, describing graphically Grade 7-10 students at № 1 Mindat High School and the four subscales of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to determine whether there was a significant difference among Grades 7-10 students at No.1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, regarding their attitudes toward English language.

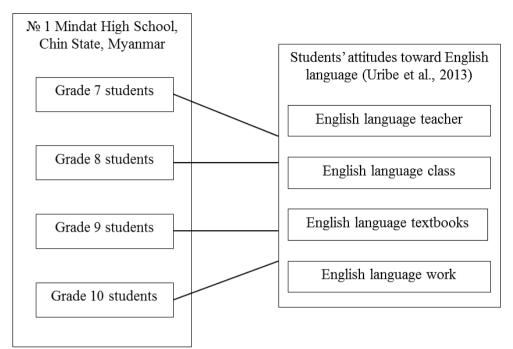


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Literature Review

A previous study conducted by Gómez and Pérez (2015) that involved 154 Grade 12 students in two subsidized secondary schools in Puerto Montt, Chile, showed that the students' attitudes towards English language were favorable; however, the dimensions related to attitudes towards learning English and English as a subject at school obtained unfavorable responses. These findings reassert the idea that students may appreciate English as a global language, but they are not necessarily committed to learning it at school.

In another research by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari (2012) in a Libyan secondary school, most of the students participanting in the study showed a negative attitude toward English. A possible reason of such a negative attitude might have been a reaction to the instructional and traditional techniques used by some of the English language teachers.

Methodology/Procedure

Population and sample.

This research was conducted on a population sample of 717 Grades 7-10 students from № 1 Mindat High School, Chin State, Myanmar, during the academic year 2017-18. From such a population, 151 Grade 7 students, 118 Grade 8 students, 152 Grade 9 students and 108 Grade 10 students, totaling 529 students, fully completed this

study's research instrument.

Research instrument.

A research questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The questionnaire was an adaptation from the study done at Compton Unified School District in California, USA, by Uribe et al. (2013). There were two parts to the questionnaire. The first part collected information on students' demographics, such as gender, grade, age, and ethnic group.

The second part was comprised of a set of statements aimed at measuring students' attitudes toward English language regarding their English language teacher, English language class, English language textbook and English language work. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert-type scale ($1 = very \ dissatisfied$, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, $5 = very \ satisfied$).

In order to establish content validity, 22 items that were not relevant to the English classroom situation in the target school were removed from the original research instrument by the researchers, after consulting a local English teacher.

For example, Item 31 was originally about *songs and games*, but the teachers in the target school affirmed that they do not teach English in that way, since they were not equipped pedagogically, materially and technologically for that. In order to establish translation validity, the questionnaire was translated into Burmese and checked by a professional translator who works for a Beijing media company in Myanmar. The instrument was administered on January 12, 2018.

The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) test, in order to address the research's objectives and hypothesis. Because the equal variances assumption was violated for grade categories, a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test was performed to determine which groups were significantly different from one another.

Findings

In the following sub-sections, the findings regarding each research objective are summarized.

Research Objective 1

Table 1 summarizes the findings obtained regarding this research objective.

				Interpretation of
Grade	n	M	SD	attitudes
Grade 7	151	4.08	.89	Positive
Grade 8	118	4.12	.84	Positive
Grade 9	152	3.61	1.05	Positive
Grade 10	108	3.47	1.08	Neither positive nor negative

 Table 1: Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations of Grades 7-10

 Students' Satisfaction Regarding Their Attitudes Toward English Language

From Table 1, it is clear that, on average, Grades 7-9 students showed a positive attitude toward English language at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, whereas Grade 10 students showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward English language.

Research Objective 1.1.

Table 2 summarizes the findings obtained regarding this research objective.

Table 2.

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations of Grades 7-10 Students' Satisfaction Regarding Their Attitudes Toward English Language Teacher Subscale

Grade	п	M	SD	Interpretation of attitudes
Grade 7	151	4.15	.85	Positive
Grade 8	118	4.21	.77	Positive
Grade 9	152	3.80	.97	Positive
Grade 10	108	3.76	.99	Positive

From Table 2, it is revealed that, on average, Grades 7-10 students showed a positive attitude toward their English language teacher at № 1 Mindat High School.

Research Objective 1.2.

Table 3 summarizes the findings obtained regarding this research objective.

 Table 3: Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations of Grades 7-10

 Students' Satisfaction Regarding Their Attitudes Toward English Language

 Class Subscale

Grade	n	М	SD	Interpretation of attitudes
Grade 7	151	4.13	.84	Positive
Grade 8	118	4.16	.81	Positive
Grade 9	152	3.60	1.02	Positive
Grade 10	108	3.45	1.04	Neither positive nor negative

From Table 3, it is revealed that, on average, Grades 7-9 students showed a positive attitude toward their English language class at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, whereas Grade 10 students showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward their English language class.

Research Objective 1.3.

Table 4 summarizes the findings obtained regarding this research objective.

Table 4

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations of Grades 7-10 Students' Satisfaction Regarding Their Attitudes Toward English Language Textbook Subscale

Grade	п	М	SD	Interpretation of attitudes
Grade 7	151	3.95	.95	Positive
Grade 8	118	3.95	.91	Positive
Grade 9	152	3.47	1.12	Neither positive nor negative
Grade 10	108	3.29	1.13	Neither positive nor negative

From Table 4, it is revealed that, on average, Grades 7-8 students showed a positive attitude toward their English language textbook at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, whereas

Grades 9-10 students showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward their English language textbook.

Research Objective 1.4.

Table 5 summarizes the findings obtained regarding this research objective.

Table 5: Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Interpretations of Grades 7-10						
Students' Satisfaction	Regarding	Their	Attitudes	Toward	English	Language
Work Subscale						

Grade	n	M	SD	Interpretation of attitudes
Grade 7	151	4.07	.94	Positive
Grade 8	118	4.11	.87	Positive
Grade 9	152	3.50	1.15	Neither positive nor negative
Grade 10	108	3.29	1.21	Neither positive nor negative

From Table 5, it is revealed that, on average, Grades 7-8 students showed a positive attitude toward their English language work at N_{2} 1 Mindat High School, whereas Grades 9-10 students showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward their English language work.

Research Objective 2

The results of the 4 (grades) × 4 (subscales of attitudes toward English language) MANOVA indicated a significant overall main effect of grade on the dependent variables (Pillai's V= .26, F(12,1572) = 12.35, p < .001). This result justified performing a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) test on students' attitudes toward English language, as well as its subscales, according to their grades. The results from the one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between students' attitudes toward English language according to their grades, F(3, 525) = 47.98, p < .001.

Then, after performing a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 and Grade 9 (p < .001), Grade 7 and Grade 10 (p < .001), Grade 8 and Grade 9 (p < .001) and Grade 8 and Grade 10 (p < .001) regarding their attitudes toward English language. However, the test failed to reveal a significant difference in terms of students' attitudes toward English language between Grade 7 and Grade 8 (p = .89), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (p = .27).

Research Objective 2.1

The results from the one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between students' attitudes toward English language teacher according to their grades, F (3, 525) = 28.56, p < .001.

Then, after performing a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 and Grade 9 (p < .001), Grade 7 and Grade 10 (p < .001), Grade 8 and Grade 9 (p < .001) and Grade 8 and Grade 10 (p < .001) regarding their attitudes toward English language teacher. However, the test failed to reveal a significant difference in terms of students' attitudes toward English language teacher between Grade 7 and Grade 8 (p = .57), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (p = .95).

Research Objective 2.2

The results from the one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between students' attitudes toward English language class according to their grades, F(3, 525) = 14.90, p < .001. Then, after performing a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 and Grade 9 (p < .001), Grade 7 and Grade 10 (p < .001), Grade 8 and Grade 9 (p < .001) and Grade 8 and Grade 10 (p < .001) regarding their attitudes toward English language class. However, the test failed to reveal a significant difference in terms of students' attitudes toward English language class between Grade 7 and Grade 8 (p = .92), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (p = .23).

Research Objective 2.3

The results from the one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between students' attitudes toward English language textbook according to their grades, F(3, 525) = 13.51, p < .001. Then, after performing a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 and Grade 9 (p < .001), Grade 7 and Grade 10 (p < .001), Grade 8 and Grade 9 (p < .001) and Grade 8 and Grade 10 (p < .001) regarding their attitudes toward English language textbook. However, the test failed to reveal a significant difference in terms of students' attitudes toward English language textbook between Grade 7 and Grade 8 (p = 1.00), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (p = .18).

Research Objective 2.4

The results from the one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between students' attitudes toward English language work according to their grades, F(3, 525) = 18.14, p < .001. Then, after performing a Games-Howell post-hoc multiple comparison test, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 and Grade 9 (p < .001), Grade 7 and Grade 10 (p < .001), Grade 8 and Grade 9 (p

< .001) and Grade 8 and Grade 10 (p < .001) regarding their attitudes toward English language work. However, the test failed to reveal a significant difference in terms of students' attitudes toward English language work between Grade 7 and Grade 8 (p = .91), as well as between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (p = .22).

Discussion

In this section, a discussion on the relation between the findings of the current study and those reported by previous ones is provided. The significant differences among the grades in terms of the four subscales addressed by this study are also explored, in order to present probable reasons.

Attitudes Toward English Language

Based on the findings from the survey questionnaires and the inferential statistics performed on the collected data, it was found that Grades 7-9 students had a positive attitude toward English language, whereas Grade 10 students had a neither positive nor negative attitude toward English language. Although it can be assumed that most of the students from Grades 7-10 students had positive attitudes toward English language, it also indicated that their overall attitude was numerically decreasing over grade (see Table 1). This result agrees with the finding of Al-Maiman (2005), which stated that the direction of motivation level toward learning English for the Grade 7 Saudi students in Onaizah decreased over time.

According to the first author's experience, the lower overall mean scores in attitude toward English language obtained from Grade 10 students may be due to the pressure and difficulty for the matriculation exam they have to take. In Myanmar education, students pass their exams with almost no effort from Grade 1 to Grade 9. However, when they are in Grade 10 and take this high-stakes standardized test, they have to take an insurmountable study load, and English is the highest failing subjects in the matriculation exam. Thus, Grade 10 students cannot relax and get away without doing homework and assignments like they used to when they were in lower grades.

Regardless, in a unique case like \mathbb{N} 1 Mindat High School, when students reach Grade 10, they use to go to bigger cities, where private boarding schools are available, with the hope of getting directions on the matriculation exam. In the same way, middle school students from neighboring villages come to Mindat Town for their high school, mostly for Grade 10. So, most Grade 10 students in \mathbb{N} 1 Mindat High School finished their middle school elsewhere. Since those students were not trained properly or attended school regularly when they were back in their respective village schools, they usually struggle in Grade 10.

Attitudes Toward English Language Teacher

The findings from this study revealed a significant difference in students' attitude toward English language teacher between middle school (Grades 7 and 8)

and high school (Grades 9 and 10) at $N \ge 1$ Mindat High School. However, students from all grade levels had positive attitudes toward their English language teacher. Thus, the findings of the current study align with those obtained by Khalid (2016), which suggested that the students from public-sector schools in Pakistan held positive attitudes toward learning English as a second language with a clear instrumental orientation. In addition, according to the first author's experience, this could be the result of the cultural influence as well. Because of the communities students live in, the language they speak and their way of life, students are conditioned to respect and follow their teacher in almost all situations. Attitude toward English language teacher was the only subscale in this study entirely found to be interpreted, on average, as positive, regardless the grade.

Attitudes Toward English Language Class

Based on the findings from the survey questionnaires and the inferential statistics applied to compare students' attitudes toward English language class, the results showed that there was a significant difference between middle school (Grades 7 and 8) and high school (Grades 9 and 10) at No 1 Mindat High School. All the students from Grades 7- 9 had overall positive attitudes except Grade 10 students, whose attitudes were neither positive nor negative toward their English language class. A study by Rifai (2010) in Kuwait stated that the overall attitudes toward learning the English language, integrative motivation toward learning the English language, and instrumental motivation toward learning the English language were very positive for EFL learners, which agrees with the findings of the current study. The study of Mustafa, Rashid, Atmowardoyo and Dollah (2015) concluded, similarly to the current study, that Indonesian EFL students have positive attitude toward the English class, which may have an impact on motivation, self-esteem and perseverance in learning the language.

On the other hand, the study done by Gómez and Pérez (2015) in Puerto Montt, Chile, showed that the students' attitudes towards English are favorable which seemed to oppose the findings of the current study. Moreover, these findings aligned with Gomez and Pérez (2015) that the students' attitudes towards English are favorable; however, the dimensions related to attitudes towards learning English and English as a subject at school obtained unfavorable responses. In this regard, the researchers' observation is similar with those findings that students appreciate English as an important subject but they are not committed to endure all the difficulties to learn it. In this subscale, it seems that a pattern begins to emerge: as students get higher grades, they tend to show more negative attitudes in all subscales.

Attitudes Toward English Language Textbook

Based on the findings from the survey questionnaires and the inferential statistics applied to compare students' attitudes toward English language textbook, the results showed that there was a significant difference between middle school (Grades 7 and 8) and high school (Grades 9 and 10) at No 1 Mindat High School. In addition, only Grade 7 and Grade 8 students had a positive attitude toward their English language textbook. For Grade 9 and Grade 10 students, they showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward their English language textbook. This result might be grounded on one of the challenges for EFL reported by Sein (2015) in her study: the present English textbooks used in Myanmar Basic Education have been in the curriculum for about 30 years without any update but the cover. In fact, this subscale showed the lowest mean score in the study, which suggests that students were not satisfied the most with their English language textbook.

According to the researchers' experience, high school students know more about the outside world than middle school students. High school students are allowed to have cellphones and they can access to different stories, news and information on internet, which makes them aware of their poor educational materials and standards, particularly for their preparation for the matriculation exam. So, this could be a reason why they tend to be more negative about the EFL education as they grow older.

Attitudes Toward English Language Work

Based on the findings from the survey questionnaires and the inferential statistics applied to compare students' attitudes toward English language work, the results indicated that there is a significant difference between middle school students (Grades 7 and 8) and high school students (Grades 9 and 10) at N 1 Mindat High School. In addition, only Grade 7 and Grade 8 students had a positive attitude toward their English language work, whereas Grade 9 and Grade 10 students showed a neither positive nor negative attitude toward their English language work. These findings are aligned with those reported by Gómez and Pérez (2015), who found that, even though Chilean EFL students' attitudes toward English, particularly toward English language work, were unfavorable. These findings reassert that students appreciate English as a global language, but they are not committed to work for learning it at school.

Nonetheless, contrary to other previous studies, such as Concepcion (2015) and Dellatola and Daradoumis (2016), where students showed positive attitudes toward English language work, the results in the current study showed that, as the students gets into higher grades, their attitudes toward English language deteriorate at N_{0} 1 Mindat High School.

Recommendations

Grades 7-10 students' attitudes toward English language is positive with regards to attitudes toward English language teacher subscale and attitudes toward English class subscales. For Grade 9 and Grade 10, their attitudes decline as the grade level goes up and their attitudes were not positive with their English language textbook and work. Therefore, in order to make the most out of their studies, students should understand the English textbook very well so that the homework and assignments will be manageable for them.

English teachers were perceived with positive attitudes from all grade levels of the students at $N_{2.1}$ Mindat High School. Nevertheless, teachers should know the weakest aspects of the students in order to help them. By making the textbook more understandable and relatable to the local environment, teachers could raise the students' level of understanding. In addition, teachers should make the homework and assignments more interesting and filled with activities and resources rather than solely relying lecture and textbook.

School administrators can improve to optimize the best learning atmosphere for both teachers and students by maximizing the students' positive attitudes toward their English language teacher and English class to enrich the learning experience by providing more materials for the teachers, facilities in the classroom and improving the teacher's quality. Policy makers should localize the textbook content while maintaining the quality of the textbook and make the students feel that their local culture is appreciated and included. Future researchers can add more variables such as achievements, genders and even a city high school so that the comparison could provide a much insights to understand and improve Myanmar education.

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