

Chapter 1

Introduction

After five decades of military rule, Myanmar entered a phase of political transformation in 2011. The loosening of the military ruler's control over freedom of expression, information access, political parties, and media paved the way for the country's long journey toward democracy. According to the Centre for Public Impact, "After 50 years of being shrouded in the darkness of international isolation, it has slowly begun to emerge into the sunlight of greater transparency and democracy."¹ The 2015 election and formation of the a new democratic government in the country initiated institutional democratization. However, the current government still reseves 25 percent of parliamentary seats for the military in each house.² In February 2021, the democratic process was once again thwarted by the military coup³, alleging irregularities in the November 2020 national election.

While the media has thus far played a passive role in Myanmar, they are currently adjusting to their recently acquired responsibility as a "watchdog"⁴. Journalists and media professionals come from diverse academic backgrounds, such as history, medicine, mathematics, or political science and have taken various educational pathways, including having training courses from international organizations in foreign countries and learning from senior working journalists. As estimated by the experts, there are about four thousand journalists in

¹ Centre for Public Impact (CPI) (2016): Helping Myanmar march forward. <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/helping-myanmar-march-forward>, retrieved on 29 May 2021.

² Di Certo, Bridget; Liljeblad, Jonathan; Matranga, Natalie; and Farooq, Shama (eds.) (2017): Rule of Law. Handbook for Journalists in Myanmar. Yangon: KAS and UNDP, p. 22.

³ CNN (2021, 10 March): Myanmar coup explained: Why Aung San Suu Kyi was detained by the military. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/01/asia/myanmar-military-coup-explainer-intl-hnk-scli/index.html>, retrieved on 11 April 2021.

⁴ Curran, James (2002): Media and Power. Communication and Society. New York: Routledge, p. 217.

Myanmar.⁵ However, many of them are deprived of above-mentioned capacity-building facilities, as so far the journalism training and education facilities are mostly concentrated in a few big cities, i.e., Yangon and Mandalay.

The education and training of prospective journalists constitutes a critical area of impact on the process of societal and political change in particular. Considering the positive atmosphere for the intellectual and creative workforce in the country, international donor countries and local and regional media companies and organizations are seizing the opportunity to introduce new journalism education systems in the Southeast Asian country. However, this newly emerging field of cooperation in Myanmar poses pertinent inquiries about the challenges, forms, space, and duration of smooth collaboration for a sustainable vibrant and pluralistic media and capacity-building facilities for the media professionals. Thus, this research tried to dig up the recommendations to cope up with these questions and challenges for the positive change in the country.

1.1 Idea and Status

Under the above-mentioned circumstances of transition from the military regime to the quasi-democratic system, international media development organizations have come forward with their possible support and cooperation for the journalism education institutions in Myanmar. However, this support is not new in the country. When Myanmar was under the strict control of the military government, the US Embassy, Indian High Commission, and European Embassies provided support to the media people, but that was only in different forms and structure.⁶ These embassies and foreign diplomatic institutions arranged some training courses for journalists under different banners or titles such as English language trainings or basic report writing workshops. These training courses and workshops were held mostly in the embassy compound or in nearby countries such as Thailand, India, Vietnam,

⁵ UNESCO and IMS (2016): Assessment of Media Development in Myanmar. Based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators. Yangon, p. 82.

⁶ Hai, AHM Abdul (2015): Myanmar. In: Schmidt, Christoph (ed.): Standards of Journalism Education. An International Comparative Study in the Context of Media and Development. Leipzig: VISTAS Verlag, p. 141.

or Cambodia. For example, the Indian High Commission example, the Indian embassies, through the H.Q., organized trainings for journalists in New Dehli, rather than Myanmar. As Chongkittavorn confirms, "Each year several dozens of Burmese journalists inside Burma receive media training clandestinely in undisclosed locations funded by Western media advocacy groups."⁷

Considering the above situation, the question arises how far the international media development organizations support and whether they influence the journalism education in the current transition period in Myanmar. The international media development organizations have been closely monitoring the democratic and reform process initiated by the current semi-elected government in Myanmar, and the world is paying attention to the new government's policies on press freedom and people's expression. However, it is unclear if the nation is fully prepared to take advantage of its potential during this transition period, particularly given the challenges of poverty, corruption, ethnic conflicts, sectarian violence, and natural disasters. In this situation, it is the duty and responsibility of the international community to provide the necessary support. From this perspective, various organizations focused on human rights, capacity development, and both government and non-governmental entities involved in development are actively engaged in diverse sectors by providing technical and logistical assistance and support. International media development organizations (IMDOs) have also not been behind the race, and they have been arriving in Myanmar for the support to the newly rising media sector. But during this time of high demand for an open media environment, the industry requires a significant number of human resources, including media infrastructure for all media stakeholders. The IMDOs may play a significant role in addressing the shortage of human resources in the media industry and supporting the journalism education program. However, such support may not always be well received by local media content producers and recipients. So, the collaboration and impact of IMDOs on the journalism education sector in Myanmar, a newly devel-

⁷ Chongkittavorn, Kavi (2006): *Staying Alive: Media Independence in Southeast Asia*. In: Harvey, Mark (2006): *Media Matters: Perspectives on Advancing Governance and Development from the Global Forum for Media Development*. Beijing: Internews Europe, p. 143.

oping country, must be identified and appropriately addressed to foster growth.

1.2 Related Scientific Fields

Given the limited availability of the capacity-building facilities and infrastructure within the country, the decision was made to utilize a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative research methods based on scientific theory. The proponents of the qualitative research commonly link participant observation, interviews, photographic techniques, historical analysis, document, and textual analysis, sociometry, sociodrama, and a number of unobtrusive techniques.⁸

For this research, it was aimed to evaluate the capacity-building resources available to journalists, as well as the level of support and involvement provided by both international media development organizations and local and regional media entities. In order to achieve this, we plan to conduct expert interviews using qualitative analysis to examine the natural settings, meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, and narratives of media stakeholders. In accordance with the recommendation of the American Education Research Association (AERA 2006),

It is the researcher's responsibility is to show the reader that the report can be trusted. This begins with the description of the evidence, the data, and the analysis supporting each interpretive claim. The warrant for the claims can be established through a variety of procedures including triangulation, asking participants to evaluate pattern descriptions, having different analysts examine the same data, (independently and collaboratively), searches for disconfirming evidence and counter-interpretations.⁹

Qualitative communication research is shaped by three major theoretical traditions, namely the phenomenological tradition, the socio-cultural tradition, and the critical tradition. The proponents of the

⁸ Berg, Bruce L. (2009): *Qualitative Research Method for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 4.

⁹ Denzin, Norman K. (2009): The elephant in the living room: or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence. In: *Qualitative Research* (2009), 9:139, p. 149. <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/millsandbirks/study/Journal%20Articles/Qualitative%20Research-2009-Denzin-139-60.pdf>, retrieved on 30 August 2019.

phenomenological tradition are, among others, Wilhelm Dilthey,¹⁰ Giovanni Battista Vico,¹¹ Immanuel Kant, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl,¹² and Alfred Schutz. “For phenomenologists, the primary scientific problem is how things get to be that way: how the life world acquires its natural quality.”¹³

The socio-cultural tradition has six specific theories, namely ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, ethnography of communication, structuration theory, and actor network theory. The critical theory has four specific exemplars in qualitative research. These are feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory, and cultural studies.¹⁴

On the contrary, a quantitative approach involves utilizing closed-ended data including “umbers, magnitude and measurement.”¹⁵ Both approaches have certain strengths and limitations. However, the mix of both approaches can be appropriate to be supplementary to each other in this research, as the expert interviews were planned to follow the qualitative approach and the surveys among the trainees and students were attempted following the quantitative method. As Creswell and Creswell argue that through the mixed approach “the strengths can be combined to develop a stronger understanding of the research problem or questions”¹⁶ and the limitations of both approaches can be overcome.

¹⁰ See Dilthey, Wilhelm (1977): *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding* (Zaner, Richard M.; Heiges, Kenneth L., Transl.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

¹¹ See Vico, Giambattista (1988): *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians: Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language* (Palmer, L. M., Transl.). Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

¹² See Husserl, E. (1931): *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (Gibson, W. R. B., Transl.). New York: Macmillan.

¹³ Lindlof, Thomas R.; Taylor, Bryan C. (2011): *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (3rd ed.). California: SAGE Publications, p. 37.

¹⁴ Lindlof, Thomas R.; Taylor, Bryan C. (2011): *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (3rd ed.), p. 35–65.

¹⁵ Berger, Arthur Asa (2016): *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications, p. 27.

¹⁶ Creswell, John W.; Creswell, J. David (2018): *Research Design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). London: SAGE Publications, p. 213.

The philosophy and concept of the research has been developed with the consideration of eleven principles of journalism education set in the first international conference of the World Journalism Education Council (WJEC) in Singapore in 2007. Representatives of 28 journalism education associations from six continents agreed on the WJEC's principles and "pledged to work together to strengthen journalism education and increase its value to students, employers and the public."¹⁷ The key aspects of the WJEC's principles are, among others, the balance of conceptual, philosophical and skills-based contents, university study from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, educators having a blend of experience as academics and practitioners, promoting media literacy, educators having collaboration with colleagues worldwide, and maintaining strong links to media industries.¹⁸

Moreover, the UNESCO model curricula for journalism education have been widely discussed in the philosophy of media education since 2006. It also reflects the Tartu Declaration of the European Journalism Training Associations made in Tartu in Estonia in 2006. The key aspects of the curriculum comprise "the foundations of journalism, which are designed to promote prerequisite intellectual and craft skills." As mentioned in the model curricula of the UNESCO,

these foundations include: 1. An ability to think critically, incorporating skill in comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of unfamiliar material, and a basic understanding of evidence and research methods. 2. An ability to write clearly and coherently using narrative, descriptive, and analytical methods. 3. A knowledge of national and international political, economic, cultural, religious, and social institutions. 4. A knowledge of current affairs and issues, and a general knowledge of history and geography.¹⁹

1.3 Goals and Limitations of the Study

Keeping the above-mentioned question and perspective in consideration, the goals of this research were to find out the existing journalism education programs in the current transition period in Myanmar and the forms of influence, cooperation, and collaboration of international

¹⁷ WJEC's 11 Principles of Journalism Education. https://wjec.net/?page_id=32108, retrieved on 30 March 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ UNESCO (2007): Model Curricula for Journalism Education, p. 8. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002211/221199e.pdf>, retrieved on 05 April 2020.

media development organizations on formal and non-formal journalism education programs. The research attempted to pick up the facts and findings on traditional pathways to become a journalist, institutional collaboration, funding and financial outcomes, educational goals, intended learning outcomes, teaching aspects, influence of the IMDOs and future changes, and challenges in the journalism education fields in Myanmar.

The research was conducted in the period of about five years from 2016 to 2021. So, it has a first limitation from the temporal side, and it has also a limitation of scope. Considering the aforementioned limitations, this research focused only five journalism educational institutions, namely the Journalism Department at the National Management College (NMC), Yangon Journalism School (YJS), Myanmar Media Development Centre (MMDC), Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI), and Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT). Although there are some other journalism training centers, there was not the opportunity to cover them in this study. Similarly, the international organizations International Media Support (IMS), Fojo Media Institute, Deutsche Welle Akademie, and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have been directly contacted for focus interviews, but other international bodies such as Internews, BBC Media Action, Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the diplomatic offices have remained out of reach, although they also provide some kind of journalism training activities or support to journalism education programs in Myanmar.

1.4 Structure of the Study

In order to give a clear concept of the socio-economic and political contexts, the media system, general educational system, journalism educational system, and to present the methods and process, including the outcome of the research, is divided into eight chapters.

The very first chapter introduces the topic, research question, hypothesis, related scientific fields, goals, and limitations of the study. Additionally, a concept of the research structure is provided in this chapter.

This is the age of networking and cooperation, where stakeholders working towards of common objectives join forces for greater accomplishments. Such is the case in the media sector, where journalists are no longer working in isolation. Multiple national, international, and transnational development organizations provide support for the role and activities of media stakeholders. Thus, the second chapter of this research work discusses aspects of media development such as the digitization process and media convergence, development theories, media development and democracy, approaches and relation of journalism education programs, and media development cooperation.

To fully comprehend the current state of of production capabilities and media landscape in Myanmar, it is crucial to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, historical, and political contexts that shape the nation. Therefore, the third chapter presents case studies from Myanmar that examine the intersections of media, human rights, and regional and international perspectives.

The fourth chapter presents an objective analysis of both the domestic journalism education and the neighboring countries' journalism education sector. Before diving into the research findings in the sixth chapter, the study design and methodology are explained and documented in the fifth chapter of the research. It encompasses the hypothesis and research questions, qualitative focus interviews, quantitative survey, content and data analysis, category scheme, and sampling and selection criteria of both interviewees and respondents.

The sixth chapter presents the research findings in detail, categorizing them into different sub-chapters such as typical educational pathways, institutional collaboration, overall educational goals, learning outcomes, aspects of teaching, influence of IMDOs, strength and weaknesses of journalism education, future changes and challenges, and the reflection of the research process.

The findings are discussed to the seventh chapter and the conclusion is presented in the final and the eighth chapter.

Figure 1: Structure of the Study

