

Educational Challenges and Aspirations of Myanmar's Muslim Community: An Empirical Study of Islamic and Secular Education Experiences

Phoo Pwint Thu Aung¹, Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak²

¹International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

²Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies (FIDS), AHAS Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600019>

Received: 14 May 2026; Accepted: 19 May 2026; Published: 16 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigates educational experiences within Myanmar's Muslim community using survey data from 180 individuals who attended both Islamic and secular schools. It addresses a notable gap in research on Islamic education in Myanmar, where Muslims comprise approximately 4 to 10% of the population. Data were collected through online surveys distributed via educational seminars, social media platforms, and direct messaging between April and October 2025.

The findings indicate significant infrastructure deficiencies: 84.2% of respondents reported no access to technology, a critical concern given the importance of technology in modern learning environments (Machmud et al., 2021). There is a marked quality disparity between religious schools (mean rating 2.54 out of 5) and government schools (3.16 out of 5). The main challenges identified are limited resources (74.1%), lack of technology (72.2%), and an outdated curriculum (58.2%). Educational equity received the lowest score (1.95 out of 5), suggesting widespread perceptions of unequal opportunities. Despite these challenges, 84.2% of respondents considered education extremely important, demonstrating strong community motivation.

Qualitative analysis revealed five primary themes: rote memorisation versus understanding, technology isolation, employability concerns, curriculum modernisation needs, and balancing religious-secular educational goals. The study recommends curriculum reform, technology integration, enhanced teacher training, and the development of pathways that recognise both religious and practical education.

Keywords: Islamic education, Myanmar, madrasa, Muslim minorities, educational quality, technology utilisation, curriculum reform

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to community development, social mobility, and cultural preservation. For minority groups, obtaining quality education while maintaining cultural and religious identity presents significant challenges (Park & Niyozov, 2008). Myanmar's Muslim community, comprising approximately 2-5 million individuals (4-10% of the population), faces distinctive educational obstacles that remain underexplored in existing scholarship (Crouch, 2016; Yegar, 1972).

Myanmar's Muslim population comprises multiple communities: Indian Muslims who arrived during British colonial rule, establishing urban communities in Yangon and Mandalay; Chinese Muslims (Panthay) in northern regions; Bamar Muslims who share ethnic heritage with the Buddhist majority while practising Islam; and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State (Berlie, 2008). These communities maintain Islamic educational traditions through madrasas—religious schools providing instruction in Quranic studies, Arabic language, Islamic jurisprudence, and religious sciences—alongside varying degrees of engagement with secular education systems (Sulaiman, 2008).

Islam arrived in Myanmar's Arakan region in the 7th century, and on the mainland in the 10th century (Yegar, 1972). During the British colonial period (1824–1948), Indian Muslims established formal madrasas, including Madrasah Mohammadia Randeria High School (opened 1867), where Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian children also attended alongside Muslim students, demonstrating considerable educational pluralism (Sulaiman, 2008). The post-independence period (1948–1962) represented what scholars term the 'golden period of Islamic education,' when hundreds of madrasahs operated nationwide and the Muslim Central Fund sent students to institutions in India and Al-Azhar University in Cairo (Sulaiman, 2008). Policy changes from 1962 onward significantly changed this landscape, with school nationalisations removing Islamic subjects from converted institutions (Berlie, 2008; Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007).

Myanmar's education system faces persistent challenges affecting the entire population. Following independence, the country achieved the highest literacy rate in its language among former British colonies (Lall & South, 2018). However, prolonged underfunding has led to steady decline, particularly in teacher training and compensation (Kandiko Howson & Lall, 2020; Lall, 2020). The political changes in 2021 further exacerbated these issues, significantly affecting public education. Over five million children left school in 2021, and by 2023–2024, more than 20 per cent were not enrolled in school (UNDP, 2025). For Myanmar's Muslim community, which already contended with ambiguous regulations, these developments intensified existing educational difficulties.

Research Questions

This study addresses these challenges by presenting findings from a survey of 180 respondents conducted between April and October 2025. The research examines educational experiences, perceptions of quality, access to technology, challenges, and community aspirations for educational improvement. The study asks how Myanmar's Muslim community members assess education quality in Islamic and secular institutions, what key challenges face Islamic education from the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents, what educational developments community members prioritise, and how experiences differ between those educated in religious versus government schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Development and Contemporary Context

Islamic education in Myanmar evolved through several phases shaped by political, social, and economic forces (Sulaiman, 2008; Yegar, 1972). During the early period, mosques served as centres of Islamic instruction, with the teaching of basic Islamic tenets becoming compulsory alongside prayer (Sulaiman, 2008). The British colonial period (1824–1948) brought formalisation, with Indian Muslims establishing schools offering an approved government curriculum alongside additional hours of religious instruction (Sulaiman, 2008). Madrasah Islamia was the most Islamic of all schools in Burma during this period, where many Ulama received primary education before continuing higher studies in India (Sulaiman, 2008).

The regulatory framework for non-Buddhist education evolved through colonial legislation. The 1892 Education Act introduced registration requirements for non-government schools. The 1920 Education Act affected language policies in educational institutions (Department of State, 2021; Kyay Mhone, 2014). During British rule, Muslim community organisations established private schools incorporating Islamic teachings alongside secular subjects. Universities such as Rangoon University (now Yangon University) provided access to higher education for Muslim students (Chai, 2014; Lall, 2020).

The post-independence period (1948–1962) represented the 'golden period' for Myanmar Muslim education. A 1997 Ministry of Defence survey found 759 madrasas operating nationwide (Sulaiman, 2008). The Muslim Central Fund actively supported students pursuing higher education abroad, enabling engagement with international Islamic intellectual discourse (Sulaiman, 2008). However, the 1964 nationalisation policies brought private schools, including Muslim schools, under state control, affecting curriculum and management (Hirata & Morishita, 2022). The educational system emphasised secular curriculum with limited provision for religious education.

The 2008 Constitution guarantees freedom of religion (Article 34), while the National Education Law of 2014 includes provisions for ethnic and religious minorities. However, specific guidelines for Islamic education remain limited (Department of State, 2021). Successive governments from 1962 onward introduced regulatory systems that significantly changed this landscape, creating what Crouch (2016) characterised as a 'grey area' in which Islamic educational institutions are 'not fully acknowledged nor explicitly prohibited'. Government policy sought to promote an integrated national identity, affecting Islamic education through school nationalisation, conditions for foreign teachers and funding, and ongoing monitoring (Berlie, 2008; Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007).

Contemporary Regulatory Environment

There are no clear-cut rules and regulations governing what a madrasah can or cannot do, and these change over time (Sulaiman, 2008). Furthermore, there is no specific regulatory body overseeing madrasa education, nor are there consistent guidelines for curriculum content, with the choice of texts determined by the head cleric, individual teachers, or donors (Sulaiman, 2008). Contemporary Islamic education operates through full-time madrasas that provide comprehensive religious education, part-time maktabas that offer basic Quranic literacy alongside secular schooling, and informal study circles (Sulaiman, 2008). Many Muslim families pursue dual educational pathways, with children attending secular schools during regular hours and receiving Islamic instruction in evenings or weekends (Sulaiman, 2008).

Educational Challenges

Curriculum Limitations

Research documents that no document written by any native Myanmar Muslim is used in any madrasah anywhere in the country (Sayed et al., 2021). Instead, Myanmar madrasas use textbooks similar to those in Indian and Pakistani madrasas. The general teaching curriculum is based on Hifzul Quran, Tafsir, Sharia, Hadith, and Islamic law and history, with most textbooks written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Sayed et al., 2021). There is no provision for science, mathematics, English, geography, or economics, which hardly trains students for contemporary employment requirements (Sayed et al., 2021). Imported materials often do not fit Myanmar's specific social and cultural context (Sulaiman, 2008).

Instructional Techniques

Pedagogical approaches in traditional madrasas have been documented as relying heavily on memorisation and lectures, with limited emphasis on learner participation and the development of critical thinking (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Sayed et al., 2021). With knowledge confined to religion, prospects for madrasa graduates seeking careers beyond teaching are limited, and they often find that the only option is to serve as an imam or teacher at a local mosque (Sayed et al., 2021). Neither the Myanmar government nor modern universities recognise madrasa certificates (Sulaiman, 2008).

Teacher Quality

Many madrasa educators are community members or religious leaders who may not have had formal training in teaching techniques (Park & Niyozov, 2008). While possessing religious understanding and community trust, they may lack pedagogical skills that could strengthen educational effectiveness (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Tanaka & Khine, 2021). Graduates of madrasahs can translate Arabic religious texts in Myanmar or Urdu, but none can communicate fluently in conversational Arabic (Sayed et al., 2021).

Technology Deficits

Technology is rarely integrated into the learning process at many madrasahs, and most lack access to modern tools like computers or tablets (Sulaiman, 2008). Myanmar ranks lowest among ASEAN countries in the integration of education technology (Machmud et al., 2021).

Community Fragmentation

Language and culture became barriers among Muslim groups of different origins, causing disunity (Sulaiman, 2008). The division centres on whether Urdu or Myanmar/Burmese should be the language of instruction. The Bamar Muslim Education Conference (1930) proposed instruction in the Myanmar language rather than Urdu and Arabic (Sulaiman, 2008).

Regional Contextualisation

While a detailed regional comparison is not this Myanmar-centred study's focus, a brief contextualisation positions Myanmar as an outlier among Southeast Asian nations with Muslim minorities.

Singapore demonstrates the highest level of integration. The government actively supports Islamic schools within the national education structure, with curricula combining religious and secular studies. English serves as the main language of instruction, reflecting Singapore's multicultural society. Registered madrasas achieve 98% secondary qualification rates through institutional coordination, and credentials are fully recognised for higher education pathways (Mokhtar, 2010; Rahman et al., 2020; Steiner, 2011).

Thailand provides moderate integration through the Private Schools Act 2007, which grants legal protection for Islamic schools. In the predominantly Muslim southern provinces, approximately 85% of Malay-Muslim students attend Islamic schools with curricula balancing religious and national requirements. Students have access to both Islamic and secular higher education (Liow, 2009; Roengsamut, 2022).

The Philippines' ARMM/Bangsamoro region grants substantial curricular independence to Muslim areas. By 2004, 21% of ARMM children were enrolled in madrasahs. Islamic content is integrated into public education in Muslim-majority regions, and Islamic education plays a recognised role in building social cohesion and meeting the needs of Muslim minority groups (Dimaukom Kulidtod, 2017; Milligan, 2005).

Myanmar, by contrast, operates without an institutional coordination mechanism, legal recognition framework, or significant government engagement with Islamic education. This lack of formal integration contributes to the quality disparities and credential recognition challenges documented in this study (Crouch, 2016; Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007).

Research Gap

Myanmar remains, as Warnk (2009) observed, a 'very neglected topic in Southeast Asian studies,' with limited fieldwork conducted on Islamic education. There has been a notable absence of large-scale surveys examining education quality, technology access, and community priorities within the Muslim population. This study addresses that gap by collecting empirical data from students, teachers, parents, and other community members.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilising both quantitative survey data and open-ended qualitative questions. Data were collected from 180 participants over a six-month period (April to October 2025). The sampling strategy employed convenience and network-based recruitment through multiple channels: Survey links were distributed to attendees of educational seminars and community gatherings focused on Muslim education in Myanmar. The survey was shared through Muslim community groups on Facebook Messenger, Viber, and other social media platforms commonly used by Myanmar's Muslim population. Participants were also invited through direct messages via messaging applications, with recipients encouraged to share the survey within their networks. This online distribution approach was necessitated by practical constraints, including limited physical access to educational institutions and the disruption of madrasas following the 2021 political changes. The method enabled participation from respondents across geographic locations, including the 17.1% residing overseas.

Sample Characteristics

The sample included students (71.5%), parents (12.0%), teachers (10.8%), and other community members (5.7%). Religious composition was predominantly Muslim (84.2%), with Buddhist respondents (15.2%) providing comparative perspectives. Age distribution concentrated in the 18–25 bracket (69%). Gender distribution showed higher male participation (62.7% male, 37.3% female), consistent with documented gender inequalities in educational access (Sulaiman, 2008; Aung et al., 2023).

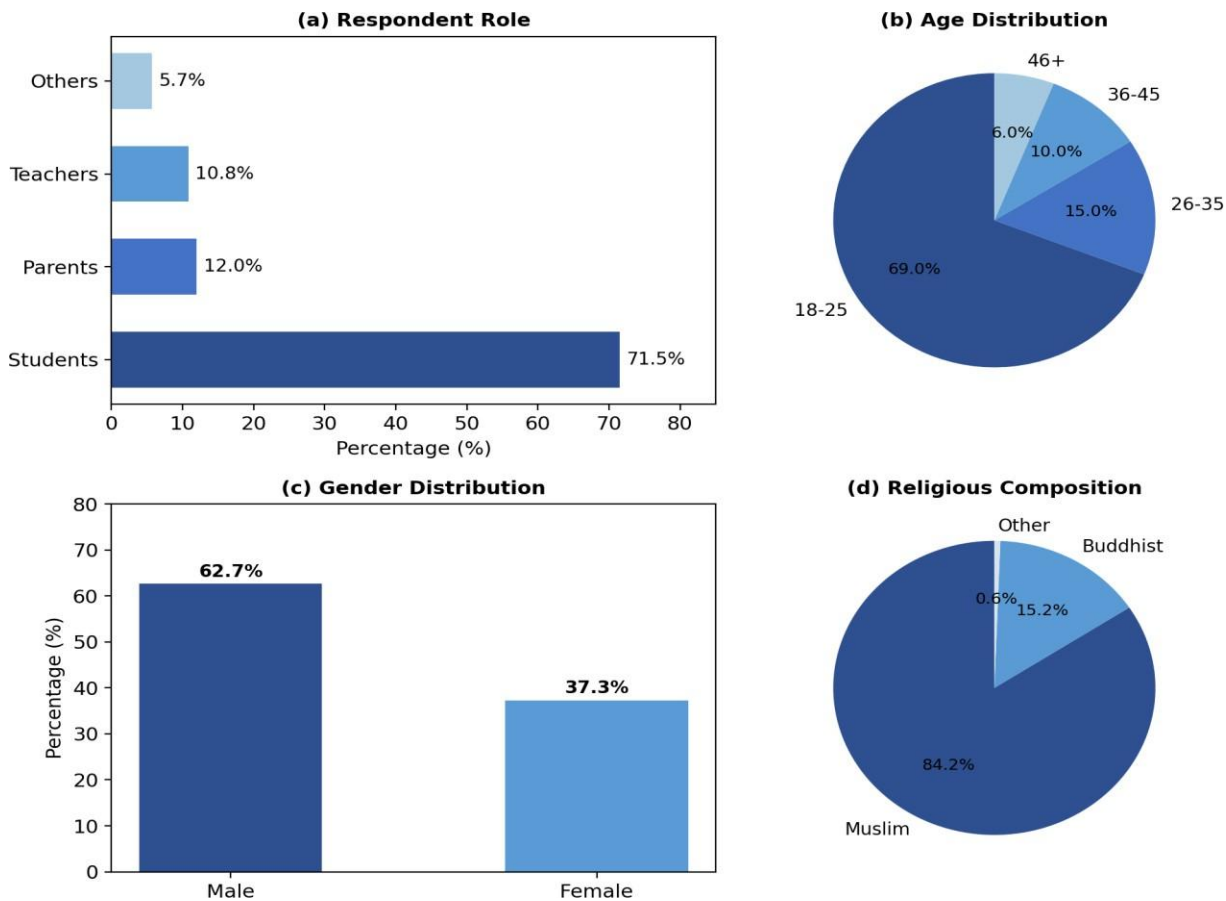


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=180)

Geographic distribution centred on urban areas (Yangon and Mandalay), with 17.1% residing overseas. The concentration in urban areas and the 18-25 age bracket reflects the demographics of online platform users and seminar attendees rather than the broader Muslim population, figure 1.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument included: (1) demographic questions; (2) educational background questions, including highest level attained, school type attended, and credential achievement; (3) Likert-scale items assessing education quality, teaching quality, equity, and importance; (4) multiple-select items identifying challenges; and (5) open-ended questions soliciting qualitative perspectives. The survey was available in English and Myanmar.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and cross-tabulations. Quality ratings were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent).

Limitations of Sampling Approach

The online convenience sampling method may introduce selection bias toward younger, more digitally connected, and urban-based respondents. Rural Muslim communities and older generations may be

underrepresented. These limitations should be considered when interpreting findings, which represent the perspectives of accessible community members rather than a statistically representative sample. Additionally, 10.1% of participants were pursuing postgraduate studies, and 6.3% reported achieving religious education credentials (Alim/Hafiz).

FINDINGS

School Type Distribution

The nearly equal distribution between government schools (42.4%) and religious schools (41.1%) enables meaningful comparison between these educational pathways.

Table 1: School Type Distribution

School Type	No	Percentage
Government School	67	42.4%
Religious School (Madrasa)	65	41.1%
Private School	12	7.6%
Overseas	14	8.9%

Education Quality Ratings

The mean rating for overall education quality was 2.95 out of 5, which falls below the neutral midpoint and indicates general dissatisfaction. Teaching quality received a slightly higher mean score of 3.12, suggesting that while teachers may have adequate capabilities, broader systemic issues impede learning outcomes (Tanaka & Khine, 2021).

Table 2: Education Quality Ratings by School Type

School Type	Mean Rating	Diff. from Overall
Religious School (Madrasa)	2.54	-0.41
Government School	3.16	+0.21
Private School	3.25	+0.30
Overseas	3.50	+0.55
Overall Mean	2.95	—

Religious schools (madrasas) received substantially lower quality ratings (mean 2.54) compared to government schools (3.16), private schools (3.25), and overseas institutions (3.50). The 0.62-point gap between religious and government schools supports concerns about madrasa education quality documented in the literature (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Sayed et al., 2021).

Technology Access

A noticeable 84.2% of respondents reported that technology (such as computers and the internet) was not accessible at their schools, representing a severe infrastructure gap. This finding validates observations that

technology is rarely integrated into the learning process at many madrasahs (Sulaiman, 2008) and demonstrates that Myanmar ranks lowest among ASEAN countries in the integration of educational technology (Machmud et al., 2021).

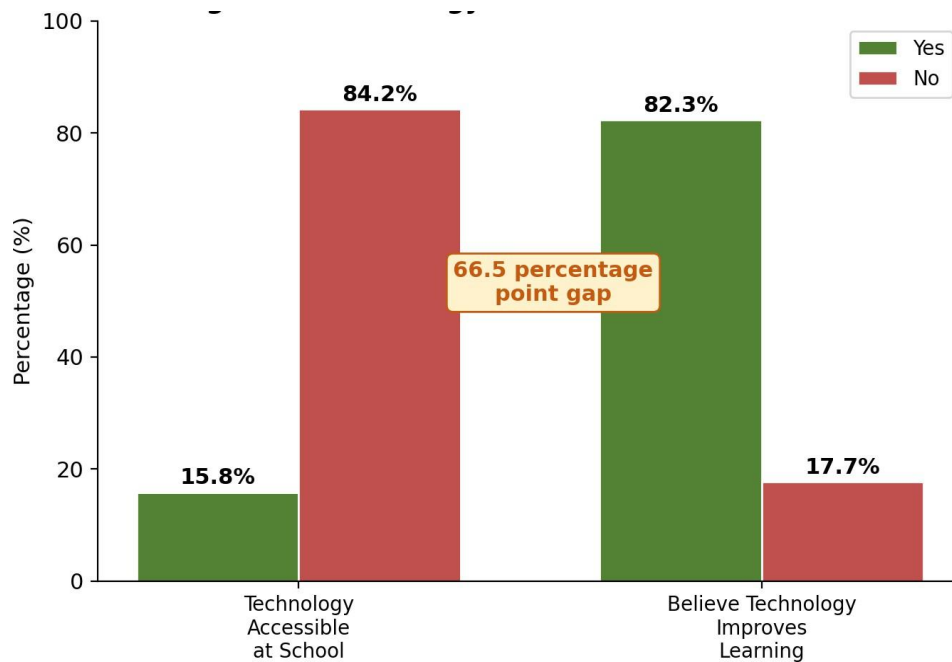


Figure 2: Technology Access vs Perceived Value

Despite limited access, 82.3% of respondents believed that technology would enhance learning. The substantial gap between those with access (15.8%) and those recognising its value (82.3%), a difference of 66.5 percentage points, indicates strong demand and receptiveness to technology integration, see figure 2. The consistent lack of access across all age groups suggests a persistent, structural challenge rather than a generational issue.

4.4 Challenges Identified

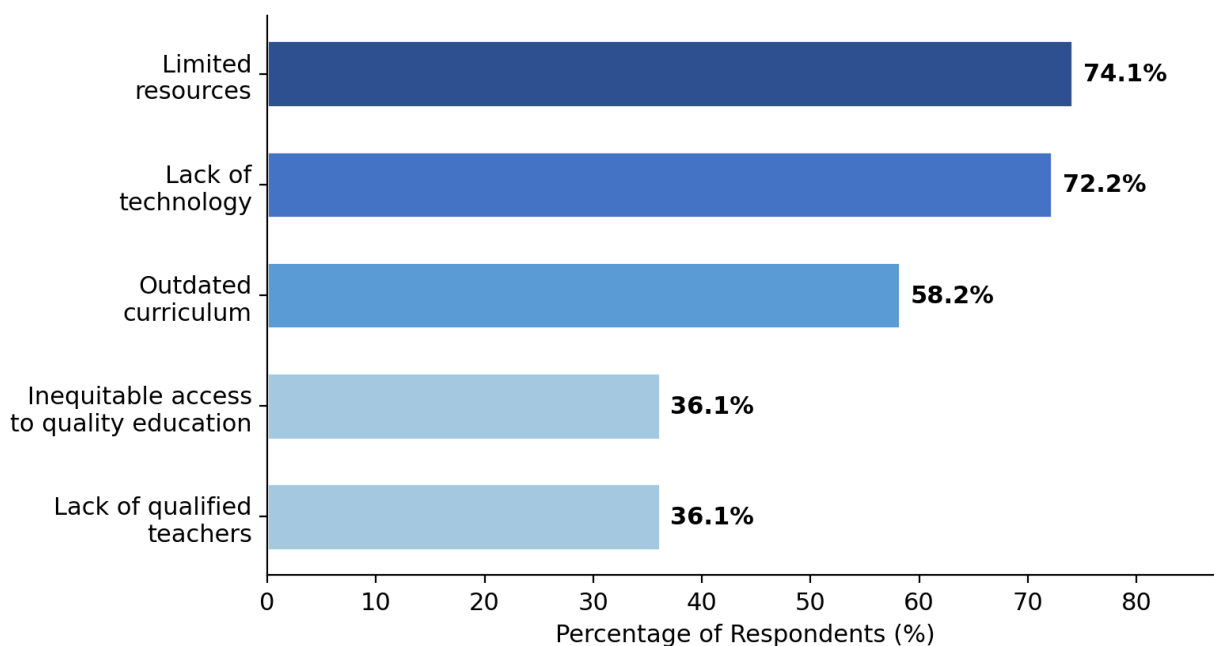


Figure 3: Primary Educational Challenges Identified

Educational equity received the lowest average score, at 1.95 out of 5. Notably, 76% of respondents rated equity as 'poor' or 'very poor.' Teacher training was also evaluated unfavourably, with 75.9% indicating it was inadequate, figure 3 and 4.

Table 3: Educational Challenges Identified by Respondents

Challenge	No	Percentage
Limited resources	117	74.1%
Lack of technology	114	72.2%
Outdated curriculum	92	58.2%
Inequitable access to quality education	57	36.1%
Lack of qualified teachers	57	36.1%

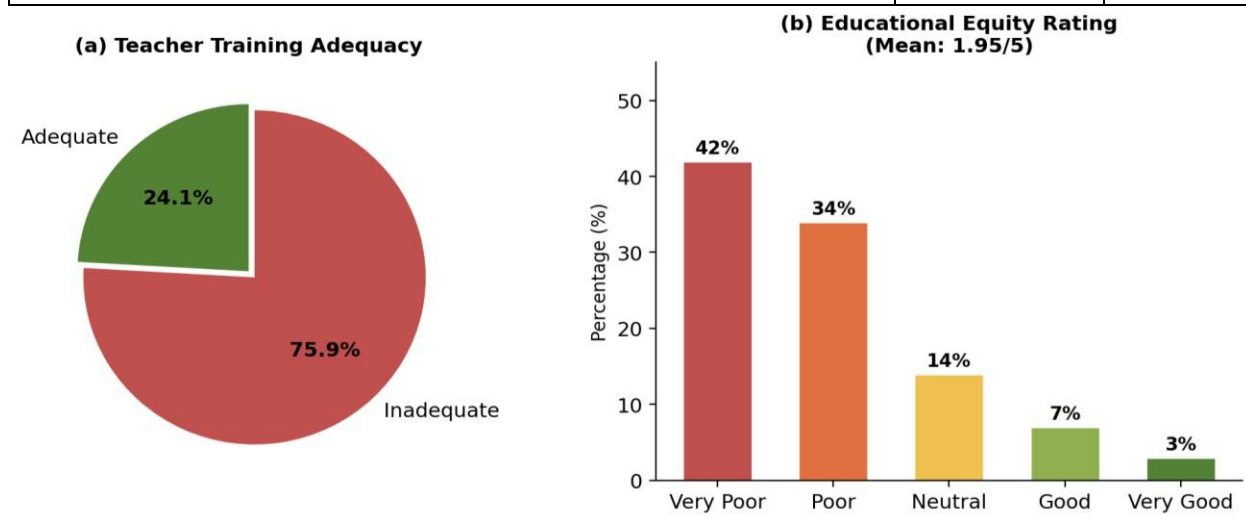


Figure 4: Teacher Training and Educational Equity Assessment

Education Importance and Priorities

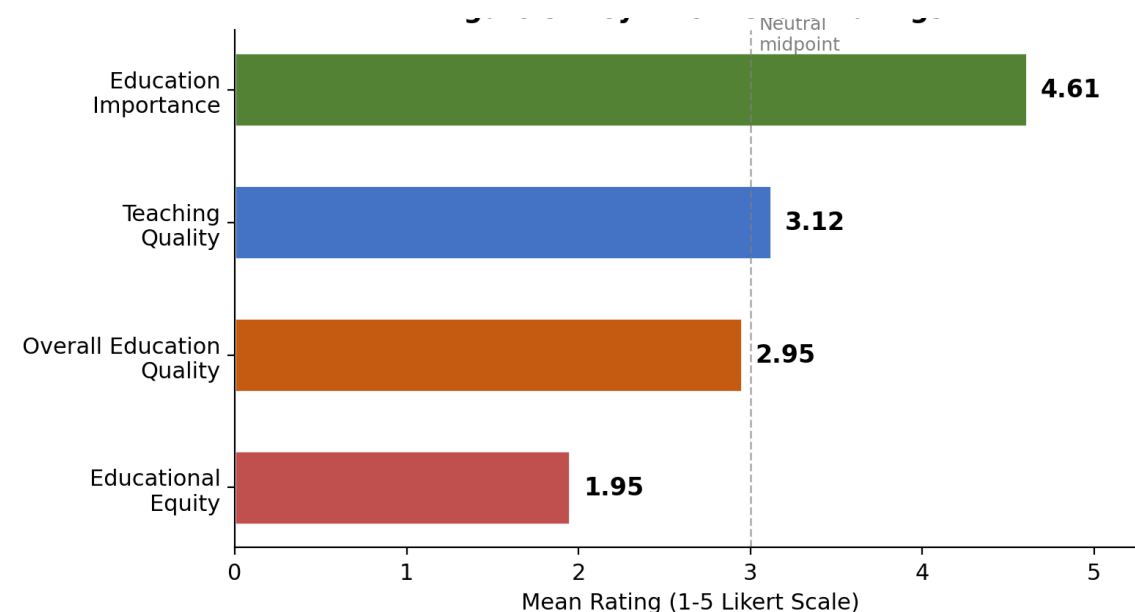


Figure 5: Key Likert Scale

Despite these challenges, the majority of respondents regarded education as highly important. The mean importance rating was 4.61 out of 5, with 84.2% describing education as 'extremely important.' This reflects strong community motivation and suggests broad support for educational improvement initiatives, figure 5.

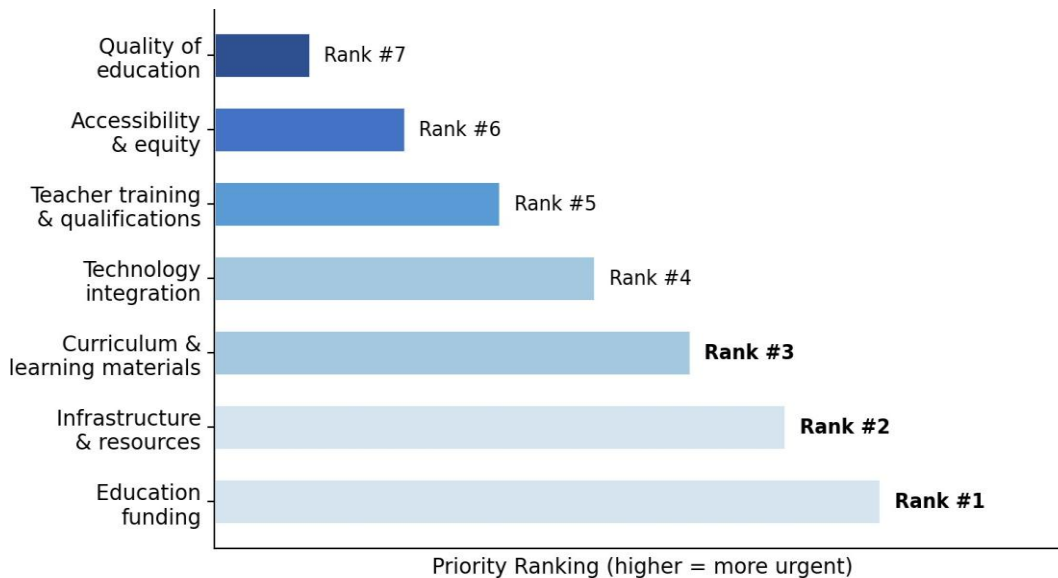


Figure 6: Community Priority Areas for Educational Improvement

The primary priorities for improvement, figure 6, identified by respondents were: (1) enhancing education quality, (2) increasing access and fairness, (3) improving teacher training and qualifications, (4) integrating technology, (5) updating curriculum and materials, (6) strengthening infrastructure and resources, and (7) increasing funding for education.

Qualitative Findings: Community Voices

Rote Memorisation versus Understanding. Multiple respondents criticised learning methods emphasising memorisation over comprehension. One noted: 'In Myanmar, they really encourage students to learn by heart, whether the students understand the concept or not. I wish they would focus on the improvement of understanding.' Another stated: 'Yes, they have to change the by heart system.' These validate documentation that teaching methodology is not encouraging inquiry or critical thinking (Sayed et al., 2021).

Technology Isolation. Respondents from madrasa backgrounds provided vivid testimonies about technology gaps. One graduate shared: 'I spent my whole life in a madrasa. I don't even know how to use a computer. In today's world, finding a job without tech skills is almost impossible.' Another observed: 'In madrasa, we're completely disconnected from the outside world. I'm about to graduate without ever having seen a computer.'

Employability Concerns. Madrasa graduates expressed significant employment concerns. One stated: 'I spent my whole life in a madrasa. I don't know anything except teaching the Quran. I don't know how to feed my family—it's really frustrating.' Another reflected: 'I memorised so many texts. But when I went outside, I was like someone who didn't know anything. This system makes us incompatible with the outside world.'

Curriculum Modernisation Needs. Respondents articulated specific curriculum improvement needs: 'Use international books, don't just use Myanmar books. Teach students English too, not only Burmese. Teach students how to use technology and other digital devices.' Another emphasised: 'We need more practical learning experiences. Theory without application is meaningless.'

Parental Perspectives. Parents expressed complex views balancing religious and secular goals. One shared: 'I want my daughter to know religion and also get a degree. In today's world, it's dangerous for girls outside, so we watch them strictly. If there were proper online learning systems, it would be much more convenient for parents.'

DISCUSSION

Having presented the quantitative and qualitative findings, this section contextualises them within the broader education landscape in Myanmar. Following independence, Myanmar achieved the highest literacy rate in its language among former British colonies (Kandiko Howson & Lall, 2020). However, prolonged underinvestment

has resulted in steady decline (Tin, 2008). For the Muslim community, these national challenges are compounded by issues such as non-recognition of credentials and ambiguous regulatory frameworks (Crouch, 2016; Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007).

Validation of Literature Findings

The survey findings strongly validate themes identified in existing scholarship. The technology gap documented by Sulaiman (2008) and Machmud et al. (2021) is empirically confirmed by the 84.2% reporting no technology availability. Curriculum concerns raised by Sayed et al. (2021) are reflected in the 58.2% identifying outdated curriculum as a challenge. Respondent criticism of the 'by heart system' validates scholarly observations about teaching methodology (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Sayed et al., 2021). The 0.62-point quality difference between religious schools (2.54) and government schools (3.16) provides quantitative evidence of quality disparities.

New Empirical Contributions

In addition to corroborating previous research, this study contributes several new empirical insights. The stark 66.5-percentage-point technology demand-access gap, the distance between actual technology access (15.8%) and its perceived value (82.3%), highlights a massive wave of unmet demand. Because this technological absence spans all age groups, it reveals a persistent structural challenge and a long-term systemic issue rather than a temporary generational phenomenon. The low equity score of 1.95 serves as a critical quantitative equity baseline to measure all future progress toward educational fairness. The finding that 84.2% of respondents continue to rate education as 'extremely important' despite facing substantial challenges demonstrates deep community resilience and a clear readiness for positive change. Strong parental perspectives and interest in solutions like online learning point to actionable avenues for technology integration, offering a practical way to address both physical access constraints and specific gender-related concerns regarding girls' safety.

Comparative Implications

Compared with neighbouring countries, Myanmar's Islamic education system faces more pronounced challenges in infrastructure and integration. In Singapore, madrasas are incorporated into the national curriculum, and their credentials are recognised (Steiner, 2011). Thailand's Islamic schools benefit from clear regulatory frameworks and government support (Liow, 2009). The Philippines integrates Islamic content into public education in Muslim-majority regions (Milligan, 2005). By contrast, Myanmar's Islamic schools receive minimal government support, have limited recognition, and experience significant technology deficits and quality concerns.

The comparative data suggest that successful Islamic education in minority contexts depends on some degree of institutional coordination, credential recognition, and quality assurance mechanisms—elements largely absent in Myanmar's current system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on findings from 180 respondents and supported by prior research (Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007; Sayed et al., 2021), this study offers the following recommendations.

Technology Integration emerges as the highest immediate priority given the stark 84.2% technology availability gap, contrasted with 82.3% of respondents believing in its educational value. Technology infrastructure can be addressed through relatively modest investments, yielding rapid and visible impact (Machmud et al., 2021). Practical steps include establishing computer facilities in madrasas, developing digital learning resources in the Myanmar and Arabic languages, training educators in technology-enhanced pedagogy, and exploring mobile learning solutions suitable for Myanmar's communication infrastructure.

Curriculum Modernisation is essential given that 58.2% of respondents reported the curriculum as outdated and that no Myanmar-authored texts are currently used in any madrasa nationwide (Sayed et al., 2021). This can be achieved by creating Islamic studies materials contextualised for Myanmar's specific social and cultural context, introducing practical secular subjects alongside religious education, encouraging local Muslim scholars

to develop community-specific textbooks, and incorporating contemporary issues and life skills development into existing programmes.

Teacher Professional Development requires urgent attention as 75.9% of participants rated current teacher training as inadequate (Tanaka & Khine, 2021). Effective programmes should include pedagogical training for religious scholars, subject-matter development in secular disciplines, ongoing professional development opportunities through peer learning networks among educators, and regional exposure visits to observe successful educational models in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Pathway Development must be established to address deep-seated concerns regarding employment prospects and the lack of official recognition for madrasa certificates (Sulaiman, 2008). This involves creating mechanisms for recognising madrasa education in higher education admissions, providing career counselling services to graduates, fostering partnerships with potential employers, and designing bridging programmes that connect religious and secular qualifications.

Quality Assurance Frameworks are necessary to bridge the observed institutional quality gap between religious schools (2.54) and government schools (3.16). Implementing shared quality standards developed by the community itself, forming peer-review groups among madrasas, recognising institutions that achieve specified benchmarks, and developing voluntary accreditation mechanisms will provide a sustainable foundation for long-term educational improvement.

Institutional Coordination would benefit from establishing a Myanmar Muslim Education Council (MMEC) to facilitate coordination of technology integration, curriculum development, teacher training, and quality assurance across the community. Establishment of integrated institution of Islamic and Secular institute and forming formal partnerships with regional Islamic education networks (Liow, 2009; Steiner, 2011) may also yield opportunities for scholarships, faculty exchanges, and collaborative learning that could strengthen Myanmar's Islamic educational institutions.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting findings. The sample size of 180, while providing valuable initial data, limits statistical generalisability, and the online convenience sampling method may introduce selection bias toward younger, more digitally connected, and urban-based respondents. Ongoing political instability following the changes in the 2021 political climate has disrupted education and complicated research efforts (UNDP, 2025), affecting participant recruitment. Security concerns, displacement, communication barriers, and institutional closures further constrained the sample, and consequently, the findings may reflect both long-term systemic issues and recent crisis impacts. Most respondents were from urban areas, primarily Yangon and Mandalay, so rural Muslim communities may be underrepresented. With 69% of respondents aged 18–25, the experiences of older generations may not be fully captured.

These factors indicate that the results should be considered a foundation for further research rather than definitive conclusions about Myanmar's entire Muslim community.

Building on this study's findings, future research should address studies targeting rural Muslim communities and regions beyond Yangon and Mandalay, including Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan states, to improve representativeness, as well as research specifically targeting older generations, female-only educational settings, and communities with limited digital access. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with educators, administrators, and community members would explore survey findings in greater depth, and direct comparison of educational experiences between Muslim and non-Muslim students in Myanmar's education system would provide broader understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence regarding education within Myanmar's Muslim community, addressing a significant gap in the scholarly literature on what Warnk (2009) described as a 'very neglected topic in

Southeast Asian studies.' The findings highlight critical challenges, including severe technology deficits (84.2% without access), pronounced quality disparities between religious and secular schools (2.54 versus 3.16), and widespread perceptions of educational inequity (mean rating 1.95 out of 5). Qualitative accounts further illustrate technological isolation, employment concerns, and curricular limitations, corroborating previously documented challenges (Sayed et al., 2021; Sulaiman, 2008).

Simultaneously, the study demonstrates the community's resilience and commitment to education. Despite considerable challenges, 84.2% of respondents identified education as 'extremely important,' indicating strong motivation and probable support for reform initiatives. The recommendations presented are directly informed by the findings: technology integration addresses the most significant gap; curriculum updates address outdated materials; teacher training enhances quality; clearer career pathways improve employability; community-led quality assurance respects institutional autonomy; and improved coordination addresses fragmentation.

Enhancing Islamic education in Myanmar advances both the community's cultural and religious objectives and contributes to national development (Lall, 2020). Historically, during the 'golden period,' schools welcomed students from diverse religious backgrounds, and robust Islamic education supported broader social progress (Lall & South, 2018; Mohiyuddin & Sulaiman, 2007). Experiences from other Southeast Asian countries demonstrate that integrating Islamic education into national systems, while challenging, is achievable (Liow, 2009; Milligan, 2005; Steiner, 2011). The empirical data presented in this study can inform and support future evidence-based initiatives aimed at strengthening educational opportunities for Myanmar's Muslim community.

REFERENCES

1. Aung, Z. J. H., Barnes, M. M., Yip, S. Y., & Saito, E. (2023). Creating equity for ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse students in school settings in the Myanmar public schools. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2246139>
2. Berlie, J. A. (2008). Burma. The Burmanization of Myanmar's Muslims. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 41(1), 175–177. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022463409990312>
3. Chai, A. (2014). The Effects of the Colonial Period on Education in Burma. *Education Reform, Past and Present*. Trinity College. <https://commons.trincoll.edu/edreform/2014/05/the-effects-of-the-colonial-period-on-education-in-burma/>
4. Crouch, M. (2016). Myanmar's Muslim Mosaic and the Politics of Belonging. *Islam and the State in Myanmar*, 9–36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ACPROF:OSO/9780199461202.003.0002>
5. Department of State, U.S. (2021). Burma 2021 International Religious Freedom Report. U.S. Department of State.
6. Dimaukom Kulidtod, Z. (2017). Islamic Educational Policies in the Philippines: Its Evolution and Current Problems. *International Research-Based Education Journal*, 1(1).
7. Hirata, T., & Morishita, M. (2022). Citizenship Education in Myanmar: Developing Global Citizens. 157–174. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-3692-0_8
8. Kandiko Howson, C., & Lall, M. (2020). Higher education reform in Myanmar: neoliberalism versus an inclusive developmental agenda. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 18(2), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2019.1689488>
9. Kyay Mhone. (2014). Myanmar National Education Law 2014.
10. Lall, M. (2020). Myanmar's Education Reforms. UCL Press.
11. Lall, M., & South, A. (2018). Power dynamics of language and education policy in Myanmar's contested transition. *Comparative Education Review*, 62(4), 482–502. <https://doi.org/10.1086/699655>
12. Liow, J. C. (2009). Islam, Education and Reform in Southern Thailand. *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*.
13. Machmud, M. T., Widiyan, A. P., & Ramadhani, N. R. (2021). The Development and Policies of ICT Supporting Educational Technology in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 10(1), 78–85. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v10i1.20786>
14. Milligan, J. A. (2005). Islamic identity, postcoloniality, and educational policy: Schooling and ethno-religious conflict in the southern Philippines. 1–225. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403981578>
15. Mohiyuddin, M., & Sulaiman, M. (2007). Islamic education in Myanmar: A case study. Online Burma/Myanmar Library.

16. Mokhtar, I. A. (2010). Madrasahs in Singapore: Bridging between their roles, relevance and resources. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(1), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602001003650663>
17. Park, J., & Niyozov, S. (2008). Madrasa education in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Current issues and debates. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(4), 323–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790802475372>
18. Rahman, A., Warsah, I., & Murfi, A. (2020). Islamic Education System in Singapore: Current Issues and Challenges. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8(2), 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.14421/JPI.2019.82.197-222>
19. Roengsamut, P. Z. (2022). Transformative Islamic Schools in Thailand – Supporting Global Citizens. *Mosaic Connections*. <https://mosaicconnections.com.au/transformative-islamic-schools-in-thailand-supporting-global-citizens/>
20. Sayed, M., Sadek, A., & Ismail, H. (2021). Evaluation of Islamic education curriculum in Myanmar Islamic schools: A review and criticism. *Journal of Usuluddin*, 2(49), 243–263. <http://irep.iium.edu.my/95970/>
21. Steiner, K. (2011). Madrasah in Singapore: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Education. *Comparative Education Review*, 49(3), 389. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3542211>
22. Sulaiman, M. M. M. (2008). Islamic education in Myanmar: A case study. In T. M. Wilson (Ed.), *Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar* (pp. 177–191). The Australian National University E Press.
23. Tanaka, Y., & Khine, M. M. (2021). Education of Myanmar. 607–638. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0032-9_15
24. Tin, H. (2008). Myanmar education: challenges, prospects and options. *Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar*. <https://doi.org/10.22459/dddm.12.2008.07>
25. UNDP. (2025). Myanmar's youth "on hold" as education and employment crisis deepens, warns UNDP. United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/press-releases/myanmars-youth-on-hold-education-and-employment-crisis-deepens-warns-undp>
26. Warnk, H. (2009). Alternative Education or Teaching Radicalism? New Literature on Islamic Education in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 28(4), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810340902800406>
27. Yegar, Moshe. (1972). *The Muslims of Burma*. O. Harrassowitz.
28. **Author Affiliations:**
29. ¹ Postgraduate student, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM)
30. ² Dr. Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, Department of Fundamental & Inter-Disciplinary Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia