

Lessons Learned from the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP): A Project Management and Sustainability Analysis of Vocational Training in Mandalay, Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive project management analysis of the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP), a vocational training program for underprivileged youth at the Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School in Mandalay, Myanmar. The program was funded by Foerderverein Myanmar (Germany) from 2014 to 2021, and it was successfully integrated over 300 graduates into the tourism workforce before it was disrupted by political instability.

The study uses a qualitative research design and collects data through 30 in-depth interviews with alumni, managers, trainers, donors, and prospective students. It utilizes the analytical framework based on the Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC), Vocational Education and Training (VET) theory, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore the formation of professional identity.

The findings show that TAP was successfully implemented and provided training aligned with industry needs, which significantly improved participants' employability. The program is designed to develop technical skills and support a meaningful change in professional identity, empowering marginalized individuals to transition into recognized roles within the tourism sector. A main weakness in the project's design was its lack of financial diversification, as it relied entirely on a single external donor to sustain its operations. The project's long-term sustainability was restricted by its dependence on limited funding sources, a challenge that was further strengthened by Myanmar's political and economic instability.

To overcome these challenges, the research proposes a hybrid, self-sustaining project model. This model advocates for the integration of income-generating social enterprises, diversified funding streams, and strengthened industry partnerships to ensure institutional resilience. This study provides actionable guidance for policymakers and development professionals by integrating project management frameworks into the context of socio-educational sustainability. It provides as a strategic roadmap for designing and maintaining resilient vocational training programs within conflict-affected or resource-constrained environments, ensuring that educational interventions can survive external shocks and achieve lasting impact.

Keywords: Project Management, Vocational Training, Sustainability Tourism, Crisis Management

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is a Southeast Asian country with an estimated population of 54.5 million in 2024 (World Bank, 2024), characterized by 135 ethnic diversity and a history of political instability, including decades of military rule and recent political crises (Cheesman, 2018; Kudo et al., 2014). These conditions have significantly affected economic development, education systems, and employment opportunities, particularly for marginalized youth. For many years, Myanmar was isolated from the global economy (Ghorpade et al., 2024; Tanaka et al., 2015). In 2011, the government began political and economic reforms and allowed more international engagement. As a result, tourism grew very quickly. The number of international visitors increased from about 800,000 in 2011 to more than 4.7 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2020). In 2013, the government introduced the Tourism Master

Plan (2013–2020). This plan aimed to reduce poverty and support rural development through tourism (Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, 2013). During this time, foreign investment increased. More than 1,300 hotels were built, and international airports were expanded to support tourism growth. By 2019, tourism had become an important part of the economy. It generated about \$2.5 billion USD, which was nearly 4% of the country's GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). The industry created many jobs, especially for young people. It also supported local businesses such as artisans, drivers, and food vendors. In addition, tourism brought in foreign currency, which helped stabilize the economy. Programs like the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP) at Phaung Daw Oo helped train young people from poor backgrounds. These programs connected them with job opportunities in the growing tourism industry (ILO, 2019).

In Myanmar, monastic education (*hphone-gyi-kyaung*) is not merely a religious tradition but a fundamental pillar of the country's social and educational infrastructure. For centuries, it has functioned as a crucial safety net for those excluded from formal state systems (UNESCO, 2013; Save the Children, 2016). Prior to the colonial era, monasteries were the primary providers of education in Myanmar, contributing to one of the highest literacy rates in Asia during the 19th century (Charney, 2009; Thant Myint-U, 2001). Even today, the Burmese word for school, *kyaung*, is the same term used for monastery, reflecting the deep historical and cultural interconnection between education and monastic life in Myanmar (Spiro, 1982).

Monastic schools like Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education High School play an important role in supporting vulnerable children in Myanmar. The school provide free education, unlike state schools that often require extra costs for uniforms, books, and transport (Lall, 2016). These schools accept a wide range of students, including orphans, children from conflict areas, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and ethnic minorities who may not have official documents (UNESCO, 2018). Monastic schools also provide more than education. They often offer food, shelter, and basic healthcare, helping students meet their daily needs (Lorch, 2007). In addition, they teach both the national curriculum and Buddhist values, helping students build moral understanding and a sense of cultural identity (Kyi et al., 2014). Today, many monastic schools also include vocational training. For example, programs like the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP) teach skills such as Language, IT, tourism and hospitality. These skills help students from poor backgrounds find jobs in growing industries like tourism (ILO, 2019).

In an increasingly complex and competitive global environment, organizations are required to adopt more modern management approaches to achieve their objectives effectively and efficiently. Among these approaches, project management has emerged as a critical discipline for planning, implementing, and controlling complex, time-bound initiatives (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021). As defined by classical scholars, project management involves the coordinated application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to ensure that projects are completed within specified constraints of time, cost, and quality (Kerzner, 2017; Project Management Institute, 2021).

The Tourism Assistant Project (TAP), implemented at Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School in Mandalay, Myanmar, represents a significant example of a development oriented vocational training initiative. TAP was established in 2014 with financial support from Foerderverein Myanmar (Germany), and designed to equip underprivileged youth with the practical skills, knowledge, and professional competencies required to enter the tourism and hospitality sector. Over a period of seven years, the project successfully trained more than 300 students through a structured program combining classroom instruction, practical training, internships, and job placement support.

Despite these achievements, the sustainability of the project has been critically challenged by its reliance on external donor funding and by broader socio-political instability in Myanmar. The suspension of TAP activities in 2021 highlights a fundamental issue commonly observed in development projects: the tension between short-term success and long-term viability. While the project demonstrated effectiveness in delivering educational outcomes and facilitating employment, it lacked a resilient operational model capable of withstanding disruptions in funding and external environmental shocks (Friedrich, 2023).

This study addresses this gap by examining the Tourism Assistant Project through a project management lens, with particular emphasis on lifecycle effectiveness, constraint management, and sustainability. It seeks to analyze

how the project was planned, implemented, and evaluated, and to identify the internal and external factors that influenced its performance and eventual interruption. By doing so, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how vocational training initiatives can be designed and managed in conflict-affected situations.

Rational Of The Study

The rationale for this study stems from the urgent need to critically evaluate the long-term sustainability of donor-funded vocational programs operating in unstable socio-economic and political environments. Although such program (Bridging Program, TEAM program) those programs are still running inside Phaung Daw Oo school in Myanmar demonstrate strong short-term outcomes in terms of skills development and employment generation, their continued operation is frequently dependent on external financial support.

Empirical studies indicate that vocational training programs targeting disadvantaged youth generate positive multiplier effects, including increased household income, improved social mobility, and enhanced community resilience (International Labor Organization, 2020; World Bank, 2018). In this sense, VET functions not only as an educational support but also as a strategic tool for social inclusion and economic empowerment.

However, the effectiveness of VET programs is contingent upon several factors, including institutional capacity, quality of instruction, availability of practical training opportunities, and the broader economic environment. In fragile or conflict-affected contexts, these factors are often constrained, necessitating innovative and flexible approaches to program design and delivery.

To conclude, the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP) provides an important case for analyzing the sustainability and impact of vocational training programs in conflict-affected settings. Since its establishment in 2014, TAP has helped more than 300 disadvantaged youths transition into the tourism workforce, demonstrating significant socio-economic benefits and contributions to youth empowerment. However, the project's heavy dependence on a single external donor and its suspension in 2021 due to political and economic instability revealed critical weaknesses in financial sustainability and resilience to external shocks. Given the limited documentation of lessons learned from vocational training initiatives in such contexts, this study examines TAP's lifecycle, stakeholder experiences, operational challenges, and alumni outcomes to generate practical insights for developing more adaptive, resilient, and sustainable project models.

Objective Of the Study

The study is led by the following objectives:

1. To evaluate how the Tourism Assistant Project's management from 2014 to 2021 impacted the jobs and career growth of underprivileged youth in Mandalay.
2. To identify the key internal and external challenges that contributed to the suspension of the project, including financial dependency and political instability.
3. To propose a sustainable project management model for vocational training initiatives operating in conflict-affected area.

Scope And Methods of the Study

This study focuses on the Tourism Assistant Project implemented between May 2014 and February 2021. It adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 30 key stakeholders, including project alumni, lecturers, project managers, donors, and prospective students. Secondary data were obtained from project documents, training curricula, donor reports, and institutional records. This study focuses on the project management practices, socio-economic outcomes, and sustainability challenges of TAP. Although the findings may provide useful insights for similar contexts, they are not intended to be universally applicable.

Identification Of the Research Gap and Academic Significance

While existing scholarly literature extensively documents the positive socio-economic impacts of VET in developing economies (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2018) and the structural challenges of donor dependency (Bebbington, 2005; Moyo, 2009), a critical scholarly gap persists at the intersection of Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC) execution, VET sustainability, and socio-educational interventions operating within Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (FCAS). Specifically, existing development literature exhibits three major shortcomings:

Over-reliance on Linear PMLC Models in Fragile Environments: Standard project management frameworks (e.g., PMBOK) treat project closure as a linear, planned termination, failing to account for how macro-level environmental shocks interact with internal structural vulnerabilities (such as single-donor dependency) in non-state educational institutions.

Under-theorization of Subjective Identity Transformation in VET: Existing VET evaluations focus almost exclusively on objective economic metrics (e.g., placement rates, wage increases) while ignoring the psycho-social mechanisms through which marginalized youth construct professional selfhood in conflict-affected, stigmatized societies.

Absence of Operationalized Transition Frameworks: While development literature routinely critiques donor dependency, it rarely provides empirical, actionable models demonstrating how non-profit educational projects in crisis settings can transition into self-sustaining, hybrid social enterprise architectures.

This study directly addresses these scholarly gaps by examining TAP as an empirical case study. By synthesizing project management principles with psychoanalytic identity theory and social enterprise models, this manuscript advances scholarship on how crisis-affected educational interventions can build structural resilience against external shocks.

Organization Of The Study

This study is organized into five sections. Section I introduces the research background, rationale, objectives, scope, and structure of the study. Section II reviews relevant literature, including project management theory, vocational training frameworks, and sustainability concepts. Section III outlines the research methodology, including research design, data collection, and analytical procedures. Section IV presents the findings and analysis of the Tourism Assistant Project. Finally, Section V provides conclusions and recommendations for developing a sustainable model of vocational training in unstable environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the analysis of the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP). It establishes the conceptual foundation of the study by examining key perspectives in project management, vocational education and training (VET), sustainability in development projects, and crisis-oriented project adaptation. In addition, it introduces a complementary theoretical lens Lacanian psychoanalysis to interpret professional identity formation among program participants.

The Project Management Lifecycle (Pmlc) And The 'Resilience Square'

Classical project management conceptualizes initiatives through a structured lifecycle comprising Initiation, Planning, Execution, Monitoring/Controlling, and Closure (Kerzner, 2017; PMI, 2021). Within traditional PMLC literature, project performance is evaluated against the 'Iron Triangle' constraints: Time, Cost, and Scope (Atkinson, 1999). However, as Friedrich (2023) and Brinkerhoff (2014) argue, the Iron Triangle is inherently static when applied to volatile, conflict-affected environments. "In fragile contexts, a project can perfectly satisfy short-term cost, scope, and time targets during execution yet remain fundamentally brittle.

To advance scholarship, this study proposes expanding the traditional Iron Triangle into the '**Resilience Square**', introducing Sustainability/Adaptability as an indispensable fourth core constraint. In fragile contexts, project

sustainability must move from being an abstract external goal to an active 'way of managing' (Friedrich, 2023) embedded within every lifecycle phase.

Vocational Education And Training (Vet) And Human Capital Alignment

Vocational Education and Training (VET) theory emphasizes that targeted technical skill acquisition operates as a fundamental driver of socio-economic mobility, youth empowerment, and poverty reduction (UNESCO, 2016, 2021; World Bank, 2018). However, VET literature highlights that the efficacy of vocational interventions depends strictly on tight alignment between educational curricula and dynamic labor market demands (McGrath et al., 2018). In fragile or post-conflict settings, VET institutions must balance technical instruction (hard skills) with soft skills, language fluency, and adaptive capacity to ensure long-term graduate mobility (ILO, 2020).

Professional Identity Formation: A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Lens

To understand the profound personal transformation reported by TAP participants beyond raw employment statistics, this study incorporates selected concepts from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory (Lacan, 1977; Fink, 1995; Žižek, 2006). Marginalized youth in conflict-affected settings often experience fragmented selfhood, structural invisibility, and social alienation. Lacanian theory offers three vital concepts to interpret their professional journey:

The Symbolic Order and the Big Other: The 'Big Other' represents the overarching social order, language, rules, and institutional norms of society. In this study, the global tourism industry functions as the Big Other, defining professional standards, dress codes, and linguistic expectations (English/German fluency). TAP acts as a gateway introducing marginalized youth into this symbolic order.

Symbolic Identificatory Objects (The Mirror Stage): Lacan posits that identity is constructed by identifying with external visual/symbolic ideals. For TAP students, tangible symbols such as professional uniforms, nametags, completion certificates, and formal titles ('Tour Assistant') serve as external anchors that stabilize their fragmented sense of self and confer social legitimacy.

Desire for Recognition: Human motivation is driven by the desire to be recognized by the Big Other. Vocational training satisfies this deep psychological desire, moving marginalized youth from 'social invisibility' to valued professional status within the community.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure complete transparency, methodological rigor, and replicability, this section outlines the qualitative research design, participant selection protocols, data collection instruments, six-phase thematic coding process, and comprehensive trustworthiness measures.

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory, qualitative single-case study design. Qualitative inquiry is uniquely suited for examining complex socio-educational phenomena in fragile contexts, allowing researchers to capture nuanced personal experiences, institutional mechanics, and contextual dynamics that quantitative metrics miss.

Target Population and Purposive Sampling Strategy

The target population comprised key stakeholders associated with TAP across its lifecycle (2014–2021). A non-probability, purposeful sampling strategy combined with criterion sampling was implemented. Participants were required to meet specific inclusion criteria: (a) Alumni, completion of the full 9-month TAP course between Batches 1 and 6; (b) management/ instructors, minimum of 2 years active service in TAP; (c) donors, Board-level involvement in funding decisions; (d) Prospective Students: Enrollment in Phaung Daw Oo basic programs with documented interest in VET. Data saturation—the point at which no new themes or conceptual codes emerged was achieved at N = 30 participants. Table 1 outlines the sample distribution.

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Description	Actual Number	Sampling Number
Alumni Students	350	16
Trainer (10), Project Manager (1), Donar Member (10)	21	9
Prospective Student	15	5

Table: Targeted Population and Sampling

Data Collection Tools

The study primarily uses in-depth personal interviews with structured thematic questions to ensure consistency across participants. Alumni interviews focus on career outcomes, skill application, and perceptions of the program's value and management interviews examine project implementation, administrative processes, and the shift from donor dependency to self-sustainability. In addition, project reports and financial records from 2014–2021 are reviewed as documentary sources to support and contextualize the interview findings.

Data Analysis: Six-Phase Hybrid Thematic Coding Process

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase thematic analysis framework, utilizing a hybrid inductive-deductive coding logic. Deductive codes were drawn from PMLC lifecycle constraints and Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts, while inductive codes were allowed to emerge organically from participant narratives.

Phase	Analytical Stage	Specific Methodological Actions Executed
Phase 1	Familiarization	Verbatim transcription of 30 audio recordings; dual translation (Burmese-English) with cross-verification; repeated reading.
Phase 2	Initial Coding	Generating 142 open initial codes (e.g., 'uniform pride', 'funding halt shock', 'language confidence') using NVivo 14.
Phase 3	Searching Themes	Grouping codes into 12 primary candidate themes aligned with theoretical dimensions (PMLC, VET, Lacan).
Phase 4	Reviewing Themes	Refining themes against full transcript dataset; mapping code relationships via thematic network diagrams.
Phase 5	Defining Themes	Finalizing 4 overarching macro-themes and sub-themes; operationalizing conceptual definitions.
Phase 6	Report Production	Synthesizing thematic findings with empirical quotes, theoretical integration, and structural modeling.

Ethical Considerations

In light of the sensitive political context in Myanmar, this study adheres to strict ethical standards. For the confidential of participants and specific partner organizations will be protected to ensure the safety and security of youth participants. All respondents will receive a clear explanation of the study's purpose and procedures and will provide either written or verbal consent prior to participation. All digital data will be securely stored and encrypted to prevent unauthorized access and to safeguard participants' identities, particularly those of socially engaged youth.

Trustworthiness And Rigor

To ensure qualitative rigor, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative framework for qualitative research across four dimensions:

Credibility: Established through member-checking with selected alumni and project managers, along with data source triangulation between interview transcripts, donor reports, and curriculum documentation.

Transferability: Ensured by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the Mandalay monastic education context, project parameters, and socio-political conditions to allow readers to assess applicability to other fragile settings.

Dependability & Confirmability: Maintained through a transparent audit trail detailing the six-phase thematic analysis process, verbatim Burmese-to-English translation cross-verifications, and explicit reflexivity regarding the researchers' positions.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The empirical findings are presented through an integrated theoretical synthesis, evaluating TAP's lifecycle performance, alumni career transformation through Lacanian analysis, and project management vulnerabilities under crisis conditions.

Alumni Outcomes and Theoretical Lacanian Identity Integration

Data from 16 alumni across Batches 1 to 6 demonstrate that TAP was remarkably effective in achieving immediate VET outcomes. Over 85% of interviewed graduates secured formal employment in hotels, tour agencies, and river cruise lines shortly after graduation. However, applying Lacanian psychoanalysis reveals a much deeper socio-psychological transformation.

Before joining TAP, participants described themselves as 'invisible', 'ashamed', or 'without a future' due to poverty and lack of formal state education credentials. TAP operated as a structured gateway into the Symbolic Order of the global tourism economy. By mastering specialized languages (English and German) and professional service etiquette, students aligned themselves with the expectations of the 'Big Other'.

The findings of the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP) through a theoretically informed lens. Drawing on the frameworks established in section II, the analysis integrates perspectives from the Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC), Vocational Education and Training (VET), sustainability theory, and Lacanian concepts of identity formation. The findings are organized into three key dimensions: alumni outcomes, prospective student perspectives, and management insights, each of which reflects different aspects of project effectiveness and sustainability.

Embedded Qualitative Evidence (Alumni) *"When I was working in my village, nobody looked at me. But when I put on the TAP formal tour guide uniform and wore my student ID badge, I felt like a completely different person. I was no longer just a poor orphan at the monastery; I was a professional representing my country to international guests. The uniform was my mirror—it gave me respect."*

As illustrated by Alumni, symbolic objects (uniforms, badges, certificates) functioned precisely as Lacanian identificatory anchors during the 'mirror stage' of their professional lives. Wearing the uniform allowed marginalized youth to repair fragmented pre-project identities, satisfying their deep 'desire for recognition' within formal society. Even following the post-2021 collapse of tourism, alumni reported that this internalized professional identity provided enduring psychological resilience, enabling them to transition into secondary service sectors.

Project Management Lifecycle (Pmlc) Constraints: The Iron Triangle Analysis

Evaluating TAP through the Project Management Lifecycle reveals stark contrasts between successful execution and flawed strategic planning:

1. Initiation & Planning Phase Deficits: During initiation (2014), TAP's business case relied entirely on 100% grant financing from Foederverein Myanmar. The initial project design completely omitted risk mitigation strategies for donor exit or geopolitical shocks, treating grant funding as an indefinite constant.

2. **Execution & Scope Excellence:** Operationally, TAP executed its curriculum flawlessly. The 9-month modular structure successfully balanced intensive classroom language instruction with practical internships. Scope management was highly effective, continuously adapting modules to incorporate emerging tourism trends.
3. **The Cost-Constraint Paradox:** Because TAP was fully subsidized, it offered free tuition and stipends, removing financial barriers for underprivileged youth. However, this total subsidization created a 'dependency syndrome'. When political events in 2021 forced international donor freezing, the project had zero financial reserves or internal revenue mechanisms, causing immediate operational collapse.

DISCUSSION

Moving beyond descriptive narrative, this section critically analyzes the scholarly implications of TAP's trajectory, advancing theoretical discourse on project management in fragile contexts.

Beyond The Iron Triangle: Proposing The 'Resilience Square'

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the critical expansion of classical project management theory. Standard PMLC literature (Atkinson, 1999; Kerzner, 2017) evaluates project success through the Iron Triangle of Time, Cost, and Scope. The empirical evidence from TAP proves that in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (FCAS), the Iron Triangle is fundamentally insufficient.

TAP achieved perfection across Time (on-time cohort completions), Scope (high-quality curriculum delivery), and Cost (operating strictly within donor budget). Yet, the project failed institutional survival. Therefore, this study formally proposes the '**Resilience Square Framework**', which establishes **Sustainability / Institutional Adaptability** as a mandatory fourth core constraint alongside Time, Cost, and Scope from the very inception of project initiation.

Reconceptualizing Donor Dependency in Crisis Contexts

Our findings align with and extend development critiques by Bebbington (2005) and Moyo (2009). Prolonged single-donor reliance undermines organizational autonomy and stifles institutional innovation. In fragile settings, donor dependency is not merely a financial vulnerability; it is a structural hazard. When external shocks occur, donor agencies often face legal, political, or ethical mandates to freeze funds immediately. Non-profit educational projects that have failed to build local revenue-generating enterprise models are left completely defenseless.

Transferable Lessons for Development Programs in Fragile Environments

From the analysis of TAP's suspension, three transferable strategic lessons emerge for international development agencies and NGOs operating in volatile regions:

Dual-Track Financial Architecture: Projects must mandate from Year 1 that donor funds decrease incrementally, matched by an escalating percentage of locally generated social enterprise revenue.

Institutionalized Industry Embeddedness: Relationships with private sector employers must evolve from informal internship placements into formal co-investment partnerships (e.g., corporate sponsored seats, fee-for-service customized staff training).

Psycho-Social Identity Construction as a Core VET Metric: VET evaluators must measure graduate resilience and identity formation alongside employment percentages. A strongly constructed professional identity enables graduates to adapt and survive during severe economic sector collapses.

RECOMMENDATION

To operationalize the findings and provide actionable guidance for development practitioners, this study outlines a comprehensive, self-sustaining model designed to replace fragile single-donor structures.

The Operational Architecture of the Hybrid Social Enterprise Model

The three core operational pillars of the proposed Hybrid Model are outlined below

Pillar 1: Internal Revenue-Generating Social Enterprises (Social Business Labs): The vocational institution establishes commercial service units—such as a student-operated 'Training Café', a boutique 'Monastic Eco-Lodge/Guest House', and a local tour operation desk. These units serve dual functions: providing authentic, high-quality practical training grounds for students while generating steady commercial cash flow to subsidize operational costs.

Pillar 2: Diversified Multi-Channel Capital Structure: Financial risk is distributed across four distinct streams: (a) Commercial social enterprise profits (40%); (b) Private sector corporate sponsorships and fee-for-service B2B training (25%); (c) Sliding-scale student fee structures with income-share agreements (ISAs) for affluent students (15%); and (d) Targeted international donor grants reserved strictly for capital expansion and scholarships for the poorest youth (20%).

Pillar 3: Institutionalized Capacity & Alumni Ecosystems: Implementing 'Train-the-Trainer' initiatives ensures local instructional autonomy, removing dependence on foreign volunteers. Concurrently, establishing a structured Alumni Mentorship and Micro-Equity Network enables successful graduates to mentor students, offer job placements, and contribute to an institutional endowment fund.

Strategic Implementation Roadmap For Project Managers

Table 2 outlines a phased, actionable execution matrix for transitioning donor-funded projects into resilient hybrid structures.

Implementation Phase	PMLC Focus	Key Strategic Actions & Milestones	Sustainability Key Performance Indicators
Phase 1: Foundation (Months 1–6)	Initiation & Planning	Conduct market feasibility analysis; register legal social enterprise entity; establish baseline donor exit strategy.	Completed social business plan; legal entity approval; 20% co-funding secured.
Phase 2: Launch & Integration (Months 7–18)	Execution & Monitoring	Launch Training Café/Guest House; embed enterprise shifts into curriculum; implement sliding-scale fees.	30% operational costs covered by enterprise revenue; 100% internship placement.
Phase 3: Scale & Diversify (Months 19–36)	Controlling & Adaptation	Formalize B2B corporate partnerships; scale enterprise capacity; launch Train-the-Trainer program.	60% self-generated revenue; 5 local trainers certified; donor grant ratio reduced to 20%.
Phase 4: Institutional Resilience (Year 3+)	Sustainable Maturity	Establish Alumni Endowment Fund; institutionalize contingency reserves for crisis response.	100% financial self-reliance for core operations; 3-month operational crisis cash reserve.

CONCLUSION

This study conducted a rigorous project management and sustainability evaluation of the Tourism Assistant Project (TAP) in Mandalay, Myanmar. By bridging the Project Management Lifecycle (PMLC), Vocational Education and Training (VET) theory, and Lacanian psychoanalytic perspectives, the research provides a holistic

evaluation of how socio-educational interventions operate, empower participants, and ultimately succumb to structural vulnerabilities in fragile contexts.

The findings demonstrate that TAP achieved remarkable success during its operational lifecycle, equipping over 300 marginalized youth with high-value technical skills and facilitating profound personal identity transformation. Entering the symbolic order of the global tourism sector allowed participants to reconstruct fragmented self-perceptions and attain lasting social recognition. However, TAP's fatal strategic flaw lay in its single-donor architecture during initiation and planning. When external political shocks hit Myanmar in 2021, the lack of financial diversification resulted in immediate program collapse.

To advance scholarship and practice, this manuscript introduced "Resilience Square"

Framework mandating sustainability as a core project constraint and operationalized a Hybrid Self- Sustaining Model. By integrating social enterprise revenue, diversified funding streams, and deep

industry partnerships, non-profit educational initiatives can build structural resilience, ensuring that vital educational interventions survive external shocks and deliver enduring social impact in the world's most vulnerable regions.

Limitations And Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into project management in fragile settings, its findings are subject to limitations. As a single-case qualitative study focused on a tourism vocational program in Myanmar, the empirical findings may not fully capture dynamics in non-service industries or different geographic conflict zones. Future research should empirically test the Hybrid Model across diverse vocational sectors (e.g., technical trades, agriculture) and examine long-term financial performance under varying levels of political instability

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