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# A Case Study of Western Teachers' Perceptions of Myanmar High School Student College Readiness in Western Society

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## **Introduction**

College readiness has long been a goal of many secondary teachers and schools throughout the world (Spring, 2018). However, college readiness is a complex ideal and is often confused with college acceptance or academic readiness. Students making a transition from secondary to post-secondary have needs beyond those of an academic nature, and must also be prepared for a social and emotional transition to be successful in college (Conley, 2015). The barriers to college success are even greater for students transitioning internationally to pursue post-secondary academics (Guantum et al., 2016). Students from the Union of Myanmar desiring to make a transition to a Western nation for post-secondary academics not only face all of these transitional barriers but often also face additional barriers because of the unique political situation of their home country. It is important to understand the barriers these students face to ensure a successful transition for the students as well as the host colleges and universities.

## **The History of Education in Myanmar**

The Union of Myanmar spent nearly half a century under a government-enforced communication ban, leaving virtually no literature regarding modern educational practices in the country. Education in Myanmar was once a significant priority. At the time of Myanmar's independence from British rule in 1948, it claimed the highest literacy rates of any country in Southeast Asia (Oo, 2015). Liberal education was virtually eradicated during the years of military dominance (1948-2010), and laws that removed all non-government issued texts were enforced (Kipgen, 2016). Textbooks were used to indoctrinate the youth into military subservience rather than for academic study, and the freedom of education was denied to all Myanmar citizens. This denial of education included closing nearly all private and international schools and many universities, and outlawing community gatherings for the purposes of mass education. The governmental bans also succeeded in limiting students' opportunities to acquire a post-secondary

education outside of the country for two reasons: first, the closing of the country's borders made leaving the country difficult for all citizens; second, students who managed to leave the country did not have the educational background necessary to succeed or even enroll in post-secondary institutions elsewhere (Oo, 2015).

Myanmar's desire for education remained strong despite the half-century of military rule. Reforms to reinstate a quality educational system began quickly after the change to a more democratic government in 2010 (Kipgen, 2016). However, change has been slow to be realized and hampered by conflicts among different branches of the nascent democratic government (Hays, 2014). According to Hays (2014), the average adult in the country has received only 2.8 years of schooling. Currently, the public education system lasts ten years or grade levels, and only those students that pass the comprehensive exam every other year are eligible to continue into the upper grades. Students take the university matriculation exam at the end of the tenth year. Students who pass the exam and receive a high school diploma are eligible for postsecondary study within the country. Students who fail the exam, attend private schools, or attend international English-speaking schools are not eligible to attend university in the country. Because of these structures, students and their families must elect early in their schooling whether to attend a private or international school with the hope of being accepted into an international college or university, or remain in the national schooling system which often does not provide the students with the requirements for international college acceptance (Hays, 2014).

Many positive changes have been present in the country since the formation

of the elected government in 2015. For example, lower secondary schools (grades 7 and 8) have officially become free to the public, and grants for free tuition in upper secondary (grades 9 and 10) have been extended to over 40,000 students (Oxford Business Group, 2016). International schooling has also been re-established in the country. According to Rose (2017), the number of international schools in the Union of Myanmar had increased from 25 schools in 2012 to 43 schools in 2016. The number of students attending international schools had also increased from 6,700 to 11,800 during the same four-year period. As a result, many Myanmar students have begun seeking opportunities to advance their education in Western colleges and universities. The number of students seeking opportunities to continue their education outside of the country accelerated rapidly and has increased the need to identify college readiness indicators (Oo, 2015).

Unfortunately, there have been many significant political shifts in the Union of Myanmar since we conducted this study in 2019. During the period the study was conducted, Myanmar was still operating under a more democratic state and reestablishing quality education for its citizens. However, in February 2021, the military in Myanmar reassumed control of the nation's government and public education. The new government enacted a state of emergency protocols for one year, and an initial nationwide school shutdown occurred. Many schools were required to reopen in May and June of 2021. Still, due to the significant violence and restrictions on freedom throughout the nation, public education is currently not a priority (BBC World News, 2022). Approximately 300,000 teachers in the country have joined the Civil

Disobedience Movement, a group designed to protest the coup by stopping work, further disrupting educational opportunities in the country (San, 2021).

Despite the lapse of the official one-year state of emergency, the country is still functioning under the state of emergency protocols. The government has promised to hold a democratic election when the country has returned to a state of peace (BBC World News, 2022). Unfortunately, no end to military hold on the country is in sight, as the nation is currently on the brink of all-out civil war (Goldman, 2022). This situation emphasizes the need for students to find and succeed in educational opportunities outside of the country.

### **College Readiness**

College readiness, as defined by Conley (2007), is “the level of preparations a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfers to a baccalaureate program” (p. 5). College readiness indicators have proven to be an effective measure of student success for students transitioning to postsecondary education in various settings (Bragg & Taylor, 2014; Wibrowski et al., 2017). College readiness has been linked to college acceptance and success but does not guarantee success in college, either academically or personally (Conley, 2015). Students transitioning from secondary to postsecondary educational settings have a difficult transition even when the secondary setting is close to home or in a familiar environment (Bonner & Thomas, 2017).

In addition, students who are also transitioning to a new country or a new culture face an even greater variety of

barriers to success (Lee et al., 2018).

According to Gautam et al. (2016), Hensley et al. (2015), and Leong (2015), it is difficult for any student to transition from an Eastern to Western culture, but students from Myanmar are new to the requisites of tertiary education in different countries, as they did not have the opportunity for international study before 2010. Regardless of whether the student is making a local transition or a global transition, it is partly the responsibility of educators to assuage the difficulty of these transitions. Educators working with students preparing for this transition can provide significant insight into the students’ preparedness to face these challenges.

Determining the perceived college readiness of students to make an international transition smoothly and successfully will allow students, educators, and all other stakeholders to make informed decisions about preparing students to navigate the transition. Multiple studies have demonstrated the benefit of including college readiness training before the college transition (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014; Wibrowski et al., 2017). Despite the inclusion of many college readiness skills in traditional secondary education, a more extensive delivery of these skills is still needed, as most students are still entering college unprepared (Leeds & Mokher, 2020). For international students, the necessity of these skills is more significant as they also face the additional challenge of cultural and language transitions within the confines of this academic transition (Perry, 2016).

### **Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this case study was to explore eight Western teachers’ perceptions of Myanmar-based high school

student college readiness to transition to a postsecondary educational setting in a Western country. The following research question guided the study: What are the perceptions of Western high school educators serving at a United States-based preparatory school in Myanmar regarding their students' college readiness in Western society?

## Method

### Methodology

This study aimed to understand the perceptions of Western high school educators regarding their Myanmar high school students' college readiness for the transition to postsecondary education in Western society. We decided that the best methodology to acquire data and understand this phenomenon was through an instrumental case study design. According to Creswell (2012), in case study research, a single case is chosen to emphasize and illustrate a larger issue. The site of a United States-based preparatory school located in Myanmar chosen for this study was ideal for illustrating the overall need for determining Myanmar high school student college readiness in Western society and was accessible for research purposes.

### Setting

The site chosen for this study was an English-speaking private school in an urban setting within the Union of Myanmar. The school functioned for profit, intending to prepare all students of acceptance into a college or university in a Western nation. A total of 64 foreign teachers were employed to educate approximately 1100 students from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade following curriculum requirements created for public schools in the United States. Except for the Spanish language teachers,

all teachers at the school were required to be native English speakers. The students communicated solely in English, and all student and teacher interactions were completed in English on campus. At the time of the study in 2019, the school was in its seventh year of operation.

### Participants

As described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), purposeful sampling was used to choose participants for this study. Eight teachers participated in the study (Angela, Brad Smith, Cheese, Demetrio, Hohenheim, Kelly, Quincy, and Rene), all of whom taught classes with 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students when the study was conducted. All participants were identified through pseudonyms that they had chosen for themselves in this study. Seven of the eight teacher participants were native English speakers and were educated in the United States. Demetrio, one teacher participant, was a native Spanish speaker and was educated in Spain. He was also fluent in English, though he had learned English as a second language. All teachers who were asked to participate agreed to participate in the study. The eight teacher participants were also the only teachers that served as direct instructors of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students at the time of the study, providing a 100% participation rate.

### Data Source

All eight teachers serving 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students at the host school were asked to participate in the study, and all of them agreed to participate. Teacher participants were interviewed individually using a semi-structured, open-ended questioning approach. The interview guide contained 10 questions and sample questions, such as "How prepared do you

feel your students are to attend college in Western society? What aspects of the transition do you feel the students are most prepared for? What aspects of the transition do you feel the students are least prepared for?" were asked.

## **Procedures**

Prior to the collection of any data, the Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the authors' university. Teacher participants were recruited through a formal letter outlining the study and requesting participation via email. Consent forms were secured from all teachers willing to participate before conducting interviews. Teacher participant interviews occurred after school or during a teacher planning period. Interviews were scheduled to fit the needs of the teacher participants and were conducted in the teacher participants' classrooms or homes within the school. These interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Participants' information and responses were kept anonymous as all participants were identified through pseudonyms.

## **Data Analysis**

Interview responses from the teacher interviews were recorded using audio software, and the audio recordings were transcribed into a text file. The interview transcripts were coded first by the first author and then codes were categorized and compiled by both authors separately. Both authors then compared categories and reached a consensus to determine the emergent themes described by Saldaña (2016). Coding was an iterative process in which codes were developed with one research perspective, then recoded through a different perspective to increase variance and ensure proper theme

emergence. Open coding processes were used to analyze the data, in which codes were created from the interview responses. Codes were then organized into themes based on codes that were most similar and occurred most frequently (Saldaña, 2016). The most prominent themes from the analysis process are presented in the findings.

## **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, measurement tools are often subjective, and therefore it is the researcher's job to introduce an appropriate level of rigor (Merriam, 2009). Trustworthiness has been defined as akin to quality in qualitative studies and is dependent on four indicators: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2009). For credibility, member checks were performed, a process in which collected data and written findings are shared with all the interview participants to ensure the information provided by the participants is accurate (Merriam, 2009). Member checks for all of the interviews were performed via email or in-person, depending on the availability of the participants. To address transferability, the final report includes a thick description of the participants, the setting, and the findings of the research. It also includes direct participant quotations to increase the availability of useful data. To ensure dependability, the first author provided transparency in the study of his role as both a teacher at the Myanmar-based preparatory school and a researcher. Lastly, to ensure confirmability, procedures for establishing credibility by providing an audit trail and a transparent description of the methods were followed as described by Halpern (1983).

## Findings

Five major themes emerged from the analysis of teacher participant interviews, which were: (a) concerns over language barriers, (b) dependence on adults, (c) mixed feelings over students' ability to make friends, (d) adapting to a new culture, and (e) preparedness for college-level academics. Table 1 shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged from teacher participant interview data, with at least one teacher participant quote representing the theme or sub-theme.

### Theme 1: Concerns over Language Barriers

The teacher participants identified the English language barrier as the most significant barrier facing Myanmar high school student success in all aspects of the transition. Despite the insistence that the Myanmar high school students lacked the necessary language skills to be successful in a postsecondary setting, the level of perceived language skills ranged from "they are not fluent speakers" (Holenheim) to "I'm a little worried. I would generalize that the top third, top 25 percent, I think are very strong, and can read, write, speak, listen well" (Cheese).

The teacher participants explained their concerns over the Myanmar high school students' lacking language skills, and every teacher participant could identify at least one aspect of language that was concerning. Two of the teacher participants (Demetrio and Brad Smith) had concerns over the students' ability to put their thoughts into words. "Even though they are in high levels, grade eleven and twelve, they struggle to express themselves at a proficient level. And I'm saying this being a non-native English speaker" (Demetrio). Brad Smith shared the same perceptions as

Demetrio and stated, "Many of them struggle with clearly explaining research, what they have researched, or their thoughts."

In addition, there existed a dichotomy between the teacher participants as to whether their students' spoken English was or was not problematic. This perception seemed to depend on how willing the teachers were to have the students speak in class and repeat themselves if the teacher did not understand. Cheese stated,

I think their verbal communication skills are maybe one of the weakest elements. That I would like to see the kids practice their speaking. Accents can be strong, and they know it, and you and I know it, and I think sometimes the kids are sensitive to it, and they don't want to speak out loud.

Kelly and Quincy, the two English teachers, also shared their difficulties working with the students to improve their English language skills. Working with language, reading, and writing with the students every day has given them much to consider in their students' language abilities. Kelly expressed his thoughts.

Verbal, I think they are fine. Able to communicate in a casual setting, able to communicate inside the classroom setting. Reading comprehension, I have some serious concerns about some of them, and because of that, it became almost too much of a chore for them to read, so it's kind of a vicious cycle, you know. And writing (pauses) it's really binary. It's either really strong or a horror show. I mean, the simple grammar issues, subject verb agreement, number agreement.

That kind of thing... Some of the other students though, that haven't embraced the idea that you need to be not just functional, but masterful when it comes to English. I think they are going to struggle, and I think they understand that.

Quincy also spoke about the social impacts of the students' language deficits and the potential impacts in the academic setting. He stated, "I'm worried. People aren't going to take them seriously when they have intelligent things to say, because they can't say them intelligently." In addition, Holenheim felt that language skills could be used as a defining factor in determining academic preparedness. He said, "I think they're going to struggle with the language of sophistication. I think they are going to have a really tough time with professors if they are in a large lecture-based setting."

## **Theme 2: Dependence on Others**

Teacher participants identified dependence on adults as one of the major factors in separating whether they felt their students were prepared for their upcoming transition to a postsecondary educational setting in a Western country or not. All eight of the teacher participants shared at least some concern over the dependency of the student group on teachers, parents, and other adults in the community. The teacher participants also identified this theme as being reinforced by the school and culture. "They depend very much on the teachers," stated Demetrio. He later added, "if they go to college without knowing anyone, it will be hard. Cause as I said before, they depend very much on friends and family. So, going from that to being totally in a new place, in a new country, I think it will be hard."

Rene agreed with Demetrio's comments about the dependence on teachers and family. She expressed, "Another thing I don't think they are prepared for is to be immersed in a social, a dorm life, really. Um, because everywhere they have gone here, it's been 'have you done your homework? Have you done your tuition? Where are you going next?' Parents have always dictated, 'you have to do your homework now. You have to go to this school. You have to go to tuition.'"

Holenheim also related this dependency through the guise of a lack of self-advocacy, stating he wished the students were "adaptable in the sense that they can seek out their own help. I think that is really important: seeking out their own individual help. Understanding that they are drowning, and they, when they don't know they are drowning, it's sad."

## **Theme 3: Mixed Feelings over Students' Ability to Make Friends**

In terms of the social aspects of making friends, the perceptions of the teacher participants were split. Half of the teacher participants (Angela, Brad Smith, Kelly, and Quincy) displayed a positive perception of the students' ability to make friends, but the other half of the teacher participants (Cheese, Demetrio, Holenheim, and Rene) perceived certain barriers to the students' making friends.

Confidence over making friends was based on the students' gregarious personalities and their willingness to put themselves in a position to make friends. Angela shared her positive perspective. She responded,

Socializing with other students, cultural immersion, making friends



that are not Burmese, I think is going to be a piece of cake, because when we [students in the College Readiness Class] were applying to colleges... they said, 'we don't care if we are the only Asian student. We don't want a big Asian community; that doesn't matter. So, they were okay being at a school that wasn't diverse.

Quincy shared that making friends would not be a concern for most students because, at the core, people are all similar and want similar things, regardless of culture or where someone grew up. Quincy stated,

I think they are going to be just fine socially. Teaching kids here, teaching kids there, getting into social circles, they're not any different on the whole. I think they are going to have a very easy time making friends, getting into social circles, bonding with other people, which could be a difference coming from somewhere so different. I think our kids here are remarkably similar to kids everywhere else. More so than people think. So, I think that's where they will have the easiest time.

In contrast, the concern over making friends was based on the preparatory school's structure of keeping the same students together throughout their schooling in Myanmar. Holenheim answered the question of students' lack of ability to make friends with depth and insight. He stated, "They have been with the same students for 12 years. Most of them, I think they are going to have to learn how to make friends. They have never had to make friends."

Cheese expressed how language and confidence in language ability can be a

decisive factor in making friends. Cheese expressed,

The jury is out. I think most of our kids are quite gregarious, vocal, and verbal with each other. They can interact in different languages, um, they're navigating a couple of different cultures here, Burmese and Chinese. But I think the lack of comfort in English may be a challenge for a couple of kids, and again I think that is the bottom two-thirds.

#### **Theme 4: Adapting to a New Culture**

The teacher participants were split over their perceptions that their Myanmar high school students would adapt well to a new culture. Five of the teacher participants (Angela, Cheese, Holenheim, Kelly, and Rene) shared anecdotes that led them to believe that the students would struggle to adapt to Western culture. In contrast, the remaining three teacher participants (Brad Smith, Demetrio, and Quincy) felt that students would assimilate quickly into Western culture. Four teacher participants (Angela, Cheese, Holenheim, and Quincy) also shared concerns over student entitlement.

##### ***Sub-theme 1: Mixed Feelings over Student Immersion into Western Culture***

The most conflicted point regarding the students' perceived preparedness for moving to another country from the teacher interviews was the perception of how "Westernized" the students are and how "Westernization" would ease or hinder the cultural transition. Three of the teacher participants (Brad Smith, Demetrio, and Quincy) perceived many values held by the students that will be appreciated in Western culture. Therefore, they thought

adjusting to the cultural shift would not be a significant issue for their students.

For example, Demetrio, a fifth-year Spanish teacher, shared that “these students are exposed to Western culture, you know, lifestyles, music, movies. So, I don’t think they will have a cultural shock.” Quincy mimicked Demetrio’s view, saying that the students are “so web-connected these days that they are so plugged into Western culture in that regard, that I think they are going to be fine.”

The remaining five teacher participants (Angela, Cheese, Hohenheim, Kelly, and Rene) took a contrary view of an easy cultural transition, at least for the long term. For instance, Rene stated,

I think they would like to say they are very prepared to do it. However, most of them have only been there [in the United States] for a week at a time. If at all. Um, and so, I don’t think they are really prepared for that culture shock, you know. Three months in, a year, I mean, they are separating their whole lives from their families and traditional values.

The initial immersion into Western culture did not seem to concern any of the teacher participants, but the impacts of living extensively in a new cultural environment gave many of the teacher participants pauses. As Cheese explained, “they’re conversant with American pop culture, music, videos, T.V., but how much personal interaction they have had with peers is questionable. They don’t interact with many kids from other countries, specifically different languages and different religions.”

### ***Sub-theme 2: Concerns over Entitlement***

The idea that nearly all the students attending the preparatory school in Myanmar are from well-off families and

able to give the students opportunities that others may not have caused some concern among four of the teacher participants (Angela, Cheese, Hohenheim, and Quincy). For example, Cheese spoke at length about entitlement and the related issues that may arise due to being accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle. He stated,

I think our students are financially well off, and finances solve a lot of problems. Having money, and the resources to get what you need when you need it solves lots of problems. But they may struggle a little bit, because there are some significant cultural differences in Asia that we’re not so exposed to. Community, family living, ah, lack of transportation or the ability to drive, self-care, those are the concerns I would have...I think moving to any new country is fraught with challenges, and if your expectations are high, you might be frustrated. Some of our kids have a pretty comfortable lifestyle here.

Hohenheim shared the view that some of the students have had issues due to the comfortable lifestyle that was mentioned by Cheese, stating, “I think that that sense of entitlement, you know they have just been getting a free get out of jail card from their mom and dad. I think that is kind of worrisome for me.”

## **Theme 5: Preparedness for College-Level Academics**

The teacher participants felt that the students' academic ability was the singular aspect of the transition for which the students were most prepared. Every teacher participant had something good to say about the students' academic abilities on some level. Overall, the teacher

participants conveyed a sense of pride and accomplishment about the students' academic prowess. However, the teacher participants also mentioned they believed not all students were academically prepared. They identified specific academic skills they felt were well developed or lacking.

**Sub-theme 1. Mixed Feelings over Student Preparedness for the Academic Transition**

Three of the teacher participants (Demetrio, Kelly, and Rene) felt that the student group was prepared for the academic transition. For example, when asked what she felt the students were most prepared for, Rene responded, "definitely the academics. I mean, no matter what kind of assignment I give them, or what kind of time frame, it always ends up done." Demetrio related strong academic pursuits to the culture in which the students have been raised. "Academically, I think the Asian societies, the study, and having qualifications is really a priority for them. For the whole family, the parents. So, they have that pressure. Um, so most of them, they study hard."

Kelly had a positive take on the students' preparedness for the academic transition. He stated,

In some respects, I think they are very well prepared. More prepared than some of the kids I have taught in the States. Ah, I think from an academic standpoint their desire for academics, they are definitely well prepared and definitely ahead of you know, some of our kids who are just looking for the college experience you know, for the first couple of years. So, I think in that regard, they are.

Despite the sense of academic preparedness that three teacher

participants shared about the students, the other five teacher participants (Angela, Brad Smith, Cheese, Hohenheim, and Quincy) did not feel that every student would be successful academically without help. For example, Angela shared her perception of the dichotomy of academic readiness. She responded,

We have some students who have never had to study for anything, and school has been a piece of cake, and we have some students who I cannot comprehend how they got passed along. So, it's a huge divide in our classroom. It is very clear whose house speaks English. But, are they academically ready to go to college? Absolutely not. I can barely sleep at night because I know who is going to come back home.

Cheese expressed his view of overall student readiness for the academic challenges of college:

I think our top students are adequately prepared...This is my second year at our school here in Myanmar, um, so I have a limited perspective on our school, but I think our top, I'm going to generalize, 25%, 30% are very well prepared. I think they will be successful almost anywhere they choose to go. Our bottom 65% might be more challenged. Does that mean they will fail? Not necessarily, but I think they're going to struggle.

**Sub-theme 2: Lack of Specific Academic Skills**

Teacher participants expanded on the reasons behind the dichotomy of preparedness for college-level academics and mentioned specific skills that the students lack. For example, Hohenheim

shared his view of the difference between studying and reading.

I have dyslexia, um, and I really learned what is studying, and I learned about what it means to study, so I kind of have an understanding. A lot of them say, 'just read. A lot of my academic strategy is to read.' And I say, 'that's not studying; it's you reading.'

Rene shared some of the specific aspects of academics that she sees will be a barrier to a successful academic transition. She stated,

You ask them to summarize things, and they basically copy down word for word what the book says. And, then you try to coach, try, and model, in any way possible, like, we are going to take these five sentences, let's summarize it into one, and it's one of the hardest things for them to do...They definitely need to figure out ways to have better reading comprehension. To summarize, and actually analyze, evaluate, you know, some of those higher-order thinking skills.

Kelly went so far as to identify time management as a barrier to a successful transition regarding independence. He shared, "...It's not that they are lazy, it's not that they are procrastinating, I think they are severely underestimating what needs to be done, and severely overestimating their capacity to do in the time that they have."

### ***Sub-theme 3: Concerns over Academic Integrity***

The final concern that the teachers brought to light in the realm of academics was the difference between academic integrity and cheating in Western and Eastern cultures. Cheese makes his statement bluntly, "I have had some

academic dishonesty, which has really chalked my biscuits." Quincy and Kelly spoke about academic dishonesty and its relation to cultural differences between Eastern and Western countries. When asked what he felt the students were least prepared for, Quincy responded,

Part of me wants to say the stringentness [sic] of academic integrity guidelines in college. Like, it's not out of malicious intent, but the de facto behavior among a lot of the school is that cheating, what we would call cheating, they would call helping each other. And I know that a lot of the teachers have had problems with that.

Kelly expressed his experiences with academic dishonesty and how he handled the situation. He said, "With the 12<sup>th</sup> graders, it's not that routine about 'oh, well, we didn't know what plagiarism was.' Oh, yes, you did. You knew full well and thought you could get away with it."

## **Discussion**

The five themes that emerged through the analysis of the interviews are (a) concerns over language barriers, (b) dependence on adults, (c) mixed feelings over students' ability to make friends, (d) adapting to a new culture, and (e) preparedness for college-level academics.

For the first theme of concerns over language barriers, teacher participants all expressed at least some level of concern over their students' ability to achieve academic success in an English language environment. Despite the students' experience learning in English at the English-speaking school in Myanmar, the teacher participants identified many of the students as having language deficits in English. These deficits may be the most

significant barrier to academic success for the students during and after their transition to a tertiary educational setting in Western society. According to Haugh (2016), many international students who have already completed a similar transition identified language as the most prominent barrier. It is challenging for individuals from East and Southeast Asia to successfully transition to Western colleges because of the subtleties of the English language (Sharaievska et al., 2019). The teacher participants' concern over language is well-founded because fluency has been strongly correlated to academic success in Western nations (Park et al., 2017). The lack of fluency could have far-reaching effects on the students' transitional success, academically and socially, and even interpersonal relationships with professors and university employees (Bista, 2015).

For the second theme of dependence on adults, Myanmar high school students were identified as being more dependent on adults and friends than students in other countries taught by the teacher participants. This is not surprising, as East and Southeast Asian cultures often value family and interpersonal relationships more than other cultures (Tsai et al., 2017). This dependence may manifest itself in various ways when the students arrive at their Western host universities. It is possible that the students are likely to utilize family' and friends' support through technology to minimize the potential effects of homesickness and loneliness. However, it is also likely that the lack of nearby family and close friends may cause or increase feelings of homesickness and loneliness, potentially even having a negative effect on the students' academic standings (Tsai et al., 2017). The lack of familiar dependents could also cause the students to pull away

from the host university or be less involved in their communities and academics from the initial stages of the transition (Ross & Chen, 2015).

For the third theme, teacher participants reported mixed feelings about the Myanmar high school student's ability to make friends. Teacher participants also reported that most of the students in Myanmar have been in school and social circles with the same group of friends for many years and have not had the opportunity or need to make new friends. While the teacher participants stated that they felt the students were an open and gregarious group of individuals, the lack of experience making friends was a cause for concern. Teacher participants were aware that a lack of friends could lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and a lack of community and academic involvement (Bista, 2019). It can be difficult for individuals to put in the time and effort to make friends and is exponentially more difficult while navigating a new culture (Perry, 2016). To ensure a successful transition to college or university in a Western nation, the students need to maintain their positivity and spend the time and energy to make friends, connect with the community, and maintain good mental health (Gautam et al., 2016).

For the fourth theme of adapting to a new culture, the teacher participants felt the Myanmar high school students would transition successfully to a Western country but had mixed feelings over some specific aspects of the transition. All the teacher participants were aware of the difficulty of the initial culture shock and adjustment period associated with a transition of this magnitude (Perry, 2016). Beyond the initial phases of the transition, the teacher participants felt confident in the students'

ability to adjust to Western culture due to the students' experience working with Western teachers. Still, they were also aware that many students have not spent significant amounts of time in Western society and have had little experience engaging with Western peers. This prompted mixed feelings because some teacher participants felt that the students understood the Western culture and cultural expectations through modern media. Other teacher participants thought that the students' understanding of Western culture was based on media. Preconceived notions gained through media are often misaligned with reality (Yen & Dey, 2019). False preconceptions could lead to a much more difficult time for students adjusting to Western culture and exacerbating other transitional issues (Bista, 2019).

In addition, many of the teacher participants also mentioned concerns over entitlement and the behaviors of the Myanmar high school students in utilizing money and parental influence to avoid disciplinary action. The students' sense of entitlement may lead to problems accepting academic and social status, such as grades and social perceptions. This may lead to feelings of loneliness or a lack of connection with the host university or community (Piff, 2014). These feelings of entitlement may also cause the students to find little or no enjoyment in the host university or Western society. Their expectations may distort their reality, causing negative feelings toward the transition and associated aspects (Stiles et al., 2017).

For the fifth theme of preparedness for college-level academics, teacher participants had mixed feelings. There are three potential causes for this dichotomy of

responses. First, teacher participants came from different departments within the college-preparatory school and therefore may have different perspectives on the students' content knowledge. Second, different teachers may also have different expectations for success in their classes and other ideas of preparedness for college-level academics. Third, teacher participants may be expressing confidence or concerns over specific students who stand out in their classes and create a perception based on different individuals or groups of students. Regardless of the cause of these mixed feelings, academic preparedness is paramount in determining a successful transition to a postsecondary educational setting, especially for international students (Lee et al., 2018).

Another concern shared by the teacher participants was about the students' lack of academic skills. Some of the academic skills the teacher participants felt were lacking include reading comprehension, time management, and cognitive skills, such as the students' ability to analyze and summarize information and their unwillingness to engage in challenging cognitive tasks. Regardless of lacking skills, students need to understand their strengths and weaknesses and apply appropriate strategies to ensure academic success in college or university (Stevens et al., 2019).

The teacher participants' final concern is the students' lack of academic integrity. The lack of academic integrity stems from different values within Eastern and Western educational systems: the differing views of what is considered cheating in Western and Eastern systems and the differences in ownership of learning between Western and Eastern systems (Ross & Chen, 2015). Traditionally, Eastern students have been more willing to bend

the rules to ensure higher grades, and Eastern educational systems are more lenient about the consequences of cheating than their Western counterparts (Stiles et al., 2017). As the students move forward in the transition, they need to make a conscious effort to familiarize themselves with the Western expectations surrounding cheating and academic integrity (Bista, 2015).

### Limitations and Future Research

This study has two limitations. The first limitation of this study was the lack of a participant pool in the region of Myanmar. All the teacher participants in this study were associated with only one English-speaking college-preparatory school in the Union of Myanmar. While there are other schools of this type within the country, the poor infrastructure in the country made it impossible to reach different schools to serve in the study. The second limitation was the first author's role as a teacher at the Myanmar-based preparatory school and a researcher. While being employed at the school granted him access to the participants, some probably were wary about divulging information they felt may have been negative toward their school or students. In terms of future research, collecting data from different schools and participant groups within the Union of Myanmar or in similar locations could provide additional insight into preparing students for a significant life transition.

### Summary and A Final Note

This case study explored eight Western teachers' perceptions of Myanmar-based high school student college readiness to transition to a postsecondary educational setting in a Western country. The research question was answered using

findings from individual teacher participant interviews and five themes have emerged. We also discussed the research findings, limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research.

We would like to express our best wishes to the people of Myanmar and are hoping for a peaceful end to the conflict as soon as possible. Our hearts and thoughts are with them as they face this terrible situation. To our knowledge, all the Western teachers teaching at the host school in Myanmar have been safely evacuated from the country. School administrations remaining in the country at the host school are hopeful for a return to normal function in the future.

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Table 1

*Teacher Participant Response by Theme and Sub-Theme*

Theme and Sub-Theme	Example Response
1. Concerns over language barriers	"Many of them struggle with clearly explaining research, what they have researched, or their thoughts." (Brad Smith)
2. Dependence on others	"...they depend very much on friends and family. So, going from that to being totally in a new place, in a new country, I think it will be hard." (Demetrio)
3. Mixed feelings over students' ability to make friends	"I think they are going to have a very easy time making friends, getting into social circles, bonding with other people." (Quincy)  "I think they are going to have to learn how to make friends. They have never had to make friends." (Holenheim)
4. Adapting to a new culture	
i. Mixed feelings over students' immersion into Western culture	"These students are exposed to Western culture, you know, lifestyles, music, movies. So, I don't think they will have a cultural shock." (Demetrio)  "I don't think they are really prepared for that culture shock; you know. Three months in, a year, I mean, they are separating their whole lives from their families and traditional values." (Rene)
ii. Concerns over entitlement	"I think that that sense of entitlement, you know they have just been getting a free get out of jail card from their mom and dad. I think that is kind of worrisome for me." (Holenheim)

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5. Preparedness for college-level academics

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|---|--|
| i. Mixed feelings over students' preparedness for academic transition | “I think from an academic standpoint their desire for academics, they are definitely well prepared and definitely ahead.” (Kelly)<br><br>“Are they academically ready to go to college? Absolutely not. I can barely sleep at night because I know who is going to come back home.” (Angela) |
| ii. Lack of specific academic skills                                  | “I think they are severely underestimating what needs to be done, and severely overestimating their capacity to do in the time that they have.” (Kelly)  |
| iii. Concerns over academic integrity                                 | “What we would call cheating, they would call helping each other. And I know that a lot of the teachers have had problems with that.” (Quincy)   |
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