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Religious Practices in Myanmar's Educational Institutions and their Implications for Tolerance and Inclusivity

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Abstract

Myanmar is a multicultural nation where religion has shaped its history, identity, and education. While Theravada Buddhism is the dominant faith, minority groups practice Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism. Religious influences are evident in various educational systems, including monastic schools, ethnic schools, and Islamic institutions. Buddhism holds a “special position” in education, affecting the learning environment and the recognition of diverse religious identities. Given the strong presence of religion in education and society, it is crucial to understand its role in shaping inclusivity. This study examines religious practices in Myanmar’s educational institutions, focusing on university students’ perceptions in Mandalay and Kachin State. The research applied qualitative Discussions and online surveys to explore how religious practices create opportunities and challenges in fostering inclusive learning spaces. Findings suggest that religious practices can promote moral values but may also lead to exclusion. To address this, the study recommends mandatory civic education in schools to encourage respect and empathy, enhanced teacher training for inclusivity, and open discussions among stakeholders to promote religious understanding. These measures aim to create a more inclusive and diverse educational environment in Myanmar.

Keywords: *Religious Practices, Myanmar’s Educational Institutions, Tolerance, Inclusive Learning Environment*

Introduction

Myanmar is a multicultural nation with a wide range of ethnic groups and religious practices. Religion plays an important and influential role in the history of Myanmar and in defining an individual's identity, as well as in educational development and opportunities. The majority of the Myanmar population adheres to Theravada Buddhism (87.9%), which has a historically crucial role because of its monastic education tradition (Ei Ei Lwin, 2020). However, there are also various minority religions, including Christianity (6.2%), Islam (4.3%), Hinduism (0.5%), Animism (0.8%), and others (0.2%) (Department of Population: Myanmar, 2016). Each religion has distinct influences and contributes to several aspects, including education. For instance, Christianity has made significant contributions to education, particularly in ethnic minority regions such as the Kachin, Chin, and Karen states, where Christianity has a stronger presence (Asian Children’s Missions, n.d.). Madrasahs (Islamic schools) provide education for Muslims in Myanmar, as the national curriculum does not include specific teachings for any religion besides Buddhism (Skidmore & Wilson, 2008).

Religion has however also driven tensions between diverse groups in Myanmar, as seen for example in religious riots in Rakhine state. Similarly, there have been instances of anti-Muslim violence in Meiktila where riots have broken out between Muslims and Buddhists (Sollom and Atkinson, 2013). While there have been incidents of violence between religious communities, there have also been instances of religious leaders promoting peace and harmony (Harvard Divinity School, 2022). Therefore, it is critical to peacefully address and resolve certain challenges and obstacles related to religion.

When one religion predominates in a country, it will likely have a direct or indirect influence on politics and legislation. As a result, minority religions may face challenges. According to the 2008 Constitution, Buddhism has a “special position” (Article 361) that entitles it to privileges and protections that are not available to other religions (Myanmar Constitution, 2008). This contradicts the right to freedom of religion or belief (Article 34) that is also enshrined in the Constitution. In essence, while Buddhism receives preferential treatment, other religious communities face limitations in exercising their faith freely. A report from the International Commission of Jurists has stated that religious minorities, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and others, experience discrimination, violence, and persecution in Myanmar (International Commission of Jurists, 2019). As an illustration, another study

reported that Christians in Myanmar endure forced attempts at conversion to Buddhism, limitations on church construction and religious activities, and even forced labour (Harvard Divinity School, 2021). The Chin Human Rights Organization has documented that in Rakhine State, there have been incidents of restrictions on the religious infrastructures of Christians, and some have faced violent acts restricting their freedom of religion and association. (Chin Human Rights Organization, 2022). This complex intersection of religion, education, and politics in Myanmar reveals the role of religious institutions in shaping the educational landscape and broader social and cultural settings.

This study uses both primary and secondary data to examine the position of monastic schools in promoting Buddhism and the influence of Buddhist practices in educational institution contexts in Myanmar. This study is structured into four specific key sections, beginning with a review of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Following this, researchers present the methodology section by describing the details of research methods and approaches utilized in the research. After that, the authors discuss five key findings of research that portray the religious practices in Myanmar schools and the implications for an inclusive learning environment. Finally, researchers present conclusions and three concrete recommendations for policy and practice to enhance inclusivity in educational settings.

The Influence of Religion in Education

This section reviews relevant literature on the role of Buddhism in education in Myanmar and lays out the objectives of the study.

The literature highlights the role of monastic institutions as providers of basic education to marginalized children in Myanmar (Khin Mar Mar Kyi & Walton, 2023). Through monastic education, Buddhist values, practices, and interfaith understanding are promoted (ibid). Furthermore, monastic education focuses on shaping culture, tradition, and social life through the lens of Buddhist teachings (ibid). A case study by Theingi Soe (2013) emphasizes the enduring nature of monastic education, highlighting its well-established system and richness in imparting Buddhist principles. The monks and educators are essential contributors to children's development by providing formal education and instilling in them the essential tenets of Buddhist culture and ethics. On the other hand, in regions where Buddhists are the majority, there is evidence that Christian minorities face disadvantages and marginalization in education and other social and professional arenas (Zat Khat Kham, 2016, p. 108).

Concerning traditional practices in the education context, Phoenix has revealed the influence of Buddhism on schools and universities, which significantly affects students' learning processes (2023). The author argues that the tradition of paying respect to teachers involves students demonstrating deference and submission, and symbolizes an acknowledgment of inferiority, and establishes a one-way relationship, where the teacher's wisdom and authority are unquestioned. Such instances of discrimination and the dominance of one faith raise concerns about potential inequalities and challenges for students from different religious backgrounds within Myanmar's education system.

Given the undeniable influence of religions such as Buddhism on the mainstream of education and society, it is imperative to understand the dynamics of religious practices within educational institutions. Therefore, this research aimed to fill a gap in the existing research and literature by examining the role of religious practices within public and alternative schools in Myanmar, specifically focusing on the Kachin State and Mandalay Region from 2010 to 2020. Since previous studies have primarily focused on the role of Buddhism in education, this study explores whether religious practices can contribute to opportunities to create an inclusive learning environment that can potentially enhance understanding between diverse cultures and

decrease discrimination in society. The research sought to assess the perceptions of university students on religious practices in educational institutions during their time in basic and higher education and to understand both the challenges and opportunities to foster an inclusive learning environment. The findings of this research are intended to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between religious practices and inclusiveness in the public and alternative schools of Myanmar.

In this context, the term “public school” refers to any school that practices “public school education”, which means applying the education system under the Myanmar National Education Law, 2014 (subsequently amended in 2015). According to the National Education Law 2015, “alternative schools” refer to schools where the national curriculum is modified and taught outside the national education system (National Education Law, 2015: Chapter 6, Section 34). Alternative schools include private or independent schools, monastery schools, and schools owned by regional organizations. An inclusive educational environment is understood here as a classroom that ensures that all students feel intellectually and academically supported, promoting a sense of belonging regardless of their identity, learning styles, or educational background (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, 2021). Multifaith Education Australia pointed out in 2023 that religious practices shape cultures, traditions, and social lives of people across various societies and this influence is evident in the diverse religious practices observed in schools. Examples of such practices include prayer before or during school hours, wearing religious clothing or symbols, celebrating religious holidays, and incorporating religious education into the curriculum (Pew Research Center, 2019). In the context of religious practices in Myanmar, the research team has defined these practices as a broad spectrum of behaviours that reflect the beliefs of different religions and are intertwined with ethnic identity, culture, and traditions, particularly in Myanmar.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The research objectives are:

- To analyse the perceptions of university students of religious practices in public and alternative schools of Kachin State and Mandalay Region from 2010 to 2020
- To explore how religious practices contribute to forming an inclusive learning environment.

The research question is:

- How do religious practices within Myanmar’s educational institutions, notably public and alternative schools, contribute to forming an inclusive learning environment?

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is employed to gather data on religious practices within Myanmar's educational institutions by conducting one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and delivering open-ended qualitative surveys. Primary data was collected from a total of 22 participants who were university students meeting the sampling criteria for religious diversity, ethnicity, and gender. These participants had attended universities in Kachin and Mandalay, as well as public and/or alternative schools during the academic years 2010 to 2020. Our selection process aimed to ensure religious diversity, ethnic representation, and a balanced gender ratio. The choice of Kachin and Mandalay regions as the initial research areas was primarily driven by logistical feasibility and allowing for effective outreach and data collection. Additionally, the Kachin and Mandalay regions offer significant geographical and demographic diversity, with various religious affiliations and a cosmopolitan nature. However, it is recognized that Christianity and Buddhism are dominant in these areas. By studying these regions, researchers

aimed to explore minority experiences within majority religious contexts, as well as the dynamics of minority groups within minority communities.

The qualitative method employed was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), facilitated through an online platform, Zoom Meeting, allowing for open and interactive dialogue among participants. Three university students from Kachin State and two from the Mandalay region participated in a focus group discussion on religious practices in schools. The group consisted of one female, two males, and two representing LGBTQIA+ identities, with backgrounds in Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and atheism, offering diverse perspectives.

Complementing the qualitative insights, the primary data were gathered through surveys distributed to a representative sample of university students in the targeted regions. University students serve as a convenient and accessible group for drawing broader discussions on the study, and they could share their experiences and perceptions of religious practices they encountered in basic and higher education. These surveys included open-ended questions about religious practices within educational institutions and students' perceptions of them. Despite time constraints and security concerns preventing direct interviews, 20 survey responses were collected, featuring participants from varied religious backgrounds, including 17 women, 2 men, and 1 LGBTQIA+ individual. Purposive sampling was utilised, ensuring representation across diverse religious affiliations, while the inclusion of online surveys upheld data security. The study followed the research integrity plan and principles, ensuring the acquisition of informed consent while maintaining confidentiality throughout the study. The participants who took part in the focus group discussions were identified as follows: Mdy01 and Mdy02 from the Mandalay region, K01 and K02 from Kachin state, and KL01 from the Sagaing region.

University Students' Perceptions of Religious Practices

In the survey and focus group discussion data, most respondents initially mentioned the influence of Buddhism on the celebration of religious ceremonies in school. Given the dominance of Buddhism in Myanmar, Buddhist practices are widespread in schools and society in terms of cultures, traditions, and activities. One respondent reported: "Religious practices are applied in many factors and areas depending on the majority religion" (K02, Atheist, Kachin State, January 28, 2024). As a result, most of the religious practices in schools derive directly or indirectly from Buddhism. A participant stated:

The majority of people in Myanmar believe in Buddhism, which greatly influences schools. For example, morning prayers are commonly recited, and even students from different religious backgrounds often memorize Buddhist prayers. From my perspective, religious practices in Myanmar are largely shaped by the dominant Buddhist traditions. (Mdy02, Buddhist, Mandalay Region, January 28, 2024).

Hence, as these findings highlight, religious practices found in schools are perceived to be closely associated with Buddhism.

Religious Practices in Myanmar Schools

The primary data collected from both the Focus Group Discussion and surveys shed light on the prevailing religious practices within Myanmar's educational institutions. Across various dimensions, such practices are deeply rooted and manifest in several ways. First, religious ceremonies and other events are widespread, notably through the celebration of

cultural events such as Kahtein¹ (Kahtina) and Warso² Robe offering ceremonies, and paying homage to teachers, particularly on Teachers' Day. Paying homage to teachers can indeed be regarded as part of religious and cultural practices in Buddhism. Respecting and honouring teachers is an important aspect of Buddhist tradition, as they are seen as guides and sources of wisdom. Additionally, there is engagement in ceremonial activities, such as going on a pilgrimage to the pagoda near the school as part of class activities and attending religious sermons at school, even for students who follow a different religion. Other ceremonial activities include participating in school-based essay writing focused on Buddhist faith-based seasonal festivals. Second, activities within schools predominantly reflect Buddhist-based practices, including collecting funds for Buddhist events, engaging in morning prayers and worship, offering flowers to statues, cleaning the shrine room, and maintaining a Buddha image in classrooms.

However, in specific geographical areas such as Kachin State, where there is a significant presence of Christian students, there are instances of religious choirs performing at schools. This is particularly notable during Christmas celebrations in December, which typically involve activities such as singing carols, choir performances, group prayers, and the exchange of sweets among students. Other religious events are less common. Third, schools observe holidays on specific religious days, such as Thadingyut (a candle-lighting festival) for Buddhists, Eid Mubarak for Muslims, and Christmas for Christians. Finally, religious practices extend to daily interactions within schools, where students greet each other and teachers with Buddhist-based gestures of respect, such as placing palms together. Overall, the primary data underscored the prominent role of religious practices within Myanmar's educational institutions, highlighting a strong influence of Buddhism alongside acknowledgment and accommodation of other faiths through occasional observances and holidays.

Participants' Personal Experiences of Religious Practices

In exploring religious practices among university students, the composition of religious demographics within classrooms and schools, as well as the geographical context, emerged as significant factors. Primary data indicated that the distribution of religious affiliations shapes the religious experiences within educational settings, often leading to the predominance of majority religions with various consequences. This dominance extends to the allocation of resources, such as religious facilities and designated prayer rooms, resulting in a lack of accommodations for minority faiths. For example, a participant from Mandalay (Mdy01) said in the FGD that she experienced a sense of exclusion for being the sole Muslim student among 32 classmates, as a low proportion of Muslim students led to the absence of Islamic spaces.

At the basic education level (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary), the religious practices discussed above are more distinctly observed in the lower secondary and upper secondary schools often incorporating diverse traditions into the curriculum. Furthermore, the incorporation of diverse beliefs and spiritual practices was primarily found in basic education schools. Although some students may have limited exposure to religious practices beyond Buddhism, cultural competency is fostered across diverse religious backgrounds. For instance, traditional snacks are distributed during significant occasions among students from Hindu and Islamic backgrounds. Additionally, celebrations such as Eid Mubarak and Diwali are honoured, alongside Christian Sunday church attendance and Muslim

¹ The word "Kahtein" is derived from a Pali word "Kahtina" meaning firm or durable. The offering of the yellow robes to the monks is considered as one of the most meritorious deeds and important rite and then these are called the Kahtein robes. (Lwin Lwin Mon, 2018, p. 3)

² Waso, the fourth month in the Myanmar calendar, occurs between June and July, coinciding with the summer and rainy seasons. A significant Buddhist practice during Waso is the offering of robes to Sangha members for use during the Buddhist Lent, and these robes are known as Waso robes (Myanmar.gov.mm, n.d.).

evening prayers. However, despite this diversity, certain religions may still hold sway, particularly Buddhism, which tends to be most prominent.

Conversely, higher education institutions witnessed a decrease in overt religious activities, with Buddhism continuing to dominate, albeit with fewer events compared to basic education. Christian events, centred mainly around Christmas, are also observed but to a lesser extent. This shift in religious participation at the university level is characterized by increased flexibility and a broader scope for interreligious interactions. While some students engage in pluralistic programs that embrace diverse religious practices, others, like the Christian participant from Kachin State, may feel limited by the scarcity of events accommodating their faith.

Overall, while higher education fosters open-mindedness and interreligious harmony, it also highlights the potential imbalance in religious representation within university settings. The prevalence of one religion can lead to the isolation and exclusion of minority students, emphasizing the need for inclusive environments that cater to the needs of all students, regardless of their religious affiliations. In essence, the findings underscore the importance of promoting unity and understanding among citizens to foster interreligious acceptance and create harmonious educational environments.

Participants' Perceptions of Religious Practices in Educational Institutions

Among the respondents were those who both agreed and disagreed with religious practices in educational institutions. Out of 22 participants, 8 agreed that religious practices at schools emphasize the importance of religious knowledge for students. Following the teaching of religious practices can have positive impacts on students' lives in both moral and ethical development. Religious practices are acknowledged as guidance in morality, righteousness, and discipline. Additionally, respondents believed that religious practices play a crucial role in nurturing good manners, such as taking care of older people, and assisting those with health conditions.

10 of the 22 participants, including Buddhists, disagreed with religious practices in the school context. They believed that religious practices could lead to inter-religious conflict between majority and minority religious groups since such practices are mostly applied to the majority religion in the school context. Additionally, these inter-religious conflicts can lead to students standing with their co-religionists, as well as disputes and misunderstandings between students of different religious beliefs. This sentiment can extend to a lack of acceptance or tolerance towards diverse religious practices. Gradually, it could become a challenge to engage all students and in turn, could cause psychological distress in, and discrimination against, those from minority religions. A participant provided her experiences of such negative incidents:

According to my own experiences at a younger age, there are fewer chances of understanding religious diversity and more possibility of internal conflicts among young children themselves by thinking their religion is superior in comparison to their friends, even if they may not speak up openly. In this way, religion in education led to differentiation among the diverse religions at schools rather than better cooperation. (Mdy01, Buddhist, Mandalay Region, January 28, 2024).

A respondent with a Buddhist background also mentioned his thinking that the association of religious practices and educational institutions is not good and that such practices are not necessary in the school context. Through education, the mindset and attitude of humanity can be promoted. Another participant with a different religious background recommended: *Since learning means developing critical thinking and humanity, religious practice is not important. I believe that education can guide people to be good. I believe that not only religion can make people good, but also education can do it. (K02, Atheist, Kachin*

State, 28 January 2024). There were some contradictory perspectives about religious practices in school with other respondents not interested in religion and noting that there was no particular teaching about religious perspectives at school.

These findings reflect a diverse range of perspectives regarding the application of religious practices in educational institutions in Myanmar. While some participants accepted the integration of religious practices into schools, citing the positive impact on students' moral and ethical development, others expressed concerns about the potential for inter-religious conflict and discrimination against minority religious students. These contrasting viewpoints underscored the complexity of balancing religious freedom and inclusivity within the educational system. Additionally, some respondents suggested that education itself, rather than religious practices, should be prioritised as a means of promoting moral values and fostering a more tolerant and inclusive society.

Religious Identity, Inclusion, and Exclusion

These findings encompass the emotional responses and perceptions regarding the affirmation or marginalisation of one's religious identity within the school context, taking into account both majority and minority religious perspectives. The data collected further underscore the significant impact of majority and minority religious dynamics within the school environment, indicating that individuals commonly experience feelings of inclusion or exclusion closely linked to their religious identity.

According to the survey data, a notable portion of respondents, 14 people, expressed feelings of exclusion due to the strong dominance of Buddhist religious practices in schools. Among 14 participants, this sentiment was shared by all 13 non-Buddhist participants. These sentiments suggest that the dominance of Buddhist practices in these educational settings has led some respondents to feel marginalised or left out. 5 Buddhist respondents stated that they had never experienced marginalisation because of their religious background. Another respondent expressed uncertainty over the experiences of exclusion, indicating a nuanced perspective on this matter.

Turning to the feeling of being included as a result of religious practices in schools, 11 participants mentioned a sense of inclusion because of their Buddhist religious background. This indicates that some respondents believe that the presence of Buddhist practices in educational institutions fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging for them. However, 8 other Buddhist respondents from Mandalay, a Buddhist majority region, said they were not feeling included, demonstrating the wide diversity of experiences among individuals with Buddhist affiliations.

The findings demonstrated the varied emotional reactions of survey respondents to religious practices within educational institutions, highlighting the influence of Buddhism's prevalence and the complexity of feelings associated with inclusion and exclusion within the school context. The descriptive data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' feelings of exclusion and inclusion.

Number of participants who felt excluded	Number of participants who felt included
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Feeling Exclusion	14	Feeling Inclusion	11
Not Feeling Exclusion	5	Not Feeling Inclusion	8
Neutral	1	Neutral	1

Challenges and Opportunities in Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

Religious Practices as a pathway to inclusive learning opportunities

17 out of 22 respondents expressed a positive outlook on diverse religious and cultural backgrounds within the learning environment. They shared experiences of learning and growing through the interactions that often took place within and between various religious groups at school. They anticipated that between the different groups, there would be cooperation and teamwork, seeing the diversity of religious beliefs in their peers as an opportunity rather than a barrier. They also expressed that a diverse religious environment could be a path to understanding other religions and widening their perspectives.

9 of the participants even found value in participating in religious practices, such as reciting prayers. One FGD participant from Mandalay mentioned that religious participation helped her acquire Pali language skills, which they viewed as a unique opportunity. Additionally, it is intriguing how the experiences of one Muslim participant stood out from the rest, especially concerning the grouping of individuals by faith. This participant reflected on her own experiences and compared them with the interreligious dynamics she witnessed. She noted that within her circle of friends, she received respect and encountered no discrimination due to her religious identity. She interpreted these experiences as the positive outcomes of a foundation built on mutual respect among friends. These divergent experiences contributed depth to comprehending interreligious dynamics within the school environment.

The school environment, whether upper secondary (high) school or university, plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious identity. Participants also shared how their experiences in these settings showed understanding and respect for different religious practices in these school settings. Furthermore, participants reported that there was no criticism or discrimination towards different religious practices at their schools. This environment of mutual understanding and respect was seen as a significant opportunity for promoting tolerance.

Regarding the cultural implications of religious praying hand gestures within educational settings, participants acknowledged their association with Buddhism but noted surprising acceptance from Christian participants, who viewed them as cultural rather than religious markers. This suggested that fostering mutual respect among students with diverse religious beliefs should take precedence over religious symbolism. Participants suggested that schools could educate students about the cultural and religious nuances of gestures to promote a more inclusive environment.

In summary, participants highlighted the positive impact of religious practices in fostering inclusive learning environments, emphasizing diversity as an opportunity for cooperation and broadening perspectives. Individual experiences, such as language acquisition and the absence of discrimination, offered valuable insights into religious inclusion dynamics within schools, underlining the importance of promoting mutual understanding and respect among students. This fosters a culture of tolerance and acceptance, shaping students' religious identities positively in educational settings.

Religious practices as a challenge to inclusivity in educational settings

Though there were positive perspectives on religious practices in the school context which were often considered as opportunities to foster inclusivity in learning environments, there were also critics who saw these practices as obstacles to overcome in creating inclusive learning environments. Regarding challenges, participants expressed both current and potential difficulties in creating an inclusive learning environment within a society of multiple faiths and also made suggestions that could help navigate the challenges to enhance inclusiveness in the learning environment.

Participants expressed concerns about fear and misunderstanding between different religions and ethnicities, complicating efforts to create an inclusive environment. They identified challenges such as interaction difficulties among student groups from different faiths, potential negative perceptions of each other's religions, impacts on students' religious identities, and social cohesion between religious groups. They also noted the possibility of minor conflicts and misunderstandings. One of the FGD participants noted “These conflicts are like cold wars” (Mdy01, Buddhist, Mandalay Region, January 28, 2024), signifying the passive-aggressive nature of the disputes which would often arise from disagreement, differing opinions, differing outlooks, and views between student groups. They further noted that these conflicts are caused by not understanding the basic practices of other religions and are unnecessary and unintended most of the time.

It has been observed that participants, reflecting on their experiences at school, emphasized the necessity of an inclusive curriculum that cultivates an atmosphere of acceptance for all religious affiliations. They pointed out the obstacles encountered by minority religious communities, such as incidents of bullying, social isolation, and exclusion from activities associated with particular religious customs. There was a shared concern among participants that a curriculum focused solely on one religion, particularly Buddhism in this context, with its comprehensive examination of Buddhist philosophy, history, and practices at the basic education level, might intensify these challenges, potentially amplifying feelings of marginalization among minority groups.

Furthermore, they noted the potential for bias from teachers and students of different faiths, further emphasizing the need for equal treatment and respect for diversity. The ongoing political climate in Myanmar was also identified as a hindrance to a positive learning environment. Notably, students described the risk of their own religious beliefs being neglected due to the dominant focus on another religion. This feeling, coupled with the concerns mentioned before, suggested the need for a more inclusive approach to education within the school.

These instances have sparked concern that the challenges posed by religious practices may overshadow the opportunities for creating inclusive learning educational settings that prioritize incorporating students' values and beliefs, while also fostering emotional, social, and academic growth for all learners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research findings on religious practices in Myanmar's educational institutions offer a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between Buddhism as the dominant religion and minority faiths within school settings. While Buddhism significantly shapes religious practices in schools, efforts to accommodate other faiths, such as Christianity - particularly in regions like Kachin State, are made. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, with some students feeling marginalized due to the dominance of Buddhist practices. This highlighted the necessity of fostering inclusive environments that cater to the needs of all students, regardless of their religious affiliation, and promoting unity and understanding among students to foster interreligious acceptance and create harmonious educational environments.

Moreover, the research highlighted the prevalence of both opportunities and challenges in creating an inclusive learning environment within a diverse religious society. While some perceive religious diversity as a catalyst for mutual understanding, others are concerned regarding potential conflicts and biases. This highlights the imperative for concerted efforts to promote tolerance and equal treatment for all religious groups, ensuring every student feels valued and included. The findings emphasize the predominance of challenges over positive opportunities, thereby providing a comprehensive exploration of the role of religious practices in shaping the inclusive learning environment in Myanmar's educational landscape. While religious practices can foster cooperation, tolerance, and acceptance among students, they also have the potential to marginalize minority religious groups and hinder inclusivity. Effectively addressing these challenges requires navigating the complexities of religious diversity to prioritize inclusiveness while promoting students' holistic development.

Based on the research findings, researchers would like to provide several key recommendations to educational institutions and policymakers. First, educational institutions, including public and private schools, civil society, and non-profit organizations, should promote mutual respect and understanding of diverse religions among students. This approach aims to create an inclusive learning environment free from discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization based on religious practices. Second, researchers recommend that policymakers—including the Ministry of Education, the National Unity Government, the Deputies of Monastic and Ethnic Education Systems, and profit and non-profit organizations related to education—formulate education policies and regulations with careful consideration of the impact of religious practices in the educational context. It is crucial to design curricula and educational practices that avoid negative and challenging consequences for both basic and higher education students. By updating the curriculum to reflect religious practices, policymakers can create inclusive learning environments that respect and incorporate religious diversity in teaching and learning settings. The data suggest that educational institutions should initiate transparent dialogues and panel discussions with various stakeholders from religious and public sectors. These discussions can raise awareness and foster a better understanding of diverse religious beliefs, promoting a more inclusive and respectful educational environment. Finally, researchers suggest that scholars and other researchers conduct comparative analyses of religious practices in different areas. This research could provide valuable insights into how religious practices influence education across various contexts, contributing to the development of more effective and inclusive educational policies and practices.

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