

**Safe distance, high stakes: The potential and pitfalls of
participatory action research as a decolonising methodology in
Myanmar**

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Abstract

Traditional research methodologies have long been likened to a mosquito — extracting what is needed from communities and leaving little behind — perpetuating colonial legacies and underscoring the need for participatory and emancipatory approaches. This paper reflects on over three years of evidence collected through two action research cycles with local education researchers from six States and Regions of Myanmar, drawing on Feekery's (2023) 7Cs Framework for Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an analytical lens. There are growing calls for decolonising research in emergency settings, and PAR represents a potential solution, yet its application in conflict-affected contexts remains underexplored, particularly regarding the heightened risks borne by local researchers. This paper argues that who bears the risk matters as much as who designs the research. PAR can only fulfil its decolonial potential in conflict settings when the safety and agency of local researchers are placed, and kept, at the centre of every research decision.