

Project Luminary: Learning, Responsibility, and Social Change

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Abstract

A comprehensive understanding of Myanmar's educational crisis extends beyond the needs of disrupted schooling access and institutional collapse. A significant part of the root cause of this crisis is a long-standing pedagogical culture of rote memorization, exam-centered learning, and fear-based discipline. These impediments have long shaped students' intellectual, emotional, and civic development. Project Luminary, a youth-led civic education initiative founded by undergraduate students at Parami University, examines how alternative educational spaces can respond to this crisis by cultivating critical thinking, mentorship, social responsibility, and participatory learning. Drawing on Project Luminary's programme experience, participant feedback, and an exploratory study on perfectionist tendencies among Myanmar students, we show how rote-oriented schooling produced a fear of failure, dependence on external validation, and limited confidence in questioning authority. In contrast, Project Luminary's programmes in higher-education access, critical social engagement, and applied research training reposition learners as reflective civic actors rather than passive recipients of information. We ultimately argue that education in Myanmar must evolve beyond memorization toward civic transformation. In the context of post-coup instability, youth-led initiatives such as Project Luminary demonstrate how students themselves can become educational actors by creating spaces that preserve not only access to learning but also civic imagination, intellectual agency, and social responsibility.