

## Trauma-Informed Practices and Social-Emotional Learning in Myanmar's Community-Led Schools

Lugyi No

College of Education, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts, USA

\*Corresponding author, E-mail: [Lugyi\\_No@student.uml.edu](mailto:Lugyi_No@student.uml.edu), [lugyino@gmail.com](mailto:lugyino@gmail.com)

Received 2025-10-15; Revised 2026-05-21; Accepted 2026-05-31;

Published online: 2026-06-05

### Abstract

Myanmar's protracted conflict, intensified by the 2021 military coup, has severely disrupted formal education and deepened psychosocial needs among children. Community-led schools, established across ethnic regions both before and after the coup, have become vital in sustaining learning, cultural continuity, and psychosocial well-being. This paper reviews how trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning (SEL) are integrated into these schools to address the layered effects of violence, displacement, and chronic instability. The review draws on peer-reviewed literature, NGO reports, and policy documents published from 2010 to early 2025, identified through searches of academic databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed) and websites of relevant humanitarian and education organizations. Evidence from Myanmar and global literature shows that predictable routines, culturally responsive pedagogy, and SEL activities help foster resilience, belonging, and recovery. Teachers play a dual role as educators and emotional supporters, while communities contribute through engagement and culturally rooted practices. The review also highlights key challenges, including limited resources, teacher well-being, and weak referral systems. These insights contribute to broader discussions on how education systems in conflict-affected and fragile settings can integrate academic and psychosocial support in sustainable, locally grounded ways.

**Keywords:** *Trauma-informed education, Social-emotional learning, Community-led schools, Myanmar, Conflict-affected education*

---

### 1. Introduction

Protracted civil war and the February 2021 military coup have caused Myanmar to endure one of the world's longest-running humanitarian crises (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In many of the country's contested territories, the collapse of state-administered services has left entire communities without access to formal schooling (Karen Human Rights Group, 2024). To fill this gap, ethnic armed organizations, community-based education departments, and local governance bodies have established thousands of community-led schools (Lall, 2021). These schools are often staffed by volunteer teachers, supported by parents, and coordinated under the leadership of monastic institutions, church networks, or village committees (South, 2016; Save the Children, 2023). The physical spaces for learning may include temporary structures, repurposed community halls, or makeshift classrooms in displacement camps (World Education Thailand, 2016). Alongside core academic subjects, these schools emphasize psychosocial support,

recognizing that education in conflict zones must address both cognitive and emotional needs (Arlini et al., 2023). By maintaining daily routines, structured lessons, and a sense of safety, they help restore a degree of normalcy for children living amid instability (South, 2016).

The compounded effects of ongoing conflict, forced displacement, and migration have inflicted deep and multi-layered traumas on affected populations in Myanmar (Pearson et al., 2025). Population-level surveys following the February 2021 coup revealed that approximately one third of adults experienced probable mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), during the so-called "triple crises" of conflict, pandemic, and economic collapse (Fan et al., 2024). In contexts of protracted humanitarian crisis and displacement, such as exist for Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar, exposure to past trauma and ongoing stressors has been strongly associated with symptoms of depression and PTSD (Ritsema & Armstrong-Hough, 2023). Research further underscores that in addition to direct violence, chronic uncertainty, disrupted social support, and family separations intensify psychosocial strain (Pearson et al., 2025; Ritsema & Armstrong-Hough, 2023). These layered stressors necessitate trauma-informed responses that integrate educational continuity with mental health and psychosocial support.

While existing literature documents the operations of Myanmar's ethnic education systems (South & Lall, 2016; Rinehart, 2024) and evaluates specific remedial programs (Arlini et al., 2023), no existing review has brought together and analyzed how trauma-informed practices and SEL are integrated across Myanmar's diverse community-led school models. NGO reports often focus on program-level outcomes without theoretical framing, while academic studies tend to examine either psychosocial needs or educational access separately. This review addresses this gap by bringing together fragmented evidence from both peer-reviewed and gray literature to examine the intersection of trauma-informed pedagogy, SEL, and community-led schooling in Myanmar's conflict-affected context.

This review contributes to the literature by synthesizing fragmented research on trauma-informed practices, SEL, and community-led schooling in conflict-affected Myanmar. Rather than treating psychosocial support, ethnic education systems, and educational continuity as separate issues, the paper examines how these intersect within community-led schools operating under prolonged instability. The review further highlights how psychosocial support in these contexts is often enacted through culturally grounded relationships, routines, local languages, and community participation rather than formal clinical frameworks. In doing so, the paper identifies important gaps in the current evidence base, particularly regarding teacher well-being, longitudinal research, and the cultural adaptation of trauma-informed approaches.

This paper examines how trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning are integrated into Myanmar's community-led schools, highlighting the roles of teachers and community engagement in sustaining education and psychosocial support in conflict-affected contexts. Specifically, this review addresses the following research questions:

1. How are trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning integrated into Myanmar's community-led schools?
2. What roles do teachers and community engagement play in sustaining psychosocial support in these settings?

3. What are the key challenges and limitations facing trauma-informed education in Myanmar's conflict-affected community schools?
4. What practical recommendations can strengthen trauma-informed practices in this context?

## 2. Methodology

This paper conducts a narrative review of literature on trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning (SEL), and community-led schooling in conflict-affected Myanmar. A narrative review approach was selected because the available literature is diverse, fragmented, and includes both peer-reviewed and gray literature. Literature published between 2010 and early 2025 was identified through searches of Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, and the websites of relevant humanitarian and education organizations, including the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), Save the Children, UNICEF, The Asia Foundation, and Human Rights Watch. Search terms included combinations of “Myanmar” or “Burma” with terms such as “trauma-informed,” “social emotional learning,” “SEL,” “psychosocial support,” “community schools,” “ethnic education,” “conflict-affected,” “children,” and “displacement.” The review included English-language publications addressing trauma-informed or SEL practices, Myanmar’s education context, particularly ethnic and community-led schools, or psychosocial support in conflict-affected settings relevant to Myanmar. Studies focused exclusively on non-conflict settings, adult mental health without educational components, or Myanmar’s formal state school system without reference to community-led alternatives were excluded. Because peer-reviewed research from active conflict zones remains limited, NGO reports, policy briefs, and humanitarian assessments were also included and considered in relation to their methodological transparency and organizational credibility. Findings were organized thematically across four domains: trauma-informed practices, SEL integration, teacher and community roles, and challenges and recommendations.

## 3. Background and Context

Myanmar's ethnic education systems have developed over decades of protracted conflict, operating in parallel to state schools in territories controlled by ethnic armed organizations (South & Lall, 2016; Rinehart, 2024). These systems are typically administered by ethnic education departments, such as those in Karen, Mon, and Kachin areas, which oversee curricula, teacher training, and governance in their respective regions (South & Lall, 2016). In conflict-affected zones, community-led schools often serve as the only accessible form of education for displaced children (East Asia Forum, 2024; Rinehart, 2024).

The historical roots of Myanmar's ethnic education networks can be traced back to ceasefire periods and resistance movements, when schooling was embedded in broader strategies of community resilience (Gravers, 2015; South, 2018). Over time, ethnic education departments institutionalized these systems, providing not only access to learning but also mechanisms for sustaining identity under conditions of conflict and displacement (South & Lall, 2016; Rinehart, 2024). Community-led schools today play a critical role in cultural preservation, extending education beyond literacy and numeracy to safeguard indigenous knowledge systems (South & Lall, 2016; Rinehart, 2024). Instruction often incorporates local languages, protecting linguistic heritage against erosion caused by

displacement and external influence (No, 2024; Saito et al., 2024). Lessons may include traditional stories, songs, and historical narratives that reinforce cultural identity and strengthen students' sense of belonging (Lall, 2021; Tyrosvoutis et al., 2025). Such practices align with global evidence on the building of resilience during conflict, where cultural continuity and intergenerational knowledge transfer support psychosocial well-being (Kohrt et al., 2014; Bath, 2008).

Curricula are frequently adapted to reflect seasonal agricultural cycles, cultural festivals, and local governance practices, embedding education within the rhythms of community life (Anui & Arphattananon, 2021). This integration of cultural elements supports children's sense of belonging, a cornerstone of resilience in times of instability (Kohrt et al., 2014; Jordans et al., 2010). The preservation of cultural values also helps sustain intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that traditions are passed on despite the disruptions of conflict and displacement. These practices not only foster individual identity but also reinforce social cohesion within displaced and conflict-affected populations (Bath, 2008; South & Lall, 2016).

International humanitarian agencies increasingly recognize community-led schools as providers of both academic instruction and psychosocial support (INEE, 2016). In Myanmar, local education initiatives established by community actors during conflict have demonstrated this dual role by combining foundational learning with mechanisms that support emotional well-being and social stability (No, 2024). These schools often attempt to provide relatively safe and structured environments where children exposed to violence and displacement can begin to recover a sense of normalcy (UNICEF, 2022; No, 2024). In line with trauma-informed pedagogy, community-led initiatives integrate predictable routines, play-based activities, and emotionally supportive teaching strategies to mitigate the effects of chronic stress (Cole et al., 2013; Arlini et al., 2023). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is intentionally woven into lessons, helping students build self-regulation, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving skills (Jordans et al., 2010; Arlini et al., 2023). Such approaches align with global evidence showing that educational systems existing in conditions of protracted crisis are not only academic spaces but also vital platforms for psychosocial recovery and resilience (Betancourt et al., 2013; Jordans et al., 2010).

#### **4. Trauma-Informed Educational Practices**

Trauma-informed education recognizes how trauma can shape children's abilities to learn and patterns of behavior, and it brings this understanding into a school's culture, policies, and daily practices (Cole et al., 2013; Avery et al., 2021). In Myanmar's conflict-affected regions, community-led schools have begun to apply these ideas to respond to the challenges of displacement and violence (Lall, 2021; No, 2024). Their efforts include creating structured routines, positive disciplinary practices, and emotionally safe spaces that help restore a sense of trust and stability for students. Global studies similarly describe whole-school trauma-aware models, in which an entire school community is guided by an understanding of trauma, as approaches that seek to provide predictable and supportive environments, helping students engage both emotionally and academically (Brunzell et al., 2015; Stokes, 2022).

Teachers are central to this process. In Myanmar, they are encouraged through local initiatives to recognize signs of distress and to respond in ways that are both culturally

sensitive and contextually relevant (No, 2024; Arlini et al., 2023). Additional research investigating larger geographic regions also highlights the importance of training educators in trauma-informed practices so that lessons can reduce anxiety, build safety, and allow children to participate more fully (Kohrt et al., 2014; Betancourt et al., 2013). Lessons that connect with local languages, stories, and traditions further strengthen belonging, which is vital for children's resilience in unstable environments (Lall, 2021; Saito et al., 2024). Together, these approaches contribute to both academic progress and psychosocial recovery in post-conflict contexts.

SEL has become an important part of trauma-informed practice in conflict-affected schools. SEL helps students build self-awareness, regulate emotions, and strengthen their relationships with others (Jennings, 2015; Jordans et al., 2010). Research shows that activities such as role-playing, cooperative problem-solving, and reflective journaling can give children practical tools for managing stress and emotions in developmentally appropriate ways (Shonkoff, 2012; Jordans et al., 2010). In Myanmar's community-led schools, similar activities are often adapted through culturally familiar storytelling, collective games, and group reflection practices. Group-based activities, including storytelling and morning circles, provide safe and structured opportunities for expression (Bath, 2008). Teachers reinforce these efforts by modelling empathy, active listening, and non-judgmental communication, and this supports trust and connection in the classroom (Cole et al., 2013; Brunzell et al., 2015).

In Myanmar, community-led schools have adapted similar strategies to meet the psychosocial needs of children affected by conflict and displacement. Evaluations of remedial and community-based learning programs highlight how play-based and group activities have promoted both foundational learning and emotional recovery (Arlini et al., 2023). These approaches are supported by school–community–family partnerships that emphasize emotional well-being alongside academic instruction (No, 2024; Lall, 2021). Together, such practices may support resilience, helping children continue their education despite living in situations of ongoing instability.

Trauma-informed education also emphasizes that teacher well-being is central to sustaining effective support for students. Educators working in conflict zones may not only face their own direct exposure to violence but may also experience secondary stress when supporting distressed children (Kohrt et al., 2014; Betancourt et al., 2013). Global studies show that professional supports such as peer mentoring, reflective supervision, and structured debriefings help teachers process emotional challenges and reduce burnout (Jennings, 2015; Brunzell et al., 2015). Although such supports remain limited in Myanmar, existing community-led networks suggest potential pathways for locally adapted teacher support systems. Training and wellness programs that promote mindfulness, self-care, and resilience further enable teachers to remain emotionally available for their students (Jennings, 2015; Stokes, 2022). Research has shown that teachers in Myanmar face similar concerns. Those working in community-led schools often labor with limited resources under stressful conditions, yet remain central figures in their students' lives as they try to offer both instructional and psychosocial support (Lall, 2021; No, 2024).

## 5. Identification of Emotional and Psychosocial Needs

In conflict-affected areas of Myanmar, community-led schools rely on a combination of teacher observations, community feedback, and locally adapted assessments to identify students' emotional and psychosocial needs (Lall & South, 2013; Anui & Arphattananon, 2021). These approaches ensure that subtle signs of distress are not overlooked and that educational responses remain embedded in community contexts (South, 2016). Teachers in these schools typically receive basic training in how to recognize trauma indicators such as social withdrawal, aggression, difficulty concentrating, and irregular attendance (INEE, 2016). Informal discussions with parents, caregivers, and village leaders further provide information about a child's living conditions and recent hardships (Lall, 2021). This integration of school-based and home-based perspectives strengthens the accuracy of the assessment process (Kohrt et al., 2014). Importantly, these schools also emphasize culturally familiar indicators of distress, which can capture issues that might be overlooked by standard psychological tools (Shonkoff, 2012). These approaches are vital in regions where professional diagnostic services are scarce or inaccessible due to security risks (Save the Children, 2022). The collaborative nature of this process fosters trust between families and school personnel, encouraging the early disclosure of student difficulties (Bath, 2008).

Structured tools are sometimes adapted for local use to systematically identify students requiring additional support (Jordans et al., 2010). Such tools, including psychosocial checklists and screening questionnaires, are tailored to the community's language, culture, and literacy level to ensure validity and acceptability (Kohrt et al., 2011; Panter-Brick et al., 2011). Where such tools are unavailable, teachers rely on noticeable behavioral changes, such as reduced participation in group activities or changes in eating patterns (Shonkoff, 2012). Observations are often cross-checked among teachers and school staff to confirm that emerging patterns are consistent rather than isolated (Jennings, 2015). Peer relationships are also monitored, as sudden conflicts among friends or withdrawal from friendships can signal underlying distress (Cole et al., 2013). These observations are typically recorded informally and shared in staff meetings to guide appropriate responses (Save the Children, 2015). Even with limited resources, such practices enable schools to establish internal monitoring systems for student well-being (Lall, 2021).

Community engagement is a cornerstone of the identification process in these schools (INEE, 2016). Parent-teacher meetings are regularly organized to discuss student progress and address emerging psychosocial concerns (Lall, 2021). These meetings also provide safe spaces where families can share their observations without fear of judgment or stigmatization (Kohrt et al., 2014). Community leaders, including elders and religious figures, play active roles in supporting schools and mediating between families and education providers (Lall & South, 2013; South & Lall, 2016; Gravers, 2015). Such culturally respectful collaboration is critical for creating stable, supportive relationships that buffer children against toxic stress and promote resilience (Shonkoff, 2012). By integrating school-based observations with community insights, these schools develop a holistic understanding of each child's needs (Save the Children, 2022).

## 6. Response Strategies and Interventions

Community-led schools in Myanmar, recognizing students' emotional and psychosocial needs, respond through locally adapted strategies such as curriculum adjustments, modified teaching practices, and strong community engagement mechanisms (Lall & South, 2013; South & Lall, 2016; Jolliffe & Speers Mears, 2016). Evidence from conflict-affected settings around the world shows that classroom-based and community-driven interventions can foster resilience and recovery (Jordans et al., 2010; Purgato et al., 2018). Classroom-based interventions often include structured group activities, such as cooperative game-playing, role-playing, and storytelling, which help children process experiences while developing social bonds (Bath, 2008; Tol et al., 2013). These activities are intentionally designed to be inclusive, ensuring participation from children who might otherwise remain withdrawn due to trauma (Shonkoff, 2012). Teachers also integrate mindfulness exercises, deep breathing practices, and guided reflections to help students manage anxiety in real time (INEE, 2016; Jordans et al., 2016). The emphasis on active participation allows children to regain a sense of agency, which is often lost in the chaos of conflict and displacement (Lall, 2021). These approaches are adapted to local cultural norms so that they resonate with community values and traditions (Save the Children, 2022). By embedding such practices into the daily school routine, children receive consistent psychosocial support rather than sporadic assistance (Kohrt et al., 2014; Betancourt et al., 2013).

Teachers use positive reinforcement and relationship-building techniques to create classrooms that foster trust and mutual respect (Jennings, 2015). Consistent routines help establish predictability, which is particularly important for children living in unstable environments (Bath, 2008). Many schools incorporate arts-based activities such as painting, singing, and acting in dramas to provide safe avenues for emotional expression. These activities reflect the developmental importance of supportive and stimulating environments that buffer against toxic stress (Shonkoff, 2012). Creative outlets also serve as non-verbal pathways to healing and have been shown to improve self-esteem and peer relationships (No, 2024). Teachers are trained to engage in active listening, allowing students to share personal stories without fear of judgment (Cole et al., 2013). The aim is to create an environment where emotional expression is encouraged and validated rather than suppressed (Lall, 2021). Over time, this safe and accepting atmosphere strengthens resilience and coping mechanisms among students (Betancourt et al., 2013).

Peer-support programs are another key intervention; in them, older students are paired with younger ones to provide mentorship and emotional guidance. In Myanmar's community-led schools, such peer relationships are often encouraged to create a sense of belonging and stability, especially for children who have lost family members or been separated from parents (Save the Children, 2022; Lall & South, 2013). Schools also collaborate with local health workers and NGOs to deliver periodic workshops on coping with stress, resolving conflicts, and maintaining healthy relationships (Kohrt et al., 2014). When children's needs exceed what schools can provide, teachers in conflict-affected settings are encouraged to refer children to specialized services, though such pathways are often weak or absent due to shortages of trained mental health professionals (Jolliffe & Speers Mears, 2016; Jordans et al., 2010; Kohrt et al., 2011). These referrals are often constrained by resource shortages but remain critical in cases of severe trauma (Lall, 2021). Stable and consistent supportive relationships are essential for buffering children against

the long-term effects of toxic stress (Shonkoff, 2012). This integrated approach, combining in-school interventions, peer support, and external referrals, forms a comprehensive safety net for children affected by conflict in Myanmar (INEE, 2016).

### 7. Summary of Key Practices and Evidence

Table 1 below provides a visual synthesis of the key practices identified across the literature, organized by domain, with corresponding evidence sources and identified gaps.

**Table 1 :** Summary of Key Practices and Evidence by Domain

Domain	Key Practices	Evidence Sources (Myanmar)	Evidence Sources (Global)	Identified Gaps
Trauma-informed practices	Predictable routines, positive discipline, emotionally safe spaces	Lall (2021); No (2024); Arlini et al. (2023)	Cole et al. (2013); Brunzell et al. (2015); Stokes (2022)	Limited teacher training; inconsistent implementation
SEL integration	Role-play, cooperative problem-solving, storytelling, morning circles	Arlini et al. (2023); Save the Children (2022)	Jennings (2015); Jordans et al. (2010); Bath (2008)	Few culturally adapted SEL curricula for Myanmar
Identification of needs	Teacher observation, parent-teacher meetings, community leader input	Lall & South (2013); Anui & Arphattananon (2021)	Kohrt et al. (2014); INEE (2016)	No validated screening tools for Myanmar context
Teacher well-being	Peer support, self-care training (limited documented practice in Myanmar)	Lall (2021); No (2024)	Jennings (2015); Betancourt et al. (2013)	Limited documented programs addressing teacher secondary trauma
Community engagement	Parent-teacher meetings, elder involvement, culturally rooted activities	South & Lall (2016); Jolliffe (2016); No (2024)	Kohrt et al. (2014); Shonkoff (2012)	Weak referral systems; sustainability concerns

### 8. Challenges Facing Community-Led Schools

Community-led schools in Myanmar face significant obstacles in providing trauma-informed education because of limited financial and human resources (Lall, 2021). Many teachers in these schools work as volunteers or receive only modest stipends, a situation that contributes to high turnover and reduced continuity in student support (Lall & South, 2013; South & Lall, 2016). Without stable funding, schools are unable to offer consistent training in trauma-informed practices (INEE, 2016). Access to culturally relevant and trauma-sensitive educational materials is also restricted, particularly in remote and conflict-affected areas (Save the Children, 2015). Ongoing armed conflict and political instability

further undermine the ability of NGOs and education departments to deliver support programs (UNICEF, 2022). Security threats such as military raids and clashes near school grounds frequently disrupt classes and erode students' sense of safety (Human Rights Watch, 2022). These conditions create an unpredictable learning environment that makes it difficult to sustain consistent psychosocial support (Bath, 2008).

Another challenge is the scarcity of trained mental health professionals in conflict-affected regions (Kohrt et al., 2014). Teachers often serve as the primary sources of emotional support for students, even if they lack advanced counseling skills (Jennings, 2015). While basic training in psychosocial first aid can help, it does not replace the need for professional mental health interventions (Jordans et al., 2010). Cultural stigmas surrounding mental health can also discourage students and families from seeking specialized support (Betancourt et al., 2013). In some ethnic communities, trauma symptoms may be interpreted through spiritual or moral frameworks, which may shape the types of help families pursue (Gravers, 2015). Moreover, referral systems between schools and healthcare providers are often weak or non-existent, resulting in gaps in care (Save the Children, 2022). These systemic barriers mean that even when needs are identified, appropriate responses are not always possible (Lall, 2021).

Logistical and infrastructural issues further complicate the delivery of trauma-informed education (South & Lall, 2016). Many community-led schools in Myanmar operate in makeshift or temporary structures, leaving them highly vulnerable to weather damage and disruption during conflict (Lall & South, 2013; South & Lall, 2016; No, 2024). Long travel distances, unsafe roads, and requirements for stopping at military checkpoints also limit regular attendance, reducing the effectiveness of psychosocial programs (UNICEF, 2022). Electricity shortages and weak internet connectivity restrict access to digital resources that could otherwise support teacher training and lesson delivery (INEE, 2016). Language diversity in ethnic areas presents additional difficulties, as teachers must translate and adapt trauma-informed materials into multiple local languages (Lall, 2021). This process demands stretches of time and levels of expertise that many schools do not have (Save the Children, 2015). Collectively, these barriers undermine stability and predictability in schooling, which are core conditions of trauma-informed education, and highlight the need for coordinated support from local, national, and international stakeholders (Bath, 2008).

## 9. Discussion

The findings summarized above and in Table 1 reveal several key patterns across the literature. However, rather than merely summarizing, this section critically examines the evidence base, identifying biases, tensions, and methodological gaps that shape interpretation.

Several limitations and tensions in the literature warrant critical examination. First, the majority of Myanmar-specific evidence comes from NGO program evaluations (e.g., Arlini et al., 2023; Save the Children, 2022) rather than independent academic studies. These reports often have dual aims of accountability and advocacy, and they may place greater emphasis on positive outcomes than on implementation challenges. Claims of "effectiveness" should therefore be interpreted cautiously, recognizing that organizational interests may influence which findings are emphasized or omitted.

Second, a significant tension exists between Western-derived trauma models and local cultural frameworks. Concepts like "PTSD" and "trauma-informed" carry specific clinical meanings that may not translate directly into Myanmar's ethnic contexts, where distress may be understood through spiritual, somatic, or relational frameworks (Gravers, 2015). The uncritical application of Western psychosocial terminology risks imposing external categories that misrepresent local experiences and may lead to interventions that are culturally inappropriate or ineffective. This tension remains largely unaddressed in the reviewed literature.

Third, the literature reveals a contradiction between the acknowledged centrality of teacher well-being and the near-absence of documented interventions addressing it. While authors consistently note that teachers experience secondary trauma, work as unpaid volunteers, and face direct exposure to violence (Lall, 2021; No, 2024), few reviewed sources documented or evaluated structured teacher well-being programs in Myanmar's community-led schools. This gap suggests that the field has prioritized student-focused interventions while neglecting the human infrastructure delivering them—a potentially unsustainable approach.

Fourth, most available evidence comes from Karen and Kachin contexts, with limited representation of other ethnic groups (Mon, Shan, Rakhine, Chin, Rohingya). Generalizations across Myanmar's diverse ethnic education systems may obscure important contextual differences in governance structures, cultural practices, and conflict dynamics. The Rohingya context, in particular, remains severely underrepresented in education-focused research due to access restrictions and heightened persecution.

Fifth, the reliance on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data means we know little about the sustained effects of trauma-informed practices over time. Most studies capture immediate post-intervention outcomes or rely on retrospective accounts, leaving questions about long-term resilience, academic trajectories, and the durability of psychosocial gains unanswered. Future research should prioritize longitudinal designs where security permits.

Finally, the gray literature upon which this review necessarily depends varies considerably in methodological rigor. While inclusion of NGO reports is essential in conflict settings where peer-reviewed research is scarce, these sources rarely disclose response rates, sampling methods, or limitations in systematic ways. This lack of transparency complicates efforts to assess evidence quality and increases the risk of selection bias in synthesis.

Despite these limitations, the convergent evidence across multiple sources—NGO evaluations, qualitative studies, and global meta-analyses—supports the conclusion that predictable routines, SEL activities, and community engagement contribute positively to student well-being in conflict-affected settings. However, the strength of this conclusion is tempered by the methodological concerns noted above.

## **10. Best Practices and Recommendations**

One of the most effective practices for trauma-informed education in community-led schools is the embedding of SEL into the daily curriculum (INEE, 2016). SEL activities,

such as cooperative problem-solving efforts, emotional literacy exercises, and mindfulness routines, help students build resilience and coping skills (Jennings, 2015). Teachers can integrate these activities into core subjects rather than deliver them as separate lessons, ensuring that supportive practices are reinforced consistently. Schools should also create predictable daily routines to help children regain a sense of safety and control (Bath, 2008). Training teachers in child-centered, culturally responsive pedagogy enhances trust and engagement, especially in ethnically diverse classrooms (Lall, 2021). Aligning classroom practices with local cultural values makes trauma-informed strategies more relevant and sustainable (Save the Children, 2022). Finally, collaborations between school staff, families, and community leaders ensure that interventions are culturally acceptable and genuinely owned by the community (Kohrt et al., 2014).

Strengthening teacher well-being is another crucial recommendation, as educators in conflict-affected contexts face high stress and significant risk of burnout (Betancourt et al., 2013). Schools can strengthen teacher well-being by fostering peer-support groups where teachers share experiences and coping strategies, a practice shown to mitigate stress in conflict-affected settings (Betancourt et al., 2015; Jennings, 2015; No, 2024). Professional development should also include training on self-care, stress management, and recognizing signs of secondary trauma (Jennings, 2015). Partnering with local NGOs or health services can give teachers access to counseling or debriefing sessions after critical incidents (Jordans et al., 2010). Investing in teacher retention through fair compensation and recognition programs improves the continuity and quality of psychosocial support for students (South & Lall, 2016). Encouraging teachers to participate in cultural and community activities can also help sustain morale and strengthen local connections (Lall, 2021). When teacher well-being is prioritized, the overall stability and effectiveness of trauma-informed education increases significantly (UNICEF, 2022).

Partnerships with external organizations can help bridge gaps in resources and expertise (Save the Children, 2015). NGOs, international agencies, and local civil society groups are essential for sustaining education in conflict-affected contexts, often providing training materials, technical assistance, and financial resources. Evidence from Myanmar shows that community-led schools depend on such partnerships (Lall & South, 2013; Jolliffe & Speers Mears, 2016; No, 2024), while studies from Nepal and Uganda highlight similar patterns of reliance on external actors for teacher training and psychosocial programming (Jordans et al., 2010; Betancourt et al., 2015). Establishing formal referral pathways to physical and mental health services ensures that students with severe needs receive appropriate care (Kohrt et al., 2014). Mobile counseling units or periodic visits from trained mental health professionals extend support to remote communities where services are otherwise inaccessible (INEE, 2016). Digital platforms, where feasible, can be used for teacher training, resource sharing, and connecting with peer networks in other regions (Lall, 2021). Building long-term partnerships fosters sustainability and strengthens community ownership of educational initiatives (Spreen & Lall, 2016).

## **11. Limitations of This Review**

Several methodological limitations affect the conclusions drawn here. First, this review relies significantly on gray literature (NGO reports, policy briefs, humanitarian assessments) due to the scarcity of peer-reviewed research from active conflict zones. While necessary, these sources vary in methodological rigor and may reflect organizational

interests. Second, this review did not conduct a systematic quantitative meta-analysis or formal quality assessment of included studies; the narrative synthesis approach may introduce author bias in theme selection and emphasis. Third, the review excludes non-English sources, potentially missing Burmese- or ethnic language publications from local researchers and organizations that could offer different perspectives. Fourth, without primary data collection, this review cannot verify claims made in source documents or capture the perspectives of teachers, students, and community members directly. Fifth, the rapidly changing conflict dynamics in Myanmar mean that findings may become outdated quickly; this review represents a snapshot of literature available through early 2025. Sixth, the review's focus on community-led schools means that findings may not be generalizable to formal state schools or other conflict-affected contexts outside Myanmar. Future research should prioritize community-based participatory methods and longitudinal designs to address these gaps.

## 12. Conclusion

Overall, this review brings together research on trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning to examine their application in Myanmar's community-led schools. Drawing on evidence from both before and after the 2021 coup, it shows how these schools function not only as spaces of learning but also as anchors of psychosocial support and cultural continuity in conflict-affected contexts. The discussion highlights the dual role of teachers as educators and emotional supporters, while underscoring the importance of teacher well-being for sustaining these practices. It also emphasizes the role of community engagement and culturally rooted approaches, such as the use of local languages and traditions, in shaping responses that strengthen resilience.

The review suggests that trauma-informed and SEL practices in Myanmar's community-led schools are often enacted through culturally grounded relationships, routines, and community participation rather than formal clinical frameworks, highlighting the importance of locally embedded approaches in conflict-affected education. Taken together, these insights contribute to broader conversations about how education systems in conflict-affected and fragile settings can integrate academic and psychosocial support in ways that are both locally grounded and sustainable.

## 13. References

- Anui, & Arphattananon, T. (2021). Ethnic content integration and local curriculum in Myanmar. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 14(2), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0060>
- Arlini, S. M., Charif Chefchaoui, N., Chia, J., Gordon, M., & Shrestha, N. (2023). Impact of catch-up clubs in conflict-affected Myanmar: A community-led remedial learning model. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 9(1), 17–63. <https://doi.org/10.33682/9t2r-vc39>
- Avery, J. C., Morris, H., Galvin, E., Misso, M., Savaglio, M., & Skouteris, H. (2021). Systematic review of school-wide trauma-informed approaches. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 14(3), 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-020-00321-1>
- Bath, H. (2008). The three pillars of trauma-informed care. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 17(3), 17–21. <https://msbos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Three-Pillars-of-Trauma-Informed-Care.pdf>

- Betancourt, T. S., Meyers-Ohki, S. E., Charrow, A., & Tol, W. A. (2013). Interventions for children affected by war: An ecological perspective on psychosocial support and mental health care. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 21(2), 70–91.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/HRP.0b013e318283bf8f>
- Brunzell, T., Waters, L., & Stokes, H. (2015). Teaching with strengths in trauma-affected students: A new approach to healing and growth in the classroom. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 85(1), 3–9. <https://gla.memberclicks.net/assets/OpenAccess/brunzell.pdf>
- Cole, S. F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Helping traumatized children learn: Creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools*. Massachusetts Advocates for Children. <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Helping-Traumatized-Children-Learn.pdf>
- East Asia Forum. (2024, December 13). *Myanmar's education crisis deepens under military rule*. East Asia Forum. <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/12/13/myanmars-education-crisis-deepens-under-military-rule>
- Fan, X., Ning, K., Ma, T. S., Aung, Y., Tun, H. M., Zaw, P. P. T., Flores, F. P., Chow, M. S., Leung, C. M., Lun, P., Chang, W. C., Leung, G. M., & Ni, M. Y. (2024). Post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety during the 2021 Myanmar conflict: A nationwide population-based survey. *The Lancet Regional Health—Western Pacific*, 26, 100396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lansea.2024.100396>
- Gravers, M. (2015). *Ethnic politics and the future of Myanmar*. Routledge. [https://www.academia.edu/64715227/Exploring\\_ethnic\\_diversity\\_in\\_Burma](https://www.academia.edu/64715227/Exploring_ethnic_diversity_in_Burma)
- Human Rights Watch. (2022, December 13). *Myanmar: Junta blocks lifesaving aid*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/13/myanmar-junta-blocks-lifesaving-aid>
- Human Rights Watch. (2022, January 28). *Myanmar: Year of brutality in coup's wake*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/28/myanmar-year-brutality-coups-wake>
- INEE. (2016). *Psychosocial support and social and emotional learning: Teacher wellbeing and support*. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. [http://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE\\_PSS-SEL\\_Background\\_Paper\\_ENG\\_v5.3.pdf](http://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_PSS-SEL_Background_Paper_ENG_v5.3.pdf)
- Jennings, P. A. (2015). Early childhood teachers' well-being, mindfulness, and self-compassion in relation to classroom quality and child outcomes. *Mindfulness*, 6(4), 732–743. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0312-4>
- Jolliffe, K. (2016). *Ceasefires, governance and development: The Karen National Union in times of change* [Policy Dialogue Brief]. The Asia Foundation. [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Policy-Brief\\_Ceasefire-Governance-and-Development\\_ENG.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Policy-Brief_Ceasefire-Governance-and-Development_ENG.pdf)
- Jolliffe, K., & Speers Mears, E. (2016). *Strength in diversity: Towards universal education in Myanmar's ethnic areas*. The Asia Foundation. [https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/assessment\\_file\\_attachments/Towards\\_Universal\\_Education\\_in\\_Myanmars\\_Ethnic\\_Areas\\_-\\_Asia\\_Foundation\\_October\\_2016.pdf](https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/assessment_file_attachments/Towards_Universal_Education_in_Myanmars_Ethnic_Areas_-_Asia_Foundation_October_2016.pdf)
- Jordans, M. J. D., Tol, W. A., Komproe, I. H., & De Jong, J. T. (2010). Systematic review of evidence and treatment approaches: Psychosocial and mental health care for children in

- war. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 14(1), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2008.00515.x>
- Karen Human Rights Group. (2024, July 10). *Schools under attack: Challenges to the right to education in Southeast Burma*. <https://khr.org/2024/07/24-2-bp1/schools-under-attack-challenges-right-education-southeast-burma-june-2023-february>
- Kohrt, B. A., Jordans, M. J., Tol, W. A., Speckman, R. A., Maharjan, S. M., Worthman, C. M., & Komproe, I. H. (2014). Social ecology of child soldiers: Child, family, and community determinants of mental health, psychosocial well-being, and reintegration in Nepal. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 47(5), 727–753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461510381290>
- Lall, M. (2021). *Myanmar's education reforms: A pathway to social justice?* UCL Press. <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/51835>
- Lall, M., & South, A. (2013). Comparing models of non-state ethnic education in Myanmar: The Mon and Karen national education regimes. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(2), 298–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.823534>
- Lee, C., Nguyen, A. J., Russell, T., Aules, Y., & Bolton, P. (2018, September 19). Mental health and psychosocial problems among conflict-affected children in Kachin State, Myanmar: A qualitative study. *Conflict and Health*, 12(39). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-018-0175-8>
- Mullin, A. C., Sharkey, J. D., & Barnett, M. (2024, May 21). Advancing trauma-informed practices in schools using the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1346933. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1346933>
- No, L. (2024, July). From conflict to classroom: Understanding school–community–family partnerships in conflict-affected Myanmar. *Journal of Education and Development*, 8(3), Article 1432. <https://doi.org/10.20849/jed.v8i3.1432>
- No, L. (2024, September 26). Shades of emotion: Art as expression among conflict-affected students. ISSN 2188-1111. The European Conference on Arts and Humanities 2024: Official Conference Proceedings (pp. 11–20). <https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2188-1111.2024.2>. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5024037> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5024037>
- Panter-Brick, C., Goodman, A., Tol, W. A., & Eggerman, M. (2011). Mental health and childhood adversities: A longitudinal study in Kabul, Afghanistan. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 50(4), 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2010.12.001>
- Pearson, I., Chase, E., Van Kim, C., Ma San, N., Ja, H., Hlaing, Z. M., Oo, N., Lae, K., Soe, E. E., Zobrist, B., Zimmerman, C., & Ranganathan, M. (2025, May 16). Conflict exposure and mental health: A survey of adolescent girls and young women in Myanmar post the 2021 coup d'état. *Conflict and Health*, 19, Article 68. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-025-00668-y>
- Purgato, M., Gross, A. L., Betancourt, T., Bolton, P., Bonetto, C., Gastaldon, C., Gordon, J., O'Callaghan, P., Papola, D., Peltonen, K., Punamäki, R.-L., Richards, J., Staples, J. K., Unterhitzberger, J., van Ommeren, M., de Jong, J. T. V. M., Jordans, M. J. D., Tol, W. A., & Barbui, C. (2018). Focused psychosocial interventions for children in low-resource humanitarian settings: A systematic review and individual participant data meta-analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*, 6(4), e390–e400. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(18\)30046-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30046-9)

- Rinehart, G. (2024). *Diversity and fragmentation of Myanmar education: Schooling shaped by protracted conflict and crisis* [Working paper]. Education Research in Crisis Consortium (ERICC).  
<https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/FINAL%20%20ERICC%20Working%20Paper%20%20Diversity%20and%20Fragmentation%20of%20Myanmar%20Education%20Schooling%20Shaped%20by%20Protracted%20Conflict%20and%20Crisis.pdf>
- Ritsema, H., & Armstrong-Hough, M. (2023). Associations among past trauma, post-displacement stressors, and mental health outcomes in Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: A secondary cross-sectional analysis. *Frontiers in Public Health, 10*, Article 1048649.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1048649>
- Saito, M., Phyu, P. H., & Win, T. (2024). Language-in-education policy and ethnic identity in Myanmar. *Comparative Education, 60*(2), 230–248.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2278941>
- Save the Children. (2014). *Hear it from the children: Why education in emergencies is critical*.  
<https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/hear-it-from-the-children---why-education-in-emergencies-is-critical>
- Shonkoff, J. P. (2012). Leveraging the biology of adversity to address the roots of disparities in health and development. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 109*(Supplement 2), 17302–17307. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1121259109>
- South, A. (2024). Education reform in post-coup Myanmar: Federalizing or fragmenting? *Contemporary Southeast Asia, 46*(2), 6–29.  
[https://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/CS46\\_2\\_006.pdf](https://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/CS46_2_006.pdf)
- South, A., & Lall, M. (2016). *Schooling and conflict: Ethnic education and mother tongue-based teaching in Myanmar* [Policy brief]. The Asia Foundation. [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Policy-Brief\\_Schooling-and-Conflict-Ethnic-Education-and-Mother-Tongue-Based-Teaching-in-Myanmar\\_ENG.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Policy-Brief_Schooling-and-Conflict-Ethnic-Education-and-Mother-Tongue-Based-Teaching-in-Myanmar_ENG.pdf)
- Stokes, H. (2022). Leading trauma-informed education practice as an instructional model for teaching and learning. *Frontiers in Education, 7*, Article 911328.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.911328>
- Tol, W. A., Barbui, C., Galappatti, A., Silove, D., Betancourt, T. S., Souza, R., van Ommeren, M. (2011). Mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings: Linking practice and research. *The Lancet, 378*(9802), 1581–1591. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)61094-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61094-5)
- Tyrosvoutis, G., Charoensukaran, W., & Chan, M. L. (2025). Conceptualising educational resilience during Myanmar’s conflict. *Education and Conflict Review, 5*, 107–115.  
<https://doi.org/10.14324/000.ch.10207910>
- UNICEF. (2022). *Myanmar humanitarian situation report: Education in emergencies*. United Nations Children’s Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/myanmar-humanitarian-situation-report-december-2022>
- World Education Thailand. (2016). *School committees and community engagement in Karen State*. [https://thailand.worlded.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/KarenState\\_SchoolCommittees\\_FINAL.pdf](https://thailand.worlded.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/KarenState_SchoolCommittees_FINAL.pdf)