ยืนหยัดท่ามกลางความไม่มั่นคง : ความยืดหยุ่นและความยึดมั่นผูกพันของครู
ในโรงเรียนนอกสังกัดรัฐ ในพื้นที่ขัดแย้งของเมียนมา
Holding the Line: Teacher Resilience and Engagement
in Myanmar's Conflict-Affected, Non-State Schools

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้มุ่งสำรวจความยืดหยุ่น ความยึดมั่นผูกพันทางวิชาชีพ และภาวะผู้นำแบบไม่เป็นทางการ ของครูในโรงเรียนที่ขับเคลื่อนโดยชุมชนและได้รับผลกระทบในพื้นที่ขัดแย้งของประเทศเมียนมา งานวิจัยนี้อาศัยข้อมูลจาก การสนทนากลุ่มแบบออนไลน์สองกลุ่ม กับครูระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย จำนวน 14 คน ใช้วิธีการคัดเลือกแบบเจาะจง เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย คือ แบบสัมภาษณ์การสนทนากลุ่มกึ่งโครงสร้าง ดำเนินการสนทนาเป็นภาษาเมียนมา และนำ ข้อมูลที่ได้มาวิเคราะห์ด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์แบบอุปนัย ผลการวิจัย พบว่า ครูสามารถธำรงรักษาความยืดหยุ่นผ่าน จุดมุ่งหมายทางศีลธรรม ความมุ่งมั่นในวิชาชีพ และความสัมพันธ์ที่แน่นแฟ้นกับนักเรียน เพื่อนร่วมงาน และชุมชนท้องถิ่น ภายใต้บริบทที่ขาดโครงสร้างการกำกับดูแลอย่างเป็นทางการ ครูได้สวมบทบาทภาวะผู้นำแบบไม่เป็นทางการ โดยการ บริหารจัดการ การดำเนินงานของโรงเรียน การให้การสนับสนุนทางอารมณ์ และการปรับเปลี่ยนแนวปฏิบัติการสอนให้ สอดคล้องกับสภาวะวิกฤต ด้านความยึดมั่นผูกพันทางวิชาชีพ ได้รับการธำรงไว้ผ่านความรับผิดชอบร่วมกัน แรงจูงใจของ นักเรียน และความร่วมมือกับชุมชน แม้จะเผชิญกับความรุนแรงและการพลัดถิ่นอย่างต่อเนื่อง งานวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่า ความยืดหยุ่นและความยึดมั่นผูกพันทางวิชาชีพในบริบทความขัดแย้งเกิดขึ้นในฐานะกระบวนการเชิงความสัมพันธ์และ ขึ้นอยู่กับบริบท มากกว่าจะเป็นคุณลักษณะเฉพาะของปัจเจกบุคคล การศึกษานี้มีส่วนสนับสนุนองค์ความรู้ด้านการศึกษา ในภาวะฉุกเฉิน โดยแสดงให้เห็นบทบาทของรูปแบบการศึกษาที่ขับเคลื่อนโดยชุมชนในการธำรงรักษาการเรียนรู้ในบริบทที่ ระบบการศึกษาของรัฐล่มสลาย และให้ข้อเสนอเชิงลึกสำหรับการสนับสนุนครูที่ปฏิบัติงานในสภาพแวดล้อมความขัดแย้งที่ ยืดเยื้อ

คำสำคัญ : ความยืดหยุ่นของครู, การศึกษาที่ขับเคลื่อนโดยชุมชน, โรงเรียนที่ไม่ใช่ของภาครัฐ, ภาวะผู้นำทางการศึกษา, การศึกษาในพื้นที่ขัดแย้ง

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores teacher resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership in community-led schools located in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar. The study draws on two online focus group discussions with 14 high school teachers selected through purposive sampling. The research instrument was a semi-structured focus group discussion protocol. The discussions were conducted in the Myanmar language, and the data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that teachers sustain resilience through moral purpose, professional commitment, and strong relational ties with students, peers, and local communities. In the absence of formal governance structures, teachers assume informal leadership roles by managing school operations, providing emotional support, and adapting teaching practices to crisis conditions. Professional engagement is maintained through collective responsibility, student motivation, and community collaboration despite ongoing violence and displacement. These findings highlight how resilience and professional engagement in conflict settings emerge as relational and context-dependent processes rather than individual traits. The study contributes to research on education in emergencies by demonstrating the role of community-driven educational models in sustaining learning where formal systems have collapsed and offers insights for supporting teachers working in prolonged conflict environments.

Keywords: teacher resilience, community-based education, non-state schools, educational leadership, conflict-affected education

Introduction

Education is often described as a stabilizing force in crisis, yet it is among the sectors most disrupted during protracted conflict. Globally, more than 222 million children and adolescents face educational disruption due to war, displacement, and violence (UNICEF, 2022). In Myanmar, the 2021 military coup accelerated system collapse: schools were closed, destroyed, or militarized, and many teachers exited state schools through the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) or relocated to resistance-held areas. By 2024, more than 5 million children were out of school, and enrolment declined from about 9 million in 2019–2020 to 6.4 million in 2023–2024 (Mohinga Matters, 2024; UNICEF Myanmar, 2024).

In this vacuum, non-state, community-led schools have become critical providers, sustaining learning under insecurity, resource scarcity, and minimal oversight, including through interim programs and Ethnic Basic Education Providers (EBEPs) (Mohinga Matters, 2024). Teachers in these settings often carry responsibilities beyond instruction, supporting student safety and well-being and coordinating schooling with peers and local communities. In such

contexts, resilience is shaped by moral purpose, student relationships, and community support.

Although teacher resilience has been widely studied in emergency and post-crisis contexts (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007), existing research has largely focused on formal, state-supported systems (e.g., Day & Gu, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2012). Far less is known about how teachers sustain resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership in non-state, community-led or resistance-run schools where institutional supports (e.g., salaries, professional development, supervision) are limited or absent. This study examines teachers' experiences in Myanmar's conflict-affected non-state schools. Drawing on two online focus group discussions with 14 high school teachers, this study examines how educators in conflict-affected, non-state schools navigate structural constraints, mobilize relational resources, and sustain educational continuity in prolonged crisis. In doing so, it advances understanding of how resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership are sustained under conditions of institutional collapse.

Resilience in the face of adversity

Resilience is commonly understood as the capacity to adapt positively and sustain functioning under adversity. Grotberg's (2003) "I Have, I Am, I Can" framework conceptualizes resilience through external support, internal strengths, and adaptive coping, while teacher resilience is closely linked to self-efficacy developed through mastery experiences, peer modeling, social encouragement, and emotional regulation (Bandura, 1997). In contexts of protracted conflict, resilience is not a fixed trait, but a dynamic process shaped by interactions among teachers, students, and communities (Beltman et al., 2011; Mansfield et al., 2012). For educators in non-state and community-led schools, where formal support systems are largely absent, resilience becomes a condition for sustaining professional practice. Teachers in crisis-affected regions face displacement, exposure to violence, material shortages, and the absence of salaries or institutional guidance (Herman et al., 2018; IOM et al., 2019). However, scholars caution that resilience should not be romanticized, as it often involves significant emotional and psychological costs (Falk et al., 2019).

Inner strengths: Self-efficacy and purpose

Self-efficacy, defined as teachers' belief in their capacity to manage classroom demands and influence student outcomes, represents a central internal resource for resilience (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Developed through mastery experiences, social encouragement, and emotional regulation, self-efficacy enables educators to adapt to

challenging conditions and sustain professional commitment in under-resourced settings (Bandura, 1997; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Teachers with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to maintain engagement and resist burnout under strain (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). A related resource is a sense of purpose, or the perception that teaching holds social and moral meaning. Meaningful work reinforces professional identity and sustains resilience despite adversity (Day & Gu, 2009; Lavy, 2022), functioning as a psychological anchor in contexts of conflict (Fadare et al., 2023).

Relational and community support

Resilience is not only individual but also socially sustained through relationships and collective practices. Collaboration among teachers, families, and community organizations provides essential support for sharing resources, coordinating responses, and maintaining educational continuity (Beltman et al., 2011; Day & Hong, 2016; Gu & Day, 2007). In contexts where institutional support is limited, peer networks and community partnerships often substitute for formal structures, reinforcing teachers' motivation, sense of belonging, and professional commitment (Howard & Johnson, 2004; McDiarmid et al., 2022; No, 2024b). Such support may include material assistance, local coordination, and symbolic affirmation of teachers' roles, all of which strengthen educational continuity in crisis settings (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Where formal governance is weakened, teachers also assume informal leadership roles that extend beyond classroom instruction. Informal leadership involves influence and decision-making grounded in relationships, shared responsibility, and collective problem-solving rather than institutional authority (Harris, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004). These relational leadership practices support both teacher resilience and professional engagement by enabling coordinated local responses to crisis conditions.

Working in the institutional void

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory emphasize the role of structured supports such as training, policies, and leadership in protecting teachers from burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989). In many conflict settings, however, these supports are absent. Teachers in non-state, community-run schools often work without salaries, formal curricula, accreditation, or policy guidance (Fadare et al., 2023; Nicolai et al., 2020). Under such conditions, resilience is sustained through informal governance, local coordination, and adaptive practices developed within communities (No, 2024c; No, 2024a).

This reliance on locally organized practices reflects distributed and informal leadership perspectives, in which leadership emerges through collaboration and shared responsibility rather than formal authority (Harris, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004). In these contexts, teachers' leadership roles become central to coordinated responses that sustain resilience and professional engagement.

Resilience and work engagement

Resilience is closely associated with professional work engagement, defined as vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Teachers who are resilient tend to remain psychologically invested in teaching despite challenging conditions, while engagement itself reinforces resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2012; Tait, 2008). This reciprocal relationship supports persistence and professional commitment, particularly when teachers experience meaningful work, autonomy, and supportive relationships.

However, this process remains fragile. Without recognition or resources, sustained engagement may deteriorate into fatigue and emotional strain (Falk et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018). In conflict-affected contexts where institutional support is limited, engagement may depend more heavily on relational and moral factors such as purpose, community support, and informal leadership. Existing research largely focuses on teachers in formal education systems supported by governments or NGOs (Çilek et al., 2025; Heng & Chu, 2023; Wang & Pan, 2023). Few studies examine how resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership intersect in contexts of systemic collapse and armed conflict. This study addresses this gap by examining teachers in Myanmar's conflict-affected, non-state schools, where educators sustain learning without salaries, recognition, or professional development.

Objective

1. Examine how high school teachers in Myanmar's conflict-affected, non-state schools sustain resilience and professional engagement in the absence of formal institutional support.

2. Identify forms of informal leadership and community collaboration that enable educational continuity in protracted crisis contexts.

Methodology

This section provides an overview of the study's qualitative descriptive design, which forms part of a larger mixed-methods project, and outlines the procedures used to examine teacher resilience in conflict-affected, community-led schools.

1. Participants

Fourteen high school teachers working in non-state, community-led schools across conflict-affected regions of Myanmar participated in this study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active teaching roles, gender diversity, years of experience, and geographic distribution. To facilitate open dialogue while maintaining group manageability, participants were divided into two focus groups of seven members each. One group consisted of teachers from the same school, allowing shared contextual reflection, while the other group included teachers from different schools to capture varied perspectives. All participants provided informed consent and voluntarily took part in the study. Demographic and teaching profiles of participants are summarized in Table 1. As a Myanmar national with prior experience in community-led education, the researcher approached this study as an insider-researcher while maintaining reflexivity to limit bias. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured through pseudonyms. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Massachusetts Lowell Institutional Review Board (Protocol #23-133, Exempt 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2)(ii)), and all procedures adhered to approved standards.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Teachers

	Age	Gender (Male/ Female)	Living Status (Internally Displaced Person (IDP)/ Local	Role (Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM)/ Volunteer (Vol))	Experience (Before/After Coup)
P1	54	F	IDP	CDM	35/4
P2	45	F	IDP	CDM	15/4
P3	40	F	IDP	CDM	4/4
P4	28	M	IDP	CDM	2/4
P5	26	F	IDP	Vol	0/1
P6	30	F	Local	CDM	1/4
P7	36	F	IDP	CDM	7/4
P8	49	F	IDP	CDM	20/4
P9	52	F	IDP	-	28.5/4
P1	25	F	Local	Vol	-
P1	42	M	Local	Vol	4/1
P1	20	F	IDP	Vol	4/2
P1	35	M	Local	CDM	4/4
P1	38	F	Local	Vol	0/4

2. Research Instrument

Data was collected using a semi-structured focus group discussion (FGD) protocol with open-ended questions on teachers' resilience, professional engagement, coping strategies, and community collaboration in conflict-affected school contexts. The protocol was developed from relevant literature and reviewed for clarity and contextual relevance. The semi-structured design ensured consistency across discussions while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences.

3. Data Collection

Two online focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in February 2024, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The discussions, conducted in the Myanmar language, explored teachers' experiences of coping with insecurity, sustaining motivation and resilience, maintaining professional engagement, adapting instruction under constraints, and collaborating with peers and community members. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English by a bilingual researcher, with accuracy ensured through repeated checks of the translations against the original recordings. The FGD protocol included prompts related to the effects of conflict on teachers' daily work, the personal and relational factors supporting motivation and emotional endurance, the role of peer and community networks in sustaining educational continuity, and the instructional or leadership adaptations that emerged in the absence of formal structures.

4. Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to interpret the transcribed data following established qualitative procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Open coding was conducted first, followed by grouping codes into categories, refining them into sub-themes, and synthesizing them into four overarching themes. Table 2 summarizes the structure of themes and categories. To strengthen credibility, the emergent themes were triangulated with findings from 17 in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher in 2023 with teachers, education leaders, and parents from similar conflict-affected areas. The interview protocol used in those interviews was applied consistently across participants to support procedural reliability. Although these interviews were not part of the primary dataset, they served as an external point of comparison to examine theme consistency across related contexts. Trustworthiness was further enhanced through reflexive memo-writing, maintaining an audit trail of analytic decisions, and engaging in peer debriefing, consistent with established qualitative rigor criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 2

Codebook summary

Sr.	Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code Frequency	Categories	Code Breakdown
1.	Living under conflict: fear, exposure, and trauma	The lived realities of conflict on education	27	living under conflict: fear, exposure, and trauma	7
				impact on schools: attacks, relocation, and adaptation	5
				barriers to education: fear and uncertainty	11
				educational disruptions due to armed conflict	1
		Psychological and emotional impact of conflict		emotional and psychological toll on teachers and students	2
				managing fear and coping mechanisms	1
2.	Resilient and purpose-driven leadership in conflict-affected schools	Resilience, commitment, and motivation in education	46	teacher and student commitment to education	5
				resilience in the face of personal loss and hardships	6
				teacher resilience, commitment, and challenges	7
				teaching under conflict and displacement	3
		Support systems and ethical leadership		support systems and coping mechanisms	2
				teamwork, support, and professional growth	4
				external educational support and aid	5
				sources of motivation and leadership	6
				school operations, community engagement, and management	4
				leadership, sustainability, and resistance	4

Table 2 (Cont.)

Codebook summary

Sr.	Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code Frequency	Categories	Code Breakdown
3.	Educational barriers, disruptions, and adaptations	Educational barriers and pedagogical adaptations	8	changes in pedagogical approaches	1
				challenges in teaching and learning resources	2
				changes in teaching practices and learning environment	4
		Financial and structural barriers to education		educational access and financial barriers	1
4.	Student and community agency in sustaining education	The role of students as agents of change	47	student leadership and engagement	3
				student motivation, resilience, and creative expression	8
				student-centered, holistic, and Innovative education	10
		Sustainability, governance, and the Future of Education		basic needs, infrastructure, and school sustainability	6
				resource availability and parental engagement	2
				academic progress and educational sustainability	3
				discipline, ethical development, and classroom management	7
				parent-teacher relationships and community perceptions	2
				school safety and emergency preparedness	1
				teacher development and lifelong learning	2
				social cohesion and school climate	2
				student dropout and risks	1

Findings

This section presents findings on how teachers in conflict-affected, non-state schools sustain resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership. Four interrelated themes

emerged: (1) the lived realities of conflict shaping teachers' work, (2) resilience and purpose-driven leadership, (3) adaptive practices under structural constraints, and (4) student and community agency in sustaining education.

1. The Lived Realities of Conflict on Education

In conflict-affected regions, schools have shifted from spaces of learning to sites of survival, where teachers and students face daily security threats requiring constant vigilance and adaptation. One teacher explained, "Since the area where we live is near a flight path (frequent airstrikes), we are constantly on alert, running to bomb shelters" (P4). In response, educators modified school environments to enhance safety, including constructing makeshift shelters and trench-like protective spaces: "Our school has dug shelters... where we take cover" (P9). These conditions illustrate how armed conflict has reshaped educational environments and required ongoing operational adaptation to maintain learning continuity.

Conflict also imposes significant emotional and psychological strain. Teachers and students experience chronic exposure to trauma, loss, and fear. Participants described fatal attacks on displacement camps, hyper-vigilance among students, and persistent anxiety among teachers. For example, one teacher recalled, "The worst incident was when a bomb hit the displacement camp, resulting in the deaths of students and an entire family" (P13). Teachers reported suppressing their own fear to provide emotional support for students, while some relied on spiritual practices to cope with ongoing insecurity (P12). These accounts show how teachers regulate emotional distress to remain professionally engaged under extreme conditions.

Beyond immediate threats to safety, conflict has disrupted educational access and reduced student attendance. Teachers reported declining enrolment as families prioritize security, noting that student numbers decreased following repeated airstrikes (P2). Parents frequently expressed concerns about their children's safety and requested guarantees that schools could not provide (P14). These structural disruptions increased professional demands on teachers and required continued adaptation to sustain learning. Despite these challenges, teachers and students continued to uphold the value of education. Their sustained participation reflects a shared commitment to teaching and learning despite ongoing instability.

2. Resilient and Purpose-Driven Leadership in Conflict-Affected Schools

Teachers in Myanmar's conflict-affected, non-state schools demonstrated strong resilience and moral leadership grounded in a deep sense of duty, community attachment,

and ethical commitment. Their continued service was not driven by external incentives but by an internalized responsibility to sustain education despite ongoing insecurity. As one teacher explained, "There are reasons for our fears and anxieties, but we continue to push forward, driven by our sense of duty and the need to ensure the children's education is not disrupted" (P9). Another emphasized, "Why do we stay? Because of a deep sense of attachment and responsibility. We fear that if we don't continue, our education system will fall far behind compared to other regions and states" (P12). These accounts suggest that moral responsibility and professional commitment function as central psychological resources sustaining teachers' engagement.

Even amid personal loss and hardship, teachers remained steadfast. One participant reflected, "Last year I thought I wouldn't continue teaching after losing my wife and child. But as the new year approached, I felt compelled to keep going" (P8). Another shared, "I've conditioned my heart and mind to accept that whatever hardships come next won't be as severe as what I've already endured" (P4). For many, teaching became a moral and political commitment following the 2021 coup. It was viewed not merely as a profession but as a means of protecting educational continuity under crisis. One teacher explained, "It is Revolution through Education… we must ensure that children receive continuous education" (P13). These narratives illustrate how teachers construct professional identity around purpose and resistance, reinforcing persistence under extreme conditions.

In the absence of formal governance structures, teachers assumed leadership roles that extended beyond classroom instruction. Their leadership was grounded in culturally valued principles of goodwill, passion, and sacrifice, reflecting shared moral responsibility and collective commitment to education. As one teacher stated, "In times of conflict, three things are essential: goodwill, passion, and sacrifice. Only with these can we succeed" (P11). Another expressed a sense of historical responsibility, noting, "I strive to be a teacher who can help shape history for my students" (P1). These accounts demonstrate forms of informal and distributed leadership emerging through shared values, relational responsibility, and collective purpose rather than formal authority. Teachers also expressed concern about the long-term consequences of disrupted education in conflict-affected communities. One participant warned, "…If these children grow up without education and only know how to handle weapons, they will continue to fight and kill each other" (P9). Such reflections highlight how teachers view education as essential not only for academic development but also for peacebuilding and social stability.

Peer solidarity and community collaboration further supported teachers' resilience. Teachers described strong collegial relationships characterized by mutual understanding and unconditional support, often referring to their teams as "a family" (P12). Community-based organizations provided material and emotional assistance, including teaching resources and nutritional support (P2). Despite the absence of formal institutional resources emphasized in the Job Demands–Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), teachers relied on informal supports and community partnerships to sustain their professional engagement. Together, these findings demonstrate how teachers embody resilient, values-driven leadership in conflict conditions. Their commitment reflects not only individual perseverance but a collective moral vision of education as a social responsibility and a right worth defending.

3. Educational Barriers, Disruptions, and Adaptations

Teachers described significant disruptions caused by conflict that required major adaptation in teaching practices and classroom management. Many contrasted their current work with displaced or rural students and their pre-conflict experience in urban schools with stronger parental support. One teacher explained, "The teaching experience here is very different from before the military takeover. Previously, I lived in the city and taught children who attended urban schools. Their parents were educated and provided full support, and the children were highly motivated" (P11).

In response to changing student needs, teachers shifted toward more student-centered approaches rather than traditional rote instruction. As one participant noted, "Before, it was all about memorization and exams. Now, we focus on a child-centered approach, encouraging children to explore and create on their own" (P14). However, teachers also acknowledged limited preparation for these pedagogical changes: "We weren't trained deeply in hands-on or child-centered teaching methods ourselves, so we often look to experts or university educators for guidance" (P6). These experiences illustrate how teachers adapt instructional practices while managing professional uncertainty in resource-constrained environments.

Limited material and financial resources further constrained teaching quality. Teachers described difficulties conducting practical lessons due to shortages of basic supplies: "One major issue is the lack of resources for practical experiments. For instance, if we have acid, we might not have a base" (P10). Economic hardship also affected students' access to schooling. As one teacher explained, "The students are eager to attend school, and we don't

force them to pay if they can't afford it" (P12). These constraints required teachers to modify instructional practices and sustain learning despite limited resources.

The erosion of formal oversight also increased teachers' autonomy and responsibility. Without centralized curriculum enforcement or supervision, educators prioritized student well-being and adapted instruction to local needs. One teacher reflected, "Before, I followed a set curriculum and carried out tasks assigned by superiors while receiving a salary. Now, there are no orders from superiors. Instead, I focus on addressing the children's problems, their desire to learn, and their emotional stress" (P2). This expanded autonomy enabled teachers to exercise professional judgment and respond flexibly to students' needs despite the absence of formal guidance.

4. Student Agency and Community Engagement in Sustaining Education

During crisis and institutional collapse, students and communities emerged as important actors in sustaining educational continuity. Teachers described how students in conflict-affected schools demonstrated agency not only in their learning but also in supporting peers and participating in community initiatives. Student-led organizations, including the Student Union and youth groups, organized donation drives and supported displaced individuals, reflecting civic engagement and reinforcing education as a collective responsibility. Students also expressed their experiences through music, film, and writing. As one teacher shared, "Soon, we will release a second album featuring songs written and performed by the students... These films often revolve around the revolution, expressing their deep emotions and commitment" (P12). These creative practices served as both mechanisms for processing trauma and symbolic expressions of collective identity.

Teachers reported that students' continued participation in schooling despite violence and resource scarcity contributed to educational continuity. "Some parents are reluctant... but the children insist on coming because they want to learn" (P14). Even after nearby attacks, students resumed attendance quickly: "The school closed for only a week after a nearby attack, and students continued attending" (P12). School environments that emphasized autonomy and choice further supported engagement. As one teacher noted, "Students have the freedom to choose... The students have the right to decide" (P9). Holistic learning opportunities, including arts, sports, and project-based activities, fostered participation and well-being under challenging conditions.

Educational continuity also depended on broader community conditions. Teachers described structural challenges affecting participation, including airstrikes, economic hardship,

and displacement. "The rising cost of goods has made people feel more discouraged" (P4). As another teacher explained, "Only when the stomach is full can one uphold morality (အ္ဈမ‌ေတာင့္မွ သီလ‌ေစာင့္ႏုိင္မယ္)" (P6). These constraints shaped the extent of parental involvement, which was often inconsistent as families prioritized survival needs, and some children were required to work. Despite these challenges, schools fostered community participation through public events and inclusive practices. Activities such as competitions and award ceremonies helped strengthen relationships between families and schools by demonstrating students' progress and the value of education. Teachers also promoted restorative approaches to discipline and community-centered values. As one participant explained, "When disputes arise, we bring all parties together... and impose appropriate consequences" (P10). These practices supported a shared sense of responsibility for sustaining education. Overall, these accounts illustrate how student participation, community involvement, and shared commitment contributed to the continuity of schooling under crisis conditions, reflecting a collective approach to sustaining education in the absence of formal institutional support.

Discussion

This study examined how teachers in Myanmar's conflict-affected, community-led schools sustain resilience and professional engagement amid the collapse of formal educational structures. The findings indicate that resilience operates as an ongoing relational practice rather than an inherent individual capacity, grounded in moral purpose, peer solidarity, and responsibility toward students and communities.

Teachers' accounts challenge conventional models of resilience that assume access to stable salaries, professional training, or institutional guidance (Mansfield et al., 2012; Wang & Pan, 2023). Instead, resilience emerged through value-driven commitment, social relationships, and adaptive coping within conditions of structural constraint. This interpretation supports Grotberg's (2003) "I Have, I Am, I Can" framework, particularly the role of social support and internal purpose, and aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, reflected in teachers' use of mastery experiences, social encouragement, and emotional regulation. Resilience in this context therefore reflects a contextually embedded process shaped by relational and environmental conditions rather than a stable psychological trait.

A strong sense of purpose further shaped teachers' motivation and persistence. Many participants framed teaching as a moral responsibility and, following the 2021 coup, as a form

of social commitment aimed at preserving educational continuity. This finding corresponds with research showing that meaningful work and self-efficacy support persistence and emotional stability under adversity (Bandura, 1997; Day & Gu, 2009; Lavy, 2022). At the same time, teachers' accounts reveal the limits of resilience, as sustained engagement coexisted with trauma, fear, and emotional exhaustion, supporting arguments that resilience in crisis settings should not be idealized (Falk et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018).

Beyond psychological endurance, the findings demonstrate how teachers sustained professional engagement despite insecurity, resource scarcity, and institutional collapse. Teachers adapted pedagogical practices by shifting from rote instruction toward student-centered approaches emphasizing creativity, empathy, and well-being. These adaptations reflect professional agency emerging in response to contextual necessity rather than formal policy direction. Teachers remained committed to instructional responsibilities and students' emotional needs, indicating sustained dedication and absorption in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Professional engagement was thus relationally sustained through commitment to students and shared purpose rather than institutional job resources.

The findings also highlight the emergence of informal leadership and community collaboration as mechanisms supporting educational continuity. Teachers assumed roles extending beyond classroom instruction, including emotional support, coordination of school activities, and mobilization of community resources. This pattern reflects distributed leadership processes in which authority emerges through collaboration and shared responsibility rather than hierarchical structures (Harris, 2004). In the absence of centralized governance, teachers and community actors collectively sustained schooling through locally organized practices.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that resilience in conflict-affected Myanmar operates across multiple levels: individually through purpose and self-efficacy, relationally through peer and community support, and collectively through shared leadership practices. This multilevel perspective supports Mansfield et al.'s (2012) conceptualization of resilience as an interaction between personal and contextual factors. The study contributes to existing literature by illustrating how resilience, professional engagement, and informal leadership function as interconnected processes that sustain education in contexts of institutional collapse. Rather than depicting conflict-affected communities as passive, the findings reveal locally organized systems of care, collaboration, and adaptive practice that enable educational continuity under extreme conditions.

Recommendations

Implications of the Study

Support for teachers in conflict-affected, non-state schools should begin with acknowledgment of the local networks that already sustain learning. Strengthening these systems through consistent communication, modest material assistance, and emotional support can help preserve educational continuity. Professional development should prioritize accessible, low-cost models such as peer mentoring, community-based workshops, and short online sessions on trauma-informed teaching. Collaboration between community education committees and local organizations can improve transparency and shared decision-making without adding bureaucratic burdens. Such context-sensitive and community-driven efforts are realistic and sustainable pathways for supporting educators who continue to teach under extreme conditions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should further explore how teacher resilience develops over time and interacts with well-being, motivation, and student outcomes. Longitudinal and mixed-methods designs would help capture these evolving dynamics and identify which community-based practices are most effective across regions. Comparative studies could also determine which strategies are locally specific and which can be adapted to other fragile settings. Continued research in this area will provide a stronger evidence base for designing practical, culturally grounded models of support for educators working in crisis and conflict zones.

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