



Saw Wah Khu from Kayin State

owners. It is very difficult to get permission from the owners", tells Shwe Sin, academic coordinator at myME.

"And even when we do get permission, it is a challenge to motivate the children for the classes. They prefer to learn driving, fixing mobiles, skills getting them better jobs. Many also move from teashop to teashop for slightly better payments, disappearing from our classes after a few months."

It is obviously tough as well to, after 12 or more hours, not going to rest but sit in a classroom for another two hours. Tim: "It's a real challenge for them. And for our teachers, to teach at night, after dark, in places sometimes far from home, in unconventional and grimy places."

Learner-centered

Teachers and students in Myanmar are not used to the objective of myME: "delivering education in a creative, fun

Henry Braun: "We support sustainable solutions and innovative pilot projects that provide evidence for increased quality learning in education. With a special focus on teacher training, child protection, and linking learning to both earning and peace-building. The learner-centered approach puts the child at the center of education rather than the teacher. It requires the teacher to think about how she or he can make sure the student really learns and understands."

FCA coordinates the Finnish Teachers Without Borders program under which experienced Finnish teachers and education specialists volunteer to develop education where it's needed.

Education specialist Annika Nieminen volunteered during the summer of 2018, providing training to myME's teachers: "What I have tried to do these past three months is to help teachers

up with examples, activities, and questions challenging students to think for themselves."

Refreshing

The learner-centered approach definitely encourages the students: "My favorite subject is life skills, as that teaches you how to develop yourself and progress with your life", tells Aung Htay Than from Ayeyawady Region. He is 19 and has worked in a teashop since he was ten.

It even gives students new energy: "Going to school feels refreshing and even though the working days are long, the tiredness vanishes as the lesson starts", smiles Saw Wah Khu, 20, from Kayin State. He has been working in a teashop for seven years.

Both live above the shop with other young adults and children also working in the shop.

their feelings and ideas to people who listen and understand", says Shwe Sin. "A girl, for example, once mentioned some male customers being very difficult to serve. So we talked about that and offered suggestions how to protect herself and solve such situations in a non-confrontational way."

Highlight situation

Despite the success of the program, myME and FCA realize it is not the solution for Myanmar.

"We cannot solve the problem of 2.7 million out-of-school children in this country, bring them all back to school or give them some sort of education. This is a government's responsibility. What we are doing is highlighting the situation and making these children visible, making people look at them, where they are and what they are missing. Look at what

"Students join myME not only to learn, but also because they feel safe talking about their difficulties in life"

By Arnold Marseille & KMM Aung PHOTOS: Supplied

FCA supports Mobile Education for out-of-school children in Myanmar

"I get up at 4am and start working by 5am. Usually the teashop closes at 5.30pm, sometimes a bit later. I am ten years old." As dramatic as it sounds, this is not the story of just one child in Myanmar. Over 2.7 million Myanmar children do not go to school. At least half of them work instead. Up to seven days per week, 12 to 14 hours a day. Earning as little as 2 euros per day, usually paid straight to their parents, who sign their children up for 6 months or more contracts paid in advance. Without education, their lives continue to be futureless once grown up.

When Tim Aye-Hardy, after 25 years in the US, in 2013 for the first time returned to his home country and saw the many children in Yangon working all day, his first thought was: "This is wrong, they should be in school."

Asking around, he soon realized families depend on their children for survival and that a more creative solution was needed. "I asked myself: how can we bring the classroom to them?" Tim Aye-Hardy says.

The question resulted in the founding of myME: Myanmar Mobile Education.

"We bought old buses and trucks and made them look like classrooms with desks, chairs, whiteboards. We put solar panels on the roof for electricity and started going around teashops in Yangon, major city in Myanmar. We ran a pilot with 60 kids in two teashops in early 2014. Now we serve more than 3,000 students from various teashops, restaurants, monastic schools, and underprivileged communities in townships of Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Mawlamyine, Myingyan and Kyaukse. Around 10,000 out-of-school children and young adults benefited since we started the project."

Challenge

Naturally myME can't simply park a bus in front of one of



myME mobile classroom

the thousands of teashops and start teaching. "We have to visit a shop several times and sometimes need to wait two or three hours for a brief first conversation with the

and learner-centered environment." That's where Finn Church Aid (FCA) came in, late 2017.

FCA Myanmar Country Director

to develop a deeper understanding of what a learner-centered approach really means. That instead of telling students what to do and not to do, teachers come



Tim Aye-Hardy, Founder of myME



Aung Htay Than from Ayeyawady

"Students join myME not only to learn, but also because they, often for the first time in their lives, feel safe to talk about their difficulties in life. To express

we can do for them. And be mindful that if we are building a country, a society, a community, we cannot leave these kids alone. Without these millions of children, what are we going to do in the future?" Tim Aye-Hardy says.

A recent law stipulates children under 16 in Myanmar are no longer allowed to work fulltime and children younger than 14 are not allowed to work in factories. A law banning child labor altogether would protect the children better.

One could argue that a program, such as myME, condones a continuation of child labor.

"We have to make a compromise when we look at Myanmar's specific situation", explains Ei Thu Zar, FCA Senior Program Officer leading the education program. "We can't neglect the children simply based on rules and regulations. We need to support them to join the human capital this country needs to fulfil its reform process."

FCA therefore plans to continue its work in this area, says Henry Braun: "Social child protection and social responsibility standards reach more and more businesses like teashops worldwide. Working children not having access to education is a serious problem in other developing countries as well. FCA will explore ways to work with teashop owners to establish social responsibility standards."