

SUPPORTING CURRICULA REFORMS IN MYANMAR UNIVERSITIES



CHINLONE

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This Report was developed within the framework of the CHINLONE ('Connecting Higher Education Institutions for a New Leadership on National Education') project, financed by the European Union, Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Capacity Building in Higher Education program.

CHINLONE's main goal is to support Myanmar universities in their quest to profoundly reframe the national Higher Education System (HES). In the heart of every citizen of Myanmar, the word "chinlone" holds a very special place, since it is the name of a traditional sport, very popular among local youngsters, based on a non-competitive mechanism whose objective is not winning or losing, but how spectacularly the game is played while passing the ball back and forth to each other using feet, knees, and heads. In other words, while enjoying the game of chinlone, the players' experience can be considered as a team-building exercise, as demonstrated by the way they support each other to keep the ball in motion.

As prescribed by the rules of this traditional sport, the CHINLONE platform aims to support the reorganization of Myanmar HES in a non-competitive environment where different institutions can actually work together for a shared goal. Accordingly, the project encourages local stakeholders to engage in the modernization of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by socializing all actors in the process (university governance representatives, faculty members, staff, and, above all, students) in a harmonious and integrated manner. To do so, the CHINLONE consortium includes three European universities – the University of Bologna (UNIBO), the University of Granada (UGR), and Uppsala University (UU); one EU university association, the Coimbra Group; five Myanmar universities – Dagon University, the University of Mandalay, the University of Yangon, Yangon University of Economics, and Yezin Agricultural University; along with the Ministry of Education of Myanmar. As a result, the exchange with EU universities is expected to put local HEIs in the position to be trained from different perspectives, ranging from university quality assurance management, the design and implementation of updated degree programs based on a "student-centered" approach, to the drafting of sound internationalization strategies that can lead to the development of fully functional International Relation Offices (IROs).

The drafting of this report stands out as by-product of the tasks and activities performed under the framework of the project's Work package 3 – EDUCATION PLATFORM (more information on the CHINLONE project activities here: <https://site.unibo.it/chinlone/it/project/activities>). Accordingly, after having finalized all WP activities, this analysis has sought to be a timely assessment of the lesson learned during the implantation of the WP and the suggestion and recommendation of the Consortium for the restructuring and modernization of degree courses according to an approach based on students' learning outcomes. For more information on the CHINLONE project's achievements: <https://site.unibo.it/chinlone/it/results>.

This report has been realized with the contribution of MM partner HEIs (Dagon University, University of Mandalay, University of Yangon, Yangon University of Economics, Yezin Agricultural University) and the University of Bologna. Authors of this text are Licia Proserpio and Lucia Ippolito from University of Bologna.



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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the recent Myanmar Higher Education (HE) reform lies the acknowledgement that Myanmar Universities need to increase the overall quality of their teaching activities. To reach this broad goal, one of the key steps is the reform of curricula in terms of structures, programs, and actual teaching. According to the Need Analysis carried out by CHINLONE project (published as POLICY REPORT “Myanmar's Higher Education Reform: Which Way Forward?”, available here: <https://site.unibo.it/chinlone/it/report>), the main issues to be addressed are:

- the structure and content of the curricula;
- the “teaching and learning culture” that revolves around the teaching methods and evaluation mechanisms that tended to discourage “deep learning” and critical thinking;
- lack of investment in the training of the teaching staff.

Although the structure, content, and learning objectives of the degree programmes are centrally established by ministerial bodies, the current process of modernization and reforming that the HE has been undergoing for the last years will predictably result in an increased autonomy of HEIs and in a substantial opening to the international world of education. Within this context, the growing international cooperation and the need to cope with the rapid changes in the global economy and in all the fields related to technology demand a higher degree of flexibility in curriculum design. Degree programmes must be constantly updated and revised in order to meet a country's social, cultural and economic needs. Thus, Myanmar universities are called to start playing a more active role in restructuring their curricula, always under the supervision of the governing bodies, that will continue to act as a central accrediting agency and provide general guidelines assuring quality standards. In conceiving a modern approach towards curriculum design, a change of perspective is necessary: when revising their academic offering, Myanmar HEIs should first understand if there is a real need for a specific degree programme. The overarching goal of any degree programme should be to prepare those professionals and academics that are essential for the country's cultural, societal and economic development. This assumption leads to a further change in perspective: designing degree programmes that focus on developing competences and skills according to a student-centred learning approach.

To support these “transformational shifts”, CHINLONE has developed a specific set of activities (Work package 3 – EDUCATION PLATFORM) aimed at reinforcing the capacity to design programs, teach and produce innovative knowledge by the Myanmar teaching staff. Carried out in the timeframe May 2019-January 2020, CHINLONE's specific activities have targeted pilot fields of studies identified by the Ministry of Education. These fields are: Humanities and Cultural Heritage, Agricultural Sciences, Economics of tourism. Definitely, CHINLONE's aim was to affect the course design in these subjects. At the same time, the Consortium hoped also to significantly impact the teaching/assessment methods and all the matters related to students' learning. By presenting the outcomes of these activities, we want to stress how a student-centered approach can be a primary engine and catalyst behind the progressive consolidation of an equitable and advanced HE system that provides real opportunities for graduates' employment, as well as tangible contributions to the socio-economic progress of the whole country. Even if pedagogical approaches cannot be changed by the law or by external inputs, new educational methodologies and a new “campus culture” are urgently needed in Myanmar and investing in teaching staff's training can be an effective way to move forward. The shift from a content-based approach to an outcomes-based learning is a cultural renovation in HE that demands effort and time. CHINLONE project has provided an opportunity to test this approach on a few pilot curricula hoping to prove its potential and to generate positive spillover effects.

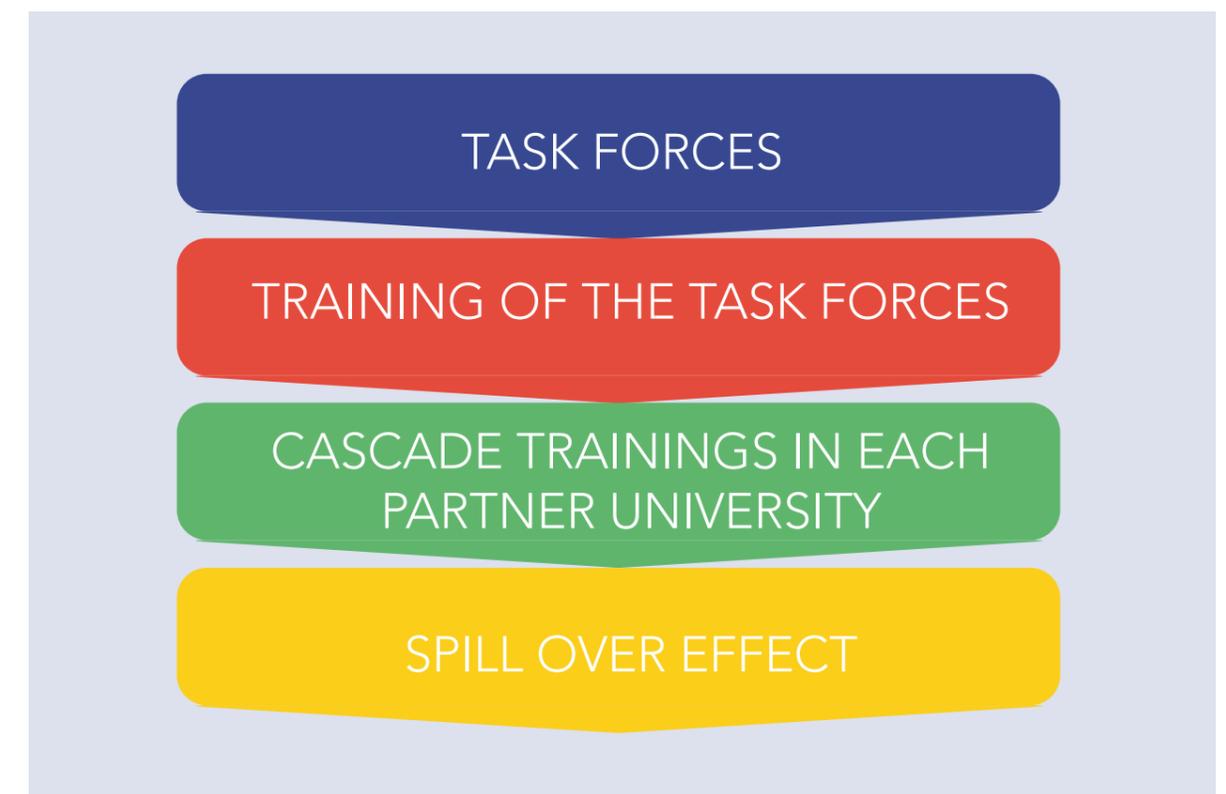
WORK PACKAGE STRUCTURE

GENERAL AIMS

Building on the outcomes of WP2, the Educational Platform's activities (WP3) focused on further developing the capacity of MM partners in designing and re-structuring degree courses according to the student-centred approach. Task Forces participated in mobility programmes, organized by the European partners in their respective universities, to experience first-hand how courses are organized, innovative teaching methodologies and to learn internationalization approaches based on the Bologna process principles. The follow-up activity consisted of a series of cascade trainings for peer academics involved in the restructuring of the pilot degree courses, selected by the project, that took place in MM.



METHODOLOGY



WORK PACKAGE STRUCTURE

WORKFLOW

Three pilot study fields selected: humanities and cultural heritage; economic of tourism; agricultural sciences. These study fields were selected for their relevance in the economic development of the Country. This evidences how the modernization of MM HE is viewed as strictly connected to the economic upgrading of the Country. For each study field a task force has been created in May 2019 to implement the educational platform.

Two weeks mobility scheme toward UNIBO, UG, UU have been carried out in Autumn 2019, followed by a cascade training held at each MM home University. The three European Universities outlined the mobility program for each task force following the same scheme. Of course, mobility programs have been then tailored according to the specific features of the relevant study field and, on the other hand, to the didactic management of the hosting University.



November and December 2019: cascade trainings. Task Forces members organized cascade trainings at their home institutions for fellow colleagues. Cascade Trainings opened the discussion on the possible adoption of the new acquired knowledge to the re-design of the pilot degree courses. Thanks to this activity, MM partners have been able to produce a spill-over effect involving in the cascade trainings more than 50 staff per Institution, with the result of having more than 250 staff trained.

Reform of Curricula. Educational Platform Task Forces, started to work on the curricula update together with the trained staff of their own institution. The updating process started just after the completion of Cascade training and the first results of this work has been presented in the WP3 – Educational Platform Conference “Recommendation for Curricula updating” at Dagon University on January 9th 2020.

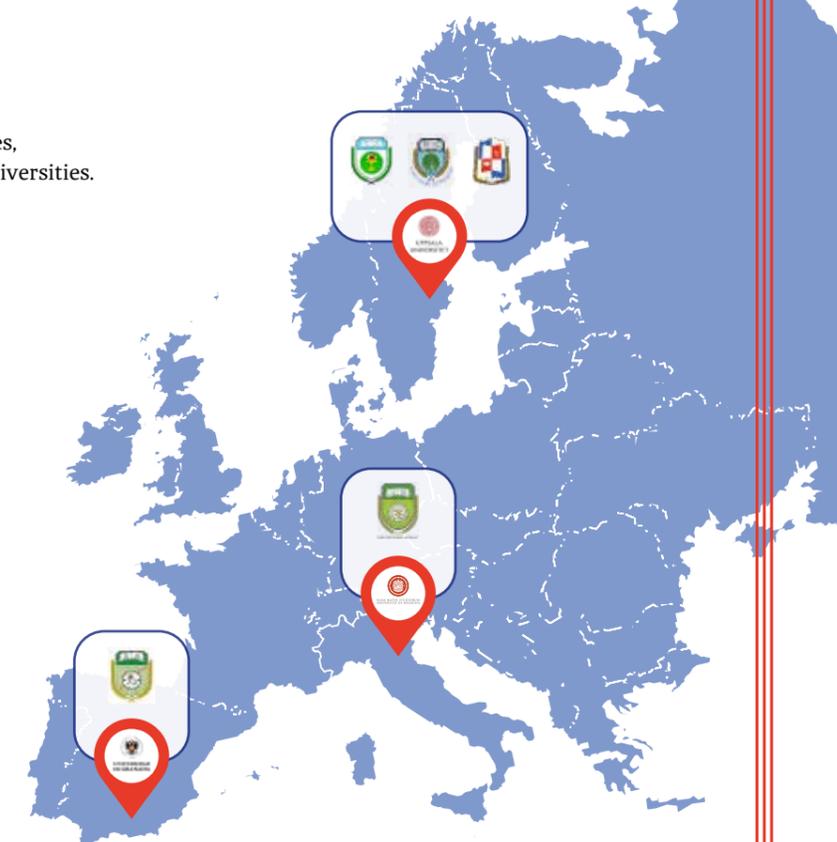
TRAININGS



MOBILITIES AT EU UNIVERSITIES

Myanmar faculty members, divided in Task Forces, participated in mobility periods at EU Partner Universities. According to the selected pilot field of studies, three educational platforms have been created:

- Educational Platform in Humanities and Cultural Heritage (Mobility at UPPSALA UNIVERSITY)
- Education Platform for Agricultural Sciences (Mobility at UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA)
- Educational Platform for Economics of Tourism (Mobility at UNIVERSITY OF GRANADA)



During the mobility periods, the Myanmar delegations had the opportunity to become familiar with European Partner Universities teaching methodologies and internationalization approaches with some insights into courses aims, learning outcomes, content, assessments and grading criteria. The MM delegation met the EU Universities teaching staff and students, discussing issues of students' governance, having the chance to take part in class activities, lectures, seminars, tutorial classes, workshops and lab sessions. This mobility experiences also had the aim to enable Myanmar partners to experience different teaching methods and different learning environments that imply a more active role on students' side. MM partners also had the opportunity to verify how EU Universities degree programs are also described, in university website pages, in terms of competences, skills and areas of professional development to better orient prospective students in their choice.

TRAININGS

CASCADE TRAININGS FOR SPILL-OVER EFFECT

Once back to Myanmar, MM professors organized cascade trainings for the academic staff to be involved in course restructuring. The trainings' focus was on the presentation of the different EU models of didactic management, innovative teaching methods and best practices in curricula design based on students learning outcomes.

01. CASCADE TRAINING HISTORY:

University of Yangon
50 participants
Dagon University
50 participants
University of Mandalay
50 participants



02. CASCADE TRAINING ARCHEOLOGY:

University of Yangon
50 participants
Dagon University
50 participants
University of Mandalay
50 participants



03. CASCADE TRAINING LAW:

Dagon University
30 participants
University of Yangon
50 participants



04. CASCADE TRAINING ECONOMICS OF TOURISM:

University of Yangon
40 participants
Yangon University of Economics
50 participants



05. CASCADE TRAINING AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES:

Yezin Agricultural University
80 participants



RESULTS



TASK FORCES	DEGREE COURSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BA in History at University of Yangon BA in Oriental Studies at University of Yangon BA in Law at Dagon University BA in Archaeology at Dagon University BA in History at University of Mandalay MA in History at University of Mandalay
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA in Agricultural Science at Yezin Agricultural University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECONOMICS OF TOURISM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA in Marketing Management at Yangon University of Economics

LESSONS LEARNED

The activities described in this report have led the CHINLONE Myanmar partners to develop a new course design method for a few specific subjects that, in the future, might apply to any course program of their academic offering. We also hope that other Myanmar HE institutions take advantage of the didactic methods and the approaches developed by CHINLONE partners and that, through a positive spillover effect, the whole HE system will benefit from this seminal experience.

A few lessons learned in the process:

- » In the framework of the ongoing HE reform, there is a strong debate around “academic autonomy”. Academic autonomy refers to a university’s capacity to manage its internal academic affairs (this means that each institution should have: the right to determine students’ admissions and their total number, as well as their selection according to the level of preparedness; the right to determine the content of programs at various levels of education; the right to abolish or cancel academic programs; the right to formulate quality evaluation criteria; the right to choose the core content of the program). The activities carried out under this CHINLONE WP prove that not only academic autonomy is necessary in Myanmar, but also that some institutions are more than ready. This might not apply to all the country’s institutions but the legal pathway should be created for all of them.
- » In the Myanmar context re-investing in the “teaching profession” means empowering teachers by providing them with better professional training. Among the training opportunities needed, there are PhD scholarships for the professors that have not been able to complete their studies yet, English courses to strengthen the use of English as medium of instruction, lifelong training on teaching methodologies. Moreover, teaching staff needs better working conditions in terms of working hours and salary;
- » A nation-wide effort is needed to promote the paradigm shift in the country’s “teaching and learning culture” towards a more inclusive model of education that not only considers the students’ needs as learners but also cultivates their critical thinking and related skills, so necessary in this transitional phase of the country. This is a collective effort by all the actors of the University life. This means that students should be included in the decision-making process regarding the teaching activities. These can be done by strengthening quality assurance mechanisms;
- » Fostering a more vibrant “campus culture” means also establishing multiple channels of interaction between students and faculty members. These channels can be structured as “office hours” or also more informally.
- » EU/Myanmar cooperation and partnership can support the challenges faced by Myanmar Universities in re-shaping their teaching activities.



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

PROJECT PARTNERS

The CHINLONE consortium works under the supervision of UNIBO as Project Coordinator, and it gathers five Universities from Myanmar, together with three Higher Education Institutions and one University Association from the EU. The Department of Higher Education of Myanmar’s Ministry of Education, moreover, acts as Project Partner.

Partners: University of Bologna, University of Yangon, Yangon University of Economics, Yezin Agricultural University, University of Mandalay, Dagon University, Uppsala University, University of Granada, The Coimbra Group, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education - Republic of the Union of Myanmar.



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