

Becoming a Monastic Teacher

Shun Lae Nge Soe, aged 22, is a young and active Shan ethnic woman who serves as a full-time teacher at Wan Nyin Monastic School located in the Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State. She is a multi-subject teacher who has taught multi-grade classes at Wan Nyin Monastic school since 2017. She is also a first year student at Keng Tung University, studying for a major in Philosophy.

Shun Lae was born in Taungoo Township and started her career as a Shan language instructor when she passed the matriculation exam in 2017. She decided to work as a teacher in Wan Nyin Monastic School, the school is a post-primary school that is attended by over 120 children, of which 44 students are novices.



According to the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, in 2017-18, there were only 17 basic primary monastic schools, with a total of 48 teachers available for nearly 2,000 student in Eastern Shan State. Generally, teacher jobs in Eastern Shan states are a challenge for young teachers like Shun Lae and most of them do not want to work for long time. However, Shun Lae has stayed committed to her career.

Quarter 2: Teacher Shun Lae Nge Soe at the MEDG's Teacher Professional Development Training. (Zaw Phyo Wai, 2019)

During her time as a Shan language instructor, she said “I wanted to reserve our (Shan) ethnic language and culture, that’s why I chose to be a Shan Language teacher first.” She went on to explain, “When I moved to Keng Tung, I found that a lot of children and novices couldn’t attend basic education schools because most of them are from less developed regions such as Monghsu. Since that time, I’ve made up my mind to help these children as much as I can because I believe that sharing my knowledge and teaching these children is valuable.” Monastic schools serve to support many children that are from disadvantaged communities, homes and conflict areas.

After Shun Lae received regional level Grade 1 new curriculum teacher training from the Ministry of Education (MoE) in late 2017, she became more confident to teach and manage the classroom. However, as a young teacher she still faced many barriers such as building good relations with the monks and using interactive teaching methods.

In 2019, she attended a one month training on Teacher Professional Development, given by the Monastic Education Development Goup (MEDG). She explained that “the training was really helpful for me because I learnt how to teach children effectively by using teaching materials and playing games. Before that, I only used one teaching method, I recited the passages in the front of the classroom and there was not much interaction with my student.”

MEDG also provided learning materials such as pictures and learning videos for Kindergarten to create effective teaching systems for monastic schools. Shun Lae said that, “MEDG’s trainers are very supportive to young teachers like me and help to build confidence for teaching”.

She went on to explain, “Before I joined MEDG’s training, sometimes I scolded my students for their manners without an explanation. Now, I realize how to interact with students properly and explain the cause and effect instead of punishment. Actually, these trainings completely changed my teaching mindset and attitude.”

In 2019, Shun Lae received Grade 2 and Grade 6 new curriculum trainings from the Government and additional Teacher Development training from MEDG. Shun Lae also said in the future, “I would like to learn new teaching skills such as creating effective teaching materials from the internet and want to upgrade my English language skills.”

Now, Shun Lae is very proud of her students competency regarding their literacy skills, especially with Myanmar Language. “My first batch of students are now studying at Grade 4 and they are very accomplished at reading and speaking Burmese language”. As they are Shan ethnic children, it is really difficult to teach with Burmese



Quarter 2: Teacher Shun Lae Nge Soe learning at the MEDG's Teacher Professional Development Training. (Zaw Phyto Wai, 2019)

school textbooks at first grade but now I am really proud of my contribution to their achievements to overcome their language barriers in learning.”

When asked where she saw herself in five years she replied, “In the coming five years, I see myself as a teacher who is capable of improving my student’s literacy skills in Wan Nyin Monastic school”.