



# TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION IN MYANMAR

After decades of isolation, a groundbreaking EFL project is opening up a world of new opportunities for students and researchers

“This is a turning point. In the coming years, any major achievements from our university in teaching, learning and research will be related to the EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project.” – Dr Kyaw Naing, Pro-Rector of the University of Yangon

Enter the University of Mandalay Library on any given day and you will find Durga Daewi, a second-year Masters of Law student, in front of a computer busily preparing for her thesis.

For millions of university students around the world using the internet to study and having access to high quality e-journals and e-books are taken for granted.

But for Durga Daewi and thousands of other students in Myanmar, it has been a revelation.

“In the past, printed textbooks were difficult to find. And if you did manage to find one, it was very expensive,” Durga Daewi explains.

Thanks to a new e-library at the University of Mandalay, Durga Daewi can now access the texts she needs online.

The e-library, comprising more than 10,000 full-text scholarly journals and 130,000 full-text academic e-books, is a central component of the EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project.

This groundbreaking project, which supports educational change in Myanmar, is making a fundamental difference to the lives of students, researchers and academics.

### A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION

The launch of the EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project could not have been more timely.

When EIFL launched the 18-month project in December 2013, Myanmar was undergoing tremendous change. After decades of isolation, the country was opening up to the outside world.

Following student protests, the government had suspended undergraduate studies in 1988 at the University of Mandalay and the University of Yangon. In December 2013, they were at last allowed to reopen their doors to undergraduate students.

The new students had high learning expectations that the universities were anxious to meet.

The university library collections were limited, out of date, and many books were falling apart. Students shared a handful of donated computers and struggled with slow internet.

Until the start of the project, no universities in Myanmar had access to online subscription resources.

Professors were hard pressed to catch up with developments in their fields and had to resort to contacting universities abroad to ask for journal articles to be sent via email.

### INNOVATIVE NEW PROJECT

The EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project set out to overcome these challenges by providing instant online access to a world-class collection of specially selected international journals, databases and e-books, and training students and librarians how to use them.

The project began by working with the University of Mandalay and the University of Yangon in early 2014, aiming to provide effective support for teaching, research and

learning across all faculties — from the social sciences and humanities to the sciences.

The universities installed new fibre optic cables to increase internet bandwidth and purchased new computers.

Demand for access to the e-resources was immediate.

Impressed by the impact of the EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project at the University of Mandalay and the University of Yangon, three more universities invested in similar infrastructure and became partners in 2014: Dagon University, Yadanabon University and the Yangon University of Economics.

### IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Professors say the impact of the resources on teaching has been transformative.

Professor Mi Mi Gyi, Head of the International Relations and Politics Department at the University of Mandalay, says she has already seen a marked improvement in her students' work as a result of the availability of e-resources.

“Now we are changing our education system from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach. So, as teachers, we need to inspire the curiosity of our students,” she says.

“We ask them a lot of questions and they find out what they want to know from the online resources.”

### SHAPING POLICY MAKING

Myanmar is currently revising its old laws, and introducing many new laws.

Dr Khin Mar Yee, Professor of Law at the University of Yangon, was invited by the Ministry of Science and Technology to help shape the country's new draft laws on trademark, industrial design, patents and copyright.

“Myanmar's current Copyright Act was enacted in 1914 during British colonial rule,” says Dr Khin Mar Yee. “So we need IP laws that are in line with our situation today.”

It is expected that the new draft copyright law will be sent to Parliament in 2015.

To do her current work, Dr Khin Mar Yee relies heavily on the new e-library at the University of Yangon to stay up to date.

“The law books we had were very difficult to buy and not sufficient for the many fields of law,” explains Dr Khin Mar Yee.

“The new e-resources are very beneficial for research and legal education. They make it much easier for legal scholars to find out about relevant laws and legal precedents,” she continues. “They are essential for us.”

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

For development to be sustainable in Myanmar, Dr Thaw Kaung, a former Chief Librarian at the University of Yangon, says universities will need to play a leading role.



**LEARNING ONLINE:** Students are learning to use e-resources at the University of Yangon.  
*Photo by Rubén Salgado Escudero for EIFL*

“We need educated people to run the country,” said Dr Thaw Kaung in a 2014 interview with The Associated Press.

“We can’t just rely on foreign aid and experts. Without a university producing capable persons, it will be difficult to sustain development in the long run.”

EIFL will continue to work with all five universities, and key priorities will include improving the dissemination of their research results through open access, to maximize the visibility, usage and impact of their research publications.

EIFL will also provide assistance in the development of the new copyright law to

better support university teaching and learning in the digital environment.

In addition, EIFL will support the creation of a national library consortium to incorporate many of the country’s universities.

By working together in a consortium, libraries can make more e-resources available to more people more cost effectively.

According to Dr Kyaw Naing, Pro-Rector of the University of Yangon, the impact of the eLibrary Myanmar project on his university will be far reaching.

“The establishment of the e-library at the University of Yangon is a significant

development in our university’s history,” says Dr Kyaw Naing.

“This is a turning point. In the coming years, any major achievements from our university in teaching, learning and research will be related to the EIFL eLibrary Myanmar project.”

Dr Thida Win, Pro-Rector of the University of Mandalay, agrees.

“Having access to knowledge online has truly changed our university,” says Dr Thida Win.

“The up-to-date information and e-resources have helped us to equip our students, educators and teachers better.”

And for students such as Durga Daewi, on whom the direction of the country ultimately rests, the future looks hopeful.

The 22-year-old hopes to use her newfound knowledge of the law to empower others.

“My country is a developing country, so most of the citizens are uneducated,” she says.

“Many are afraid of the law. I want to share with them information about the Myanmar legal system. I want to educate them.”

*The eLibrary Myanmar project is funded by the Open Society Foundations’ Higher Education Support Program (HESP).*

## 2014 PROJECT NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

<b>5</b>	Number of partner universities
<b>5,000+</b>	Number of librarians, faculty and students who attended training on use of e-resources
<b>15,000+</b>	Number of full-text scholarly journals available
<b>27,000+</b>	Number of total full-text downloads
<b>60,000+</b>	Number of students in Myanmar who now have access to e-resources available through the project
<b>130,000+</b>	Number of full-text academic e-books available

**IN 2014:** EIFL saved libraries in EIFL partner countries more than 217 million USD as a result of negotiations with publishers.

**IN 2014:** Students and researchers downloaded more than 5 million full-text journal articles and e-book chapters across the EIFL network.