

Unveiling Myanmar Dropout High School Students' Motivation in EFL Learning Based on Self-Determination Theory

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: EFL, motivation, self-determination theory (SDT) DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v10i2.2153 How to cite: Kyaw, C. C. E. & Wilang, J. D. (2025). Unveiling Myanmar Dropout High School Students' Motivation in EFL Learning Based on Self-Determination Theory. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 10(2), 375-393	<i>This study examines the role of motivation based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) among Myanmar high school dropout students who continue learning English. Specifically, it explores the underlying motivational factors and their impact on students' engagement with EFL learning. The study involved nine Myanmar high school dropout students who have attended or are currently attending EFL centers in different cities. Data were collected through online and face-to-face interviews, focusing on students' experiences in learning English. Findings indicated that motivation in EFL learning is driven by inner spark, doors of opportunity, and loss of momentum in formal education, alongside the SDT elements of pursuing a purposeful path, empowerment through growth, connections, and expanding aspirational horizons. The results also suggest that students exhibit a high degree of autonomous motivation in their learning and develop stronger social engagement compared to their previous educational experiences. Additionally, while some students are motivated to pursue further education, others express a strong desire to contribute to their communities. Overall, the study highlights that high school dropout students in Myanmar demonstrate motivation to learn English, both to achieve personal goals and to contribute to their society. These findings underscore the need for socio-cultural, metacognitive, and technology-enhanced teaching approaches tailored to the autonomous learning styles of these students.</i>

1. Introduction

The English language has become the lingua franca of the world, as its speakers have progressively disseminated it through various historical events (Phillipson, 1992). However,

English language learning in outer circle countries, where it is taught as a foreign language and learners have limited opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom, is identified as a highly challenging process that requires a willful effort from learners (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017). Harmer (2007) claimed that learners of English have different reasons and purposes globally. In such a situation of abundant socio-political crises, Nra & Vibulphol (2020) stated that students' performance is affected by these factors, and school dropout is the most severe impact. In the context of Myanmar, students refused to continue high school education due to the socio-political situations, but they enrolled in EFL classes in language learning centres.

In Myanmar, a country where English is not widely spoken, language learning is often conducted in EFL learning centres rather than in government schools. Despite students in Myanmar learning English as a compulsory subject from the primary level to the bachelor's level due to the curriculum (Zein, 2022), the proficiency in the language is inadequate for many students at the expected level (Ozer & Akay, 2022). Moreover, access to online English learning resources is limited in Myanmar, and the instruction of English in classrooms is mainly conducted in the mother tongue (Linn, 2016). These factors lead students to attend EFL classes outside of schools or universities (Bağçeci, 2004; Genç et al., 2021).

Nra & Vibulphol (2020) commented that socio-political situations have been one of the factors that affect the learning of students. Many high school students in Myanmar have dropped out of school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing political conflicts in Myanmar since 2020. Due to the civil wars and recent political crises, many teachers and students have fled to safer areas, and schools have been damaged (Lut, 2013). Many of them have not returned to school for various reasons. Although they have withdrawn from formal schooling, many of the students have taken several language classes, especially EFL classes in language learning centers, with intense passion, ambitions, and motivation.

Despite learners having different intentions in their course of learning, motivation has been a focus for second language studies due to its distinct relation with success in second and foreign language learning (Bobkina et al., 2021). Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasized that highly motivated students, both intrinsically and extrinsically, will strive for opportunities to practice and enhance their language proficiency in the target language. Despite the challenges of instruction and obstacles, many young people in Myanmar are learning the English language these days for several reasons, especially with the hope of continuing their studies abroad. Moreover, some students attend EFL learning centres because they desire to take standardized language proficiency examinations, such as IELTS or TOEFL, which are required for their further studies (Thant & González, 2017).

However, the study on the motivation of Myanmar dropout high school students based on SDT has not been conducted in the field of education so far. Moreover, this gap is significant, as this study aims to address it by investigating the role of motivation in the SDT framework among Myanmar high school dropout EFL students. By examining the factors that influence students' motivation and the impact of motivation on their EFL learning, this study will contribute to theoretical advancements by providing additional insights into existing knowledge regarding students' motivation. Besides, the findings of this study can be applied to pedagogical and theoretical implications in EFL learning to sustain motivation with similar

groups of students. Moreover, this study will provide EFL teachers with a constructive insight into developing teaching strategies to enhance students' motivation.

2. Literature Review

Deci & Ryan (1985) state that "SDT addresses such basic issues as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goal and aspiration, energy and vitality, non-conscious processes, the relationship of culture to motivation and the impact of social environment on motivation, affect, behavior, and well-being" (p.183). Zareian & Jodaei (2015) state that when learners have a high degree of self-determination in language learning, they are more likely to demonstrate autonomy in their learning process, which leads them to higher achievements. Moreover, learners with intrinsic motivation tend to exhibit better academic performance than those with extrinsic motivation (Sarrazin et al., 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

SDT is a theory of personality and motivation, related to two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. The first one is a natural interest in the activity, and the second one is based on the rewards of the activity (Noels et al., 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). However, Noels (2001) stated that motivation comprises three elements: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

According to Deci & Ryan (1985), SDT is theorized as fulfilling the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which enhances the intrinsic motivation of an individual, leading to optimal functioning and well-being. Advocates of SDT argue that students with intrinsic motivation exhibit higher levels of academic performance compared to those with extrinsic motivation (Sarrazin et al., 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Moreover, Wang & Chen (2021) explain that the satisfaction of psychological needs — especially autonomy — guided students' self-determined motivation and engagement in physical education settings, strengthening the essential role autonomous motivation plays in educational success.

The relationship between SDT and motivation in EFL learning is stated as if learners have autonomy, competence, and relatedness to the activities they do inside and outside the classroom, and to their peers and teachers, they will possibly be more psychologically fulfilled and motivated with the language learning process (Otoshi & Heffernan, 2011). Moreover, they state that SDT has relations to goal pursuits. According to Deci & Ryan (1985), with the SDT, the primary concern of individuals in chasing after goals is to the extent that they can fulfil their basic psychological needs when they strive for these goals.

The reasons for EFL learning and motivations have undergone chronological changes in the Myanmar context due to alterations in political, social, and economic situations (Ireland & Van Benthuyzen, 2014). In Myanmar, before the pandemic, it was a stereotypical perception among young people that when they dropped out, they would become general workers, while some of them became migrant workers. The reasons for dropping out were often related to socioeconomic and sociocultural factors (Hong, 2021). Much of the past literature focused on the topic of Myanmar youth dropouts being impacted by the labels of poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.

According to Save the Children (2022), the estimated number of dropout students in Myanmar was 7.8 million, resulting from the closure of schools in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent military takeover. The military government reopened the

government schools in June 2021 (Choo & Aye, 2022). However, Htet (2022) noted that no exact data were available on the number of students who returned to government schools, despite the military government stating that 5.6 million students were enrolled in 2022.

The recent takeover led the country's education to fewer resources, facilities, and educators (Brown & Hung, 2022), as the military government had excessively controlled, monitored, and censored academic freedom inside and outside the academic institutions (Hong, 2021). After the takeover, the public schools have become political grounds since many teachers, parents, and students denied continuing schooling under the military government (Choo & Aye, 2022; Htet, et al., 2022). This is due to the security concerns that schools are not safe and do not meet the interests of students (Saito, 2021; Choo & Aye, 2022). This motivated many students and parents to seek further educational opportunities abroad and enroll in schools and universities outside the country (Speckien & Ku, 2024).

However, the ability to speak English has become a pathway to setting better personal value and future opportunities (Li et al., 2019; Baecher et al., 2014) for Myanmar high school dropouts after 2020. To pursue a better postsecondary education abroad, many Myanmar students have been seeking international education opportunities (Speckien & Ku, 2024). This is because they require the necessary skills to continue their education in an international academic setting and adapt to a different culture, particularly the English language.

At a glance, many of the Myanmar high school dropouts who have taken and are taking EFL classes in learning centres appear to be motivated in their language learning journey. However, the study on the motivation of Myanmar dropout high school students based on SDT has not been conducted in the field of education so far. Hence, the factors that motivate Myanmar students to learn EFL, by which means they are motivated, whether intrinsically or extrinsically, and the impact of motivation on their EFL learning, are to be studied in this research.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research design

A qualitative narrative design was used to explore this study. The goal of qualitative research in a social science study is to conduct in-depth investigations of the phenomenon (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). Moreover, narrative design is a significant form of research that emphasises the stories of individuals, collecting data from various stories, recounting people's experiences, and elaborating on the meaning of such experiences for the people (Creswell, 2015).

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were nine dropout high school students in Myanmar who were taking and had learned EFL for various reasons after the COVID-19 pandemic and the following political crisis. The purposeful sampling procedure was employed, where individuals were intentionally selected to gain an understanding of the central phenomenon. It is the most efficient method for this study, as many of the dropout students in this study have security concerns and are unwilling to participate. The participants were from various cities in Myanmar, particularly from Mon State, with one student each from the Yangon region and Kayin State. There were six female students and three male students, all in Grades

10 and 11, respectively. It was concluded that data saturation was reached with the ninth interview, as many of the themes were repeated.

The selection criteria for the participants were as follows.

1. The participants are high school dropouts after 2020.
2. The students are attending or have taken EFL courses after dropping out.

The following Table represents the description of participants.

Table 1. Description of participants

Participant number	Region	Grade level
P ₁ (female)	Mawlamyine, Mon state	G-10
P ₂ (female)	Mawlamyine, Mon state	G-11
P ₃ (female)	Mawlamyine, Mon state (currently in Thailand)	G-11
P ₄ (male)	Mawlamyine, Mon state	G-10
P ₅ (male)	Yangon	G-10
P ₆ (male)	Ye, Mon state	G-11
P ₇ (female)	Kanni, Hpa-an, Kayin state	G-11
P ₈ (female)	Mudon, Mon state	G-10
P ₉ (female)	Mudon, Mon state	G-10

3.3. Instrumentation

In this research, semi-structured interview questions were used during online and in-person interviews, with open-ended questions presented in a different order to provide flexibility and comfort for the participants. To validate the interview questions, an expert review and a pilot test were conducted.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis technique employed a six-step analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2015). The interviews were audio-recorded, manually transcribed, and rewritten chronologically as stories in English, as this is important in narrative studies (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). After rewriting the stories, the researcher coded the data into narrative blocks. The researcher grouped the codes into different themes and conducted the procedures for coding by applying selective coding to develop a theory (Creswell, 2015). In this phase, the researcher systematically organized the themes into different categories, such as sectors and text data, and labelled them with a term. The codes and themes were validated with peer researchers. Then, the researcher presented, recited, and elaborated the findings in a narrative arrangement. Throughout the process, the data were analyzed according to the motives that drive high school dropout students in Myanmar to learn EFL, their motivation in learning, and the impact of motivation on their EFL learning journey.

4. Results

4.1. The Motives of Dropout High School Students in EFL Learning

The factors that drove high school dropout students to take EFL classes in learning centres comprised both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as amotivation and goals. The primary motives of high school students who drop out of EFL learning mainly stem from an inner spark. The motives of high school dropouts in EFL learning are presented below.

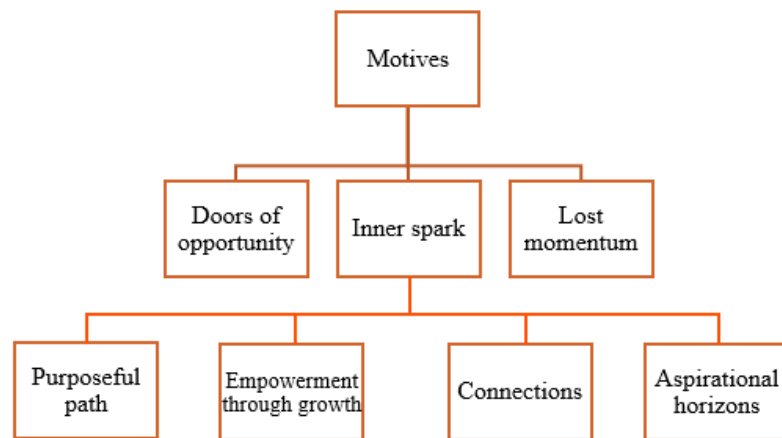


Figure 1. The motives of dropout high school students in EFL learning

4.1.1. Inner spark

Five students reported that they were motivated by their inner spark, which led them to take EFL classes in language learning centres after dropping out of their previous classes. Students had a purposeful, self-directed learning journey and made intentional decisions. The elements included a belief in potential, a desire to improve, and a passion for learning.

P6 stated that he had a passion for the English language, but P4 explained that he had noticed his English language skills were weak during high school, which led them to join EFL classes in learning centres after dropping out.

P6 : *I have a passion for this international language, so I attended the language classes.*

P4 : *I was weak in the English language, and I wanted to turn my weaknesses into strengths.*

P2 wanted to enhance her language skills so that she could take specific tests for her desired education.

P2 : *I can take GED or IGCSE tests, but I need the English language to get the education that I want.*

According to P5 and P7, the influence of social bonds and strengthening communication were desired in their learning process.

P5 : *I think having a proficiency in the English language can give me many benefits for my future in communication...*

Students highlighted their ambitious dreams, such as achieving scholarships addressed by P9 and studying abroad for P5, as inspiring targets in their learning.

P9 : *I joined the English language class because I wanted to apply for a scholarship."*

P5 : *I wanted to continue my education internationally.*

4.1.2. Doors of Opportunity

It was found that the motives serving as gateways to future success and new possibilities served as the external motivators for the students towards EFL learning. Four students reported that they had expectations for opportunities to fulfil their parents' suggestions and not feel the worth of education in high school after the crisis.

As explained by P₄, the government education system after the coup was unqualified, with insufficient teachers who lacked experience in the subjects they taught, indirectly affecting students' choices of better education.

P₅ : *I think having a proficiency in the English language can give me many benefits for my future ... or for work.*

P₁ : *My mother heard that my friends attended summer English language courses ... and she suggested that I attend there.*

P₄: *The reason ... was not only about political intention. In fact, I continued my high school education for one year after the schools reopened. However, there were not enough teachers, and the teachers were not competent enough in the subjects.*

4.1.3. Lost Momentum

Four students felt a lack of direction or confusion before they took EFL classes in language learning centres after dropping out.

P₂ : *After dropping out, I lost all my tracks...*

P₃ : *After one year of dropping out, I started learning English instead of wasting time."*

4.2. The motivations of dropout high school students in EFL learning

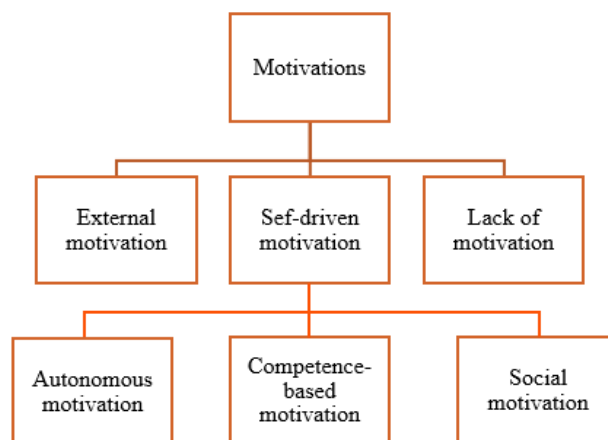


Figure 2. The motivations of dropout high school students in EFL learning

It was found that all participants were intrinsically motivated along with autonomous motivation, competence-based motivation, and social motivation, which are the basic psychological needs of SDT; meanwhile, the extrinsic factors positively and negatively affected the motivation of students. Additionally, data was found on factors contributing to a lack of motivation among students.

4.2.1. Self-driven Motivation

4.2.1.1. Autonomous motivation

According to student reports, autonomous motivation was the primary reason students dropped out of EFL learning. Students reported that they chose to attend EFL classes at learning centres independently and conducted self-study during their EFL learning process.

P₃ : *I was eager to attend a class, so I searched for a good class by myself.*

P₈ : *I practiced on my own for the difficulties.*

According to reports from eight students, satisfaction and enthusiasm played a significant role in their learning process, both in terms of developing their skills and in the overall learning experience.

P5 : *It is enjoyable to learn after getting used to the language.*

Five students emphasized the importance of having confidence in their learning process.

P1 : *I believe that I have potential in this language, and I trust myself that I could do better when I learn more.*

Two students reported a realisation that they needed to put more effort into their learning process. Consequently, four students also commented that they had self-control to have consistency in their learning process.

P4 : *I motivated myself by reminding that education is the only way for a better future to overcome the difficulties.*

Surprisingly, three students reported perseverance in their EFL learning, despite having regrets about not learning English earlier and previously being unable to communicate in the language.

P2 : *I felt regret for not learning English early enough.*

4.2.1.2. Competence-based motivation

Students also reported the elements of competence that intrinsically motivated them in the learning process. It was found that pairs of oppositions, such as ease vs. difficulty and inability vs. mastery, were reflected by the students. Two students mentioned ease in learning, but six students complained about difficulties in listening, speaking, writing, grammar, and presentation.

P1 : *It became easier for me to understand the English language ... I did not feel learning English was too difficult.*

P9 : *I think the difficult part is speaking in English ... English is not my mother tongue, so I have many difficulties learning it.*

Three students explained that they had both an inability and mastery in the language, while P5 added his experience of having achieved mastery.

P2 : *I could not read the topics that I was interested in. I was nervous about communicating with foreigners before taking classes. However, after doing self-study and completing the classes, I can read what I want. I can write well... now I can communicate well...*

P3 : *When I first met with Americans, I was not able to communicate properly with them,... However, after learning and doing self-study, I have improved in speaking and communicating, and I can share my knowledge with others.*

P5 : *...I got new experiences. We need confidence to be fluent in English ... it is a personal skill.*

In addition, three students also explained that improvements in their language skills also boosted their motivation.

P9 : *I felt that I improved in my English skills more than in the past, such as getting to know more grammar rules.*

Effective study techniques also helped motivate students with self-esteem in their learning process, two students reported.

P6 : *...doing some lesson projects makes me confident.*

P7 : *I felt happy when I got techniques for reading and grammar.*

Moreover, two other students mentioned that competence in technology was another factor that kept them motivated in language learning.

P5 : *I also use free IT and AI tools for my English learning.*

4.2.1.3. Social Motivation

Having social motivation was found to be significant in the reports of students. Family support, including encouragement and permissions, greatly motivated students, as reported by four students.

P1 : *When I chose to attend English class, she (my mother) encouraged me by registering for me ... My uncle also encouraged me to study.*

Four other students reported having teacher support and peer support inside and outside the classroom, such as receiving suggestions and compliments during their learning process.

P2 : *I met a teacher who suggested that I go to libraries.*

P3 : *A friend of mine recommended it when I was looking for an English class.*

On the other hand, students emphasized that the factors related to community were the ones that motivated them in the learning process. Six students significantly reported communication with both local and international people.

P6 : *I met many students from different cities, which improved my communication skills... I wanted to communicate internationally.*

Two students also pointed out that collaboration and getting engagement with people also played a role in motivation.

P6 : *We learned the language with teamwork, so I got leadership skills too.*

P3 : *I can share my knowledge with others. After having many meetings ... in English, I am more engaged in the program.*

4.2.2. External Motivation

Based on the data collected, external motivation could be divided into two categories: positive and negative factors. Students were motivated in EFL learning due to the different atmosphere from schools. Three students mentioned this in their comments.

P1 : *I felt different learning English in government school and the language class.*

P1 recognized that the English language is a requirement for her, but for P7, there were inadequate classes and facilities in her village, which made her travel to another place to learn the language.

P1 : *Learning English as a language was a requirement for my education ...*

P7 : *In my village, there are only summer schools that offer English, but it is not enough for the students.*

The usefulness and opportunities of the English language, as well as the accomplishments, were also motivating factors for other students.

P5 : *We can use it for education, business, travelling, and communication with foreigners.*

P5 and P3 highlighted that getting compliments and work experience boosted their motivation.

- P5 : *The teacher complimented my writing in class ... Foreigners also compliment me on my fluent communication with them.*
- P3 : *I worked as a child-led researcher in a World Vision program ... I worked as a facilitator for discussions in English ... I served as a master of ceremonies for the event (in the Philippines).*

The negative factors were significantly influenced by problems with family, finances, and relationships, as well as mobility, political situations, and peer pressure.

- P1 : *I confronted challenging factors in my studies, such as family problems, financial issues... I did not have my own income, and I did not have a financially strong family background ... I also was in a toxic relationship.*
- P7 : *I came far from my village to attend the class. So, transportation is difficult for me. It took a long time to travel, and the transportation was tough. The political situation is also a barrier to our freedom of learning because there are many investigations out there.*
- P3 : *I had a senior who is more fluent in English ... I felt inferior and sad.*

4.2.3. Lack of Motivation

It was fascinating that one student reported a lack of motivation in her EFL learning.

- P1 : *Sometimes I almost lost track of keeping my studies up due to financial problems and pressures, and was undecided whether to continue my studies or not.*

4.3. The Effects of Motivation on the EFL Learning Process

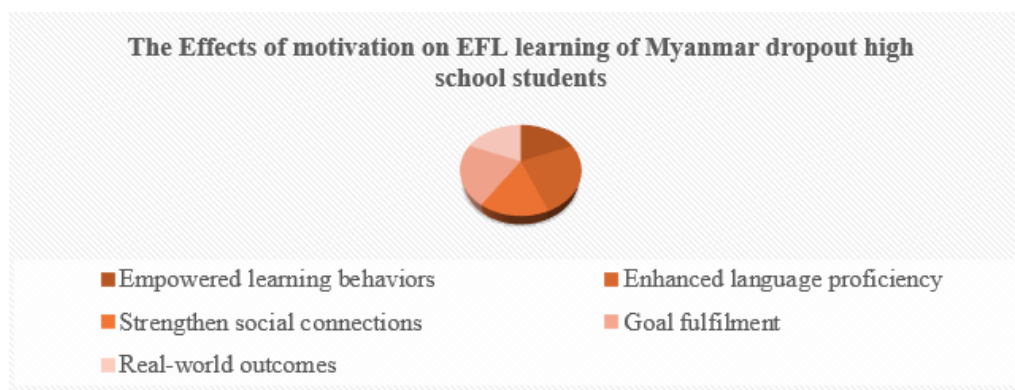


Figure 3. The effects of motivation on the EFL learning process

4.3.1. Empowered Learning Behaviors

Students reported the effects on their autonomous learning behaviours, including self-study, consistency, perseverance, excitement, confidence, and satisfaction. Three students reflected that they engaged in self-study while learning with a strong motivation drive.

- P4 : *We must do self-study and learn online to be better in the English language.*

Other students also commented on the importance of consistency and perseverance in learning the language.

- P8 : *I want to suggest ... to have consistency in the learning process.*
- P3 : *I want to suggest that English language learners not give up on learning.*

Students stated that they felt excited and confident about applying the language in their EFL journey practically.

P7 : *I was excited to communicate with foreigners*

P1 : *If I have English proficiency, I can break financial problems. I want to prove that I can do.*

Moreover, two students reported satisfaction with their language due to motivation.

P3 : *I felt delighted by seeing them (the children I taught) improve.*

4.3.2. Enhancing Language Proficiency

Several factors were also discussed regarding the effects of enhancing language proficiency. Students mainly emphasised their language abilities, as seven of them addressed it.

P5 : *I encourage some of my friends who are also dropouts from rural areas and have little exposure to the English language by giving some grammar notes and explaining to them every day online.*

Four students added that they acquired knowledge from learning the language, as well as from sharing it with younger students.

P3 : *I know some global Englishes... I learned hospitality English by working there.*

P4 : *I want to share what I have learned and know with the youngsters.*

Moreover, students also mentioned their improvements in the learning process and reported that they were learning more easily.

P8 : *My communication skills have improved.*

P1 : *There will be less difficulty in understanding the lessons.*

Leadership skills were another factor that two students reflected on.

P2 : *Some friends and I led a business training for single mothers.*

Students also commented on giving encouragement, getting learning techniques, and technology integration.

P1 : *I encourage my students in successful communication.*

P1 : *I got some reading techniques ... I learned mostly from YouTube.*

P3 : *I facilitate speaking groups online.*

P5 : *I also use Discord...*

4.3.3. Strengthening Social Connections

Students emphasised the significant effects of motivation on strengthening social connections, particularly in terms of communication and helping others.

Seven students reported that they had effects on communication.

P2 : *When I went to a library, I found that there are programs that I can apply. In this way, I expand my network.*

P5 : *When I go to some local events, I get many contacts... It is effective to discuss business with foreigners.*

P7 : *I became fluent by speaking with foreigners.*

As for helping people, students categorised their comments as helping the community, helping the family, and helping their peers.

P2 : *Some friends and I led a business training ... I gave educational suggestions to children.*

P3 : *I did many voluntary works with my English language.*

- P1 : *I encouraged my little brother to study.*
P7 : *I helped my aunt with teaching English in her tuition.*
P2 : *There were some of my friends who dropped out, ... I shared with them how to continue their education.*
P5 : *I encourage them (dropout friends with loose access to English) ...*
P8 : *I want to create an opportunity for dropouts in my village.*

4.3.4. Goal Fulfilment

As for the effects on goal fulfilment, students primarily discussed their education and experiences abroad, including test-taking, studying, scholarships, career aspirations, and volunteering. Six students discussed taking tests to continue their education abroad, including getting scholarships.

- P3 : *I am going to take the GED test and attend a university in Japan.*
P5 : *I think it is effective to prepare for tests like IELTS and IGCSE. I am also planning to study abroad.*
P7 : *I am planning to go to Thailand soon for my studies and work.*
P9 : *I want to take the IELTS test and apply for scholarships in the future.*

Four students also reported that they can fulfil their goals with the effects of motivation.

- P2 : *In future, I see myself doing research, sharing about education and helping others.*
P3 : *One of my goals is to be a volunteer, so I did many volunteer works with my English language.*

4.3.5. Real-world Outcomes

Students also gained insight into the effects of real-world outcomes, including work experience, business expansion, payments, acknowledgements, utility, and travel.

- P2 : *I once worked as a dog sitter for a family who lives in Spain.*
P3 : *I worked under a World Vision program and a British Council education program. I also worked as a waitress in a big hotel in my town.*
P5 : *I can also expand my business to the foreign community...*
P3 : *I also earned some payments on my own.*

Additionally, P3, P4, and P7 individually reported the effects of achieving acknowledgement, utility, and travelling.

- P3 : *...children appreciate my contributions.*
P4 : *I can communicate in English; it is helpful for me in my workplace.*
P7 : *I visited Malaysia once.*

5. Discussions

The data suggest that the motivation among Myanmar high school dropouts in EFL learning was generally self-driven, although external motivations and a lack of motivation were also detected. It was found that students were more motivated by the opportunity to take EFL classes in language learning centres after dropping out of school. However, as learning continued, their motivation became more autonomous, and students claimed their goal fulfilment with firm, empowered learning behaviours and strengthened social connections in discussions about the effects of motivation in the learning process.

It was found that inner spark, a motive related to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), greatly influenced Myanmar high school dropout students in EFL learning. According to Ireland & Van Benthuyzen (2014), Myanmar EFL learners were more extrinsically motivated in the learning process for academic and professional achievement. However, the findings of this study indicated a more intrinsic form of motivation among high school dropouts in Myanmar. Students demonstrated autonomy by claiming that they believed in their potential as well as having desires and passions towards EFL learning.

As Kim et al. (2018) stated that university entrance exams requiring EFL proficiency are the primary demotivating factor among EFL students in East Asia, it is fascinating to note the motivation of Myanmar high school dropouts towards EFL learning, who were enthusiastic about continuing their education. In the previous literature, Ireland and Van Benthuyzen (2014) stated that the advantages and opportunities of international communication drove the eagerness of Myanmar students in EFL learning.

Likewise, this study has found that one of the reasons behind the dropout of students taking EFL classes in learning centres was due to the lack of communication privileges. Moreover, winning scholarships and studying abroad were the two primary goals of dropouts behind their EFL learning process. Zareian & Jodaei (2015) claimed that having a wish for an achievement towards a specific goal and taking attempts to fulfil that goal are the vital factors for motivation. Therefore, the goals identified in this study suggest that students are motivated extrinsically when they first take EFL classes in learning centres after dropping out of government high schools.

It is a positive motivator for students, as it was primarily and commonly assumed in Myanmar that low family literacy and a lack of family encouragement were among the significant factors contributing to dropouts (Aggarwal, 2024). However, this study has found that students were supported by their families to attend the EFL class. Moreover, dropout students had learned EFL due to the opportunities they had, as commented by Lwin (2011), who noted that learning the English language could bring economic advantages, facilitate communication with the world, and improve education and employment prospects. Students in this study admitted that they believed that English proficiency would bring abundant benefits for their future.

One intriguing factor found was that students' dropout and learning EFL were not just about political intention, but also due to the insufficient infrastructure in government schools, such as having inadequate and unqualified teachers. This is one of the consequences of the military takeover, as some teachers also discontinued schooling under the government due to security concerns (Choo & Aye, 2022; Htut et al., 2022). Moreover, according to Brown & Hung (2022), this crisis led to the country's education sector having fewer resources, facilities, and educators. Therefore, difficult learning conditions, such as negative teacher encouragement (Falout et al., 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009), were the leading factors that led dropouts to choose EFL learning.

With the motives, the participants expressed diverse motivations, especially intrinsic motivation, with the most reported elements of SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, than extrinsic motivation and amotivation during their EFL learning process. According to Niemiec & Ryan (2009) and Deci & Ryan (1985), autonomy refers to an individual's perception and behaviour of having freedom of choice and voice in the learning

process. This is confirmed by six participants who searched for and chose to attend the EFL classes in the learning centers themselves.

Almost all of the students demonstrated satisfaction during their learning process. Based on their answers, their satisfaction stemmed from aligning with their pronunciation, the successful communication they made, the test results, their enjoyment of the learning process, and the activities they were engaged in during their learning. These results support the study by Turner (2023) on part-time PhD students, which suggests that sustaining motivation and satisfaction is significantly related to SDT, especially emphasising the role of autonomy in enhancing individual academic experiences. The results also support the explanation of Wang & Chen (2021) that autonomy highlights students' self-determined motivation and engagement in education settings by strengthening the role of autonomous motivation in educational success.

Students expressed mastery after learning EFL for a duration, even though they faced difficulties in the beginning. Therefore, as stated by Niemiec & Ryan (2009), the results of this study indicate that students may be more deeply engaged in their education because they have a more positive perception of their competency.

According to the students, diverse learning techniques, such as doing projects, made them confident in the language, and acquiring reading and grammar techniques made them happy. Moreover, two students demonstrated that they applied technology in their EFL learning by practising on websites and utilising free IT and AI tools. This could contribute to the new findings as well as to future research, as there is very little literature on the motivation of Myanmar students in EFL learning regarding the application of technology.

Four students claimed that support from parents and family was one of the motivations they had during their EFL learning. This finding contradicts the previous literature, which suggests that a lack of encouragement from family was the primary factor affecting high school students' dropout rates in the Mandalay region, Myanmar (Oo, 2015). However, the support of parents in dropout students' EFL learning aligns with Speckien & Ku's (2024) study of students and parents seeking educational opportunities outside the country and enrolling in schools and universities abroad after the military takeover.

Moreover, four students reported receiving support from teachers. The support included providing suggestions related to lessons and for further studies, as well as complementing students' efforts. Appreciation is essential to an individual's motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), as being encouraged and appreciated by others fosters emotional esteem related to others.

Usefulness of the English language was also an affecting factor for students' extrinsic motivation. Two students discussed how they could utilise the English language for their education, as well as in their business, when they travel, and for communication. This is because the English language has been a vital factor in Myanmar's education, politics and social sectors (Ireland & Van Benthuyzen, 2014). In addition to its usefulness, two students also discussed the opportunities that come with proficiency in English. As Li et al. (2019) and Tin (2014) suggested, English-speaking ability has become a pathway for setting personal values and future opportunities; likewise, the beliefs that Lwin (2011) commented on regarding the advantages of learning the English language.

On the other hand, there were negative extrinsic factors controlling the motivation of dropouts in their EFL journey, including problems, the political situation, and peer pressure. One student had family, financial, and relationship problems that led her to feel demotivated during the learning process. There was also a mobility issue, which was addressed by two students who had difficulty accessing their respective classrooms due to transportation problems. Thus, it can be concluded that students hold high motivation only when they have positive extrinsic factors (Hayashi, 2005).

Students explained that they became autonomous learners in their learning process because the motivation they had acquired empowered them to develop effective learning behaviours. Three students stated that they did self-study because they believed that doing self-study and practising online could improve their language skills. This suggests that the students are autonomous because they can derive pleasure from the learning activity itself and develop a sense of capability within it (Ehrman et al., 2003).

Acquiring knowledge of Global Englishes can help students communicate conveniently with people from around the world. Moreover, acquiring terminology related to specific occupations, such as hospitality, would be a great help to the student with abundant opportunities. Hence, it indirectly implies what Falout et al. (2009) and Kikuchi & Sakai (2009) addressed, that difficult learning situations, such as rigidity, grammar-based books, and the negative encouragement of teachers, made the students demotivated because the students in this study had experiences with informal and flexible learning experiences in their EFL learning.

Additionally, students commented adequately on helping others, including their community, families, and peers. The help they could offer included leading a training program, providing suggestions to children, undertaking voluntary work, guiding younger siblings with their education, explaining English to parents, and encouraging other disadvantaged high school dropouts to continue their education. These findings align with those of Hong (2021), who found that dropout students worked to support their families by providing additional information on their intentions.

Since students expressed that they took the EFL classes in learning centres to obtain scholarships and study abroad, their perspectives had been broadened when they learned English, as six students explained their plans to take some proficiency tests for their future studies. The tests primarily included the GED, IGCSE, and IELTS tests, which are the requirements for university and college entrance, as stated by Thant & González (2017).

Therefore, this study found that the motivation of Myanmar high school dropout students in EFL learning is remarkably intrinsic in the whole learning process, starting from taking the classes, during the learning, and the effects they had after learning, based on the theory of SDT, even though there were extrinsic motivations moderately found in this study.

6. Conclusion

This study has found that dropout students in Myanmar were intrinsically motivated in EFL learning, and hence they attained outcomes in their motivation towards learning. Other high school dropout students in Myanmar should be given the opportunity to take EFL classes in learning centres for their personal development, as well as to contribute to their community, rather than doing nothing. Students were intrinsically motivated in EFL learning when they

were assured of the support from their family, teachers, and peers. Therefore, it could be advantageous for all dropout students to have access to people who can provide them with the necessary help for their education.

Since students possess a high level of autonomy in learning, teaching approaches should be more student-centred, incorporating metacognitive strategies that allow students to integrate lifelong learning into their learning process. Teachers should consider incorporating project-based learning into EFL learning centres to keep students motivated. Students also emphasized the technology that they utilised while doing self-study. Thus, the time has come for EFL learning centres in Myanmar to utilise the strengths of technology in classroom settings to provide students with modern teaching and learning strategies, as well as practical lessons, to enhance their motivation.

In addition, students expressed their desire to help the community using the language skills they possessed. It would be mutually advantageous for the local and international organisations to engage these students in specific community jobs. The experience they could gain by working with the community would be an exceptional opportunity for students who have personal goals for further studies abroad, as it would enable them to apply for scholarships.

However, related studies in the literature on the context of high school dropout students' motivation in the EFL setting are a relatively new topic in this field, and hence, there is limited access to them, which suggests the need for more in-depth research in the future. Moreover, the inclusion criteria should encompass students from diverse cities and socio-economic backgrounds with varied profiles to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the motivation of Myanmar high school dropouts in EFL learning. Their perspectives could also expand the awareness in the literature of the motivation of disadvantaged students in the EFL learning process. It would also be beneficial to conduct future studies with other frameworks and theories rather than SDT.

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