



# **A Correlational-Comparative Study of Burmese High School Students' Motivation and Academic Achievement in English as a Foreign Language Class**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether there was a significant relationship between motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and English academic achievement, and a significant difference in motivation for learning EFL, in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitudes toward learning English, between Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar. **Research design, data and methodology:** A total of 225 students participated in this study. Motivation-related data were gathered through administering a survey questionnaire adapted from Gardner's (2010) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, while the English students' monthly test scores were considered to measure participants' English academic achievement. **Results:** There was no significant relationship between Grade 10 students' motivational intensity and desire to learn for learning EFL with their English academic achievement, while their attitudes toward learning English were found to have a significantly weak relationship with their English academic achievement. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between any of the motivation-related variables and the English academic achievement of Grade 11 students. Besides, only a significant difference in motivational intensity between Grade 10 and Grade 11 students was found. **Conclusions:** The results indicate that being enrolled in either Grade 10 or 11 at the target school appears to have a statistical effect on the students' motivation for learning EFL.

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language, Motivation for Learning, Academic Achievement, High School, Myanmar

**JEL Classification Code:** C12, I20, I21, N35

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## **1. Introduction**

The teaching and learning of English language play a fundamental role in Myanmar as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), whose lingua franca is English (Bolton, 2008). Therefore, the current demand for Myanmar people who are highly proficient in English language becomes inevitable, in order to be able to communicate not only with each people from the ASEAN region, but also with other people from all over the world (Ireland & Van Benthuyzen, 2014).

The importance of English language has been obvious throughout the history of Myanmar, as it was used as the language of choice in the areas of law, administration, politics, and even education at all stages during the pre-independence era (Fen, 2005; Ireland & Van Benthuyzen, 2014). In the era of post-independence, the use of English language in Myanmar has been limited to the diplomatic and educational arenas.

Since 2010, the interest in English learning in Myanmar has rapidly increased due to the political and

educational reforms that have taken place in the country. Then, as a consequence of these reforms, which have attached a great importance to the role of the English language in the fields of education, politics, society and economics, the number of private language institutes have significantly increased in Myanmar (Siphora & Lynch, 2019). Accordingly, the Myanmar students have been motivated to learn English for academic and professional advancement (Thant & González, 2019).

The role of motivation is regarded as a significant factor leading to successful learning, particularly in relation to language learning (Winke, 2005). In that regard, Gardner (2010) mentioned that the second or foreign language learners who put more effort, and become more enthusiastic in acquiring a particular knowledge or skill, tend to do have a better academic achievement than those learners that are less effortful and enthusiastic. Similarly, the learners' motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is an imperative issue in the success and failure of learning in Myanmar (Siphora & Lynch, 2019), especially for



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students that qualify as internally displaced persons (IDPs), people who have been forced, due to different conflicts or hard circumstances, to flee or to leave from their homes or places of residence.

With all this in mind, and considering that motivation for learning English has been reported to significantly influence both high achievers and low achievers (Gardner, 2010; Li & Pan, 2009), the researchers designed and conducted a comparative-correlational study to the motivation for learning English as a foreign language and English academic achievement of Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

## 2. Research Objectives

The following were the specific research objectives addressed in this study.

1. To determine the level of motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL), in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English, of Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

1.1. To determine the level of motivation for learning EFL, in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English, of Grade 10 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

1.2. To determine the level of motivation for learning EFL, in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English, of Grade 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

2. To determine the level of English academic achievement in English as a foreign language (EFL) of Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

2.1. To determine the level of English academic achievement in EFL of Grade 10 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

2.2. To determine the level of English academic achievement in EFL of Grade 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

3. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL), in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning

English, and English academic achievement of Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

4. To determine whether there is a significant difference in motivation for learning English as a foreign language (EFL), in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English, of Grades 10 and 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

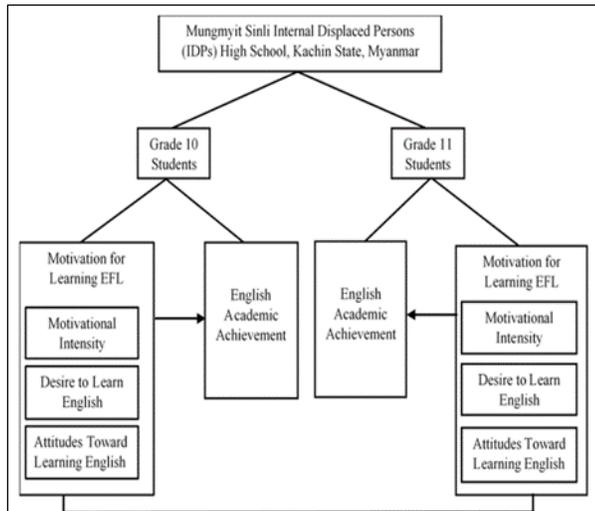
This study was conducted based on the socio-educational model of second language acquisition as supporting theory.

### 3.1 Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition

The socio-educational model of second language acquisition is a framework that describes the factors that mainly affect the language learning process. This model is primarily focused on motivation and the components that have influence on it. According to Gardner (2010), the students' motivation for learning a second or foreign language is comprised of three variables, which are motivational intensity (i.e., the amount of individual effort put by a language learner into learning the language), desire to learn English (i.e., the enthusiasm or keenness of a language learner toward mastery and acquiring understanding of the English language), and attitudes toward learning English (i.e., the enduring preconceived notions, evaluations, and positive or negative feelings about learning English and its related activities that guide a language learner's actions and reactions while learning the language). In order to measure motivation for learning EFL and its subscales, Gardner developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 2010).

## 4. Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1** depicts the conceptual framework of the study. The independent variable of this study was motivation for learning EFL in terms of motivational intensity, desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English, while the dependent variable was the participants' English academic achievement.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework for the Current Study

## 5. Literature Review

In this section, some previous studies related to the research variables addressed in this study are reviewed and summarized.

Binalet and Guerra (2014) conducted a study focusing on the relationship between motivation and language academic achievement among tertiary students. The total participants were 30 freshman students taking a Bachelor of Science in Criminology at the Ifugao State University, Philippines. According to the findings of the study, there was no statistically significant relationship of motivation and the students' language academic achievement, which indicates that the level of the participants' motivation did not have an explanatory and predictive power for their language academic achievement, and vice versa.

Siphora and Lynch (2019) conducted a study on 215 students at Nelson English Language Center in Yangon, Myanmar, focusing on the students' motivation for learning EFL according to their preferences for indirect learning strategies. The findings indicated that these Burmese students were highly motivated to learn EFL, regardless of their preferences for a particular indirect learning strategy. Moreover, the levels of the participants' motivational intensity and desire to learn English were also found to be high, with the level of the latter subscale being numerically higher than the level of the former. The participants were

also found to have positive attitudes toward learning English.

Thant and González (2019) conducted a comparative-correlational study on the attitude toward and motivation for learning EFL of Grade 9 students from three different ethnic groups at No. 2 Basic Education High School, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. A total of 199 participants were recruited for this study by convenience sampling. The investigation demonstrated that the students had a positive attitude toward and a high motivation for learning EFL, regardless of the ethnic group. Moreover, the level of the participants' motivational intensity was found to be partially high, and the level of desire to learn English was found to be high, regardless of the participant's ethnic group. The level of participants' attitudes toward learning English ranged from partially positive (for students belonging to the Shan ethnic group) to positive (for students belonging to the Akha and Bamar ethnic groups).

Kitjaroonchai (2012) conducted a study on secondary schools' students English learning motivation in the Education Service Area Office 4, Saraburi Province, Thailand. The study was administrated to 266 participants in different years of study, ranging from Grades 7 to 12. The data analysis revealed that the target students had high levels of both integrative and instrumental motivation, with the level of integrative motivation being partially lower than level of instrumental motivation. It was also found that students with a high academic achievement (i.e., those with a GPA  $\geq 3.20$ ) had a significantly slightly higher level of motivation for learning EFL than the other students.

## 6. Methodology/Procedure

In this section, details on the study's population, sample and research instruments are provided.

### 6.1. Population and Sample

This research was conducted on a population sample comprised of all 96 students from Grade 10 and 129 students from Grade 11 students who were enrolled in the academic year of 2020-2021 at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar, for a total of 225 students.

### 6.2. Research Instruments

This study was conducted using the following research instruments: the Motivation for Learning English



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as a Foreign Language Questionnaire, and the English subject's monthly test for English Language class.

### 6.2.1. Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (MLEFLQ)

In order to measure the participants' level of motivation for learning EFL, the researchers developed this instrument by adopting the 30 items corresponding to the motivation construct, and its three defining subscales, from the international version of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner, 2010). The AMTB has been widely used as a standardized motivation test by many researchers conducting studies on EFL (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001; Marina, 2018; Siphora & Lynch, 2019; Thant & González, 2019). The AMTB was developed using the construct-oriented approach, a theory-driven method of measure development based on professional judgment and construct definitions from the research literature. A construct-oriented approach to measure development is particularly useful if the questionnaire being developed is intended to measure constructs from a specific theory, like in the case of the AMTB, in which Gardner wanted to develop a research instrument able to measure the different constructs defined by his socio-educational model of second language acquisition (Gardner, 2010). Then, the following steps were taken to ensure content validity: after conducting an extensive literature review and consulting with language teachers about variables that might be important in language learning, the variables relevant to the constructs in the socio-educational model of second language acquisition were identified and given explicit definitions, followed by the development of a representative collection of items for each variable of interest, making sure that the items and their wording were appropriate to the population and sample of interest (i.e., school students age 12 to 16). Finally, Gardner conducted two validation pilot studies on samples of 552 and 1521 language learners, respectively.

The 30 items chosen from the AMTB, 15 positively and 15 negatively worded, were distributed as follows: 10 items about motivational intensity (Items 1-10), 10 items about desire to learn English (Items 11-20), and 10 items about attitudes toward learning English (Items 21-30). A 6-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree) was used to rate the extent of agreement with the statements on each item (see Appendix 1). There is a psychometric justification for employing six response options or anchors per item. In

psychometric assessment, an even number of choices or anchors (e.g., six) in a Likert rating scale is used when the researcher wants the respondents to express clear agreement or disagreement, instead of taking a neutral position, by leaving out the "midpoint" choice, which is widely regarded to be a neutral response (Devlin, 2020; Gardner, 2010).

The Cronbach's alpha reliability test was carried out for the overall and subscales of the MLEFLQ, for internal consistency reliability analysis. As a result, a good internal consistency reliability was found for the total score, with a Cronbach's alpha of .84, while the Cronbach's alphas for all the three subscales ranged from .65 to .83 (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Reliability Coefficients of the MLEFLQ, Reported by Siphora and Lynch (2019) and the Current Study

Subscale	Cronbach's alpha values	
	Siphora and Lynch (2019)	Current study
Motivational intensity	.66	.65
Desire to learn English	.75	.69
Attitudes toward learning English	.79	.83
Overall	.85	.84

### 6.2.2. English Subject's Monthly Test for English Language Class

The English subject's monthly tests were used to measure the participants' English academic achievement. The tests, which were created by five English language teachers from the target school, were designed to assess the students' reading skills (i.e., read the passage), writing skills (i.e., letter and essay), and the implementation of grammatical skills (i.e., fill in the blanks, complete the sentence with the correct grammar forms). Scores under 40 points were considered as failure, whereas a score of 80-100 points was regarded as excellent.

## 7. Research Findings

The research findings obtained from the data collection and analysis follows, presented by research objective. For the data analysis, negatively worded items were reverse coded in order to average them with the



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positively worded ones, and then create a composite mean score of each of the motivation-related variables.

### 7.1. Findings From Research Objective 1

Regarding to Research Objective 1, the following findings were obtained.

- The overall level of Grade 10 students' motivation for learning English as a foreign language was high,  $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ .
- The overall level of Grade 11 students' motivation for learning English as a foreign language was high,  $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ .

#### 7.1.1. Findings From Research Objective 1.1.

Regarding to Research Objective 1.1, the following findings were obtained.

- The level of Grade 10 students' motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language was partially high,  $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ .
- The level of Grade 10 students' desire to learn English for learning English as a foreign language was high,  $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ .
- The level of Grade 10 students' attitudes toward learning English for learning English as a foreign language was positive,  $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = .96$ .

#### 7.1.2. Findings From Research Objective 1.2.

Regarding to Research Objective 1.2, the following findings were obtained.

- The level of Grade 11 students' motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language was partially high,  $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ .
- The level of Grade 11 students' motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language was high,  $M = 5.04$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ .
- The level of Grade 11 students' motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language was positive,  $M = 5.07$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ .

### 7.2. Findings From Research Objective 2

Regarding to Research Objective 2, the following findings were obtained.

- The level of Grade 10 students' English academic achievement was moderate,  $M = 59.07$ ,  $SD = 11.17$ .
- The level of Grade 11 students' English academic achievement was moderate,  $M = 42.67$ ,  $SD = 15.73$ .

#### 7.2.1. Findings From Research Objective 2.1.

Regarding to Research Objective 2.1, the following findings were obtained.

- The level of Grade 10 students' English academic achievement was moderate,  $M = 59.07$ ,  $SD = 11.17$ .
- Grade 10 students' English academic achievement ranged from a minimum score of 39 to a maximum score of 87 points.

#### 7.2.2. Findings From Research Objective 2.2.

Regarding to Research Objective 2.2, the following findings were obtained.

- The level of Grade 11 students' English academic achievement was moderate,  $M = 42.67$ ,  $SD = 15.73$ .
- Grade 11 students' English academic achievement ranged from a minimum score of 15 to a maximum score of 85 points.

### 7.3. Findings From Research Objective 3

Regarding to Research Objective 3, the following findings were obtained from performing a correlational analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficients. Table 2 depicts the results of bivariate correlations of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, attitudes toward learning English with English academic achievement of Grade 11 students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar.

**Table 2:** Bivariate Correlations Between Motivational Intensity, Desire to Learn English, Attitudes Toward Learning English and English Academic Achievement of Grade 11 Students at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar

Variables	1	2	3
1.Motivational intensity	—		
2. Desire to learn English	.35* ( $<.001$ )	—	
3.Attitudes toward learning English	.40* ( $<.001$ )	.66* ( $<.001$ )	—
4.English academic achievement	-.01 (.910)	.12 (.176)	.09 (.319)

**Note.** An asterisk \* denotes a statistically significant relationship (statistical significance level set at  $\alpha = .05$ , two tailed). p-values appear within parentheses below the correlation coefficients.



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- There was no significant relationship between the participants' motivational intensity with their English academic achievement (for Grade 10 students,  $r = .01$ ,  $p = .913$ ; for Grade 11 students,  $r = .01$ ,  $p = .910$ ).
- There was no significant relationship between the participants' desire to learn English with their English academic achievement (for Grade 10 students,  $r = .13$ ,  $p = .194$ ; for Grade 11 students,  $r = .12$ ,  $p = .176$ ).
- There was a significantly weak relationship of the Grade 10 students' attitudes toward learning English with their English academic achievement,  $r = .29$ ,  $p = .004$ .
- There was no significant relationship between the Grade 11 students' attitudes toward learning English with their English academic achievement,  $r = .09$ ,  $p = .319$ .

#### **7.4. Findings From Research Objective 4**

Regarding to Research Objective 4, the following findings were obtained, from performing a 2 (Grades 10 and 11 students)  $\times$  3 (motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitudes toward learning English) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the collected data.

- There was a significant difference in motivational intensity for learning English as a foreign language between Grades 10 and Grade 11 students,  $t(223) = -6.68$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- There was no significant difference in desire to learn English as a foreign language between Grades 10 and 11 students,  $t(223) = -1.24$ ,  $p = .218$ .
- There was no significant difference in attitudes toward learning English between Grades 10 and 11 students,  $t(223) = .79$ ,  $p = .429$ .

### **8. Discussion**

In this section, a discussion of the research findings from the current study is provided, by relating such findings with the ones reported by previous research studies.

#### **8.1. Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language**

The Grade 10 and Grade 11 students' motivation for learning English language was found to be high at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School. This finding is similar to the one reported by Kitjaroonchai (2012), who found a high level of motivation for learning EFL in secondary school students in the Education Service Area Office 4, Thailand. Additionally, the Grade 10 and Grade 11 students

participating in the current study also had a partially high motivational intensity, which indicates that they put a partially high amount of individual effort to learn English. This result is in line with that of Thant and González (2019), who also reported a partially high level of motivational intensity to learn EFL in Burmese Grade 9 students from three different ethnic groups. According to the findings of the current study, the Grade 10 and Grade 11 students had a high desire to learn English as a foreign language. This result is aligned with Deci and Ryan (1985), who indicated that the learners' intrinsic motivation influences their learning level and a positively related between them. Based on the findings, the students can be considered as they are willing to get involved in their EFL learning activities.

One of the findings revealed that the participants were highly motivated and had a partially high motivational intensity. This finding aligns with the one of Wang (2008), whose investigation found that students highly motivated to learn EFL had the tendency to spend more effort to learn English; that is, to have a higher level of motivational intensity.

Another of the findings in this study revealed that the participants were highly motivated and had positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. The findings of this study are also in a line with that of Marina (2018), who conducted a study on 157 students from Grade 6 to 8 enrolled in a private school in Myanmar. Marina (2018) found that the students in her study had very positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language.

#### **8.2. The Relationship of Students' Motivation for Learning EFL and English Academic Achievement**

According to the data analysis from the current study, there was no significant relationship between the participants' motivational intensity with their English academic achievement. This indicates that motivational intensity has neither explanatory nor predictive power about the participants' English academic achievement. In the same way, participants' desire to learn English was found not to have a significant relationship with their English academic achievement. This result is in agreement with the one of Piller and Takahashi (2006), who also found that highly motivated Japanese women's desire to learn EFL was not associated to their language achievement. On the other hand, one of the results from the current study showed that Grade 10 students' attitudes toward learning English had a weak explanatory and predictive power for their English academic



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achievement. This result is in line with that of Marina (2018), who found that there was a positively significant relationship between the motivation for learning English and the English academic achievement of Burmese Grades 6 to 8 students at St. John's Private School, Patheingyi, Myanmar.

Moreover, the findings pointed out that Grade 11 students' motivational intensity did not have an explanatory and predictive power for English academic achievement. This result is in line with the findings of Binalet and Guerra (2014), who conducted a study on 30 freshman students studying Bachelor of Science in Criminology at the Ifugao State University, Philippines, and found that students' motivation had no significant correlation with their grammatical judgement test (GJT) scores.

### **8.3. The Comparison of Students' Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language**

In this study, the findings revealed that there was a significant difference in motivational intensity for learning EFL between Grades 10 and 11 students, favoring the latter group. This result could be due to the effort that Grade 11 students have to make to pass their university matriculation examination, in which the English language section is considered to be a very important part for passing such test. Therefore, it comes with no surprise that the Burmese Grade 11 students participating in this study tended to have a significantly highly motivational intensity than their Grade 10 counterparts, which implies that they spend a higher effort to learn EFL by persistently and consistently attempting to foster their skills in relation to English language acquisition (Gardner, 2010).

Based on the findings from this study, the Grade 11 students' motivational intensity for learning EFL showed a slightly greater level than Grade 10 students' one. This can be because the Grade 11 students might consider English and passing the matriculation examination to be a very important part of their study, more than Grade 10 students did. Therefore, the Grade 11 students participating in this study tend to be highly motivated to make an effort to learn English language, and that accordingly cultivates a persistent and consistent attempt to foster in language acquisition (Gardner, 2010).

On the other hand, there was no significant difference in either desire to learn English or attitudes toward learning English between the Grades 10 and 11 students in this study. Thus, it can be concluded that the

desire to learn English and the attitudes toward learning English held by a student participating in this study were independent of the grade the student achieved in EFL class, and hence a student's grade level appears to have no significant statistical effect on their desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English.

## **9. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided for teachers, students, school administrators and future researchers.

### **9.1. Recommendations for Teachers**

The researchers believe that the characteristics of the language teacher factor has a significant connection on students' motivational region and on their learning academic achievement to draw an overlook attention to motivational sector for learning EFL. Besides, they should apply rather active and differentiation teaching methods to maintain all the students getting involved in learning, than focusing on traditional teaching strategies (i.e., teacher-centered method) specifically in Myanmar. The researchers strongly recommend the innovation in the combination of curriculum modification and advancement, instructional strategies that are administrated by teachers how to improve the students' motivation for learning EFL and raise their favorable attitudes toward learning EFL.

### **9.2. Recommendations for Students**

The findings of this study revealed that the Grades 10 and 11 students of Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School had a high level of motivation for learning EFL, and among the subscales of motivation, motivational intensity was partially high while desire to learn English and attitudes toward learning English were high. The findings of the study would lead the students to understand and recognize their individuals' aspects toward motivation for learning EFL in their school years. Hopefully, they could obtain some sort of positively effective improvements from this study and they would be able to realize some possible rational thoughts why they fail or succeed in learning EFL. Consequently, they could be able to understand their strength and weakness and they could make a better change to be successful in learning EFL.

### **9.3. Recommendations for School Administrators**



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In order to be able to convey interesting and fun lessons, and effective various teaching strategies, the school administrators should provide constantly professional development programs to upgrade the instructional and teaching methods and to keep abreast of techniques, ideas, or equipment. Last but not least, they should support and provide with a wide range of the materials and resources that they demand to reach their teaching and learning objectives.

#### **9.4. Recommendations for Future Researchers**

The current research was a quantitative research designed to investigate the relationship and comparison between Grades 10 and 11 students' motivation and their English academic achievement for learning EFL at Mungmyit Sinli IDPs High School, Kachin State, Myanmar. The data of this study was collected only focusing on the Grades 10 and 11 levels from one school in Myanmar, due to the access limitation. Future researchers are recommended to collect data from different contexts in a wide-reaching scale, in order to have more generalizable results. Moreover, future researchers should consider the other factors (e.g., teaching strategies, gender, extrinsic motivation, age, parental encouragement and language anxiety) that could influence the motivation for learning and the academic achievement in English as a foreign language class held by the students.

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