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Volunteer Teachers' Intrinsic Motivation in Myanmar's IDP Camps through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory

Introduction

Since the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar has faced a major political crisis. This crisis forced people to flee across the country for different reasons (Saito, 2021). One of the significant impacts after the military coup was the collapse of formal schooling, particularly in Sagaing, Magway, Chin, and Karenni regions. In these regions, the Myanmar military carried out air strikes in civilian areas, including villages, religious buildings, hospitals, and schools. As a result, many of these structures were severely damaged. In these dangerous situations, teachers and parents could not keep children safe, so schools were shut down (UNICEF, 2024a).

Before the military coup in Myanmar, the country had more than 47,000 Basic education facilities throughout the country. According to the reports of UNICEF (2004a), some of these schools were bombed, and others had to be closed under the military threat. Rinehart et al. (2024) note that in many places, the only option left is small community schools or makeshift classrooms. These schools rely on volunteer teachers with little or no pay. They often have very short formal training and limited resources to use for their teaching. Despite these different barriers, volunteer teachers continue to make education alive for displaced children (UNICEF, 2024a; Rinehart et al., 2024).

By 2024, UNICEF estimated that over five million children in Myanmar needed humanitarian aid. According to the UNICEF data, education for displaced children was one of the least funded areas (UNICEF, 2024b). Most research on education in emergencies looks at access, government policy, or student results (Amiri, 2020; Rinehart et al., 2024). However, fewer studies talk about teachers in these areas. However, without teachers, there is no classroom and no learning, especially in crisis areas. Therefore, it is essential to understand what motivates these volunteers to continue working in these crisis areas. It can improve education for children and also protect the well-being of teachers.

Scholars have used different theories to explain why teachers stay motivated. One of the most common is **Self-Determination Theory**, or SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Others include the Integrative Framework of Motivation in Education (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Another well-known model is TPACK, which links pedagogy and technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). For this study, we focus on SDT to look at the work of volunteer teachers in Myanmar's IDP camps. This area of research remains underdeveloped. There are two main reasons why SDT is used here instead of the other theories.

The first reason for using SDT is that it explains how people stay motivated from within, even when there are no outside rewards or proper teaching resources. It makes the valuable theory in crisis settings, where many teachers continue their work despite danger and hardship. The second reason is described by Ryan and Deci (2017). They argue that three basic needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – are at the center of intrinsic motivation. These needs are especially relevant for volunteer teachers in IDP camps, where material and institutional support are almost absent. Studying their experiences via this lens helps fill a clear gap in research on Education during crises in Myanmar. The study also aims to provide practical guidance for NGOs, humanitarian groups, and policymakers to improve support for teachers in conflict-affected areas.

Literature Review

Myanmar's Socio-Political Crisis and Educational Context

For many years, Myanmar's education system was shaped by central control and exclusion of ethnic groups (Rinehart et al., 2024). After the 2021 military coup, schools were disrupted even more by violence and the collapse of public services. Many children lost access to Education (King, 2022; Lwin, 2019). In response to these situations, communities set up informal learning centers and schools led

by volunteers. These were often kept running by teachers who worked without pay or a minimal salary (Saito, 2021).

Some ethnic education systems, such as those of the Karen and Mon, continued to teach in mother tongues and use local curricula (South & Lall, 2014). Similar community schools in Shan State also provide psychosocial support and inclusive practices for displaced learners (Jolliffe, 2014). Higher education in Myanmar also faced many problems after the coup. Hopes for reform during the democratic transition were dashed, and instead, there was increased surveillance, diminished academic freedom, and fewer opportunities for international cooperation (Proserpio, 2022). Even with these challenges, community-based and ethnic education systems remained important. Local groups such as interim education councils, volunteer teachers, and CDM teachers set up learning opportunities for children who were out of school and worked to keep them going. They promote mother-tongue instruction and establish flexible learning spaces. They also support schools through grassroots efforts (ERICC, 2024). These initiatives have enabled children to continue learning and demonstrate the strong value communities place on education in conflict-affected areas.

Teacher Motivation in Conflict and Low-Resource Settings
In conflict-affected areas, teachers are essential for keeping Education when formal schools collapse. Their effort is significant for students to continue learning. In Afghanistan, research shows that teachers supported their students even under serious security threats (Amiri, 2020). A study from Uganda also found that refugee education depends mainly on the commitment of teachers (Kisaakye et al., 2024). It is the same for Myanmar volunteer teachers in IDP Camps. Volunteer teachers there remain central to Education, even while facing insecurity and a shortage of resources.

The work of teachers in crisis settings goes far beyond teaching lessons. They also give their students emotional support and a sense of stability. According to investigations of studies in crisis areas, female teachers often play a significantly larger role in many camps. They are not only educators but also the symbols of resilience for their students (Ullah et al., 2017; Kipgen, 2022). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) helps explain these experiences. The theory shows that the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are still crucial for sustaining motivation. These needs remain central to teachers' commitment, even when resources are scarce and conditions are insecure.

Self-Determination Theory and Teacher Motivation
Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was first developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and later refined in their more recent work (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It has become one of the leading theories of motivation in cognitive and educational psychology (Kálmán, 2018). Legault (2017) even describes SDT as a metatheory because it includes several smaller theories that together give a broad picture of human motivation and behavior. Within this framework, Deci and Ryan (1985) outlined two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation describes the natural human drive to engage in activities for genuine interest, enjoyment, or personal satisfaction.

In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when a person does a task without genuine interest. Instead, they act because of external rewards, such as promotion, or to avoid negative consequences (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2020; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). This theory has been applied to research on teacher motivation, particularly in examining the relationship between teacher motivation and learner motivation (Han & Yin, 2016).

Researchers argue that teacher motivation can be studied through different theories. These include self-efficacy theory (Calkins et al., 2024), expectancy-value theory (Abrami et al., 2004), goal-orientation theory (Malmberg, 2006), goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2015), and self-determination theory (Kunter et al., 2008). To explore the factors that significantly influence the complex nature of motivation associated with teaching, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have highlighted four significant motivational aspects in relation to teacher motivation: intrinsic component, social contextual factors, temporal axis,

and fragility (i.e., negative influences). Since a primary focus of this study is teacher intrinsic motivation, the intrinsic aspects of teacher motivation through the lens of SDT will be discussed in the following sub-section.

The Intrinsic Aspects of Teacher Motivation

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) stated that teaching is closely linked to intrinsic motivation and pursuing teaching as a profession has been connected to the inner desire to educate others, to share knowledge and values, and to contribute to the betterment of a community or even a whole nation. Reviewing the literature, two sources of intrinsic rewards or values of teaching suggested by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) are the educational process itself and the subject matter. The first one involves engaging with students, fulfilling their needs, and experiencing the progress of their performance because of teachers' efforts, and the second one represents teachers' genuine interest and curiosity in their discipline, leading to the sources of joy and fulfillment within their career. Therefore, teachers' most incredible joy and satisfaction might be observed not in extrinsic rewards or incentives, but in intrinsic rewards (e.g., being deeply immersed in pedagogical practice). According to educational psychology research, when people meet the three basic psychological needs, they are intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020; Ryan et al., 2019). For teachers in IDP camps, meeting these basic needs is important because only intrinsic motivation helps them keep their passion and commitment even under challenging circumstances (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It also encourages genuine interest in professional growth and supports adaptability in different educational contexts (Ryan et al., 2019). In addition, intrinsic motivation can strengthen teaching practices and lead to better student outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020; Slemp et al., 2020; Wagner & French, 2010).

The first basic psychological need, "autonomy", means having the freedom over an individual's actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). When people fulfil their autonomy, they can adjust their actions to fit their own needs and abilities. It helps them manage and prioritize both personal and professional responsibilities more effectively (Zhang et al., 2021). Scholars further emphasize that teacher autonomy involves a sense of control over professional responsibilities, including the organization of teaching practices and lesson design, which reflects their pedagogical decision-making. Such autonomy is strengthened when it is recognized and supported by institutional leaders and colleagues. This view was supported by Ertürk (2023), who stated that teachers having professional autonomy to plan new tasks and take part in innovative practices possess motivation and professional dedication. Therefore, in the field of Education, teacher autonomy is linked to having control over teaching practices and making instructional decisions that are essential for maintaining or sustaining their motivation.

The second basic human need is "competence". It refers to feeling effective and confident in one's abilities, along with a sense of accomplishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). For teachers, competence means being able to complete their tasks. It is also about achieving their goals effectively (Krapp, 2005). This need is best met in environments that provide the right level of challenge. It also requires constructive feedback and chances for personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In schools, competence means teachers feel successful in their work. It also reflects how their abilities are recognized in daily teaching. Competence is closely linked to teachers' sense of efficacy. It refers to their belief that they can positively influence student learning (Ashton, 1985, p. 142; Lazarides & Warner, 2020).

The concept of the teachers' self-efficacy can be understood at two levels. The first one is teaching efficacy, and the other is personal efficacy (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Teaching efficacy refers to teachers' belief that they can improve student learning, even when facing educational barriers (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Lee et al., 2013). This confidence shapes not just what teachers do but how persistently and resiliently they act in the face of obstacles (Lazarides & Warner, 2020; Özcan & Özgür, 2010). Personal efficacy involves teachers' belief in their own skills and capabilities and the evaluation of their effectiveness to accomplish the tasks (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Özcan & Özgür, 2010). In an educational context, teachers' personal efficacy supports their intrinsic motivation and resilience (Rai, 2025).

The third basic human need, "relatedness", represents the feeling connected to others, facilitated through respect and care (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Zhang et al. (2021), teachers' relatedness involves social connections with their colleagues, students, and school community, feeling accepted and appreciated by school leaders, and having positive relationships with their colleagues. Ideally, teaching fulfills the first two fundamental psychological needs (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Teachers have autonomy to some extent in managing their classes, and the school community (i.e., both colleagues and students) offers a rich and engaging environment.

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) argued that the key components of teacher motivation are their intrinsic interest and enjoyment in teaching. On the other hand, Latham et al. (1997) claimed that teachers tend to be more persistent if they have specific and achievable goals based on goal-setting theory. Latham and his colleagues also emphasized the fact that setting appropriate goals along with constructive feedback could enhance teachers' performance and motivation. It could be said that the combination of these concepts and the above-mentioned intrinsic motivation reflects the framework of work motivation proposed by Hackman (1991).

The framework suggests that people are more motivated when their work has purpose, when they have freedom in how they approach it, and when they receive feedback on their performance. Therefore, the intrinsic aspect of teacher motivation stems from the genuine satisfaction of engaging in meaningful tasks in relation to one's subject interests, in an autonomous manner, within a supportive professional community. In addition, factors such as self-efficacy, goal clarity, and performance feedback play significant roles in influencing teachers' effort and persistence, as well as their intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Methodology

Research Design
In this study, a qualitative research design was used. Researchers carried out a thematic analysis, guided by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of how volunteer teachers in Myanmar's internally displaced person (IDP) camps experience and explain their motivation.

Participants and Context
For this study, the researchers conducted interviews with seven volunteer teachers from IDP camps in the Sagaing and Karenni regions of Myanmar. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. It meant that teachers were identified with the help of trusted teacher networks and support groups within the targeted communities. This approach ensured the inclusion of teachers who were both willing and able to share their experiences in detail, which is essential for collecting meaningful qualitative data (Dörnyei, 2007). Information about the participants is presented in figure of Table 1.

Figure 1 — Biographical Data of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational Qualification	Teaching Experience before Displacement	Total Teaching Experience (Years)	Region
Teacher 1	27	Female	B.A. (English)	None	3 (started in an IDP camp)	Sagaing
Teacher 2	36	Female	Diploma in Teacher Education (DTEd)	Yes – Primary level	13	Sagaing
Teacher 3	31	Male	B.E. (Engineering)	None	5 (since relocation to a camp)	Karenni
Teacher 4	42	Female	B.A. (History)	Yes – Secondary level	15	Karenni
Teacher 5	29	Male	B.Sc. (Chemistry)	None	4 (volunteer teacher in a camp)	Karenni
Teacher 6	34	Male	B.Sc. (Math)	Yes – Tutoring/private teaching (freelance)	8	Karenni
Teacher 7	40	Female	B.Ed. (Education)	Yes – Middle school	12	Sagaing

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the seven volunteer teachers. These volunteer teachers are all working in IDP camps in the Sagaing and Karenni Regions. Both areas are highly affected by armed conflict and have ongoing insecurity, including military threats and aerial attacks. Moreover, the teachers and students in these areas are facing the high challenges of educational barriers such as insufficient infrastructure, lack of electricity, and unstable internet access.

It is risky and challenging to visit these areas in person; researchers conducted all interviews remotely via the Zoom platform. The whole interview conversation was held in Burmese, so that the participants could talk more freely and comfortably. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. A self-developed semi-structured interview guide based on the SDT framework was used. In the interview process, open-ended questions were used to explore the three main dimensions of motivation under the SDT framework- autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Interviews took place between May and June 2025, were transcribed in Burmese, and then translated into English for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis following a deductive approach informed by Self Determination Theory SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) was used to interpret the data. Under the framework of the SDT, the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are formed in the initial coding categories. In the analysis process, there were two main coding circles. The first-cycle coding was Initial coding. In this process, interview transcripts were read fully to gain familiarity with the data. Sentences related to each theme of SDT were highlighted and assigned descriptive codes. Second-cycle coding was Axial coding. In this stage, initial codes were refined, grouped, and compared across all participants. Relationships between sub-themes were examined to understand how different motivational elements emerged in the context of teachers in selected areas. Coding was conducted manually using Excel to organize interview quotes, codes, sub-themes, and interpretations. This approach allowed the researchers to keep the analysis grounded in Self-Determination Theory and the specific features of teacher motivation that emerged in the crisis context.

Ethical Considerations

This study has received formal approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary, on 8 May 2025. The ethical approval reference number is 2024/390. Before the interview process began, researchers explained the purpose and process of the research to participants and obtained verbal consent. To protect data security, all steps in the interview process were taken with high confidentiality. During the transcription stage, researchers removed participants' personal details, such as names and identifying information. All interview records and transcription files were stored safely for academic use only.

As the research took place in a sensitive context of conflict and displacement, the researchers took special care to reduce emotional strain. When participants shared painful or difficult experiences in the interview, the researchers listened to them with empathy, acknowledged their feelings, and offered reassurance. These practices reflected a strong commitment to safeguarding the dignity, safety, and well-being of all individuals concerned in the study.

Research Questions

- How do volunteer teachers in IDP camps experience and express autonomy in their teaching practices?

- In what ways do teachers in displacement contexts perceive their own competence, and how do they pursue professional growth?

- How does a sense of relatedness shape teacher motivation and resilience?

Findings and Discussion

Autonomy

This section answers RQ 1: *How do volunteer teachers in IDP camps experience and express autonomy in their teaching practices?* Two major sub-themes emerged under the central theme of "Autonomy": (1) flexibility in adjusting lessons based on learners' physical and emotional states, and (2) negotiation of teaching schedules with students in line with their on-the-ground conditions in crisis zones.

Flexibility in Adjusting Lessons based on Learners' Physical and Emotional States

It is noted that volunteer teachers in the present research context need to be flexible enough in dealing with the lessons. Regarding this aspect, Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 expressed their experiences as follows: *"We adjust the lessons when we notice that our students are tired or hungry. Sometimes, we skip writing tasks." (Teacher 2, a 36-year-old female teacher from Sagaing Region)*

"We adjust the topics depending on how the children feel. Sometimes they are too tired or sad, so we talk about their feelings before we continue with the lesson." (Teacher 5, a 29-year-old male teacher from Karenni Region)

These excerpts illustrate that teachers have complete autonomy in decision-making when it comes to their students' well-being in war-affected educational areas. In other words, they prioritize their learners' physical and mental states over fixed lesson plans, which is one of the essential practices in unstable or traumatic settings. Similar findings can be found in Wang et al.'s (2024) study, which suggests that teachers' ability to adjust lesson topics and address their students' feelings reflects their autonomy in planning lessons and managing classrooms. This autonomy is closely related to teachers' intrinsic motivation. This finding was also supported by some recent studies (see e.g., Beltman & Poulton, 2025; Ma, 2021; Valente et al., 2022) that teachers were intrinsically motivated if they had the right to adapt the lesson contents according to their students' physical and/or emotional conditions.

Negotiation of Teaching Schedules with Students in line with their on-the-ground Conditions in Crisis Zones

In accordance with the findings of this study, volunteer teachers in conflict zones need to negotiate teaching timetables with their students. To put it another way, they have the right to adjust class schedules to accommodate their students' everyday circumstances. In relation to this, the experiences of Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 can be seen in the following excerpts:

- *"We don't follow the exact schedule like formal schools, but I know what my students are dealing with – I teach accordingly." (Teacher 1, a 27-year-old female teacher from Sagaing Region),*

- *"Our schedule is not fixed like in the towns (formal schools). We discuss with students, and sometimes we have to cancel or reschedule due to the weather or security concerns." (Teacher 3, a 31-year-old male teacher from Karenni Region).*

These findings proved that volunteer teachers' intrinsic motivation derived from their autonomy in flexibility in scheduling teaching time because of the external factors such as weather conditions and security concerns in crisis settings. These findings resonate with a qualitative study of IDPs in Northern Nigeria, which reported that camp leaders and teachers likewise abandoned fixed routines in favor of flexible, adaptive management practices that reflected residents' needs (Ekezie et al., 2022). Nigerian IDPs reshaped schedules and daily activities around community challenges such as health concerns, security issues, and emotional well-being. The study concluded that autonomy-driven adjustments were central to fostering resilience, noting that *"IDPs can be active actors in their change and development if basic and essential management support is provided"* (Ekezie et al., 2022, p. 1). It reflects how volunteer teachers in the Sagaing and Karenni Regions in Myanmar engage their students in negotiating teaching schedules and respond quickly to contextual disruptions. Taking these findings into consideration, it can be assumed that having authority to reschedule teaching timetables based on the situations (e.g., weather conditions and security concerns, as can be seen in the above interview excerpts) leads to their intrinsic motivation.

Competence

This section answers RQ 2: *In what ways do teachers in displacement contexts perceive their own competence, and how do they pursue professional growth?* Three main sub-themes emerged under the central theme of "Competence": (1) building professional knowledge and skills, (2) sustaining learning environments with limited resources, and (3) conducting classes in harsh environments.

Building Professional Knowledge and Skills

In the context of this study, volunteer teachers build their professional knowledge and skills not through formal training but through collaboration among colleagues and the use of social media like Facebook, despite not having stable internet access. In this regard, Teacher 6, a 34-year-old male teacher from Karenni Region, explained, *"We learn from each other. Some use Facebook to find new ideas for teaching, and we share during Sunday meetings."* This excerpt highlighted that building their professional knowledge and skills in these ways fulfils their *personal efficacy* (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), one of the dimensions of basic psychological need "competence". From the point of view of SDT, such a need is crucial for enhancing teachers' intrinsic motivation even in conflict zones where formal support is scarce. Similar findings have been reported in Belay & Melesse's (2024) study from the Ethiopian context, which suggests that the intrinsic motivation of teachers from Ethiopia's crisis-affected schools can be fostered through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and participation in learning communities.

Sustaining Learning Environments with Limited Resources

In the targeted contexts, an extreme shortage of educational resources is one of the main challenges faced by volunteer teachers. Despite these constraints, they usually find ways to solve this problem and

make sure that their students have continuous support from them. In the following interview excerpt, a 42-year-old female teacher from Karenni Region shared her experience regarding how she adapted her teaching practices in the case of limited resources:

- *"We do not have enough books or copies. We always ask students to share, or sometimes I rewrite lessons on the blackboard many times for different groups." (Teacher 4)* As can be seen in the above interview excerpt, volunteer teachers in crisis zones coped with limited resources by enhancing student collaboration and adapting their teaching methods, e.g., teachers' willingness to rewrite lessons on the blackboard many times, which could be regarded as teachers' intrinsically motivated behaviors. In other words, the teachers' act of rewriting lessons for different groups of students does not come from external rewards, but from their genuine enjoyment. Interestingly, a similar finding can be found in a study conducted by No (2024) in the Karenni and Pekon Regions, which are conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. The key findings of his research highlighted that "teachers are driven by empathy and a sense of duty, facing significant obstacles such as insecurity and resource scarcity" (No, 2024, p. 18). Studies of refugee and IDP education have consistently shown that resource constraints force teachers to be innovative and creative by sharing materials among students and rewriting the same lessons for different learner groups. Such practices not only guarantee access to learning but also build professional competence through adaptive problem-solving and reinforce relatedness by creating a collective culture of sharing (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

Conducting Classes in a Tough Environment

Since the present research context was conflict zones having inadequate infrastructure, this forced teachers to find possible learning spaces for their students. Extreme weather conditions could also be additional challenges for them in sustaining their students' learning process. A 40-year-old female teacher from Sagaing Region described her experience in this regard as follows:

- *"We try to continue lessons even in the rain, under a tree or in a small hut. We don't want to stop teaching because of the weather." (Teacher 7)*

This interview excerpt illustrated that teachers' intrinsic motivation and resilience in war zones could be demonstrated by their determination to maintain learning routines in informal and weather-exposed environments. That is to say, their willingness to teach their students despite the rain, by finding possible locations (e.g., under a tree or in a small hut), showed their intrinsically motivated behaviors. Recent research conducted by OECD (2022) and Wang et al. (2024) also reported similar findings that continuing lessons under any available conditions demonstrates competence not only as mastery of teaching skills but also as persistence and adaptability in sustaining Education despite adversity.

Relatedness

This section answers RQ 3: *How does a sense of relatedness shape teacher motivation and resilience?* Three main sub-themes emerged under the central theme of "Relatedness": (1) sharing teaching materials and teaching tips among colleagues, (2) receiving appreciation and emotional support from others, and (3) having social connections with students' parents.

Sharing Teaching Materials and Teaching Tips among Colleagues

Volunteer teachers in this research context worked with limited resources and had no formal teacher training for their professional development. In this regard, they shared teaching materials and teaching tips with their colleagues, believing that this kind of collaboration could strengthen their sense of relatedness. A 36-year-old female teacher from Sagaing Region shared her experience regarding this aspect, saying that: *"We share materials and ideas during weekends. Sometimes one of us brings teaching aids from the nearby town, and we all use them." (Teacher 2)*

The above excerpt highlights the importance of social connections among colleagues and collegial support that fosters relatedness – one of the primary psychological needs in the SDT framework. To put

it another way, teachers are intrinsically motivated when experiencing a sense of belonging within a group. Similar research findings have been reported in Mass et al.'s (2022) study, stating that teachers' sense of relatedness was met through supportive relationships with peers, enabling them to sustain their intrinsic motivation even in low-resource and unsafe settings (i.e., conflict zones). Kolleck's (2019) systematic reviews also showed that working collaboratively and sharing pedagogical knowledge and resources can enhance teachers' motivation and commitment. Comparable findings in U.S. rural schools and low-income Indian schools reinforced that peer-driven resource sharing fosters both professional growth and emotional resilience (Brill et al., 2025; Vashistha et al., 2021). Such practices illustrated how relatedness fulfils a psychological need under SDT, reducing stress while enhancing a collective identity as educators working "together" rather than in isolation.

Receiving Appreciation and Emotional Support from Others

In this study context, volunteer teachers often depend on emotional and social support from others to foster a sense of relatedness. This fundamental human need is closely tied to intrinsic motivation. Teacher 1, a 27-year-old female teacher from Sagaing Region, shared her experience that *"I feel proud when parents tell me their children want to come to school every day – even when it is raining or difficult to walk."* This interview excerpt demonstrated how relatedness strengthens teachers' intrinsic motivation in conflict-affected areas. That is, receiving recognition and appreciation from their students' parents reassures them that their efforts are meaningful despite adverse conditions. Since relatedness in the SDT framework refers to feeling connected to others, having positive relationships among teachers, students, and their parents plays a vital role in sustaining teachers' intrinsic motivation and resilience. Similar findings were reported in Belay and Melesse's (2024) study, which found that positive recognition from their students' parents enhances Ethiopian teachers' intrinsic motivation as well as their professional development, despite political instability. Therefore, teacher relatedness extends beyond their professional networks to encompass relational bonds with their students and parents, which reinforces their motivation (Robinson, 2022).

According to the findings of this study, the intrinsic motivation of volunteer teachers in displacement contexts heavily depends on emotional support and encouragement from their colleagues. A 31-year-old male teacher from Karenni Region described his experience as follows:

- *"When I feel too down, my co-teacher encourages me. We talk about our feelings together." (Teacher 3)*

The above excerpt demonstrated that receiving encouragement from their colleagues and having trusting relationships are important in sustaining their sense of belonging and relatedness. Such peer support strengthens their intrinsically motivated behavior in coping with the adverse conditions. These findings resonate with research from the Philippines (Gonzales et al., 2020), which discussed that teacher motivation and mental health conditions in crisis zones depend primarily on support from their colleagues, emphasizing how such supportive relationships boost their intrinsic motivation.

Having Social Connection with Students' Parents

In this study context, volunteer teachers often depend on emotional and social support from others to foster a sense of relatedness. This fundamental human need is closely tied to intrinsic motivation. Teacher 1. The involvement of students' parents has become an important source of encouragement for volunteer teachers in the present study context. From the point of view of SDT, relatedness is also sustained through connection with students' parents. Regarding this aspect, a 34-year-old male teacher from Karenni Region explained, *"When the parents join meetings or help in school events, I feel we are not alone."* Such a social connection has become crucial in conflict areas where teachers often feel isolated. Interestingly, similar findings can be found in No's (2024) study, which suggests that high levels of parental cooperation are vital for teacher motivation and resilience in war-torn zones in Myanmar.

Implications for Practice and Policy
Findings from this study show that supporting teachers' psychological needs is essential in crisis settings, and this requires approaches that go beyond the provision of books or supplies. In practice, training programs should be flexible and modular so they can be delivered even in insecure or resource-poor environments. Portable toolkits and mobile training packages, which have been used effectively in other refugee education contexts, could be adapted to Myanmar's IDP camps. These trainings can provide not only pedagogical guidance but also psychosocial strategies that teachers specifically need (UNESCO Teacher Task Force, 2020). In addition to training, organizing teacher networks is a practical way to maintain competence and resilience. These networks can take the form of weekly or monthly peer-learning circles, where teachers can exchange lesson plans and teaching strategies, and receive suggestions on their lessons. In the areas where in-person meetings are not possible under different conditions, virtual platforms such as Telegram groups can be used.

Experiences from South Africa and India show that such teacher learning communities, including digital platforms, help strengthen professional identity, build resilience, and reduce isolation (Oduro, Ngwenya, & Bhengu, 2024; Vashistha et al., 2021).

Another important implication is providing teaching resources. Providing adaptable and low-cost materials, such as community libraries or solar-powered devices, helps teachers adjust their lessons in flexible ways. In the research targeted regions, teachers already rely on sharing inadequate textbooks and rewriting lessons on blackboards for different groups; these problems could be addressed and scaled through structured resource-sharing systems (OECD, 2022). At the same time, recognition of teachers' contributions is vital. Community-based education committees or parents' groups could formally acknowledge teachers' efforts through certificates, symbolic stipends, or community appreciation events. Research evidence from Russel 2024 shows that recognition from parents and peers reinforces teachers' sense of relatedness, which sustains motivation even when financial incentives are limited (Russell et al., 2024; UNESCO Teacher Task Force, 2025).

At the policy level, a significant implication is to integrate volunteer teachers into broader education networks. Provisional accreditation for these volunteer teachers or their inclusion in Humanitarian teacher databases would increase visibility, enabling them to access training, professional development, and financial support (UNICEF, 2024a; INEE, 2024). Another priority policy is to create conditions that protect teacher autonomy. Flexible guidelines according to location and conditions of the regions should allow teachers to adjust schedules and lesson content based on children's emotional state, fatigue, or security concerns. Many studies have shown that autonomy-supportive practices, such as participatory decision-making with students, can enhance both teachers' resilience and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Wang & Sun, 2025). Strengthening competence also requires structured pathways for professional development. Partnerships with universities that offer distance learning courses and mentoring programs are also possible ways to enhance the competence of teachers (Kisaakye et al., 2024; UNESCO Teacher Task Force, 2025).

 Finally, relatedness can also be supported through policy by involving parents and communities more in school decision-making. In Myanmar, in some IDP camps, parents and the community already contribute by providing materials and helping to organize school events, as seen in other crisis contexts (Morales & Walker, 2023). By implementing these practices, policymakers and practitioners can create conditions that not only sustain teacher motivation but also ensure continuity of learning for displaced students in Myanmar.

Conclusion
This study demonstrates teachers' motivation in a challenging environment under the theoretical lens of Self-Determination Theory. From the interviews, the data show that teachers' autonomy grows when they are involved in decision-making and when they can keep their teaching flexible. Moreover, when teachers receive peer support or professional development and can share teaching resources with

others, their sense of competence is enhanced. The data also show that when communities engage with them and recognize their contributions, teachers' relatedness to their students becomes stronger. These factors collectively support teachers in maintaining their motivation. Moreover, these factors can also enable teachers to continue their role in sustaining Education for displaced children. Such measures are important because they can improve teacher retention and morale.

There are some limitations to this study. The sample size was small and focused only on two geographic areas. Therefore, the findings should not be extended to all contexts in Myanmar. Despite the limitations, the in-depth approach of the study still provides meaningful insights into teacher intrinsic motivation in crisis settings. Future research could explore this topic in other areas. While crisis conditions are often assumed to weaken motivation, the findings of this study show that teachers adapt and develop strategies to meet their psychological needs. Moreover, they use the practical, relational, and often improvised strategies in their teaching. By using these approaches, they provide not only academic lessons but also emotional support and stability for their students. In this way, they offer children hope for a brighter future and highlight the vital role of teachers in sustaining education during times of crisis.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Autonomy
• How do you decide what and how to teach within the constraints of the camp?

• How can you express your teaching style and methods within the camp setting?

• What challenges do you face that affect your teaching style and methods?

• How could changes to these spaces enhance your autonomy, mastery, or sense of purpose as a teacher?

• What strategies would you like to see implemented that could help you and your colleagues feel more autonomous, skilled, and purposeful in your roles?

Competence
• How do these challenges impact your sense of competence and satisfaction in your teaching role?

• What strategies have been most effective in enhancing your motivation and ability to teach effectively in the camp?

• Are there any resources or types of support you think would make a significant difference in your teaching effectiveness?

• Can you share any experiences where these barriers directly impacted a lesson or educational outcome?

• How do these support mechanisms help you in your day-to-day teaching tasks?

Relatedness
• Can you give an example of how mentorship or community support has helped you overcome a teaching challenge?

• How do you envision the learning environment within the camp?

• How do you think the community can play a larger role in the Education of children in the camp?

• What are your long-term aspirations as a teacher in this setting?