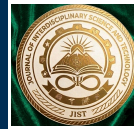


Research Article



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Students' Motivation and Learning Interest in Quality Education in Secondary Schools of the South Gondar Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Students' motivation and learning interest are essential components of quality education, as it contributes to the academic performance of students. In this regard, the purpose of this study was to examine students' motivation and learning interests in their education. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection. First, quantitative data were gathered from a sample of 350 students selected through multistage sampling techniques, utilizing a structured questionnaire. To complement these findings, qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with seven purposively selected school principals and teachers. The qualitative data gathering was using semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistical techniques (frequency and mean). The qualitative data were analyzed thematically using description and narration. The results revealed there was weak student motivation and learning interest. The demotivation of students needs special attention by regional, national, and global authorities for appropriate intervention. As the current observed militarism and material shortage has intensified students' hope and well-being, policy intervention is required to reduce local conflict. Humanitarian organizations, civic organizations, elders, and local indigenous institutions need to reduce the bad effect of ethnocentrism at national levels. The findings of this study have important implications for teachers and secondary schools to have empirical evidence about the lack of students' motivation as a challenge for quality education.

Keywords/phrases: Classroom management, Quality education, learning style, motivation.

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1 Background of the Study

Motivation is an essential component of quality education, as it contributes to the academic performance of students [1]. Different scholars (educators and psychologists) had established the vital impact of motivation on acquiring learning outcomes and exhibiting good performance on learning tasks [2]. Motivational strategies contribute to capturing interest in the proposed content of a curriculum. Motivation favors the development of a positive attitude for students toward their learning. Participation and the acquisition of significant learning are possible with games, stories, verbal stimuli, and recognition [3].

Motivating the learner to learn is relevant to curriculum implementation, as it is an influential factor in the teaching-learning process. The success of learning depends on whether or not the learners are motivated. Motivation drives learners in reaching learning goals. Learners' motivation is probably the single most important element of learning. Modern education is compulsory, teachers cannot take learners' motivation for granted, and they have a responsibility to ensure learners are motivated to learn. Teachers must persuade learners to want to do what they ought to do [4].

Despite students' motivation and interest being essential, education still demands working with a sense of urgency. The Ethiopian national learning assessments revealed that there has been low student performance in secondary schools, with science subjects particularly affected [5]. For instance, the 2022 Ethiopian General School Leaving Certificate Examination (EGSLCE) showed only 3.3% of students achieving passing grades [6]. These national examination results also consistently show lower passing rates in the South Gondar Zone [6]. Research in North Gondar and other zones highlights issues like lack of motivation, ineffective teaching strategies, and limited infrastructure as barriers to quality education [7, 8]. A recent report in Ethiopia on the quality of school-based practices in enhancing secondary school students' national examination achievement shows that school-based achievements

were strong predictors of the national examination results in some schools, whereas they were weak predictors in some other schools [9]. A study conducted in North Wollo, Ethiopia, shows that teachers' educational level, experience, subject matter knowledge, students' interest towards education, attendance, parents' educational level, parents' income, the distance of the school from the students' home, the availability of materials, textbooks, and language skills of students have an influence on the academic performance of students [10]. Similarly, a study conducted in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, investigated that the most common causes of insufficient performance were the ineffective science and mathematics teaching techniques, a scarcity of reference materials, and a lack of well-equipped laboratories [11]. According to the researchers' preliminary observation, in Ethiopia, specifically in Amhara region there has been involved deeply in a conflict since 2020 first as part of the Northern Ethiopia War between the government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). An armed conflict between the Fano and government forces has been ongoing since late April 2023. Since 2023, the educational landscape in the Amhara Region has been profoundly affected, preventing millions of children from attending school. In most districts of the region armed conflict (militarism) associated with high cost of life (material shortage) led to the closure of numerous schools and the existing learners has been with weak motivation in their learning.

The existing research often lacks focus both in the study area and in the contents to be addressed. Therefore, this study will examine and explore the status of students' motivation and learning interests in quality education in secondary schools of the South Gondar Zone. In this regard, there is a need to address students' motivation and learning interest in schools, with particular reference to schools of South Gondar, which is the felt need. The researchers' observation shows that students' hope and interest have gradually deteriorated in this situation. This problem was to be investigated on the basis of the following basic question. What is the level of students' motivation and learning interest in

secondary schools? How are students' motivation and learning interest explored in secondary schools of the South Gondar Zone?

2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

Therefore, this study is based on integrated theories that can be the foundation for the interest and motivation of students. The integrated theories from general motivation, expectancy value, social

cognitive, intrinsic idea of self-determination, interest, and achievement goal theories are in one way or another reflected in this study.

As a conceptual framework of the study (Figure 1), different intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting students' motivation were explained and qualitatively explored.

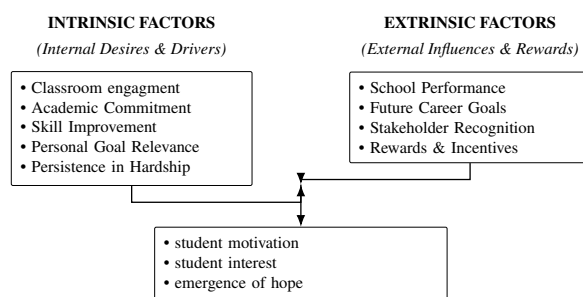


Figure 1. Conceptual framework diagram.

The intrinsic factors, such as students' enjoyment in their classroom learning, their commitment to performing challenging academic tasks, their engagement in improving knowledge and skills, their understanding of topics relevant to personal goals, and their aspiration to learn when the subject is difficult, were assessed. Whereas, from the extrinsic perspective, their tendency to work hard to perform well in their school, working based on their future expectation to secure a good job or career in the future, motivation to get recognition from key stakeholders academically, and motivation to study when there are rewards or incentives for good performance influence their effort in school were also the focus of the study. Secondary school students' interest and emergence of hope in relation to the situation of different motivational theories were explored qualitatively.

3 Methods of the Study

3.1 Study Area

The study area South Gondar administrative zone is found in Amhara National Regional State with Debre Tabor Regio-politan city as its center of administration that is 667kms from Addis Ababa and 113 km from Bahir Dar. South Gondar zone is geographically located between 11022' and 12033' north latitude and 37025' and 38043' East longitude, covering an area of 14,595 Sq.km. It shares common borders with East Gojjam in the south, West Gojjam in the south west, Lake Tana in the west, North Gondar in the north, Wag Hemra zone in the north east, North Wollo in the east, and South Wollo in the south east. Abbay River separates South Gondar from the two Gojjam zones (Figure 2).

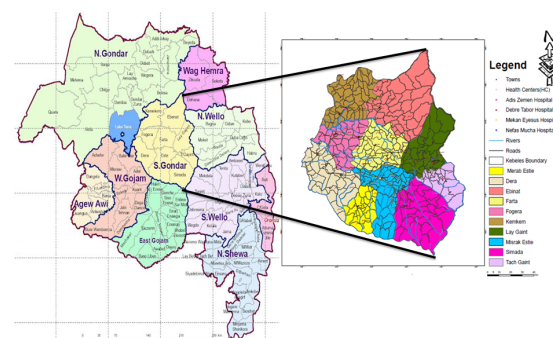


Figure 2. Map of the study area.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

To achieve the objectives of the study, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. The design for this study was parallel convergent mixed, with qualitative approaches concurrently integrated with the quantitative parts at the discussion section. This design is essential to collect data at a time than the explanatory or exploratory mixed sequential methods of inquiry [21]. To treat the objectives of the study, a convergent parallel mixed design was employed. According to [22], a convergent parallel mixed method is a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data. This helps to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this method, the

researchers typically collected both forms of data at roughly the same time and then integrated the information in the interpretation of the overall results. Therefore, a side-by-side comparison approach was used in which the researchers first reported the quantitative statistical result and then discussed the qualitative findings either to confirm or disconfirm the statistical results at the level of data analysis.

3.3 Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

According to [23] the population is defined as a broad umbrella encompassing all subjects under study. The target population of this study consists of students, teachers, and school principals in secondary schools of Debre Tabor, located in the South Gonder Zone. In the study area, the target population included 15,384 students enrolled in 36 schools, along with 36 principals and 1,186 teachers. The sample size of students was 390, determined using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$). Of the 390 questionnaires distributed, 350 (89.7%) were returned and found valid for analysis.

To ensure better representation of the population, three clusters of schools in the Eastern, Western, and Central were selected, with one school in each cluster. The study employed cluster sampling techniques, and sample students were chosen using the cluster random sampling method. In addition, from the three selected schools, a planned sample of 10 teachers and 3 principals was considered; however, only 7 participants (5 teachers and 2 principals) who consented were included in the interviews. Although the sample size of seven ($n = 7$) participants is relatively small, it is methodologically justified within a mixed-methods framework, where the qualitative phase is designed to provide depth-oriented insights. Moreover, the participants were purposively selected in consultation with school principals to ensure diversity in terms of gender and teaching experience.

3.4 Data Gathering Tools and Procedures

This survey is designed to measure students' interest and motivation toward their education, based on

the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) developed by [24]. In the process of adaptation, the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) to the study area secondary school context, the instrument underwent were translated and passed cultural contextualization process. First, the original English items were forward-translated into Amharic educational experts and subsequently back-translated by an independent linguist to ensure semantic equivalence. Items were then contextually adjusted to align with local secondary school

terminology and structural realities, followed by an expert content and construct validity. The adapted instrument is a standardized, validated instrument grounded in self-determination theory, assessing intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and a motivation. Understanding students' motivation and engagement is critical for educators and institutions to foster a positive learning environment, improve academic outcomes, and address potential barriers to student success. It was using a 15-item survey on a 5-point Likert scale to measure responses, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The questions are categorized into three key areas: Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Interest in Learning. This questionnaire is suitable for high school students and can be adapted with minor modifications. 10 semi-structured interview items were used with teachers and principals to explore perceptions and contextual factors.

The standard instruments were further piloted with 27 respondents to ensure reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$) and to check their fitness to the study context. As a result, it was possible to comment that each item would be relevant to get basic information about the objectives of the study and reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.875$) was feasible to use the items.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were organized and analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics (frequency-percentage and mean) and qualitatively using narration. To test the status of students' motivation and

learning interests, frequency and mean were used. Quantitative responses were also processed with interpretations guided by a mean of a five-level scale: 4.20–5.00 (very good), 3.40–4.19 (good), 2.60–3.39 (fair), 1.80–2.59 (poor), and 1.00–1.79 (very poor). The qualitative type of data, once collected, was thematically analyzed and the interview was interpreted by identifying recurring themes related to students' interest and motivational characteristics.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Regardless of the disciplines and methodologies used, the study's validity and reliability are essential to all research. The information gathered ought to be true, genuine, and representative of the world. According to [25], researchers want their work to be legitimate regardless of its format or goal.

Qualitative research data need to be acceptable, credible, reliable, and defensible. Qualitative research data gathering is to obtain in-depth, valid, and reliable data [26]. In the qualitative data, the researcher and participants can both understand the interpretations and concepts [27]. The consistency of the researcher's interaction approach, data collection, data processing, and interpretation of participant meanings from the data are all considered aspects of reliability in qualitative research [27]. According to [22], combining several data types improves validity and reliability since the advantages of one strategy might offset the disadvantages of another.

As a result, the researchers tried using different data for triangulation. It was using both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, followed by semi-structured interviews. Before administering the instruments, face validity was done by professionals. The standard instruments were further piloted, and reliability was confirmed to be within the recommended reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$).

4 Results of the Study

4.1 Demographic Features of Respondents

Participants in the study comprised principals, teachers, and students of secondary schools. Four sig-

nificant demographic characteristics were gathered from respondents. Considerations were age, sex, level of education, and overall work experience. Data for this study was gathered through questionnaires and interviews. A total of 350 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. Students in the three secondary schools received 350 copies of these surveys. As an additional source of information for the study, key informants, principals, and teachers were interviewed because they had firsthand knowledge of the teaching-learning process. The school principals and teachers have a BEd or BSc degree or higher and have expertise in their roles.

4.2 The Level of Students' Motivation and Interest Towards Students' Academic Performance

The study investigated the status of South Gondar Zone secondary school students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and interest in learning. The dimensions of students' motivation and learning interest indicated in Table 1 were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean. Quantitative responses were interpreted by means of a five-level scale: 4.20–5.00 (very good), 3.40–4.19 (good), 2.60–3.39 (fair), 1.80–2.59 (poor), and 1.00–1.79 (very poor).

Table 1. Students' motivation and interest in learning survey results

No.	Construct and Survey Items	SD n (%)	D n (%)	U n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)
A. Intrinsic Motivation							
1.	I enjoy learning new things in my classes.	260 (74.0%)	10 (2.9%)	35 (10.0%)	15 (4.3%)	30 (8.6%)	1.70
2.	I feel a sense of accomplishment when I complete challenging academic tasks.	68 (19.0%)	41 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	86 (25.0%)	155 (44.0%)	3.60
3.	I study because I want to improve my knowledge and skills.	196 (56.0%)	85 (24.0%)	27 (7.7%)	23 (6.6%)	19 (5.4%)	1.80
4.	I find my coursework meaningful and relevant to my personal goals.	173 (49.0%)	125 (36.0%)	7 (2.0%)	29 (8.3%)	16 (4.6%)	1.80
5.	I am motivated to learn even when the subject is difficult.	184 (53.0%)	153 (44.0%)	3 (0.9%)	6 (1.7%)	4 (1.1%)	1.60
Aggregated Subscale Values		176 (50.0%)	83 (23.0%)	14 (4.2%)	32 (9.2%)	45 (12.8%)	2.10
B. Extrinsic Motivation							
6.	I work hard in school to achieve good grades.	148 (42.0%)	125 (36.0%)	8 (2.3%)	54 (15.0%)	15 (4.3%)	2.00
7.	I am motivated to study because I want to secure a good job or career in the future.	163 (47.0%)	115 (33.0%)	19 (5.4%)	32 (9.1%)	21 (6.0%)	1.95
8.	Recognition from teachers or peers encourages me to perform better academically.	179 (51.6%)	93 (27.0%)	8 (2.3%)	39 (11.0%)	26 (7.4%)	1.90
9.	I feel motivated to study when there are rewards or incentives for good performance.	24 (9.0%)	88 (25.0%)	38 (11.0%)	94 (27.0%)	106 (30.0%)	3.50
10.	Parental or family expectations influence my effort in school.	15 (4.3%)	63 (18.0%)	9 (2.6%)	103 (29.0%)	148 (42.0%)	3.80
Aggregated Subscale Values		115 (32.8%)	99 (28.3%)	17 (4.9%)	64 (18.3%)	55 (15.7%)	2.60
C. Interest in Learning							
11.	I look forward to attending my classes.	193 (55.0%)	103 (29.0%)	8 (2.3%)	24 (6.9%)	18 (5.1%)	1.70
12.	The teaching methods used in my classes make learning interesting.	89 (25.0%)	167 (48.0%)	36 (10.0%)	43 (12.0%)	13 (3.7%)	2.20
13.	I actively participate in class discussions or activities.	196 (56.0%)	98 (28.0%)	17 (4.9%)	11 (3.1%)	27 (7.7%)	1.80
14.	I am curious about the subjects I am studying.	184 (53.0%)	97 (28.0%)	19 (5.45%)	16 (4.6%)	25 (7.1%)	1.70
15.	I enjoy exploring topics beyond what is required for my coursework.	167 (48.0%)	128 (37.0%)	9 (2.6%)	13 (3.7%)	21 (6.0%)	1.70
Aggregated Subscale Values		166 (47.40%)	119 (34.0%)	39(11.1%)	12 (3.4%)	14(4.1%)	1.80

Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Slightly Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Slightly Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place for consistency.

In Table 1 above, the aggregated mean from the total 350 respondents is about 176 (50%) who strongly disagree, 83 (23%) who disagree, 14 (4.2%) who are undecided, 32 (9.2%) who agree, and the remaining 45 (12.8%) who strongly agree on the existing intrinsic motivation of students. This was a 2.1 mean level of intrinsic motivation, which is within the range of 1.80–2.59 (poor) motivation. Of the respondents included in this study, 155 (44%) of them said that a sense of accomplishment when completing challenging academic tasks is the main intrinsic factor that affects their motivation, with a mean scale value of 3.6 within the range of 3.40–4.19 (good).

In the study, the extrinsic motivational factors were too weak to inspire students' interest and well-being. The aggregated mean from the total respondents tells us 106 (30.2%) strongly disagree, 97 (27.7%) disagree, 16.4 (5%) are undecided, 64 (18.4%) agree, and the remaining 63 (18.1%) strongly agree on the existing intrinsic motivation of students. This was a 2.6 mean level of extrinsic motivational factor, which is within the range of 2.60–3.39 (fair) level of motivation. Among the extrinsic factors affecting motivation, for 148 (42%) of students, parental or family expectations influence their effort in school. In addition, for 106 (30%) of students, rewards or incentives for good performance are extrinsic motivators. These two factors, with mean values of 3.8 and 3.5, were at a good level of motivation within the 3.4–4.19 scale level.

In addition to determining the intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting students' motivation, factors affecting students' interest in learning were assessed. From students included in the study, 139 (40%) strongly disagree, 119 (34%) disagree, 18 (5%) are undecided, 21 (6%) agree, and the remaining 21 (6%) of the respondents have a strong agreement response about their learning interest. Overall, the aggregated mean result shows that student's interest in learning was at 1.8, which is within the range of 1.80–2.59 (poor) for motivation level. In the study, 196 (56%) of the respondents were not actively participating in class discussions or activities. In the

same way, 193 (55%) of the students were not interested in attending classes. Moreover, 184 (53%) of the respondents confirmed that students are not curious about the subjects they are studying.

In the same vein, qualitative data also indicated that students' motivation and learning interest are in a state of deterioration with thematic categories:

Student Disengagement and Classroom Hostility (theme1)

Students' classroom engagement and their academic commitment (students dis engagement theme) were negatively influenced. This is as students gradually drop their education to earn money for their subsistence, and they disregard education (T3 and T4). There has been a lack of student interest and motivation; mainly, their body is present, but their mind is absent in the classroom (T5). Excessive enrollment of baseless students without academic knowledge and students' location in conflict areas, militarism, and high cost of life due to greed and materialism demotivated them (T4). The classroom environment has been also affected by inappropriate student behavior. Students are engaged in provocative or disrespectful actions, such as boy students sitting with girls in a way that provokes sexuality. This is intended to distract or challenge authority. Such behaviors create a hostile teaching environment, making it difficult for educators to maintain discipline and focus on instruction. More alarmingly, some students resort to intimidation tactics, demanding passing grades without studying. Teachers have faced direct threats, with students confronting them at their homes, saying, "If you don't give me a passing grade, I will deal with you." This culture of coercion undermines the teaching-learning process, fostering fear rather than fostering intellectual growth. Additionally, the absence of mental health support or counseling for students for such misbehavior leads to stressful learning conditions (T1 to T7).

Academic Dishonesty and Integrity Crisis (Theme2)

Academic commitment and students' school performance shadowed (academic dis-honesty

theme) by students' academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is a critical issue, particularly during national and regional examinations. Some students employ psychological intimidation to pressure high-performing peers into allowing cheating, with threats such as, "If you don't let us cheat, we will take bad measures against you." This evil act not only sabotages the academic performance of honest students but also compromises the integrity of the examination system. The prevalence of such behaviors is exacerbated by overcrowded schools, where students with moral or academic deficiencies are often admitted after being rejected by other schools. The problematic students strain resources and further deteriorate the learning environment (T3 and T7).

Credentials and Weak Academic Aspiration (theme3)

Many students view education not as a pursuit of knowledge or personal development but as a transactional process aimed at securing credentials, such as a driver's license or a degree, with minimal effort. Their school performance for future career goal was weakened (weak aspiration for far reaching goal). This mindset has led to a culture where academic success is often measured by certificates rather than competence for advanced future career (T1, T2, T7).

Moral Decline and Erosion of Academic Values (Theme4)

The extrinsic motivation via stakeholders' recognition was affected by the moral decline of students which can be traced to a broader societal problem. The lack of role models, inadequate parental guidance, and the glorification of material success over ethical conduct contribute to this trend. Additionally, the failure of educational institutions to enforce strict codes of conduct and their inability to provide counseling and ethical education perpetuates the demotivation of students in their academic success. Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach, including community engagement, stricter academic policies, and programs to instill values of integrity and respect in students (T6 and T5).

Discussion

Although the aggregated mean score for intrinsic motivation was 2.1, which falls within the "poor" range, it is important to note that certain items within this category demonstrated stronger influence. Specifically, item 2 ("sense of accomplishment") achieved a mean of 3.6, placing it in the "good" range. This indicates that while overall intrinsic motivation appears weak, the satisfaction students derive from completing challenging academic tasks remains a significant driver of engagement. Similarly, the aggregated mean for extrinsic motivation was 2.6 ("fair"), yet items 9 and 10 scored 3.5 and 3.8 respectively, both within the "good" range. These results suggest that although the general level of extrinsic motivation is modest, specific external factors such as recognition or tangible rewards play a more substantial role in influencing student behavior.

On both quantitative and qualitative data, the aggregated result inclined towards the weak learning interest and motivation. The result of this study is not in line with the motivational advantage suggested by scholars. Motivation is an essential issue that contributes to the academic performance of students. Different scholars (educators and psychologists) had established the vital impact of motivation on acquiring learning outcomes and exhibiting good performance on learning tasks [2, 12, 13, 28, 29]. Motivational strategies contribute to capturing interest in the proposed content and favor the development of a positive attitude towards learning, participation, and the acquisition of significant learning, among which games, stories, verbal stimuli, and recognition stand out [3, 18, 30]. The systemic weakness across both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also aligns closely with recent educational research. It is consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), of optimal human functioning that relies on satisfying three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness [31]. In this regard, when instructional delivery fails to connect coursework to personal goals, the need for autonomy is blocked. Similarly, when classroom environments offer no recognition or sense of accomplishment on tough assignments, the need for com-

petence is compromised. This structural failure is deeply rooted in teacher variables. As [4] points out, a teacher's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is what transforms dry curriculum guidelines into meaningful, engaging classroom experiences. When teachers lack advanced instructional methodologies, they cannot spark an enjoyment of learning new things. Instead, the classroom atmosphere defaults to rigid compliance. This directly explained in the works of [32] that indicated Ethiopian secondary schools show a sharp decline in intrinsic academic drive, forcing students to rely on weak external expectations that fail to inspire real effort. These perspectives were not observed in schools of the South Gondar Zone. Hence, attention and special intervention are essential to motivate and encourage well-being and emergence of hope for students as suggested by scholars [33-36].

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Different intrinsic and extrinsic factors demotivated students in secondary schools of the South Gondar zone. Students learning interest is weak, which make them unable to perform their education to the expected competency level. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivation surveyed was not satisfactory. Moreover, preliminary observation and lived experiences of the researchers confirmed that prolonged conflict discouraged their vision for education. The well-being and emergency of hope of students have been affected by the trauma of the deaths of their friends. The education relapse, because of learning interruption, may decrease students' motivation. The ineffective intervention in the education emergency may lose the hopes and interests of students.

The demotivation of students needs special attention by regional, national, and global authorities for appropriate intervention. It could be by creating peace and a multicultural education system via school co-curricular activities. As militarism and material shortage affected their hope and well-being, policy intervention is required to reduce militarism and local conflict. Organizations like the World Food Program (WFP) need to provide emergency food and material aid. Humanitarian organizations,

civic organizations, elders, and local indigenous institutions need to reduce the bad effect of conflict at national levels.

Secondary schools need to practice models and theories for the emergence of hope and interest. This can be by motivating students intrinsically and extrinsically. Probably they need to have integrated theories from general motivation, expectancy value, and social cognitive, intrinsic ideas of self-determination, interest, and achievement goal theories, which can be the foundation for the interest and motivation of students' study. This is possible with psychosocial training and practical counseling services.

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Conflict of Interests

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